



#### HAUPTBEITRÄGE - THEMENTEIL

## Brazilian psychodrama for the next decades

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Abstract This article in the Zeitschrift für Psychodrama und Soziometrie (ZPS) gives an overview on the history and current developments of psychodrama in Brazil. As a part of the special issue on the future of psychodrama, the authors derive conclusions and recommendations for the further development of psychodrama around the world. Brazilian psychodrama has been writing its history in different moments, and from different perspectives, which are considered for an analysis of its contemporary practice, of the history we produce in the present, and what we project for the future. This text presents the results of a sociodramatic act named "Brazilian psychodrama: a collective construction of our history, the present moment and the future", held with a representative sample of Brazilian psychodramatists in remote mode. This Sociodrama brought the opportunity to rescue the seminal value of the history and memory of the pioneers, point to the transformative power of the method and characterize the fertile ground being built for the future.

**Keywords** Psychodrama · Sociodrama · Brazil · History · Future · Interviews

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## Brasilianisches Psychodrama für die nächsten Jahrzehnte

Zusammenfassung Dieser Beitrag in der Zeitschrift für Psychodrama und Soziometrie (ZPS) gibt einen Überblick über Geschichte und aktuelle Entwicklungen des Psychodramas in Brasilien. Im Rahmen des Themenheftes zur Zukunft des Psychodramas leiten die Autorinnen Schlussfolgerungen and Empfehlungen für die weitere Entwicklung des Psychodramas in anderen Teilen der Welt ab. Sie beleuchten die Geschichte des brasilianischen Psychodramas zu verschiedenen Zeiten und aus verschiedenen Perspektiven, um eine Analyse seiner zeitgenössischen Praxis, der Geschichte, die wir in der Gegenwart produzieren, und möglicher Zukunftsperspektiven vorzunehmen. Dieser Text präsentiert die Ergebnisse eines soziodramatischen Online-Aktes mit einer repräsentativen Stichprobe brasilianischer Psychodramatiker\*innen unter der Überschrift "Das brasilianische Psychodrama: eine kollektive Konstruktion unserer Geschichte, des gegenwärtigen Moments und der Zukunft". Dieses Soziodrama bot die Möglichkeit, den Wert der Geschichte und die Erinnerung an die Pioniere in Erinnerung zu halten und die transformative Kraft der Methode zu nutzen, um das Potenzial des Psychodramas für die Zukunft herauszuarbeiten.

**Schlüsselwörter** Psychodrama · Soziodrama · Brasilien · Geschichte · Zukunft · Interviews

#### 1 Introduction

The invitation to write an article about the social ground where the history of Brazilian psychodrama began, the factors that facilitated the positive results, and the legacy that is being created for the future transported me to the 1940s when psychodrama emerged in the country as a social therapy for the black population of Rio de Janeiro. Slavery had officially ended less than six decades ago, and this population found in the Teatro Experimental do Negro a space to express feelings and take ownership of themselves (Malaquias 2007). Psychodrama created a space to bring the body into action with a cathartic, organizing effect and strengthened inclusion opportunities for this population (Fleury 2021).

It was a promising beginning, with some sparse reports until 1964, when the painful period of dictatorship began in the country, with intense repression against any group manifestation. During those difficult years, Paulo Freire proposed a democratic education to give voice to one's own culture and personal resources. Augusto Boal also created the Theater of the Oppressed, seeking to give voice to the people (Rodrigues et al. 2022). Actions that were strongly contested and only much later were valued.

The first Brazilian book on Psychodrama was released in 1967, with a preface written by J. L. Moreno. He described the unique characteristics of Brazil:

"one of the largest countries in the world, where lives a people that we can consider the most spontaneous among the nations of the planet [...] rare are the peo-



ples that have evolved as fast as the Brazilian people, whose creative evolution is concretized in the songs and dances of the carnival—constantly renewed—, in literature, theater, poetry, folklore, architecture. If Brazil has reached such great results, one can say that it owes it to the spontaneity of its people, who know how to resist 'cultural conserves'" (Moreno 1967, p. 13, our translation).

Our history has been written from multiple perspectives, but analyzing its results for contemporary psychodrama and the legacy we are building for the future required a perspective that broadened the view. We decided to organize a sociodrama, as an instrument for data collection, to survey the impressions, movements and speeches of a representative sample of psychodramatists who also experienced psychodrama history in Brazil.

We used the sociodramatic method to enrich this analysis, to give voice to the Brazilian psychodramatists of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Invitations were distributed, mainly by social media, with the call "Brazilian psychodrama: a collective construction of our history, of the present moment and the future."

This text aims to discuss the elements raised by sociodrama and weave relations with the main historical facts concerning the birth of psychodrama in Brazil, its strengthening and the legacy being built for the future.

#### 2 Sociodrama

Sociodrama is a research and investigation method in which all participants are both research subjects and researchers. Each one becomes a participant-observer in the position of an "*in vivo*" investigator in the here and now. J. L. Moreno assigned researcher status to the subjects by transforming them from spectators into actors, participants and competent to evaluate their reality.

Sociodramatic action values the present, characterizing a truly democratic principle of social action. It values the insertion of researchers as members of the group, allowing them to participate actively to act in two moments: initially proposing ways of description (narratives) and then directing the transformation of the group through their actions. In this way, the researchers/group participants can do the research themselves, at the places of their activity (Fleury et al. 2015).

Sociodrama develops a creative circle between action and reflection experienced in the session: the space of the "as if" where the subject and the object construct an experience from which new ways of feeling, perceiving, thinking, and acting emerges, promoting new attitudes towards life.

The methodology that propels group movement is based on the tripod of psychodramatic practice: stages, contexts, and instruments. Group interaction is revealed through these action resources available in psychodrama, putting the group in motion and characterizing a work of investigation of oneself and the group (Fleury and Marra 2022). Psychodramatic practice occurs in three stages to facilitate emotional involvement: (nonspecific and specific) warm-up, dramatic activity, and sharing. The contexts of a session are: social, group, and dramatic. The elements of a psychodra-



matic session are five: scenario, protagonist, director, assistant ego, and the audience (Fleury and Marra 2022).

Sociodrama is an instrument for collecting data in qualitative research, action research, which main aspect is the existence of a wide and explicit interaction between researchers and those involved in the investigated situation (Thiollent 2000). All movements, voices, discussions, and images created by the group are considered indicators for the construction of this text.

### 2.1 Sociodrama description

The group participants were professionals from different regions of Brazil, psychodramatists with a psychotherapeutic and socio-educational focus, gathered on the Zoom platform for an online meeting.

The nonspecific warm-up consisted of the presentation of a video about the birth of psychodrama in Brazil, with a selection from the 1960s that culminated with the V International Congress of Psychodrama, which took place in 1970, at the iconic São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), stage for movements on behalf of democracy and human rights in the country.

The specific warm-up "The voices of yesterday's, today's and tomorrow's psychodramatists" consisted in dividing the group into three subgroups, according to the criterion of time of professional activity as a psychodramatist: working for more than 10 years; working between 5 and 10 years, and working for less than 5 years. In the large group, the participants freely chose the subgroup they identified to bring their voices and compose a group sound. To give visibility to each subgroup, the director asked the participants to keep their cameras open.

Characterizing the three criteria for subgroup formation, in sequence, each of them, for a few minutes, produced sounds accompanied by body movements and facial expressions.

After these sounds, the participants were invited to choose the room corresponding to their subgroup to discuss the questions below and write a short text with a title that expresses the content of the discussion. Twenty minutes were given for this activity:

- Subgroup 1—What legacy has Brazilian psychodrama produced?
- Subgroup 2—What have we been producing that could become fertile ground for the future of psychodrama?
- Subgroup 3—What future do we want for Brazilian psychodrama?

Then they went back to the large group and presented the texts created in the subgroups.

After the presentations of the texts, the director invited each subgroup to build a picture of what had been discussed. The group suggested a single image, each passing image of affection from one Zoom window to the next, accompanied by music that expressed the movement experienced by the psychodramatists of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. They sang the song *Nos Bailes da Vida* by Milton de Nascimento and Fernando Brant, which had been heard during the presentation of the video on the history of psychodrama (nonspecific warm-up). Another song also



emerged in the group as an expression of that moment, the song *Imagine*, by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, considered an anthem of peace and representative of the Morenian utopia of the common good, of an emancipated human life.

Then the group started sharing with words, comments, and many accounts of their experiences. They gave a lot of praise to the initiative of this sociodrama.

The authors facilitated the group on the creation of movements and voices, articulating the discussions that led to the results. Considering that the authors had taken the role of president of the Brazilian Federation of Psychodrama (2 terms each), they had also experienced different periods of this history.

#### 3 Results and discussion

## 3.1 The legacy of history: the birth of brazilian psychodrama

The nonspecific warm-up strongly moved the participants. The crowd's sight gathered around the psychodramatic stage, and the awareness of the roots of Brazilian psychodrama planted in a libertarian act in the middle of the dictatorship energized the group, firmly moved by the richness of our history. The field for the coconstruction of the future of Brazilian psychodrama contained the essential ingredients for the creative process: conservation (history, memory), spontaneity and creativity.

Participants in subgroup 1 (over 10 years of performance) created low, spaced-out sounds accompanied by slow movements that evolved into gradually louder sounds. In the second part, they wrote the text titled *Movement*, *disruption*, *transformation* with a spiral for the collective.

"Our fight is all day long, psychodrama is not a commodity. Let's take back the group movement that provokes, enriches, questions, breaks and reconstructs the being and the collective. Let's take back the value of cultural preservation—the social, the affect, the action, the dialectic, driving the spontaneous and creative spiral to reconstruct network relations. We hope that the new generations will immerse themselves in the cultural conservancy to transpose it qualitatively, with a fruitful direction in the actual encounter with horizontal human relationships."

The low, spaced-out sounds are reminiscent of the "years of lead," during the country's dictatorship, with the intensification of repression. In this context, the sounds rose, representing our psychodrama's gestation. In 1967, the Latin American Association for Analytical Group Psychotherapy held a congress at the University of São Paulo Medical School. One of the scientific activities was a public psychodrama directed by Jaime Rojas-Bermúdez. The theater was packed with psychiatrists, psychologists, and health professionals, primarily trained in psychoanalysis, the primary therapeutic option. There was a delight in the method's power and the speed and competence with which the protagonist's inner world was approached (Cepeda and Martin 2010).



Some participants sought out Rojas-Bermúdez to start a study group in São Paulo, which grew to 200 students, including the most prominent mental health professionals.

In 1969, a delegation of 200 Brazilians attended the IV International Congress of Psychodrama in Argentina. They came into contact with the research of the Argentinian educator Maria Alicia Romaña on the use of psychodrama as an educational method. Later, she was invited to join the study group in São Paulo to train professionals who did not identify with therapeutic psychodrama, such as pedagogues and other professionals in education and social services. It was the beginning of what came to be called socio-educational psychodrama (Cepeda and Martin 2010).

At the end of this event, Moreno invited Brazil to host the next one, and, in 1970, the V International Congress of Psychodrama took place in São Paulo. It gathered 3000 participants and became a milestone in the history of Brazilian psychodrama. The president of the Scientific Committee and other participants evaluated that the congress opened passage for numerous so-called "alternative" practices. It came outdoors, to the group, to the public (Cepeda and Martin 2010). The louder sounds produced by subgroup 1 in the sociodrama represent this historical moment.

One of the poles of the social phenomenon Zygmunt Bauman called *utopia of* the possible has been installed. In Brazil and the world, the liquid society, with its frayed social networks of solidarity, had its hopes renewed to reform the world by sociatry and the belief that the human potential would be able to promote this transformation by sociometry (Almeida 2008).

At the height of political repression in the country, a new generation of psychotherapists found freedom in psychodrama. However, the 1970s were contaminated with political disputes in the national and international psychodramatic scenario and the polarization between different theoretical tendencies in psychodrama.

Brazil has cultural, geographical, ethnic, economic, and social differences. There was an ethnic and cultural mix involving indigenous people, Portuguese, Africans, and immigrants from many countries in the last century. These differences were reflected in the regional trends in psychodrama.

Study groups began to emerge in other country regions, and most of these experiences were successful and became psychodrama training centers, mainly in the psychotherapeutic modality.

Psychodramatists were divided into two competing trends, which reflected the main trainers: the classical model proposed by J. L. Moreno and the new trend developed by Rojas-Bermúdez.

In 1976, a group of psychodramatists representing this Brazilian theoretical and geographical diversity started a movement to create a national organization called the Brazilian Federation of Psychodrama (Febrap), under the leadership of José Fonseca, one of the main articulators of this approximation of differences. He relates this process in the documentary *Psicodrama: 100 Anos em Cena* (Febrap 2021).

The statute of the newly created federation defined as its main objective the strengthening of a scientific psychodrama, proposing to organize every two years a national congress and the launching of a scientific journal.

During the first decade, almost all federated institutions were training psychotherapists. Professionals from other areas identified with socio-educational psychodrama,



felt excluded from the psychodramatic movement. Many understood this movement as the imprisonment and loss of the joy experienced at the MASP Congress (Brito and Merengué 2022).

Many voices began to be heard, clamoring for new airs to the Brazilian psychodrama. In the 1980s and 1990s, Latin America saw structural changes in education and the expansion of the demand for psychology, involving universities in researching new fields of study.

Community work was born in this context of dissatisfaction among professionals in social sciences and health, who expanded their proposals and lines of action, valuing actions of greater social amplitude. Socio-educational and sociotherapeutic practices have gained new meanings, driving changes in government policies regarding mental health care and social development (Marra et al. 2009). In these two final decades of the 20th century, these movements brought about a new polarization between psychotherapeutic and socio-educational psychodrama.

A significant movement was the rescue of J. L.'s Moreno theater of spontaneity with national differentials. Rodrigues et al. (2022) differentiate sociopsychodrama (present in theatrical modalities such as rerun theater), with the proposal of unveiling situations of oppression and the theater of the oppressed, which starts from the conception that the group is oppressed, seeking to reveal this condition to the participants. In playback theater, the focus is on group truth, promoted by the emergence of the coconscious and counconscious in the group context.

Most of the pioneers in Brazilian psychodrama articulated psychoanalytic fundaments with psychodramatic practice. Theater was also making its first experience, but the outstanding highlight was the construction of a theoretical referential, based on the writings of J. L. Moreno but that it could be taught with a complete body of theory. It sought the enhancement of a consistent and complete psychodramatic theory.

The text produced by this subgroup reflects this legacy left by the pioneers in the form of cultural preservation, an essential element for the creative process that values the group and the collective interest. It cries out for the recovery of conservation/history for a consistent transformation for the future.

## 3.2 The approach to the current moment: The factors that led to the good results

The current moment was understood as the last two decades. Participants in subgroup 2 (between 5 and 10 years of performance) created sounds accompanied by body movements and words: commitment, attention, questioning, talking and little action, limits, counterpoints, and joy.

They produced a text titled Current production as fertile ground for the future of psychodrama.

"Psychodrama is revising itself and searching more for its origins and transformative potential. There is an enthusiasm and a greater tendency for action, seeking a position, a political place, especially in the socio-educational field because this is our roots.



The spaces for expression and participation of psychodramatists have expanded, with greater inclusion of our diversities, although there is still much exclusion. It is essential to spread the word through scientific writings that broaden the view of psychodrama's effectiveness.

A greater integration of the psychotherapeutic with the pedagogical or socioeducational is occurring. It seems to get closer to the Morenian utopia, a therapy for everyone. The online mode has promoted a greater integration of socionomy and is making it possible to expand the formation of groups. But there is still a long way before the essence of the social being's perspective on health is regained."

The sounds and the text express the turbulence experienced in the passage to the 20th century, characterized mainly by the search for an inclusive and scientific psychodrama, represented by the structuring of the Febrap and the strengthening of the Brazilian Congress of Psychodrama and the Brazilian Journal of Psychodrama.

The statute and the regulating principles of psychodrama practice and training adopted by the Febrap highlight the proposal to unite diversity under a common base: the philosophy, theory and methods proposed by J. L. Moreno, always considering the possibility of enrichments arising from new studies and research (Kim and Marino 2022). This common base defined the evolution of Brazilian psychodrama in these last decades and regulated the formation of socio-educational psychodrama.

In 1998, the Brazilian Congress of Psychodrama inaugurated a psychodramatic intervention in the community, named *Em Cena* (On Stage), in later editions. The psychodramatists submit proposals for intervention in the most diverse places: in the street, parks, libraries, hospitals, schools, places selected by the congress organizers in the city that hosts the congress. This practice has a strong social impact.

In 2001, in the city of São Paulo, a new historic milestone occurred in Brazil. The event "Psychodrama of Ethics and Citizenship" gathered psychodramatists, favoring the recognition of our identity in the beginning of the millennium: we were in the streets, in schools, in consulting rooms, in organizations, in institutions, in communities and in other contexts where psychodramatic action finds its moment of transformation, expanding the available resources of the groups and each human being present. The systematization of the material produced by the 180 teams that worked with the most varied segments of São Paulo's society made several clippings for analysis and subsidies to recognize the multiple theoretical-practical tendencies of Brazilian psychodrama. Not only citizens and employees regained power, but also psychodramatists, in work teams or at a distance, supporting their colleagues, regained hope for new possibilities of transforming actions (Costa 2001).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Febrap was expanded and could be understood in several dimensions: political (strengthening of Febrap's political model of management), scientific (recognition of the Brazilian scientific production), methodological (debate on the peculiarities of the various applications of psychodramatic methodology), pedagogical (continuity and deepening in the resignification of the teaching of psychodrama), sociological (growing recognition by society), professional (confirmation and respect for differences) etc. They were all equally impor-



tant in that a bottleneck in any of them could compromise goals relevant to the psychodramatic community (Febrap 2001). Some of the issues raised in this report by the president of Febrap at the beginning of her second term remain current.

At that time, we tried to add to the dream of the pioneers, the need to meet the appeals from all segments of society, recognizing the multiplicity of applications of psychodrama nowadays, working and investing in the expansion of psychosocial interventions, stimulating the insertion of the psychodramatist in projects in organizations, institutions, teaching, community and clinic. The psychodramatists were professionals from different areas: doctors, psychologists, educators, speech therapists, managers, all people who, in their professional practice, work with groups, guaranteeing with this diversity a greater reach in society.

Interventions with defined objectives that could be evaluated started to be developed, mainly in health, education, organization and promotion of human rights (Fleury and Marra 2005a, b, c, d).

In a survey on Brazilian psychodrama in 2017, 240 respondents reported that psychodrama is the main approach for most of them. Still, they add knowledge from Systemic, Psychoanalysis, Community, Jungian, Cognitive Behavioral, Phenomenology, Gestalt theories, and a significant number of other approaches, suggesting a great diversity of influences in Brazilian psychodrama today. More than half work with psychodrama psychotherapy. Among those in the socio-educational field, there is a multiplicity of applications, mainly in teaching and organizational. There is also a balance among those who apply Psychodrama in therapeutic procedural groups, workshops and time-limited interventions, with only 20% not working with groups (Fleury et al. 2017). In this study, the predominant influence of J. L. Moreno's writings was evident, as established by Febrap, and the almost total absence of authors from other countries, which keeps Brazilian psychodrama distant from meaningful exchanges with the international community and, consequently, rarely cited in international journals (Fleury 2021).

The search for scientific psychodrama has led to master's and doctoral theses using sociodrama as an analysis method. The universities accepted it as a scientific method in qualitative research, which stimulated cross-fertilization with other theories, especially systemic thinking, generating unique peculiarities of the Brazilian psychodrama.

Both the sounds and the text indicated attention to the practice but constantly reviewing, reflecting, and questioning to stay attentive to the roots that point to a liberating practice and open to new scientific discoveries. With the pandemic, new ways of practicing psychodrama emerged. Initially, the challenge was daunting, but new answers were consolidated in practice gradually.

# 3.3 The current production as a fertile ground for the future coconstructed by brazilian psychodramatists

Participants in subgroup 3 (less than 5 years of performance) produced sounds that mixed cadenced clapping and gestures of excitement and motivation. Deep breathing sounds seemed to indicate energy and renewal. They wrote a poem:



"Psychodrama occupies Brazilian languages, bodies, cultures and genders.

It is Brazil(ian)!

It is individual, it is people, and it is community!

It is movement!

It is connection!

It is birth and it is creation!

It is co-creation!

It occupies itself with space and time, through hands and keyboards; and through fingers, even if at a distance, it touches and is touched.

Psychodrama consciously invades the action in social networks.

It goes beyond the breakfast. It goes beyond the offices and stages. It is in the corner and the center.

It allows us to get out of the 'box-office' and expands into the streets and the homes-souls/identity.

The place of healing is the common within-outside, it is the breathing.

Psychodrama is the flip-flop, it's the foot on the ground, the foot in heels, and the moccasin.

It's the frayed T-shirt, it's the blouse with bijoux and the one by a famous brand. It is the whole and the everything. And everything is possible!

And we come to the here-now!

Which is so now that soon it will be yesterday, with the possibility of being conservation.

The Psychodrama of the future breathes the past's psychodrama and communicates today's psychodrama."

This poem expresses the growing vital force of the new generation of psychodramatists. They project vigor and joy into the future, increasing life capacity and new resources. They indicate the importance of dissemination to increase the number of people interested in studying, practicing, and benefiting from this methodology. They suggest a psychodrama that revitalizes everyone, professionals and clients alike.

The Brazilian Journal of Psychodrama has created the Revista Viva project, a program with two modalities of online events: interviews with the authors of the most accessed articles in the databases, inaugurating a model of open revision after publication, and the presentation of articles through active methodology, which promotes learning in a ludic context and aims to increase the number of accesses to the articles. Sociodrama was adapted to create the Revista Viva online, with presentations by the authors of the content of the articles, followed by discussions and role-plays that synthesize the content of the articles (Fleury and Kim 2020).

The potential of online resources has been empowering Brazilian psychodramatists. The visibility of the national scientific production and the exchange with colleagues from abroad, enriched by psychodramatic resources, promoting feelings of inclusion and belonging, creates an atmosphere of hope for the future.

The approach to the new generation of professionals interested in group practices, made possible by the insertion of the Brazilian Journal of Psychodrama in the main



Latin American database, the SciELO Platform, may be represented in in poem by the expression of feelings of expansion and diversity.

The indicators produced by the group and organized in this text by the authorresearchers depict the organization of social movements that built the history of Psychodrama in Brazil. The indicators allowed to report this story from the group's own creation and manifestations. The history lived by this group is metaphorically the same lived by the psychodramatic movement in Brazil.

#### 4 Final considerations

The fertile ground of hope for freedom, concretized in a libertarian and democratic action in the middle of the dictatorship, was sown over many years and reached its apogee in public psychodrama with the elite of health professionals in 1967, followed by the V International Congress of Psychodrama in 1970.

The development was tumultuous, with political clashes until the organization of an institution with the ideal of assembling the country's diversity, the Febrap, which constituted itself as a fundamental element for strengthening a scientific psychodrama valued in the academic world. The movements of consensus and dissensus enriched the scientificity of the practice and promoted the expansion of a growing number of psychodramatists, renewing the generations.

Over nearly five decades, the Febrap has played an important role in strengthening psychodrama, with the organization of biannual congresses and the publication of the scientific journal. We learned that democratic, entrepreneurial leadership expands the potential of presenting psychodrama in new contexts and with professionalism.

The valorization of scientific psychodrama has created communication channels with a new generation of professionals interested in working with groups.

The psychodramatists of the future will be challenged to expand their socio-educational practices to groups with new demands and from different social backgrounds (Fleury et al. 2022). Socio-educational psychodrama, born in research in education, has played an important role in developing public policies (Marra et al. 2022), of its revolutionary proposal of valuing group resources, favoring organization and the creation of realistic solutions for the demands of Brazilian society.

We believe that, in the future, psychodrama, and especially the socio-educational field, will find more and more spaces to disseminate the potential of this practice that stimulates group work that favors democratic, consistent and committed participation to develop the social being that we are, that Brazil and the world seek and need so much.

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