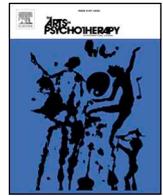




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Research Article

Hall of mirrors on stage: An introduction to psychotherapeutic playback theatre

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A B S T R A C T

Psychotherapeutic playback theatre is a form of group psychotherapy in which the playback theatre ritual is at the heart of a group therapeutic process. These groups usually meet on a regular basis, in a psychotherapeutic setting, with a psychotherapeutic contract and aims, and are conducted by a therapist. Each participant gets a chance to be a teller, a performer or a spectator. The aim of the present article is to present the theoretical concepts and techniques of psychotherapeutic playback theatre through the lens of psychotherapy concepts; and to provide therapists with guidelines using three continua that characterize the different variations of psychotherapeutic playback theatre, according to the group's specific process and goals.

Introduction

Playback theatre is a form of improvisational theatre in which improvisation is created in response to a personal story coming from the audience (Fox, 2007; Salas, 1993). In a playback theatre, the teller tells a personal story, such as a moment experienced during the day, a memory from childhood, or a dream. The conductor facilitates by interviewing the teller in a friendly and attentive manner. As the story is told, actors (between two and four) listen. After the story is told, the actors immediately improvise a theatre piece in which they reflect back the story with empathy (Moran & Alon, 2011). The expression "Playback" encompasses the gentle movement of the story - from the teller, as a member of the audience, to the stage, and back to the teller and the audience (Lubrani Rolnik, 2009).

Playback theatre was founded by Jonathan Fox, Jo Salas, and the Original Playback Theatre Company in 1975 in New York State, in the U.S. Fox was an actor and a teacher with an interest in the oral tradition of pre-literate societies, in which personal stories play a major role in preserving social historical and ethical knowledge. Fox experimented with improvisation and with an informal type of non-scripted, personal theatre. He was also inspired by Psychodrama (Moreno, 1946, 1985; Moreno, 1946, 1985), which played a key role in the early version of playback theatre (Fox, 1994, 1999; Rowe, 2007). When asked about his vision, he said:

"My dream is of a new kind of theatre that brought theatre back from the domain of entertainment to its earlier purpose of preserving memory and holding the tribe together."

(Fox, 2007, p. 92)

"The idea spread internationally and currently includes hundreds of registered groups in over 60 countries (IPTN, 2018)." Playback theatre has been adopted by a variety of group therapeutic settings (Chesner, 2002) such as hospitals and mental institutions (Haneji, 1998; Larkinson & Rowe, 2003), with children at risk (Salas, 2007), older adults (Keisari, Yaniv, Palgi, & Gesser-Edelsburg, 2018), and in the training and continuing education of drama therapists and other psychotherapists. Participants in playback theatre courses, challenged with mental illness, have indicated its healing value by describing playback theatre as enhancing self-esteem, self-knowledge, fun and relaxation, as well as generating a stimulating sense of connection and empathy in others (Moran & Alon, 2011). Bornmann and Crossman (2011) found that playback theatre performance can be used as a social intervention to heighten feelings of empathy and negative views towards aggression as an interpersonal strategy. Although the literature discusses the strong connection between playback theatre and therapy (Salas, 2007, 2009, 1993), playback theatre does not position itself in the therapeutic domain (Fox, 2004) and has never presented itself as a form of psychotherapy. The aim of this paper is to present the therapeutic potential of playback theatre and its unique aspects as a form of group psychotherapy.

Psychotherapeutic playback theatre

Psychotherapeutic playback theatre is defined as a type of group psychotherapy, in which the playback theatre ritual is the basis of a

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group therapeutic process. In each session the members enact personal stories within a group framework. Everyone gets a chance to be a teller, a performer or a spectator. These groups usually meet on a regular basis, in a psychotherapeutic setting, with a psychotherapeutic contract and aims, and are conducted by a therapist. As in other forms of drama therapy (Snow, 2000), psychotherapeutic playback theatre has a strong ritual approach. Each session starts with a short warm-up, whose aim is to “awaken” the participants’ personal stories and help them enter into the realm of dramatic reality (Pendzik, 2006), where they can “play” with the personal content that comes up. Subsequently, one of the group participants, serving as “the teller”, brings a personal story to the group. The conductor can briefly interview and facilitate the teller. In psychotherapeutic playback theatre, the term “story” is used in its broadest sense and can include any type of mental input. This can be a memory from the past, a feeling concerning the here and now of the group, a moment from an everyday experience, a dream or a contemplation. While listening to the story, the other group participants are instructed to use active listening skills—to remain open-minded and attend to the personal story, as well as to feelings, images, past stories, and their own personal stories, which resonate within them. After the story has been told, the other group members, as “playing-participants”, create a theatre improvisation echoing back the story. A primary difference between playback theatre and psychotherapeutic playback theatre is that the “Playing participants” in psychotherapeutic playback theatre who improvise the teller’s story are members of the psychotherapy group rather than actors from a playback troop. The term “playing-participants” is used in psychotherapeutic playback theatre, rather than “actors” or “performers”, in order to emphasize the nature of playing, rather than performing or acting, and the continuous flow of participants among playing, telling and observing. “Playing-participants” also stresses the fact that the improvising participants in psychotherapeutic playback theatre are always seen as a part of the group, rather than differentiated from the rest of the group by a role of an actor or a performer.

The teller witnesses and observes the improvisation from the point of view of a “spectator”. At the end of the performance, guided by the conductor, the teller responds to the theatre improvisation. At this stage of the process, he/she can also re-direct the outcome and the way it reconstructs his/her story. The last stage of the ritual is the sharing circle, where the group participants are invited to respond to the story and the theatre improvisation, from a subjective point of view, expressing how the theatrical improvisation touched them and how the teller’s story is connected to their own life. This therapeutic psychotherapeutic playback theatre process has multiple therapeutic benefits. The following section presents these benefits through their main therapeutic aspects: narrative transformation and group psychotherapy.

Narrative transformation in psychotherapeutic playback theatre

Literature about the therapeutic effects of playback theatre in a therapeutic setting emphasizes the transformative process of the narrative, placing it at the center of the therapeutic effect (e.g., Barak, 2013; Keisari et al., 2018). The improvisational piece embodies the story and makes it tangible through the performers’ movements, gestures, use of words, different tones of voice, dramatic roles, positions on stage, metaphors, music and other creative choices. The live theatrical episode constructs a new, vivid and tangible experience of the life-story that is being portrayed as a dramatic scene for the teller. This new experience captures the story’s content, validates the teller’s personal experience and reveals opportunities for the teller – to perceive new perspectives and meanings in his/her own story.

The teller receives acknowledgment and recognition in relation to his/her life-story, as it is told in a safe environment and enacted by others. The tellers observe their own story from the position of spectators, leading to a sense of “aesthetic distancing” (Landy, 1996), providing the tellers with a safe place from which to explore their past life

events and the way they handled them. Being a “spectator” enables the teller to achieve a reflective point of view, experience new perspectives from which to examine life events, and thus gain new insights (Orkibi, Bar, & Eliakim, 2014).

The present, lived improvisational creation expresses tangible and vivid aspects of the story, in a way that cannot be expressed through words alone (Moreno, 1946, 1985; Moreno, 1946; Moreno, 1946, 1985; Yaniv, 2014). Due to its artistic and aesthetic qualities, this improvisation can exaggerate and externalize different aspects of the story; it can add to, explore, and bring to life the main themes of the story through varied dramatic elements. Thus, it fosters a process in which personal stories are deconstructed and reconstructed in a way that exposes the teller to new possible meanings to the story which, in turn, generates mental growth (Keisari & Palgi, 2017). This was beautifully illustrated by Salas (1993):

‘Our job is to reveal the shapeliness and meaning in any experience, even the one that is unclear or formless in the telling.... The richness and effectiveness ... comes from allowing all of its dimensions of meaning to be there, echoing and illumining each other.

(Salas, 1993, pp. 22–24).

In a similar way, psychotherapeutic playback theatre generates interpretation and narrative construction, which expands the story and proposes new perspectives (Rowe, 2007).

The experience, in which a personal story is carefully held and transformed by others, is the core of the therapeutic process – *the act of containing*. According to Bion (1963), the container’s function is to put together raw mental experiences, thereby lending them meaning or, in Bion’s own words: “to make the unthinkable thinkable” - making the raw primary mental experience more meaningful and by that more accessible to transformation. In a psychotherapeutic playback theatre process, the manifested theatrical improvisation expresses the diverse aspects of the story through the dramatic elements integrated into a theatrical form. The theatrical expression of the personal story integrates and organizes its mental content in a way that creates a sense of coherence and meaning. The theatrical aesthetics serves as well as a container, or in the way Bion (1978) had put it - “Beauty can hold the most difficult truth and make it easier to digest” (Bion, 1978). Thus, it serves as a therapeutic container – enabling transformation of the subjective experience by creating new meaning for the teller along with various perspectives for observation. The improvisation, through its qualities as a container, enables all of the participants to deeply engage with the story’s mental content, transformed through the group creative process. This engagement fosters transformative experience not only for the teller, but also to the other group participants that is part of the group theatre creation.

The transformative qualities of the encounter between the personal story and the group participants are well emphasized in Pendzik (2008) idea of “Dramatic Resonances”, which refers to the dramatic-creative responses participants offer in reaction to the teller’s story. It emphasizes the idea that during the creation of the improvisation, the participants do not dramatically respond on behalf of someone else (the teller), but rather - individuals can resonate in response to their own internal feelings and experiences. Thus, the playing-participants who create the improvisation in response to the teller’s story work in a creative way with contents and images that are meaningful both to them, as well as the teller. This emphasizes how the engagement of the other group members with the story content facilitates growth and transformation for all of the group participants. The term *resonance* is also a key factor in group analysis, as described by Foulkes (1990a):

...Each individual member picks out of the common pool what is relevant to him... (And) responds according to his individual disposition... this unconscious, highly specific reaction...is roughly what I have called resonance...

(Foulkes, 1990a, 1990b pp. 298–299)

The resonance reaction is spontaneously manifested during the psychotherapeutic playback theatre process. One’s personal story is

shared in the group, and becomes part of the group's content. Each participant picks out and responds to the personal story, part of the *common pool*. The story is shared with the collective—the group—for further exploration, reconstruction and unfolding by the creation of the theatre improvisation and also during the sharing cycle. This then generates a psychotherapeutic process for all of the group members: the teller, the playing-participants, and the spectators. This reflects the way psychotherapeutic playback theatre is not only a form of narrative psychotherapy, but also a platform for narrative encounters (Schlapobersky, 2016) as a form of group psychotherapy.

Psychotherapeutic playback theatre as a form of group psychotherapy

During psychotherapeutic playback theatre sessions, group members constantly switch back and forth between "playing the other" - examining the experience and practicing the ability to observe the situation from his/her perspective, and "allowing the other to play me" - expanding one's self-perspective through the point of view of the other. This process is a type of ongoing training in empathy and understanding of others, a way of working through the related feelings of satisfaction, frustration, difficulties and aspirations of reparation. Levinas (1948) states that any development - mental, emotional, moral - can be achieved only through exposure to "Le Visage de l'autre" - the ability to, endure the distressing gap between self and other, the ongoing attempt to reduce the illusory resemblance between other and self, and ultimately the development and reparation of the self through the other. In this way, psychotherapeutic playback theatre - by shifting between the two aspects of the process - "playing the other" and "allowing the other to play me" - can be perceived as a path to growth through continuously working through the similarities and the gap between self and other. These two aspects will be explored through the concepts of "mirror reaction", "exchange" and "the collective unconscious".

One of the transformative aspects of the process, which promotes growth in individuals through the other, lies in "mirror reaction" (Foulkes, 1964). The theatre improvisation reflects different aspects of the story to the teller; in addition, each one of the participants observes aspects of himself or herself through the reflection of others playing out the story. The reflections that arise in the improvisation manifest the concept of a "mirror reaction" and make it tangible as described by Foulkes (1964):

A person sees himself, or part of himself...reflected in the interactions of the other group members. He sees them reacting in the way he does himself, or in contrast to his own behavior. He also gets to know himself - ... a fundamental process in ego development - by the effect he has upon others and the picture they form of him.

(Foulkes, 1964, pp. 110)

The story, which becomes part of the collective content, is reflected in various ways. Each group member has the opportunity to reflect and be reflected. Foulkes (1957) called these phenomena a "hall of mirrors", where an individual is confronted with various aspects of himself (Foulkes & Anthony, 1965). There are different ways to reflect the story, as described in the group analysis literature - there are different types of mirrors: imitative vs. modeling; empathic; contrasting; confrontative; oppositional; projective; and malignant. Each form has a different effect on the interpersonal process and the group dynamics (Schlapobersky, 2016). These forms are well performed in the theatre improvisation reflection of the story. For example, the improvisation can take the form of an empathic mirroring, thus enhancing attunement, recognition and identification in the group. Another improvisation can take the form of a confrontative mirror, and thus enhance motivation for change, transformation and growth. Furthermore, one theatre improvisation can, at the same time, have several types of mirrors, and influence the group participants in various ways that promote self-development. A malignant mirror (Zinkin et al., 1993) might be reflected in cases in which the story touches upon aspects of

group members who feel they cannot contain their story. Therefore, they have a need to expel these feelings through the improvisation, in a way that will block their own and others' creative work. This is a very challenging situation for the conductor.

While "mirror reactions" might enhance a sense of sameness and belonging in the group, the therapeutic "exchange" factor highlights the differences in the group. *Exchange* is the ability to give and take among group members: one gives the other something he/she doesn't have or needs to enhance, and he/she gets something else in exchange. As Foulkes (1964) describes it:

...There is an element of exchange: This not only makes the discussion more lively and full, but alters the emotional situation. Just as children accept many things from each other, which they would refuse if they came from their parents...

(Foulkes, 1983, pp. 167)

By using the metaphor of children accepting things from each other, Foulkes refers to the therapeutic exchange factor as a "playground" - in which everyone is equal and the ability to share information and explanations provides mutually beneficial gains, creating a common pool of knowledge for the participants (Zinkin et al., 1993). The therapeutic exchange factor is well expressed during the psychotherapeutic playback theatre process. The ability to "play" with each other and with one others' stories enables the sharing of explanations, information, insights, and meanings. Performing another's personal story imbues the story with something new. The playing participant who dramatizes the story becomes engaged in the other's story; meaning, he or she also receives something new through the story, a gift from the teller. The stories that are brought to the group, and the theatre improvisation pieces created in response to them, build up the group's common knowledge and culture.

The participants resonate with the mental content that is brought to the group in a creative, symbolic way. Each of the symbols that appear in the improvisation stimulates further associations, emotions and phantasies. In this way, the personal story becomes a shared group event, which charges it with deeply personal responses, thereby stimulating the group's collective unconscious materials. The improvisation embodies these aspects of the group's collective unconscious through the dramatic elements that manifest it into dramatic images. Thus, the improvisation serves as the group's "condenser", as Foulkes describes it:

...the 'collective unconscious' acts as a condenser covertly storing up emotional charges generated by the group and discharging them under the stimulus of a shared group event.

(Foulkes & Anthony, 1965, pp.151)

Through its created symbols and the embodied language of the theatre, the improvisation becomes a "space" where the group's collective unconscious comes alive. In this way, the group - with the help of the conductor - can, later on in the process, observe the unconscious emotions and reactions that were brought to the group, thus generating self-development. In this way, the process occurring in the psychotherapeutic playback theatre group setting creates a high level of engagement among participants. The group's common knowledge is based on its stories, but is also created through the enactment of theatre improvisations, which become the main part of the group's experiences. This process of story to enactment becomes the culture of the group and is repeatedly brought to the group for further exploration. This allows for deep psychotherapeutic processes for the individual in a social group setting. To summarize, the psychotherapeutic playback theatre process manifests "resonance", "mirror reaction", "exchange", and "activation of the collective unconscious" - the main therapeutic elements in the psychotherapeutic group process (Foulkes & Anthony, 1965; Foulkes, 1964).

The three continua of psychotherapeutic playback theatre

There are different ways to maintain a psychotherapeutic playback

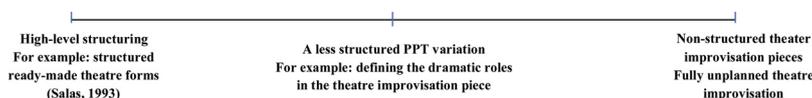


Fig. 1. Level of structuring.

theatre process, according to population and the situation of the group. For example: There are psychotherapeutic playback theatre groups that can benefit from a more structured process, while others will flourish in a less structured psychotherapeutic playback theatre variation. Some groups need a creative process in playground-like small groups while others need to work in a large group format using a stage-like play space. The different variations of psychotherapeutic playback theatre can be characterized along three continua. These three continua can be very useful for conductors in finding the psychotherapeutic playback theatre variation, which is most suitable to their group and its situation in the therapeutic process. Each session and group stage process can be planned and characterized using the three continua:

- 1) Level of structuring
- 2) Level of stage and audience presence (Playground–Stage continuum)
- 3) Level of emphasis on individual narratives vs. group narratives

Level of structuring

The first continuum is *the level of structuring* of the psychotherapeutic playback theatre variation (Fig. 1).

Structuring is basically carried out in three stages: 1) dividing the mental input into separate, selected aspects that will be embodied in the improvisation; 2) developing a concentrated theatrical representation for each aspect through movement, dramatic roles, text, music, monologues, etc.; and 3) re-integrating the different aspects into a single flow, presented as one dramatic creation. This continuum represents the level of structuring of the mental contents in the theatre improvisation.

One end of the continuum represents a high-level structuring process, using short, structured ready-made theatrical forms of playback theatre - a creative process that defines the way the story's mental input will be organized and reconstructed in the improvisation. High-level structuring of the mental input is usually achieved through the use of structured, ready-made theatre forms. The examples in Table 1 demonstrates some ready-made theatrical forms inspired by the "Playback theatre short forms", developed by Fox and Salas (Rowe, 2007). Structuring can be applied in three dimensions: space, content and time. Each dimension refers to the three stages of structuring (detailed

in Table 1).

A less structured psychotherapeutic playback theatre variation can be observed in partly improvised playback theatre. In these cases, the group members discuss some basic ideas and then improvise along these lines. This can be further structured by the conductor assigning different roles to group members, or less structured by assigning only the role of the storyteller or none of the roles.

The most unstructured variation of psychotherapeutic playback theatre, which can be seen as the other side of this continuum, is open, fully unplanned improvisation. In this variation, after listening to the mental input, group members are invited to engage with its mental content in free association in different ways. They can choose the moment they enter the play space, their position in the play space, the creative way they respond to the story, the way they respond to the other participants playing in the play space, the dramatic role that is taken, the way reintegration is created in the play space, etc. This is the psychotherapeutic playback theatre variation most similar to the psychoanalytic free-association technique (Freud, 2010). As such, it enables the group the fullest study of unconscious mental content underlying the stories and the group interaction. This variation also enables issues of transference and projective identification to be expressed in the most complete manner.

Structuring can be perceived as a developmental line in psychotherapeutic playback theatre, as a group usually starts out in a more structured manner and gradually moves towards less structured variations of psychotherapeutic playback theatre. However, structuring and level of structure can also be seen as very meaningful psychotherapeutic interventions, and are among the main instruments in applying psychotherapeutic playback theatre to different populations. There are populations and stages in group life when the stressful deconstruction of experience is one of the main problems that should be addressed by therapy. In these cases, a higher level of structure is needed in order to organize the experience and reduce anxiety, thereby creating a space in the group for self-exploration. In other cases, rigid, over-structuring populations should be addressed by less structured variations of psychotherapeutic playback theatre, in order to help them adopt more flexible and creative points of view about their experiences.

As described above, the metaphorical concepts of container vs. contained and their relationships, as described by W. R. Bion (1963),

Table 1
high-level structuring psychotherapeutic playback theatre variation.

Space structuring	Emphasizes the creation of the improvisation through theatrical forms that center on the position of the dramatic elements in the play space. Organizing the structure of the theatre improvisation through space can position certain aspects of the story at the front of the play space, and others at the back, or make all aspects equal by framing them in a similar position or emphasizing the contrast between aspects by dividing the space in different ways. The "arrow V" short theatrical form, for example, is a very basic form, commonly used in playback theatre (Salas, 1993). In this form, one of the playing-participants is closer to the front part of the play space, while two others stand further back, forming a triangle. This structure can emphasize central aspects of the story by positioning them in front of the stage, and the more marginal or hidden aspects at the back of the stage. Thus, the positioning of the different aspects in the play space helps to re-organize and re-construct the story in a way that creates new meaning and encourages the transformation process.
Content structuring	Emphasizes the re-construction of the mental input according to its content and interpretation. In this aspect, re-organization of the mental input gives space to the participants' interpretations and insights, alongside the conscious and overt parts that were brought by the teller. In addition to the "arrow V" form mentioned above, another example of structuring is the "back to back" theatre form, which presents stories around conflicts (Sallas, 1993). The conflict is divided into two parts; each one of the parts represents one side of the conflict. Two playing-participants, standing back-to-back and moving around an imaginary axis, represent, in turns, both sides of the conflict. In this structure, the movement is used to divide the conflict into its two counter-parts, bringing them to life and making them tangible through the improvisation, thus clarifying the conflict that was brought in the story.
Time structuring	Emphasizes the course of the story by dividing the narrative into a beginning, middle and an end, developing a concentrated theatrical representation of each part, and subsequently re-integrating them into a single flow. Another time structuring example would be to represent different periods throughout the life course, for example: childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age (Keisari et al., 2018). Time structuring can be created through the "fluid" theatrical form (Salas, 1993). The story is divided into three parts, each one is represented by a playing-participant through movement and a single sentence: one represents the beginning of the story; he/she steps forward, presents the movement and the text, and then "freezes". Subsequently, the second participant joins the improvisation, presents the middle of the story through movement and text, joins the sculpture, and "freezes". Finally, the third participant joins the first two and presents the end of the story. In the final "scene", the three participants move together on stage in a single flow, which integrates the three parts of the story into one dramatic image and serves to reconstruct participants' mental content.

are very useful in understanding the relationship between psychotherapeutic playback theatre level of structuring and mental content. The theatre improvisation, as a container of mental raw material, creates meaning by structuring and organizing mental input. A good container will also allow for new raw material to appear outside of the container, thus allowing space for the development of new thought and creativity. However, in many cases and as a natural part of the therapeutic process, there are instances of "over containing" or "under containing". *Over containing* describes a situation in which an old meaning is forced on new material in an overly rigid way that limits development. *Under containing* describes a situation in which raw mental material is left with no meaning. In Bion (1963) view, *development* is seen as a process that moves between creating meaning and giving up this meaning for new raw mental material, creating new meaning, giving up the new meaning for new raw mental material, and so forth. In this sense, PPT's level of structuring can be seen as the level of the container's density and the subsequent enhancing or reducing of the containing. In this way, mental content can be under-contained or over-contained by an under or over-structured variation of psychotherapeutic playback theatre. The conductors should make sure the theatrical improvisation creates a good enough container for the story's varied elements. A "good enough" container is one that creates meaning for the teller and various perspectives for observation, while at the same time leaving space for more observations and new meanings. A good container does not produce forced meanings in a way that limits growth and development. It is one of the conductor's main tasks to notice these movements and processes, and to change the level of psychotherapeutic playback theatre structuring, accordingly.

Level of stage and audience presence (playground–stage continuum)

The second continuum is *level of stage and audience presence* (Fig. 2). Originally, playback theatre takes place in a theatrical setting, which includes the conventions and presence of stage and audience – dividing the participants into performers and spectators. However, the psychotherapeutic playback theatre process is maintained in closed groups; and the use of the terms "performance", "stage", and "spectators" relates to the performance process that takes place within a group setting, in which performers and spectators are the group participants. Various drama therapy practices emphasize the potential therapeutic effect of self-expression on stage in front of spectators after a meaningful process of working-through their way to the stage (Penzik, Emunah, & Johnson, 2017). However, the performance process often creates a situation which involves inner persecutory objects and heightens anxiety. Terms such as "performance anxiety" and "audience anxiety", for example, refer to this situation and its common negative emotional color. This anxiety often limits creativity and the ability to "play", which is particularly crucial in regard to psychotherapeutic playback theatre and to psychotherapy, in general (Winnicott, 1971). Therefore, the conductor must carefully and gradually move between different levels of stage and audience presence. On one end of this continuum are psychotherapeutic playback theatre forms that blur the presence of stage and audience, portraying the play space as a playground rather than a stage. A playground-based psychotherapeutic playback theatre can be achieved, for example, by working simultaneously in very small groups of three or four. Each group chooses the teller and the playing-participants, who then switch roles after each story. At the other end of this continuum are psychotherapeutic playback theatre forms that place more emphasis on the presence of a separate play space in front of others (hence, a stage). Working in a circle, for example, can be seen as an in-between point along this continuum, since everybody can be seen

simultaneously, while the focus of attention moves among the different group members. The conductor should keep in mind that the aim of movement along this continuum is to achieve integration between playing and being aware of being watched. This will be demonstrated through a short description of a group process concentrating on the subject of guilt.

In one of the sessions conducted with a psychotherapeutic playback theatre group of adults in a private setting, the conductor recognized the group's need to process the theme of guilt. The conductors invited the group members to share stories related to the subject of guilt. These stories were explored in small groups of three - one teller and two responding playing-participants. After listening to the teller's story, the two playing-participants created an improvisation: one played the accuser and the other portrayed the inner voices of the accused, followed by a short feedback session and sharing among the three group participants. Subsequently, the participants then changed roles, so that all participants could experience the role of the teller, the "accuser", and the inner voices of the "accused". The main benefit of working with the playground side of the continuum is that it reduces participants' awareness to that of spectators and "a stage", though the two playing-participants actually work in front of one observer - the teller. This reduces anxiety and allows for greater levels of freedom and playfulness, which is even more important working on subjects loaded with guilt, embarrassment and shame. Another benefit of working in a small group is that it enables all participants to be actively involved in the theatrical and mental work, and experience its different aspects. The conductor can guide the participants to work on the playground end of the continuum in order to establish a feeling of freedom and playfulness within the group, and then gradually move towards increased awareness to the presence of spectators and a stage. In the presented case, during the last phase of the session, one of the "guilt" stories was brought to the whole group. It was explored through an improvisation created by a group of playing-participants in the play space, in front of the other group members, who were spectators (Hence, on stage). This allowed for a deeper experience of overcoming guilt and shame in a safe atmosphere that included the whole group. It demonstrated the way participants can put these feelings on stage after an experience of safety was established in a playground setting.

The ability to bring the story to the group and create a theatre improvisation in response to it within the group's play space, allows participants the essential experience of "emergence" (Kohut, 1977, 1979). The story emerges; thus, aspects of the self are manifested in a more tangible way - through the theatrical creation that emerges in front of others, within the group's play space – the stage. Such a process has essential therapeutic value for a healthy narcissistic development of self-esteem. The challenge facing the conductor moving along this continuum is to find a way "to put the playground on stage", enabling an experience of playfulness and creative exploration – but, at the same time allowing for the experience of emergence. The conductor should be aware that movement along this continuum is not obvious and that he/she should help the participants to actually benefit from the experience of emergence. This can be done by working on different levels of this continuum, while gradually putting the improvisation on stage.

Level of emphasis on individual vs. group narratives

The third continuum is *the level of emphasis on working through individual narratives vs. working through group narratives* (Fig. 3). Psychotherapeutic playback theatre is basically a form of group therapy and, as such, most of its underlying thought is group-based and inter-subjective by nature. However, most psychotherapeutic playback

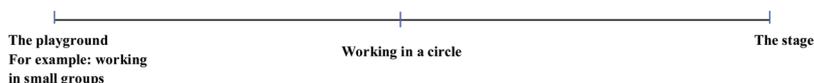


Fig. 2. Level of stage and audience presence.



Fig. 3. Level of emphasis on individual narratives vs. group narratives.

theatre is done through narratives brought by individuals to the group. In this sense, the conductor should facilitate group work through the individual story, while maintaining a basic commitment to the storytelling individual. This is highly important due to the sensitive emotional position of the teller. In this way, psychotherapeutic playback theatre calls for integration between individual and group narratives. Nevertheless, this integration is not obvious, due to the constant strain between needs of *belonging* and *individualization* (Foulkes & Anthony, 1965). Psychotherapeutic playback theatre participants constantly express a strong need to belong to the group and, at the same time, a strong need to express their own true inner self – individualization. These needs are very often experienced as conflicting – one might feel that he/she should give up expressing parts of his self in order to be accepted by the group, or he might feel that he/she has to give up the sense of belonging to the group in order to more fully express the self. Working through this conflict is a basic requirement for *intimacy*, which allows one to fully express himself or herself in an interpersonal relationship – and *internalization*, integrating something which is not initially experienced as a part of the self into one's self (Foulkes, 1990b). Intimacy and internalization are essential capabilities for positive mental health and growth, as well as satisfying relationships with others. The basic feature of psychotherapeutic playback theatre – expanding oneself by working on someone else's mental content by playing with his/her stories – is aimed towards working through this conflict, thus fostering the abilities of intimacy and internalization. The conductor can encourage this process by moving along this continuum of emphasizing individual vs. group narratives.

This continuum is achieved by giving more time to working through individual narratives and gradually interweaving more and more of them into a group narrative. This can be accomplished by paying attention to the relative space and time given to each story with its unique language and characters, to the creation of a group language, telling more stories, interweaving them, and giving less time to individual stories. This can result in playback that represents group narratives more than individual narratives. It is important to stress that this is not the aim of the group, but one end of a continuum, and it is important to continue moving along it, leading both the group and the individual to mutual fulfillment. The following example demonstrates this: A 35-year-old woman says that for a long time she has wanted to bring her story to the group, but she felt there wasn't enough space in the group for her story because of the many other important stories that people wanted to relate. She explained how session after session, she gave up the teller's role and passed it on to others. In response, the group created a theatre representation of her story, and the playing-participants worked on the theme of "not having a place in the group". In the sharing cycle, other participants brought stories about not having a place in the family, at work, in our psychotherapeutic playback theatre group. The next theatre improvisation was created in response to the group narratives, and it bonded the voices of the group participants through the shared theme of "not having a place", which had become a unifying statement rather than one expressing separation. In this manner, the "I have no place" theme becomes part of the group's basic language, which is then perceived more as group content, and less as personal content.

Summary

From its early beginnings, the literature has indicated the healing effect of Playback theatre. Psychotherapeutic group processes centered on the playback theatre ritual are established and used by drama therapists, psychodrama therapists and other therapeutic disciplines. However, psychotherapeutic playback theatre has never been defined as a form of group psychotherapy.

The aim of this article is to define psychotherapeutic playback theatre as a group psychotherapy method. The psychotherapeutic playback theatre process is portrayed by integrating key concepts of psychoanalysis and group analysis with playback theatre and drama therapy concepts. It also describes the main therapeutic aspects of the process through narrative transformation and through the main key factor of group analysis. Finally, it gives therapists guidelines regarding the three continua that characterize the different psychotherapeutic playback theatre variations, according to each group's specific population, process and goals. This can help psychotherapeutic playback theatre therapists explore the group process and encourage growth and development through psychotherapeutic playback theatre interventions by: defining the level of structuring; defining the level of playground vs. stage and audience presence; and defining the level of emphasis on individual narratives vs. group narratives. Future articles should address each aspect of the process from a broader perspective, in reference to various populations and other psychotherapeutic approaches.

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