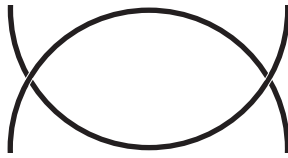


The image features five painted moths, likely from the genus *Enantia*, arranged on a dark, textured wooden surface. The moths are painted with various patterns: one with green and orange checkered wings and a central circular motif; one with black and tan wavy patterns and a central circular motif; one with black and tan wavy patterns and a central circular motif; one with black and tan wavy patterns and a central circular motif; and one with brown and tan wavy patterns and a central circular motif. The text "AANZPA JOURNAL" is centered in the upper half, and "#29 2020" is centered below it.

# AANZPA JOURNAL

#29 2020



**AANZPA JOURNAL #29 December 2020**





## **AANZPA Journal #29 December 2020**

AANZPA Journal #29

Editor: Sara Crane

Editorial Team: Chris Hosking, Judy Sutherland

Editorial Support: Jan Allen, Philip Carter, Claire Guy, Bev Hosking, Peter Howie, Jenny Postlethwaite, Elizabeth Synnot, Vivienne Thomson, Jenny Wilson

Technical Support: Simon Gurnsey

Cover: Jenny Wilson, Ceramic Moths 2020 (photo), reproduced with permission of the artist

Design: Katy Yiakmis

Printing: Bluestar, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

Copyright © 2020 Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association Inc.

All Rights Reserved

ISSN 1836-1196 (Print)

ISSN 1836-120X (Online)

Correspondence with, and submissions to, the *AANZPA Journal* can be addressed to the editor by email at <[journal-editor@aanzpa.org](mailto: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 electronic publication *Socio*, and at annual conferences.

#### 2020 AANZPA Executive

President: Martin Putt

Vice President: Helen Phelan

Immediate Past President: Elizabeth Synnot

Secretary: Helen Kearins

Treasurer: Rosemary Nourse

Membership Secretary: Selina Reid

Publications: Patricia O'Rourke

Committee: Claire Guy, Ali Watersong



# Contents

Editorial	7
A Place to Meet — Reflections on Group Improvisational Processes on Zoom <i>Hilde Knottenbelt</i>	9
The Honest Mirror <i>Yvonne Shaw</i>	21
Directing Psychodrama on Stage <i>Hamish Brown</i>	27
Distortion, Praise and Authenticity — The Power of Mirroring <i>Phillipa van Kuilenburg</i>	31
Three Ceremonies: Sociodrama In Situ <i>Anna Heriot</i>	39
A Haiku Journey — Slow Walk Around a Small Island <i>Christo Patty</i>	47
Psychodrama Theory and Group Work in Reflective Practice Groups for GPs <i>Ali Begg</i>	59
Book reviews	
<i>SOCIOMETRY, EXPERIENTIAL METHOD AND THE SCIENCE OF SOCIETY</i> (2012)	69
<i>OUR HOUSE: VISUAL AND ACTIVE CONSULTING</i> (2020)	73
Order in the Chaos <i>Jenny Wilson</i>	77



# Editorial

Kia ora koutou  
Greetings to you all

My hopes for this *Journal* are that it will bring beauty and stimulation into your experience as you read the articles. Maybe some of them will enable you to act on your dreams.

Many of you have contributed to bringing this *Journal* to life. Alongside the writers are a team of steadfast companions, provocateurs and clear eyed editors. Especial thanks and gratitude to Bona, for a thoroughly thorough handover, to Judy for the final painstakingly detailed edit, to Simon for superb technical support and training, and to Chris and Phil for unwavering support. We made it!

I was trying to come up with a sentence or phrase, other than “The Year of Pestilence”, which would somehow encapsulate this year of Covid-19. All I could think of was “The Year of Wonder” by Geraldine Brooks about the plague in 1666 and the self-imposed isolation of a group of villagers who sought to protect themselves and others from the plague. So many unforeseen events have manifested in this new way of being, the realms of Zoom and other virtual realities dominating interpersonal relationships like never before. How is tele experienced and measured now? All this alongside the ongoing issues of climate change, racism, poverty and everything else we hope psychodrama can influence.

At the core of everything are our relationships with each other. We value the connections that AANZPA sustains between us and we’ve grown accustomed to being able to meet up, associate, work, train and have fun together, to go to conferences, workshops and training events. The depth of these relationships span many decades and continue to ripple through our community. I imagine that all of you are challenged in a myriad of ways to keep the spirit of psychodrama alive as you live with the impact of Covid-19. Some of you will have been stretched by the incredible demands of work and some of you may have had times to catch up on projects and creative pursuits. Together we will get to know what has been learned and developed from the new norms that are being established.

Here are some stories for you to read so that you get a sense of what others are up to in their lives.

We are opening this *Journal* with “A place to meet” by Hilde Knottenbelt through which she invites us to join her in this new territory in which we are called to muster all our spontaneity, especially in the realm of Zoom. A photographer, Yvonne Shaw, captures the essence of a psychodrama group and Hamish Brown responds with his experience of



being photographed. Phillipa van Kuilenburg brings us her insights into the impact of the mirror. Anna Heriot leads us into the heart of her work as a sociodramatist in situ. We travel with a poet, Christo Patty as he lets us into his island world through a series of haiku. Ali Begg demonstrates how she works as a medical educator so we can engage with the doctors' perspective.

Elizabeth Synnot and Diana Jones review two very different books: J.L. Moreno's seminal work on Sociometry and Antony Williams's latest offering on consultancy. On the last page Jenny Wilson describes her work as a ceramic artist and the creator of the moths which feature on the cover of the *Journal*.

Happy reading!

Nga mihi mahana

*Sara Crane*

*Journal Editor*

# A Place to Meet: Reflections on Group Improvisational Processes on Zoom

WORKING ONLINE IN THE TIME OF COVID

HILDE KNOTTENBELT

*All that's solid  
Melts into Air  
The taken for granted  
No longer holy  
We are compelled  
To face with sober senses  
The conditions of this  
Paradigmshiftfuckery.*

(Lyrics from a song by Hilde Knottenbelt, April 2020, with significant borrowings from Karl Marx 1848, and a dash of Honest Government Ads)

## KEY WORDS:

covid-19, German, J.L. Moreno, director, protagonist, psychodrama, poetry, warm-up, spontaneity, creativity

It's been a month since I worked face-to-face. The studio is looking decidedly casual. It's become a place to hang out rather than a place to work.

In the first weeks of Covid-19 lockdown, as I considered what my working life might look like in the next while, the word *ersatz* came to me. It's a term borrowed from the German language meaning replacement, substitute, imitation, fake. In WW1 and WW2 *ersatzbrot* (substitute bread) was made with potato starch and sawdust and fed to prisoners who starved of malnourishment. I don't want to create ersatz anything.

*I witness the flurry of activity on facebook  
As people work to reinterpret our 3D lives  
For the screen*

Around the same time, the title of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's book; *Love in the Time of Cholera* (Marquez, 1988) runs on a loop in my mind. It's linked in a felt sense way to what draws me to the work I do as an improviser, vocalist, psychodrama practitioner and trainer. I know what I

love in the work; aesthetics, responsiveness, immediacy, meetings in the air, the domain of Kairos; moments of opportunity, that linked together create a sense of something both enduring and ephemeral. In this time of Covid-19, when working together is reimagined as staying apart, I remember this love.

*People in choirs catch Covid  
Some die  
Singing in a room with others is suddenly bad for your health*

## The Shift

*Displaced  
Dislocated  
Dislodged  
Rehomed  
Relocated  
Re-placed*

## Poetic Faith: How Far Can We Stretch?

In 1817 Samuel Taylor Coleridge asked readers of his fantastical poems, including “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” to give him “that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.”

He asked people to suspend judgement and allow the mind to be awakened.

In a psychodrama session, we similarly accept the co-existence of two seemingly inconsistent realities. We are in the room and at the same time we are in another time and place as we enact scenes from people’s lives. Supported by a few props, a stage, and a group of people, we draw on poetic faith to support our capacity for embodied imagining.

Switching from in-place to online work, I wonder how far our capacity for poetic faith might stretch without the markers of place and the meanings held in how we organise our bodies in space in relation to others.

*In the context of;  
A screen filled with shoulders, necks, chins, eyes, cheeks, mouth, forehead,  
hair,  
How will we situate the markers of place, the trees, hills, rivers, offices,  
streets, and kitchens of our lived experience  
In the absence of presence  
How might we evoke and sustain a real enough imagining  
To enable the awakening of our poetic bodies  
In service of coming to know ourselves and others*

*In service of developing greater spontaneity*

Later in April...

EX NIHILO NIHIL FIT  
NOTHING COMES FROM NOTHING

*Parmenides, around 475BC*

*The Sound of Music, 1965*

*Conserves inevitably figure into new creative acts (Nolte, 2017)*

While creating something in the moment is familiar territory for any director of psychodrama, it is always mediated by the psychodramatic form; i.e. the techniques, principles, practices and theory that guide action in the moment. Also part of the form, but so taken for granted pre-Covid that there didn't seem a need to emphasise it, is meeting in a room or space in physical proximity with others.

*At the same time as I relinquish, and protest at relinquishing, the familiar of working in place, I'm steeped in a poetic body of practice. My pre-reflective responses and the creative impulses that arise from this practice are interwoven with inhabiting time and place with others.*

*There are moments now  
Of feeling completely floored  
That co-exist with a dread longing for what was  
Fluency is missing in action*

I develop a fresh appreciation of Moreno's term *act hunger* through the experience of dis-placed gestures.

*Yes, hand reaches ohhh, ummm, hand drops  
What that, errr, yes, drrrrrrr,  
Out of place  
If we were in the room together, I would have...  
Eventually I find my tongue*

We're always creating something out of something.

### Acknowledging the Absurd

The notion that this Zoom situation offers creative possibilities for adaptation of group improvisational processes seems absurd in light of the absences.

Listing them seems risky. If so much is missing, will I even dare?

I make a list

1. Simultaneous sounding
2. Stage
3. Shared perception of where we are in the room
4. Spatial knowing
5. The possibility of reaching out a hand
6. Harmony heard by more than one person
7. Having a random hello conversation with one other person
8. Hanging out in a break
9. Arriving through a door
10. Sitting next to a person of your choice
11. Choosing not to sit next to someone
12. Evidence of sociometric choices
13. Who said that? (with 25 faces on the screen)
14. Spatial relating
15. Breath
16. The whole body, moving in a space with other bodies
17. Air
18. Leaving through a door
19. Transitioning out of shared ritual space

## The Leap

*Out of a wish and commitment to sustain offerings  
A leap is required*

*I move into the fray  
Make stuff up  
Stuff up  
Make Stuff*

## Anticipation

*Things I can, things I can't  
Discoveries in living it through*

*Implicit knowing  
Split second  
Non-verbal  
Too fast for words*

*Too fast for words  
Too fast for words  
Explains the feeling of being dumbfounded*



## Action Precedes Words

At the end of the first lockdown, I go walking with a friend and colleague. As our conversation turns to the challenges of working online, and the writing I've embarked on regarding online work, she alerts me to the work of Barbara Tversky, and to her book *Mind in Motion; How Action Shapes Thought* (Tversky, 2019). When I later follow this lead, I discover some *simpatico* in thinking between Tversky and J.L. Moreno in relation to the moving body.

In *Mind in Motion*, Tversky (2019), shows that "spatial cognition isn't just a peripheral aspect of thought, but its very foundation, enabling us to draw meaning from our bodies and their actions in the world. Our actions in real space get turned into mental actions on thought, often spouting spontaneously from our bodies as gestures." Tversky (2019) is convinced that movement, not language, is the foundation of thought.

In a similar vein, J.L. Moreno emphasised the significance of the moving body and what he termed physical starters in the warm up process. At a gathering of international psychodramatists in Oxford in 1994, Zerka Moreno, having been asked why Moreno created psychodrama said; "Because he (Moreno) recognised that *movement* precedes language in development, and is the highway to the psyche." (Reekie, 2013). Reekie elaborates on this saying "Movement, and reciprocity in response to movements, are the earliest signals within relationship. Movement articulates and amply expresses states and levels of emotion and well-being."

These provocations, including contemplation of the significance of the body in space/place as a source of knowing, ignite further considerations of how to bring this to life in online psychodramatic work.

With a weekend of training on Zoom on the horizon, this aspect of production becomes the focus of our attention.

In the examples from sessions that follow, I have at times conflated details from a number of sessions to illustrate a particular point and or to preserve the anonymity of group members.

## Attending to the Details of Bringing the Body to Life on Zoom

Gone for now, the grand productions, the chorus of voices, instead we find ourselves attending to amplification of a single gesture, the energetic nature of it, the sound, the quality of movement, slowly, slowly opening into text. Baff, baff, baff, legs akimbo, arms and fists karate style, eyes afire.

As she enacts this character, which originates from bringing to life a small plastic ninja, the protagonist has a moment of action insight. There's an atmosphere among the group members that suggests that everyone in the group is absorbing and re-cognising some version of the meaning of what we are witnessing; this thing about gesture, about the body, about awakening life and being spirited.

At times as a director, when producing the body, I'm aware of what Alexander Technique practitioners refer to as the universal habit of *end gaining*\*. In this case, the end gain might be getting to the point where the person puts *words to their action*. This value on verbalising can lead to a skimming over of what's held in the body and the quality of the voice, before the words arrive. It is in slowing down and attending to these places the mind has not yet claimed, that moments of revelation can occur. They can become access points for amplification of spontaneous expression.

## Running on the Tundra

In another session, as we're working with producing enactments in the places and spaces where group members are located; bedrooms, offices, a laundry, living rooms, a parental home, places with an action space of 1.5 square metres and less, as we negotiate the arrival of unexpected visitors in these places including the swishing of a cat's tail, a protagonist warms up to a challenging situation at work. Earlier in the session, she reported having watched the Icelandic movie *Woman at War*. As she brought this to the group, she was invigorated and delighted by the central character, a warrior woman; physically capable, acting on her convictions, courageously and determinedly disrupting the status quo. Now, as the protagonist begins to set out the scene related to her workplace, there's an atmosphere of resignation and same old same old frustration. In the process of warming up to this scene however, the protagonist makes a passing reference to the character in the movie running on the tundra. The *Woman at War* is still present in her psyche, and these two different experiences come together in a spontaneous confluence when the scene on the tundra is immediately produced in and around the office scene in her lounge room. Time and the multiplicity of place collapse and coalesce in our shared imagining...

*We are all on the screen, we are all in her lounge room skirting past her situation at work, we are all on the tundra, the voice of the director links her to everyone, she is running barefoot on the tundra, she's on camera, she's off camera, she flits past, she is indomitable, fearless and motivated by her principles, she is energised, we are energised, we occupy a shared spatial imagining, our 5 senses available, our proprioception activated.*

At the height of her warm up she enters the scene at work, unified and energetically transformed. When a colleague asks her how she's going she

---

\* 'End gaining is a universal habit' (F M Alexander ~ *The Use of the Self*) (Alexander, 1932). End gaining is the tendency we have to keep our mind and actions focused on an end result whilst losing sight of, and frequently at the expense of, the means-whereby the result is achieved.



says: "I've been running on the tundra". She is light, in charge of herself, humorous.

I still savour this moment as proof of the possibility of embodied experiencing on Zoom, which leads to spontaneous expression of the psyche and a reinvigorated warm up, however momentary, to a difficult situation.

## Discovery

Leaders of psychodrama groups in AANZPA and many other parts of the world, have grown up with the tradition of setting up the room in a particular way, with an arc of chairs and an open space. Some of us have subsequently had to adapt to working in other kinds of sets up, including rooms that have large immovable fixtures that take up all the available space. The Zoom group environment presents a very particular set of challenges. Firstly, we have no possibility to influence the way *the space* is organised. Secondly, the way it's organised visually is unnatural and demanding; multiple 2D small squares (or a bit larger if you're lucky enough to have a big screen) are the window / filter through which we make sense of what's being communicated between people.

Creating scenes in people's spaces offers relief from the work our brains have to do in making sense of the data available to us on the screen. Having people being off camera, or partly on camera, right up close to the camera or a long way away from the screen in the course of an enactment, liberates us from the dictates of the Zoom room. It restores traces of what it's like to be in a room with others and uncouples us from the distorted and exhausting effect, of monitoring multiple face-on-faces on a screen.

*This seems like a creative opportunity for directors to develop the visual consciousness of a movie director as opposed to a director of drama on a stage. The aesthetics and meaning of placement in relation to the eye of the camera offer a new window on bringing experiences to life in the Zoom medium, both for the audience/group and the protagonist.*

## Creative Arts Practices as a Bridge to Enactment on Zoom

In 2006, through a connection to someone I'd met in my first year of psychodrama training in 1990, I found myself running some voice sessions in a multi-modal experiential and creative arts therapy programme with a theoretical framework based in phenomenology. In the years that followed, I was able to bring my knowledge of voice and vocal improvisation, story telling, group work and psychodrama to this way of working. I loved witnessing students create multi-modal work which spoke directly to their experience and there were times when I

was able to expand this creative expression through dramatic enactments relating to work they had created.

When we made the switch from room to Zoom in April this year, these experiences informed some of the ways I related to bringing psychodrama to life on Zoom.

Hence, in a two-day online psychodrama workshop titled *Creativity and the Life of the Imagination*,

*In an effort to...  
Break the confines of*



*Awaken the sense of touch,  
Evoke spatial relationships,  
Map experiencing over time,  
Invite pre-reflective contemplation,  
Evoke non-verbal refinements to emerging expression,  
In a manner akin to a protagonist sculpting an auxiliary...*

My co-facilitator and I invite group members to create *installations* in their bedrooms, offices, laundries, lounge rooms

*A gathering and grouping of  
Objects, drawings, photos, music, songs, poems, collage*

To stimulate expression of their warm up in concrete form, with the intention to work with the emerging concerns expressed in the installations through the use of relevant psychodramatic techniques.

*A floral arrangement  
A pile of books  
A prayer: please let this be...  
A goanna in the sun  
A box of wooden figures  
A vision of the future  
A poem with photos of rock pools  
A gathering of people  
A diorama*

Working with these creations, we begin a series of enactments. Through a combination of relating spatially to the placement of objects,



interview for role, and producing interaction between different aspects of the installations, a sense of embodied presence is evoked. The dimensions of time and space are wrested from the screen.

### The Places We're In

When the shared ritual space of a group is constructed in an online setting, particular challenges and considerations emerge. People's circumstances can and do vary enormously and being in lockdown adds another layer of complexity, with many group members sharing their homes 24/7 with others. On a number of occasions, family members have made an appearance during a session, offering glimpses of lives we would ordinarily experience on the stage or not at all.

Ritual space is generally marked by separation from everyday living, so this co-existence in chronological time, of the everyday and the group situation can both add to the experience and be unsettling. In one instance, it contributed to a group member leaving the group. In another, a group member experienced her partner's willingness to wear headphones in a separate part of the house as liberating. This alerted me to the way in which her participation was being actively supported in concurrent time. It also highlighted the larger systems at work that were impacting the spirit of participation in the group at that time.

On quite a different note, the multiple places we're physically located in create challenges in producing dramas that can be hard to get your head around. A trainee went some way to addressing this when, in taking up an auxiliary role, she spontaneously created a stage in her own home in a way that replicated that of the protagonist's set up at another location. This initiative helped to bring to life the visual/spatial dimensions of the drama for protagonist, auxiliaries, audience and director alike. Amongst other things, it offered a welcome alternative to the early experiences of conducting enactments in which, because of the dictates of the screen, there was at times a confusing lack of separation between the audience and the stage. It has entered my repertoire as one of a number of ways to stage dramas on Zoom.

*Looking beyond the screen*

*To an acknowledgement of multiple places and stages*

*Shared ritual space is experienced simultaneously*

*On the screen, on the stage and in diverse locations*

*The realities of in-place and out-of-place proximity*

*Nudge new considerations*

## Recovering Ground

July 27, 2020

We're half-way through the second lockdown in Melbourne and it's looking like the idea of half way is changing.

Zoom IS NOW THE ONLY PLACE TO MEET UNMASKED IN PUBLIC.  
Really!!

There are still moments in the lead up to running groups on Zoom, where it defies my imagination to consider that this medium can offer meaningful, embodied acts of co-creativity. Moments of mourning sit alongside moments of relinquishing and re-entry. At the same time, there's consolation in surrendering to the inevitable and getting on with the work in these reconfigured circumstances.

In the time of Covid, with restricted travel across the globe, getting together online has become an integral part of how countries are run, futures are imagined, ideas are exchanged, and therapy and education are conducted. After all these months, steadiness and flexibility increasingly feature in my experience of working within the parameters of Zoom and I'm reunited with experiences of flow and a re-cognition of myself in the work. Out of the interaction between psychodramatic conserves, the conserves of Zoom and the need to create afresh, there are new possibilities for the ways and places we can meet.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, F. M (1932). *The Use of the Self*, Accessed July 2020 at <https://www.hilaryking.net/glossary/end-gaining>
- Barash, David, P. (2018). All that's Solid Melts into Air, Accessed on 7 May, 2020 at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/pura-vida/201805/all-is-solid-melts-air>
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. (1817). *Biografia Literaria*, Accessed on 15 July 2020 <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/biographia.html>
- Erlingsson, B. Film director. (2018). *Woman at War*, Finland
- The Juice Media. (2019). Honest Government Ad/Quiet Australians, Accessed May 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/user/thejuicemedia>
- Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. (1988). *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Penguin Books, London
- Nolte, J. (2014). *The Philosophy, Theory and Methods of J.L. Moreno, The Man Who Tried to Become God*, (Chapter 5, p75). Routledge, New York
- Reekie, D. (2013). Heart of Humanity: Thinking it Through with Moreno Again and Again *AANZPA Journal* 2013 #22, (p60). AANZPA Inc.
- Tversky, B. (2019). *Mind in Motion: How Action Shapes Thought*, Basic Books, New York
- Tversky, B. (2020). *Stanford Seminar - Mind in Motion: How Action Shapes Thought*, Accessed June 15 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmc4wEL2aPQ>



**Hilde Knottenbelt** is a Psychodramatist, TEP and staff member of the Melbourne Campus of Psychodrama Australia.

She brings an enduring interest in the creative process and in working emergently to diverse settings, including vocal improvisation, counselling, and training programs in the creative arts and psychodrama. Living in extended lockdown in 2020 has offered her a new place from which to contemplate the recovery of spontaneous expression as she works online.

Hilde can be contacted at [hildek@netspace.net.au](mailto:hildek@netspace.net.au)

# The Honest Mirror

YVONNE SHAW

## KEY WORDS:

photographs, auxiliary, auxiliary ego, mirroring

Photographs, even documentary ones, are ambiguous records. I am drawn to many types of photographs, ones that are tricksters as well as ones that are faithful. In my own practice as a photographer I am interested in making portrait photographs that mirror social encounters, photographs that connect the viewer to a depth of expression in human relationships.

In April, 2019 I was in a marvellous, run-down theatre in Auckland making a series of photographs of psychodrama that I hoped would bring the method of psychodrama to life in a realistic way. This is the story of how that series came about. It is a telling of my love for photography and my love for psychodrama and the parallel I see between the photograph and the psychodramatic concept of the mirror.

It's Sunday, early April. The days are getting shorter; the shadows are stretching out. In the Crystal Palace Theatre in Mt Eden it's cavernous and dark. I have brought in studio lights and they are arranged on the stage, creating a pool of light in which the psychodramas take place. Tattered curtains hang at the sides of the stage and a screen rises at the back. On the stage are some of my fellow psychodrama trainees and a few of their friends. My trainer is directing these psychodramas.

The photographs that I make will be exhibited as part of the Auckland Festival of Photography in June 2019. I have written consent from all the participants to exhibit the photographs after they have sighted the digital images and approved them. But how can any of us comprehend what that future experience of seeing those images will be like? How will it feel to observe one's own vulnerable moment, stilled, made monumental, exhibited? My camera is an impartial observer, reflecting back these living moments without judgment, but there can be a felt vulnerability in the experience of being mirrored. What will the future audience of these images see when they look at them? I already know that I will print these photographs over a metre wide. They will be life-like. The camera that I'm using will record such detail that when the pictures are printed the pores of the skin will be replicated, the creases of the clothing and the tiny light reflecting from a button will be faithfully documented. The figures will be

at such a scale that the viewer will feel that they are transported here, to this moment, to this place, the subject lit by the studio lights, the background receding into darkness in the vast theatre.

A drama has begun. Two women stand on the stage. They are both auxiliaries in the drama. The protagonist is not in the image. I am photographing from just behind him so that I see what he sees. One woman faces the camera, the other faces away. When I look more closely I notice the hands of the woman facing me. They are tense. Her thumb and forefinger pinched together as if she's just holding on. She's holding on to a chair with her other hand. Her face is full of expression. I see clarity; a degree of resentment; a gathering of resolve. There is something happening here. I'm impartial and at the same time curious and compassionate towards the subject. The studio light creates a glow on the back of her hair. I notice the balance of this composition. It pleases me.

I look through the viewfinder. I focus on the face of the auxiliary, on her eyes. I set a small aperture, which together with the studio flash, ensures a wide depth of field so all these features can be seen. I trust my ability to produce a photograph that is correctly exposed so that the scene comes to life in the way that I see it.

I know that I have something. I feel a quiet excitement as my camera connects with this living moment.

When I first participated in psychodrama in 2017 I was transfixed by moments in the dramas. I saw them as living artworks and I knew that I wanted to photograph them one day. When I was awarded the annual photographic commission by the Auckland Festival of Photography Trust in February 2019 I immediately started to plan towards photographing a psychodrama workshop.

What is it that I'm trying to represent in these photographs of psychodrama? The honesty that photographic portraits can convey is not easy to pin down in words.

I used to believe that a photograph could express the character of a person but through my study and exploration of photography I have come to believe that this aim cannot be fulfilled. The photograph is not fixed. It expands beyond the limitations of the frame, full of potential. Not everyone will have the eyes to see what a photograph points to but some will. Some will have their eyes and hearts open when they look.

It's June 2019. Four photographs of the psychodramas are being exhibited as part of the Festival of Photography in a disused silo in the Wynyard Quarter in central Auckland. It's an unusual, evocative space with concrete walls.

I'm with my sister, Kathleen. She has just arrived from Australia. I have brought her to see the newly installed work this morning, before the evening opening event.





*ROLE REVERSAL, 7/4/2019 12:27*



*AUXILIARY ROLE, 7/4/2019 4:10*

The photographs are framed with narrow black frames and at first my sister thinks that the works are moving images on HD Television screens. They are lit from above but they seem to glow from within. There is a forward sense of movement in the photograph of two women standing adjacent to each other. One faces the audience, the other is turned away.

I'm drawn to the woman facing us. Her body is like a coiled spring. Something is happening in her. She is about to spring to life. This is what I see in the photograph. This is what my sister sees when she says to me "I thought it was a video. I was waiting for her to move."

The photograph doesn't hold anything back. It challenges the viewer to look further into the image, beyond the surface. It is open and patient. Over time the mirror of the photograph reveals even more if we spend time with it, just as the experience of a psychodrama can unfold and reverberate further after the event.

As I write this now in June 2020 I look at another photograph from the psychodramas at the Crystal Palace. It's the photograph that I'm most drawn to from my series of images. One woman comforts another woman who huddles in a chair like a vulnerable child. There is a great tenderness in this scene. I, too, felt tender as I stood on the stage quite close to this protagonist and auxiliary and photographed them.

It comforts me to look at this image, to really take it in. Something tugs at the edge of my consciousness. A memory of a photograph that could not be taken. The memory is from 2014. My sister Anne has just died. Her eldest son is standing in the room at the hospice in the early hours of the morning, being comforted by his young, anxious partner. She's pregnant with their first child, the grandchild that my sister knew she would never meet. It's a moment of grief and beauty and I know that I cannot photograph this moment. Yet I want to photograph this moment. My camera is in the room but it's not possible for me to disturb that grief or try to memorialize it in that way.

My mind is like a camera which takes a photograph that will never be printed. No-one else will see this image of a shadowed room in which Anne's children mourn the loss of their mother, who was also a second mother to me. She was fifteen when my twin sister and I were born. Her patience and her ability to comfort others were cherished by our family and by all she came into contact with in her profession as a nurse. Later on that morning in April 2014 I do photograph the empty room. I capture the autumn light filtering through the curtain, the empty chairs, and the soft folds and creases of a sheet laying on the bed. The photograph has a capacity to mirror even the unseen. I welcome this last trace of her spirit.

The photograph of the tender comforter in the psychodrama at the Crystal Palace Theatre evokes a rich store of feelings in me. I see many layers of my life in one image. I see my fellow psychodrama trainees



*ENACTMENT, 7/4/2019 3:39*



*WARM-UP, 28/4/2019 2:54*

participating in a profound drama, fully involved with each other. I see my nephew being comforted by his partner. I see my sister comforting her babies. I feel the comfort that my sister gave to me when she was just a teenager.

Photographs hold more than what is first seen. They are mirrors to our lives if we warm up to them. What I see in a photograph is not what the person next to me sees in that same photograph. They see something of themselves. Like a psychodrama — a photograph may become an honest mirror, returning us to our bodies so that we can see and feel our lives more deeply if only we look closely.



**Yvonne Shaw** is an Auckland-based artist, and Lecturer in Photography at Unitec, Auckland. In 2019 she commenced training with the Auckland Training Centre for Psychodrama. She is currently investigating the ways in which photography and psychodrama intersect, particularly with regard to doubling, mirroring and the category of the moment.



# Directing Psychodrama on Stage

*HAMISH BROWN*

## *KEY WORDS:*

psychodrama, love, photography, role, protagonist, director, encounter, humanity

It is 10 am. I am sitting at the edge of a horse shoe of 8 chairs on the stage of the dilapidated Crystal Palace Theatre in Mt Eden. It is freezing and a vast blackness stretches upwards and beyond the first few rows of chairs that I can make out. I draw my attention down and into the group, I take in the stage lights set up around the group, the lighting technician adjusting things at the edge of the circle, Yvonne looking on with her camera. Now I can see the people in the group I will be working with, some I know well and we exchange easy smiles, others are new to me and new to the psychodrama method, sent along by enthusiastic friends to a free workshop. Briefly I get anxious as I consider their experience, this must seem crazy to them, to be sitting in this place among all of this.

Yvonne and I have worked collaboratively in the creation of this event. We have developed a beginning in which she will make a welcome, so that the group can take in her intent and the scope of her project. She sits now centre stage in front of the group. I know that acknowledging the camera and the lights and meeting the people behind them will assist the group to let them be part of the background. Yvonne speaks briefly about her love of photography, her love of the psychodrama method and shares the moment during a psychodrama when she first conceived of this project. She talks about the importance of each person's consent to her and how she will not use any images that participants are uncomfortable with.

I can feel myself gathering as I anticipate the next beginning which I must make. First I take up my role as group leader letting the group members know that "while Yvonne and Duncan, the lighting specialist will be working all around us we will not pay attention to them, we will be involved with each other and the work that comes alive here between us." I pause and look softly around the group making eye contact, my being is still, I can feel their warmth and anticipation. This is the moment in which the group is formed. I know my next words matter — they must connect us to a common endeavour, to each other and to our purpose.

*Here we are in this extraordinary situation, I have never directed a group on stage like this before, however we have two days to work together. This is the beginning, we cannot know what will be created between us, everything is yet to unfold, nothing is determined and everything is still possible. You will be warmed up to your involvement with us here, perhaps you anticipate an area of focus you hope to attend to in your development, maybe you anticipate being here as yourself and getting involved with others? It's a bit of a task aye, the beginning, finding a way to speak to each other that will begin to make this workshop a meaningful experience to you. Take some time now to let people know who you are and what you hope for in this workshop. As you do this get involved with each other, if you find yourself responding to something express yourself in response.*

I settle back in my chair, I feel satisfied, as I look around the group and a person begins to express herself in a soft vulnerable manner, others are attentive to her. It feels a good beginning.

During the workshop as the connections between people continue to deepen there are moments in which a great deal of vulnerability is being expressed, as Yvonne takes an image the large light pops with a flash. I particularly enjoy the way that producing psychodrama invokes and requires 100% of my attention and I believe a reciprocal relationship develops between group, protagonist and director in which a deep focus is provoked and sustained. I notice that I am conscious of orienting the production so that it is well presented in relation to the camera, however my primary attention is with the group. The warm up between members of this group is central to them; they do not appear to notice the sounds and lights; the action unfolds just as it might in a private space. At morning tea time we get more heaters and the area on the stage becomes warm.

Weeks later I meet with Yvonne and I am stunned by the images. I see myself at work and the extent of my involvement is evident. In several of the images I encounter myself as compassionate and fully involved. The memories and feelings living in me in the psychodrama workshop are still alive within me as I view the photographs. I take in the impact I am having on those involved and I observe myself in relation to them as they stand on the stage.

These photographs cause me to encounter myself as a director in a way that I have not experienced before. The effect is to bring me into contact with my humanity. As I experience the reciprocal nature of the effect between myself and others portrayed in the photographs, I am humanised.

My motivations were to support Yvonne's integration of her work as a photographer and her development as a psychodramatist and to assist in making psychodrama visible to the many people that will view these



images over time. I am surprised at the ongoing impact the images have on me as I continue to see the living spirit of the psychodramatic method alive in them.



**Hamish Brown** is a Psychodramatist with an interest in making our method more visible and more available to the public. He believes the psychodrama method and the AANZPA has a lot to contribute to the mental health and well-being of the people of New Zealand. He is currently the Chair of the Psychotherapy Board of Aotearoa New Zealand and on the Staff of the Auckland Training Center for Psychodrama. He practices as a registered psychotherapist and Psychodramatist in Auckland in private practice.



# Distortion, Praise and Authenticity: The Power of Mirroring

*PHILLIPA VAN KUILENBURG*

## *KEY WORDS:*

psychodrama, mirroring, modelling, J.L. Moreno, Zerka Moreno, development, role theory, relationship

Research has proven the need for positive social interactions for a child to survive (Poulton et al., 2020). A parent's job therefore is to create a nurturing environment in which the child experiences themselves as being safe, loved and valued. For many of my clients their parents failed miserably in this duty of care as their particular way of engaging their child was through control, judgment and criticism. The child had repeated experiences of being victimised, humiliated, shamed, patronised and pathologized until their confidence was eroded, their perception of self skewed and their ability to relate severely impaired. Somehow however those children survived into adulthood and maintained a small kernel of hope for a different future that led them to sign up for an eight week skills based programme for women on anger management, identity, self worth and assertiveness. That's when my work begins as I lead this self development programme.

Although the clients come voluntarily to the programme and want to learn and grow, they have suffered long term abuse that has left them hyper-sensitive, closed off and well defended. My role as a therapeutic guide either in a group or one to one is to assist these clients to free themselves from their past trauma. Moreno says, "...every true second time is the liberation from the first." (Moreno, 1983, p. 91) meaning that through psychodrama it is possible for a person to have a new experience, one that corrects, repairs or frees the person from the original trauma they suffered. As a skills based rather than therapy programme I focus on education and coaching and find mirroring to be a particularly useful process to assist development. This article highlights theory related to mirroring that informs my practice and describes my application of it in the self development programme.

## The Stage of the Mirror and Developmental Process of Mirroring

In a general sense mirroring is a process of reflection that informs a perception of self. It begins in early childhood and continues throughout life.

Kellerman states that mirroring "...is based on universal interpersonal feedback processes that evolve during our entire lifespan to reinforce our sense of self." He goes on to say, "Looking at ourselves in the mirror forces us to repeatedly come to terms with who we are, even though we continually change. This process of 'mirroring' is in fact a central and inherent part of 'being in the world,' since it helps us through life to synchronize the reciprocal interaction between the outer world and ourselves." (Kellerman, 2007)

Moreno's notion of child development and philosophy of sociometry, role development, spontaneity and creativity underpins the theory and concept of both the stage of development known as the stage of the mirror and the technique of mirroring.

Moreno identifies stages of development as 1) the matrix of all identity (primary narcissism), 2) the double (where the child does not yet experience as separate and voices what is not yet voiced), 3) the mirror (the outside reflection where the child begins to differentiate self from other) and 4) role reversal (when the other person exists even if s/he is out of sight) (Moreno, 1952). The stage of the mirror occurs as a part of early childhood development usually between the ages of around 3-4 and half yrs. According to Gwen Reekie (1997), "Mirroring enhances a person's awareness and recognition of oneself." The stage of the mirror is a process of maturation and formation of the self that occurs as the child receives mirroring from a variety of sources e.g. literally looking in a mirror, comments from parents, interactions with friends, etc., that shape and grow their perceptions and beliefs about their identity. Cooley (1902) used the metaphor of the self as a mirror, or a *looking-glass self*, to illustrate the idea that an individual's sense of self is primarily formed as a result of their perceptions of how others perceive them.

The view of mirroring within social psychology maintains that children develop in interaction with certain main caretakers who either stimulate or inhibit their emotional and cognitive growth as well as their sense of self. These significant others convey an outer social reality with which the child can identify. In the dialogue with this outer social reality, the child becomes an object for itself, thus developing a self as object (*me*). The self as object, or the social self, is the first conception of a self and grows from the perceptions and responses of other people. (Kellerman, 2007)

Relating to Moreno's role theory Casson describes how the process of mirroring occurs: "In the mirror the 'I' observes 'me' (I observes myself); I am audience of my own performance; the subject 'I' and the object 'me'. 'I'

instruct 'me' (I tell myself what to do, direct myself self.) The client is audience to his own behaviour, his observer ego is suddenly engaged and the smile of recognition shows some insight was achieved." (Casson, 2004, p. 58)

Casson's description of mirroring resulting in a smile of recognition however is not always the case as the experience a person has of being mirrored by someone else depends on the role relationship with the person providing the mirroring and what it is they are mirroring. Zerka Moreno describes mirroring as when the client "...sees herself as others see her." (Horvatin, 2006, p. 41). This process becomes complicated when the mirror provided creates a distortion in the person's self perception. It is this phenomenon that is central for the clients attending the self development programme.

### Distorted Mirroring

A useful metaphor I use to explain the concept of the distorted mirror to my clients is the hall of mirrors found at a fairground where a person can stand in front of a mirror and see their reflection grossly changed either elongated, shortened, widened etc. As a sideshow at a fairground the distortions are typically a source of amusement however such distorted mirroring also occurs in reality and can result in long lasting damage.

The notion of a distorted mirror is mentioned by a number of people. In her book *Psychodrama: Group Psychotherapy as Experimental Theatre*, Eva Roine describes an example of the distorted mirror occurring when a protagonist sets out a scene: they often give very unpleasant descriptions of the auxiliary egos in the scene. Moreno calls this the *distorted mirror technique* because the protagonist usually disregards objective reality and presents a distorted picture. (Roine, 1997, p. 106-107)

Zerka Moreno differentiates three different possible distortions that can occur in mirroring, "The portrayal of the actual person may differ greatly in many respects from the picture the subject has of that person. It can be seen easily that a number of distortions of the role can thus take place: (a) the distortion that comes from the auxiliary ego himself as it is coloured by his own experiences; (b) the distortion which the subject suggests to the auxiliary ego because of her subjective experiences in reference to the person to be portrayed by the ego; and (c) the distortion may come from the actual person". (Zerka Moreno, 2006, p. 38) For my clients usually all three of these distortions are at play and require quite a lot of untangling in interactions.

It is the long lasting damage created by distorted mirroring that I aim to correct in the work we do on the self development programme. This approach is well expressed by Clayton and Carter, "Mirroring is designed to increase human awareness. It is not intended to promote evaluation; either

an accepting evaluation or a condemning evaluation. It's not designed to promote any kind of evaluation. It's designed to heighten awareness, to enlarge our senses and through the enlargement of our senses to enable us to enlarge our whole being." (2004, p. 43)

### Long Term Effects of Distorted Mirroring

The effects of mirroring can be defining and long lasting. "We continue to rely on the various more or less appreciative responses towards us all through life." (Kellerman, 2007) Sometimes, when comments are made often enough, a person begins to believe them as true and they begin to fit their self image into the shape defined by those viewpoints.

As part of my preparation for leading the programme on self development I consider what has contributed to the clients' beliefs about themselves and how their identities have formed in early childhood. The starting point for most of the women attending is in Transactional Analysis terms "I'm not OK". They tend to be highly self critical and have a perception that there is something wrong with them, that they are not good enough and in many ways are inferior. It is my assessment that they have developed this perception of self as a result of the mirroring they have received.

Having repeated experiences of distorted mirroring in early childhood has been a major contributing factor for the afflictions the women present on the self development programme. I have heard innumerable accounts from clients' childhood that reveal how labelling, critiquing, attacking, coaching and conditioning have been used to correct, change, ridicule or drive the client as a child to accept a distorted view of themselves.

For example Mary grew up with a mother who was constantly critical about how Mary looked. Throughout Mary's teenage years her mother would make negative comments pointing out that she was too fat and would insist on putting her on a diet. Growing up, Mary believed what her mother had presented to her so by the time she was an adult coming to me as a client Mary identified herself as fat, ugly and bad.

Another client recounts an interaction with her mother when she tells her that she got 98% in a school exam. Her mother's reply was, "Well why didn't you get 100%?" Despite being a successful student she could never seem to be good enough. No matter what her endeavour, her mother would typically focus on the gap and find her wanting.

As I see it the problem lies initially with the person providing the mirroring. Often what is done is a misguided attempt to correct a behaviour or build a particular concept e.g. of being an attractive or academically successful woman. In contrast to Clayton & Carter's view expressed earlier, the person mirroring is typically focused on evaluation, usually a condemning evaluation. Their approach generally suggests they have



taken a superior position, have an idea that the individual needs fixing in some way and conveys a lack of generosity of spirit.

As a clinician I see the negative impact and consequences for many women that I consider have been subjected to 'distorted' mirroring. The effects are far reaching. One client described her situation where her partner has been calling her names and criticising her, she has snapped back provoking him to physically attack her while her 14 year old daughter watches the event. The client has ended up in hospital for yet another broken bone and is angry but resigned and oblivious that there is anything wrong about the situation — to her this is just how it is. This scene of domestic violence is not uncommon amongst the clients attending the programme. Typically these clients are unable to differentiate between what is appropriate and inappropriate; their ability to express their feelings is severely inhibited; their way of engaging exemplifies what they have learned i.e. to be critical, judgmental, harsh, advising, demanding; they are unable to sustain long term respectful relationships; they are well defended and oriented to the world as a hostile place.

## Feedback and Praise

Moreno's intention and use of the technique of mirroring to me differs from feedback and praise. Both feedback and praise tend to have contaminants that interfere with a person's freedom to make their own conclusions about what they consider to be positive or negative or what awareness they might develop as a result of the mirroring. The authentic mirror portrays what has been seen or heard and leaves the judgement or conclusions about that to the individual to reach for themselves.

Originally feedback was the label describing the a high pitched squeal coming through an electronic or speaker system when there is a return to the input of a part of the output of a machine, system, or process. Negative feedback was used to describe in electronic terms "feedback that tends to dampen a process by applying the output against the initial conditions" and that of the positive variety to mean "feedback that tends to magnify a process or increase its output." Feedback emerged as part of our language in the 1970 and 80s as a method of critiquing someone's behaviour intended to be a form of coaching or guidance. A derogatory description of the experience is that of a shit sandwich — *something critical sandwiched between something palatable*.

Praise is predicated on evaluation in contrast to authentic mirroring which is free from evaluation. In a recent discussion in the self development programme focusing on the use of praise, a group member stated that she did not trust it as it felt false. She felt she was being patronized. She described that the mirroring came across as mechanistic as if she was being given a pat on the head. There was no specific information about what was

observed by the person providing the mirroring and she was not able to get any useful information that might have been helpful for developing her own self awareness.

Distorted mirroring including praise and feedback can have long term negative effects. Countering these requires significant therapeutic work. In the self development programme clients are assisted by experiencing what I describe as authentic mirroring as a means of expanding their self awareness. In the next section I describe what I mean by authentic mirroring and what is required to be an authentic mirror.

### **On Being an Authentic Mirror**

I describe an authentic mirror as one where the reflection is one of generosity and acceptance that the person being mirrored is ok and not needing to be corrected or fixed. The authentic mirror is based on respect to self and others and mirroring is given without conditions. As Casson (2004) says, accurate mirroring becomes a source of empathy, and is central to Moreno's philosophy of the encounter between people as the basis for healing and growth.

There are a number of things to take into account to be an authentic mirror. As we mirror a person, ideally, we warm up to being generous and loving towards them and see them for all that they are, not what we might want, or not want, them to be. Authentic mirroring provides an accurate portrayal of a person's functioning.

The challenge is to warm up to unconditional love that does not demand that the other person changes to please us or relate to them as if they need fixing in some way.

Often a relationship contains conditions that are invisible that can interfere with the mirroring process. An important aspect is to think about what assumptions and expectations either oneself or the other person may be holding about the relationship and what impact these might have e.g. if there are authority issues. An authentic mirror takes account of the relationship and connection with the person they are mirroring and the impact the mirroring might have.

Another important aspect has to do with warm up and a person's readiness to receive mirroring. If the other party is not willing to receive anything and you still go ahead then the mirroring is imposed, boundaries are crossed and that is unacceptable.

### **My Application of Mirroring in the Self Development Programme**

Typically there is considerable work to assist the women on the self development programme to come out from behind their defence mechanisms, initially building rapport and establishing group norms that create a welcoming, respectful climate that will encourage them to soften

and free up enough to share their experiences. One group guideline is that advice giving is discouraged. Another is that we convey a generosity of spirit and relate to people respectfully. In such an environment group members learn that they can relax, that they can share their experiences and will be accepted for who they are. It is not unusual for someone to say at the end of a session, "Normally I don't say much in a group but I felt comfortable to talk here". Group members value the supportive nature of the group and understanding that comes from sharing experiences. They mirror each other validating each other's pain and accepting each person as being "ok".

My approach in the programme is to regard all interactions as potential opportunities where mirroring might be of value. Because the focus is on skills development there are particular things that I focus on all of which are inherent in the functioning of an authentic mirror.

I attend to my relationship with the clients as it is important that they feel trusting, open and willing to receive the mirroring. For example this might involve me asking permission before providing coaching, first acknowledging a person's intent, encouraging appreciation and companionable generous enquiry.

If I or someone else has provided modelling I ask what they notice about the impact of that. I ask what their experience was when others tell them what to do and draw attention to moments when a person seems to be rejecting of mirroring. These approaches often result in discussions about the importance of asking rather than assuming that providing mirroring is appropriate.

While I may teach models and concepts to help understanding, my job is also to assist integration through reflection, application to their own story and actual practice.

I encourage them to role reverse, to make assessments about situations, communication and relationships and distinguish between ways of being that might be productive or counterproductive. I encourage them to listen to their communication and what warm up this is likely to produce. I get them to be attentive to language noticing words that indicate a need to tell or advise.

Although the stated purpose of the group is not therapeutic, the process of sharing their stories, coming out of isolation and learning to relate respectfully is therapeutic. The mirroring they receive from each other and me makes a difference.

## Conclusion

My reflections on mirroring are drawn from many years of working with clients applying what I have learned through psychodrama. The particular client group that I believe have suffered from distorted mirroring are women who have low self esteem, little self awareness and are often victims of

domestic violence. I have found these women have benefitted from experiencing what I call authentic mirroring, that is offering an accurate reflection of what is observed in a spirit of love and respect and without conditions.

## REFERENCES

- Casson, J. (2004). *Drama, Psychotherapy and Psychosis: Dramatherapy and Psychodrama with People Who Hear Voices*. Routledge, London, New York
- Clayton, M. & Carter, P. (2004). *The Living Spirit of the Psychodramatic Method*. Resource Books. Auckland.
- Cooley, C.H. (1902). *The looking glass self: Theory and Examples*. Accessed 30 October 2020 <https://www.sociologygroup.com/looking-glass-self-theory/>
- Horvatin, T. & Schreiber, E. (Eds.) (2006). *The Quintessential Zerka: Writings by Zerka Toeman Moreno on Psychodrama, Sociometry and Group Psychotherapy*. Routledge. London, New York.
- Kellermann, P. F. (2007). Let's face it: mirroring in psychodrama. In Baim, C., Burmeister, J. & Maciel, M. *Psychodrama: Advances in Theory and Practice*, Routledge.
- Merriam-Webster *Get Looped In on 'Feedback' Its history is more than just noise*. Accessed 30 October 2020 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/the-history-of-feedback>
- Moreno, J.L. (1952). Psychodramatic Production Techniques. *Group Psychotherapy*, 4: 243-273.
- Poulton, R. et al., (2020) *The Origins of You: How Childhood Shapes Later Life*. Interview, Radio New Zealand, Sunday Morning 13<sup>th</sup> Sept 2020. Accessed 30 October 2020 <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/sunday/audio/2018763801/new-book-examines-how-childhood-shapes-later-life>
- Reekie, G. (1997) *Alice and her sisters through the looking glass: The value of mirroring*. Unpublished thesis. AANZPA Inc.
- Roine, E. (1997) *Psychodrama: Group Psychotherapy as Experimental Theatre*. Jessica Kinsley Publishers. London and Bristol, Pennsylvania
- van Kuilenburg, P. (2006) *The Role of the Coach: The use of role training to develop others*. Unpublished thesis. AANZPA Inc.

# Three Ceremonies: Sociodrama In Situ

ANNA HERIOT

## KEY WORDS:

sociodrama, ceremony, J.L. Moreno, social atom repair, spontaneity, doubling, mirroring

## Introduction: Integration of sociodrama into my being

I respond somatically to completing my written and practice tasks for my final accreditation. Experiencing myself cellularly as enlivened and buoyed, I am able to sink down into the ocean of my life and work fearlessly, then bob up again, corklike, lightly and joyfully. My confidence, strangely, also feels unsinkable: another completely new experience. I remember Max Clayton looking at me in one memorable moment and saying, "You're alright you know." I heard him and believed him, but I didn't feel it. Now I do. I begin to present myself as a sociodramatist, one who works with the whole group and different subgroups. I know I offer them, and they actively receive, something of real value. I feel the reverberations as I work.

Truth to tell, I am anointed!

Like other sociodramatists, I work in a society where I am called something else, in my case, a celebrant. As I write my thesis (Heriot, 2019), I realise that I hold my identity as a sociodramatist which is not mirrored back from the larger society.

What follows are three ceremonies conducted this year, 2020, and my commentary on the reverberations in my professional practice as a sociodramatist including the formulation of sociodrama principles. I present three pieces of work and elaborate on my reflections below.

My renewed and expanded identity is enhanced and validated in my work this year

Firstly, a *green* family burial for Margaret in a new allotment next to a conventional cemetery, an endangered, protected Melaleuca Forest where an arborist has set out the plots so the burials don't disturb the tree roots. I work with Margaret's son Richard, his wife Joanne and daughter Cristy, and later with Margaret's sister Beryl. The funeral is for the family. The numbers are within the Covid limit.

Secondly, a wedding: Jill and Max are marrying in middle age. Her

mother Jane who lives in a nursing home dementia ward is to be a witness.

Thirdly, a living wake where Bill is dying of cancer, at home with his wife. He wants his grandchildren to know his story. His wife Gillian and daughters Barbara, Susan and Felicity plan to host a luncheon for this purpose, including his siblings and their families. The work unfolds as Covid arrives.

### 1. The green burial: warmup to spontaneity, again and again

In this first scene I meet with Richard, his wife Joanne and middle daughter Cristy in their sitting room. We each sit slightly lopsided and forward in our chairs and I present myself, saying that I am there to compose and conduct the ceremony in tune with them and how they want to honour Margaret, whatever they require. I invite them to tell me about Margaret. "Ah!" they say, "She was amazing!" And the stories tumble out, of her love of children and family, nature and animals, and her great sense of playfulness and fun. I notice we are each settling back in our chairs and that they haven't mentioned Margaret's parents, her siblings or indeed her childhood. I ask about them and they say her childhood was difficult, that she and her sister were taken into care and badly abused by their foster carer, and there's a lot they don't know. Joanne reads a long Children's Services Report from her phone in full referring to them as illegitimate, starving and uncared for by their single, unmarried mother. The language is telling. She reads softly and steadily for some time, without haste, right through to the end.

Sociometry is inherently systemic, I conclude. I find it hard to hear and my spontaneity drops. I come back to myself and realise I am mirroring them, also with my head bowed. I wonder where the health in the system is and ask who was there for her — a grandparent perhaps. They say no. Again, we are silent. I think to myself that this is important for the ceremony and wonder how it can be included. After a pause I say that for all the pain of her childhood, as an adult she was loving and much loved and they nod emphatically, telling further fragments of what they know. I realise intuitively that this is enough for now, reassured by these words, written twelve years before I was born:

*There is such a uniqueness about each actual momentary position of an individual in the community that a knowledge of the structure surrounding and pressing upon him at that moment is necessary before drawing conclusions. (Moreno, 2012, p. 25)*

In the second scene I meet with Richard at my house to assist him with his eulogy, doubling and mirroring him. I invite him, with his three adult children and Margaret's sister Beryl, to shine the light on Margaret in their mind's eye and focus on the heart of their relationship with her and the



gifts of her life, to imagine themselves speaking to her and their family directly and to write down what they want to say. I have the confidence to conduct this leader-led warmup.

At the ceremony I curve the chairs including Margaret in her coffin next to me. Children run around with parents and others picking them up from time to time; there is no sense of disruption. I say that Margaret had a difficult childhood. That she was taken from her mother and fostered at the age of four, that *foster* means to *feed and nourish* and Mrs Crofter did neither of those things.

Richard, with his hand on her coffin, addresses his Mum and thanks her for her love and care, for the joys and security of his childhood regardless of their gypsy life and for not becoming an alcoholic or drug addict as she could have so easily, given her childhood. Beryl takes his place and brings everything out, including Mrs Crofter's brutality. She speaks of Margaret's love and forgiveness for her, Beryl, and care for her children when Margaret was yet to have her own. Beryl describes how she wronged Margaret and how grateful she is that they reconciled towards the end of Margaret's life. She says how much she loved her and felt herself loved in return and she will miss her forever. She drops her head and is silent for a long moment, then folds the pages of her script, nods quickly again, smiles slightly and returns to her seat.

There is a sense of a sigh and a settling in the group as we continue. Processing with Margaret along the path through the Melaleuca Forest, I imagine the little girl Margaret, somewhere safe from the abusive house, alive in nature, making a decision that she will never treat children as she is being treated. Rather that she will love all the children and those who have no voice: animals and nature, the poor and homeless. And now she will be at rest in this beautiful place, so in tune with her.

At the wake Beryl takes a seat next to me, full of stories. Richard's five year old granddaughter plonks herself on the other side of me to ask direct questions of life and death and I feel myself between two burbling, joyfully spontaneous little girls. We are warmed up to being life giving.

## 2. A wedding: Sociometric shifts in rites of passage are social atom repair

Jill and Max are marrying in middle age. When we first meet they say they want all their family and friends to rejoice with them at their wedding. Max is the only partner of Jill's approved by her mother Jane. He is a sustaining presence when Jill returns home wounded by her mother's vindictiveness. Jill is also appreciative of the changes in their relationship and her mother's softening in this last phase of her life; they have had several long periods of estrangement. Maria is delighted to be a witness and signatory for the wedding. Jill's twin Joan will walk her down the aisle. They are dissimilar,

fraternal twins who also have had periods of estrangement. Now Joan will stand in for their much-loved father, in this renewal of tradition.

As our work on the ceremony proceeds, Joan calls to say that their mother can't come to the wedding: she is too anxious. Jill and Max are distressed and helpless. I appreciate the centrality of this core subgroup and of Jill's mother. I propose that we have the wedding in two parts, the first to be the legal ceremony with Jane at her nursing home, and Joan *giving her away*. Jane can choose a hymn and her close friend Brigid can say a prayer they choose together. It turns out there is a small park next door and we make the ceremony ready to go for when the lockdown ceases.

Whilst the second part of the ceremony with their larger group of guests will contain the same essential elements, there is a range of subgroups and it will require different elements in tune with the larger group and the social context. It may be partially or wholly on Zoom. We three, Jill, Max and I, agree we are confident as a flexible core working group, at ease with whatever unfolds.

### 3. A living wake where Bill is dying of cancer; spontaneity ebbs and flows as I adapt this methodology to this unique situation moment by moment

In the first scene Barbara calls to ask if I know someone who can do a *living wake*. I say, "Yes, I can: I can work with you and your family to create what you want."

The next scene is an in-person meeting with Barbara and her middle sister Susan, with their husbands, at Barbara's home. It takes several hours. They are beginning to warm up to the reality of Bill's impending death, though it is hard for them to speak of it, and they don't know what to do. I ask a few questions and listen as they share their thoughts and feelings for the first time.

We are warming up together. They say Bill wants his grandchildren to know his story and their mother Gillian suggested they have a living wake. Susan, a practical woman, wants to have a lunch for their extended family at her house and we spend some time considering how to arrange the space, with the display of photos they have in mind. It becomes obvious the space is awkward and catering would be problematic. The decision rests for now, as does the date. Barbara will arrange a meeting with Bill and Gillian and their youngest sister Felicity who is arriving from Cairns. At this point there are many unknowns: not the least is when Bill will die, and how long he will be present and conscious and able to achieve his purpose. Our warmup progresses.

The third scene is at Bill and Gillian's home with Barbara and Felicity. Bill is alert, funny and welcoming. They prefer a lunch at a restaurant they all know, centrally located for those coming from different country

locations. At this point there are no restrictions and we plan the logistics, the flow of the story and the purpose of the gathering. It emerges that it is a ceremony of gratitude and appreciation and will include Bill's siblings and their families and a few very close friends. It remains difficult to make the date.

Subsequent scenes are held using Facetime, phone and email, still with the hope of an in-person lunch with special cake and we plan the ceremony accordingly. I send them the first draft, which they amend a little. They collectively express surprise and satisfaction in our following scene on Facetime and there are tears as we decide on the final details and make the date.

Eventually it is clear that the whole ceremony will need to be on Zoom if it is to occur at all. Bill is despairing and ready to give up. Felicity gently coaches her Dad in the process of Zoom. A grand daughter takes him on a Zoom inspection of her new home in Toowoomba. He has been an adventurer and *learner by doing* all his life. His spontaneity arises once more and we proceed.

Felicity moderates a rehearsal to warm up those relatives unfamiliar with the process and two days later we have the ceremony. The young ones dress up. Some old folk are comfortable in their lounges, peering at the screen in amazement. Following the introduction and warmup, Bill's closest brother and Bill share their stories, some old and some new and then, with little prompting, speak from their hearts and the intimacy deepens. Bill's oldest brother James, a quiet intellectual and very different, is moved to tears. The grandchildren are riveted. The internet drops out from time to time. Felicity patiently attends to it and supports her Dad as the stories and gratitude continue to flow, directly to each one. After the formal conclusion the whole family is divided into breakout groups to continue their conversations, which they do with great energy and verve. The ceremony has taken two hours altogether. I reflect; I am orientated to the whole system here and now as it shifts and evolves.

By the end I am exhausted and rudderless. Lacking the choreography and sociometry in the physicality of the staging and the warmup of a rehearsal in situ, I am adrift, unable to make any assessment at all and ending up in a pit. I'm most concerned about Bill, fearing he had found it disjointed and fragmented, then about James, and on and on it went. However, Felicity texted me shortly afterwards to say Bill was resting with a beatific smile on his face, listening to the music and to say that they felt very satisfied and really well held throughout. I haul myself out of the sewer realising that I am a poet even when at the bottom of the pit.

The whole was recorded for those who were unable to be present and their responses are congruent with Felicity's. Gillian says she realised after the ceremony that she needs to tell her daughters how much she

appreciates them, and now especially as she also is approaching the last phase of her life.

I have had to adjust my self assessment, and my relationship with Zoom, and to appreciate that there are valuable elements of Zoom ceremony which are not present in in-person ceremony. More people can attend, older people and those far away can be comfortably present at home with their local and heart community, everyone can adjust their own volume, and intimacy actually can be evoked. I realise that I adapt this method to each unique context.

I have a friend who is a dedicated and much valued Uniting Church Minister who is doing her sermons using the word version of Zoom. She hates it, preferring to make rough notes and refer to them as she flows with the here-and-now of presence with the congregation. She also experiences the loss of intimacy. However, the members of her congregation have a different experience, enjoying not having to go out and present themselves in the world, feeling her presence in a personal way and having it recorded so they can listen again. Colleagues in ritual, we both adjust ruefully to our changing times.

In the two situations above, I was able to call the groups to order in a companionable manner, by doubling and mirroring progressive roles and warming up to my own and others' spontaneity, in spite of my own discomfort and drops in spontaneity at times. As I write now, I appreciate how the work resonated with each community, the drama in situ unfolded and the work flowed. Farnsworth (2013) wrote of Max illustrating flow as "a spring of living waters." I conclude that in these two instances as a sociodramatist I have tapped the spring of living waters.

Like Moreno I am ambitious with my work: "a truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an objective than the whole of mankind." (Moreno, 1993, p. 90). I expect that my clients may be freed from limiting conserved notions or refreshed with a new experience: their spontaneity heightened and relationships strengthened through the process and intimacy of our preparatory work, and the subsequent enactment of their ceremony with their community.

I realise my work is often therapeutic. What I offer my clients could be called a contemplative opportunity, to step away from the imperatives of busy modern life and simply be present with themselves, each other and their experiences, and be open. To listen, express, and enquire, taking the time to attend to the present moment, and to gather in community to share the wonders of this intimate presence, in joy and sorrow. Often, in evaluations, my clients write that, although the ceremony was satisfying for them, even more so were our free-flowing meetings in preparation. Oh yes, I think to myself, "It's all in the warmup" as Max used to say.

## REFERENCES

- Farnsworth, J. (2013). Boundary and Flow: Max Clayton and Psychodrama in Action. *AANZPA Journal* #22
- Heriot, Anna (2019). "Community despair in the face of controversial tragedy addressed through sociodrama in situ", Unpublished Thesis. AANZPA Inc
- J.L. Moreno (1993). *Who shall survive? Foundations of Sociometry, Group Psychotherapy and Sociodrama*. American Society of Group Psychotherapy & Psychodrama. McLean VA. (Original work published 1953)
- J.L. Moreno. (2012). *Sociometry, Experimental Method and the Science of Society*. Northwest Psychodrama Association. (Original work published 1951)



**Anna Heriot** is a community worker, recently accredited Sociodramatist and maker and master of ceremonies. Her settler childhood in Wiradjeri country, southern New South Wales, was steeped in family and community rituals. Psychodrama radically changed her life from her first training in 1989. Realising that sociodrama in situ best describes her work in community development and the making and conducting of ceremony has given her life, retrospectively and currently, new ground. Anna can be contacted at [anna@annaheriot.com.au](mailto:anna@annaheriot.com.au)





# A Haiku Journey — Slow Walk Around a Small Island

CHRISTO PATTY

*Slow Island walking —  
Journey with Christo on his  
Island — A Haiku*

## KEY WORDS:

writing, love, poetry, reflections, warm-up, imagination, environment

## Prologue

I think we're all time travellers. In a second we can conjure events from the past and the experiences and feelings of *back there and then* can flood into our *here and now* and become real. And the opposite can occur — a present moment can activate my memory glands. I often experience this when writing Haiku.

There's a formula to traditional Haiku — three lines — 5 syllables in the first, 7 in the second and 5 in the third. I like and prescribe to the seventeen syllable limit as I experience a satisfying feeling of push-back, a kind of requisite resistance to other poetic foibles I may have at the time.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Please join me for a slow walk around my island home of Coochiemudlo. Along the way I'll let you in on how this journey started, my now abiding passion for Haiku, how I benefit from my practice, a little of my process and how I use it in my work with clients.

## Beginnings

It's October 2018 and I'm a participant in a five-day psychodrama workshop. Each evening we sit and write up an aspect of the day's process. Despite encouragement from the group leaders Diz and Sara to write, I find myself in an extreme version of writer's block. As I sit in a funk with myself, I remember that Haiku are 3-line poems. "Maybe I could squeeze out a poem or two to stimulate my reflections" I say to myself. Now, I don't really know what Haiku are, but I start. Here's one of my first efforts:

*The body in full motion  
Feels the flowing river  
Life is now*

I write it reflecting on a moment in a drama in response to a group member. I read it out to her and she is moved. My funk is shifting. I try another, also from the day:

*People see I'm tall,  
My gifts used to make me feel small  
Now I see further*

This also seems to land well with the receiver. I feel stimulated to write up other moments in this way. I follow up with the group members with additional (what I think are Haiku) after the workshop.

As I look at these early attempts, I feel slightly embarrassed, but also pleased — “What were you thinking?” says my “more knowledgeable self-critic”. “Ah yes, but it got you moving” responds my *wise guide*.

After my workshop writing experience, I make a commitment to write Haiku each day. I take a breath, compose an email to this effect and send it to my fellow workshop compadres and they respond by flooding my inbox with beautiful messages of encouragement and love. I am buoyed up by this, so off I go and I start publishing on my blog page, LinkedIn and Facebook.

I realized after a bit, that I wanted to *give* more to the reader, this included the use of titles. I like to link the Haiku to short videos as well — no more than 10 seconds usually and this keeps my interest and from what folks tell me, the readers as well.

Lately I've eased up on the use of titles as I want the reader to *get their own juices flowing* without too much announcement of what's to follow. In this article you'll have to make do without the videos, so hopefully your imagination gets going.

### **A bit about my process — what gets me going.**

One of the principles of writing Haiku is that the three lines should include references to nature and the seasons. I hadn't quite grasped this when I started out, but you'll see this principle reflected in a number of my Haiku. I'm also not a slave to this principle, but I think for me, the sense of walking as I warm up to write a Haiku, gives me pause to stop. It's as if the forest, my island, is making a request of me — to stop what I'm doing right now, or to paraphrase what David Whyte says most poignantly “to stop what I'm becoming as I do it”.

Since I started writing regular Haiku, I've found my awareness to my

surroundings has been heightened. I find myself taking time to pay attention to things in my environment and so a greater sense of attunement to what's happening around me.

The stimulus to write a Haiku happens very quickly as I go about my life. It could be an experience from being with a friend, or a moment from my work, or the movement of a bird, or a sound I hear just once, or is repeated, or a shift in the light revealing an object from a shadow I had previously not seen. Often it involves noticing people as they go about their daily lives. I think many people if you ask them, are either secretly or openly people watchers. I notice this when I walk through a city and see the rows of people sitting at tables in a café. Frequently they're watching others as they pass. Hmmm, I wonder what they make of this?

I find the writing of Haiku similar to mediation. I notice this affects my physiology — my breathing changes, heart rates slacken if it's been racing and I become more in touch with my physical sensations. I think these are good things, given we are physical forms — embodiment is practically being aware of the body that we have and the nuances of how we move, touch the ground, get around and so on.

Using the 5-7-5 syllabic form, shapes me to be present with the stimulus of the Haiku. There's a number of principles for writing Haiku and you can Google "Haiku" to find any number of writers who have shared their suggestions. The work of Mark Blasini (*The way of Haiku*) resonates with me. He talks about *Singularity* (focus on a moment), *Accuracy* (descriptive over interpretive), *Accessibility* (words that allow the reader to enter the experience), *Economy* (take out the waffle) and *Brevity* (the 5-7-5 or such that the entire Haiku is said in one breath). This last one is a beaut — not only has assisted my writing, but guess what else.... my breathing...I guess I'm a slow learner in this reflective meditative space.

I also aspire to have something like a *surprise* in the Haiku. If I break the Haiku into 2 parts, then, in the second part I'm wanting a bit of a shift. I'm not sure if I always get there. See what you think.

Join me now as I set off with you around my island.

## Setting off around the Island

### *Life in downpipes*

Coochiemudlo, or just *Coochie*, means *redrock* in the Jandaywal language of the Kuwanpal tribe. It's my beautiful island home in the middle of Moreton Bay. My work as a therapist, executive coach and organisational consultant is conducted on the island but I'm also away from the island much of the time. The 10-minute ferry ride is enough to loosen the hold of life's corporatisation and allow the island to work its magic.

We've had lots of rain lately and the striped marsh frogs are very

audible. I stop and record them, so I become aware I'm paying attention to the ordinary things... they're at it again right NOW in the downpipes.

*Croak croak croak croak croak  
Urgent calling now it stops,  
My heart lifts a beat*

### *Steve and Maree's Garden*

Steve and Maree are my neighbours. We often hang out over the fence and connect up over the day. Both of us also have a habit of sometimes making *waving* gestures to each other which means "afternoon tea — 3.00 pm, just pop over". They have the most fantastic garden and in return for herbs and seasonal veggies, I frequently cook for them and take over a pastiche of different meals. Sometimes this surprises them, but they appreciate the community.

*Sharing garden greens  
Is more than just about food,  
It says I see you*

### *From my deck life comes to me*

I am constantly delighted by the way the bird life on the island shapes my interactions with the environment.

*The birds come to feed  
They fill the world with their voice,  
I feel my heart beat*

### *Pelicans*

Pelicans are amazing birds. There are several places on the island, where, if I'm quiet, I can approach — right up beside them, as they move from the land and lower themselves into the water.

*This clumsy walking  
Tied in rope — on water grace  
And ease — pelican*

### *At the water's edge*

I find the water's edge a liminal space. My eyes and ears wake up as I

position myself right there where the land gives way to the sea in various stages. As I sat half in and half out of the water a few months ago I doodled the following in the mud:

*Sit here with me, let  
The stillness of the bay work  
Its timeless magic*

### *Tree of my youth*

One day as I walked around the wetlands, I stopped beside a Moreton Bay fig tree. I've often stopped here and pondered and reflected. For some time, I'd wondered what my strong felt connection with this particular tree was. I notice a certain shadow fall across the boughs, and I'm taken back to a similar tree that grew right on the water's edge at Redcliffe where I grew up. My mind immediately fills with joy at remembering climbing the tree when I was younger, pretending to be captaining a ship, aloft in the sails, riding the storm on a windy day, finding hidden treasure in a nook or cranny, escaping barking dogs with my cousin as a guardian angel. I write the following lines in the sand at the base of the tree.

*Mmmm, sweet memories,  
Many are the thoughts from climbing  
This tree in my youth*

### *The ferry*

The ferry acts as a gateway to the island. It's a short 10-minute trip but that's enough to encourage most folk to leave the vicissitudes of their 'mainland' behind. I usually can't wait to get on the ferry on the way home, but even leaving the island I fill up as I take in a sunrise or feel the salt spray on my face. One evening, in a particularly thoughtless mode for the lives of others who also visit my island, I note the following in my phone:

*The newbie drags his  
Overfull trolley aboard  
"Fuck you" I murmur*

### *Adam's memorial*

On the northern most part of the track through the wetlands stands a small cairn of rocks, some Buddhist prayer flags, shells and some handwritten notes from Adam's children. This marks where he died, quite suddenly,

one summer's evening 5 years ago. He was running on his beloved Coochiemudlo and suffered a severe heart attack. Adam was a mate and a real community minded man and as I walk past this space on most days, I feel something of his presence in my life.

*What a magic thing  
Where this gentle spirit fell —  
Cicadas singing*

### *Curlews*

So much has been written about Curlews. I feel like writing a Haiku would be like adding an extra brush stroke to the Mona Lisa. Yet they are embedded in my being as part of Island life. I was reminded about this several years ago when I visited a friend in Canada. He's a bird watcher and he asked straight up as I told him I lived on Coochiemudlo "So how was the curlew count this year?" I hadn't realized how curlews were uniquely identified with my island. Their relationship with the night is with me as I write:

*Can you hear it yet?  
The wail and cry of curlews  
Piercing the still night*

### *Kayaking and the life of boats*

I'm a keen paddler and as often as I can, I make my way out from the island, away to other islands or simply around Coochiemudlo. There's something about being on the water in my skin on frame kayak which helps me be at one with the movement of the ocean and the seasons. I'm also constantly delighted by how marine life somehow finds me in my floating nylon sarcophagus.

*Half way' round Coochie  
I stop paddling and breathe — a  
Turtle takes one too*

### *Letting down into water*

When Adrienne, my eldest daughter comes to visit, we almost always make our way to our favourite swimming spot. In summer, mornings are particularly attractive to get to the spot early, shed our clothes and let the water cradle our bodies. I really feel the waters have some kind of curative powers.



*Coochie's warm waters —  
Nothing is better than this  
For vitality*

### *The wind*

Mostly I find the winds on the island to be my friends. There are limits to this, especially when rounding the tip of the island in my kayak to be greeted by 20 knot headwinds. At these times I dig in, try to keep my form and go steadily. At other times I find my equilibrium and resolve is tested.

*Nothing about wind  
Helps me walk more upright when  
Carrying my bags*

### *The ebb and flow of the tide continues*

Life on the island revolves around tides. Some movement to the island is restricted by the constantly shifting sandbars, but the rhythm and pace of the tide makes its own chorus. While I love all variations in the tidal opera, I'm particularly fond of high tide in springtime.

*The tide rushes in  
Gently kisses the foreshore,  
Then rolls out to sea*

### *Flowers of Coochiemudlo — Fleurs d'une ile*

The day after an early autumn rainstorm and while summers hot breath still had bite, I was struck by how quickly flowers seemed to respond to this overnight drenching. My neighbour points out some old flowers which I remember as cottage flowers. Everywhere seems to be alive with colour. I write the following on a notepad and leave it on my neighbours' fence:

*Around the island  
Fresh colours blossom, Autumn  
Wears a bright palette*

### *Spider webs*

I love watching spiders move in their web. When sunlight or rain catches them, I'm immediately taken by their shape and form and I marvel at how their architects live in their creations. I'm taken by what I sense is the dual purpose of these structures — communication and containment.

*Spider webs restrict  
Movement, yet each wriggle is  
Felt from far away*

*Life in the forest lives in the undergrowth*

If I take my time, really take my time, as I walk through certain parts of the wetlands, I can feel the forest's beating heart. At these times, all forms of life reveal themselves to me.

*Unknowing Autumn  
A magpie wanders slowly,  
Betrayed by the leaves*

*Sitting around a fire*

Covid 19 has led to some touching evening gatherings with friends around a fire. I sense some of David Whyte's poetry accompany us at these times — "Time to go into the night, where the night has eyes to recognize its own"

*This fire pit has held  
The joy, the love, the sadness  
As witness to friends*

*New Life — my first Grandchild Klara is born in a far-away land*

In April this year, my first grand-daughter Klara is born in Warsaw. I am at once delighted and saddened that I can't be with her and my daughter Elyssa and her partner Agatka as their world opens up anew. On this day as I walk past a couple with their new baby, I note "Pictures can say a thousand words. Sometimes less is better":

*Not for no reason  
Do I look at this beauty  
And sigh— here is love*

*Are we the only species who have to explain ourselves?*

There are several large patches of rocks on the eastern beach of the island. They seem to me to be eternity's reminder of the inevitability of the forces of nature — exposure in this place is not a development option, it's just how things are. As I sit on these weathered remains of giants, I etch the following:

*The rock worn smooth by  
Thousands of years of weather  
Need not explain self*

### *Ageing Gracefully*

Gary is an island legend. He has an old border collie called Jack and the two are inseparable. This couple are like many on the island — two sides of a decrepit old church leaning against each other to hold each other up. I am touched by their companionship. One day as they shuffled past my house, I could see Jack sniffing the breeze and strain slightly against the lead towards the fresh bread I'd just taken out of the oven and was resting on the deck. I immediately broke off a piece and tossed it to him

*Lift your head old dog  
And sniff, cooking smells still bring  
You out for some love*

### *High Tide*

High tide seems to clear away what lingers at low tide:

*High tide this morning  
Water covers mangrove roots —  
Seaweed smells are gone*

### *Even an island has midlife*

I think the island is keeping pace with me through midlife and beyond.

*BMW  
Ridden for only six months  
Through midlife crisis*

### *Driftwood rings the island*

The bleached bones of fallen forest leviathans litter the northern and eastern beaches. They welcome strangers with their shape. Their limbs carve passages to navigate the dross.

*The years work all their  
Usual changes — driftwood,  
Chronos and Kairos*

*Wild mushrooms grow everywhere in the wet months*

Now, I'm not into picking wild mushroom when I don't know whether they'll kill me or not, but I am taken by the many delicate colours of several of the types that spring up throughout wet and even cold months on the island:

*How amazing, how  
Remarkable, how deadly  
Grow poison mushrooms*

*Banjo Man*

He's become a regular on my walks around the island. Mark finds a sunny spot each day on the deck of the community hall that overlooks the rustic 9-hole golf course and picks out a tune or too. On quiet days when the tune is carried on the breeze, I'm accompanied by Mark and his banjo for much of my walk

*April shelters the  
Banjo man, soft emerges  
The tune as he picks*

*Sunset stillness*

Sunset colours are vividly etched in my memory from sitting and watching the sun go down on so many occasions.

*That moment when the  
Sun cools into the sea — the  
Watchers all breathe out*

*Rounded rocks work best*

Last year I spent an enjoyable hour with my two adult sons on Kaladi beach on Kythera, a little island off the coast of Greece which has some similarities to Coochie. Kaladi beach is all rounded weathered stones. We skimmed stones across that clear Adriatic Sea and laughed and laughed and laughed. Today, it's just me and the odd rounded stone I can find to do the job:

*On a silent sea  
Under a cloudy grey sky  
A stone skims 8 times*

### *Storms on the bay*

There's something about a storm on the bay which stirs everything up:

*As the storm builds the  
Colour grey diminishes  
Not the wild beauty*

### *Even my unformed street has magic places — Dans ma rue*

I was the beneficiary of the local council turning my street into a cul-de-sac. My front yard has now extended, and I like how it's a place where people walk their dogs, stop and talk. Sometimes I take a chair and sit out in the middle of the oil sealed track and invite folk to have a cup of tea. Sometimes they accept.

*On my street wind blows  
Leaves into places people  
Never walk or see*

We're back home.

### **Some Extras — working with my clients**

A great benefit to me from writing Haiku is the creation of a sense of stillness after I've worked with a client. After they've left, I can see them moving around the room or sitting in the chair beside me or the shape of their body as they express themselves. This helps my clarity as I write up my notes and I see them progressing in their life. Sometimes I'm surprised with these afterthoughts and I consider how I'll bring them forward when we next work together. I put this down to the 5-7-5 structure of Haiku providing me with a 'workable container' for some reflections.

I give some of my clients Haiku assignments which link to their therapeutic goals. I find the principles (*Singularity, Accuracy, Accessibility, Economy and Brevity*) mentioned earlier very helpful to assist them focus and get clarity on their goals. Implicit in my work is the development of spontaneity — mine and theirs. I know this brings us both to the edge of what we can do in the moment to moment interactions in a session. This is good as we're working on new responses to situations and not repeating old patterns. When clients are developing new responses, they aren't practiced like old roles. This means they frequently feel awkward or clumsy. I think this is *learning* and it's to be expected but it's *not comfortable*. Staying with the discomfort long enough I find is needed for people to start to integrate the new response into their role repertoire.

Following the session, as homework, I'll get them to write a Haiku about a moment during the session. Usually they'll choose moments where they were stretched. I encourage them to find a situation in nature which reflects their experience. This Haiku assignment often gives them a deeply reflective experience where they gain new insights into their behaviour and can start to integrate both the learning from the session as well as from the writing of the Haiku into their work and life.

Here's an example from a client struggling to express what he was experiencing as his father was dying:

*At ten a.m. the  
Ghost gum dropped a limb — trees know  
When it's time to die*

## Epilogue

I have enjoyed taking you for a slow walk around my island. Perhaps you will want to don your favourite scarf or put on a coat or take off your shoes and head out the door to your own 'island'. You may be happy to simply close your eyes and sit quietly entertaining the images that appear in your mind. I hope this is satisfying. You may be fortunate to glimpse, for just a moment, a turtle's salty tears.



**Christo Patty** is an advanced trainee at the Brisbane Institute of Psychodrama Australia. In his practice, he works as a counselor, executive coach and change agent. Writing daily Haiku has become one of his passions.



# Psychodrama Theory and Group Work in Reflective Practice Groups for GPs

ALI BEGG

## KEY WORDS:

patient, hospital, role analysis, psychodrama, GP

## Introduction

On obtaining certification as a psychodramatist I recall Max Clayton saying “Now the real learning begins” — and it certainly did! I got a job as a medical educator and have gradually transformed from being a GP on the treadmill of 15-minute consultations into a medical educator and group leader. When I wrote my AANZPA thesis “Psychodrama for Doctors” (Begg, 2005) I proposed psychodrama as a path to help doctors develop self-awareness and interpersonal relationship skills that would help medicine progress towards a new holistic medical paradigm. I imagined ways of using action methods in medical settings. I then experimented with various aspects of psychodramatic production as opportunity arose in my work for the NZ College of GPs’ education program — concretisation, action sociograms, role play etc. However, group work and psychodrama theory have proved the most useful aspects of my psychodrama training for my current work. This article is about my *Reflective Practice Group* for first year General Practitioners (GPs) which I have been leading for 13 years. I will introduce you to these groups and share some ways I see psychodrama theory and group leadership skills contributing this work. Hopefully, this will be of interest and relevant to your work, especially if you run groups in settings where psychodrama is not explicitly practiced.

## Context

It is morning tea break on a Friday. I walk into the seminar room to the buzz of animated conversation between GP registrars. These are fully qualified doctors in their first year of training to become specialist general medical practitioners (GPs, or family doctors). I love seeing this diverse group of 30 or so people engaging with each other. They are mostly between 27 and 35 years old and fresh from hospital work. There are always some who are older and have experience in different specialties, or other life experience

before doing medicine. Quite a few have trained overseas. Occasionally we have fully trained cardiologists or surgeons and the like who are changing career for various reasons. For some, English is their second language. This makes for an interesting mix.

After morning tea my Reflective Practice Group gathers in our group room. I have one and a half hours with 7 registrars each week. The explicit purpose of these groups is to reflect on non-biomedical aspects of practice. This includes difficulties in the doctor-patient relationship, challenges in the practice teams, coming to grips with general practice work and developing the identity of a GP. Transforming from hospital doctors with sicker patients in fully equipped hospitals to GPs working with independent people in the community is quite a process. Patients walk in and walk out, come with their own expectations and ideas and look after themselves between visits. They do not always follow advice. Uncertainty is rife as diseases are often seen early when diagnoses are not yet clear. Learning to work in the time limited appointments of general practice is another of the many challenges faced.

### Getting going

At the beginning of the year these GP registrar group members are in survival mode as they settle into their placement practices and get to know their host GPs, partners, nurses, receptionists and others. They need to ask questions such as “How do I do this?”, “Can you come and have a look at this rash?”, “What do I charge for this?”, “Where is the liquid nitrogen kept?” “What form do I use for this?” and “How do I record a new diagnosis on this computer system?”. It would be common to have to check something out every second consultation during the first few weeks. When we meet in Reflective Practice Groups (RPGs), they are generally very keen to talk about practical details and to know how their peers do things in their practices. This is an important way of getting to know each other and *putting themselves on the map* of the group. As a group leader I value these exchanges as a way for them to display themselves to their peers.

GP registrars are capable high achievers often with great expectations of themselves so it can be stressful to be floundering in their practices while trying to get their feet on the ground. Being seen as competent is important to their identity as doctors. A commonly faced conflict in RPGs is that of needing help with a problem while fearing being judged as incompetent or inadequate in some way if the problem is presented. To address this focal conflict (Champe & Rubel, 2012) I often begin groups by asking questions that help them display their competence such as:

*What have you enjoyed about your work in the week since we have met?*

*How has your hospital experience been useful to you and your practice in the last week?*

*Tell us about a satisfying experience with a patient.*

*What interested you recently that could be relevant to your peers?*

This enables functional roles to be expressed — an important principle of psychodrama. It tends to get the ball rolling and often, paradoxically, naturally leads to someone offering to present a patient encounter that did not go so well. Warming up to other group members through stories that highlight capability can diminish their fears.

### Group process

There is a strong tendency for the group to want to focus on problems of diagnosis and management with advice and information being sought from the group. This is generally the norm for medical groups they have been in previously. Despite the explicit focus for RPGs being non-biomedical aspects of their works, getting this to happen has been a major challenge I have faced in these groups. It requires swimming against a tide that pulls towards medical problem solving. Group works skills (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) learnt through psychodrama training have been a great help with this task. Skills such as:

- relating to group process and resisting seduction by the content
- drawing attention to group members appreciating each other
- noticing non-verbal responses and encouraging words to be added to these.
- naming themes of group discussion
- drawing attention to the mood of the group and group members
- identifying focal conflicts when recognised

These all tend to help the focus move towards their deeper concerns, such as: fear of complaints or making a mistake; emotions such as sadness, despair, anger and disgust generated by their work; challenges in boundary setting with people seeking drugs, medical certificates, benefits etc; and a myriad of other things. There is usually plenty going on in group members' lives that can affect their work — new relationships, buying houses, having babies, wondering if they have made the right career choice, sickness in family members etc. And work can affect their lives with its various stresses and time demands. Accepting these as relevant subjects enriches the life of the group.

Today group discussion leads to a case presentation that initially seems to be about a worrying medical problem.

## Case presentation

*This is a compilation of cases with identifying details changed*

Sam diffidently offers to presents a case. "It's not long..." he says. A couple of group members encourage him, and he tells us about Fred, a 72 man who came in for a driver's medical. His notes show that he has high blood pressure and has been prescribed 3 drugs to manage this. At this appointment his blood pressure is dangerously high (260/150). A simplified version of the crux of their interaction follows:

- Sam: Are you taking your medication?  
Fred: Yes, I am.  
Sam: In that case I need to send you into hospital as your blood pressure is dangerously high.  
Fred: Oh, I just ran out a few days ago...  
Sam: Only a few days? I still think you need to be admitted as you are at serious risk of a stroke.  
Fred: Oh, well actually, I haven't been taking them for a while. I don't like taking them.

Sam's description was richer in detail than this and covered other aspects of the consultation, but mainly stuck to medical facts. He made himself out to be blunt and challenging and there was a sense that Fred was a difficult non-compliant patient. I also heard a sense of satisfaction in getting the patient to admit to not taking his pills and got the feeling that Sam enjoyed his interaction with Fred.

The group engaged with Sam's story and expressed concern at the risks of such a high blood pressure. They bombarded Sam with questions such as "What was he on?" "Did he get side effects?" "How long ago did he stop taking them?", and "Did he stop all of them?". Questions about medical facts and management are common following a case presentation in medical groups. This is consistent with the role of problem solver that is strongly ingrained from medical training. While useful in diagnosing and managing medical conditions, in this context a barrage of questions runs the risk of shaming the presenter through revealing areas not considered and requiring justification of actions. The presenter, who may already feel over exposed is held in the spotlight. It can be a challenge for a group leader to cut across such a strong norm, but important if we want to create a friendly conducive environment for future presentations. One way I do this is by intervening to appreciate questioners' lively interest and desire to get involved, then request they hold back for a while so we can make something of what has already been said.

I asked Sam what the patient was like as I had little sense of the patient as a person, apart from being a challenge. Sam described an unkempt man

with straggly grey hair and really bad psoriasis — “skin flaking off everywhere. He is overweight and doesn’t come in much.” He sounded like a homeless man to me and so I asked about his social circumstances — “lives with his wife in a state house”. Then I suggested Sam stay quiet for a bit as “you have given us a lot to go on” and asked the rest of the group to wonder out loud what might be going on for this man and what might you feel if he was your patient. Balint\* groups have taught me this way of producing the presenter’s *drama* within this educational group setting. Often I get the ball rolling with some modelling.

Group leader: He sounds a bit like a homeless man. I was surprised he is married  
Fariq: I bet he’s not treating his psoriasis either  
Mary: He shouldn’t be driving with his BP that high  
Fariq: It’s so hard when people don’t look after themselves. I get very frustrated.  
Ben: Yes, me too. It’s depressing and hard work.  
Jayne: Maybe he’s depressed  
Ben: Maybe he has dementia  
Sarah: Maybe his wife has dementia. He seems uncared for.

Speculations like these encourage spontaneity and creativity in group members who can have fun coming up with ideas. It helps them role reverse with the patient — and the presenter often feels well doubled by this process. If questions are aimed at the presenter I try to intervene and reflect them back to the group, getting them to guess at answers and encourage the presenter to sit back and consider these ideas. This keeps him from being the focus of the group. He is also away from the pressure of the consulting room and this gives opportunity to sit back and reflect. This enables him to see the bigger picture and develop empathy for the patient — and himself.

Advice giver is another role well-developed by medical training that has potential to undermine presenters. A strong desire to ask questions or give advice in relation to presentations can be driven by a need to defuse emotions such as anxiety, anger and sadness generated by stories presented. Registrars face, and share stories ranging from complex medical problems to stories of child abuse, sexual assault, patient complaints, delivering new cancer diagnoses and confronting drug seekers. Reactive advice giving based on immediate emotional responses generally does not take

---

\* Balint groups have a specific focus on the relationship between doctor and patient. They evolved from the work of Michael and Enid Balint in the UK post second world war. Present day groups commonly include psychotherapists and other professionals who work in close relationships with patients/clients. More information can be found at <https://www.balintaustralianewzealand.org/>

into account all that has occurred between presenting doctors and their patients. Intervening to help the advice giver recognise and identify feelings that generated their response can potentially serve to both increase consciousness of the advice giver and protect the presenter from the advice.

Another intervention I use is to I ask for speculations on the relationship between the patient and the presenter if it does not emerge naturally. Returning to this group's work with Sam and his patient Fred, Sarah shares her thought that maybe Sam was being a bit of a bully by scaring him into admitting not taking his meds. Ben thought it sounded like friendly concerned banter and Mary agrees as she heard enjoyment in Sam's story, as well as frustration and real worry that Fred was in danger. More ideas flow:

Sarah:	He hasn't been in for a while.. maybe he doesn't like doctors
Ben:	Maybe he's sick of being told to take his pills
Jayne:	Maybe he feels guilty for not taking his pills, so he lies
Mary:	It sounded like Sam enjoyed jousting with Fred. And maybe Fred wants to talk about his trouble with side effects. Maybe no one else has taken the time with him.
Fariq:	Yes, I think he will know Sam is worried about him and doesn't want him to have a stroke. Maybe he didn't really know the risk he was taking.

After a while I ask Sam to join us in wondering about what was really going on in the consultation. He shares that he really was worried. And that he did feel a bit like a bully too. From this sharing it is apparent Sam has become more conscious and reflective about his own functioning from listening to the group speculations. This method can produce mirroring in a way that is easy to take on. Sam also shares his concern about Fred's social situation and interest in pursuing this when he next comes in. And he plans to have a discussion with his usual GP. These ideas emerge from Sam without the need for advice. We learn Fred has agreed to restart one of his pills and to come back for follow-up. I acknowledge the relationship Sam must have built with Fred for him to be returning. The group murmur and nod agreement. To finish this case presentation, I thank Sam and ask group members what is relevant to their own work from this discussion. This parallels sharing after a drama in a psychodrama session. It helps group members concretise any learning in words and connects Sam to his colleagues through enabling him to see the relevance of his presentation to group members.

Case discussions such as these generally build connections between group members, increase trust and strengthen their identities as GPs. They



provide a counter to the relative isolation of 1-1 consultations. Establishing strong professional relationships with Colleagues who know you and can provide support when needed reduces the risk of burnout — an all too common experience in our profession. The final section of this article addresses another potential cause of burnout, and discusses how these groups can address this.

### The Imposter Phenomenon

Progressive	Coping	Fragmenting
Ordinary fallible human	Striving perfectionist	Fearful fraud
Honest error sharer	Fallibility concealer	Mistake denier
Clear limit setter based on accurate self-knowledge	Superwoman/man	Judgemental self-flagellator
Conscientious worker	Anxious over worker	Slave driver
Worker within known capabilities	God impersonator	Scared pretender
Recogniser of own success	Belittler of own achievements	Rejector of own abilities and achievements
Internaliser of positive feedback	Deflector of positive feedback	Negator of positive feedback

This is the common experience that doctors have in feeling like they are playing the role of doctor rather than actually being one. The *Imposter Phenomenon* (Clancy & Imes, 1985), was first named in relation to experiences of professional women by Clancy in 1985, but it is not limited to women, medicine, or high achievers. I have heard the “Imposter Syndrome” referred to not infrequently in medical circles. Sufferers of this feel fake and fear being found out as a fraud — not a “real” doctor. Shame can be experienced for not feeling like the genuine article. I have experienced this, and you may recognise it in yourself at times. The importance of being right and the perfectionistic demands of

practicing medicine contribute to *imposterism*. We are all fallible human beings, including doctors, and yet a close to perfect doctor is what everyone wants — especially when sick and vulnerable. I have listed some roles associated with this syndrome in the table on the previous page.

### Roles analysis of the Imposter Phenomenon

Imposter Syndrome arises when functioning from the fragmenting and coping roles listed above. Strengthening the progressive roles is the antidote to feeling like an imposter. When these are developed the fragmenting and coping roles tend to drop away. These progressive roles are associated with being known and accepted for who you are without pretence or over achievement. Experiential psychodrama and psychodrama training groups enabled me to share my vulnerable self and I discovered, contrary to my fears, this tended to strengthen my connections with others.

I gained a sense of myself as acceptable that was not dependant on performance, but rather was based on group members really getting to know me. Reflective practice groups have the potential to provide similar experiences for GP registrars. They provide opportunity for strong connections to develop between group members in which they are valued despite sharing very fallible human experiences from their work. Imposter syndrome is countered when group members develop enough trust to share things that are potentially shameful in a group of peers where they are known and valued. Hopefully, this has given you a taste of some of the ways group work and psychodrama theory underpin my work with running Reflective Practice Groups. They are full of complexity and challenges, not always running smoothly, but generally they are enlivening, satisfying to run and give great scope for reflection. The real learning continues! I feel truly fortunate that psychodrama has led me to this work and provided a foundation of theory and experience to guide me.

### REFERENCES

- Begg, A.F. (2005) *Psychodrama for Doctors: Role development for a new medical paradigm*. AANZPA Thesis
- Champe, J. & Rubel, D. J. (2012) Application of Focal Conflict Theory to Psychoeducational Groups: Implications for Process, Content, and Leadership. *Journal for specialists in group work*, Vol 37 No 1
- Clancy, P. R. & Imes, S.A. (1978). The Imposter Phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 15(3). 241-247

Sakulku, J. & Alexander, J. The Imposter Phenomenon. *International Journal of Behavioural Science* 2011, Vol. 6, No. 1, 75-97

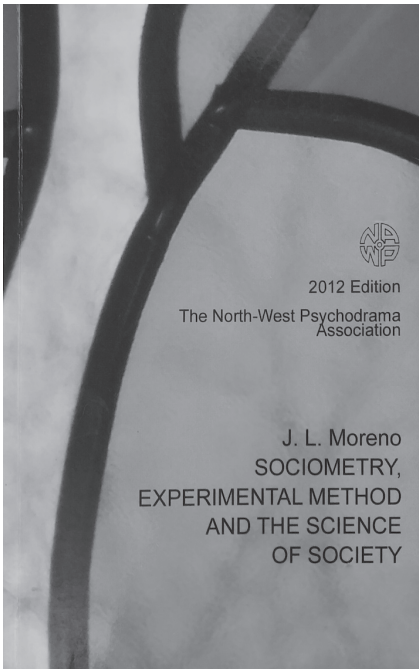
Yalom, I. & Leszcz, M. (2005) *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy* (5th ed.). New York: Basic Books.



**Ali Begg** is a GP, Psychodramatist, Balint group leader and Medical Educator for the New Zealand College of GPs in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. She enjoys continuing to integrate psychodrama and other experience into her work.



# Book reviews



*Sociometry, Experimental Method and the Science of Society; an approach to a new political orientation* (2012 edition)

By J.L. Moreno

The North-West Psychodrama  
Association

United Kingdom

Reviewed by Elizabeth Synnot

This book is the second edition. It was first published in 1951 by Beacon House, New York. It includes much of Moreno's significant sociometry writing from the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. His writing continues to be relevant today with current social upheavals and tensions between and within social groups exacerbated by

internet and other satellite communications.

Sociometry is Moreno's fresh start to creating a reality based concept of society. Moreno presents his original inspirational ideas, the methodologies he devised and his research into formed and soon-to-be-formed communities and institutions. He also compares his approach with his contemporaries and makes critical comments on their approach to similar territory.

## *1. Sociometry and the experiential method.*

Moreno's approach considers each part of human society in its concreteness using sociometric procedures. The concepts and presentation of sociometric data, investigation and experimentation in situ are elucidated and are adapted to each specific group situation as it arises. His orientation is to the individual as a member of collective systems.

Spontaneity and the experimental method are defined. He discusses the private and collective aspirations of group members and that the purpose of an experiment relates to the group's purpose and the purpose of each member with each member becoming a co-experimenters.

Moreno compares his sociometric model of experimentation with

Marxian sociology's model of experimentation. Moreno opined that Marx was mainly oriented to changing the world while he could be said to be more oriented to finding the basic structure of society by trying to change it. Hence, there is only an implicit experimental model in Marx's work. I found Moreno's analysis of society in the 1920s through to the 1940s highly pertinent in 2020.

## *2. Group formation and social dynamics.*

This section is Moreno's vision for a methodology to change the whole world. He presents many sociometric investigations and the results from the 1920 through to 1947. For instance, it was from Moreno's and his colleagues sociometric research that Moreno formulated the cultural and social atom as a repeated pattern in group after group.

Moreno distinguishes sociometry methodology from other fledgling social science methods; by fully embracing subjectivity, the full involvement of those being investigated, the investigator as auxiliary, and psychodrama method being both experimental and therapeutic simultaneously. The latter arising in part because the exploration warms the participants up to their spontaneity.

He alludes to the intuitions that he has and then tests out in formed and forming communities. He creates verification processes for sociometric results, retesting the same population over time. He also gives an example of verification using the dispersement of rumours.

Throughout this section Moreno defines and elucidates the concepts that form sociometry including his philosophy of the moment. There are prescient passages, for instance, where he comments on the impact on human relationships of the technologies of his time; the printing press, radio and motion pictures. He anticipates further technological impacts that will bring together in one instance many psycho-social networks and allow for the interpretation of political phenomena.

Moreno also makes some generalised findings; the dialectic or truthful character of sociometry, its value when applied to such social planning concerns as migration of ethnic groups within a given geographic area, etc., the fledgling relationship of sociometry with the democratic process.

## *3. Political sociometry*

Moreno begins this section with his assessment of Marxism in 1947 emphasising that, unlike Marx, he considers the capitalistic-economic phenomena with the total social structure. He distinguishes the purpose of the politician with the sociometrist, saying that "The sociometrist is interested in the social revolution ... primarily as an exploration experiment and not as a social crusade — in what one learns from it and not only whether society improves through it." (p. 81).



It is a heart-felt disappointment to me that the theses that Moreno held for the use of his methodology in revolutionary events, movements and times have not found a central place.

#### 4. Military sociometry

*"The first step to be taken must be with the consent and the cooperation of the individuals concerned. It must be made by them as if it were their own project – their own design for living. There is no other way imaginable which can enlist the spontaneity, the critical intelligence and the enthusiasm of grown up, thinking people"* says Moreno (p. 206).

Having done much of my work as a sociodramatist in para-military organisations such as the Police, and large public service hierarchical organisations such as Health and Education Departments, this requirement for participants pursuing their own design for living was sometimes hard to achieve.

After considering different selection and training for leadership, Moreno cites a passage that he wrote earlier in *Who Shall Survive*, 1934,

*The leader ... gains in objective strength through considering the spontaneous forces within the group and does not impair the subjective strength of his own spontaneity.* (p. 353)

#### 5. Sociometry and microsociology

It takes some imagining for me to relate to a time when we did not conceive interpersonal relationships.

At page 228 Moreno significantly says, *"But as soon as we transferred these responses to the sociometric level and studied them not singly but in their interrelations, important methodological reasons suggest that we conceive this flowing feeling, the tele, as an inter-personal or more accurately and more broadly speaking, 'as a sociometric structure'."* (Italics in the original) He goes on to say that he never deviated from this position.

Throughout this book Moreno rails against commonly held cleavages; between the social and the personal, between inter-mental psychology and collective phenomena, between sociology and psychiatry. As he sought to have sociometry used in psychiatry and psychology, in sociology and social psychology, he used different language to persuade these audiences. Persuasion is still required to have psychodrama and other group psychotherapy held in good regard alongside individually focussed approaches. The sociogram was Moreno's invention in 1923. It was constructed for presenting, exploring and measuring social structures as a whole. Moreno sees this as the scientific debut of sociometry.

As a practicing sociodramatist relating mostly to families, I find this

book highly relevant to my work. I commend it to all students and practitioners of psychodrama.



**Elizabeth Synnot**, Trainer Educator Practitioner (TEP) and Sociodramatist, is the executive director of Psychodrama Australia (PA), Director of Training at the PA Brisbane Campus and the immediate past president of the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association (AANZPA). She runs a practice as a family therapist and leadership team role trainer. Elizabeth can be contacted at <diz@eis.net.au>.



*Our House: Visual and Active Consulting* (2020 Edition)  
 By Antony Williams  
 Illustrated by Nelle Pierce  
 Published by Routledge, NY  
 10017

Reviewed by Diana Jones

Antony Williams is a rare consultant who shares his consulting methodology freely and gives insights into his consulting practice. *Our House* is an invaluable handbook for new and experienced consultants, sociometrists, psychodrama trainees, and practitioners who want to embed vitality among these they work alongside.

He shares his insights into organisation and human behaviour, his acceptance that all may not go well within human interactions, and his eloquence in describing consulting dilemmas, the process of alignment, and the vibrancy of awkward human behaviour makes for an invaluable resource for consultants working in organisations. He knows how to navigate the territory and wants to help others.

Antony's mastery of both concepts and language is reflected in his acuity with metaphor and analogy. Metaphors enable people to gain insight into their situation as if they have the third party alongside. They can lean into and explore similarities and differences without the heartache of diving straight into a wound. Well-chosen metaphors light up our imaginations and open doors to possibilities rather than us being stuck in the perceived limitations of the situation we are in.

When Williams' names the facilitator's role as structural engineer in a high-viz readers can immediately relate, appraise, and imagine resulting possibilities. Again, on page 8, the analogy of transformation in the kitchen to transformation in a company makes one not only see differently but see different things. This insight paves the way for the rest of the book.

Williams outlines one of his many organisation gems on page 8. Innovation efforts lose punch because the boundaries of decision-making are not set, and people wander in directions never allowed by the company.

If you ever wondered why profound and brilliant ideas flounder and are not implemented, this is it.

His phrase “Lapse into conventional business talk” rockets me into my experience of leaders who speaking incomprehensibly while I realise I have no idea what they mean or what they want, just as his phrases describing facilitation skills as the authority of a ringmaster, the aesthetic of a choreographer and the hypnotic power of an illusionist reminds me of the daring complexity of working in groups with representational methods.

We see the psychodramatist at work with Williams’ attention to warm up and preparation. Not only does he provide preparation for technical details for an intervention in *Our House*, he wants participants to come to his workshops well informed on the business dilemma they will engage with. Each person researches and interviews others about the problem they are addressing. He has them write ideas on cards before the workshop. He wants thoughtful, experienced wise ones in his workshop, not impulsive contributors.

Enhancing the metaphors within *Our House*, Williams breathes life into his methodology. Readers learn how to produce and facilitate a range of invaluable approaches to establish Clarity, Vitality, and Alignment within organisations:

- Pillars in basement
- A Laundry Programme
- The V perspective
- The living report card
- Crossing the line
- Lay it on the table
- Memory lane
- Hidden Influencers and
- The Live Leadership Review

Classical sociometric methodologies; continuums, spectrograms, and explorations of informal relationship networks and subgroups are displayed linguistically and diagrammatically with simplicity and clarity.

I have had the privilege of participating in many of Antony’s workshops where he refined these approaches and the tools he uses. To read their applications in *Our House* is a testament to the trust, courage, and tenacity Antony has in helping leaders resolve persistent tricky business dilemmas.

Armed with these approaches, any consultant has enough methodologies for years of application in the broad field of organisation consulting.

How many consultants approach their clients armed with a roll of tape and a collection of quirky magnets knowing their onsite tools are a table, a whiteboard, and some chairs? The secret with these tools is that Williams' sense of fun and orientation to exquisitely crafted question and group work interventions to display responses, relationships, and movement designed to help organisations to gather their own data about the *system* and to make meaning of those data. Resistance to participating imaginatively would be low.

Williams generously peppers perceptive questions throughout the book that any consultant might use to interview for a role or to explore the varied situations they encounter. What makes these questions special is that Williams' dedication to awakening and strengthening interconnections and differences among people dominates. They are not just sharp questions. These questions are crafted to awaken dormant interpersonal perceptions that will assist the business going forward.

Several case studies threaded throughout the book reflect Williams' implementation of the metaphors and methodologies. One standout narrative is that of Gale. What we learn is the relationship between organisation and system change and individual behaviour is irrevocably interwoven.

In this case, Williams uses the display of the alliances and schisms in the informal network of relationships for and against a proposed change, role reversal to draw out perspectives, mirroring, and strategic sociometric criteria resulting in significant behaviour change.

I was intrigued to read Williams' systematic reflection of the perspectives shared in role reversal, then realised the sensitivity he had with someone new to learning with psychodramatic methods.

This is the essence of this book. Readers have a lens into a master at work; a trainer, practitioner, and educator, and experienced consultant who knows that organisational work is more just getting on with each other. We can expect no less, and he delivers.

Williams' insights into how representational methods affect us and our relationships are tossed in throughout the book. See pages 97 *Why magnets?* and 107 *Place and 'placeness'*.

These musings reflect why it is essential we are physically together for experiential learning. It is not possible online.

*Our House* would be better off with a thorough edit, attention to consistent layout, headings, and use of fonts. Without this, tips, gems, and cross-references are lost or only happened on by chance.



**Diana Jones** is a sociometrist, TEP and FTINZ staff member. She works as leadership advisor and executive coach helping leaders and their organisations interact with vitality and relevance. Diana can be contacted at [dianaj@diana-jones.com](mailto:dianaj@diana-jones.com)

# Order in the Chaos

JENNY WILSON

AANZPA member Jenny Wilson has provided the photograph for the Journal cover. Jenny has recently followed a lifelong clay interest and completed a Diploma in Ceramic Arts. She is of Chinese and British origins, and identity and existential questions are current motivations for her artwork.

*These are the moths of my childhood. Heavy-bodied dusty beauties beating against cupped hands, or resting against the glass of a darkened window. The grid layout is a reference to museum collections and the hopeful impression that we can understand things by capturing and cataloging.*









