

Dramatic Resonances: A technique of intervention in drama therapy, supervision, and training

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Abstract

Dramatic Resonances is an advanced drama therapy technique that can be applied as an intervention in therapy, supervision, and training. Mostly used in group settings, the method is based on the creative responses that participants offer from within dramatic reality to an input posed from outside dramatic reality. The input may be a member's personal experience (memory, dream, etc.) or a non-personal narrative (tale, text, etc.). The approach has a strong ritualistic style and integrates elements from various sources—including the shamanic tradition and the Playback mode. This article describes the technique of Dramatic Resonances, its rationale and therapeutic value, while setting it in theoretical context.

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Dramatic reality is a unique feature linking all drama-based approaches to therapy. Any therapist working within a dramatic framework draws on the notion of the *as if*—a core concept in drama that involves the concretization of the imaginary realm, the actual manifestation of subjective reality in the here and now. Thus, dramatic reality is seen as a major locus of therapeutic interventions in drama therapy (Pendzik, 2006). Its use as an instrument for effecting therapeutic change is widely supported in drama therapy and related fields' literature (Blatner & Blatner, 1988; Duggan & Grainger, 1997; Emunah, 1994; Jenkyns, 1996; Jennings, 1998; Johnson, 1991, 2000; Jones, 1996; Kippner, 2001; Landy, 1992, 2001; Moreno, 1987; Pendzik, 2003, 2006).

Depending on the circumstances and their particular working style, drama therapists choose to make therapeutic interventions either from within, or from outside dramatic reality (Landy, 1992). A drama therapist that takes on the role of director or audience to a performance is operating from outside dramatic reality. Interventions from within occur when the drama therapist enters dramatic reality, either as fellow performer in an ongoing scene, or as a guide who helps individuals to maintain, enrich, and navigate through the *as if* from inside (Johnson, 1992, 2000). Although these approaches differ significantly in the position that each one ascribes to the drama therapist in

relation to the dramatic milieu, their common feature is that they locate the clients invariably within dramatic reality: The assumption underlying this form of intervention is that the therapeutic effect is achieved through the client's personal visit to the dramatic realm.

Yet drama therapy also provides options for intervention in which the client is the one standing outside dramatic reality. This arrangement brings to the fore the theatrical dimension of the field (theatre, from Greek, "to view") rather than its dramatic ("to do") aspect. An intervention of this sort can be found in Playback Theatre, where tellers are invited to tell their story and witness its presentation by others—either group members or trained Playback performers. Playback conductors are not positioned within dramatic reality: they stand at its threshold, linking between performers, tellers, and audiences (Fox, 1994; Salas, 1993, 2000). Yet the intervention in this mode is based on the premise that tellers *witness* an occurrence in dramatic reality, rather than make a journey to the *as if* themselves.

Analogous forms of intervention – which could be called "the client as witness" – may be found in therapeutic story-telling, ritual, or any instance in which the drama therapist (on his own or assisted by others) performs for a client or group. According to Johnson (1992), drama therapists working in this mode act as shamans, as they take "the imaginative journey" on their own, on behalf of their clients (p. 116).

This article presents a technique for making interventions of this kind, which I call *Dramatic Resonances*. Integrating ele-

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ments from various sources and traditions, such as the shamanic and the Playback modes, the method takes full advantage of the therapeutic potential inherent in both functions: the act of witnessing dramatic reality and the act of performing on behalf of someone else. The method can be used in therapeutic settings, as well as in training and supervision.

I have been developing Dramatic Resonances for more than 15 years now. The exploration initially set out as an attempt to find a contemporary correspondence to the shamanic paradigm, as well as to expand and deepen the therapeutic effects of Playback Theatre. I felt that there is a remarkable therapeutic value in the witnessing process, not only in the sense put forth in Authentic Movement – where the witness acts mainly as a living presence, providing containment and safety to the performer (Adler, 1999); but also in the act of beholding the transformation of one's subjective contents – the unfolding of an experience that is carefully held, developed, and transformed by others.

Similarly, there is an outstanding therapeutic potential in the act of resonating, for to perform a resonance is not merely to create an image on behalf of someone else: a person can only resonate with that which already exists in her or him; thus the resonators are also identifying, exploring, and working with images which are meaningful to them as well.

In Dramatic Resonances there is a fluid combination of performing and witnessing: participants play in turn as witnesses to the imagery that their offerings evoke on others, and as performers who respond to other people's offerings, or to collectively evolved imagery.

Dramatic Resonances is primarily a group technique—although it can be adapted for individual work as well. As an intervention method, it is extremely useful not only in the therapeutic milieu, but also in the context of supervision and drama therapy training, where it proved to be a powerful teaching tool.

Description of the technique

Dramatic Resonances are creative responses offered from within dramatic reality to a personal experience, a dream, a question, a text, a therapeutic session, or any stimuli conveyed in a drama therapy setting—mostly in a group session. These responses take inspiration from the initial account and remain attuned to its spirit, with which they resonate. Thus the technique has two main components: An *initial input*, and the *resonances* themselves—a *series of performed responses to it from within dramatic reality*.

An image can further illustrate the idea: the original communication can be likened to a stone thrown into a calm lake; the Dramatic Resonances resemble the expanding ripples that this act creates. They echo the initial movement, encircling it in successive rings, creating a chain of aesthetic pulses. Dramatic Resonances expand the sphere of influence of the original account in a poetic movement that is attuned to the initiating impulse.

The technique bears a strong ritualistic style. The original input is seen as an offering presented within a sacred space. The communication may be a personal account (an issue, question,

dilemma, etc.) referred by a group member; or a non-personal input—such as a fictional story, myth, poem, etc. The initiator is placed in a specially designated area of the space; other participants are instructed to use active listening skills—stay open and alert to the input, as well as to the feelings, images, moods, and stories that resonate with them. The account is conveyed as a monologue or a solo (if it is nonverbal); its beginning and conclusion are marked by a musical instrument or another ritual device.

Until the group becomes familiar with the format, the drama therapist guides participants into developing resonances, by helping to deconstruct the input, suggest possibilities, and assist members to form creative teams in order to work on them. When the group is trained in the technique, members can move into what I call “spontaneous resonances”—a round of improvised resonances that begins as the original communication ends, with no further planning or break except for a few silent moments for concentration and attunement. (As any improvisational technique, *spontaneous resonances* have particular conventions, which I cannot detail in this article.) In another variation of the technique, the resonances accompany the initial input as it unfolds.

A sequence of resonances may include, for example, a stylized sound and movement version of the input, soliloquies by secondary characters involved in it, a popular song that deals with similar issues, a missing scene that could have happened, a universal story or myth that the input evoked. The resonances are performed in a ritual fashion, keeping the atmosphere of a sacred time and space, and with an eye to the aesthetics. Whether they are spontaneous or planned, the resonances are not presented as individual associations, but are seen as part of a collective effort to unfold the input. By the time the group agrees to “close the stage,” the feeling is that the original account has been explored, carefully unfolded, and somehow transformed by the resonant sequence.

Although the resonances always keep a connection to the original input, they are not meant to be a mere reflection of it: they aim at expanding and deepening its scope, while keeping in sync with it. They resemble an aesthetic, living feedback performed from within dramatic reality, more than a mirror image. If they would be some kind of mirror, they would be rather like a lake. I shall give an example to illustrate a sequence of resonances:

A single woman in her 30s describes her experience of going to a couple of weddings, meeting a few of her pregnant friends, and coming back late from work, to her dark and lonely apartment—all in one week. The piece was named “too many weddings and one big loneliness.” The process began with a playback enactment, followed by several scenes that explored her experience (what I call the “closer ring”), such as a sound and movement rendering of it, a monologue she could have said when returning home, her pregnant friends talking among themselves about her singleness, etc. As the unfolding proceeded, the resonances extended the story past the personal sphere of the teller: someone sang a song about loneliness; a group member enacted a phone conversation

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