

There's Lots of World Out There

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Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space (Card, 1995); sparking our imagination, our creativity, our understanding; providing us a royal road of relating to situations and possibility.

Here follows a scene from a classic musical.

I invite you to warm up to the world of a developing psychodrama practitioner. Don their garb, enter into this scene, sense the role relations, experience the spontaneity, look for what truth, insight and inspiration it may offer for them.

A scene

Cornelius, a callow young store clerk from Yonkers, confident and desirous of adventure and romance, is entreating his co-worker Barnaby to join him for a night of excitement in the bright lights of New York city

Out there

There's a world outside of Yonkers

Way out there beyond this hick town, Barnaby

There's a slick town, Barnaby

Out there

Full of shine and full of sparkle

Close your eyes and see it glisten, Barnaby

Listen, Barnaby...

Barnaby, a less assured fellow, is captivated yet apprehensive. It is, after all, quite a leap from hick town to bright lights, from the known comfort of Yonkers to the unfamiliar and exotic of the big city. Cornelius offers a suggestion

Put on your Sunday clothes there's lots of world out there

*..... put on the Sunday clothes ... get out the brilliantine and dime cigars
... take in the shows at Delmonicos ... ride in the horse drawn open cars,
breathe in the sights, the sounds, the smells*

Dressed like a dream your spirits seem to turn about

That Sunday shine is a certain sign

That you feel as fine as you look!

So goes the opening of the number *Put On Your Sunday Clothes*, from the celebrated musical *Hello Dolly*.

For J. L. Moreno “psychodrama was a way to train people to be more spontaneous in their lives in a safe and controlled environment, then go out and try their new roles” (Moreno, 2014). Of course! Barnaby simply needs a little role development! He and Cornelius sing and dance their way through a role training session of sorts, in which Cornelius’ vision, his advice to Barnaby, might be paraphrased in Morenian terms as to ‘take up the role, take it up fully, with an integration of thinking, feeling and action’.

However, singing about it in Yonkers is not the same as living it in New York city. Role training is one thing, role application another.

In here and out there

The situation facing Cornelius and Barnaby in a sense mirrors a quandary I have often heard expressed by budding coaches and psychodramatists whom I am training or supervising, who have a desire to take what they are learning in a training context and apply it in their ‘real world’.

They have experienced the *in here* of their training world as relatively cloistered and supportive, a place, a space where they have warmed up to and begun to integrate something new: a mindset, a philosophy, a technique. It has been a semi-comfortable Yonkers of sorts for them. But their concern, their reactive fear, is that beyond the training room, in the *out there* of their ‘real world’ their new offering is somehow out of place and may land as gratefully foreign, neither comprehended nor valued by the target audience. Their New York city equivalent looms as a daunting destination, where the role tests, real and perceived, are likely to be quite

different to those experienced in the training room.

During training, a developing coach or psychodramatist is in company with others who share an appreciation of what they are learning. Present because they wish to develop greater expertise in their chosen discipline, the values and principles inherent in that discipline ordinarily appeal to them at a deeply personal level. One of the top reasons people choose to be professional coaches is to “actively promote and contribute to human development on an individual and global scale” (Erikson Coaching International, 2016). This mirrors Moreno’s vision for fostering spontaneity in “the whole of mankind” through psychodrama, sociodrama and sociology.

However, in the *out there* of their everyday professional context, the perceived and actual expectations, priorities, norms and values encountered by practitioners (at any stage of their development) can be markedly different. Their audience, be it individual or group, may not be so open or willing to engage in a process which feels foreign to them, or which exemplifies values and beliefs which conflict with their norms.

The narratives of Carmen and Hailey, two developing practitioners, illustrate this experience.

Carmen¹, a mature, experienced and well respected scientist and academic, is in conversation with me about her desire to change the focus of her career. Having for many years concentrated on establishing quality clinical controls in her scientific field, her desire now is to take up a formal coaching and mentoring role with the next generation of scientists. She wants to help them develop greater relational skills; skills which she feels are critically important, but generally not well developed or valued in a scientific context. “Scientists are generally impatient with feelings rather than facts”, she explains to me. Carmen has operated informally as a coach/mentor and has delivered lectures on the topic to scientist colleagues and students, but she is concerned about being seen as an imposter by her target audience if she steps into their professional development space explicitly as a coach who also has experience in science, rather than as a recognised scientist who also knows something about coaching.

Hailey, an administrator in a public service organisation, is passionate about changing the culture in her organisation. She wants to take her psychodrama learning out into her workplace to build a new way of relating, of dealing with conflict, of working through interpersonal and structural issues. From her training room experience she values the power of vulnerability and of staying in relationship as a means to work through issues and differences. However, her perception is that such things are undiscussable in her workplace, where safety is valued over vulnerability

1 Names and other identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

and where issues are more often addressed through opaque back channels than person to person.

The extent to which Carmen's and Hailey's concerns are reflective of actuality, versus some aspect of their own performance anxiety, doesn't much matter. Either way it is part of their immediate warm up to *out there*.

And the challenge for both is simple but potentially confronting — how do I bring myself, my being, what I have learned, into relationship with what is actually valued *out there*? How do I get with the warm up that *is out there*, rather than lose my spontaneity in the absence of the warm up I wish was there?

Carmen and Hailey were both initially considering their situations from a practical or process perspective. For example Carmen was looking to me for advice regarding which coaching qualification she might best pursue in order to attract the professional respect of her target audience of scientists. In that world formal qualifications are a valued currency of respect, though not of relationship. Hailey, contemplating an upcoming difficult conversation with work colleagues, initially shared with me her concern about the practicalities of who might speak first and what impact that would have on the proceedings.

Missing from their initial sharing with me was an awareness of their own being, of how they are bringing themselves to the table, beyond the techniques they have learned and adopted. Focused on 'how can I use this method?', they have overlooked 'how can I use this being?'. Also missing was consideration of what might be blocking their spontaneity, their courage to be, to take up their leadership, to identify as more than simply a technician of a method.

I suggested to Carmen that she not conflate or confuse qualifications with presence and capacity, the fundamentals of a good coach. "There are two key paths of development as a coach. One is the skills stuff — what the training course will help you with — the other is your being and mindsets. The former can be taught but the latter is internally developed and critically underpins your effectiveness, particularly if you are working in a space where you are inviting people to step into the vulnerability of emotions rather than facts. It would be helpful for you to consider both paths."

In effect my suggestion is a mirror of Cornelius' advice to Barnaby. The Sunday clothes are important, crucial even, but it is not enough to simply put them on. You need to warm up fully to the role, with the whole of your being, to fully engage in relationship with the world *out there*.

The Bigger Picture

Taking a step back from the immediate content of Carmen's and Hailey's situations, it is possible to explore the wider system and various factors in play in each of their contexts *as developing practitioners*.

In Carmen's coaching training room, other trainees are willing partners

for a coaching session. However, in her work environment, where knowledge is king, other needs and expectations are more likely to be in play eg 'I want you to give me an answer, not coach me', or 'Just give me the facts; feelings are irrelevant and get in the way of good decision making'.

In her clinical context, she experiences and witnesses lots of push back from the frontline scientists when new clinical standards are rolled out. The culture is authoritative and status oriented and she recognises the frustrations which flare when standards arrive, without consultation, as mandatory edicts. In that context the proposed solution she shares with me is to provide more information as to why new standards are required, as they are issued. "If we explained more, there would be less frustration." she explains. "That's a possibility," I respond, "but how is it addressing the underlying relational issue?"

Ideally, Carmen wants all parties involved — the standard setters and issuers, the laboratory managers and the frontline scientists — to be able to engage and discuss what is happening, with a view to arriving at a more effective and satisfying process. But she is frustrated herself. "These things aren't real to them. They live in a world of microbes. Microbes are real. Feelings aren't real."

We discuss an upcoming conference address she is planning to deliver. She can envisage what she wants to share with the audience, the vision she has, but thinks it will largely fall on deaf ears as it is outside the audience's reality. Or at least what she perceives their reality to be. I offer a suggestion. "How would it be if, toward the beginning of your presentation, you invited them to turn to each other for a minute or two and share an experience of the process not working well for them? That might help them warm up to their reality in a way conducive to your purpose." "Oh, yes, I could definitely manage that. That could be quite impactful." Carmen, her eyes now wide and bright, is in this moment more in her own being. Her spontaneity has risen as she imagines this New York city scenario, where she invites others to a new future by being different herself, moving beyond the Yonkers norm of presentation style content transfer, to engaging audience members in relationship.

In Hailey's case the norm in her psychodrama training room is to work in group, with a stage, in action. Playfulness and experimentation is encouraged. She is learning the classical psychodrama method with warm up, enactment and sharing/integration. By contrast, in many if not most organisational settings, including hers, such an approach might typically be met with discomfort and suspicion. This has left Hailey unsure, not only of the mechanics of how to proceed, but more importantly of how to manifest her full being in that environment, questioning even what right she has to challenge and change the environment. "Who am I to say what is better?" I am reminded, in the moment, of the words of Marianne Williamson. "Our

deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us." (Williamson, 1992)

Haley shares with me that her fear of becoming grandiose is sapping her confidence. It is cutting across her spontaneity, inhibiting her fully taking up her purpose. "Well, yes, it's possible," I respond, with a shrug, "so what?". "Oh Okay then Yeah So what!" she replies. Clearly warming up to something new in her being, her spontaneity lifts and our conversation about the upcoming difficult meeting takes a sharp 180° turn. We stop talking about the process of the meeting and start talking about how Hailey will maintain her spontaneity in the face of the various obstacles which might arise in the moment. *In here*, in our conversation, she is now seeing herself *out there* as a resourceful agent for change. Cornelius would be delighted, "That Sunday shine is a certain sign, That you feel as fine as you look!"

Out there, beyond the net

As a child visiting the circus, I was mesmerised by the daredevil feats of the trapeze artists. I can still feel the chilling thrill that ran through me when the most daring of them were boldly introduced by the ringmaster as about to perform Without The Aid Of A Safety Net!!

I think I'm safe in assuming that those artists didn't start off that way. Their training would have involved safety harnesses and nets and most likely commenced firmly on the ground, not up in the air. Their transition from earthbound to flying free and unimpeded under the big top is not unlike Carmen and Hailey moving from the relative safety of *in here* training to *out there* practice. They can build up their muscles, hone their balance and spatial awareness, apply the rosin powder to their hands, but ultimately, in their being, they need to let go of the bar in order to fly.

But how to get to that point? As Carmen and Hailey pursue their development as practitioners, their role development is fundamental; yet there is no ideal set of generic roles, no magic role system to aim for, no optimised checklist against which to mark off their unique psychodramatic roles. Roles emerge and unfold in relationship. And each context, each moment, each *out there* presents a different challenge and opportunity for a practitioner. It requires of them a capacity to warm up to their own spontaneity, in order to get with the actuality of what is met. For any practitioner — developing or experienced — our ongoing work is to warm up, in our being, with spontaneity, ready to meet the world *out there*, where it is, as it is.

Cornelius is a master of warm up and scene setting. "There's lots of world out there!!" See it, hear it, smell, feel it!! Lots of opportunity, lots of possibility, lots to relate with. As I hear his voice in my head, I feel the

spirit in Carmen's desire to unite the qualities of humanity and science, the fire in Hailey's passion to change the culture of relationship in her workplace. My own spontaneity, my own life force rises. My own *out there* is expanded. 'Tis good.

There is lots of world *out there*; out beyond the crucially formative yet ultimately limiting safety nets of *in here*. And whether or not you are a Barnaby, or a Cornelius, or an altogether different character, the core principle remains. To enter fully into *out there* we need access to our spontaneity. Consider for yourself, how you step out into whatever your *out there* is. What are the somethings that foster spontaneity in your being, in order that you might let go of the bar and fly?

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Jenny Postlethwaite is an accredited Sociodramatist (AANZPA) and Professional Certified Coach (International Coach Federation). She has her own organisational coaching and consulting business, Reach Coaching and in 2021 joined Psychodrama Australia Sydney Campus as a TEPIT. Since first encountering psychodrama in 2010, she has enthusiastically integrated and applied psychodramatic philosophies and methods into her practice.