

# Seeing Double

*MOVING BETWEEN A PSYCHODRAMATIC AND  
A SOCIODRAMATIC PERSPECTIVE*

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## *ABSTRACT*

In the debate about the differences and different uses of psychodrama and sociodrama, the most useful conclusion is to 'see double'. In any group or drama, both a psychodramatic and a sociodramatic perspective can be useful. The paper posits that, in the final analysis, psychodrama is a focused and specialised form of sociodrama because everything that takes place in a psychodrama is connected to the group, and through the group to the socius. Examples from practice are included to illustrate the premise.

## *KEY WORDS*

Moreno, sociodrama, psychodrama, sociodramatist, psychodramatist, protagonist, enactment, group, group work, spontaneity

## **Introduction**

Along with other practitioners, I have come to regard as unnecessary many of the assumptions and cultural conserves surrounding the questions, 'What is sociodrama?' and 'What is psychodrama?' This paper considers the subject in a different light, by asking what I think are the more useful questions, 'What are the psychodramatic aspects?' and 'What are the sociodramatic aspects?'

## **The Urge to Settle**

Psychodramatists, sociodramatists, sociometrists and role trainers are trained to keep an open mind, an open imagination and an open spirit towards a protagonist's and a group's presentation. Indeed this is one of the training's great outcomes. The purpose

is to discourage the producer-director from settling on a single, rigid explanation or solution regarding a protagonist's enactment. I discovered in my early training as a scientist, a computer programmer, a house painter, a Herbal-life retailer and a property developer that I wanted to rapidly settle on a solution. I wanted things sorted. I felt better when I knew 'what's what' and could tell the protagonist authoritatively 'what's what!' My automatic mental processes, the conscious and especially the unconscious, non-conscious and pre-conscious, propelled me towards a settlement in quick time. It was ironic to realise that, in terms of adequacy, my rapid movement towards resolution was probably acceptable to most people. Better to get it sorted, any old solution being better than none, case closed, rather than tolerate ambiguity and approximation, and remain open to possibility and its attendant anxieties.

Psychodrama training is designed to counter this tendency towards a quick and final settlement, in many and varied ways. Trainees train and work with a wide variety of people. They are supervised in situ and while working. They practice with peers, supervise peers and others, and reflect on, process and document sessions. They learn how to work with the protagonist's warm up and the group's warm up. They read, observe, listen, investigate and try things out. Most importantly, they try things out, they experiment. This is entirely a part of the Morenian spirit of the fully engaged participant scientist who remains open to what s/he sees, hears, feels, tastes and touches.

## Seeing Double

The director of a psychodrama looks, with a psychodramatist's eye, at a protagonist and begins to imagine the pictures that they are forming of their life and experience. The images may include a view of self, together with some of the more localised and family forces that have impacted on their life and the development of that self. From this vantage point, a director may then produce some or all of these pictures, following the protagonist's warm up from one scene to another.

The director of a sociodrama, with a sociodramatist's eye, looks at a protagonist and begins to imagine the pictures that they are forming of their life and experience, as well as the larger cultural forces that formed and informed that experience. The images may include a view of self, together with some of the more communal and cultural forces that have impacted on their life and the development of that self. From this vantage point, a director will then produce scenes containing some or all of these larger forces and follow the protagonist's warm up from one scene to another.

## The Practical Applications of Seeing Double

There is great value in applying a sociodramatist's eye to the direction of a psychodrama. There is great value in applying a psychodramatist's eye to the direction of a sociodrama. It is important to be able to move easily between these two vantage points. In the following section, I discuss four applications and examples where a flexible switching of focus has been of great benefit to the protagonist, the group or the director.

### *Reflecting on a Session*

The real value in post hoc reflection is to develop new responses, new thinking, new appreciation and new understandings about the work that has concluded. These new responses are of value to the director, both for their own learning and for their consideration of future work with the protagonist.

At the end of a psychodrama session, there is often a subtle tendency to reflect upon it from the perspectives that were generated during the session. This is where a sociodramatic eye can be of great benefit. From a sociodramatic perspective, we can picture the larger socius and culture within which the protagonist lives or lived. We can imagine the impact of those cultural conserves and norms on the social atoms and roles produced or implicit in the drama. Any character, object or representation in a drama can have a sociodramatic element. For instance, the protagonist may have enacted the role of a childhood teacher. A teacher has both individual qualities, and 'teacher' qualities that are more culturally oriented. This type of reflection is crucial for ongoing work with individuals and for improving practice.

Looked at the other way around, I recall the value of viewing sociodramatic work through a psychodramatic lens. I recall group participants strongly responding to a protagonist in one particular sociodrama, in ways that promoted significant social atom repair and opened the protagonist to new ways of operating and living. This got me thinking 'What! A sociodrama providing psychodramatic healing elements. Has this always been so in sociodrama? How has this assisted this particular person and am I awake to the potentials and results?'

### *Working with a Protagonist*

I am directing an open psychodrama session with a group of largely naïve participants. They have come along of their own volition in response to invitations. We are about thirty minutes into the session. The group is forming slowly and the participants are cooperative. A protagonist, Tracy, steps forward partly because she was challenged to do so by a colleague in an earlier group warm up. Although Tracy has an intensely personal area of concern, I doubt that at this point she carries the central concern of the group. Tracy presents as a gangly, naïve young hippy full of positivity. She wants to explore the times 'when I zone out and get caught up with my own ideas and responses while listening to people'. At this point I consider a number of questions. Will this protagonist carry the concern for the group? Will she be able to present her concern in a contained manner? Will the group be able to stay involved with her? Can I make her concern relevant for the group? How might I do this? From a psychodramatist's perspective, I am aware of the necessity for the protagonist's concern to be of relevance to the group. From a sociodramatist's viewpoint, I am aware that the presenting concern is both supported and challenged by different cultures and values in our larger socius. I then produce three sociodramatic scenes. A range of sub-groups with different value systems regarding self awareness, self presentation and self containment form and interact. I follow this with a psychodramatic scene that involves Tracy as the protagonist. As Tracy enacts her personal story, there is

considerable connection with the group theme. In the sharing, these connections are explicitly expressed by many group members.

### *Planning for Group Work*

Thinking from a psychodramatic perspective and a sociodramatic perspective provides me with a rich picture of any group that I am planning for. For example, I was considering plans for a group whose purpose was to learn the psychodramatic approach in work with children. Twenty adults and one young teenager had enrolled, but unfortunately the presenter was unable to attend and I was asked to stand in. Firstly, I considered the group using my sociodramatist's eyes. I thought about the kinds of participants, mostly working in education, who would use the psychodrama approach with children. I reflected about the social systems that they would come from. Utilising my psychodramatist's lens, I thought through the participants' potential experiences and memories of childhood school days. I produced a sociodrama of the schoolyard. I invited the group members to form the sub groups that operate in a school yard — the quiet brainy group, the loud pushy group, the anti-school group, the dropping-out-of-school group, the don't-want-to-be-in-a-group group and others. Having thought through the group in advance using both perspectives, I was able to imagine and work easily with a range of issues that can affect children. I was able to provide a way for participants to make contact with, and consider, some of the important issues of childhood.

### *Mobilising Spontaneity*

There have been moments when I have found myself immobilised while producing a psychodramatic scene and my spontaneity has failed me. At these times, I have found it beneficial to imagine the sociodramatic elements of the scene. This perspective has immediately provided me with a larger systems view. In a parallel process, I have then been able to warm up the protagonist to the production of a wider range of elements in the system. My imagination expands in these moments, I become aware of a limitless range of possibilities, and my spontaneity increases tenfold.

### *Seeing Double Rules OK*

I recommend that practicing psychodramatists use their sociodramatic eyes regularly, and practicing sociodramatists use their psychodramatic eyes in a similar way. Obviously, discrimination and flexibility are called for. A psychodramatist might use a sociodramatic perspective during a group warm up, when settling on a protagonist and during sharing. Perhaps a sociodramatist might use a psychodramatic viewpoint to choose a workable theme from a range of options, to decide whether the enactment will be group centred or protagonist centred, and to determine the depth of exploration.

In the final analysis, psychodrama is a focused and specialised form of sociodrama. I say this because everything that takes place in a psychodrama is connected to the group, the socius, and nothing exists outside or absolutely independent of the many meta-

groups, groups and sub groups that make up our lives. What takes place is connected through these groups to our wider culture, *socius* again, which is the ocean in which we all swim.

### *LYNETTE CLAYTON RESPONDS . . .*

Peter Howie's article is thoughtful and reflective. It warms people up to an open mind, to spontaneity and flexibility in their role as psychodramatist and sociodramatist. I note that he is primarily considering protagonist centred dramas in the first two pages and appears to be addressing those who work primarily with protagonist centred dramas. Was this his primary audience?

In the section titled 'Working with a Protagonist' he begins with three sociodramatic sub-groups and moves to the psychodrama with the young girl. It was a very useful technique in the situation. In the section 'Planning for Group Work', Peter planned a sociodrama using the principles laid down for sociodramatists — consider the purpose of the group, reverse roles with group members, set out the system, allow sub-groups to interact, reverse roles amongst sub-groups. It was a useful way to proceed with a group that he had a one-off presentation with, and much safer than a protagonist centred drama.

I like Peter's sharing about the thinking he uses to stimulate his spontaneity and remain open minded in the role of director. Perhaps he needs to make this purpose more specific when he specifies his audience and purpose for writing. I think his final statement that 'in the final analysis, psychodrama is a focussed and specialised form of sociodrama' is Morenian, but needs to be put into context.

Moreno diverged from psychoanalysis and other theories of mind on three points. The baby is active and spontaneous from birth. The social and cultural context is important in the formation of the inner world. Open minded encounter between social and cultural groups makes for a healthy society. A core spiritual aspect which he called creative genius organises the inner system and the beliefs about self and others. It can be explored through axiodrama. The 'I' and the other 'I's' are one in the encounter.

Psychoanalysis has changed radically since Freud's structural view of the mind. Attachment theory based on Bowlby (late 1940s) emphasises the relationships from birth and acknowledges the baby's spontaneous part in them. Sullivan and Horney (1940s) brought in the cultural context. A developmental model was developed by Anna Freud, Erikson and others.

The major issue is the core where there is still exploration. Some call it the self, as in Self Psychology. Some describe creativity and the need for the silent space for creativity to emerge (Symington-flavour of the month). Some deny its existence. Some take a Buddhist view. Many are blinkered by religious ideas that they believe are real and concrete, thus making beliefs into facts.

What I like about Peter's paper is that it encourages the action of the creative genius by shifting frameworks. His spontaneity and flexibility encourage 'the encounter, the moment'. This is only my view. Others may critique differently and I would be interested

to see how Max Clayton, Brigid Hirschfield, Diana Jones, Warren Parry, Ross Colliver might write about it. That would also expand the socius.

*Best Wishes and Kind Regards,  
Lynette Clayton.*