

“A Cast of Thousands”

Working with the Five Instruments of Psychodrama in the Therapeutic Relationship

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Introduction

Psychodrama is traditionally and more commonly known and experienced as a group therapy method. However, some of us work primarily with psychodrama in the one-to-one setting. This requires shifts in our thinking, ingenuity and creativity as therapists. There is very little written on the similarities and differences between group and individual psychodrama. Over recent years we have become intrigued by the challenge of using psychodrama in the one-to-one setting; by the importance of the space we work in; by the use of the objects that occupy that space as potential auxiliary egos and audience; and how these relate in the context of the therapeutic relationship between therapist and client.

Moreno (1953) identified the psychodramatic method as using five instruments, “the stage, the subject or actor (protagonist), the director,

the staff of therapeutic aides or auxiliary egos, and the audience” (p. 81). Take a moment to picture the room in which you work with clients. In that room there will be an area you think of as the action or therapeutic space (stage). This will be distinct from office space. There will be at least two chairs or other seating arrangements for you the therapist (director) and the client (protagonist). Around the therapeutic space will be other items of furniture and various objects, cushions, pictures, books etc. This could be thought of as an audience.

In this paper we will explore how Moreno’s five instruments of psychodrama may be applied in the one-to-one setting, so as to assist the development of spontaneity in the client.

The Stage

The stage in the one-to-one setting is usually an area of the therapy room

or whole of the room. The traditional stage as designed by Moreno in the group setting provides the actor with a living space, which is multidimensional and flexible to the maximum degree. The living space of reality is often narrow and restraining, he may easily lose his equilibrium. On the stage he may find it again due to its methodology of freedom – freedom from unbearable stress and freedom for experience and expression (1953, p.82). The traditional stage was multilevel and round in shape and followed the influence of Greek dramatic form.

The concept of a space that is multidimensional and flexible may be beyond the resources of many of us in our therapy rooms, but the principle of providing a space where client and therapist meet is still valid. Russell Meares in his book “The Metaphor of Play” has this to say about the place of therapy, “The place must be quiet, free of noises from the corridor, from telephones and the sounds of conversations in neighbouring rooms ... The decoration of the room should reflect something of the therapist, who is expected to be ordinarily human and not the opaque, neutral character of classical times ... Nevertheless, his or her life should not obtrude ... The most important characteristic of the setting is reliability. The (client) must have confidence in a fairly predictable environment ... It is as if this space becomes a precursor of inner space” (1993, p.128).

When I think about the space I work in, I am aware of what warm-up it might produce in the client and in me. This has become particularly relevant in recent years when I moved into a large space that became my office and therapy area.

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Previously, I had worked in a very small and cluttered area that permitted little freedom and movement. Now I had choice about what came into the space and how it was set out. I gave thought to what I wanted to create in myself and the people who came into this space. I felt, thought and acted quite differently when my external space was cramped, confining and stifling. The therapy I provided in those years tended to be restrictive, limited and safe. In my new space I found I was more spontaneous, moved freely and used concretisation and maximisation in ways that hadn't been possible before. Enlarging the therapy space (the external space) has assisted me to develop my inner space and my capacity to make room for a depth and range of therapy beyond me in the past.

It is not just that there is more room but that there are a variety of spaces e.g. a verandah, pillars, a clear office area and the action area itself. The effect of the room on the people who come in is often remarked upon e.g., “What a welcoming place”. The plants, posters, furniture and objects of all kinds convey their own message, which may be one of hope of life or struggles or possibilities.

As the relationship between therapist and client develops, the space becomes a container that safely holds the feelings and experiences that emerge. The space develops familiarity and flexibility as the client explores its potential and sets scenes for a variety of situations.

The Protagonist, the Director and the Auxiliary Egos: Bringing these Elements Together in the Therapeutic Relationship

The therapeutic relationship is the dynamic encounter between therapist and client that emerges when both are working together towards enhancing the spontaneity and well being of the client. The therapeutic relationship is the primary vehicle for one-to-one therapy. Ultimately clients are most likely to remain with a therapist because the therapeutic relationship seems viable – that is, strong enough to contain the depth of work the client is preparing to move into.

Psychodrama appeals to me as a model to assist me to understand and work within the therapeutic relationship, because psychodrama theory and practice emphasise the essential value of encounter – the relationship of person to person, of person to self, of person to group and person to environment. Psychodrama holds as a starting point a picture of the healthy spontaneous individual, rather than the sick patient. So the therapeutic relationship begins as an encounter between two adults who are both competent in some aspects of their lives. The client enters into the relationship as a free agent who

chooses to engage in therapeutic work. The therapist brings her willingness to travel alongside the client on their journey. The therapeutic relationship offers the client an opportunity to enter into an encounter with another human being in a real and intimate way; and challenges the therapist to be spontaneous and genuine, while remaining clinically aware.

The goal of all psychodrama is spontaneity. Moreno saw the director's role being to develop the spontaneity of the client by warming

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them up to creativity. When he spoke of spontaneity Moreno said, “(the) spontaneity state is not only an expression of a process within a person but also a relation to the

outside through the spontaneity state of another person" (1953, p.334). He also described the role for the director in a psychodrama to be that of an auxiliary for the client, much as a mother is an auxiliary for the infant: "(the director) arouses and starts them, prepares them for the key situations to be portrayed ... (and) leads their analysis after the scene and tries to arouse and stimulate them to spontaneous reactions during the analysis" (1972, p.211).

Marsha Stein and Monica Callahan (1962, p.121), in applying psychodramatic concepts in individual therapy, see the therapist as often taking on the role of double, "comparable to the natural co-being of the mother and infant", and the role of mirror "to reflect to the client in action how he or she appears to others". In one-to-one therapy the therapist does not need to set out an enactment to become an auxiliary to the client. Within the encounter of the therapeutic relationship, the therapist has the opportunity to take on auxiliary roles that are developmentally indicated for the client. As the dynamics of the client's world play themselves out within the therapeutic relationship, I (as therapist) am required to explore what is happening between us. In this I am an auxiliary to the client, and where my spontaneity and clinical judgement are both functioning well, I am likely to be an auxiliary who assists the spontaneity of the client.

However, when we talk about the therapist taking on auxiliary roles, we are usually referring to the enactment of the client's drama. In this instance, the therapist moves moment-to-moment between being director and auxiliary. Some therapists choose never to take an

auxiliary role in the one-to-one setting; others selectively take various roles but keep a chair or open space that is quite firmly established as that of the therapist.

Various issues may influence the decision of whether or not to take on these roles. To act as director, and also enter into the various roles within the client's drama, may create confusion in the minds of some clients. The presence of the therapist in the therapy room, is a significant aspect of the containment that the client requires to do the therapeutic work, so while the therapist is taking another role, her presence as therapist must also be felt. The variety of auxiliaries available in a group session enables the protagonist's transference to have a number of potential targets. Williams (1989, p.192) notes that "the 'internal objects' become living auxiliaries. The director slips back as the 'transference object' and group members fill up the roles occupied by historical figures from the protagonist's past". Without additional auxiliaries in the one-to-one setting, role taking by the therapist may increase transference. This may mean that taking on certain roles is contra-indicated. For example, Hudgins and Toscani (1996) argue strongly that the therapist must not take on a perpetrator role in a drama, as the client risks losing sight of the therapist as a safe therapeutic guide.

Yet often a client is assisted by having an actual person in the role, by being able to make eye contact with the other person, and by being able to respond to the sound and strength of the spoken words. The therapist taking on the auxiliary role, will expand the depth of the encounter, particularly in areas of the client's life where their capacity

to imaginatively enter into the situation is limited.

The Use of Objects as Auxiliary Egos

Moreno speaks of a staff of auxiliary egos in the group setting. "These auxiliary egos of participant actors have a double significance. They are extension of the director, exploratory and guiding, but they are also extensions of the subject, portraying the action or imagined personae of their life drama. The functions of the auxiliary ego are threefold: the function of the actor, portraying the roles required by the subject's world; the function of the counsellor, guiding the subject; and the function of the social investigator" (1953, p.83). In this sense, the director is the only one available in the one-to-one setting to be an auxiliary ego. However, the description above could apply just as well to the symbolic objects or props used in a session (e.g., toys, materials, magnets, etc). It is as though the symbolic objects make available to

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the client vast resources that have their origins in the world outside the therapy room. Williams suggests that "by means of concretisation and dramatisation, the self may be represented dramatically either by

another person or by a chair or other object ... The object is thrown 'outside' the speaking self in order that the relationship aspect of self with self may be manifested and then developed" (1989, p.17). The use of symbolic objects for a particular role concretises some aspects of the role, marks the space, assists in setting out the system. The projections of the client are cast on the object giving much more colour and substance to the role than an empty chair – though an empty chair may be the very choice for a particular role. We have noticed with interest that the object that gets chosen again and again for a role by a client actually becomes a familiar part of their social atom in the therapy room. Both therapist and client can bring this object/role into the action space when it is appropriate or needed.

There is no limit to the variety and range of symbolic objects that can be used as auxiliary egos in one-to-one therapy, apart from the dimensions of the space and the resources of the therapist. Stuffed animals of all types, shapes and sizes; materials and cushions of different colours, textures and proportions; clay figures; stones and shells; pot plants; posters and pictures; all these are some of the aspects we use. Even the furniture in the room may prove useful at times e.g., the standing fan with three blades was chosen as a metaphor for an enmeshed family or mum, dad and daughter. Separating out the three people as individuals and their roles in relation to the client became the work of therapy.

The animals in particular are available for a range of roles based on their real life abilities or stories they have inhabited. Kermit the Frog is often chosen as the Humorous,

Down-to-Earth Counsellor while the Dinosaur becomes the Angry Truth Sayer. It has been important to provide the ferocious and scary animals as well as the more loveable Disney-type animals. The worlds of fantasy, story and imagination bring social investigation to a new art form. The animals are not bound by the same rigid rules imposed on human beings!

On occasion an object may be taken home on loan when it has been used to symbolise a role in transition or newly developing. The relationship between the client and this new role seems to be assisted by the time spent with the object outside the therapy session. Recently a woman was startled by the eye of a crocodile hand puppet as she reached for something else. Later when the system she was exploring was laid out, I asked who or what was the crocodile's eye in the system. The Cold, Heartless, Watching Judge was crucial in the system and was transformed to a Discerning, Caring Observer, no longer remote and uninvolved. She asked to take the crocodile home so she could get to know this new role in herself.

Just as participants in a group bring their experience and life history to the auxiliary ego roles they take for each other, it seems the objects, when chosen, provide a similar service.

The symbolic objects are metaphors of their very nature and working with them stretches the client beyond their well trodden paths of old systems and surprise them into new ways of thinking and being. In choosing an object, the client is already acting spontaneously and well on the way to change. The change will not always be visible in the words used but may be

manifested in the behaviour that ensues. Musical instruments are a recent addition to the therapeutic space. The very day the drum was installed a client announced, "On my way here, I decided that today I want to learn to walk the beat of a different drum". Seeing the drum was affirming and exciting for her and the sound of the drum and the movement of her body allowed her to experiment and develop the beat of her new life.

The Audience

Moreno spoke of the audience as having a double purpose in psychodrama. "It may help to serve the subject, or being itself helped by the subject on the stage, the audience becomes the problem. In helping the subject it is a sounding board of public opinion" (1953, p.84). If we think of the symbolic objects around the therapeutic space as the audience in the one-to-one setting, then purpose is a single one – that is, to serve the client by being a sounding board of public opinion. It is useful to look at what objects we have available. Do they offer a breadth and depth of opinion in the roles to which they warm-up clients? It seems even for the client who has a limited role repertoire, toys, cushions or materials will remind them of someone or something that offers hope and spontaneity. The different textures can offer new understandings in a similar way to hearing the sharing of a group member, e.g., choosing a large piece of black material to be the Blanket of Depression may startle the client by its silky, soft feel, inviting touch and stroking rather than a kick. It is good to have objects which are abstract rather than specific characters. The shape, texture, size and colour stimulate associations,

which are far reaching. They are more open to projections and thus more versatile.

Because one-to-one therapy generally takes place over time, the client becomes familiar with the objects available and some retain the original role they were chosen for. They remain as witness to the work or the client and accessible as an immediate auxiliary ego. The therapist may bring them into the action space to assist the warm-up of the client and to provide the wisdom needed to produce change or the challenge to old behaviour.

In one sense you could think of the audience in the one-to-one setting as being the internal audience of the client externalised. Initially, this internal audience may be limited, critical and unsupportive. In the course of therapy, the audience is expanded as social atom repair takes place. Gradually the new roles are integrated internally by the client.

One of the many roles of the therapist in the one-to-one setting is that of audience. The therapist stands as witness to the client, often being the first to receive a very painful story. As a "sounding board of public opinion", the therapist will challenge and educate, e.g., where there has been a lack of information, or inaccurate information given about sexuality. The client undertakes many role tests in the therapeutic space before taking the roles in their everyday life.

Conclusion

Although Moreno developed the concept of the five instruments in relation to using the psychodramatic method in groups, we have demonstrated that it is very relevant to the one-to-one setting. The therapist is required to be flexible

and versatile in a multitude of roles. The use of symbolic objects as auxiliary egos and audience and the therapeutic space as stage, are important adjuncts to the development of the therapeutic relationship. Therapy becomes both enjoyable and challenging with a "cast of thousands" to draw upon.

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