

# AUXILIARY EGO

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## AUXILIARY EGO

**Primary Disciplinary Field(s):** Psychology, Psychotherapy, Psychodrama

### 1. Core Definition

The concept of the **Auxiliary Ego** is central to the therapeutic methodology of psychodrama, a form of action method developed by J.L. Moreno. Fundamentally, the Auxiliary Ego is a trained or spontaneously selected participant from the therapeutic group who assumes the role of a significant person, object, or sometimes an abstract entity (like an emotion or fear) in the life of the **Protagonist** (the individual whose issue is being explored). This role is meticulously crafted to give concrete, corporeal representation to the internal world of the protagonist, allowing deeply ingrained emotional conflicts and relational patterns to be externalized and worked through in a safe, controlled environment. Unlike conventional role-play where participants merely act out a script, the Auxiliary Ego must embody the perceived emotional and behavioral essence of the figure they represent, often requiring high levels of empathy and spontaneity to react authentically within the dramatic context created by the protagonist's narrative.

This function serves as a crucial bridge between the protagonist's intrapsychic reality and the interpersonal sphere of the group session. The Auxiliary Ego steps into the shoes of the absent, real-life figure--be it a parent, spouse, colleague, or even a part of the self--enabling the protagonist to interact with these internalized objects as if they were present. The immediate feedback loop established during this interaction provides the protagonist with novel perspectives, opportunities for emotional release (catharsis), and the ability to practice new responses or confront unresolved issues. Furthermore, the selection process for the Auxiliary Ego is important, as the director typically chooses someone who possesses a high degree of role flexibility and responsiveness, ensuring the enactment remains therapeutically relevant rather than devolving into mere theatrical performance.

### 2. Etymology and Historical Development

The term "Auxiliary Ego" finds its genesis directly within the theoretical framework established by J.L. Moreno in the 1920s and 1930s, concurrent with his development of psychodrama and sociometry. Moreno, unlike his contemporaries focused on purely verbal analysis, believed that genuine therapeutic change required action--a spontaneous, creative encounter in the present moment. The Auxiliary Ego was conceived as an essential tool to make the psychodramatic stage an adequate representation of the protagonist's social atom. Initially, the roles were often filled by trained staff or psychodrama students, referred to specifically as "auxiliary egos," who possessed extensive training in spontaneity and dramatic technique, ensuring consistent quality and adherence to the structured spontaneity required by the method.

As psychodrama evolved and moved into community and group settings, the role broadened. While specialized training remains valuable, group members often serve as the Auxiliary Ego, leveraging their own life experiences and intuitive understanding to fulfill the role. This shift emphasizes Moreno's belief in the therapeutic power inherent in the group itself--that group members, through their shared humanity and potential for empathy, can effectively model the social reality required by the protagonist. This development highlights the transition from a purely clinical model to one rooted in sociometric principles, where relational choices and group dynamics are leveraged for individual healing, confirming the group's capacity to serve as a resource for exploring interpersonal conflict.

### 3. Key Roles and Functions

The Auxiliary Ego performs several distinct, yet overlapping, therapeutic functions on the psychodramatic stage, each designed to maximize the protagonist's insight and emotional processing. One primary function is representing the **Significant Other**. In this capacity, the Auxiliary Ego embodies the character of a person central to the protagonist's conflict, whether past or present. This allows for dialogues, confrontations, or expressions of unmet needs that were impossible or incomplete in real life, providing closure or a new perspective on historical events by allowing the protagonist to rewrite or re-experience the interaction under safer conditions.

Another critical function is the **Double**. When serving as the Double, the Auxiliary Ego stands beside the protagonist, mirroring their posture and movements, and voicing the protagonist's deepest, often unexpressed, feelings, thoughts, or internal contradictions. This technique is profoundly effective in accessing repressed material, amplifying emotional states, and validating the protagonist's internal experience, forcing them to confront the parts of themselves they might be attempting to deny or minimize. The Auxiliary Ego acts as an externalized conscience or suppressed voice, often facilitating the move toward greater self-acceptance and integration of conflicting internal states.

Furthermore, the Auxiliary Ego may function as a **Mirror**. In the Mirror technique, the protagonist temporarily steps off the stage while the Auxiliary Ego takes the protagonist's place, reenacting the protagonist's behavior and mannerisms as observed moments before. This non-verbal feedback provides the protagonist with a powerful visual and auditory representation of how they appear and act in a specific social situation, often leading to immediate self-recognition and insight into their behavioral patterns and non-verbal communication style that they were previously blind to. This externalization is vital for developing self-awareness and preparing for behavioral modification.

### 4. Selection and Preparation of the Auxiliary Ego

The success of a psychodrama session often hinges on the judicious selection and preparation of

the Auxiliary Ego, a task managed by the Director (or psychodrama therapist). Selection is guided less by acting skill and more by the potential auxiliary's perceived **Role Receptivity**--their capacity to intuitively grasp and spontaneously embody the essential characteristics of the required role. The director employs sociometric awareness, observing group members' empathy levels, emotional availability, and relational dynamics within the group to choose the most suitable candidate who can commit fully to the dramatic reality without personalizing the conflict.

Once selected, the preparation phase is brief but critical. The Director provides the Auxiliary Ego with essential biographical details, emotional context, and behavioral cues about the person they are to represent, often gleaned directly from the protagonist's narrative. The Auxiliary Ego is instructed to act "as if" they are the real person, utilizing their own emotional resources and lived experience to inform the characterization. Crucially, the Auxiliary Ego must commit to the dramatic reality without blending their personal identity into the role; they serve as a channel for the protagonist's perception of the other person, maintaining fidelity to the dramatic truth established on the stage under the Director's guidance.

It is important to emphasize that the Auxiliary Ego is not attempting to achieve factual accuracy regarding the real person, but rather **Perceptual Accuracy** as viewed by the protagonist. If the protagonist perceives their father as harsh and critical, the Auxiliary Ego must embody that harsh criticism, even if the group member knows that such behavior is typically antithetical to their own personality. This focus ensures that the enactment directly addresses the protagonist's internalized relationship objects and the specific emotional wounds they carry, allowing for a genuine therapeutic encounter that targets the source of the emotional conflict.

## 5. Therapeutic Mechanisms and Action

The integration of the Auxiliary Ego into the psychodramatic action activates several profound therapeutic mechanisms. Firstly, the presence of a tangible representation facilitates **Catharsis**. By providing a target for repressed anger, fear, or love, the Auxiliary Ego enables the protagonist to discharge intense, pent-up emotions that could not be safely expressed in the real-life situation. This emotional release is physically embodied and immediate, often leading to a significant sense of relief and mental clarity necessary for subsequent cognitive restructuring.

Secondly, the enactment allows for **Insight and Role Training**. Through the interaction, the protagonist can gain distance from their habitual responses and experiment with new behaviors. The Auxiliary Ego, especially when coached by the director, can offer reactions that push the protagonist out of their defensive or repetitive patterns. For instance, the protagonist may practice asking for a promotion, and the Auxiliary Ego, playing the boss, might respond in multiple ways (supportive, aggressive, indifferent), preparing the protagonist for various real-world outcomes and building spontaneity and confidence in social interactions.

Thirdly, the Auxiliary Ego contributes to **Tele**, Moreno's term for mutual feeling, empathy, and intuitive connection between individuals. When the Auxiliary Ego successfully embodies the character, a powerful therapeutic bond is formed, not only between the protagonist and the Auxiliary Ego but also within the wider group. This collective engagement validates the protagonist's experience and deepens the group's understanding of shared human struggles, moving the session from individual therapy toward a collective healing experience by fostering a sense of universality among participants.

## 6. Ethical Considerations and Safeguards

While the role of the Auxiliary Ego is highly therapeutic, it necessitates careful ethical consideration by the Director to protect both the protagonist and the group member filling the role. A primary concern relates to the emotional burden placed upon the Auxiliary Ego. Stepping into a highly emotional or negative role (e.g., an abuser or a deceased loved one) can lead to temporary emotional residue or stress, requiring a thorough **De-roling Process** immediately following the scene. This process ensures the psychological safety of the auxiliary by clearly separating the group member's identity from the role played.

De-roling ensures the group member sheds the character they played and reconnects with their own identity, often through sharing their experience of the role, stating, for example, "I am John and I was playing the role of the father." The Director must also monitor for signs of **Countertransference**, where the Auxiliary Ego's personal history or unresolved issues interfere with their ability to authentically represent the character required by the protagonist. If the Auxiliary Ego begins injecting their own agenda or emotional needs into the scene, the therapeutic value is diminished, and the Director must intervene immediately to refocus the action onto the protagonist's narrative.

Furthermore, the use of Auxiliary Egos underscores the importance of group confidentiality and trust. Since the Auxiliary Ego gains intimate knowledge of the protagonist's vulnerabilities and life history, the ethical guidelines stipulate that this information must remain protected. The group must operate under a strong commitment to non-judgment and respect, ensuring that the vulnerability shared on stage is contained and honored, reinforcing the safety required for deep psychotherapeutic work and maintaining the integrity of the therapeutic contract.

## 7. Debates and Criticisms

Despite its proven efficacy in action methods, the implementation of the Auxiliary Ego faces certain theoretical and practical criticisms. One frequent debate centers on the potential for **Inauthentic Representation**. Critics argue that regardless of how empathetic or skilled the group member is, they can only offer a stylized performance based on the protagonist's subjective (and potentially

distorted) perception, rather than providing an accurate or balanced view of the absent person. While proponents argue that addressing the protagonist's perception is the therapeutic goal, skeptics worry that the enactment might reinforce existing cognitive biases rather than challenging them effectively.

Another area of concern is the risk of **Role Strain and Projection** within the group. If a group member consistently plays highly negative or victimized roles, they may experience emotional fatigue or inadvertently absorb aspects of that persona, making the de-roling process more difficult. Conversely, protagonists might unconsciously project their own repressed aspects onto the Auxiliary Ego, leading to confusion between the character and the group member. Expert directorial guidance is essential to manage these dynamics and ensure clarity for all participants, particularly during the sharing phase where participants reflect on the drama and differentiate between the actor and the role.

Finally, there is a technical criticism regarding the dependence on spontaneity. While spontaneity is core to Moreno's philosophy, reliance on untrained group members to embody complex roles can lead to inconsistent results. If the Auxiliary Ego lacks sufficient role flexibility or empathy, the scene may falter, hindering the protagonist's process and potentially causing frustration. This necessitates that psychodrama directors invest time in cultivating group members' sociometric awareness and spontaneity skills to maximize the therapeutic utility and reliability of the Auxiliary Ego as a key instrument in the therapeutic process.

## Further Reading

[Psychodrama \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Jacob L. Moreno \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Sociometry \(Wikipedia\)](#)