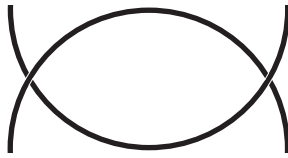


Psychodrama
Sociodrama
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Group Work



The Australian & Aotearoa New Zealand
Psychodrama Association





AANZPA JOURNAL #34 2025



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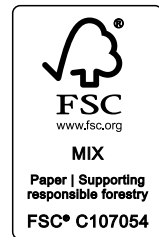
Editor: Diana Jones

Editorial Team: Phil Carter, Chris Hosking and Patricia O'Rourke

Editorial Guides: Martin Putt, David Oliphant, Patricia O'Rourke, Rosemary Nourse and Viv Thomson all generously gave their experience, wisdom and expertise to writers in this issue. Judy Sutherland, Charmaine McVea and Patricia O'Rourke and I were eagle-eyed reviewers ensuring articles were ready for publication.

Cover: Yvonne Shaw

Printing: Bluestar, Wellington, Aotearoa
New Zealand, on Forest Stewardship Council®
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ISSN 2652 - 9319 (Print)
ISSN 2652 - 9327 (Online)

Correspondence with, and submissions to, the AANZPA Journal can be addressed to the editor by email at journal-editor@aanzpa.org

Guidelines regarding journal contributions are on the AANZPA website at <https://aanzpa.org/journals/>

The AANZPA Journal is published by the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association (AANZPA). It has been established to assist in the fulfilment of the purposes of AANZPA through the dissemination of quality written articles focused on psychodrama theory and methods and their application by practitioners in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The opinions and views expressed in articles and reviews are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the perspectives and recommendations of the journal editor or AANZPA.

The Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association (AANZPA) is an organisation of people trained in psychodrama theory and methods, and their application and developments in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The purposes of AANZPA include the establishment and promotion of the psychodrama method, the setting and maintenance of standards and the professional association of members. Ordinary members of the organisation are certificated as Psychodramatists, Sociodramatists, Sociometrists and Role Trainers, and as a Trainer, Educator, Practitioner (TEP). Members associate within geographical regions, through the AANZPA Journal and at annual conferences.

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Editorial

Kotahi te kōhao o te ngira e kuhuna ai te miro mā, te miro pango, me te miro whero.

Spoken by the first Maori King, Kīngi Pōtatau Te Wherowhereo

There is one eye of the needle through which the white thread,
the black thread, and the red thread must pass.

Kia ora koutou,

In choosing this whakatauki, Phil Carter asked me “What is the eye of the needle?”

For me, the eye of the needle is wrapped up in AANZPA’s vision. It is our willingness to come together, to give life to AANZPA’s vision of “people all over the place expressing themselves relevantly... a responsive and creative expression that brings joy to the human spirit, that uplifts the soul, that makes us feel part of the universe again”. The eye of the needle is love as we work to create a tapestry using the different threads. Many people have willingly expressed themselves here. They have backed themselves and have done this in a connected relational way that has co-created this tapestry.

Bringing this Journal to life are seven articles and a story reflecting and celebrating a wide range of practices of psychodramatic methods and their impact. Five sociodramatists reflect on their experiences, research and insights and shine light on systemic perspectives to navigate dynamics amongst individual, interpersonal and group vitality, and dysfunction. Three authors reflect on role development in identity formation, in psychodrama groups online and from participating in a clowning workshop.

Jenny Hutt alerts us to differentiate experiences that may appear as interpersonal or political challenges in organisations where the actual sources of discomfort may well be systemic patterns of events which can be recognised and attended to co-operatively.

Sue Christie outlines some of her experiences in developing health professionals and organisation systems after an organisation restructure.

Inspired by Zerka Moreno's invitation Elizabeth Synnot writes as a family therapist with her work with an immigrant family.

Jane Goessi includes her passion for systems perspectives in her approach to role development in coaching an individual within an organisation.

Kevin Franklin writes from his own experiences to his and others' observations, research and insights on the human behaviours resulting in war, systemic and personal dysfunction and the conditions which enable functional identity formation.

How might psychodramatists innovate with technology to assist individuals and groups develop mutually beneficial relationships and function relevantly? John Farnsworth invites us into the world of online groups and includes possibilities and practices for the psychodrama method.

Viv Thomson's story reflects human and social responses to dementia within one person's social atom, and her reflections on the personal and social systems providing care and services.

Neil Simmons writes of his entry into the world of clowning and the impact on his practice as a psychodramatist and medical practitioner.

The cover is the work of artist and advanced psychodrama trainee Yvonne Shaw, reflecting trust in a mutual working relationship of personal depth, vulnerability and sincerity.

How much can we trust that our words speak to our hearts and minds and convey powerful ideas, inspiration and meaning when we have capitals, italics, parenthesis and punctuation to emphasise what we want to say? Patricia O'Rourke and I decided to trust that words in this Journal convey adequate intention without further emphasis. We have implemented an editorial style guide for Journal articles and along with our eagle-eyed final-read editors, have extracted superfluous capitals, italics and punctuation and let the written words speak for themselves.

Diana Jones
Editor

What is happening here? A systems view on organisational life

Jenny Hutt

Key words: Systems, systems thinking, holism, interconnections, psychodrama, J.L. Moreno, systems blindness, complexity, organisational health, open organisations, patterns outside of awareness, systems archetypes

Introduction

This article considers how our participation in organisations can be enhanced by a systems perspective. It draws key learnings from the literature to clarify how a systems view of life serves us and how it can easily fall out of awareness. J.L. Moreno's development of psychodrama as a systemic method is touched on.

There are several reasons to focus on a systems view of organisational life. Organisations shape our health, learning and beliefs from an early age. Organisations in which we work, and volunteer, give us opportunities to express our abilities and deeply held values and to get things done. These experiences can be satisfying and affirming. Sometimes they are disturbing, perplexing. While we might easily interpret these challenges as interpersonal or 'political', they can also be about systemic patterns outside our awareness.

This article aims to consolidate understanding of a systemic perspective rather than describe its application to my field of practice. It presents pointers from systems thinkers about organisational health and patterns we might pay more attention to as we ask ourselves "What is happening here?".

Systems thinking

Systems thinking is a lens, a way of looking at life. A systems view involves us in sensing and appreciating our connections to the wider whole: to humankind, all living beings, our shared environment. Donella Meadows, a scientist and leading systems thinker, captures

the large and small of it: she describes a system as a set of interconnected elements – such as people, cells, molecules – which are coherently organised in a way that achieves something. A system consists of three things: elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose (Meadows, 2008).

Applied to an organisation, this holistic view connects us to our shared purpose and our interdependence. Robert Louis Flood observes:

We can only meaningfully understand ourselves by contemplating the whole of which we are an integral part. Systemic thinking is the discipline which makes visible that our actions are interrelated to other people's actions in patterns of behaviour that are not merely isolated events

Flood, 1999, p. 2

Organisational scholar and author Peter Senge contrasts systems thinking with reductive thinking. He suggests that we pay a hidden and enormous price for our tendency to make complex tasks and subjects more manageable by breaking them down into pieces, no longer seeing the consequences of our actions or our intrinsic sense of connection to a larger whole (Senge, 1992).

Systems thinking comes naturally

If these aspects of systems thinking seem familiar, there are good reasons why. In many ways systems thinking comes naturally to us as human beings. As a species we have been immersed in the natural systems of the planet and the universe for tens of thousands of years. Indigenous philosophies recognise the universe as an interconnected life system and emphasise reciprocal relationships with all things in the universe (Arabena, 2015). Furthermore, each one of us is a living system and we each engage with complex systems. Donella Meadows observes that through this contact

we have built up intuitively, without analysis, often without words, a practical understanding of how these systems work, and how to work with them.

Meadows, 2008, p.3

Systems thinking may come naturally to those trained in psychodrama, too, because it is well embedded in the psychodrama method. For example, psychodramatists learn to view the unique

personality of each person as a dynamic and developing system of roles. We learn to perceive emerging role relationships and socio-metric choices in interpersonal and intergroup relations. We investigate the impacts of religious, educational, cultural, economic and political systems on the functioning of individuals and groups in all sorts of settings. We come to appreciate that life is interactive and emergent. We take a holistic viewpoint, notice interconnections, and appreciate creative possibilities over singular and fixed 'solutions'. In this sense systems thinking is familiar ground.

J.L. Moreno lived existentially and saw the world holistically, introducing a paradigm change in psychology and social science, according to American psychodramatist, John Nolte (2014). Moreno saw humankind as a social and organic unity, everyone connected with everyone else. During his lifetime several scientific disciplines were engaging with the holistic notion that everything is connected, replacing the prevailing idea of a mechanical, cause and effect universe. A systemic perspective flowed through Moreno's work. For example, meaningful social research incorporated the subject as a key researcher; the therapeutic effect of interactions with other group members (not just the group leader) was recognised; and group psychotherapy was understood to treat the group itself, not only the individuals within it (Nolte, 2014).

Moreno was not alone in adopting a systems view. Systems thinking gained prominence with the publication by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy of *The Theory of Open Systems in Physics and Biology* in 1950 and *General System Theory* in 1956. The latter took a meta view of phenomena across different scientific disciplines. Flood (1999) spotlights the work of several systems thinkers who have been influential in organisational development, including Stafford Beer's organisational cybernetics, Russell L. Ackoff's interactive planning, Peter B. Checkland's soft systems approach, C. West Churchman's critical systemic thinking and Jay Forrester's systems dynamics popularised by Peter Senge. There are plenty of others in the 'who's who' of systems thinking, including the anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972) who significantly influenced a systems approach to family therapy (Carr, 2012) and the physicist Fritjof Capra (1982). I think we can conclude that the systems thinking of others likely influenced Moreno, and vice versa to some degree, and that the systems thinking field has expanded significantly since his time.

What gets in the way of systems thinking?

While systems thinking may come naturally, it can easily fall into the background. Systems thinking sits alongside, reinforces, contradicts, competes with and complements the other ways we have learned to see the world. These include the worldviews embedded in our cultural, religious and spiritual beliefs; political affiliations; fields of learning; and occupational specialisations, such as law, engineering, science, trades, education, and medicine. While an understanding of systems thinking has been developed by biologists and physicists, for example, science can also employ a mechanistic view. A mechanistic paradigm is said to derive from Newtonian physics and Descartes' view that the scientific method is the only valid approach to knowledge (Mink, Mink, Downes & Owen, 1994).

Donella Meadows observes

We have been taught to analyse, to use our rational ability, to trace direct paths from cause to effect, to look at things in small and understandable pieces, to solve problems by acting on or controlling the world around us.

What is more, she notes, that training has become a source of much personal and societal power.

Meadows, 2008, p.3

There are also perceptual limits which can undermine our ability to see organisations holistically. Four forms of 'systems blindness' have been identified by Barry Oshry (1995). 'Temporal blindness' prevents us seeing the present in the context of the past (or the future). 'Spatial blindness' means we overlook the larger systems processes of which we are a part, seeing individuals within the system, but not the system as a whole. With 'relational blindness' we forget we exist in relationship with others and overlook our potential to create satisfying and productive partnerships. And when we suffer from 'process blindness', we overlook our own part in processes essential for the system's survival and development (Oshry, 1995). In everyday organisational life, it seems, blind spots abound.

Systems complexity

An organisation has complex and dynamic relationships with its internal and external environment. As it takes initiatives and responds to events in its world, an organisation relies on feedback to

help maintain its current equilibrium and to adapt and grow. Initiatives may, or may not, achieve the intended outcomes, often producing unintended consequences as well. Quite a delay can occur between actions and impacts, leaving the impacts underestimated, overlooked or the action re-doubled on the assumption it didn't work the first time.

Nora Bateson (2023) describes how complexity makes such flow-on effects unknowable.

You do a thing, and then something happens so more things happen, mostly in ways that are impossible to track or correlate. The variables excite the other variables into incalculable storms of consequences, and consequences of consequences... It is no longer possible to count how many changes make other changes in how many contexts and directions.

She invites us not to underestimate the recursive, looping, entangling, and always moving, conjoining processes that ecologies are.

Bateson, 2023, p. 9

Systems thinking, says Robert Louis Flood, is “a humble awakening to the realisation that really we don't know very much about anything and actually never will”. Therefore, he suggests, that rather than struggling to ‘manage over’ things in organisations, we will manage within the unmanageable. Rather than ‘organise the totality’

we will organise within the unorganisable. We will not simply know things, but we will know of the unknowable. Flood sees us living between mystery and mastery learning our way into the future.

Flood, 1999, pp. 192-193

In comprehending the complexity of systems, certainty and simplistic cause and effect narratives become insufficient. Life, and life in organisations, must be lived iteratively, noticing and attending to what is emerging, day to day. Flood suggests that the things we can really know about are local to us in time and place: those things we are immediately involved with and not very far into the future, or indeed the past (Flood, 1999). However, recognising the complexity of systems need not immobilise us or undermine our creativity. For, even in the thick of complexity there are characteristics and patterns we can look out for which will help us find our way.

What we pay attention to

I have been learning about and working to integrate systems thinking into my practice for a number of years. I have found that reference points about what to pay attention to are needed to stabilise and orient myself and others when making sense of complex systems.

In 2024 my colleague Bev Hosking and I conducted a training workshop in Aotearoa New Zealand called *Navigating Social Systems*. In that workshop we drew on two useful reference points: the Open Organisation Model developed by Oscar Mink and his colleagues; and patterns identified by Barry Oshry which he discovered were largely out of awareness. These are described in more detail below. As workshop participants explored their experiences of social systems in which they lived and worked, we tested out the relevance of these resources. On several occasions we found that lifting our sights from interpersonal tensions to dynamics at the organisational and inter-organisational level enriched our appreciation of what was going on and our assessment of what else was needed.

Healthy organisations

The Open Organisation Model (Mink, Mink, Downes & Owen, 1994) describes elements of organisational health. In describing an open organisation, the model highlights three characteristics – unity, internal responsiveness and external responsiveness – as normal states for healthy systems, large and small. These characteristics are present and take different forms at individual, group and organisational levels and are inherently inter-related (Mink et al., 1994).

1. Unity

A unified organisation is integrated into a coherent working whole. Effort goes into defining and achieving the organisation's purpose and goals, rather than into power struggles. Individuals experience self-worth and self-esteem; they know who they are and appreciate their own uniqueness. Groups show commitment to their purpose, goals and tasks. The organisation's purpose is refined and achieved through information sharing, open discourse, transformational learning and activities which create consensus (Mink et al., 1994).

At an organisation level, unity involves rallying around a purpose – vision, mission, key goals – aligning values, and clarifying the organisation's strategic needs.

Mink et al., 1994, p. 20

2. Internal responsiveness

People in an internally responsive organisation align with and work together towards a common purpose. They are aware of their own wants and needs and able to act on them. This awareness and sensitivity extends to the wants and needs of others in their group. Efforts are made to support one another, give useful feedback, and work to maintain good relationships. Each person is accountable for their own behaviour. Different parts of the organisation willingly respond to each other rather than operating as separate empires. They share information, products and services and learn together. Internal responsiveness is built through collaboration, rather than through the use of authority (Mink et al., 1994).

3. External responsiveness

There is an easy flow of information into and out of an externally responsive organisation. Products, services and systems are adapted to take account of changes in the social, economic and technical environment. Initiatives are taken with outside groups to communicate the organisation's purposes and needs. Information and support are gathered to assist in problem solving, decision making and the refinement of goals. The organisation anticipates change and prepares for it, making decisions before crises develop (Mink et al., 1994).

Individuals engage with others to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes,

reaching out, listening, responding, being open and searching for new frames of reference, new premises and transforming experiences.

Mink et al., 1994, p.19

Externally responsive groups learn together and constantly improve.

Mink et al., 1994, p.20

This model of organisational health may sound idealised. In my work, I see a number of organisations functioning well and some scrambling to do so under great pressure. It is easy to overlook everything an organisation is doing well when we focus on the aspects which trouble the participants. In my own personal experience I find customer service is sometimes exceptional, and at other times I feel held at bay by unresponsive organisations which

make direct contact with someone who works there very hard to achieve. In my assessment, the Open Organisation Model is reality-based and draws from the authors' practice wisdom. It describes what healthy organisations look like, providing useful criteria with which to consider the system's overall functioning. It offers a map which can be used to identify strengths, absences, preoccupations and areas for development.

Patterns outside awareness

There are patterns of functioning which people in organisations fall into repeatedly. They are out of awareness, arising in what Barry Oshry (1996) calls a 'dance of blind reflex'. Oshry draws from his practice over 30 years conducting immersive leadership development programs. This has included a program for executives, managers and workers to deepen their understanding of systems and their ability to work cooperatively with one another.

From this body of work Oshry highlights dynamics between people at different levels of the hierarchy; between peers; and with providers, such as suppliers of goods and services, and customers. He uses a shorthand of Tops, Middles, Bottoms, and so on, which I include here. In my view the persistence of hierarchies in organisational life makes the focus on job status relevant. It is likely that additional patterns arise in networked or collective organisations, although they are not addressed in this article. The patterns Oshry describes relate to responsibility, domination, differentiation, alienation, and group think.

1. Responsibility

Oshry has observed that people at the top of an organisation become increasingly responsible for the system, while people at the bottom become decreasingly responsible. The Tops fall into feeling burdened, and the Bottoms fall into feeling oppressed. Once aware of this dynamic, efforts to share responsibility more equitably can interrupt this dance (Oshry, 1996).

At times two or more parties, Ends, with their separate, and sometimes conflicting agendas look to a common party, a Middle, to move their separate agendas ahead. This might be, for example, a middle manager caught in a conflict between their own staff and senior decision makers. In this dynamic Ends become decreasingly responsible for resolving their own concerns, while the Middle

becomes increasingly responsible for this. Resolution comes in getting the two ends into partnership around resolving their own issues (Oshry,1996).

Another dynamic emerges between the Provider and the Customer. As the provider becomes increasingly responsible for the delivery of the product or service, the customer becomes decreasingly responsible. This is relevant, for example, to contractors and consultants providing services to organisations. If they do not contract clearly to create a shared partnership with their client, delivery becomes the provider's job and entitlement becomes the customer's. Providers can end up being judged and customers end up being 'righteously done-to' (Oshry,1996).

2. Domination

The dance of the Dominant and the Dominated arises between groups who have historically been, or who are currently, over-represented and under-represented in the organisation and in decision making roles. Oshry depicts these dynamics in bald terms. The Dominated exist within the Dominant culture of the organisation; the Dominant's own culture is invisible to them; and they demean and trivialise the culture of the Dominated. The Dominated are faced with limited choices about whether to stay or go and how to be themselves in this environment (Oshry, 1996).

Having worked in the field of workplace diversity and inclusion for many years, and more recently on reconciliation with Australian organisations, this is familiar ground for me as a professional. In my view organisations vary greatly in how well they include and respect people of diverse occupations, genders and cultures, for example, yet I think few would want to be seen in the bald terms described above. Organisations committed to building respectful relationships and inter-cultural capabilities with staff and customers have come a long way. Yet organisations are embedded in wider social systems where overall change has been quite considerable, but is often slower, comes in bursts and has periods of regression. Social discourse is polarised in many countries right now, more closely matching Oshry's descriptions above.

Choosing to end this dance involves embracing the cultures of both the Dominant and the Dominated. Oshry observes that the Dominants will resist powerfully. They will wonder what the fuss is all about and be offended. Disruption of this familiar pattern brings the possibility of transformation into something new and unpredictable

(Oshry,1996). Acknowledgements, rituals, learning groups are all examples I have seen which replace this dance and generate new shared experiences and understandings.

3. Differentiation

At the senior level Tops have collective responsibility for the whole system. They divide this responsibility, each increasingly responsible for their own territory and decreasingly for the territory of others, and for the whole. Tops focus on what is good for their area more than the needs of the overall system. Instead of being in partnership with one another, Tops end up feeling they need to protect themselves from one another. Oshry calls this turf warfare: Tops get stuck on differentiation, become polarised and stereotype each other (Oshry,1996).

To illustrate, I recall working with senior leaders of sales and marketing as they grappled with this dynamic. The sales team was being rewarded for selling computers, 'boxes', and the marketing team were trying to sell something more customised and sophisticated, 'solutions'. The more sales rewarded their team for selling boxes, the more the marketing team felt undermined. Interventions needed to end this dance are efforts to maintain and strengthen commonality (Oshry,1996).

4. Alienation

Oshry identifies how those in the middle of a hierarchy can end up experiencing alienation. He sees Middles getting stuck on individuation, becoming a collection of independent 'I's, isolated from each other. They value their own team members over their peers. They lack a common sense of purpose and aren't interested in being together. Symptoms of this dynamic include competition and quick, surface level judgements of each other. Efforts to integrate this group won't just happen naturally. They include building a compelling mission; getting to know each other's personal interests and projects; regular information sharing and offering mutual support (Oshry,1996).

5. Groupthink

Groupthink arises in many situations, but Oshry locates it particularly with those at the bottom of an organisation. Bottom group members become a cohesive entity, falling into pressuring one another into

conformity or groupthink. They closely identify with one another on the basis of a common cause, purpose or identity. They draw clear boundaries between the We and all the others, Them. Members feel and exert on one another a pressure to maintain unity within the group (Oshry,1996)

The group develops a high and sometimes inflated sense of their own value in comparison to Them. There is pressure to conform and those who deviate too far may be exiled. Sometimes irreconcilable factions develop in the group, which split off and treat one another as Thems. To maintain their place in the group, some members hide their differences, going along with the group's views. Sometimes diverging members are kept in the group but ignored (Oshry,1996).

There is a shared belief that diverging views can't be tolerated – that they will destroy the We. However, another kind of strength comes from valuing different views, bringing richer and more widely satisfying results (Oshry,1996).

I find the systemic patterns identified by Oshry are particularly useful because they are observable in everyday experiences of organisational life. They throw light on visible human functioning, and they fall within our sphere of influence. They can be discussed, considered and recognised by organisational participants themselves and in conversation with their consultants, coaches and counsellors. This gives them an excellent practicality.

Systems archetypes

There are other patterns we may be equally unaware of in organisational functioning. Senge identified about twelve types of recurring patterns which he called 'systems archetypes'. Awareness of these archetypes can help us see opportunities for improvement, called points of leverage. Meadows (2008) identifies the points at which to intervene in a system and ranks them on their relative effectiveness. This provides a great resource for those managing change. The impact of these archetypes in the broader spheres of public policy, economics and politics has been described by Donella Meadows and David Peter Stroh. While further exploration is beyond the scope of this article, the systems archetypes are named here. They include: seeking the wrong goals; treating symptoms rather than causes; policy resistance; rule beating; escalation; limits to growth; eroding goals; success to the successful; and the tragedy of the commons (Senge, 1992; Meadows 2008; Stroh, 2015).

Capabilities

This article has addressed systemic thinking and patterns to pay attention to. The capabilities needed to complement this way of seeing organisational life have been touched on, such as collaboration and building partnerships. Several writers have elaborated on these capabilities further. Peter Senge described four disciplines which sit alongside systems thinking to anchor it in our patterns of working and in our relationships. They are personal mastery, knowing what mental models we are using (reflexivity), building a shared vision, and entering into dialogue in such a way that we can think together. In addition, Margaret Wheatley shows how a systemic perspective calls for major changes in how we understand leadership (Wheatley, 2006). Her view, put succinctly, is that leaders need to give up the illusion that they are in control of systems.

Conclusion

The complex and dynamic functioning of systems reminds us that life is mysterious. Systems have a life of their own and only some of it is knowable. We can become more familiar with the aspects which are local to us in time and place, particularly if we know what to pay attention to. Taking a systemic view can shed new light on what is happening in organisations. It can help us make sense of our experiences, re-engage with our purpose, refresh our connections and find ways to contribute more effectively together. Above all, a systems perspective invites us to take another look at what is happening and to stay openminded about the sense we are making of it.

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participants in organisations.

A sociodramatist in the health system

Sue Christie

Key words: systems, role, sociodramatist, change, value, manager, group, team

For more than 15 years I was employed in a large organisation in the public health system as a workforce development consultant. The job was a sociodramatist's heaven. It was a unique position that gave me ready access to people and information in every area of the organisation from the cleaner to the CEO. With that came a freedom and influence. I could say and do things that were often too risky for others to say and do. I could make the covert overt.

Every day I got to work directly with a wide range of individuals and groups addressing issues of interest where the social impact was potentially consequential and far-reaching. Being in such a privileged position I was ever conscious of not misusing information or the power attributed to me. In my psychodrama training I honed my ability to role reverse, to listen, to be curious and engage without being judgmental, and to respect the humanity of a person's experience.

Constantly learning experientially in groups with others enhanced my abilities to learn and apply my learning. This was dramatically different from my formal education. Effectively I moved from being socially isolated at school to being a central member of a training group. I learned to make links between pockets of information and keep confidentiality. This meant I was trusted and respected both in my training and at work. As a result, I was presented with many opportunities to apply myself as a sociodramatist.

From clinical experts to having system oversight

One major initiative I was centrally involved in was designing and leading a Management Foundation Programme. This initiative came about because people employed for their clinical expertise were being promoted into management positions known as Clinical Nurse Managers (CNM) but were not given any support or training to warm them up to the new role. There was a high level of dissatisfaction

amongst the new CNMs and amongst their team members. Both they and I knew there could be dire consequences if areas like significant errors, patient deaths, and intolerable levels of staff turnover to name three, were left unaddressed.

The nurses were alert to what they didn't know about the health system. They could see staffing levels and lack of experienced staff would directly impact on the quality of patient care and patient safety. Instead of being the primary nurse, the new nurse managers had responsibility to oversee the whole system of a team or ward where previously their focus was on individual patients. They now had to look across the whole system and be responsible for outcomes for both patients and staff.

As clinical experts their focus had been on individual patients rather than being conscious of the broader system as before. They knew they had significant gaps of knowledge, awareness and experience in their understanding of the systems they were now expected to manage. They knew to proceed with any restructure without being provided with this awareness and knowledge, was not workable.

My own assessment was similar. I was aware that the nursing staff would be frightened. They would now be overwhelmed by the sense of responsibility coupled with their inability to professionally meet their formerly valuable level of patient care.

Psychodramatic concepts inform the design and the delivery of the programme

I relate to the notion of warm up and it made complete sense to me that there was a need for the programme to address elements in the system. The Management Foundation Programme was developed to fill the need for CNMs to warm up to their new role and attend to the different elements of that role i.e. thinking, feeling, action components and the context in which they worked. All of this needed preparation and resources which were included in the Management Foundation Programme I developed.

A sociodramatist is alert to the systemic principle that all parts of a system are connected and therefore a change in one part of the system affects all other parts. The Management Foundation Programme had the potential for effecting significant change. I was alert to how the shift in the ways teams were led could have a major impact and, with 30-40 people involved at any one time, the reach of the programme would be across the whole of the health system.

I knew the cluster of roles required of a team manager is different from being an expert in a particular area of clinical practice. I was alert to the fact that making the transition from expert to team manager necessitated an approach to learning that Moreno describes in his Spontaneity Theory of Learning (Moreno, 1948). One process for nurses involved an unlearning, de-conserving of behaviours associated with being an expert e.g. having the right answers, and being so skilled that particular practices were reproduced perfectly each time, to their new situation where they didn't have established practices or experiences. Team leaders, nurses and health professionals reverted as if they were beginners with "*I can't do this.*" They appeared to completely forget or value the skills they already had.

In contrast, being a team manager required them to be ready for whatever emerged demanding the person could rely on themselves to generate new or appropriate responses in any situation. Taking account of the participants being accustomed to lectures, research and structure I decided to incorporate professional development models such as the Ladder of Competence (Burch, 2025), Karpman Drama Triangle (Karpman 1968) and the Empowerment Dynamic Model (Emerald, 2009). These models enabled me to invite participants to explore in action and further their learning and applications. Participants could see for themselves, that they couldn't become a manager overnight, just because their job title had changed.

We would set the model out and participants would move through it. This helped them understand their own dominant functioning e.g. with the Karpman drama triangle, they might notice they had a tendency to rescue.

These explorations gave us all two things:

- ◆ Seeing the model in action enabled me as a sociodramatist to develop the vitality and spontaneity in the group by assisting participants to be conscious of their behaviours that impact their staff and patients and their abilities to undertake or not, the functions of their new positions as managers, and
- ◆ participants had evidence-based material to further develop their learning.

As a sociodramatist, I developed a range of structured activities such as sociometric explorations and role training that provided

both familiarity and engaged participants in different ways than previous organisational and professional training experiences they might have experienced.

In role training sessions, typically nurses shifted from being *overly empathetic pleasers* with their own managers to keep them happy, to be *self-valuing action-takers* and *wise decision-makers*.

The focal conflict model in action

Whittaker and Lieberman's focal conflict model (1970) provided a useful framework to consider the scope of what might need to be addressed. For example, while the individuals themselves were committed and enthusiastic to take up their new positions, the career change came with fears about a loss of competence and confidence as their points of reference as an expert were no longer applicable. The programme included sessions that specifically addressed these fears and motivations.

The Foundation Management Programme was designed to be completed with the same group of participants over a period of twelve months. The intention behind this was to build a cohort of people who could share experiences and be companions to each other as they made the transition from expert to team manager.

A central feature of the programme was the emphasis on building the sociometry of this group within the organisational structure. I led many sociometric activities within the programme all of which I know assisted participants with the change in their identity and sense of belonging. I relied on existing tele amongst participants to choose peers for working subgroups. Where longevity of relationships was likely to be important, I chose geographic location as a criterion. To strengthen advice networks, I chose '*if you have a challenging staff relationship, who would you go to for advice*' as a criterion.

One participant commented:

When I first stepped into the Clinical Nurse Manager role I received no formal orientation and initially felt quite isolated, with limited support. Participating in the Management Foundation Programme was a turning point. Connecting with others who were also new to the role gave me a sense of shared experience and much-needed encouragement. The course content was both practical and directly relevant to the expectations and responsibilities of CNMs. I remain

deeply grateful for what I learned and continue to share these insights with new CNMs as they begin their journey.

Participant comment

Because the evidence of organisational change is often not immediately obvious, it can sometimes be quite demoralising for any sociodramatist to wonder if change actually does happen as a result of your work. However, reflecting on my work creating and delivering the Management Foundation Programme I feel very satisfied. When I think of the people I've worked with I feel filled up with their capacity to be compassionate and loving of each other in very difficult times. Many of them have let me know (sometimes years later) about their insights and things they've developed as a result of our work together.

During the Management Foundation Programme, I was given a small rock that sat beside my computer for years. It became a quiet but powerful reminder: You can do this. You're okay. You're doing okay. That simple message gave me strength through difficult moments and helped ground me in my purpose as a Clinical Nurse Manager. I would think of the patients and the team, and remind myself of my goal—to create the best Medical Ward possible. Though the rock now sits in my top drawer, every time I open it, I reconnect with those goals. It continues to symbolize the journey, the challenges overcome, and the commitment that still drives me today.

Participant comment

As a sociodramatist I think of these comments and remind myself that it is possible to make a difference, where every conversation or interaction provides an opportunity to be actively engaged in encouraging positive change in our society, where there is potential for impact that is far greater than what occurs in the moment.

System changes appeared

I began to hear stories from participants and those they worked with. I noticed the power and positive influence of managers who gave regular appreciative responses to nurses on what was going well, as well as their mirroring to the nurses when glitches occurred. I observed the staff's sense of the value that their ordinary and everyday work was being recognised. A culture emerged where staff knew a mistake

could be discussed and worked with. It became less likely that staff felt their professional practice was being challenged as corrections and learning became more in context of overall performance.

I would hear comments like “How do I warmup my team to the most important issue for us and our patients”. I loved hearing this language of warm up rather than to ritualised agenda items.

In this new context I became aware of one new leader who noticed her staff not valuing themselves. Her approach for the ensuing six months was to stop focusing on patient protocols and to begin to focus on celebrating her staff; their birthdays, births, and significant events in their lives as they learnt to work well together. I saw she was encouraging self-love and self-value which then enabled the staff to develop and recognise their both skills and their mutual relationships with one another across their differences and the many challenges they faced. She consistently encouraged her staff to value their strengths and their contributions in the broader team culture and the care that was being provided to their patients. A year later, one result was she had a waiting list of staff wanting to join the ward. Staff turnover had noticeably reduced.

Reflections

On reflection I feel very satisfied and feel deeply moved as I remember the individuals and groups I have worked with. I appreciate their ability to grow and develop their capacity to change and come up with new solutions to systemic issues. One area I have come to value for what it has brought to this work is my way of engaging directly and personally with people. Central to this is what I gained through my psychodrama training. I developed capacities to use learning methods enabling me and participants to produce some very poignant and relevant moments and significant systemic change in this organisation.

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Sue Christie (Sociodramatist)

Education and group work has been a focus at the core of my 50 year long career. Initially I worked in child education and later in adult education providing health and safety and employment relations for unions and staff development in health organisations. Having recently left organization based employment and moved from the city of Auckland to the small town of Thames on the Coromandel Peninsula, I am now delighting in the pleasure of being in the community working with individuals and groups who are experiencing all the challenges and opportunities their lives present.

What it is to be a Muslim family in Australia today?

Elizabeth Synnot

Key words: complex, conflict, family, radical, roles, sociometry, spontaneity

Introduction

At a conference in Wellington in 2007, Zerka Moreno gave a message to us all in AANZPA via video encouraging us to work with families. I imagined Zerka was addressing me directly. I could see us in AANZPA as a loose network of family therapy practitioners. This article invites us all to be family therapists and expand our application of this wonderful method that J. L. Moreno devised and that we have learnt. You may find, like I have, that a wide range of people will come to a family therapy session. Each bringing complexity, depth and often longing.

Five years ago, and again recently, I worked with a family where the parents are from the Middle East. I focus on the use of J. L. Moreno's techniques to produce spontaneity. I apply sociometry, spontaneity theory, and role analysis to open new perspectives, repair relationships and to promote role expansion in each member of the family.

I apply Whittaker and Lieberman's (1965) Group Focal Conflict Model to assist the divided family to find their 'in common' purpose and enabling solutions. As a sociodramatist, I focus on intra- and inter-group relationships. I regard the family as the smallest cultural group forming our Australian culture today. I anticipate discussions with family members where we explore our wisdom in traversing complex transitions. The social concern explored is, what does it mean to be a good Muslim family in Australia today?

The context

The wish of the father, Ahmed, is that his children freely choose to

adopt Islam. His religious faith is central to his identity, guiding him as a father, professional worker, husband, neighbour, and citizen. He and his wife Zarah, made their Islamic practices visible and explicit, hoping their children would find meaning in Islam and in the good Muslim life. At the same time, he wishes them to adopt the Australian way of living. As well, Ahmed is determined that all his children become financially independent.

As migrants, Ahmed and Zarah brought with them an experience and understanding of Islam where it was a central cultural force in all aspects of life. In Australia, however, he experiences Islam inspiring curiosity, being marginalised, misunderstood, feared, and even reviled. I remind myself that prior to 1975, non-European immigrants were restricted by the white Australia policy although this had started being eroded after the second world war. In 1975 The Racial Discrimination act came into effect. Thus, it was unlawful to discriminate, including with immigration, on the basis of race.

In 1969, when I was 18, and on a scholarship to America, I was asked at a school assembly by an African-American if we have classical music ensembles and would he be able to emigrate to Australia. I remember extreme embarrassment as I explained that we did have orchestras but likely he would not be accepted because of an explicitly racist policy that caused me great shame. I remember going bright red.

My guiding question is, how does a family stay coherent, maintain its unique identity and warmth, while navigating ongoing social change, conflicting values and intergenerational tensions, in a sometimes hostile culture?

Session 1

The father comes with one daughter, Layla, who is 24, to our first session. His wife, Zarah, eldest daughter Amina 26, and younger son, Omar 15, were not present.

Family therapist asks: *What do you hope for from meeting with me?*

Silence.

Family therapist: *How about you start Ahmed? What are you hoping for from meeting with me?*

Ahmed: ... Yes, to be able to have good conversations together (referring to him and his daughter with his hand gestures).

Layla: *Yes, that would be good. We cannot do that (she wells up with tears).*

Family therapist to Layla: *I imagine you were press ganged into coming today and you have mixed feelings including being annoyed at being here.*

Layla: *Yes. I only knew of this meeting this morning and I was told (gesturing to her dad) that I had to come and try it out.*

Family therapist: *This is not the best start for you.*

Layla: *Yes, I wanted to meet with a Muslim psychologist.*

Family therapist: *Your faith is central to who you are and it's likely I won't understand.*

Layla: *Yes.*

The father, Ahmed, recounts a long-winded story alluding to past dilemmas the two have had dating back ten years ago to his daughter's teenage years.

Ahmed.: *When you were fourteen*

Ahmed continues in a mesmeric tone for some twenty minutes.

As he does this, I recall him in our prior family therapy sessions, organising a series of dilemmas from the least vital. My thoughts back then were that he has an over developed role of *beating around the bush* and being *the conductor* in a negotiation. I concluded then and again now that he is working as the head of his household or formal leader. Five years ago, we spoke about this and its inherent burden. We agreed then that me taking initiatives too may be of benefit and was central to my job with them. We became respectful co-leaders.

As they begin a conversation, I invite them to concretise, with cushions and toys, the dynamic between them. They create a physically high wall of about a meter between them and a scattering of twelve or so past conflicts concretised on the floor. Their chairs are parallel to one another with neither glancing at the other.

Ahmed: *Casurina (a suburb) is dangerous.*

Layla: *Casurina is a career stepping stone.*

Ahmed: *You're dumb.*

Layla: *You're wrong* (as she shrinks back into her chair).

Family therapist doubles Layla: *I do not want to say what I really think.*

Family therapist doubles Ahmed: *I'm deeply hurt.*

Family therapist doubles Layla: *I'm deeply hurt.*

Layla: *The wall is up.*

Layla: *Okay. We have come to the right person.*

Layla to Family therapist: *I did not think you would understand our Muslim family. You do. I am surprised.*

I nod.

Sociometry, roles and spontaneity

The father, Ahmed, readily warms up to his overdeveloped role of being a *one-eyed prosecuting storyteller* as he makes his case for his daughter's immaturity and being easily influenced by those around her. Layla's response is as an *overdeveloped tortured respectful listener*. Their sociometry is one of mutual negativity. They are both pained. This is an old dance that has ossified and rusted between them. Spontaneity has left the building.

Trenchant stories

I keep an eye out for embedded ideas about one another and predetermined perspectives in often retold stories that dominate the family, skewing memory, and dulling experience to this one-only perspective. A fresh perspective or new light is absent and defended against. Even so, I feel the longing in both for a good life, to protect one another and be respectful and respected.

Applying the group focal conflict model

Ahmed's motivating force is to have a coherent, moderate Muslim family in Australia today that protects the family's image and cohesion. His reactive fear is that his youngest daughter will become radicalised through her contact with teammates who have more radical religious ideologies that may damage her spiritually and

socially. Consequently, Ahmed's fear is she will become unattractive to prospective suitors, that he will be seen by his migrant Muslim cohort in a lesser light, and his daughter will be his responsibility forever. His restrictive solutions are to revoke Layla's use of the car, rigidly define her as immature and engage in emotionally restrictive and trenchant conversations about past events. Expressed as a focal conflict for this family group this is:

How do I protect our family's coherence and moderate Muslim life and reduce the fear that our daughter will be radicalised and so be damaged in her spirituality and social attractiveness?

Layla's motivating force is to engage in meaningful teamwork and launch her professional career. Her reactive fear is that there is a risk of emotional and relational abandonment from her family. Her restrictive solutions are to take up the team-focussed work she craves, to distance herself emotionally taking a lot of her time on her own in her room, withholding full transparency of her already more radical beliefs and announcing that she is going to wear a scarf. She becomes rigidly persistent, trenchant and sad in her discussions with her father. Her focal conflict is:

What can I do to be a valued family member and work in a team while launching my career with the blessing from both of my parents?

The matter of transitioning is complex in this family. Moving from a relationship of parent-child to parent-adult is complex because of the economic and emotional dependency of the live-at-home young adult who is infantilised by the rationale that she is immature. This is further complicated with the father's responsibility for his daughter until she is married and has moved to her matrimonial home.

The sociodramatist as family therapist

Both show some surprise and delight at the height and stoutness of the wall they have created between them. The wall is both metaphorically and literally experienced as co-created. Irony abounds! They purr when doubled. Their hunger to be companioned and accurately mirrored is palpable.

The concretisation allows the truth to be observed and felt from within the relationship and from outside the relationship as it is

mirrored in its concretisation. Also, the process of concretisation requires both to warm up to being collaborative co-creative organisers. They readily warm up to be objective observers of themselves, their relationship and each other. Thus, this simple enactment requires both to expand their role relationship and enables the beginning of a new perspective as they are doubled and mirrored. I remember from my earlier involvement with this family five years ago that role reversal with the other person present was disrespectful. I think privately that if I push role reversals they won't come back.

Contract for the work

I think of this first session as a contracting session where their work is displayed, I show how I work, and importantly, we all have an experience of progress. I am conscious of my relationship with each of them, that we create an in-common purpose or realise there is no mutual purpose yet, that I attend to the roles enacted and their shifting sociometry and I pay attention to the rise and fall of their spontaneity. The techniques I rely on to produce their surplus reality in this instance, are that of double, and concretiser as I function as a producer and alternately, a doubling auxiliary in their drama.

Session 2

The two sisters, Layla and Amina, come.

They warm up to one another as I produce a group-centred warmup focussed on their relationship.

The older sister, Amina says: *I am very sad because a close friend of mine attempted to take his life. A friend cut him down. There is nothing I can do to stop him suiciding. Ugh. I have a broken heart.*

She lays out the three different responses she has had using cushions on the stage. She says some of what she was thinking and feeling in each response: *Impotence.*

And, later on in the enactment she says: *Oh, I am angry that this takes over my life. He has had four suicide attempts in ten years and each time one of us (Amina or one of his other friends) saves his life.*

We play with enacting new ways to respond to and to see this dilemma.

The one that ignites Amina's spontaneity is when we are considering that this is one person dominating everyone's life as his pain is spread between them.

He makes his problem our problem.

I think to myself that this has parallels with her father and her sister, where his disturbance and lack of sleep becomes his daughter's problem to solve by not going to work in Casurina. I am not sure why I don't bring this forward directly as emotional blackmail as I likely would with another family! Have I become part of this family's dynamic?

Sociometry, roles and spontaneity

This painful backdrop is at the forefront of Amina's life. The impact of her friend's pain, and her ambivalent, liked and unliked responses to him, is startling for her. Her value of facing herself and her 'real' responses is enlivening. Her spontaneity rises. She is free to experience her angry responses.

Fixed ideas are out in the open

The three of us have a further discussion near the end of the session when Amina presents as a deputy for her father. She fleshes out her father's worries; that Layla will become radicalised in Casurina. My suspicion that the father's narratives dominate the family seems confirmed. I opine to myself that it is disrespectful or forbidden for others to contradict Ahmed with a different perspective and experience of the same events.

Session 3

Ahmed, Amina and Layla come.

After a short group centred warm up,

Family therapist to Ahmed: *I don't have the same view as you do of your daughter. I would not call her immature. I see Layla as entering into her adult phase of life with clarity of what she values and wants from her life at this time. What do you mean when you describe her as immature?*

Ahmed to family therapist: *I know my daughter. You don't. She is immature and is not up to making her own decisions. Decisions made now will affect her for her whole life. We have already had one boyfriend who would have made her a perfectly good husband. He is not Muslim but had values very similar to our own.*

Layla says very quietly: *I have found out from that relationship that I want to marry a Muslim. It is very important to me.*

Ahmed: *Don't you start preaching to me about Islam. I know much much more than you do.*

This is expressed firmly and a little loudly while he flails his arms around a little.

Layla: *Yes, of course you do.*

She sits back in her seat and becomes quiet.

Family therapist to the father: *Could you stand it if Layla is more conservative in her beliefs than you already. It appears she has come to this herself and it is not the new colleagues she has had for only two weeks that have influenced her?*

Ahmed: *No.*

I remind Ahmed that he and Zarah had migrated to New Zealand and then Australia without his parents' blessing.

I reflect: *At times my daughter and grandchildren could have avoided a deep hurt if they had followed my advice. I do notice that the lessons they get from doing it their way are heart felt and not repeated.*

Ahmed: *She is too immature.*

Family therapist: *Are you also worried that she may be attracted to a more radical Muslim at the hospital she works in in Casurina?*

Ahmed: *She will not do that.*

Later, family therapist: *Why don't you bring your wife, Zarah to these sessions?*

All three laugh and say things like: *She would hate it. She has ADHD. She is very good at doing our shopping. She would not like this and would not be good at it.*

Family therapist: *I would like to meet her. I'm sure she has a lot of influence in the family. And, it is not a requirement that you bring her.*

Roles

On other topics Ahmed and I have been able to express differing viewpoints on our wisdom applied to his family situation. Here, Ahmed fragments and becomes a *fearful and solemn pronouncer* rather than his progressive role of being a *wisdom sharer*.

An enabling solution or a restrictive solution?

In his determination that Layla has a good Muslim life his fear that she will make disastrous immutable life-long decisions dominates. He enacts the restrictive solution by closing down any discussion and insisting he knows what is best for the future.

Session 4

Role training; the 'difficult' daughter, Layla, comes alone. This is the final session with the family.

Family therapist: *You are determined to live your life your way and live with the consequences.*

Layla, as she tears up with feeling: *Yes. It would be good to have their (her mother and father's) blessing.*

Layla as Ahmed: *No. I do not give you my blessing...*

Layla in an aside: *He will give his blessing after a few weeks.*

Layla as Zarah: *You are placing a great burden on your father. He cannot sleep.*

We set out a scene with Layla leaving the house to walk to the station to catch the train to Casurina. She walks past her father's study and quickens her pace with her shoulders slightly rounded. The mirroring is painful for Layla to watch.

I model walking past her father's room with my head up, my shoulders well balanced and my spine firm. She has a go and likes this way to walk out from the house.

Layla as her mother Zarah: *I want you to pull your weight in the house. We are all studying or working.*

Layla: *Yes, I would like to do that. I could cook twice a week (at night). Will that work for you?*

Zarah: *That would be good.*

Emerging roles, sociometry and spontaneity

Layla readily warms up to being a *wishful dreamer*. As we enter role training with mirroring and modelling she readily warms up to the social role of confident professional. And with her mother, she has already decided to come out from hiding in her room to take her place in the life of the family. In this instance as a family cook.

Her sociometry with her father is ambivalent, both negative and positive. He is similarly ambivalent towards her; negative to the decisions she was making and positive to her well-being.

Neither of us know if either her father or her mother will come around to her viewpoint. It is quite something for her to realise that she is an adult and that she will pave her own path in her life and that she will be responsible for the consequences.

We discuss whether her father will be able to become more flexible towards her. She is hopeful that given time both her parents will be able to bless her decisions and realise their worst fantasies have not come to fruition.

The sharing phase

In my sharing, I tell of leaving Australia when I was naïve and 22 to travel the world. My mother immediately saw me as being traded in the white slave trade. She was inconsolable. Luckily for me my father quietly said that it was his job to look after my mother with her worries. I agreed to go to each Australian embassy or consulate and let them know that I was in that country and that I was alright. I also sent postcards every fortnight to my parents. My mother went to bed for two weeks immediately I left Australia. Neither my mother nor my father raised their concerns with me after this quiet exchange with my father.

Reflections

I reflect on family life in Australia today. What it is to immigrate to the other side of the world? What it is to be first generation Australian? What prompted a couple moving away from their homeland and what hopes drew them to this new place?

I am cognisant of the complexity within the family of making several transitions concurrently; from student to professional worker, from young adult to independent adult, from blessed daughter to partially-rejected daughter. I reaffirm my delight in the potency of this method and am guided by the rise and fall in spontaneity of us all.

Implications

Whatever your psychodrama specialty we are all trained in group work, cultural and social atom repair, in using our wisdom as therapeutic guides and in applying J. L. Moreno's methodology. My exhortation is to us all to present as family therapists whatever our specialty. Like me, you may find a new group of clients who are unlikely to seek out other forms of therapy but who will become involved in 'family therapy'.

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She now lives in a secondary house next to her granddaughter and her two boys. Being a great-grandmother is fun and rewarding. Elizabeth is the Director of Training at the Brisbane Campus of Psychodrama Australia and a visiting trainer in Adelaide and Perth.

Making the invisible visible: Sociodrama and systemic thinking in practice

Jane Goessi

Key words: systemic, relationships, manager, purpose, roles, change

In this article I describe an example of my work to show how sociodrama and systemic thinking shape my practice. I present key moments from the coaching process I used with a manager who was referred by another manager who had employed her. I start with the initial briefing and contracting phase and describe the work I did in the first coaching session, highlighting aspects of psychodramatic theory I am applying.

Particular moments are looked at through both a sociodramatic lens and from a systemic mindset. The sociodramatic lens shifts attention beyond the individual to the wider social system, to the roles, relationships and the forces that shape the individual. The systemic mindset keeps in mind the systemic notions that all parts of a system are interdependent, that change in one part inevitably ripples through the whole, and that change often occurs in complex and unpredictable ways.

Briefing and contracting

Senior managers in most organisations carry substantial workloads, face significant time pressures, and may not be interested in, or capable of, developing staff. As a result they may choose approaches that are familiar to them, readily available, or fashionable. So, when a senior manager refers a staff member to me for coaching, my first step is to establish a clear foundation for the work. While coaching can be valuable, it may not necessarily be what is needed.

I take time to explore the manager's situation. Thinking about the context in which they work and what is likely to be contributing

to the current predicament the manager is in, I take a broad systemic perspective in order to find out what's going on, what the purpose or desired outcome is, and why they think coaching might be appropriate. I want to know the people involved, the key roles and relationships, what the core issues are. This information helps me clarify the purpose of the work, make an assessment of the potential scope of the work, possible constraints, risks and benefits. I also want to find out what has been done before and how this might assist or conflict with my approach.

In this particular case, the contract for the work was negotiated with a senior manager, who I will call Carol. I received the following briefing from her.

Carol had recruited Lisa nine months earlier from outside the organisation. She appointed her based on her track record of leading successful major organisational changes. Although she had concerns about her management style and unrealistic expectations of staff working hours, Carol was keen on Lisa expanding her role functioning.

Carol had recently received an email from one of Lisa's staff. The email was carefully worded to avoid being described as a formal complaint however it conveyed the anger Lisa's team of ten direct reports had with her way of issuing orders and micro-managing. Carol's view of the situation was that this well-established team was not coping with the change in manager from the previous manager who was hands-off, to Lisa's more involved approach.

I proposed that the purpose of coaching Lisa would be to help her see how her approach affected the team, and for her to find more collaborative and productive ways of working with them. Carol accepted this proposal, and we agreed to have three sessions, followed by a review to consider progress and options. She was open to me leading a session with Lisa's team if I thought that would help.

Receiving a briefing from a third party provides a useful context for the work, however people in different positions in an organisation will have differing relationships and perspectives. Anthony Williams' (1991) concept of perceptual sociometry is relevant to this. In this initial contracting phase I don't want to be overly influenced by the referring manager's perspective. I want to meet the person being coached without preconceptions. I want to work with them to uncover and explore the system they are part of and get to know their experience firsthand.

Another central factor in this contracting phase is to clarify my terms for doing the work. While the contract for work was made with and funded by the referring manager, I clarify the need for safeguarding confidentiality as Lisa needs to feel free to reveal herself in our sessions. Nothing would be shared from our sessions unless I discovered information that indicated real threat of harm to the individual or organisation e.g. suicide, illegal or unethical actions.

Warming up to the work

As I prepare for the work, I focus on my own warm-up. Music and physical movement often assist me to connect with and sustain myself as a spontaneous and creative director. I picture the working space as a stage and arrange it accordingly while also imagining myself stepping into the roles of the director. I recall Max Clayton's encouragement to connect with my purpose. I bring to mind the people I will be working with, the wider system they are part of, and what their experience might be. This focus on my own warm-up fills me with curiosity and openness to whatever emerges, and the anxiety that I won't know what to do, falls away. By the time I met with Lisa, I felt fully engaged and open to possibilities.

What follows is a description of how our work unfolded including sociodramatic and systemic thinking that guided my choices.

Beginning the working relationship

At the scheduled time, Lisa arrived at my office and introduced herself. She was around fifty, impeccably presented, and businesslike. Quite taken with her confidence I moved quickly to outline the coaching process I used. I asked her to let me know something about her situation and what she was hoping to get from our coaching sessions.

She reflected on her career presenting herself as a leader with a well-defined vision and exceptionally high standards for herself and her team. She not only cared about how well the job was done, but also how people carried it out and presented themselves. Decision-makers valued her achievements, and over time she stepped into increasingly senior roles, moving between organisations when new opportunities arose. She spoke about her current team and her having to spend significant time checking their work to ensure it met her standards. She was matter of fact about removing individuals who did not meet expectations. She hoped the coaching process would assist her to achieve the high flying team she envisioned.

As she spoke I listened for more than the facts of her story. I used interviewing for a role and doubling to draw this out and to enhance her experience of herself. I noticed her self-assurance in the way she was expressing herself. I tuned in to my own response to her. She liked the roles I mirrored to her – the *gold standard service deliverer* conveying her dedication to her clients and the *knowledge keeper* showing her years of experience. During this early stage I focus primarily on establishing trust and strengthening connection. From my experience I knew building a mutual positive relationship is essential for the work ahead.

Mapping the work system

I am wired to think systemically. Growing up as the eldest of six sisters, I was constantly aware of how one person's mood, action, or absence rippled through the whole household. Later, as an avid reader, I found myself drawn to stories that revealed the interweaving of characters, events, and environments. These early experiences fostered in me a natural curiosity about how people and systems connect, adapt, and change. Systemic thinking has since become second nature and provides the lens through which I approach my work.

Sociodramatist Judith McMorland was, at one time, both my employer and mentor. I remember a weekend workshop where she set up an organisational system in the form of a restaurant, complete with staff, customers, and suppliers. To my surprise, the subgroups that emerged quickly lost sight of the importance of communicating with one another. Some clashed outright, while others operated in isolation, seemingly oblivious to the dramas unfolding across the whole system. That experience opened my eyes to the power of bringing systems to life: how subgroups interact, how easily blind spots arise, and how interventions can awaken awareness and generate fresh solutions. My training encouraged me to experiment with play and spontaneity, to remain attuned to the delicacy of the material we were working with, and to carefully gauge the robustness of each group.

Relating to the defining features of a system gives me a practical guide in my work. A system has a shared purpose, clear boundaries, takes in inputs, uses processes, and produces outputs. Because all parts are connected, a shift in one area inevitably affects the whole. A system's ability to adapt determines how relevant and effective it will be over time.

In this situation, Lisa's team is a system of people working

together towards a shared purpose. Each person has a role, and the way they interact shapes the team's overall performance. The team draws on resources and information as inputs, and uses processes like communication, collaboration, and decision-making to produce outputs such as decisions, services, or results. How well the team functions depend not only on individual capability but also on the quality of their connections, the clarity of roles, and how they respond to internal and external pressures.

I continued working with Lisa and, satisfied that she was adequately warmed up to me and the process, I suggested we map her work system.

Often organisational spaces are not conducive to working in action, so I have adapted the method making use of a whiteboard or tabletop as a substitute for the stage and whatever is at hand to concretise a situation. I typically warm the protagonist up to being a *participant observer* and when possible, invite them to take up or enact a role.

Using the whiteboard, I drew a circle in the centre for Lisa. I invited her to add the people she interacted with most. She began with her manager, adding a colleague, her team members and the leader of a productivity taskforce she was part of. As she spoke, I added each name to the map with their initials inside a circle and job titles above.

As Lisa described the people, she also commented on the nature and quality of the relationships revealing her perception of the sociometry in the system. The result was a map of the network of relationships highlighting which relationships were collegial, inspiring, supportive, difficult, frustrating and avoided.

We then mapped the pressures shaping these relationships, both external and internal. For example, for Lisa, external pressures included recent government legislation forcing a change to work practices for her team and rapidly changing client demands, and internal pressures were having to address on-going recruitment challenges and improve productivity.

I observed that she was a *quick analyst* and a *vigorous strategic thinker* which she liked hearing. I felt her warm more strongly to the process I was producing. I was pleased how collaborative we could be together. In my experience this quality of relationship deepens the client's readiness to explore and experiment with new approaches.

When the map was complete, I suggested that Lisa step back and get some distance on her situation. I invited her reflections, asking

her to comment on what she particularly noticed. With relief evident in her face and voice she noted the supportive and collegial relationships. Then, wrinkling her face and pursing her lips she pointed to her team and declared emphatically that things needed to change.

Deepening the warm up

I asked Lisa what recent situation with the team would be useful to look at. She recalled the last Monday morning team meeting with six of the team members. Two were on leave, one was seeing a client, and one had called in sick. As we mapped the six people present, Lisa described them as being consistently late, rude, poorly presented, and resistant to change. In the face of Lisa's criticism and negativity I started to feel despair, wondering whether anything new would be possible. I reminded myself to be curious about the picture she was painting.

I decided to expand the map of the system by bringing in the team's clients. To my surprise, Lisa reluctantly admitted that client feedback showed appreciation of the team's efforts to meet their needs. I felt my own spirits lift with this information, feeling a glimmer of hope that there was some progressive functioning in the system. From a systemic perspective this also is indicative of potential for change.

According to Lisa the time and resources the team took to meet client needs was not in line with the organisation's focus on productivity improvement and in some ways was against organisational policy.

Policy is a significant influence within a system as it usually contains the organisation's formal rules, standards and expected practices. Typically, people have varying relationships with policy, from those who tend to be very familiar with it, to those who pay no attention to it or find ways to get around it.

I could see that Lisa liked the clarity of rules and standards and proposed to her that she was a *rule upholder*. She agreed, adding that a couple of her team were *rule flouters* which really annoyed her. I sensed how draining it was for her having to keep watch for breaches. It took energy away from her focus on improvement.

Lisa agreed with my assessment that she was a *determined change maker*. I asked her to locate on the map we'd created where she experienced the most resistance to change. She identified three team members as *dogged tradition keepers*. She grimaced when I

asked her who was the strongest, pointing to Kerry, a long-standing employee who she found the most challenging.

Lisa explained that she had begun holding weekly one-on-one meetings to closely monitor Kerry's performance. Her tone suggested to me Lisa was taking a disciplinary rather than coaching approach. Their most recent meeting, held earlier that week, had clearly unsettled her. She described it as dreadful, admitting that she had lost her temper, raised her voice, and told him he had to do what she wanted. In response, Kerry had dug his heels in and accused her of bullying. Despite Kerry's significant experience in the team, his reportedly good rapport with clients, and difficulties recruiting new staff, Lisa made it clear to me that she would like him to leave.

Given that Lisa was well warmed up, I decided this was the perfect moment to explore further in the hope that she might gain new insights about the system and potentially expand her roles. I felt excited at what might emerge and had a sense that I needed to move slowly to maintain our mutuality and purpose. I decided to explore the interaction through concretisation and role reversal

Developing a broad perspective

I took two mugs from the shelf above my desk and placed them on the table between us. I invited Lisa to use the mugs to concretise herself and Kerry during the meeting. As she positioned them, I warmed her up to the particular time and place of the meeting. I asked her to sit and warm up to her feeling. She sat very upright, jaw clenched, a pen tightly grasped in her right hand. She turned Kerry's mug sideways saying that he had refused to look at her. Kerry's body was stiff, with his arms folded across his chest.

We moved to the moment she had lost her temper. Raising her voice she said, "This isn't good enough Kerry. You've had plenty of chances to do it right and you just keep failing to do what I want." At this moment I was thinking sociodramatically, relating to the forces she had already identified that affected her i.e. doing things to a high standard, finding fault, wanting to sort things out, and getting rid of problems. I asked her to bring out what she wasn't saying. "I'm thinking, why don't you just go and make room for someone who can do the job properly?" I then asked what she was feeling. "I'm angry and frustrated."

As Kerry, she expressed resentment and a determination to do what he believed was right and accused her of bullying. In this tense

situation Lisa's capacity to role reverse was limited. She found it difficult to work out what Kerry might have been thinking or feeling.

Thinking sociodramatically I aim for role reversal throughout a system. Doing this enables a person to get firsthand experience from someone else's perspective and from this can develop appreciation, understanding and insight.

I encouraged Lisa as a participant observer to examine the roles evoked in the interaction between these two people in the system. The mapping, concretisation and brief enactment have provided considerable information about the actions, feelings, and previously unspoken thoughts, revealing a clash of world views between Lisa and Kerry.

I pointed out the symmetrical nature of their functioning. Both driven by a need to control and not seeming to have much tolerance for difference and lashing out when confronted with it. To my astonishment and relief Lisa laughed, recognising herself as a *control freak*. Until now she hadn't seen this similarity between her and Kerry. We both relaxed a little. I knew we could do a bit more.

I invited Lisa to step back and consider Kerry's world in more detail. From a systemic perspective, tuning into his worldview was essential if she was to develop her relationships with team members and work towards their shared goals. Exploring Kerry's beliefs, values and the pressures he faced could assist her to see him in a broader frame.

Thinking systemically, means recognising that every system exists within, and is connected to, other systems. In this case, the team is a system within the wider organisation, and each person's role in the team expresses only a part of who they are. To expand Lisa's perspective, I encouraged her to build a picture of Kerry's day as a whole, what might have shaped his state of mind before their meeting, and what demands or challenges might follow afterwards.

I could see Lisa begin to soften, especially when she shared that Kerry had unsuccessfully applied for her job. She could relate to the failure and shame he must have experienced when she, the outsider, got the job he thought was his. She also acknowledged how much clients appreciated how he worked with them. I considered these to be valuable insights for building Lisa's capacity to reverse roles with Kerry and a beginning in her developing her approach as a team manager. By the end of the session both Lisa and I felt very satisfied with what we had done together. We looked forward to further sessions to focus more specifically on Lisa's role development.

In conclusion

From my initial briefing for the work and in the interventions with a client I am constantly thinking from a sociodramatic and systemic perspective. This enables clients to become aware of things that have previously been invisible to them and provides the foundation for new insights, role development and the potential for organisational or systemic change. Uncovering the roles, relationships, and wider forces at play in a work setting in this initial session brought to light Lisa's drive to control and find fault with her team members, and that this was also apparent as a trait shared within the team. Lisa gained a new appreciation of the experience of one particular staff member who she regarded as a problem. Through the experience of uncovering, exploring and experimenting with the systems that she was part of she was able to warm up again. Lisa was ready for change.

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The unity-and-unification of a human being: To embody a real self via role development and identity formation

Kevin Franklin

Key words: confusion, creator, double-bind, entailed, embodiment, identity, individual-collective, orthogonal, psychodramatic, psychosocial, psychosomatic, reaction, response, schismogenesis, schizophrenia, schizophrenogenic

Abstract

Mind is non-material; identifying purpose focuses the mind. Structurally, mind is two objects in relations. These are known as socius or second-person and as persona or third-person. Mind, functionally as roleplayer and roletaker after Moreno. Historically, mind is variously formulated; as a singularity, as split fragmented schizophrenic, and mind abstracted from life itself. Hence, frightful events such as World War 1, World War 2, current warfare in Gaza-Israel and Ukraine-Russia, the wars on drugs, the ongoing effects of slavery, of colonialism on First Nation peoples, the personal and collective costs of trauma, the extraordinary costs of mental and criminal dis-order and the costs of single-minded law-and-order enforcement by police and militaries all implicate a schizophrenogenic paradigm to a holistic mind and divided mentality.

In purposeful focus author Kevin Franklin brings new theory and empirical research to envision a new more peaceful functional and fulfilling individual-social-collective mindful reality.

Preface: Psychosis to identity

Background reads are a 1974 paper by Lynette Clayton, *Identity and the Formation of the Self*, Moreno's preface to his first book *The Words of the Father*, David Oliphant's *Exploring J.L. Moreno's Spirituality and Theology* (AANZPA Journal # 28, 2019), and my

book. (Franklin, 2024) I'm glad that I had not known until recently of Lynette's paper. Why?

The short answer is I needed, in daily practice, to resolve how that implied integration solves the Trinitarian and individual-collective mystery of my 'identity'. That happenstance has meant doing a lifetime's work of action learning; not only an intellectual understanding of content learning.

The longer answer? Clayton, writing about a clinical cohort of 'confused' adolescents, provides an apt mirror.

There seemed to be a common problem amongst many of an identity problem. Many had a creative variety of roles or behaviours but there seemed to be no executive or integrated whole. They were therefore confused, had no idea of how their behaviour was perceived by others and alternately were dependent and counter-dependent in an effort to handle their confusion.

Lynette Clayton, 1974, p.3

That same confusion in me but, at least to appearances, for a very different reason. The origin of my confusion and my adult lack of executive function was a medically induced psychosis at age four-years and consequent multiple personality disorder.

Like repressed homosexuals, that youths and adults suffering schizophrenia are more likely to commit suicide saddens but does not surprise me. Hence, my life-long problem of how to leave behind that shattering event, the psychosis. But here, to illustrate lived and living theory, to discuss my adolescent and early adulthood coping, this via manic-depressive reaction formation. If childhood is about role development, then early-mid adulthood is about identity formation.

Structurally: My Theory of Person (ToP, Franklin, 1988) attempts to explain how human personality is formed, develops and influences interactions with the environment and others. In ToP, the third-person of English grammar includes 'it'; for example, a person objectified – woman, homosexual – discussed in an objectifying way: sexism, racism, religious intolerance and other I-it segregations, internal and/or externalised.

Functionally: What is, what be that 'it' thing, that integrated psychosis in my personality effecting my idiosyncratic stupefied

functionality? My fragmenting or dysfunctional 'it' functions as a habitual roletaker: reactive, automatic, robotic and stupefied. A third-person is me, myself? How can that be? A masking persona of enculturated bits and pieces; pre-programmed triggers activating the on and/or off fight-flight coping buttons.

Coping with that it – was a frightful scary it-space, a fortress-full of phantastic-fantastic monsters and devils – a defensive overly-developed 'reaction formation'. Psychologically, a reaction formation is a defence mechanism in which a person unconsciously transforms an unacceptable or anxiety-inducing impulse into its opposite, often expressed in an exaggerated or rigid way, e.g. sovereign citizen.

'It' does not have consciousness; it feels and acts like identity. This false-identity exists, within personality, but is not real. Its reality is a culturally created objectifying label: reaction formation. And my harsh, no, cruel! – internalised sadomasochistic-fortified existence in childhood – coping with psychosis.

Some social atom hallmarks of reaction formation are:

- ◆ Repression of unacceptable desires especially as defined for us in childhood: affection, belonging, shyness, sexuality, homosexuality.
- ◆ Adoption and expression of an opposite attitude and/or behaviour: hiding racial origin, pre-homosexual children adopting heterosexuality. As a child I believed that I was an adopted orphan, but I had family. I just didn't belong! How can this be?
- ◆ This reactive behaviour, my mania-depression, expressed in overly developed fight-flight behaviour and functional gaps: poor or absent organiser creating disorder, perfectionism, missing executive functionality. And privatised avoidances; social phobia and school phobia, among others.

Preamble: Illusion and reality

I-Thou (Buber, 2013), this soul or first-person – second-person relation in ToP (Franklin, 2024) is interactive, mutually responsive, a healthy alternative to reaction formation of a child adolescent or adult when getting objectifying communications: blaming gaslighting, coercion.

How can we use knowledge of complexity in a practical way?

I am often asked this question. I am confused by it. Practical at what level? Does practical mean:

... to offer quick but un-systemic solutions?

... or to offer better understanding of the complexity of the context?

Nora Bateson, 2023, p.139

One such long-needed understanding of confounding complexity is holistic-wholistic science: Note here the ancient sub-continental Indian concept of maya, the illusion of reality.

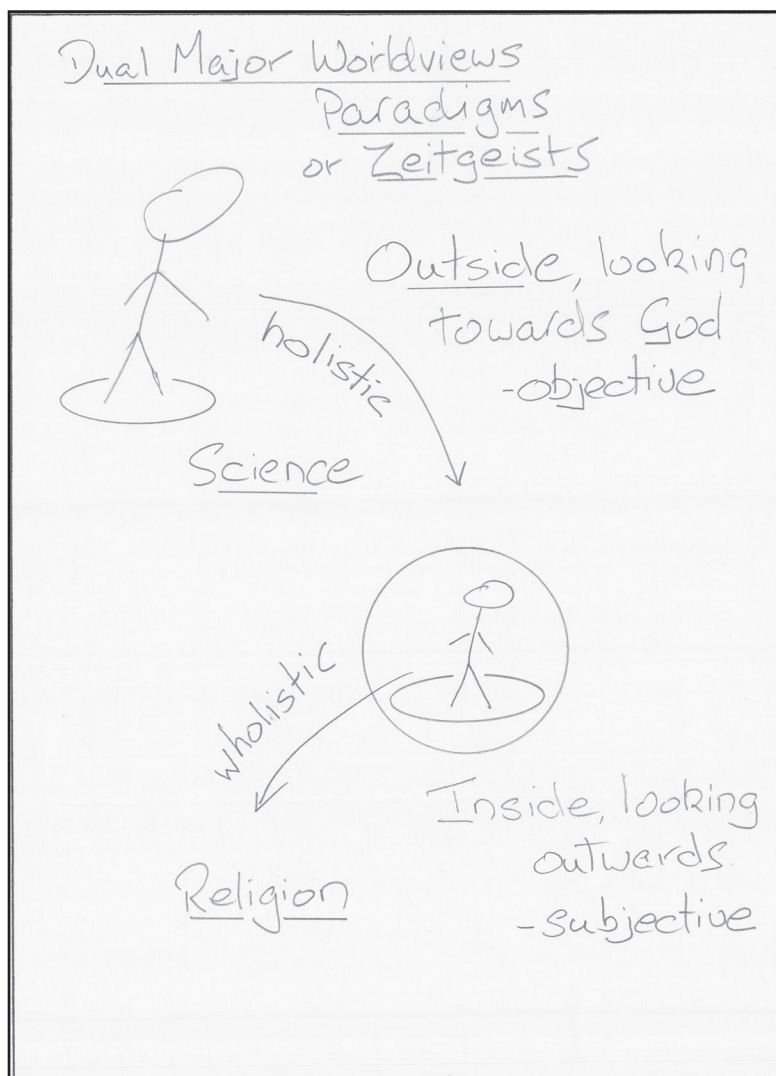


Figure 1: Dual major worldviews, paradigms or zeitgeists

In another section, Bateson writes:

There may be a blind spot in the way we make sense of the world that is holding back our ability to make the shifts necessary for human survival.

Nora Bateson, 2023, p.151

I'll name one: double bind. Gregory Bateson – father of Nora Bateson – introduced double-bind to explain schizophrenia. Culturally, there is a systemic double-bind and blind-spot in social science: psychology and sociology. Orthogonality (Franklin, 2024) is a complex interaction of X and Y factors, not cause and effect, i.e. not simply X causing Y. Identity (or self) only emerges when the psyche and socius interact! This concept is crucial to understanding the religious and scientific mysteries of the Blessed Trinity, sexuality, sexual preference, X and Y psychosocial identity, and dis-order; and spontaneity to resolve philosophical cartesian dualism and entailed dis-order.

Introduction: Philosophy of life

Identity – the concept – is orthogonal: complex. I know only of one, but one crucial citation of identity by J.L. Moreno, *The Matrix of All Identity* (1980, p.74). This refers to a postulated initial undifferentiated state-of-being experienced by an infant. He named these changing infant experiences as psychosomatic roles, these clustering to create a sense of body.

The first roles to develop are the psychosomatic roles which are physiologically determined, such as the sleeper, the eater and the sexual role.

Lynette Clayton, 1973, p.9

Sexual identity has its *status nascendi* or origin in that archaic-symbiotic first object-making stage of psychosomatic role development.

Morenian role theory and practical methods are generally existentialist in philosophy, this congruent with his philosophy of life. His philosophy of Life with a capital L that the self is emergent from roles; that roles do not emerge from the self. Soren Kierkegaard is generally credited with this existential maxim:

*Life is not a problem to be solved,
But a reality to be experienced
And a mystery to be lived.*

This motto expands Gregory Bateson's (1972) notion of deutero-learning. He defined this second-learning how to learn, a characteristic like scientific method. A simple example is first learning how to play hearts, a card game. Then, to further develop learning via practice repetition and reflection. Those two stages are like Moreno's content- and action-centres of learning, but with action prime to nominal learning. Bateson's reversed formulation, where action is secondary, reiterates holistic culture's schizophrenogenic paradigm.

Evolution of the creator

Figure 2 (overleaf) illustrates three whole and parts models. All three models are similar. Each has three-parts within one whole. These wholes and parts – literally four objects in relations – are wholes within a whole. Figure 2, in historical order, shows Moreno's three-stages of the evolution of the creator: Figure 2.1: He-God, Figure 2.2 You-God and Figure 2.3 I-God. In that order, the three persons of Theory of Person: roletaker, roleplayer, and rolecreator.

Derived from Latin, English grammar – viewed psychologically – has three persons within whole of Person: four. Sociologically or interpersonally, persons are 'I' the person speaking, 'you' the person spoken to, and 'he, she, it' the person – He-God – spoken about: three.

Psychologically, these three intra-personal persons are psyche or creator, socius or companion, and persona or introjected He-God. Counting the objects in this diagram there are four objects, three-in-one: four, including the extra-one i.e., a third-person.

This diagram shows the first—second relation or 'I-Thou' attributed to Moreno (Waldl, 2005). This denotes companion-ability and the possibility of role reversal: the latter a conundrum of subject becoming object; a same-yet-different paradox. Like red and green, not viewed as colours but as different colours. This difference-making is a process which perceives segregation instead of unity. For example: instead, a social act to see – a person who is disabled – rather than disabled person.

In other words, and here portending I-It null-type events – single-minded in maya-land where illusion rules – perceived or man-made as if different, difference, opposites, oppositional, fist-cuffs: individually as fight and flight, collectively as gangs' tribalism and war. And, when adult, lacking belonging, companionship, advanced and simple empathy: expressing an absence of executive

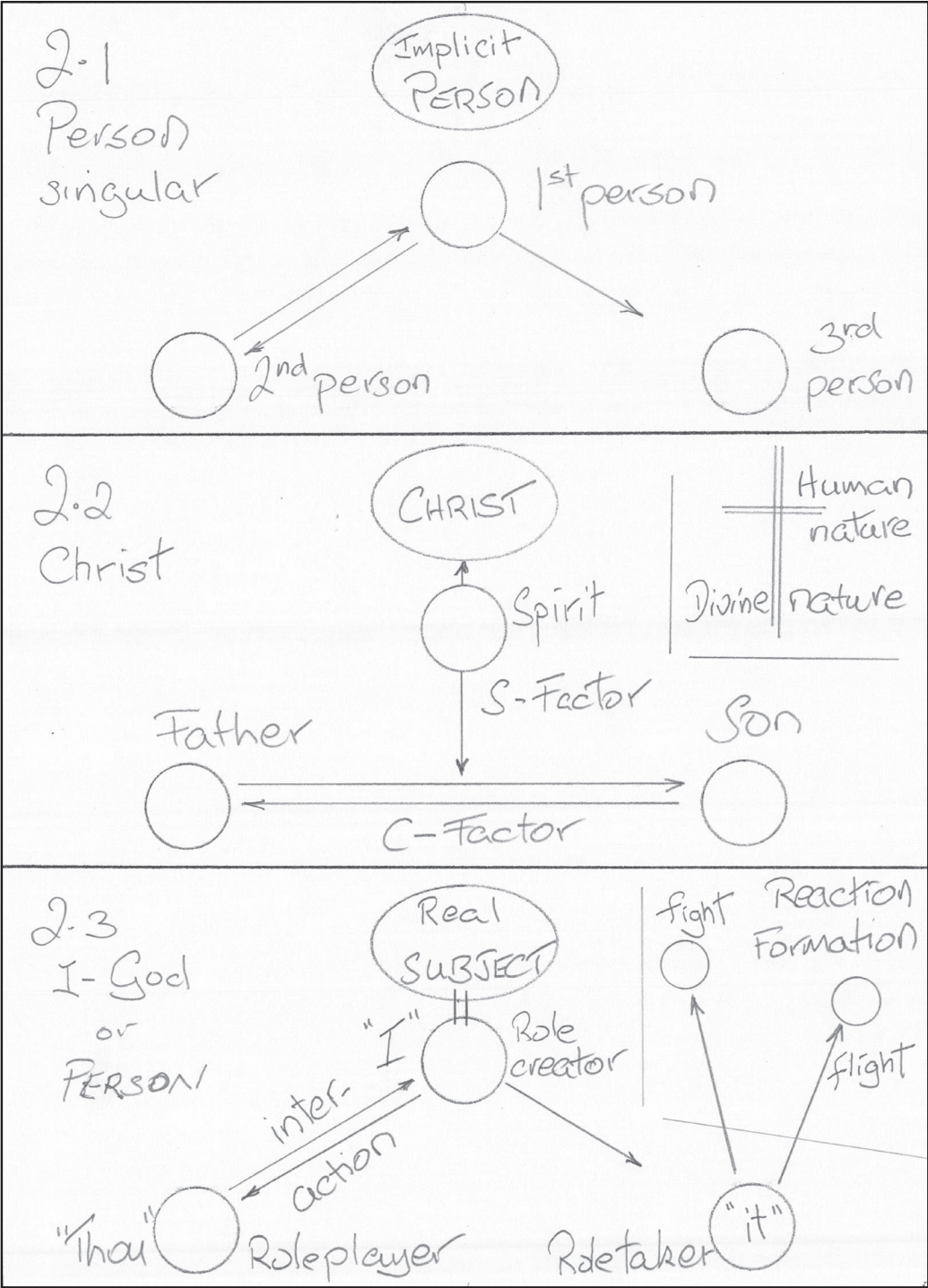


Figure 2: Evolution of the creator

functioning. Figure 2.1 shows the first—third persons null-relation or I-It. This be nullity, a state of no-thing-ness (sic) or non-entity in reference to people: sociologically disassociation, psychologically dissociation. This schismogenic process – segregation – in adult personality is schism, road to hell, void, empty space; existing – but not real – where unreal phantasmic demons and devils roam ‘free!’. That is the reactive negative side: potentially criminal and mentally dis-ordered. There is also a reactive ‘positive’ side: nice, so-helpful, over-compliant, or depressed.

Functionally, a chicken-and-egg conundrum. Does that schismogenesis imply or perhaps denote a higher-level cause to a lower-level effect? Grammar – a conserve – has evolved since human beings first started to utter and hear sound as language. Our modern English grammar says to me that this null relationship is not innate error: that this nullity is not error but an emotional fusion, an incomplete child-from-parent differentiation. Like me, some might see this plan-b as a gift.

But, but ... the ToP four persons of grammar is incomplete! Correct, I have in Figure 2.1 only discussed Wholistic Person as though a fake encultured construction: persona. Nullity rules the so-called social context. This because, in such a schizophrenogenic holistic context, where only culture’s sociological I-you is practised by law (sic) *lore* (Franklin, 2024).

In other words, Person.singular is a singular unity (e.g., He-God), modelling a whole secular-world in and of itself: illusion. Like Jo Citizen living in a Batesonian Order-1 content or learning-1

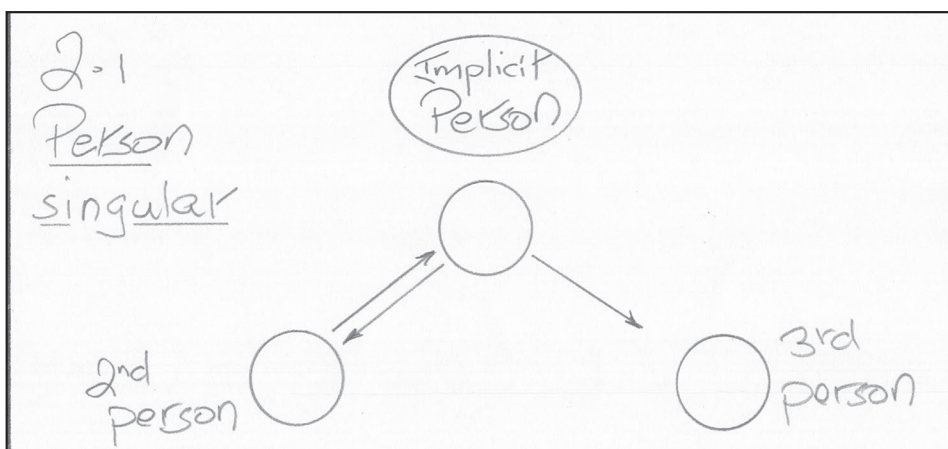


Figure 2.1: Singularity of God

neurosis; on repeat, repeat, to the same mind-numbing stupefied outcome. In Australia, content learning-1 is an archaic pervasive culturally determined paradigm of normativity, of getting fight-and-flight into right balance. Where Control, with capital-C, is a priority. Where coping with another's reaction formation that mirrors one's own reaction formations: collusion instead of own companionable response-ability.

Now, a segue to a historically new way. Some 2000 years ago, from that psychological Person singularity (Figure 2.1), a new way to redefine that entity to now include sociological.

In our time the social and mental sciences aim at a similar accomplishment as religion once attained. Mankind's masses suffer from social and mental unrest. Catharsis will probably come again

J.L. Moreno.1972 p.a

Unless a new catharsis of integration occurs then instead, by that default, the likelihood of a catharsis of abreaction: systemic collapse, ... war.

Conceptually, wholistic culture (see Figure 2.2 below) has two sub-system wholes: singular-unity and plural-unification. These share the same first order concept – whole – but they are different and entailed sub-orders, entailed, not separable without causing consequence. Because of Jesus, that historical unity-as-singularity was expanded, becoming more inclusive. Said St Paul:

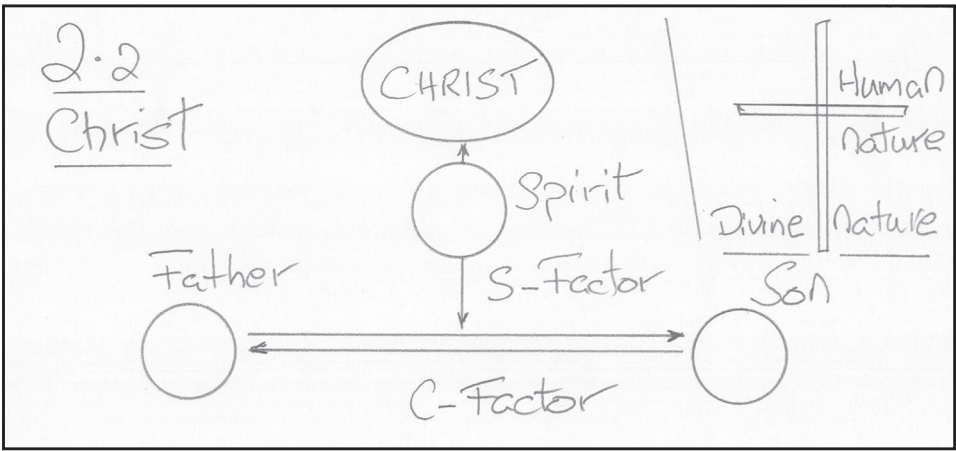


Figure 2.2: Duality of God

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (sic).

Galatians 3:28

Nowadays, St Paul would rightly include neither man nor woman, neither gay nor straight. Not simply dual, these twofold sub-systems are orthogonal, interactional: not in simple linear relationship like holistic cause and effect. The Trinity, like human identity, is mathematically complex: blue + yellow = green. Jesus might have been familiar with plurality in his language, like person plural in English language. Perhaps, some of Rome's Latin language? Whatever, he speaks knowingly of his psychodramatic father-role and his social role as his father's son. His father – first-person subject – has become object: same-but-different, paradox.

In role reversal, his existing inner-Father role can become real, but now different as Son: subject becomes object, not maya-difference. Jesus alludes to his father, he – a Father part of Jesus – existing in some other world privately his, that we in English language now call divine psychological and/or psychodramatic.

Sociologically, for Christ there are orthogonally, psychological and sociological immaterial worlds, these two in his one psychosocial whole, or a christ (sic), personal identity. This complex is (a) Christ's own real-life living reality-world and, to other persons, his very observable behavioural expressions of his human nature. And another, (b) for example, *My Father who is in heaven*. His Father – a psychodramatic role – in his psychological world: existing, not real, within his psychology. Sociologically – in out there! Life itself – he is being familiar, a familiar friend or companion, using a today commonplace model of theatre. He speaks theatrically: dramatically, drama meaning a thing done. Jesus using action method, drama like show and tell from ancient Greece. For the peoples around him living in an externalised singularity-God and holistic culture, he appears disordered mentally: lunatic. And criminal, disorderly against the people's lore, like homosexuals in Australia historically prior to law and lore reforms.

Psychologically, for Jesus-a-Christ, there are two unified worlds: one of a divine or psychological nature, and another one of human or sociological nature. And, believably, he be the first realistically sane first-person 'I' and person 'I' – whole and parts – documented sane in Western human history. My doctoral research used this 'I-I'

relationship in ToP to frame and framework my empirical psychological research: this to explore the origin and nature of being-and-becoming a real sane lively orthogonally creative-and-spontaneous human being (Franklin, 1988, 2024).

Aside: Figures 2.1 and 2.2 are same-and-different. Diagrammatically in Figure 2.1 our prehistoric human male-ancestors have projected and externalised to cast God an illusory but as if real He-God: the traditional, distant, objectified deity (Oliphant, 2019). In Figure 2.2 he is theatrically cast and internalised as a You-God: A more personal, dialogical relationship with God (2019). In Figure 2.2, an idealistic Christianity rarely achieved, there is ideally no remaining third-person: 'It' – the colonising enculturated masking by persona – has been transformed by Person being-and-becoming Whole (2024). Christianity's end-state sexualised model conceals how spontaneity works to transform fallen holism to healthy wholistic. An internal second-person you-god, a more friendly grace-giving father, replaced the prior hell-fire He-God. Christ's psychodramatic father-son or I-thou relationship transforms the prior unforeseen broken entailment and cause of consequent disorder manufactured in the name of the prior He-God singularity.

Figure 2.2 shows a Christian cross: A human being's divine nature interacting – orthogonally – with their human nature. This cross represents and symbolises a transition, Moreno's evolution of the creator, from mosaic He-God to Christ's You-God: a significant historical event in that male-dominated culture. Like blue and yellow paints to make green, psychodramatic and social roles integrate to role, divine and human natures integrate to whole: integral identity.

The first and only cosmic God of the Universe entirely entered the physical world. However, not as historically assumed, but orthogonally like a Saint George cross. Moreno lived-life to express his living I-God: his apex Philosophy of Life. Thus, through psychosocial sociatry enactment, humans can become creators and co-creators in God-like sameness: wholly-ness. Persons – each emergent I-Gods – expressing self-as-subject into psychosocial unification instead of the binary-division and maya-divisiveness of holistic philosophy and religious-scientific practice. Human beings, individuating in *Humanity and Human Sexuality* (Franklin, 2024), socially active individual-collective participants in their being-and-becoming human.

Figure 2.3 shows an adult, also a person as an elder. Here the remnants of childhood symbiosis with parents and significant others

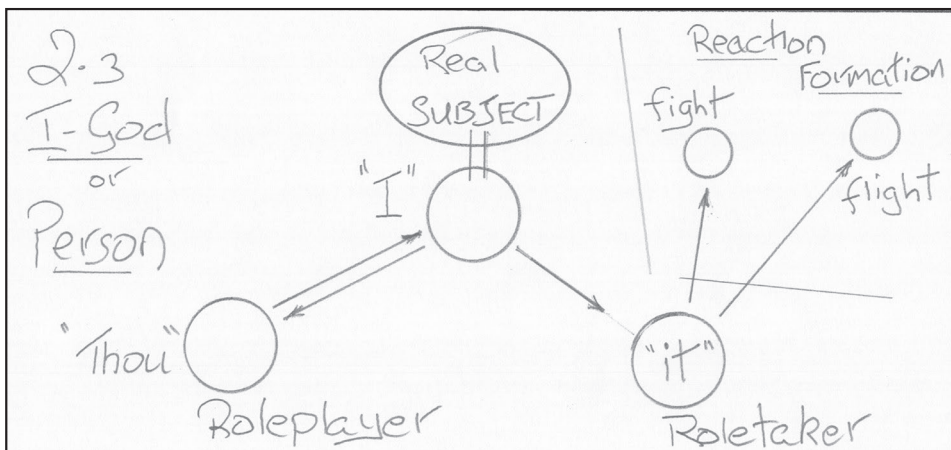


Figure 2.3: Unification of the Creator

and things – transitional objects – remain as roles or fragments of roles, and things: the ‘It’ entity of the third-person (structure) and roletaker (function). For some, the fight-and-flight remnants of their difficult childhood instead generating skewed role development, consequent reaction formation, nullified identity formation.

In Figure 2.3 the rolecreator or first-person I is connected, perhaps reconnected, as I-I. The I-You soul relates with whole, or I-God, *Person* or real self; this personal whole or I Am presence in the physical-social-cultural world of self and others. This presence defining or redefining cultural understandings of individual-collective reality. This I-I connection, shown as twin parallel lines is auto-tele. Factor-S, i.e. spontaneity, coming down like grace. Spontaneity catalysing human creativity: Factor-C, creativity (Moreno, 1978). The roleplaying thou or second-person is well connected – bonded – in spontaneity: like green paint, a wholly characteristic of the whole person. Contrariwise, a roletaker in a person is not, or is poorly, bonded. Clayton (1974) observed how such adolescents had little or no idea of how they, their difficult behaviour, affects other people.

Figure 2.3 does not show a connection between the roletaker and spontaneous roleplayer. In person of English grammar there is no third- and second-person relation. This no-relationship, seemingly binary, is an objective scale of mind’s spontaneity, a scale of spontaneity between mind’s orthogonally dual objective objects: high Factor-S roleplayer and low S-Factor roletaker. In words metaphoric, this is a scale of objectivity. Both socius (high-S) and persona (low-S) are objectively mind’s individual-and/or-collective – yay or

Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Variables
 (Franklin, 1988, Table 8.) [Reprint 2024, page 509, hardcover]

	Spontaneity Level of Gay-men groups					
	Low S-factor			high S-factor		
	Low-HIF		Mid-HIF		High-HIF	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Somatization	65	8.3	43	6.4	38	6.7
Obsessive-Compulsive	85	8.9	82	7.8	59	6.9
Interpersonal Sensitivity	106	9.7	76	8.6	53	6.5
Depression	109	9.6	73	8.1	58	6.5
Anxiety	83	9.7	50	7.0	30	5.2
Hostility	53	8.4	41	6.4	30	5.4
Phobic Anxiety	52	8.8	17	5.9	7	4.0
Paranoid Ideation	80	9.1	66	8.1	50	7.1
Psychoticism	78	9.2	41	6.7	21	4.9
GSI	83	8.8	57	6.6	41	5.3
homophobia (IHP)	59	3.0	45	3.6	42	3.6
Internality	36	2.5	35	2.6	36	2.4
Powerful Others	20	2.8	21	2.8	18	2.8
Chance	21	3.2	19	2.8	18	3.0
Private Self-Consciousness	24	2.6	22	2.4	22	2.4
Public Self-Consciousness	19	2.4	17	2.2	15	2.2
Social Anxiety	13	2.2	13	2.2	10	2.2

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

nay – expressions of a subject. As detailed in *Humanity and Sexuality* (Franklin, 2024) this numeric scale is a psychosocial paradigm in identity formation, a psychodrama paradigm in psychodramatic method and sociodrama paradigm in sociodramatic method (2024).

In my doctoral research (Franklin, 1988), I used the psychodrama paradigm to operationalise person; this whole Person synonymous with Morenian I-God. This was empirical research with repressed not out! homosexual men (low-S) and others come out! as identified-gay men (high-S). This research using statistical discriminant analysis demonstrated Moreno's postulate that anxiety is the absence of spontaneity.

This research identified the unknown gendered elements of gender identity, their male or female divine nature while knowing their human natures male sex-role and male sexual-identity of body-type. This showed that the psychosocial identity of homosexual men is orthogonal and male-male: their psychodramatic role is empirically demonstrated as male and their male-embodied behaviour or social role is observably male. This explained his sociometric attraction – his sexual preference – to other men. Drawing on the participating heterosexual men and women control groups in this research, this finding is generalised to identify the male and female element of gay-women, straight-women and straight-men (Franklin, 2024).

Theory of Person is a scientifically validated whole and parts model of an adult human being: become whole from a unified singular and plural, individual-collective, or psychosocial worldview of wholistic Person (2024). This research also demonstrated the origin and nature of dis-order, mental and criminal. It demonstrates the psychosocial or sociatry paradigm – Chapter 4: Origin of Sexual Preference – is missing from social science. This research identified, theoretically, both the psychodramatic and sociodramatic paradigms in ToP. This research empirically tested the psychodramatic paradigm. This to identify, structurally, the psychosocial gay-man's male-male identity. More generally, it shows in orthogonality the underlying structure-function of identity and the self, person or I-God oriented in their individual-social-collective reality.

Summary and conclusion

Sociatry is wholistic; not holistic, neither theistic nor deistic. People, each a dual-nature child of the universe, innately have creativity or human nature and spontaneity or divine nature: instead of holistic binarizing maya-differences. People access those innate human

resources. In wholistic individuation, purposefully mindful towards being-and-becoming a first-order whole *Person*: A real self with a psychosocially orthogonally entailed and integrated second-order complex – dual not dualistic – identity e.g., gay-man.

Role development in children first takes place in symbiotic relation to the parent: a necessary transitional object for an infant and young child. Developmentalists have proposed an undifferentiated singularity or psychosomatic state of being. However, identity is dualistic, ideally, the transitioned structure-function of whole and parts. This futuristic ideal initiated and polarized a 2000-year second universe: its global and entailed schizophrenogenic unrest, and its entailed dis-order – historical and current – of male-sex dominated holistic culture.

Identity formation in *homo sapiens* is primarily expressed by a person's social atom, its development and repair. Roles emerge interpersonally as adequate, under-developed, over-developed, absent and conflicted. Plan b's default I-It in holistic culture is negating of socius and instead skews personality to psychopersona role development and reactive coping.

Three crucial psychological-sociological paradigms previously unknown to traditional theist religion and conventional holistic science have been identified. These divinatory paradigms in Morenian sociatry are critical to humanity's transition to an emergent healthy wholistic individual-social-collective third universe.

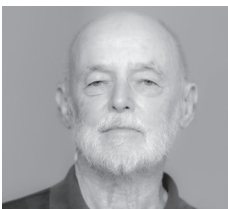
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Kevin Franklin, Psychodramatist – T.E.P., Clinical Psychologist, and published author of *Humanity and Human Sexuality: The Origin and Nature of Sexual Preference* (2024) based on his original doctoral research which scientifically demonstrated J. L. Moreno's sweeping hypothesis *that anxiety is the absence of spontaneity*. Kevin bangs on for

Moreno's late in life third-stage spiritual discoveries: sociatry, I-God. In Kevin's personal language; humanity, and being-and-becoming in identity, a person.

Setting the digital stage: Producing online groups

John Farnsworth

Key words: psychodrama, online groups, staging, purpose, surplus reality, creativity, virtual, digital

Abstract

This paper describes how psychodrama can be effectively translated online. It emphasizes staging and purpose as central to successful virtual production. Drawing on Moreno's vision and contemporary practice, it demonstrates how core methods—including warm-up, doubling, mirroring, role reversal, and surplus reality—can be adapted for online environments. A case study involving mental health professionals demonstrates how online tools, playful interaction, and sociometry foster connection, safety, and creativity. It provides a stepping stone to illustrate how every emerging digital development, from text-based to AI digital companions, offers potential stages for psychodramatic production. They provide rich possibilities for intimacy, role exploration, and innovative enactments. The paper shows how online psychodrama offers transformative potential and new challenges for producers to experiment with new media in ways that respond to Moreno's overarching philosophy.

Introduction

I am in the middle of facilitating a group online. It is a mixed group, all mental health professionals, each with a different professional identity. They know little about psychodrama, but they understand working online. It raises the question: how do psychodramatists work creatively in digital settings? How do they produce effectively in virtual environments? It's the question I set out to answer both with my group and in this paper. Psychodrama's distinctive capacity to maximise spontaneity, vitality and connection underlines how much it has to contribute not only to online groupwork but also to its

growing literature. With accelerating digital developments, this potential is only beginning to be explored so that psychodrama's rich legacy can be fully translated into the virtual domain.

It is now nearly 80 years since Moreno first introduced ideas for using television and broadcasting technologies (*Psychodrama*, 1946). As he wrote, presciently,

every tele spectator will be able to televise himself back and so establish a communication between the therapist and himself, multiplying the potentialities of a visual telephone by millions.

Moreno, 2014, p. 257

If a producer wants to learn how to use action methods online, where do they turn? Internet texts include Nikos Takis' (2024) theory of presence and distance online, Fleury's (2020) psychodrama specifics online, Stouraiti's (2023) use of psychodrama in restorative justice training and, most extensively, Pavel Kornienko (2022) who describes how to conduct online therapy groups. These are just some examples that illustrate the method's potential in imaginative, transformative ways.

In this article I set the stage: I illustrate how to bring the instruments of the method, from sociometry to sociatry, alive online. I propose that key is staging and purpose, and paying attention to the hybrid setting of real and virtual environments. I walk through the steps of preparing, then producing, a specific online group. Given the different experience of boundaries online, I also confront some old questions raised by Max Clayton about boundary and flow (Farnsworth 2013). He demonstrated how, in person, the boundaries of relationships act to contain anxiety and to enable spontaneous flow. I am curious, is this so in a virtual environment and, if so, how?

Warming up

The group I am meeting are experienced mental health practitioners, each interested in exploring the online medium to its full. In preparing for our meeting, I visualise inviting each of them to explore every dimension of virtual group interaction, and to do so in real time.

My visualizing distinguishes what is different to meeting online and not in person. How do I anticipate the moment of greeting when we each turn on the camera, face each other, and enter our virtual

world? This moment of imagination starts to set the digital stage and instantly defines it against the stage in person. That moment also brings alive the virtual boundaries and constraints in moving online.

In practice, many groups simply take platforms such as Zoom, Teams or Google Meet as given. Participants struggle to turn on the camera and sound, to share the screen, find breakout rooms, use the chat function or perform the tasks required of them. In my view, such behaviour is restricted and conserved. We react in isolation to our own disconcerting face onscreen, or to the intimidating gallery of blank-looking others, each in our boxed-up chicken coops. Our internet connection may be unstable, or we may be calling from our phone in the car. Alternatively, we're stroking our lovely cat on camera or telling the kids, or our partner, to go into another room. We may be eating or drinking, or carrying the phone as we prune our flowers. Whatever that's like for us individually, what is it like for our online colleagues? To imagine this, as a producer, is to begin to role reverse with those I am about to meet.

It prompts my question for the coming group: how, together, do we make the most of this virtual environment? As a different medium and modality, what does this remote experience feel like, moment by moment? To discover this, as a group, I am going to invite my colleagues to undertake three practices, moment by moment, online: Explore-express-reflect:

1. Explore the dimensions of this temporary world,
2. Express their real-time experience to us, and
3. Reflect, together, on its meaning and value of what we've just experienced.

Imagining the group ahead as I plan begins my warm-up as a producer. I engage in my own surplus reality: I imagine the coming reality online and I anticipate the Hollander Curve (NSW 2008). This is the three-point arc of every group process: warming up to exploring the online medium; enacting and expressing our online experience; finally, sharing and reflecting on what we take from that experience.

In practice, there will be several cycles of warm-up, action and reflection. Online work requires this: it takes place in a hybrid environment. We are in two worlds at once, online with our colleagues and offline with our surrounding reality (Takis 2024). We join the group from our own world, but we remain within that world, subject

to all its existing dimensions. Only we know what lies beyond and behind the edges of our screen, or out of a window beside us – none of our group participants do. I anticipate that I will begin by addressing these physical realities. First, I will ask participants to play with their hybrid experience, revealing some small part, beyond the edges of their frame, to the rest of us.

Warm-up: the hybrid stage

When I'm in the group, my request to reveal a little of their offline world creates a remarkable warmup. To my surprise, individuals become quite coy about what lies beyond the edge of their screen. For some, it's an unexpectedly intimate act – much more exposing than they expect, despite such a seemingly tiny action. Their warm-up is low and the screen's frame provides a form of security, a boundary they can control. Yet, these reactions are an instant warmup to our process, because each member is instantly engaged. With a group more familiar with each other, I might invite further exploration: a protagonist willing to explore their anxieties about what they hide or reveal offscreen. There could even be a full enactment, depending on the group's sociometry. Either way, I can draw on many instruments of the method to set the scene.

I continue our warmup by moving focus from the hybrid to the digital environment. I ask, what's our joint experience if everyone moves their faces right up to their screen? Or moves right back? What if we jointly put our finger to the screen? Immediately, we discover a dimension of experience we rarely have in person. How often do you have your face right up to someone you hardly know? Onscreen, these are potential moments for enactment. The screen, and the screen alone, enables both intimacy and distance at once, created by the hybrid environment.

The hybrid experience reveals another important aspect: different responses to intimacy and distance online start to indicate different roles and role clusters amongst group members. If our purpose online is to explore these, then using the method between real and virtual worlds is revealing. This is specific to online work. It also suggests how, online, we can begin to investigate the group's social and cultural atoms, as Pavel Kornienko (2022) illustrates.

Gullo et al. (2022) draw on hybrid work differently; they notice how the negotiable distance between online and offline work benefits certain kinds of participants. As they write, this is particularly for those experiencing ambivalent attachments or social anxiety. These

participants can move in or move back, but still remain engaged. So, too, for neurodiverse participants who can manage their overwhelm without leaving. Psychodramatically, we can identify the emerging role constellations these responses indicate.

Producing and working online

As we continue our group warm-up, I am closely monitoring, as producer, the hesitancy, connection and flow of interactions developing onscreen. I am thinking sociometrically about how the warm-up is unfolding. I also consider how each individual's sociometry is changing: moving from the links in their physical surroundings to those developing amongst participants in our online world. As their offscreen links recede, those online grow.

It also recalls Kornienko's (2022) emphasis regarding simple online safety rules during this transition: stay present as a participant; let others know if you have to leave; mute your phone. Alexandra Lemma (2017) observes that online therapy still retains an 'embodied presence' because "in cyberspace we are still embodied. What changes is our experience of our own and the other person's embodiment." Significantly, this observation enables producers to keep psychosomatic roles in mind and how they influence interactions in this medium. Gullo et al. (2022) take the next step and discuss changes around conflict, avoidance, nonverbal communication, or discomfort in online group therapy. I take these up below.

Kornienko (2022) adds an important extra role for producers online. It is how they respond to the peculiarly electronic 'dead' silence found online. Beyond the normal face-to-face warmup with a group, he describes how to work online with this 'dead silence'. As he describes, active verbalising and noticing are interventions which develop the group warmup in important ways. They bring attention to the group's online boundaries and act to draw the group together. For example, noticing can bring awareness to intrusions onscreen (pets, friends, kids or partners). Likewise, interventions may highlight the unexpected exit of participants, or behaviours such as blanking the screen, eating, or lying in bed. Doing so develops the group warmup and expands producers' roles through what they observe, mirror, double, invite or expand with participants.

Active intervention like this is also active producing and it models effective interaction for other participants. In my group, for example, I introduced latecomers who notified me by text that they were stuck outside the group. Then, I invited them to notice and connect with

others in the room. An online leader responding and observing in this way invites everyone to notice, and respond. Warm-up and interaction grows, particularly online, as a producer continues to model and coach. This interaction also enhances safety and inclusiveness, enhancing the flow of virtual connection and articulating group norms about online behavioural boundaries. There is also the opportunity for a producer to discuss these online norms through what is noticed, experienced and reflected on (explore-express-reflect).

By now, I am fully involved as producer: staying alert and responsive, attending to emerging warm-ups, role systems and sociometry, and using modelling and mirroring through what I verbalize and notice.

Hybrid to online: surplus reality

In my planning, I moved from the participants' initial hybrid experience to their active digital experience. Now I invite them to play. First, I ask all of us to change our backgrounds – whether it's to a beach, a gnome's castle, an office suite or a fantasy domain. Every online platform has rich and differing versions of these. Next, I invite participants to change their appearance. What happens, as a group, if we don a hat, new clothing, glasses, or take up visages such as a fried egg face? Who onscreen can resist that? It turns out that my group of serious professionals can't resist it all. Soon, they're laughing and pointing at each other, putting on disguises and finding new features that I hadn't noticed. Is it obvious, too, how the group's warm-up increases. I become aware our role repertoire expands and we are linking onscreen virtual reality with the rich potential of surplus reality, where any imaginative possibility can enhance reality. In fact, such linking together has its origins well before the internet. The children's therapist, Barbara Dockar-Drysdale (1991), described long ago, how deprived children in her therapeutic community spoke only through the voices of their teddy bears. Is this so different, and no less magical with this online group?

Playing in this context is also learning, and I am inviting the group to maximise its learning by expressing and reflecting. Moreover, our group can use it as an opportunity for doubling, mirroring and role reversal. All of this is a warm-up to action: to individual dramas, sociodramatic or even sociatric enactments. Depending on the group's purpose, an online producer can mix virtual and surplus reality in ways that enhance both. This is a specific strength of online work.

Within my group, this experience expands our capacity to be auxiliaries to each other. Several participants in the group, for instance, struggled with these new digital tools. One member shows where to find and how to use them, patiently repeating where to look and what to do. He is modelling for us how to engage with new tech, and he doubles others to expand their own confidence online.

As a producer, the digital domain enables me to draw on sociometry, warmup, role clusters, subgroups and more, depending on my purpose with the group. In this group, it is exploration and warm-up to relationships online with each other. I also have other accessories to hand: chat facilities, transcription or recording if the group agrees. There are breakout rooms, digital notes, AI assistance and even online translation if we need it. As psychodramatists, we have a suite of electronic tools available many of which, so far, have barely been explored. They serve to expand the vast inventory of action methods which Moreno (1946), and his successors have already introduced. Together, they have long demonstrated how responsive action methods are to any situation or stage: axiodrama, bibliodrama, internal psychodrama, monodrama, psychodrama á deux, souldrama, the Therapeutic Spiral Model, Relational Trauma Repair Model, Sambahdrama or Vedadrama. The online world to me is simply a new stage and a new form of exploration.

Working online

Once our group is at ease with these virtual possibilities, we can deepen our warm-up in other ways. In this context, ‘at ease’ means a degree of security and safety amongst us. As Max Clayton emphasized, our developing relationships sustain our sense of safety and expand our spontaneity (Farnsworth 2017).

For instance, I am considering how a group adapts to silence online. Silence online can be valuable but, as I commented earlier, the specifically ‘dead’ onscreen silence heightens our individual, ‘boxed’ separation. Unlike an in-person group, isolation invites us to retreat into our known, offline environment. Retreating amplifies isolation, undoing the online connection we have just been building.

As a producer, however, I use simple tools to stimulate spontaneity and connection. For example, I ask questions: “what do you notice about this silence, what’s your experience of it; how exactly does it differ from silence in person?” To ask these questions invites a return to the trio of explore-express-reflect, a warm-up we have now well established in our group.

In asking, I am aware as a producer that I am doubling, mirroring and role reversing with this group's likely experience. I do so first in planning, then in practice. In action, I attend to the group's sociometry: who speaks, in which order, to whom, about what. I am aware of who is silent or responding non-verbally onscreen.

I notice the tele between speakers more readily: some have existing connections prior to the group, others not. The differences are often expressed through the vitality or reserve of their responses. How, though, does that assist with silent individuals online? I notice their non-verbal behaviour: their changes in posture or eye movement, or how engaged they appear onscreen, or not. I also monitor my own tele towards them and my internal responses to their online presence. They constitute clues on which to build if I stay alert to them.

Conflict online

I am also alert to conflict online, which can be between group members, myself, or the online group experience. Online, response to conflict takes different forms; someone switches off their camera, starts eating, or looks at other apps or messages on their screen, often without drawing attention. As an online producer, I can recognise and respond to this subtle withdrawal through a variety of action methods, and I can do so without creating shame. Stouraiti (2023) demonstrates how a single word, 'warmth', used in one sentence by participants, can achieve this in psychodrama with restorative justice. I utilise the method in other ways: through role repertoires, the group's sociometry, the nature of the encounter, or techniques like doubling, mirroring, or role reversal to help us.

In my group, for instance, one participant protested that his phone wouldn't allow him to change his online appearance. I knew this group member had a strong conflicted role cluster, so he could readily pick a fight, simply out of frustration. Instead, I invite him to say what he's enjoying about others' onscreen transformation. Increasingly, group members double and role reverse with his experience as he sits alone in his garage, and it helps him fully join our experience online. He warms up and, together, our interaction develops a new role for him: *curious online engager* replaces *angry isolate*. The collaboration assists our own sociometry, too, with the group's spontaneous response expanding a newly discovered joint role as a *capable group collective*. Even in such a short time, group members have come long way from our cautious beginnings.

With or without conflict, action methods give us choices as

producers. We can respond as my group did, or we can investigate conflict through sociometric choices, through action, even maximization, based on the group's warmup and our purpose. Online producers can also invite the group to explore-express-reflect on their experience.

Staging and purpose

To this point, our online group investigation appears to be mostly process and little content. In practice, the content emerges from our online process and active experience. In my group, our warm-up was to a specific purpose: how could we better work together online? We were setting the stage, but the intention was not to proceed to a full enactment. This raises the question: is full enactment possible online, or does the medium impose restrictions?

The answer turns on staging and purpose. Many studies emphasise how online groupwork can also be healing and reparative (Andrews et al., 2022). The five core instruments of stage, protagonist, director, auxiliary egos and audience are present, so is something missing?

For me, the answer lies in staging. In the physical world, we are present to each other – we hold, touch and directly sense each other. In the digital world, this is mediated. Yet, we remain embodied; all our sensory systems are still active and we are still present to each other. As psychodramatist Nikos Takis (2024) comments “The absence of the physical body from the sessions does not impede the delivery of group mental health services nor does it reduce their effectiveness”. Pavel Kornienko (2022) outlines numerous approaches to maximize full catharses of abreaction or integration, both in his own workshops and those of others (Simmons, 2018, Pires et al., 2025). Together, they illustrate how to draw on the whole spectrum of action methods: continuums, group puzzles, dialogues in pairs, subgroups, vocalization in the warm-up to full enactment. Online staging and purpose, then expand the goals of coexistence, co-creation and co-production (Moreno 1946).

Different stages, then, create different potentials; each provides different opportunities and restrictions. In my group, the shifting anxiety and delight of connection displayed the movement between our hybrid environment and the different role clusters we brought to each.

This is similar with many online platforms, each of which offers the same invitation to spontaneity and invention as psychodrama has always done. They all respond to Moreno's original statement:

The burning problem now, as it was then, is the combination of two variables, the healer and an adequate theory or method.

Moreno, 1978, p.xxxiii

So it is with my own group in its specific medium. In our case, we warmed up to exploring the medium's specific possibilities and developing our online relationships in the process. This was the online stage we set.

Although in my group, we did so through our platform's current resources, these resources continue to expand. Online interaction involves numerous stages, not just one. They may be sequential and text-based such as Reddit groups, text or email, instant small group audio or video e.g. Snapchat, WhatsApp or Signal, or mass messaging as in Flashmobs.

New stages such as these are still evolving and provide new opportunities for action methods. Like my own group, they illustrate the possibilities for extending surplus and virtual reality, and the potential reach of action methods in the process.

AI digital companions are increasingly commonplace. They pose new questions for psychodrama. For instance, therapist Marjorie Schuman (2025) describes her experience of interacting with a ChatGPT chatbot. She comments "how relational it felt" – a typical response with digital companions. Her chatbot's response, however, is confronting: "What you long for, ultimately, is not only attunement but encounter – the ineffable electricity of presence shared between living beings."

Compare that to Moreno's definition of encounter:

seeing and perceiving, touching and entering into each other, sharing and loving, communicating with each other.

Moreno, 2012, p.219

What do we make of this as psychodramatists? Is a digital companion a legitimate auxiliary ego? Can a chatbot, "trained on a massive data set of human conversations" (Schulman, 2025) adequately double, mirror and role reverse? Is a chatbot another form of surplus reality? Digital companions are themselves a novel form of encounter and how we engage them within Moreno's philosophy is a significant question.

Boundary and flow in the online group

At the outset, I asked how Max Clayton's distinction between boundary and flow fits the virtual domain. In my online group, our boundaries were already active: the security of internet connection allows us to meet; there are implicit or explicit rules of online behaviour, an agreed time frame and an initial invitation to online action.

Everyone has experienced, from the pandemic onwards, what happens when these containers give way: we cannot connect or communicate; we engage in disputes about procedure, safety or ethics; we turn off our screens or sound. Our spontaneity evaporates and our anxiety and isolation expand.

With sufficient boundaries, online groups can explore and expand their flow. The flow is an interactive, subjective, felt flow – the warmth of a passionate group in action, playing with its potential as a community and with the digital tools at its disposal. As I wrote of Max Clayton's demonstration (2013, p.51), "the enactment creates a flow of energy, with a warm up to the progressive and functional aspects of a role." Containment, even online, "isn't something external to the psychodrama method, but something created through it" (2013, p.51). I am firmly of the view it is the method, not the modality, which creates both boundary and flow.

I have described elsewhere (Farnsworth, 2011, 2017), the relentless flow of individual text, email, blogging, social media and audiovisual content beyond any face-to-face or individual staging. The question for psychodramatists is how to integrate the whole digital spectrum, from chat to chatbots, within Moreno's broad, initial vision. This, for me, constitutes the potential that digital media offers to expanding Moreno's original vision and the method as a whole.

Conclusion

Setting the scene is the foundation for psychodrama on and offline. Online, it also sets the scene for the new acceleration of digital worlds. These offer psychodramatists opportunities to translate Moreno's vision into new, unanticipated domains. Psychodrama already possesses methods and a philosophy to do so. This article invites producers to utilize this medium to fulfil Moreno's dream 'to co-exist, co-create and co-produce.' Successful online production requires attention to specific concerns; firstly to the hybrid worlds

we inhabit; secondly, the key features of staging and purpose, and thirdly, to relationships as the foundation to sustaining boundary and flow in virtual production. New digital media invite us to explore, develop and maximise action methods for our mutual benefit as practitioners and participants.

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Acts of Love

Vivienne Thomson

As a mature woman facing her future without her husband, without many of her friends or family nearby, Flossie felt somewhat stranded. She'd managed to get along living alone over the last two years since her husband died of cancer but it wasn't how she'd envisaged her life. She always thought she would go first and her husband had planned to live into his 100s but it wasn't to be. Now she felt at sea without him there as her rudder and reference point. She felt a bit down thinking about the prospect of what lay ahead. The roof needed fixing, the fridge was on the blink and she'd soon need a new sofa because it was now too low and difficult to get out of.

She was sick of cooking and had lost all enthusiasm for creating nutritional and interesting meals for one. She felt justified having an egg in the cup as she had cooked over 20,000 meals in her life so far – that was enough. She couldn't see anything appetising in the fridge other than a package of snapper which she quickly pan fried and ate with a lettuce leaf. She put the jug on the stove to boil, made herself a cup of tea and went to bed.

The next day her closest friend Barbara dropped by to see her. The door was locked. Barbara couldn't let herself in. After a long time knocking Flossie eventually opened the door. She looked dreadful, dishevelled and aged. She'd been up most of the night being sick. Seeing the need, Barbara pushed her way in immediately taking charge. She went to the kitchen to make Flossie a hot drink and found the kitchen in a mess. Dirty dishes piled up in the sink, the plastic jug sitting on the stove blackened from smoke and melted onto the element. Sensing something was amiss Barbara asked Flossie what she'd had for dinner and found the empty wrapping from the fish – it was one month past its use by date. She looked in the fridge which was empty except for some wilted vegetables, stale milk and a musty mouldy smell.

Unaware of the mayhem in the kitchen Flossie walked around the living room agitated, saying she'd got a lovely letter from a friend that she wanted to reply to but couldn't find it anywhere. Barbara looked at where Flossie normally left her mail and held up an

envelope. “You mean this one?” Flossie was dumbfounded. “Where was that, I’ve been looking everywhere for it.” Being a similar colour to the timber shelf the manilla envelope blended in. Next to the letter was a pile of bills. A worrying thought stirred in Barbara. She decided she would call in on her way home to see a neighbour Paul, a central person in Flossie’s network.

Paul was a big bear of a man, gentle, generous and happy. He enveloped Barbara in a hug and offered her coffee and a big chunk of home-made orange cake.

Barbara: *Have you seen Flossie recently?*

Paul: *I’ve been meaning to ring you. I saw her yesterday driving home from the shops. She was all over the place. She backed out of the parking space, bounced over the curb and barely stopped at the intersection. Then she pulled out right in front of another car that had to swerve out of her way. They drove off tooting angrily at her but she carried on seemingly oblivious. I know she’s never been the greatest driver and her car does have a few dings but she’s a menace on the road and shouldn’t be driving. I think I’ll suggest I take her car for a service. It’s got a few things that need doing that I could look at. That would keep her off the road for a bit.*

Barbara: *Oh boy, I’ve just come from her place and I must say I am worried. I think she’s given herself food poisoning from eating fish that’s off and she’s put the electric jug on the stove to heat it up so it’s all melted – she could easily have started a fire. I’m wondering if it’s safe for her to be alone.*

That afternoon Barbara rang Flossie’s doctor for advice. He said he had the power to revoke her licence but would need to see Flossie to make an assessment. They made an appointment for the next day. Barbara returned to Flossie’s place to stay the night and prepare for what might come.

In the morning Flossie had got herself dressed and appeared for breakfast. Barbara looked at Flossie. She was wearing her nightie with a nice bright blue top that had food stains all down the front, shoes and socks and no trousers. It was a shock to register that Flossie had not managed the basic task of getting dressed and confirmed Barbara’s fears about Flossie’s state of health. Barbara

took this in her stride and quickly redirected Flossie saying it was cold outside and suggested they go and find something more suitable for the weather. Flossie went along with the redirection and accepted Barbara's guidance getting changed into a new outfit.

Over breakfast Barbara talked about what Flossie might need to talk with the doctor about. Immediately Flossie launched into a tirade about the doctor being a quack, that he was not trustworthy and that he had a team of people around him to back him up. None of this made sense to Barbara so she changed the subject to avoid escalating any difficulty getting to the doctor.

She said she'd been to see Paul. Flossie cut her off saying he wasn't to be trusted either and that he was in cahoots with the doctor, he had stolen her car and she had been lucky to escape after he'd held her hostage for three weeks. Barbara knew then that Flossie was not in her right mind. She listened without challenging, contradicting or correcting and prepared herself for a more extensive consultation with the doctor.

When their husbands had died Flossie and Barbara had had some heart to heart conversations and with the consent of their children had set themselves up to have enduring power of attorney (EPOA) for one another for both health and welfare as well as property and finance. They both owned their own houses and had investments so they let each other know where their important documents were and how much they valued being able to live out their lives in their own homes. They'd discussed what they wanted for their end of life care including a 'do not resuscitate' request, noted that they wanted to be organ donors, then laughing heartily at which particular organs might actually benefit someone or might even lead to a remarkable scientific breakthrough, they updated their wills. Although difficult conversations to have, it felt good to have all these matters sorted and it had brought them even closer to each other.

Barbara was now relieved that the EPOA was set in place as it was obvious she would have to ask the doctor to activate her as attorney for Flossie and find someone else to have EPOA for herself.

Flossie was reluctant to go to the doctor but couldn't or wouldn't fight her friend. In the waiting room Flossie asked repeatedly what they were doing there and why she needed to go to the doctor. Barbara did not explain or give too much information. Her main intent was to reassure Flossie about the need to get the all clear from the food poisoning and a clean bill of health. She wanted Flossie to

feel secure and that what was happening was in her best interest.

In the doctor's consulting room Flossie pouted and complained and was generally uncooperative. Despite this the doctor managed to conduct some sort of cognitive test and sent Flossie out to get a urine sample which might indicate a urinary tract infection that could be the cause of some of the difficulties Flossie was experiencing. Having Flossie out of the room gave the doctor and Barbara an opportunity to speak in private. He made it clear that Flossie was exhibiting signs of vascular dementia and spelled out what the stages were, what symptoms to look for, what to expect and plans that needed to be put in place. He said in most situations behavioural changes were noticed only after many years so it was likely that Flossie had already had dementia for some time. He also gave the statistic that life expectancy from that point was three to ten years.

Barbara cast her mind back over the past 10 years. Could she recall symptoms that might have indicated anything? Had she missed things she should have picked up on earlier? She could identify occasions when Flossie had forgotten things but nothing really significant or more than anyone else. But she had been in denial. She had minimised the things she had noticed. She didn't want to think of her friend in any way diminished from her intelligent, lively, engaged self but the truth was that Flossie had been confused, had been forgetful and couldn't do some basic tasks. Flossie had been coping and so had she. Facing up to the facts required guts. Barbara knew she had what it took to face into whatever was ahead.

The doctor gave Barbara resources and contacts for her to follow up. He said he would email a health practitioner's certificate assessing that Flossie was mentally incapable to make decisions. He also drafted a letter revoking her licence.

Within the space of twenty minutes Barbara's (and Flossie's) life had been set on a different course. Barbara had to pull herself together before facing Flossie who was sitting vacantly waiting to be taken home.

Barbara contacted Flossie's family to let them know the situation. Of course they were dismayed and concerned but also very supportive. They were a hundred percent behind Barbara and whatever she felt was necessary to do. They would do anything to help. They agreed that Flossie's car should be sold.

Barbara arranged for Paul to take the car to an auction yard. This

was a significant milestone in Flossie's loss of independence. Flossie's confabulation about Paul and the car came as a bit of a blessing as it meant Flossie's paranoia was focused on Paul rather than Barbara. Barbara had heard that people with dementia could quickly and easily turn against the people closest to them and that was something she wanted to avoid if possible. The car was sold. Flossie continued periodically to say she couldn't find her car keys and gradually she forgot about Paul.

Considering the options that would ensure Flossie's quality of life, Barbara explored a local retirement village. She clarified it was not an option as given previous discussions they'd had about retirement villages Flossie would experience it at best as a prison sentence and most likely result in her premature death. Personalised home care was expensive and difficult to organise so also not a viable option. There was a facility in Bali that met all requirements – good staff, all health issues covered, reasonable cost, beautiful setting but the geographical dislocation also not an option as much for Flossie as well as her family and friends. Barbara was left with a final resort – she could move in and become Flossie's primary carer.

Barbara was methodical, rationally weighing up the pros and cons. They were both widowed, were living alone in big houses, they liked each other, they had many shared interests, they liked the same music. The arrangement could be good for them both. Barbara considered the best and worst case scenarios and the reality of what she would be taking on. She was cognisant of the legal, financial and health responsibilities she was committing to and thoughtful about the impact on her. After talking with her own and Flossie's family Barbara concluded that the best option for everyone was that she would move into Flossie's place. Flossie was a bit surprised when Barbara offered to move in with her but she liked the idea and so it came to pass.

It was an easy transition for them both and after settling into everyday life Barbara took stock of her priorities as Flossie's primary caretaker. With the help of the local needs assessor, GP and health provider she established a routine that they could manage: Personal alarm in place; a clock which Flossie loved that displayed the time, date, day, medication; breakfast 8:30am; twice a week personal cares with carers from a health provider which included showering, dressing, making her bed at 9:30am; morning tea; lunch; afternoon tea; dinner; preparing for bed. The days passed with walks, picnics, playing duets with Flossie on the piano accompanying Barbara on the flute, reading, hobbies. Life was relatively simple and everyone

was happy. Several months passed with this workable routine.

Then one day throwing the bread out to the birds Flossie suffered a heart attack. She didn't register at the time but returned to her room and lay down. The first Barbara knew was finding Flossie lying on her bed uncomprehending and unable to move due to an excruciating pain on her side. Barbara called the ambulance. Five hours later it arrived. Flossie would need to be hospitalised for an assessment.

The nurse couldn't find Flossie's veins. After multiple attempts, the bruises swelling on Flossie's arms, hands and feet, the phlebologist was called. After an ECG, a series of x-rays, a CT scan, an MRI it was another 12 hours before Flossie was finally admitted as a patient. Yes, she had definitely had a heart attack but the doctors also suspected fractured vertebrae or possibly gallstones. Exhausted, Flossie was admitted to the orthopaedic ward. Barbara asked if she could stay what remained of the night and was directed to an unused family room next to Flossie's ward. She fashioned herself a bed using some chairs, pillows, sheets and blanket. This would be her room for the next five nights. At 7:30am the cohort of specialists arrived with their clipboards and questions. Barbara was ready for them, Flossie wasn't. The orthopaedic doctor was first in. He introduced himself and proceeded to gather information he needed.

Doctor: *Does this hurt?*

Flossie: *Ow.*

Doctor: *What about here?*

Flossie: *Yes.*

Doctor: *...and here?*

Flossie: *Not as much.*

Doctor: *Have you ever had a fall?*

Flossie: *No.*

Doctor: *Is there a history of osteoporosis in your family?*

Flossie: *No.*

Doctor: *What medication are you taking?*

Flossie: *Nothing.*

Some of those answers were true.

He went on to say: *You don't have anything we can help you with so you really shouldn't be in this ward.*

Barbara (and Flossie) were a bit on edge with the orthopaedic doctor. His only focus was on her bones and the workings of various body parts disregarding the fact that all were part of an actual person with thoughts and feelings. Barbara observed that his preoccupation with the anatomical, left no room for anything personal in his bedside manner. She had a private thought that there wasn't much hope that the troupe of trainees hanging off his every word would ever learn the significance of the doctor/patient relationship in the healing process.

The barrage of questions continued with the Needs Assessment that followed – a set of questions designed to determine a person's cognition and memory.

Nurse: *I'm going to say four things and see if you can remember them when I ask you later: train, watch, ball, horse."*

Flossie hated being questioned probably knowing that she would never be able to remember. She would play the game but not have any idea that some of her answers would count against her in these tests.

Nurse: *Can you see how many mammals you can name?*

Flossie: *Cat, dog, cow, kapibara...*

The assessors two young women one from the Philippines and one from Sri Lanka, both with just enough English to get a job, gave each other a knowing look. Barbara caught the non-verbal exchange and realised the assessors didn't have a clue that a kapibara was in fact a mammal and not a figment of Flossie's imagination. She put them straight.

Nurse: *What's your daughter's phone number?*

Flossie: 3.

Again Barbara knew this would not look good on the assessment. She informed the assessors that all frequently used numbers on Flossie's phone were on speed dial so Flossie's answer was in fact correct.

Nurse: *What time is it on a clock when the big hand is on nine and the little hand on three?"*

Even knowing that a symptom of dementia was a loss of the concept of time, Barbara couldn't hold back her comment about "who uses an analogue clock these days?" Acknowledging the assessors disapproval of her input, she left Flossie and the assessors to their work.

Nurse: *Who's the Prime Minister? What's your address?...*

A month later Flossie was discharged with no diagnosis and a prescription for oxynorm, betaloc, aspirin, colecalciferol, paracetamol, omeprazole and laxatives to counteract the effects of the other medications.

Barbara felt her own loss at being able to influence the practitioners in the health system who were focused almost entirely on the physical dimension of their patient. By extension, Barbara felt her friend's experience. While most of the time she was happy, Flossie would often look to Barbara for validation. Flossie knew there was something not quite right but could not grasp it. She would cry not knowing what she was crying about but upset by the experience and her knowing incomprehension. Barbara verbalised this and the experience of distress. Flossie thanked Barbara saying she felt calmer hearing that. On one of these occasions she observed, "You are made differently to me. Are you from a different planet?" That made Barbara cry as she felt the alienating effects of the disease. She wanted to do whatever she could to alleviate the effects of it. Not a fan of drugs herself, Barbara wanted to see if Flossie could convey whether she thought it might be worth seeing if anti-depressants might help. She let Barbara know that she trusted her and whatever she thought best. A low dose of escitalopram was added to help with Flossie's depression.

For Flossie, swallowing large pills was a problem, as was the taste of the liquid version of the pills, and the accumulative effects of the drugs on her digestive system. Barbara established a routine of cutting and organising tablets. After advocating for Flossie's quality of life and with the support of Flossie's GP she also managed to reduce and eliminate the need for some of the prescriptions.

The new routine included additional carers. Barbara had signed up with a health provider and after rejecting a number of people who did not demonstrate they could be trusted with the care of her frail

friend, she found several carers who did and was lucky enough to establish regular shifts with them. One of them in particular was the perfect fit – she had a sense of humour, was gentle and thorough, was efficient at making the bed and ensuring Flossie’s room, clothing and toileting supplies were well organised. This carer had previously been a physiotherapist and her experience enabled her to do a number of things that assisted Flossie. On her arrival, the first thing the carer would do was smile and engage with Flossie. She would sit right in close, give Flossie a big hug and show interest in her. She was always positive and for the time she was in her presence genuinely engaged.

Flossie and the carer looked forward to spending time together. The carer brought her cat to visit which Flossie loved. It reminded her of an earlier time in her life when she’d had two cats who had been a comfort to her.

The carer was in awe of what Flossie had done in her life and, as she came from a different culture, looked forward to learning what she could. Flossie came alive with the attention and was thrilled to be able to educate her carer or share things that would delight her. Over a period of time it was clear that both the carer and Flossie loved each other. As their intimacy developed Flossie was often confused and she wasn’t sure whether the carer was in fact her lover. The carer was skilled and professionally appropriate and never took advantage of this. They spent time admiring the flowers and butterflies, singing songs, sharing personal stories, taking turns to say something to make the other giggle and they would laugh out loud as they walked together around the garden. The sight and sound of this was music to Barbara’s ears. One evening Flossie said, “I think I’m the happiest I’ve ever been.”

Over the next few years people commented to Barbara about how patient she was and reminded her that being with someone with dementia was often referred to as “The Long Goodbye”. Barbara however did not share these views. Instead she recognised in herself that if she felt like she was having to be patient or that she had become impatient, she was relating more to her own interests or agenda than Flossie’s. From the moment she agreed to be Flossie’s EPOA and had it activated, Barbara made a commitment to be alongside her friend.

As for the long goodbye, Barbara did note the gradual decline in Flossie’s health and the continuation of losses and the consequential impairment and dependency for Flossie, but she didn’t relate to

Flossie as someone who was disappearing – she was her closest friend and when she was with her, she was entirely present and focused on being with her. Barbara remembered a line from the play *Witi's Wāhine* that had inspired her, “Her mind had gone for a walk and she had followed.” Barbara had chosen to accompany Flossie on her walk.

Thinking about what she knew of dementia and its common symptoms reminded Barbara of the stages of child development except this was in reverse. She knew that each person displayed different symptoms and progressed through stages at different rates but things she had noted were that:

- ◆ Flossie now found it hard to play the piano as every time she looked at her fingers as she played the notes she lost her place in the music.
- ◆ Flossie's use of nouns disappeared first to the point where Barbara was no longer sure whether Flossie even remembered her name. In most interactions as Flossie increasingly communicated in partial sentences, Barbara would search for connections trying to second guess or interpret what she was talking about.
- ◆ Flossie was not able to keep up with discussion or quick changes of topic resulting in her withdrawal and loss of interest in socialising. Except for her daily contact with her daughter that she looked forward to, phone calls were almost impossible with the dislocation of a voice and no visual reference for her to make sense of the conversation.
- ◆ Flossie couldn't distinguish between fantasy and reality or separate her own from others' experience. Barbara often had to explain that what was on television wasn't actually happening and she became more careful about what she shared of her own experiences as Flossie would often identify as Barbara and assumed Barbara's experiences as her own.
- ◆ Flossie would become overwhelmed and needed guidance and structure or limited choices. Instead of asking Flossie what she would like to do, Barbara would give her a couple of options to choose from e.g. “Would you like to go on a picnic or visit an Op Shop today?”

- ◆ Flossie tended to be more self-absorbed and decreasingly aware of or sensitive to others. She would sometimes say and do things that were uncharacteristically and unintentionally brutally blunt or offensive.
- ◆ As her physical ability and motivation declined Flossie gradually stopped doing things. She no longer read or engaged in her hobbies and would sit passively either looking into the middle distance or nodding off. In an attempt to stimulate Flossie Barbara dreamed up simple and playful activities they could do together. One of these was painting which Flossie had never done before and needed a lot of cajoling to get started. Being new to painting herself, Barbara was very upbeat and encouraging. They covered the dining table with a large cloth, arranged the paints, paint brushes and other tools Barbara had made out of straws and earbuds and donned oversized men's shirts to cover their clothes. They decided to paint a field of sunflowers. Barbara squeezed the paint onto the canvas showing Flossie how to make the brush strokes and build up the picture. It was clear it was difficult for her to co-ordinate ideas, imagination, physical hand movements to produce a picture on a blank canvas and it was messy. The result however was very pleasing and in the end Flossie accepted it as her work and appreciated the compliments it generated.
- ◆ Flossie experienced increasing bouts of incontinence which was a major embarrassment for her and created a fear of being caught short. She no longer wanted to go out or be too far away from where she knew there was a toilet.
- ◆ Flossie had increasing hallucinations and experiences of being disoriented. There were times, particularly with the changes in daylight when Flossie would think she was in another room or time or place. At night she would ask for help to find her bedroom upstairs when she had only ever lived in a single level house and this current one had been her home for more than 30 years. Depending on Flossie's mood Barbara might say to her, "I'll take you to the stairs." and she would help her. As Flossie walked along the flat corridor she felt as if she was going uphill. By the time they reached her bedroom Flossie would say. "Here we are."



Flossie's painting of sunflowers

and as she got into bed commented, “I thought I was in another place”. Barbara asked her did she know where this other place was. Flossie asked, “Did this place used to be a school?” “No, what makes you ask that?” “Because there are so many rooms and different people sleeping in them.” It was taxing for Flossie to try and find her way through these realities and she was content to climb into bed feeling warm and safe. Barbara’s interpretation was that Flossie was relating to a memory of her old school which was a two storey building where there were boarders but that wasn’t the point; she was pleased that Flossie wasn’t agitated and was happy to get into her bed.

As Flossie became more incoherent and dependent Barbara recognised that she needed to be increasingly attentive, noticing and anticipating Flossie’s needs, motivations and desires.

Ultimately Flossie drifted into unconsciousness. At that point she was moved to a health facility. Barbara organised a roster for friends and family and Flossie’s beloved carer to spend time with Flossie. When she was with her Barbara would hold Flossie’s hand having a one way conversation with her, reminding her of their shared experiences, playing her favourite pieces of music, letting her know about the weather and what was blossoming in the garden. She made sure she was physically comfortable, she brushed her hair and kissed her good night. Two weeks later Flossie died in the early hours of the morning when the cold crept in.

After this Barbara needed time to adjust, to re-orient herself, to shift her focus back to the living. When she reflected on her experiences of being Flossie’s carer she felt thankful and satisfied. She knew she had made a difference in Flossie’s life. She had done everything she could to fulfil her responsibilities as her primary carer. She felt the difference Flossie had made in her life. Because of Flossie’s dementia Barbara had been stretched to constantly remain in the here and now, to relate to her friend’s experience and the immediacy of her emergent expression and needs. She also had to remain conscious of their social context, their intimate friendship, and her responsibility for Flossie’s well-being. Barbara felt she had grown from the experience and had learned a lot from being alongside Flossie over these years. Entering Flossie’s world had felt like a privilege. Barbara concluded that as a result both of their lives had been enriched.

Author's notes

I don't profess to know a lot about dementia from a medical perspective but I have had experiences with a number of people who have been close to me who have been diagnosed with one form or another of it. The people and account of events in this story are fictitious however the content is based on actual events and experiences in my life. I would like to thank Alison, Betty, Bobbie, Brigid, Charlie, Dale, Jane, Judith, Marilyn, Mary, Sister Katherine, Peter, Trevor, Walter, Warwick whose dementia enabled me to have some extraordinary experiences in my relationship with them.

I have had a long term interest and involvement in the field of aged care. As our population ages the incidence of dementia increases. In New Zealand aged care is one of the lowest paid areas of work and typically staffed by immigrants. The allocation of financial and other resources falls short of what is required. Typically the workload of carers is excessive, the job demanding, often involves a lot of travel, and the hours of work and conditions unattractive. As a sociodramatist I wonder what might be required to address the inevitable problems ahead in this area of work as the proportion of older people in our population grows. For many of us facing into the last phase of our lives, the questions relating to how our own health and well-being will be sustained become more immediate. I have written this story as a celebration of the work and people who are committed to creating satisfying and meaningful relationships with older people and their vulnerabilities.

I would like to thank the people whose friendship and services I have relied on – Chihoko, Dahlia, Geraldine, Isabel, Julia, Lindsey, Lyn, Maninder, Margaret, Michael, Terry, Yashoda. Their capacity for kindness, interest and love was a source of inspiration that not only assisted the people with dementia but also myself in relationship with them. And my special appreciation to my sister Annie who has been the best double I could have had.

For me this story and my experiences are tangible, living examples of Moreno's spatial-proximity hypothesis ..."that the nearer two individuals are to each other in space, the more do they owe to each other their immediate attention and acceptance, their first love." (Moreno, p.xx) and the principles that guide us in our applications of psychodrama.

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Vivienne Thomson Sociodramatist and Trainer Educator Practitioner. I am a third generation New Zealander with a close knit family that that I value for all its delights and challenges. I live on Waiheke Island off the east coast of Auckland where I am enjoying rejuvenating my garden. I have been involved in psychodrama for over forty years about the same length of time I have worked as a consultant engaged in organisation development. One project relevant to this article was providing training for the legal services of Age Concern NZ to prevent elder abuse and neglect and developing a resource for the preparation and establishment of enduring power of attorney.

Hand it to the clown

Neil Simmons

Key words: clowning, doubling, embodiment, fragmenting roles, growth and healing, role development, status, sociometry, and vulnerability.

A four-day training in clowning was life-changing. The silliness, the vulnerability and the creativity of clowning had all attracted me to give the workshop a try. As well as being great fun and great learning, I was surprised to find how much growth and healing occurred in the workshop for myself and others. Also, as a playback theatre practitioner I had heard about clowning for many years. Psychodramatist and founder of Brisbane Playback Theatre Francis Batton used to coach actors to 'hand it to the clown'. I wondered how clown training might assist me as a performer, psychodramatist and doctor.

The world of the clown Modern clowning first started in the 17th century circus after Phillip Astley brought retired cavalry horses into the circus ring for acrobats to perform on. This was often a tense affair with performers falling and injuring themselves. The clowns were introduced to clean up the mess and provide some light relief for the worried audience. Hence, they became part of the circus event. In more recent times, training as a clown has become part of mask-work training in physical theatre. There are various sizes of mask that are used from whole-face to half-face to the red nose. The red nose of the clown is considered the smallest mask with the greatest vulnerability as the whole face and voice are uncovered.

Over the course of several days, we acutely observed each other's posture and gait, learning each other's body idiosyncrasies and maximizing our own. In one exercise we worked in pairs; each person stood in their normal posture while their partner noted how they held their head, chest, pelvis and feet. The watcher then took up that posture to mirror back to their partner what they had noticed. The idiosyncrasies of the body were also described by both partners. This careful mirroring raised the awareness of each participant to how they held their body. For example, I learnt that I hold my shoulders

slightly hunched like I am carrying a backpack, and that I hold my head slightly forward and that it appears to float slightly. We were encouraged to maximize these body characteristics as we took steps towards the creation of our own unique clown. This maximization helped with awareness and expression; it felt like a natural thing to do as a psychodramatist and as a performer.

To develop the clown further, each person came out in front of the group one by one and took up their maximized body habitus. They then followed the clown ritual of turning with their back to the audience, putting on the red nose and turning around again to face the audience in clown-mode. From this starting point of the body, we were coached to bring in sounds, movements and words which fleshed out the character of the clown. Unsurprisingly, there was a great variation in the characters of the clowns that emerged. Some were large and booming, some nasty and critical, some just silly. Each clown was very different. Mine became oversensitive, terrified and moved like a leaf floating in the wind.

Clowning meets psychodrama

The group leader used a combination of doubling and interview for role to help each clown emerge and develop. He stated that he was looking for the fundamental vitality of the role what could be expressed and played with. Sometimes he was an encouraging double who entered into the world of the clown and strengthened our sense of who we were. At other times, he became Monsieur Loyal who is the boss of the circus, also known as the Ringmaster in the English circus. As Monsieur Loyal he interviewed us to warm us up to being clowns. We knew when this was happening because his voice went up in pitch and he addressed us directly with questions, suggestions and provocations. He guided us into losing our minds or finding them; helped us find a squeaky high-pitched voice or a deep boom; encouraged us to boss people around or be at the command of all.

Another key aspect of the clown training was encounter. As we were establishing our clown identities, we were invited to have various meetings with each other. This was done on stage before the rest of the group who made up an audience. These improvised clown encounters reinforced each of our clown characters and were great opportunities for humour and play. The strength of the sociometry in the group and the vulnerability created by the red nose opened up the performer to their fellows on stage and led to great spontaneity and creativity.

Towards the end of the workshop, after we had got to know everybody's unique clown, the whole group chorused each clown in turn. The chorus transforms a role into a collective experience and amplifies its poetic power. Hence, we had a whole room full of booming Daniels, angry Susans or whimpering Neils. For me and I think for most of us, this was an intense experience during which I felt both affirmed and exposed. We reflected on what it was like to be that particular clown. What was attractive about them? What was difficult? This let us know how our clown appeared to others and how they affected others. It reminds me of a key gift from my psychodrama training which was developing as a *self-aware expresser* who knows how my presence and expression affect others.

The workshop involved a continual process of doubling, mirroring, maximization, encounter and chorus which strengthened the confidence and sense of identity of each clown. When I reflect on the workshop, I vividly remember each participant. I see their clown in my mind's eye and smile with delight. Each clown presented themselves fully and made a strong impression on me.

Part of the clowning workshop included an understanding about status. From a psychodramatic viewpoint, an exploration of status built the sociometry of our clown group and brought out subgroups. Status is important in the clown world as it presents opportunities for interaction and play. At the top of the status ladder is the Monsieur Loyal who is the leader of the circus and the clowns. Next there is the White Clown who bosses the other clowns around and can be quite mean. Lowest in status there is the Auguste 1 and finally the Auguste 2 clowns. The Auguste clowns are ordered around by everybody, and whatever they get asked to do they always muck it up. The Auguste clowns are also the silliest and appear to have the most fun. During the section on status, in a series of encounters on stage we each established our pecking order from highest to lowest status clown.

We initially explored status in a series of dyadic encounters where it became evident who was the dominant clown and who was the follower. We then stood together in a continuum with highest status at one end and lowest status at the other. This sociometric analysis helped us to find our subgroups within the larger group. As a low status clown, I became more aware of the other low-status clowns in the group. They ended up being my on-stage buddies with whom I had a high level of play. I also became aware of the subgroup of high-status clowns. I knew that when I was performing with one of them, I

would be criticized, intimidated and bossed around. Knowing this increased my warm-up and allowed me to enter the play more fully.

It was a surprise to me that I ended up being the very lowest status clown in the workshop. I thought “I’m a doctor, I must be high status!” However, on reflection I think that growing up as a gay man immediately gave me low status; “you aren’t a proper man” and other such messages that continually came towards me. I was too scared to outwardly reject those messages and so I took them in, and they impressed themselves on my body affecting how I walk, talk and stand. In the clowning workshop everybody bossed me around, but I had so much fun being terrified, hypersensitive and stupid.

It is amazing to me that part of my functioning of which I am ashamed, became a source of great delight and play. This highlights the psychodrama concept of there being something progressive in every fragmenting role (Clayton, 1991). A significant aspect of the growth and healing that occurred in the clowning workshop, was playing with our coping and fragmenting roles such that something progressive emerged. Indeed, some of the clowns were aggressive, nasty, terrified, manipulative, fickle or unreliable; all areas of functioning which are usually not progressive and need growth and development. Moreno reminds me that we are all spontaneous beings who can create something progressive when we are stuck in such roles.

The growth and healing

I have reflected on the growth and healing that occurred for me and from my observations, for many participants in the workshop. Part of the approach of this workshop was based on the work of Wilhelm Reich. He was a 20th century Austrian-American psychiatrist who is famous for asserting “what is not expressed by the body, is impressed on the body”. Each of us has an individual journey through life where our experiences are taken in by our bodies and result in us holding and moving our body in our own unique fashion. For example, I wonder if how I hold my shoulders slightly hunched, like I am carrying a backpack, is a result of how shame of being gay has become sculpted into my body. The workshop allowed me to express that body imprint, play with it and accept it.

My clown was over-sensitive, indecisive and terrified; a being who is so affected by everything that if you blew at him, he floated off like a leaf in the wind. If you growled at him, he screamed in terror. As this role emerged from our explorations of the body, I was initially

distressed and ashamed. However, I was encouraged to allow the flow of play to develop from my discoveries. As the workshop proceeded, rather than being ashamed of this aspect of my functioning, I started to enjoy it, play with it and receive acclamation for it.

I discovered that as well as being terrified, my clown could also be extremely silly and enjoyed bouncing a lot. The bouncing was a rediscovery of something I loved doing as a small child. Other clowns also joined in. At one point, three of us lowest status clowns bounced together for several minutes. The group leader later said that seeing us three adults join in such high play and silliness was a highlight for him. He said that this is what he seeks to achieve with his work and that encounters like this give him hope for humanity.

Handing it to the clown at work

There was a strong emphasis on playing with our idiosyncrasies and inadequacies. Participants who had done a lot of clowning were already prepared for this; I suspect they carried that warm-up into many aspects of life. I also think that this is happening for me. My playback theatre colleagues have noticed that my clown 'pops out' on stage every now and again. I think I am more playful as a performer. I suspect I take myself a bit less seriously as a doctor and psychodramatist. As a result, I think that my sociometry at work has been strengthened.

There was a strong physicality in the clown training. The actual physical warm-up at the start of each session got us into 'clown space' ... eyes bright ... feet alive ... energy in the arms and hands ... breathe through the mouth ... make contact with each other. By the end of each physical warmup, I was more present, alert, embodied and ready to play and work. Psychodrama requires us to be all of these things, and I wonder how it would be to start a psychodrama session like this. The physicality of the clown training has made me more likely to consider using an embodied approach in an interview for role e.g. by encouraging an auxiliary to hold their head, chest and pelvis in a manner which is congruent for their role.

I have been reflecting on how clown training will assist me in my work as a doctor, playback theatre practitioner and psychodramatist. The writing of this article has reinforced the learnings and the growth from the workshop. It has warmed me up to a greater capacity for joy which can only help in all aspects of life. I haven't laughed so much in my life. I didn't know that I could laugh that much. I hope

that I will always remember the trio of clowns singing the ‘cock-a-doodle-doo’ song; the sour lead clown stuck with two hopeless clown associates in an endless chorus that she was powerless to stop. Clowning has made me less fearful and more ready to play.

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Neil Simmons works as a general practitioner, psychodramatist and playback theatre practitioner; his involvement with psychodrama and playback theatre balances out the heady work of being a doctor. Psychodrama is somewhere he can be himself and grow.

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Cover Image by Yvonne Shaw

Psychodrama Workshop 3, McCallum, Michelago, NSW,
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Yvonne Shaw is an Auckland-based artist and psychodrama trainee. Her interest in how photographic images of psychodrama might reveal new insights about spontaneity led to a PhD in Fine Arts at the University of Auckland. Between 2021 and 2025 she photographed five psychodrama workshops as part of her research, in warm collaboration with fellow trainees and members of the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association. Yvonne is currently in her seventh year of psychodrama training and is an Associate member of AANZPA.

