

Directing Psychodrama on Stage

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It is 10 am. I am sitting at the edge of a horse shoe of 8 chairs on the stage of the dilapidated Crystal Palace Theatre in Mt Eden. It is freezing and a vast blackness stretches upwards and beyond the first few rows of chairs that I can make out. I draw my attention down and into the group, I take in the stage lights set up around the group, the lighting technician adjusting things at the edge of the circle, Yvonne looking on with her camera. Now I can see the people in the group I will be working with, some I know well and we exchange easy smiles, others are new to me and new to the psychodrama method, sent along by enthusiastic friends to a free workshop. Briefly I get anxious as I consider their experience, this must seem crazy to them, to be sitting in this place among all of this.

Yvonne and I have worked collaboratively in the creation of this event. We have developed a beginning in which she will make a welcome, so that the group can take in her intent and the scope of her project. She sits now centre stage in front of the group. I know that acknowledging the camera and the lights and meeting the people behind them will assist the group to let them be part of the background. Yvonne speaks briefly about her love of photography, her love of the psychodrama method and shares the moment during a psychodrama when she first conceived of this project. She talks about the importance of each person's consent to her and how she will not use any images that participants are uncomfortable with.

I can feel myself gathering as I anticipate the next beginning which I must make. First I take up my role as group leader letting the group members know that "while Yvonne and Duncan, the lighting specialist will be working all around us we will not pay attention to them, we will be involved with each other and the work that comes alive here between us." I pause and look softly around the group making eye contact, my being is still, I can feel their warmth and anticipation. This is the moment in which the group is formed. I know my next words matter — they must connect us to a common endeavour, to each other and to our purpose.

Here we are in this extraordinary situation, I have never directed a group on stage like this before, however we have two days to work together. This is the beginning, we cannot know what will be created between us, everything is yet to unfold, nothing is determined and everything is still possible. You will be warmed up to your involvement with us here, perhaps you anticipate an area of focus you hope to attend to in your development, maybe you anticipate being here as yourself and getting involved with others? It's a bit of a task aye, the beginning, finding a way to speak to each other that will begin to make this workshop a meaningful experience to you. Take some time now to let people know who you are and what you hope for in this workshop. As you do this get involved with each other, if you find yourself responding to something express yourself in response.

I settle back in my chair, I feel satisfied, as I look around the group and a person begins to express herself in a soft vulnerable manner, others are attentive to her. It feels a good beginning.

During the workshop as the connections between people continue to deepen there are moments in which a great deal of vulnerability is being expressed, as Yvonne takes an image the large light pops with a flash. I particularly enjoy the way that producing psychodrama invokes and requires 100% of my attention and I believe a reciprocal relationship develops between group, protagonist and director in which a deep focus is provoked and sustained. I notice that I am conscious of orienting the production so that it is well presented in relation to the camera, however my primary attention is with the group. The warm up between members of this group is central to them; they do not appear to notice the sounds and lights; the action unfolds just as it might in a private space. At morning tea time we get more heaters and the area on the stage becomes warm.

Weeks later I meet with Yvonne and I am stunned by the images. I see myself at work and the extent of my involvement is evident. In several of the images I encounter myself as compassionate and fully involved. The memories and feelings living in me in the psychodrama workshop are still alive within me as I view the photographs. I take in the impact I am having on those involved and I observe myself in relation to them as they stand on the stage.

These photographs cause me to encounter myself as a director in a way that I have not experienced before. The effect is to bring me into contact with my humanity. As I experience the reciprocal nature of the effect between myself and others portrayed in the photographs, I am humanised.

My motivations were to support Yvonne's integration of her work as a photographer and her development as a psychodramatist and to assist in making psychodrama visible to the many people that will view these

images over time. I am surprised at the ongoing impact the images have on me as I continue to see the living spirit of the psychodramatic method alive in them.



Hamish Brown is a Psychodramatist with an interest in making our method more visible and more available to the public. He believes the psychodrama method and the AANZPA has a lot to contribute to the mental health and well-being of the people of New Zealand. He is currently the Chair of the Psychotherapy Board of Aotearoa New Zealand and on the Staff of the Auckland Training Center for Psychodrama. He practices as a registered psychotherapist and Psychodramatist in Auckland in private practice.