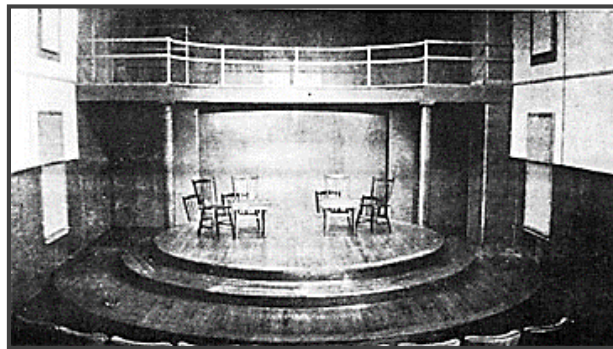


MUSINGS: KATE SHARES THE EXPERIENCE OF 3 PSYCHODRAMA STAGES

I recently did a small group training at my home in Charlottesville, VA and was reminded of a unique role I carry in the psychodrama community as a storyteller. A young woman, new to psychodrama, asked about the picture of me on the psychodrama stage at the Psychodrama Theatre of Protection in Black Earth, WI in 1996. It led me to talk of the 3 psychodrama stages I have been privileged to work on in my 30+ years as a psychodramatist and clinical psychologist. So, as a bridge from the people and places who are some of the historic figures in psychodrama to people that may not ever meet them, I take on this new role of oral historian.



The first stage where I saw psychodrama was at the original Beacon Theater, Beacon, NY in 1980 when I attended a training there, along with the then-current group of psychodrama interns from St Elizabeths Hospital. It was a magical introduction to the depth and wonder of psychodrama in its original setting—I walked the grounds many patients had, worked in the theater where both J.L. and Zerka Moreno developed psychodrama in the USA, and ate at the long table with others seeking training. It was here, too, that I discovered *"The Words of the Father,"* Moreno's philosophical treatise. Having grown up in the 60's, the concept of the god-within as the curative factor in healing touched me to the core. And, I have loved Spontaneity and Creativity theory and practice ever since.

Many years later, I returned to the Beacon Theater, before it was moved to Boughton Place, to do a weekend of personal psychodrama with Zerka as Director and two local psychodramatists as trained auxiliaries, along with my husband Peter Dummett, a psychodramatist (and accountant) from Australia. We slept in the bedroom where Zerka had raised her stepdaughter, Regina, and her son, Jonathon, and worked in both the theater and her living room throughout the weekend. It is wonderful that the original theater is still available for trainers to share their work to people in the USA.

The Theatre as it now stands, renewed, at Boughton Place, Highland, NY. → → →
(<http://www.boughtonplace.org/>)



The second stage I experienced psychodrama on was at St. Elizabeths Hospital, the hotbed of psychodrama training for over 50 years, first started by J.L. Moreno and later led for many years by Dr. Dale Richard Buchanan. I graduated in 1982 after an intense year in a clinical setting at this VA hospital in Washington, DC and was set on my way to working with what would soon be put in the DSM 3 (at the time) as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Unfortunately, that NIMH internship program closed a decade or more ago and there are no formalized year-long internships in psychodrama anywhere else in the USA. (Our own TSI International Certification in Trauma Therapy is based on the training structure used at "St E's" of theory, research, clinical practice and supervision. Click TSI's website below for more info.)



Dr. Jim Ennis, Director of the Psychodrama Section, at St. Elizabeths Hospital Stage in 1962.

The third stage on which I experienced the healing of psychodrama was my own. It was created from my trust in spontaneity and creativity and a group of clinicians (our first TSM team) who were serious about making psychodrama safe for its emerging use in the fields of addiction and trauma. In 1992 I replicated the original psychodrama stage (Zerka had given me the architectural plans) in Black Earth, WI, where we dedicated the ***Psychodrama Theatre of Protection*** to Zerka. → → →



This picture (*below*) was taken in 1996 at the Theatre soon after a workshop Zerka directed with students from Australia and New Zealand. My legendary and mystical Mr Magic, the self trained therapy dog, wild animal, and spirit protector, is a shining star as he shows his noble and

regal self. I am there, with an art project of a community shield made by a group during a “Surviving Spirits” workshop behind me, and clutching two batakas. For this article, I thought to photoshop out the batakas as I always tell students now



not to use them because they role-train violence. But, then I thought, “Well, that’s where we were with psychodrama in those days.” It was then, too, that the evolution in neuroscience hit the psychotherapy world with a big impact and the Therapeutic Spiral Model was clinically right in alignment.

Today, TSM has not been done on a stage since 2000, but the experience of directing and being part of dramas on these stages stays with me in a cherished place I learned to call my well of spontaneity and creativity.

Dr Kate & Mr Magic

I’d like to tell you about the components of a psychodrama stage because they are relevant even if you never step foot on a stage to direct or be protagonist. As you can see in the photos, there are 3 levels to the stage itself. These are different warm-up levels and were originally used to do a walk-and-talk with the protagonist at the beginning of the drama. While walking, the protagonist would become more aware of what Zerka defined as “surplus reality”—inner sensations, thoughts, feelings, images, and act hungers for new endings to old stories. The Director would then ask the protagonist to step up gradually onto the new warm-up level until he or she was standing in the center of their own life on the main level of the stage.

Today, In TSM, this has emerged into a walk-and-talk inside the Circle of Safety that defines a stage in all TSM workshops. In TSM, the walk-and-talk is designed to get a clinical contract from the protagonist as to what is possible to achieve in the time amount allotted. It is also the ‘assessment’ time and to begin to concretize what Restorative Roles are needed to establish safety so that a true state of spontaneity and creativity can emerge for the protagonist.

Another interesting feature is the balcony, above and in back of the protagonist’s center stage. It is here that many people at Black Earth would place

dissociated child parts waiting for rescue, or evil perpetrators who have power and control over their lives, and, even more importantly, what they call their godhead--Higher Power, Creator, God, Jesus, Buddha, et al. One of my fondest memories at Black Earth was a drama in which a woman, who had been sexually abused for many years as a child, was on the main level of the stage. She had her support roles around her and was looking up at the balcony calling out, "God, why did this happen to me? Why?? Why???" All of a sudden, Mr Magic peered over the balcony at her with his deep and intense blue eyes and the action stopped as everyone took a breath. As Director I said, "Well, 'dog' is 'god' spelled backwards, so why don't you role reverse with your God and answer this question: 'Why did this happen to me?'" Mr Magic had originally entered through the back door to the balcony and had then left by the time the protagonist had chosen someone to be her questioning adult self and had climbed the stairs to role reverse with her Higher Power. From the balcony, her message back to her adult self was, "There is no 'Why.' You did not deserve this any more than you deserved a perfect childhood. It's about living life on life's terms even when they truly suck. I wonder what you can learn from this to share with others."



The back door through which Mr Magic (god/dog, and many other roles) entered and left.

TSM today translates the 'balcony' into a concept of looking at which parts of self are dissociated. This view can be from the psychodramatic 'mirror' position, or even in the TSM intrapsychic Observing Ego role. Sometimes these dissociated roles become clear not from the protagonist, but when someone in the group outside the Circle of Strengths (center stage) begins to dissociate or, conversely, feels triggered into past feelings and memories. *It is here that the concept of*

needing both to protect your wounded child and to rescue that part-of-self before role reversing into it was born.

As we know, experiential methods are quite powerful and without proper safety structures, people can experience uncontrolled catharsis of intense dissociated affect, or regression to a child state without choice. In TSM, we concretize what is being displaced, much like we did in the balcony, and then proceed to use the Restorative Strengths and Containing Doubles to help the protagonist rescue that part-of-self, before role reversing and becoming that which is dissociated. In this way, the adult ego strength is supported so that once a protagonist has demonstrated the ability to rescue a child state, then she or he is ready to become that child and experience being rescued, but not before. I think having to walk up the stairs from the main stage to the balcony helped slow down this process and helped the protagonist gather his or her strengths needed on the way up. Today, with or without a stage, we also need to slow the process down so it becomes a conscious choice, not just disjointed actions.

To this day, a scene from a video we made at Black Earth in 1993 about using TSM with PTSD and Dissociative Identify Disorder (MPD at the time), still stands out for me. It is of a group member playing the wounded child for the protagonist and also becoming overwhelmed with the feelings of terror of her own inner child. She screamed repeatedly for the adult protagonist to come rescue her until the protagonist ran up the stairs and embraced, soothed, and made contact with this dissociated part-of-self in a conscious and creative way, bringing new action to an old situation.

It has been fun and rewarding to revisit both the stages I have worked on as a psychodramatist and also the concepts of the warm-up layers and balcony. In future Musings I hope to weave more memories of my 35+-year psychodramatic journey together to share with you. In the meantime, thank you for being part of it.

