



The therapeutic function of role repetition in drama therapy

Tamara Guénoun

Robert Landy's work (2009) has highlighted the centrality of role in drama therapy. Building on his theories of role and role relationships, he developed the Role Method, a therapeutic approach which invites clients to explore, enact, and reflect upon the many roles that shape their identities. Through this process, individuals expand their role repertoire, confront inner conflicts, and move toward greater integration of self. The method thus transforms theatrical play into a means of psychological insight and change.

Drawing on psychoanalytic theories of play (Winnicott, 1975) and symbolization (Roussillon, 2008), this study seeks to deepen the understanding of clients' relationships to roles in drama therapy. We hypothesize that there are typical patterns of reliance on different roles as therapy progresses.

This research, based on a case-series group methodology, aims to identify distinct types of relationships to roles and characters in drama therapy groups with adolescents (Guénoun, 2021). It may also provide a model applicable to other populations and intervention contexts. The findings first show an initial reliance on idealized social roles. Subsequently, clients express fantasized, repressed, or unmentalized parts of themselves. Third, the enacted scenes echo painful experiences from the participants' lives, and the characters that emerge often take the form of haunting figures from their past. Finally, in the last movement, a creative relationship with the character develops, marking the clients' growing capacity to symbolize painful aspects of their psychic bonds, both past and present.

During the second and third phases of this typical embodiment of roles in drama therapy, a repetition of identical roles can be observed. Clients replay the same scenes and roles, eliciting the same impressions of astonishment in therapists. This phase of repetition is of fundamental importance, as it represents the time of psychic work that enables the processes of symbolization and metaphorization to unfold.



Bibliography

Guénoun, T. (2021). Chapitre 7. **Les jeux adolescents d'incarnation de personnages en médiation thérapeutique par le théâtre**. In *Jeu et médiations thérapeutiques* (pp. 131–141). Dunod. <https://doi.org/10.3917/dunod.brun.2021.01.0131>

Landy, R. (2009). Role theory and the role method of drama therapy. *Current Approaches in Drama Therapy*, 2, 65–88.

Roussillon, R. (2008). *Le transitionnel, le sexuel et la réflexivité*. Dunod.

Winnicott, D. W. (1975). *Through pediatrics to psycho-analysis: Collected papers* (2014th ed.). Routledge.

Biography

Tamara Guénoun is associate professor in clinical psychology and head of the university diploma in artistic workshop design and facilitation (DU CAAMA) at the University Lyon 2. She is also co-head of the Dramatherapy specialty on the Artistic Creation Masters at the University Paris Cité.

She also practices as a psychotherapist, group therapist and drama therapist, mostly but not exclusively with children and teenagers. She is engaged in several funded research projects on psychotrauma, violence in adolescence and the international health practices using art.

Recent publications

Guénoun T., Attigui, P. (2020), **Group psychotherapy with adolescents: a process of crossed subjectivation**, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1-24

Smaniotto, B., Réveillaud, M., Dumet, N., & Guenoun, T. (2021). **Clinical Analysis of an Exhibitionist Patient in a Psychoanalytic Psychodrama Group**. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 57(3-4), 564-595.

Guenoun, T., & Attigui, P. (2021). **When acting with teenagers reveals its empathic dimension**. *Revue québécoise de psychologie*, 42(1), 49-67.



Guénoun, T. (2021). Teenagers' role-playing games in therapeutic mediation through theater, In A. Brun, R. Roussillon (eds.), *Games and therapeutic mediation, evaluating and developing mental health care systems*, Paris, Dunod.

Guénoun T., Tiberghien C., Juteau A. (2021), Le Vidéodrame : médiation thérapeutique par le dessin animé pour les enfants à troubles du spectre autistique, *Neuropsychiatrie de l'enfance et de l'adolescence*, vol. 69/5

Translation : Guénoun T., Tiberghien C., Juteau A. (2021), **Videodrama: therapeutic mediation through cartoons for children with autism spectrum disorders**, *Neuropsychiatrie de l'enfance et de l'adolescence (Child and adolescent neuropsychiatry)*, vol. 69/5

Campelo N., Guénoun T. (2022), **Le cas de Thérèse : du lien d'emprise à l'objet radical**, N. Dumet, B. Smaniotto (dir.), *Souffrances subjectives, au carrefour du corps et du socius, 12 études de cas en psychopathologie*, Paris, In Press

Translation: Campelo N., **Guénoun T. (2022), The case of Thérèse: from the bond of control to the radical object**, N. Dumet, B. Smaniotto (dir.), *Subjective suffering, at the crossroads of the body and the socius, 12 case studies in psychopathology*, Paris, In Press

Guénoun, T. (2024). Jouer avec les limites à l'adolescence. *Adolescence*. 422(2), 307-319

Translation: Guénoun, T. (2024). **Playing with boundaries in adolescence**. *Adolescence*. 422(2), 307-319.

Essadek, A., Guenoun, T., Gressier, F., Najdini, M., Cappelletti, M., Frigaux, A., Melchior, M., Musso, M., & Robin, M. (2025). **Post-Pandemic Changes in Anxiety and Depression Symptom Networks Among Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Young Adults: A Repeated Cross-Sectional Study**. *SSM-Population Health*, 101854.