

Theater Therapy and its Integration with Improvisation

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Abstract: Role playing has been a common treatment since immemorial and theater therapy was founded by Jacob Levi Morand in the 1920's. Theater therapy runs in the open and flexible environment which the authorities observe and investigate better solutions on their issues and Treatments of predominant personality characteristics, interpersonal communication, contradictions and inner conflict as well as psychological and sensational disorders by special procedures. The main factors of this method includes: 1- first person (protagonist) which is the main axis exhibiting his/her psychological problems with the help of others called "helper" 2- "Helper" which exhibits different aspects and dimensions of the first person 3- Director (therapist) who guides participants in drama therapy towards greater awareness and insight. 4- Stage, scene of theater is circular. This method is not restricted to the patients but it is applied to delinquents, criminals, education, industry problems and so on. In theater therapy, the individuals are assisted to play and review the issue instead of talking about that. On the scene of psycho-dramatic disorder, self-centeredness is discovered and the individual hears himself through his own language and since there is no punishment, the person starts the creativity which leads to the appearance of inner personality conflicts and contradictions. Finally, when it reaches to the level of creativity and spontaneity (improvisation), it would be easy for patient to show emotion.

[Shamseddini Lory S, Yousefi S, Ahmadi A, Naseri R, Torfi F. **Theater Therapy and its Integration with Improvisation.** *Life Sci J* 2012;9(4):3971-3978] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 592

Key words: protagonist, helper, psycho-drama, catharsis, impromptu, director, speech therapy

1. Introduction

Playing a role as theater has been existed since ancient times and after the creation of civilization and urbanism. At first, the theater was used as a means to perform certain traditional ceremonies. About four thousand years BC, the Egyptians took advantage of theater and tragic theater flourished in ancient Greece. Ancient myths like Oedipus myth came on the scene. Dancing, and singing are regarded as a human need for symbolic expression and then are gradually replaced in certain cases such as training and education and psycho-therapy.

Theater therapy was founded by Jacob Levi Moreno. He was a psychologist who was born in Romania and was living in Vienna and finally in the year 1925 went to America to continue his career. He was one of the followers of Freud and conducted a tireless and hard effort in separation principles of theater therapy from principles of psychoanalysis.

In today's theater therapy, the essence of group therapy, Gestalt therapy, analysis method of behavioral therapy relationship and some other methods of psychotherapy are used.

To define theater therapy, it can be said that following a group therapy and outstanding characteristics of personality, interpersonal relations,

conflicts and psycho contradictions as well as mental and emotional disorders can be observed and evaluated.

In 1919, Cori March used group therapy method to psychiatric patients. In the 1920s, Jacob Levy Moreno employed group therapy for non-admitted (outpatients) neurotic psychiatric patients.

Samual Slavason whose main profession was mechanical engineering founded "The American association of psychological group therapy" in 1948.

From the 4th decade of twentieth century onwards, groups therapy became one of the methods of psycho-therapy drawing the attention of psychologists and psychiatrists.

The early man accustomed to show the form of his excitements and psychological sufferings by body movement, anger and happiness since the pre-historical times. In the most primitive, in which social and religion customs were more performed collectively, love and episodic stories were done by imitating the gestures and movements by which they reduced stress and excitement. After the foundation of medical science, many psychic and physical patients were treated with the aid of (psycho-dramatic) shocks.

Aristotle invented the word Catharsis; he used this term for expression and decreasing the

exhilaration effects of Greek dramas of Hercules torch and Achilles on the spectators. Aristotle believed that drama by means of artistic theaters has a tranquilizing effect on the lost affection and selfishness and spectators will heal.

Since the psychodrama theaters of Vienna in 1919, the concept of Catharsis has changed. Instead of influencing audience, it tended towards actors (spontaneously) and when Moreno registered the spontaneous theater in 1923, he defined Catharsis as follows. It has a curing and healing effect not on the audience but on the actors and executors by which at the same time he creates it and frees himself from it.

In theater therapy, we can simultaneously think that behavior and excitement together recognize inter-connections and the contradiction. In brief, in this kind of treatment thought, feelings and behavior, every three come to awareness and in the process art creation is in integration, adjustment and conformity between these three elements. The means of therapy and drama therapy consists of music pantomime, improvisation, doll and etc. The best possibility of treatment is artistic dramatic therapy that has plenty of dramatic possibilities. In safe conditions of theater therapy, individuals are invited impromptu because it is in this safe circumstance which spontaneity and creativity would arise.

1.2. The purpose of theater therapy and its implicational methods

Theater therapy was founded in the 20th century by Dr Levi Jacob Moreno. Theater therapy is a kind of scientific search for truth through a theatrical manner.

In theater therapy, the person is assisted to act out and review a given subject instead of talking about it. In practice, the interaction is implemented between individuals, engaging with the problem, and engaging of body and mind simultaneously. Further, the most anger mode of behavior or the more visible fears leads to awareness of hidden and collapsed excitements.

Practical approaches are effective not only for prescribing patients who possess limited capacity of mental activity but for those who have badly experiences and deny a making logic mechanism. It can be used in any area that requires disclosure of the psychological dimensions of the issue.

Education, psycho therapy, industry and industrial communications, experimental learning and in the field of mental, hygiene has a wider range of applications such as health care mental hospitals, clinics and counseling centers in spurious treatment of drug addicts in rehabilitation centers.

2. Theater therapy for adolescent and the young

It is effective for emotional treatment and conflicts of children, adolescent and young people. These methods can be changed occasionally and performed at home, clinics, child counseling, treatment centers, orphanages, speech clinics, nursery schools, recreation centers, summer camps, family classes and sports field. Theater therapy can be applied also in professional training such as social work education, teachers, nurses, missionaries, police, medical students and other groups.

2.1. Psychodrama principles

Self motivation and creativity is one of the fundamental features of psychodrama, acceptance of desiring roles and flowing ultimately free speech. Free creation and self motivation enables a person to decipher the role uncovers. The magic of improvisation is an opportunity to be a gift to the creative consciousness and actor to create new reality in the heart of their living reality and for this creativity there is a need to practical freedom which so far he has not experienced it. The reaction of human creative consciousness is a response to external adversity which is manifested through improvisational acts. Moments of self motivation and improvising in psychological shows are considered as a kind of reflection of personality and reflection of mental organization to the closed framework of life. Even in cultural norms, we cannot easily talk about sheer imitation. Self motivation is the basic need of life. Clients (Protagonist) talk about itself in creative scene and illustrate the deepest inner needs.

Psychodrama is a harbinger of flexibility. In this method, the living space is an expanded and desiring space. Barriers and prohibitions of this treatment are very little. In the space of psychodrama, the person can do everything and give them concrete realization without any fear of his/her behavior consequence. As Psychodrama is a kind of living exercise that the person is not punished because of his/her mistakes. Helper selves are some aspects of person's self and different dimension of his/her characteristics. These helpers' selves play as group members in the stage against protagonist (first person). Psychodrama is a response to repeated mental illness and his/her robotic style life.

In Psychodrama, what is replaced by stories and authors scenarios is the life story of the person which has been recreated at once and is performed immediately. Here protagonist stands in the center of play and is the hero of his / her real life events. If occasionally he goes out of his role because of technical requirements and plays the opposite role

his/her aim again is to correct his/her attitudes. The psychodrama can have the following functions:

- Through psychodrama, one can upgrade what it is to what it can be and achieve the improvement of mind, emotions and suppressed affections and gain a translucent look of self.
- Through psychodrama one can search for the person's past, present and future and opens closed doors of mind and find the enclosed inner way of characteristic which is the main role.
- Sometimes it can be reached on this importance by exploring dreams and fantasies and sometimes these unknown parts of character can be realized with dramatic plays.
- Playing different roles teach an individual how to take the accustomed and unpleasant behaviors and adapt with the new behavior.
- The role is part of life, so it should be analyzed all stages of human life from birth to death to create it in a true and correct manner.

In theater therapy definition, Moreno starts his career with the slogan "I want to be myself". In his point of view, the most important psychological and educational achievements of the drama therapy is to teach spontaneity (elasticity movement) and creativity. In his opinion, creativity and spontaneity are the fundamental of human personality and in principle the human being is based on creativity. However, creativity involves errors and essentially without the possibility of mistake and spontaneous movement no one would learn something.

2.3. Theater therapy and its elements

Theater therapy is carried out with two elements of action and active observation. Action means mental visualization via dramatic movements which is done by special techniques (Doubling, the mirror, movement, hot chair, dark room, empty chair, fairy dream and projection). Active observation means to be aware exactly of what we experience in any moment of time. In the theater, the time is always present tense even if some parts of past and future is traced by the authorities.

Moreno believes the person is forced to act and observe in the moment. He has to react against what is going and forces the others into act. Therefore, the person is the creator and the creature at the same time.

Human in the scene of theater therapy is creating and projecting his inner world and outer world constantly, and the world is made of these two worlds.

Theater therapy is a way of intersecting two worlds of out and inside and a different way to reach creativity where communication is established between the conscious and unconscious parts of mind and human emotional process is formed.

Spontaneity has a great importance in theater therapy. The people do not enjoy any text on the stage. They attend on the scene to find a worthy response to the situation. Regarding the most important feature of theater therapy, we can mention the followings:

- Cause to creativity and spontaneity.
- The inner images are to be objective.
- Since there is no discipline in theater therapy and everything is possible, things experience that has never been experienced in real life.
- Theater therapy is the language of emotion, affection, act and observation.
- Theater therapy is a conflation of central character with the understanding of space and situations. And, with this act, the right hemisphere of the brain is stimulated and it stimulation leads to increase of spatial awareness, memory and affection. As Moreno says, theater therapy is an aesthetic description of freedom, because in the stage one can become everything he wants. Since showing them, one can review his / her problems via dialogue.
- In the scene of psychodrama, the self-centered disease is discovered where the person hears his description via his own language. If he/she is not able to describe him/her a helper goes to assist.
- The role enjoys such a place in the theory of psychodrama which Moreno considers it prior to himself. The role is not a product of self, but the creator of it. Role was existed before the advent of self. Young children are not capable of self – perception in the first period of their lives, but at that same period play their role. In short, the role before the formation of ego and before self starts its action. So at first role is born and then the role consciousness, that is self or ego.

One of the main elements of psychodrama is "Director", that is an individual who is expert in psychotherapy. Since he accepted the psychodrama as a guide of therapeutic activity, he gained the scientific and practical skills and is familiar with the art of theater and role playing. The most important role of director is to prepare the way for spontaneity. If a director consider the group dynamics, he can understand which one of team members is ready to display a section of his/her life in front of the group.

The first person (protagonist) is selected by the director or group or volunteer. The director encourages the persons to express their issues and perform them at the scene. And this performance has a natural and spontaneous form.

The director has a variety of actions, display production, therapists, analyzing the game and group leadership is considered as one of his most important actions. One of the important duties of a director (the therapist) in psychodrama is production. Finally, the director role in production includes:

- No danger scene (a free risk environment for first person)
- Stage resolution (mise en scène without any annoying and untargeted associations)
- Presence at the scene (in order to support the first person to be present at the scene)
- Use of space (any space in which the first person to be able to play among the other actors)
- Use of the platform (use of a platform is necessary)
- The audience and the stage (stage observation by the audience and a sense continuity)
- Changing the scene (If there is any need to change the scene, the scene changes)
- Light (light is an important role, has many symbols)
- Equipment (some does not believe in equipment and thinks that creativity and spontaneity of the actors should utilize as much as possible)

2- Protagonist (first person): someone who has mental, social and personality problems and is introduced to the group to improve and achieve the changes and psychological desired changes. Protagonist is the hero of the story and is the main aim of treatment (he is the patient or client). Feeling of safety and trust that is the basis of psychotherapist is at its peak in psychodrama.

3. How to select the first person?

The first person is chosen by the director, by the group, introduction by others and based on readiness. The first person explores and exhibits his own inner world in the stage. He is the main element of psychodrama.

The very important technique melting the closed spontaneity and frozen creativity of first person is the *“role inversion”*. This technique is capable of improving the behavioral treasury of first person and causing the variation in his/her behavior.

The second technique is *“poly protagonist”* in one stage, in which the simultaneous presence of

several references in the stage of psychodrama requires high experienced director, intellectual defense to lead them on the stage and practical skills that should be scientific and practical expertise. When the clients problems are more similar to each other and there are other variables (such as age, gender, culture, education, etc.) one can use this method.

The third technique is *“Blocking the first person in the scene”*. In the procedure of psychodrama, it is possible for the first person to lie in the interruption and blockage situation of energy where there is no passages to continue the play.

Some ways that director deal with the problems of interruption and blockage situation of energy in the session of psychodrama include the use of a partner, playing the reversed role, the use of the coming technique, other team members, and stop the play.

The fourth technique *“psychodrama and telling the story of the soul, or storytelling”*, is used when the concept is retelling his life. Through this way, one can improve their relationship with one's soul. On one hand, with the deepest parts of his/her mental and on the other hand, it connects to the highest and most idealistic inner desires.

Building a new concept in recent years which have been increasingly considered by philosophers and psychologists can be considered as another technique. Psychodrama is one way to aware of this creative process.

One way to understand the creative nature of mind is family therapy. In fact, each member regarding to the set of his/her mental attitudes (especially emotional) considers parts of event and rebuilds it in a completely unconsciousness manner. In psychodrama sessions, we realize the astonishing power of creative retelling process or reconstruction. But, the human needs moments of new evolution in the set of his personality. This evolution is called *“intuition”*.

The evolution means the entrance of soul to the realm of psychology. Some therapists are going to use the term soul in the process of psychodrama effect. This method of treatment deepens the realms of meaning and imagination. Deepening is the person's continuity with the soul.

Spirit is a simple semantic meaning and therefore communication with the spirit means entrance in fluid and unconscious inner world which has a global nature. In the stressful world of individual and social life, the spirit lose parts of his existence. But. It is always searching for his missing part. Need to hear and be heard indicate the spirit effort to recover its wholeness. In the story retelling

in the scene, the spirit tries to rescue the unwanted break and gather it's lost.

Ego- the human self has the role of mediator between the soul and the world. My world, self and soul are in the continuum its starting point is the outside world and visible realistic in the material and human world. The midpoint of the continuum is the human who is able to bind the spirit world among the best and most ideal conditions. The spirit is not able to manifest itself while the spirit is crystallized and proves its existence.

The stage psychodrama is the binding of spirit separations, the strengthening of the place of relationship among three elements, world, ego-self and the soul. Retelling the story of life is the outline of soul ulcers and its treatment. Psychological effects of this retelling are also critical.

Retelling is not just an alert, but can take picture the human in his/her dream. Storytelling in a dream can be noted in a few points:

- The unconscious nature: therapists ask the clients to rebuild the scene as it was in the dream world. Validity and therapeutic value is performed based on the dream events, as the source of story is the unconscious system and creativity of personality. Between the human behaviors, no behavior but dream enjoys arousal feature, so it is noteworthy. Therefore, the purest psychodrama sessions are hidden behind the dreams, since the most unconscious life stories appear in dreams which is full of emotion, passion and happiness.
- The symbolic nature: dreams are full of different symbols: personal symbols, cultural symbols, ethnic, and international symbols. What are depicted in dreams are the symbolic retelling and life story and its objective are visualized and repeated.
- Refining value of dream: retelling the life story and illustrating and visualizing life events in dream has a great action therapy.
- Moreno, in comparison draws a parallel between the theoretical basics of psychodrama, psychoanalyzing of stage and playing parts of clients' life in the scene and dreaming. He believes that Freud interprets and analyzes clients' dreams, while the therapist of psychodrama encourages the clients to dream again.
- Helper egos: in order to bring objectivity to the subjective world of the first person (protagonist) it is required in addition to the first person, other people come on stage and play the role of influential people in the life of first person.

- Helper ego and theoretical position: if we consider the presence of helper me as an expansion of client personality and objectivity of inner world, then what is outer and objective, has a root in the theory of subject relations.

Otokrenberg (1967) explain how every interaction with the outside world (e.g. Feeding the baby by the mother) leads to a symptom of memory that stays in the mind and includes internalizing those aspects of self in connection with some aspects of others. This phenomenon is related to the memory of emotion.

In the psychoanalyzing these aspects come into inner issues in the mind.

Helper ego: group members are involved in life group by undertaking different roles such as the role of advocate, and helper and helper ego as necessary. Director's role is clear in some treatment sessions, but some sessions may consider as the mother or the father, a phenomenon that Psychoanalyzing refers to it as transformation.

There are two roles for helper ego: the first is related to the discovery of the inside in which one of the unique techniques of psychodrama is to discover the inner world of group members. Guiding of client or first person can be regarded as the second role in which helper me in their relationship with the first person facilitates his/her cognitive development and leads him/her to the higher level of knowledge about themselves and communication with others and the world.

When helper ego could consider creatively and accurately some of unknown aspects of the first person and guide him to study the aspects that are usually very high therapeutic value, has accomplished his main task.

- 1- Acting role: the helper ego's role as an analyst or counselor and therapist has a profound impact on the quality of the display.
- 2- Scene: the scene where psychodrama is that clients and helper egos have been on it and play the role. This scene is often circular and group members and the audience sit around it and the scene has profound philosophical and psychological explanations.

In the superior scene, psychodrama leaves good effects on psychiatric patients (schizophrenic). Since the patients suffer from auditory hallucinations and can't deal with the problem, the director based on the principle of superior reality gives character to their mind voice and then a conversation occurs between the patients.

Regarding the superior time, the time has three dimensions including past, present and future

and that each of these dimensions is the source of suffering and stresses. It is worth mentioning that the coordination of these dimensions is to influence the clients.

Further, appealing to the approach of superior time in the stage of psychodrama is based on the conflicts removing. As alive and dead come together on the scene, imagination and reality forget their permanent conflict. Therefore, the superior reality is created and the past and the future are intertwined and ultimately the superior time is created.

Moreno confirms the dynamics of the present and call it here and now. It cannot be denied that a number of psychological disorders result from patients' anxiety about the future phenomenon.

The most important techniques used in psychodrama are accurate and effective ones and are designed for situations that allow the client's compromise with the future.

The evolved concept of superior time in psychodrama and dreams is to strengthen the life force and keep up with the being soul. The unconscious state which creates the sleep mode is the magnanimous source of the rebirth of the vital forces. During sleep, human is doing procreation and creativity.

As Blanter believes (1996), one of the most important assistance of psychodrama is that it supports the developing flow towards the technical integration in psychotherapy. Though it is possible to apply psychodrama efficiently to various types of individual therapy, its strongest state is when the group reception is used.

Therapists face to this challenge that what would be a useful tool in a given situation. Blanter (1996) believes that psychodrama is not a panacea and should be judged properly and be applied in balance with other group skills of therapy. Although arousal is one of the fundamental concepts of psychodrama, it can be exploited. It is necessary for a group leader that his/her resilience, creativity and encouragement for using new techniques be accompanied with their caution, respect to members and attention to welfare.

Further, those who use psychodrama should be careful to observe people who has exhibitiv behaviors or people with severe disorders. It is also important that leaders have experience and knowledge of dealing with psychopathology.

The play has a positive effect on individual's creativity or the patient which is a factor to discharge the inside of a person. But, when the therapist faces with people, who have trouble in communicating, here it is essential to find new

strategies to overcome the patient's problem. Further, those who lack confidence or have no motivation to communicate must be encouraged to communicate and motivate in order to create creativity and foster analysis and verbal and physical performances (To accomplish).

4. Speech therapy

When the speech therapy is done, the person expresses his sentiments and opinions by talking or expression and the person is encouraged to stimulate his subconscious mind and to express his thoughts and feeling.

Those having problems are not aware of the nature of their issue end even it is possible for those who are aware of their problem not to be able to complete discharge and to relax themselves. (Such as loss of a dearest one).

Expressing manner of each person depends on his/her thoughts and feelings. In fact, the expression is a bridge between feelings and thoughts. Now the time of expressing is important and is done consciously or unconsciously. Whenever a person feels the need to communicate with others tries to express hidden feelings through non-verbal expression. This act is done consciously and people tend to express their daily life through the day and night dreams, fantasies, and desires that may be unconsciously and while the life is going they are able to express their description. Further, people are always playing different roles. However, what is important is that in all of these roles, there are the existence character of the individual with that playing role.

One of the duties of psychodrama is to help the patient in order to discharge him/her and to establish the necessary condition for a peaceful coexistence between him/her and the virtual person.

Dreams are also effective in changing mind. The dream is a living sample of subconscious mind which plays an important role to fulfill wishes and strengthen the emotional relationship. When it interprets a correct image of patient, it plays an important role in his/her treatment, so in receiving its important points, it should be done with sufficient accuracy and insight.

The therapist as a leader and guide enters the person into the world of imagination and after pouring out all his inside world returns him/her to the real world and at this time treatment begins. When the patient says, no one understands me, I feel being or not being of me is not important for anyone, I do not have independence, and I am damaged emotionally and so on.

In some cultures, the loneliness and strangeness emotion of this people push them to the sport and art, so perhaps in this way, they can show off and they intend to remind the society of them to be gain importance and value.

To assess the health condition of the client, some insight into the skills is needed to see the unconscious factors in the person's attitude clearly. These methods can be said complementary to the verbal analysis during the analytical psychotherapy (called psychoanalytic) in relation to emotional problems. Since each client has its own unique issues and capabilities and so has an independent solution, the person should express his/her emotions, failures and inner conflicts with improvisation and creativity in a space which produces inner peace for him/her.

Therapist and the director can consider an occasion and position without conditional dialogue and with the improvisation of the first person (client) and indirect relationship on stage in a manner that the client does not feel director controlling and be able to express and discharge his emotions and create new insight. And, while the client doesn't reach to the level of creativity and spontaneity (improvisation), showing emotions is not easy. Furthermore, everyday imaginations of the client has a self-consciously and self-made dimensions and gives him the power to watch him in distance. This imaginations are part of the human aspects includes the surplus fact.

When the client stands in the scene and communicates with the accessories, touches them, plays with them, takes hold with craving, tears, keeps the exclusion, he/she discharges all of his/her feeling towards those symbolic tools. He expresses all of his feelings and hatreds.

Finally, the space construction can face the persons with their behavioral mistakes (client) in an environment free of risk, which is draining emotions and encouraging to the consistent behavior. Then, the desired result will be achieved.

5. Conclusion

Theater has been used since ancient times to perform certain rituals and traditions. Dance, verbal and non-verbal movements have been as different symbols and it changed to an art over time. In the 20s was found by Jacob Levy Moreno as an effective art in treatment and discharge of individual and group emotions.

This art is used in training, education, mental health professions, treatment of children and adolescents with emotional and physical problems, in some professions such as teachers, nurses, missionaries, etc and in the industry through the role

performance and management skills, and also group therapy and family therapy.

In the theater therapy, outstanding characteristics of personality, interpersonal relations, conflicts and psycho contradictions as well as mental and emotional disorders can be observed and evaluated

Because of the performance of mental illnesses arising from the emotional disorders and accumulation of stresses and negative and positive emotions on the stage, they can justify the clients and cause to discharge all of the mental and emotional aspects of an individual.

The best possibility in the treatment of the client about his character issues is through psychodrama which has plenty of facilities. In the safe situation of theater therapy, the individuals are invited to be improvised, because it is only safe condition which leads to spontaneity, creativity and advent of feelings, emotions and discharge of them. This situation is a position to consider and solve the problems with reduction of action and emotional distance. In this way, they can make flourish their destructive reactions. One of the most important tools of these changes is the roles replacements in improvisation.

When tragic and painful situations that occurred in earlier times are repeated, their pressure would be reduced and each time of reconstruction by the client has a less pressure on him. In addition, at this time, he achieves his repressed emotions and feeling and gains a transparent view of his own life and finds his balance and gravity point through the theater therapy since nobody will punish him because of his mistakes on the stage.

In the scene of improvisation, the person is constantly creating and projecting his inner world to the outer world and his world is made of the intersection of these two worlds. Therefore, improvisation is the intersection of two inner and outer worlds and is a different method to reach to the creativity of the client. Since the time is not a single dimension reality, in theater therapy which is not focused on the past, the person can trace the different parts of life in the past, present and future.

Thus, in the theater therapy, treatment is reflected as a kind of client-centered treat. As Carl Rodgers, the father of counseling believes, the counselor should be beside the client to help him from mistakes and it is the client who conducts the counseling sessions.

The treatment method of theater therapy is like this. Treatment of the therapist is like assistance and the client come on the stage without prior dialogue in an improvisation manner. The therapist is

allowed to use only theater therapy methods in order to clarify and explore client's problems. The improvisation of feelings and emotions should remain in the client-centered manner. The director (therapist) allow the client (patient) to participate with his own steps and without any violence in the theatre therapy process to use his spontaneity and creativity to discharge emotions and feelings and the therapist determine indirectly the direction of patient's role.

Finally, with the use of symbolic objects of the stage, the director can define the correct direction of exploration and self-connection for the client in order to disclose the blind spots of problems and unsatisfied needs on the stage.

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09/04/2012

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