

## Psychodrama 2000: Where are we going?

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First of all, I would like to thank the Conference Committee (American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama: 2000, NY) for inviting me to participate on this panel. I represent a part of the world with different cultural connotations. The Brazilian psychodramatic movement also has a different history from other parts of the world. J. L. Moreno, in 1961, predicted that Latin culture would be fertile ground for the growth of psychodrama. Indeed, Moreno was right; in Brazil we have approximately 4000 people working with psychodrama and our biannual congresses attract roughly 1000 participants. So, it is from this cultural perspective that my comments originate, though I also consider information that I have gathered through my work with the IAGP (The International Association of Group Psychotherapy).

I would like to point out some of the historical highlights of psychotherapy, group psychotherapy and psychodrama so that we can better understand the present and contemplate the future.

### GROUP ERA

The sixties and seventies mark the *group era*. In the United States, two locations stand out in the propagation of the group movement. Beacon, N. Y., with the World Center of Psychodrama led by J. L. Moreno, and Bethel, ME, with the NTL (National Training Laboratory) led by Kurt Lewin. Later, the Esalen Institute also becomes distinguished as a group and alternative therapy temple. This dynamic peak of group psychotherapy coincides with the hippie culture and its proposals for community life. This period also marks the advent of anti-psychiatry, initiated by Ronald Laing and David Cooper in England.

## THE NARCISSISTIC CULTURAL SYNDROME OF THE END OF THE CENTURY

In the 80s, generally within the middle and upper social classes, a “culture of the individual” rises — from internal growth, to individual meditative practices, to the cult of beauty and health. A sophisticated style of living is encouraged, and great financial maneuvers, often accomplished with merely a click on a keyboard, are exalted. It is the kingdom of clean, the prevalence of *I* over *us*, the *me decade*. It deals with the yuppie as opposed to the hippie. The individual replaces the group and the private substitutes the public. Communities and dormitories are replaced by small individual apartments. Group psychotherapy is left behind for individual therapy or simply “taking our daily Prozac.” Cleanliness, order and beauty become the idealized goals. Long, unkempt hair gets cut and controlled with gel. If, on the one hand, this cultural movement puts forth some healthy habits, in its exaggeration, it reveals hypochondriac and narcissistic features on the other. One must not forget that a psychological reading of Nazism reveals the narcissistic ideal of purity, perfection, beauty and superiority. Coincidentally or not, in the political arena, one observes the resurgence of the right, which is reflected in various areas of human activity. An apparent conservatism also impregnates the sciences. It is within this greater scientific-cultural context that psychiatry and psychotherapy must be situated. Everything indicates that the neo-organicism or biochemistry of current psychiatry is placed within this new world order of values. This is the scientific-cultural syndrome in which we live: the narcissistic cultural syndrome of the end of the century.

## PERSPECTIVES ON PSYCHOTHERAPIES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Doing an exercise in futurology, the prediction is the discovery of the genetic component of some mental illnesses and personality characteristics which will have their psychosocial aspects re-appraised and, as a consequence, their psychotherapeutic management re-evaluated. There will be a reduction in the number of indiscriminate referrals to psychotherapy, resulting in a reduction in the number of professionals working in this area.

Psychotherapy, in a generic sense, as a practice which purports to help people with psychological suffering, will adapt to the new scientific cultural and economic order. Within this new order exists a trend toward methods with proven results. This is a pressure which, despite the protests, will instill an objectivity in psychotherapy. Regarding objectivity and speed, the ample use of strategic and action techniques (cognitive psychotherapy, psychotherapy, gestalt therapy and neurolingistic programming, among others) is predicted.

Family psychotherapy, which belongs to the group therapy field and includes couples therapy and other related psychotherapies (with different intra-family sociometric arrangements), will continue developing greatly, due to the direct nature of its approach and the brevity (according to some schools of thought) of its process.

Generational research will include genetic and psychological aspects when studying the family profile and the personalities of its members.

The IAGP (The International Association of Group Psychotherapy) has noted a considerable decrease in the affiliation of new entities to the association in the 90s, as compared to the 70s. This data demonstrates that, either the groups who intended to join did so in previous years, or, more probably, the group psychotherapy movement doesn't present the same power as before. In the city of São Paulo, there are fewer psychoanalytic and psychodramatic process groups (groups that meet weekly with the same psychotherapist over an extended period) than in the 70s and 80s. This has not happened due to a belief that group therapy is a less effective therapy. It continues to be as effective as ever. Rather, it means that process group psychotherapy goes, as we see, against the current cultural tide. The *narcissistic cultural syndrome* of the end of the century opposes the group, the public and the community. In the meantime, the employment of group techniques in workshops, retreats, demonstrations of techniques, courses, and the selection and training of personnel, continues to grow. I think that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, group therapies, along with the resulting tendencies mentioned above, will receive strategic focus in brief and theme (obese groups, phobics, etc.) psychotherapies. Group therapies will continue being useful in community outreach programs directed toward preventative medicine and public health. Individual psychotherapy presents characteristics which group therapy doesn't have: exclusivity and coziness. But group psychotherapy offers what individual therapy doesn't have: relational insertion in a group

network and observation through the multiple therapeutic eyes of the group. Individual and group therapy make the psychotherapeutic process complete.

Since cultural movements occur in waves, filtered by the values of the time, it is possible that we will have a new *group era*. It would come with the reaction against the values reminiscent of the yuppies and the narcissistic cultural syndrome of the end of the century. It would be a neo-hippie phase. We would have a newfound appreciation of the group, of the community, and of process group psychotherapy. But I'm not sure if this is a prediction or the desire of the author missing the values of his youth.