TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIODRAMA

Rollo Browne

2005

A thesis presented to the Board of Examiners of the
Australia and New Zealand Psychodrama Association Incorporated
in partial fulfilment of the requirements toward certification as
a sociodramatist.

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the questions: what is sociodrama, what is its purpose, how does it work and what as a director do I need to pay attention to. A summary of the literature identifies that there is neither agreement about what constitutes sociodrama as a method nor any clarity about how a sociodrama logically builds to a resolution. A working definition of sociodrama is given and a structure and framework proposed for directing sociodrama. An example is given to highlight the application of the sociodramatic method in practice.

PREFACE

I was working as an adult educator and trainer in the health field in 1989 when I first heard about sociodrama. The participants in the training session next door were laughing, making lots of noise and were obviously having more fun than the participants in my group. At one of the breaks I asked the trainer in the next room what she had been doing. She said, "I use action methods. I learnt them at psychodrama training". I had no idea what she was talking about but realised she was working in a whole new way that seemed to engage participants in actively creating their learning. Psychodrama sounded very, well, psychological. By contrast I came from an education background which emphasises learning about the world we live in. When I explained this to her, she replied, "Well then you'll probably be interested in sociodrama".

The break ended and we went back to our groups. But my curiosity was aroused. I knew I wanted to be better at my work and for my participants to enjoy the learning process. Sociodrama sounded tailor-made just for me. Could sociodrama be what I was looking for? Over the next weeks I began to inquire about sociodrama, what it was and how it worked. However I quickly realised that training in sociodrama was taught as part of the psychodrama training program.

I began attending psychodrama workshops and in 1991 started training in the method. Soon I was applying different aspects of the method to my work with great effect. The groups got more engaged – they talked more easily to each other and spoke about what really mattered to them. I was enthusiastic: this had been what I was looking for. My work became more rewarding.

While I continued training in psychodrama and enjoyed the learning, I still wanted to know about sociodramatic applications and specifically how to direct a sociodrama. Schools and organisations where I work are not overtly therapeutic environments and typically there is no specific contract to investigate or work with people's internal psychological worlds. Like many practitioners in education, health, community, government or in business I needed a way of working that enabled deep learning without appearing overly personalised. Such learning is actually very personal but it was important not to blur the boundaries between professional and therapeutic work.

I became clearer about the questions I held. I wanted to know the principles and phases of sociodrama, how the director approached the drama and how to bring about a good closure where learning was integrated. What then was the basic framework of sociodrama, the aims, concepts, principles of reasoning and methods? I knew that sociodrama had been taught by Warren Parry during the 10 week Practicum in Perth in the late 1980's, so considerable thinking about sociodrama principles and practice had been going on.

I embarked on a learning journey that still continues. Over the last 10 years I have read widely about sociodrama and made sense of the basic theory. I found there was little written which actually laid out what was involved in making sociodrama work, especially in the contexts I worked in.

I tried things out. I directed a range of sociodramatic events including a session for 140 high school staff on relations with non-English speaking parents. I got good supervision from my primary trainer. I learned from each event, especially those that didn't work well. One important aspect in my development was having to respond to what was happening in the moment and making sense of it as I went along. I also talked to anyone who was interested in systems. Slowly I began to appreciate the purpose of sociodrama, how the warm up holds that purpose, how critical the framing of the purpose is in the group, and that sociodrama develops different roles in participants throughout the session.

One of the basic challenges for me in becoming a sociodramatist has been to make sense of Moreno's basic principles across all his applied methods and then apply them in the context of the organisational and social issues where I live and work.

This thesis sets out what I have to say to my peers about my practice of sociodrama. I sum up what I have found to be useful and important and why. To the reader new to Moreno's work the terminology may be unfamiliar but you will be well rewarded, as I have, in coming to grips with his concepts and theories.

I am particularly grateful to Warren Parry in the supervision of this thesis for his perspective and depth of understanding of sociodrama that has enabled me to bring my experiences into a coherent framework. My teachers and peers have been very important to me and their work and love has assisted me to develop in all areas of my life.

Special thanks to Joyce Williams, Max Clayton, Chris Hosking, Helen Kearins, Diz Synnot, Cher Williscroft and, not least, my wife, Wendy, who introduced me to psychodrama.

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Chapter 1   Introduction

At the heart of this thesis are the questions: "What is sociodrama, what is its purpose, how does it work and what as a director do I need to pay attention to?"

This thesis sets out my working answers to these questions. These questions are important because the field of sociodrama is still developing. Initially Moreno wrote about sociodrama and sociatry, the treatment of social ills. However his interest soon moved to sociometry, group psychotherapy and psychodrama. Consequently he did not follow up his early work with research or develop a body of sociodrama practice. That was left for others to do.

Since then the idea and practice of sociodrama has been kept alive through Moreno's writings and through various practitioners developing their own applications. For example, sociodrama was picked up and adapted by US educators in the 1940s and 1950s but this never entered mainstream education practice.

In the last 20 years, largely due to increasing interest in organisations and how they work, there has been a resurgence in the study of social systems, in organisational development and in applying adult learning principles to organisational issues. In an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world many organisations have begun to recognise that they need to develop and sustain an organisational culture that will enable them to thrive in such conditions. Consequently they are now paying attention to the fundamental question of how to tap the inherent creativity of groups to address their own issues. It is here the practice of sociodrama has something unique to contribute. As an applied method, sociodrama is valuable to practitioners working in education, community, organisational and health professions because it offers a way of thinking about and working in the here and now with social systems, with organisational and team culture.

This thesis aims to set out a framework and some useful concepts to assist practitioners to further develop sociodrama as a method. As much of our lives is spent in schools, communities, in organisations and at work, I believe we all benefit when we extend our understanding of how Moreno's principles can be applied to those contexts. Certainly I have found that participants in corporate and community groups respond well to Morenian methods.

The literature related to the core questions is reviewed in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 I give my working definitions of the purpose of sociodrama and what makes it work. Next, the structure and phases of a sociodrama are outlined in Chapter 4. Implications for practitioners are outlined in Chapter 5 before the conclusion in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2   The Literature on Sociodrama

This chapter is intended to acquaint the reader with Morenian sociodramatic writing in its historical context and to identify two aspects of the literature which this thesis seeks to address.

Over his life Dr J L Moreno's work evolved into four applied methods designed to address the human condition: Psychodrama, Sociodrama, Sociometry and Role Training. Although he wrote a lot about his ideas and methods Moreno never quite succeeded in bringing his work into a well-defined and consistent framework where the differences between the applied methods, such as sociodrama, were fully clarified. There are overlaps and gaps in his overall methodology[1]. The sum of his writings is a wonderful mixture of insight, experiments, theories, provocative assertions and techniques; and his terminology develops along the way.

Although his vision for sociodrama was large Moreno never elaborated techniques for putting sociodrama into action to the extent he did in role training, psychodrama and sociometry. In this sense he left sociodrama to be carried forward by his successors.

2.1   Moreno's Vision For Sociodrama

In examining the literature on sociodrama we start with Moreno's grand vision.

> *"Sociodramatic workers have the task to organise preventive, didactic and reconstruction meetings in the community in which they live and work; to organise, upon call, such meetings in problem areas everywhere; to enter communities confronted with emergent or chronic social issues, to enter mass meetings of strikes, race riots, rallies of political parties, and so forth, and try to handle and clarify the situation on the spot.*
>
> *The action agent moves into the group accompanied by a staff of auxiliary egos, if necessary with the same determination, boldness or ferocity as a fuehrer or union leader. The meeting may move into an action as shocking and enthusiastic as those of a political nature, with the*

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[1] The term methodology is used here in its wider sense to include a general investigation of the aims of a discipline, the main concepts, the methods used to achieve its aims, the principles of reasoning and the relationships between sub-disciplines (after Bullock et al, 1988, 525). The narrower definition of methodology as 'a description of the methods used' limits our understanding of the scope of Moreno's work.

difference that the politicians try to submit the masses to their political schemes, whereas the sociodramatist is trying to bring the masses to a maximum of group realisation, group expression and group analysis. …

The sociodrama … starts from within the audience present, it is calculated to be educational, clarifying and energising to all members, to serve as a stimulus to spontaneity, creativity, love and empathy, and as a check and balance to cultural tensions and hostilities arising from local or world-wide events and as a means for social catharsis and integration."

<div align="right">(Moreno 1953/93 p 88)</div>

This is truly a bold picture. Moreno had a strong dream of collective social transformation. His clearest description of sociodrama is as one of:

"*several instruments of social change in order to harness the spontaneous-creative forces of the community*"   (The Sociometric Concept For Social Change, in Moreno 1953/93 p 86).

Moreno must have been influenced by the social and political upheaval of his time. Certainly it is likely, as Ken Sprague suggests, that

"*sociodrama arose from the upheaval and horror of World War I*"   (Wiener 1997).

Moreno's early work in Austria and Germany had a wide social focus. After the war he experimented and learned from his work in refugee camps, with prostitutes in Vienna. This was a time when, as after any destructive war, the possibilities for renewal were strong. He continued to focus on social issues as a doctor in Bad Voslau, and in Vienna through the 'Living Newspaper' performances by the cast of the Steigrifttheater (Theatre of Spontaneity) and the audience-generated scenarios enacted in public performances (Marineau 1989). Interestingly Moreno developed sociodrama (1921) before psychodrama (1922-4)[2] .

In the 1930's after he emigrated to the USA he turned his energies to psychodrama, sociometry and group psychotherapy (Marineau 1989). At this time he developed his basic concepts and theories that support all his methods and techniques. The fields of group psychotherapy, human dynamics and the

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[2] Moreno indicates that he first developed axiodrama in 1918, sociodrama in 1921 and psychodrama between 1922-4 (Moreno 1953 xxvi). He later identifies his work with a suicidal patient in Bad Voslau in 1920, with Marianne Lornitz as a trained auxiliary, as his first psychodramatic treatment (Marineau 1989 p 67-68).

study of sociometry began to take off. One example of his research is his study of sociometry at The Hudson School for Girls. In other words Moreno gave less focus on developing the practical applications of sociodrama as a tool for social transformation.

By the end of the 1950's, and partly as a result of the Second World War, group psychotherapy and research into human dynamics had become well-established within the disciplines of psychiatry, psychology and sociology (for example Dunphy 1972). Insights from these disciplines contributed to the growth of schools of management and the study of organisational development in the 1960's and 70's. By the end of the century such concepts as harnessing individual creativity at work and considering employees as leaders in their own work area were commonplace.

So Moreno's vision of mobilising the spontaneous - creative forces in our own communities remains compelling, even if there are significant difficulties with what he imagined. For example, in his description of what a sociodramatist does, he overlooks such practicalities as the need for a crowd or a community to warm up to having a director or to using a theatrical form within which to work out their concerns. Despite these difficulties, others were inspired by his vision of sociodrama and carried his work forward into their practice.

2.2   Subsequent Writings On Sociodrama

Sociodrama did receive significant attention in the 1940's and 50's in the education field (see Haas 1949, Anna 2000). A lot of pioneering work was done in the early years and by 1949 there were claims that Moreno's action approach was in most cases pedagogically effective. Robert Haas, a leading Morenian educationalist, commented that

> "*miniature forms of each of the psychodrama genres seemed more effective and manageable in classroom situations than the "classical" forms described in the literature*"   (Anna 2000).

Despite this beginning sociodrama failed to claim its place in the literature or in academic curricula. The literature that exists is relatively small, perhaps because sociodramatists were practitioners rather than writers. Without writers on the sociodramatic method the necessary theoretical development and practical refinements remained within circles of practice and training. This occurred at the Wasley Centre in Perth, Western Australia, where considerable effort and thinking, led by Warren Parry, went into the development of a methodology and curriculum for sociodrama. This was a major focus in the

10 week Training Practicum offered between 1986 and 1990. While this training influenced practitioners in Australia, New Zealand and internationally there are no published documents.

An examination of the literature since the 1950s shows that most articles and books on sociodrama and its applications have been written by professionals for colleagues in their field. The largest area of writing is in education – in primary schools (Lee 1991, Bell & Ledford 1978), as part of social development (Attschuler & Picon 1980), as an approach to secondary health education (McKimmie 1985), in tertiary education (von Weise 1952), in work conferences (Williams & Folger 1949), in teaching sociology (Bogardus 1955), basic communication (Murray 1949a, 1949b), and social issues (Harshfield & Schmidt 1949) and in disability education (Sprague 1991).

More recently there has been a reawakening of interest in sociodrama in organisational and community development, including outdoor adventure training (Gillis & Bonney 1989), organisational applications in public affairs (Knepler 1970), professional ethics (Stein, Ingersoll & Treadwell 1995), the study of the future (Torrance 1975), staff training in working with older people (Wiener & Traynor 1987-1988), teambuilding and staff development (Weiner 1997, Thomson 1997, Williscroft 1998), workplace diversity (Hutt 2001), in community development (Guild 1999), community groups (Radecki 197?) and community theatre (Sternberg & Garcia 1989, Sternberg 1998). At a more theoretical level Synott (1989) and McMorland (1998) integrate sociodrama into organisational change and development.

A smaller group of authors have focused on sociodrama as a methodology and outlined elements of what in their view constitutes the sociodramatic method (Sternberg & Garcia 1989, Weiner 1997, Sprague 1998, Kellerman 1998).

The strength of this body of literature is that it brings together a substantial range of approaches to warm up, production and technique in sociodrama. It is clear that sociodrama is alive and well and that practitioners believe deeply in the effectiveness of what they are doing. However there are two problems.

The first is that there is no agreement about what constitutes sociodrama as a method. The various definitions given by Moreno and other practitioners (see accompanying box) mostly serve to illustrate the reasons directors give for using sociodrama rather than describe what it is. Given the wide range of

applications described by practitioners this is perhaps no surprise. However, even with the authors on sociodrama there is still substantial debate about what sociodrama is and the purpose it serves. Only Kellerman (1998) takes a critical approach to inquire into the theoretical basis of sociodrama.

Kellerman does see sociodrama as a method for social change but dramatically reduces its scope from Moreno's original vision. He is very critical of Moreno's claim of sociodrama as a tool suited to intercultural conflict and he reframes sociodrama as a method for intercultural communication. He finds the theoretical underpinnings of sociodrama as a tool in conflict resolution to be seriously lacking. In Morenian theory, he argues, there is no explanation of the development of inter-group conflict nor of the principles of resolving it, other than separating people who do not choose each other in sociometric tests and that people should 'love their neighbour' through role reversal (1998 p184). He proposes that the more recent literature in sociology, social psychology and anthropology on inter-group conflict would constitute a much stronger theoretical foundation for sociodrama.

> Definitions of Sociodrama
> - *"The group approach … of analysing and treating social problems"* (Moreno 1977)
> - Ideally suited for *"the study of inter-cultural relations"* (Moreno 1977)
> - "A *variety of role playing applications in education, business, therapy and theatre*" (Sternberg & Garcia 1989)
> - *"Sociodrama is a social learning activity based in a group setting* (Weiner 1997)
> - Sociodrama is an *"an experiential group-as-a-whole procedure for social exploration and inter-group conflict transformation"* (Kellerman 1998)
> - *"Sociodrama stands for the work with "natural" groups in crisis (families, job teams, institutional boards)* (Aguiar 2001)

Kellerman defines sociodrama as "*an experiential group-as-a-whole procedure for social exploration and inter-group conflict transformation*" rather than for conflict resolution. (1998 p181). He suggests that Sternberg and Garcia's narrower description of sociodrama as "*a variety of role playing applications in education, business, therapy and theatre*" is inadequate because the essential goal of exploring social events and community patterns that transcend particular individuals is lost. (1998 p182).

In contrast, Weiner and Sprague have emphasised sociodrama as a method for learning rather than social change.

> *"Sociodrama is a social learning activity based in a group setting. … A sociodrama has three primary aims:*
> - *an improved understanding of a social situation*

- *an increase in participants' knowledge about their own and other people's roles in relation to that situation*
- *an emotional release or catharsis as people express their feelings about the subject"*

<div align="right">(Weiner 1997 p106-7).</div>

"Sociodrama is a group method of education. It gives us the opportunity to use our imagination to practise living in the sociodrama group without being punished for making mistakes as we might be if we did the same thing in everyday situations. The sociodramatic method provides a training group for collective action and education." (Sprague 1998 p249)

Recent writings in English about sociodrama as practiced in Brazil also add to the range of how sociodrama is defined. *"Sociodrama stands for the work with "natural" groups in crisis (families, job teams, institutional boards), whereas axiodrama labels interventions designed for the community as a whole"* (Aguiar 2001). Further still, the emergence of 'sociopsychodrama' in South America (Zuretti 2001) expands the possibilities for sociodrama.

The second and related problem in the sociodramatic literature is that, because there is no agreed purpose for sociodrama, it is not easy to see how, as an expression of group life, a sociodrama logically builds towards resolution and what it is that the director pays attention to along the way to assist this. Because the purpose was different for most practitioners the structures and techniques described do not form a coherent picture of the sociodramatist in action.

The diversity of definitions and the vagueness about how sociodrama works and what the director does demonstrates that the field of sociodrama is still evolving. In that sense the process of becoming a sociodramatist has meant that each director has had to come to their own understanding of sociodrama and how it is applied in practice. The next chapter outlines my working assumptions behind what sociodrama is and how it works.

Chapter 3   Working Assumptions That Guide Practice

The practice of sociodrama depends on how the director understands the purpose of sociodrama and how it works. In this chapter I describe the basic assumptions that sit behind my practice. These descriptions are a work in progress and collectively form what is in effect a framework for sociodrama.

Moreno's high level description of sociodrama and its purpose is relatively simple: *"The group approach … of analysing and treating social problems"* (1977). In sociodrama we are concerned with our social roles and our collective identity as a group or sub-group in society or in an organisation, and with making sense of the way the group operates. The purpose in sociodrama is to focus on social and organisational issues with a view to understanding our position and making changes. Like all Morenian action methods it is a tool for social transformation.

However as a director I need to know how this high level description translates into practice. This is so that I can separate principles from techniques. Working from principles rather than techniques means I have more scope as a director to adapt the method to meet the situation. Below I describe my assumptions about what sociodrama is, thinking systemically, how sociodrama creates change, deepening warm up and creating a unified warm up.

3.1   What Sociodrama Is

Here is a working description of what sociodrama is in practice.

> *Sociodrama is a learning method that creates deep understanding of the social systems that shape us individually and collectively.*

Through sociodrama we can experience and come to understand the nature of our social systems and their influence upon our personal and group roles and relationships. With this understanding we can better address some of the collective issues that face us.

3.2   Thinking Systemically

A sociodramatist needs to think in terms of social systems. To do this means the director thinks systemically about a presenting situation and identifies the various parts of the system and the dynamics between those parts so that the group learns about what shapes its behaviour. Systemic thinking involves making descriptions about such things as the roles, relationships, rules, norms, behaviours, patterns and social forces operating in the social system.

A 'social system' is a term that loosely describes the field of complex inter-relationships around a presenting social issue. Systems can be as large or as small as the issue being described. There is no right way to describe a system as that always depends on your viewpoint and why you want to explore it. Naming something as a system allows us to see it in a different way, and look for organising principles, patterns of behaviour and points of leverage. It allows us to discuss complex issues in a way that can develop insight and understanding. [3]

We can think of social systems as being subject to social forces that provoke or resist change. These forces operate on elements of the system and relationships between them. In this context it is useful to distinguish between social forces that are external events and those that are our collective responses to events. The social forces we have no control over are typically external events, such as our history, economic conditions and natural disasters. The social forces which we do have some control over derive from our collective response to such events. This distinction allows the sociodramatist to focus participants on finding actions they can take rather than remaining helpless.

As an example of a large scale social force, the Great Depression of 1929-33 meant that jobs and money were scarce for the great majority of people. The Depression itself was an external event which was outside our control. In Australia, our collective response to the experience of unemployment, poverty and being dependent on welfare created a fear of debt and a focus on job security that has shaped attitudes to money and work for several generations. These attitudes entered our culture and are passed on to our children as a set of values to live by. They became part of what Moreno termed the 'cultural conserve' of Australian society. While we had no control over the Depression occurring, we

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[3] For a description on the evolution of systems thinking see Browne (1996).

do have control over whether we will go along with this social force and whether we still live by these values.

Similarly, in organisations and families, there are social forces that shape behaviour in groups, such as conventions around status, politeness or difference. Some of these are overt, *"Nobody challenges the boss' ideas"*, and some are held unconsciously as assumptions about life, *"conflict is to be avoided"*.

Depending on the issues a group or organisation faces and the purpose for it is meeting, through sociodrama we can examine the effect of relevant social forces on the group. By definition one person cannot easily change a social system or an organisation but collectively individuals can create structures and build relationships, in effect a subculture, that will contain, mitigate or redirect these social forces. We can do little to influence external events but we can manage our responses differently and influence what aspects of our culture gets conserved and what gets re-examined.

3.2.1   What Does This Mean for the Sociodramatist?

Thinking systemically is not as straightforward as it sounds. In even the simplest meeting there is a lot going on. The complex reality of people is automatically there in every scene. The sociodrama director works with this reality but trains his or her perception to notice the social system at the scene, what social forces are operating and how they influence behaviour. In any given moment the social, the group and the personal world are all present. The director needs to keep aware of all three and hold the focus on those elements (such as patterns, data, forces and relationships) that relate to the purpose of the group. The director's job is to work with the participants and bring out the value for them. The aim is for participants to see the dynamic forces operating in the situation and understand their roles in it.

The diagram below illustrates the sociodramatist's systemic focus. The director pays attention to the social forces alive in the life of group members while at the same time being aware of the impact in the personal world of individual group members.
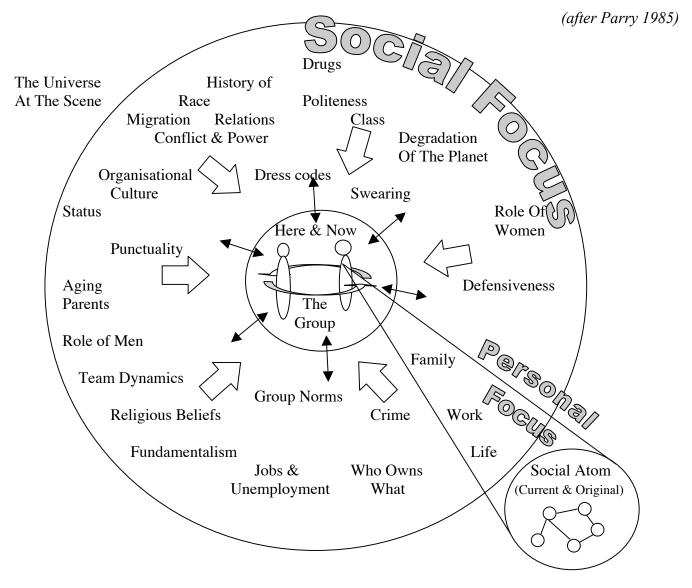
Diagram 1   Sociodrama As The Exploration Of How Social Forces Shape Us Collectively

(after Parry 1985)

Social Focus

Drugs

The Universe
At The Scene

History of
Race
Migration   Relations
Conflict & Power

Politeness
Class

Degradation
Of The Planet

Organisational
Culture

Dress codes

Swearing

Status

Role Of
Women

Here & Now

Punctuality

Aging
Parents

The
Group

Defensiveness

Role of Men

Team Dynamics

Family

Religious Beliefs

Group Norms

Crime

Work

Fundamentalism

Life

Personal
Focus

Jobs &
Unemployment

Who Owns
What

Social Atom
(Current & Original)

As a result of systemic thinking the director and participants can experience different positions in the system and more deeply understand the social forces that shape and transform us. The purpose is to create change.

A working description of how sociodrama creates change:

   The transformative power of a sociodrama emerges when participants:

   • *develop action-insight from their experience of exploring a relevant social system as-it-is*

- *generate sufficient spontaneity to intervene in that social system and reconfigure it (i.e. go beyond the cultural conserve)*

In any situation we do have choice about what to focus on. In fact the director must maintain a sense of choice so other people realise it is possible. If the director loses it then others go down the tube! Part of the benefit of understanding the forces involved, is that participants see those which they can do something about, influence or where they can take action and those that are out of their control.

In most dilemmas or stuck situations people don't realise that they are interacting with the world from a single and possibly fixed view. For example, "*I can't say anything because I'm the junior person here*" or, "*Swearing is allowed here. It's a man's world*".

In setting out a scene participants start to experience other points of view and this begins to broaden their perspective. As they develop insight through exploration, their energy gets released and they take action in the situation they face. I think of this as action-insight.

An example of this occurred in a group session on classroom behaviour. We set out in action how the school discipline system worked in practice. In the enactment it was clear that the demand that students be punished undermined their ability to learn from their mistakes and manage their own behaviour. This demand also forced teachers to apply escalating punishments and had a negative effect on their relationships with students. In the enactment group members got a sense of the powerful social forces (parental expectations, the need to show who's in charge) behind that discipline system and the ways in which the principal, deputy, teachers and students (key elements in the system) were affected. Strong feelings emerged in the group and they generated ideas about what they could do to improve the situation. This is where the spontaneity generated is reapplied to the situation to reshape it.

Systemic thinking and a sociodramatic approach can be applied even when there is no group. This can happen in a one to one conversation with a manager about what is driving the behaviour in a team, drawing diagrams together on the whiteboard (used as a stage) to show the relationships and the forces impacting on what is happening.

All transformation, in Moreno's terms, works on the basis of co-creating and being co-responsible for what occurs (Marineau 1989). The sociodramatist works interactively, with a genuine spirit of enquiry – not as an expert there to tell the group or manager what the problem is and what they have to do. As a rule of thumb, one of the outcomes of sociodrama is that participants more effectively intervene in their social systems. Hence, in the group example above, the true test of this work is whether the spontaneity generated is sufficient to assist those teachers to intervene in their own school.

Thinking systemically is an essential starting point for the director however conducting an effective sociodrama in a group requires an understanding of what is involved in warm up.

3.3 Warm Up

The development of action-insight and the release of spontaneity into the social system occurs as the director promotes the purpose of the group, and works with the warm up to co-create and be affected by the enactment. Within Morenian methodology the concept of warm up has a central place because it is such a fundamental element in the success of the method. Warm up is the key to unlocking the doors so that participants experience themselves flowing with free choice rather than acting out of narrow roles in constrained situations.

Warm up is best known as a theatrical term referring to what actors do to get ready for a performance or rehearsal. In developing his theories Moreno drew on concepts from the traditional theatre (Marineau 1989) and expanded on the process of warm up in the expression of spontaneity, and warm up to role. For the purpose of this paper, I focus on particular aspects of warm up that relate to directing a sociodrama.

i)   Deepening the Warm Up
ii) Creating and Maintaining a Unified Warm Up

3.3.1   Deepening The Warm Up

One of the tasks of the director is to manage the warm up to a sociodrama so that it deepens and serves the purpose of the group. Three aspects of deepening warm up include understanding warm up as a process of becoming absorbed in a role, working to maintain the group warm up at the level where the work of the group is, and sustaining a parallel warm up to both the social and personal worlds of the group members.

One useful way to think of warm up is as a process of giving attention to someone or something and becoming absorbed in that state[4]. We warm up to what we give attention to and become absorbed in a role (thought, feeling and action) in relation to what we give attention to. Therefore the process of giving attention is the vehicle by which we get into role. The more we give attention to someone or something the more we become absorbed in the role.

The degree of warm up refers to the extent that participants bring their personal selves into a role and become absorbed in the role. The more they do this, the more they warm up to their own spontaneity and hence bring out the core issues in the various roles. This has a major impact on their experience, in how they make sense of (integrate) the drama and on learning outcomes.

For example in a session on giving feedback to staff, the manager is distracted over a recent meeting with an important user of his services. The more attention he gives to this the more he enters the role of '*worried provider of IT services'*. If this role persists it is unlikely that the work of the group will get done adequately. So the director intervenes in the warm up, and draws group members' attention to each other, to their purpose and bringing out roles more needed to meet that purpose. "*Among your staff, whose performance are you most wanting to develop?"* This evokes the role of '*thoughtful leader'*.

So a participant becomes warmed up or absorbed in a role. However every role exists within a system and, when evoked, the role gets acted out. It must then be put to service in meeting the purpose of the group. The question for the director is, what is the focus that the group needs to sustain so that the work gets done.

A second aspect of warm up is that the director manages the degree of warm up so it matches the work focus of the group[5]. There are three broad levels of work focus, see diagram 2 below.
   a) Social Focus is concerned with the outer, external world of human society,
   b) Group Focus is concerned with the dynamics in the group of participants who are present in the room, and

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[4] This description of warm up is attributed by Warren Parry to Lynette Clayton.
[5] This section is based on Warren Parry's concept of 'Levels of Warm Up' (1985).

c) Personal Focus is concerned with the internal personal world of an individual, with more intimate or deeper issues, often relating to their original social atom.
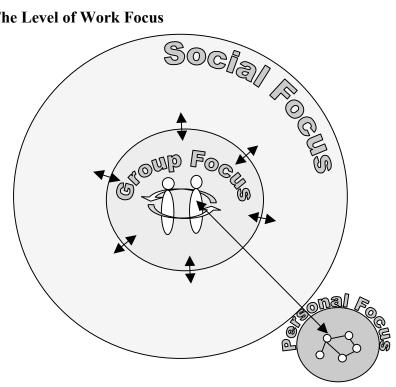
Diagram 2   The Level of Work Focus

These levels co-exist all the time and intersect. For example, a dispute between a staff member and their boss exists at all three levels. It is, at the same time, an industrial relations problems in the organisation, a dynamic between two people (if both are present) and a personal issue for one or the other. The sociodrama director holds to the purpose of the group and focuses on the level of work required to meet that purpose. The director then manages the warm up so participants remain focused at the level required.

It is worth noting that once a warm up has deepened within a group people do not easily return to a shallower warm up. It is human nature to seek greater intimacy, to get to the personal. In contrast, when we work with social forces and social systems there is an opposing tendency to go into the abstract as we make generalizations about complex systems. If not well managed, this takes the warm up to a less personal level and reduces the depth of warm up. It is vital that the director sustains a parallel warm up to the personal.

The third aspect of warm up is sustaining a parallel warm up in participants.

From looking at how children learn and play Moreno categorised roles as; somatic (eater, sleeper, breather); social (doctor, policeman, sports fan); and psychodramatic (that captures the unique way an individual enacts that role). However it would be a mistake to assume that sociodrama works with social roles and psychodrama works with psychodramatic roles. All three types of roles are present all the time.

If the director only works at the level of social roles this will create a tendency to stay stereotyped and superficial. From such enactments we don't get much learning, we just get performance. Social and personal roles already co-exist and the director sustains a parallel warm up that is both personally and socially focused. A warm up to the personal is important because effective learning occurs only when we are touched deeply at an individual level. If we are not individually affected then we do not care much about what happens. The enactment will seem trivial or hollow. In addition, unless we are engaged personally then we cannot be effectively engaged at a group level. However a warm up to the social is equally important so that we can work on our collective issues.

But if the warm up to the personal dominates then the social focus can get lost. If the warm up to the social dominates then there is little possibility for the experience to touch participants at any depth. Exploring with a social focus is in no way less intense, less relevant or less important than exploring from a personal focus. In reality the social and personal are inextricable.

The point is that the director selects the degree of warm up and the level of work so that they are congruent with the group purpose. In a sociodrama the purpose of the group will not be met if the director encourages individuals to focus solely on their personal work. Nor will a sociodrama be meaningful if the group members focus solely on social roles.

3.3.2   Creating And Maintaining A Unified Warm Up

At the same time as deepening the warm up the director pays attention to whether the group is unified in its warm up to achieving its purpose. In creating a unified warm up to a sociodrama it is important to influence the initial contact with participants and to shape the question that frames the work of the group.

Warm up is highly individual and often contradictory. To be effective the director needs to recognise and work with the here-and-now life of the group – whatever is attracting the attention of group members. The task of the director is to take account of the existing individual warm ups in the group, refine them to a single focus thus creating a group warm up. The purpose of doing this is so that the spontaneity of group members can be applied to what the group is there to do. Managing the warm up effectively is a critical part of Morenian methodology. It is not too much to say that "everything depends on the warm up" and hence planning the warm up phase is important. This is particularly true of sociodrama (Parry 1985).

The first time participants hear or read about the forthcoming session is a significant point in their warm up. The initial announcement to participants in a meeting, by email or in a brochure or conference program usually states the purpose of the group session and what might be gained from it. Participants will immediately have a response to the announcement (excitement, dread, ambivalence and so on) and will bring this to the group session. Planning a sociodrama requires that the director think about what to say to the participants prior to the session and at the beginning of the session so that they generate a positive warm up to the work.

As part of my work I consider the key roles I want to evoke in participants so that the session is successful. For most organisational work I plan for participants to warm up to the progressive role of *active learner*. But for a sociodrama I have found that something more is needed. The most helpful role is one where participants come prepared to make sense of their own experience in the here-and-now exploration of the group issue. So I deliberately warm up group members to the role of *social investigator* exploring a social system and to each other as *co-explorers*.

I have found that the role of co-explorer allows more spontaneity to be brought to the presenting issue and, as a group, we enter the issue collaboratively, as companions. This also takes the pressure off me as the director having to come up with the answer and that assists me to access my own spontaneity. Once a warm up is created prior to the session then the director needs to build on it once the session begins.

One effective way to crystallise a unified warm up and a hold the group's attention on the presenting issue is to reframe that issue as a question for the group to explore. This approach, developed and taught by Dr. G Max Clayton, is referred to as the "Sociodramatic Question".

The issue facing the group is expressed in such a way that the group as a whole can warm up to it as relevant both to them personally and as a suitable focus for the work of the group. In itself a powerful sociodramatic question creates a unifying purpose in the group. It is a way of holding the purpose in front of the group. It helps the group to stay focused and to mobilize their resources. The framing of the purpose in this way is a critical step in creating a good sociodrama. The question can come from the group (*group-centred*) or it can be set by the director (*director-directed*) and advertised as the purpose of the session.

The following are sociodramatic questions I have used in my work:
- How can we have healthy power relations in a detention centre?
- How can we intervene in schools to bring spontaneity into stuck situations?
- How can we work more effectively together to build reconciliation?

The director uses the sociodramatic question as the basis for generating action and setting it in the here and now context of living. It is the basis for learning and producing insight. At the end of the drama the group returns to the sociodramatic question to see the logical 'whole' of their exploration and make sense of their individual and collective experience.

3.3.3   The Use of Language in Warm Up

At each stage the language used by the director is significant. It is a major determinant of the depth of a sociodrama. In directing a sociodrama the director uses language to frame the work focus, to create the warm up needed to do the work, to articulate the sociodramatic question. Language is one of the most powerful ways to intervene in or sustain a warm up. It is important that the director is aware how language shapes roles and role relationships and sets the degree of warm up.

For example, in a sociodrama with youth workers concerned with the influence of politics on unemployment the director selects the degree of warm up and the level of work to focus on through their choice of words. If the director says: *"Consider a typical politician, with all their concerns. What*

would be the main issue here?" then he or she is choosing a social focus with a low degree of warm up. The participants will respond with generalizations. The enactment will have little emotional impact and there will be a feeling of 'so what?'.

However, if the director says *"Imagine you become involved in politics, with all your existing values and philosophies, what would be the main issue here?"* then the participants' warm up changes significantly. The level of work has a personal focus and the degree of warm up is deeper. The responses will be much more authentic. The enactment has a stronger sense of reality that will enhance the learning from the experience.

The language used shapes what the group pays attention to. Consider the following statements:

- *"Why* do *I* keep recreating the same pattern of events in my life?" This is an "I" invitation to join in a personal search for understanding. It offers the role of '*interested researcher'*.
- *"How* can *we* maintain our integrity as employees in a reactive bureaucracy?" This is a "we" invitation to become part of a group exploring a social issue, in the role of '*committed co-explorer'*.

When used by group members, the use of '*we'*, rather than '*I'*, often indicates whether they are ready to join with others to a common purpose. The use of '*we'* evokes collective responsibility. The use of '*I'* evokes personal responsibility. Both are necessary to the work of the group. However, in creating a unifying warm up to the sociodramatic question the director emphasises collective responsibility to the presenting issue.

In addition, the use of '*why'*, rather than '*how'*, indicates whether the focus is on explanation or on exploration. I have found that in shaping either a collective or a personal inquiry, '*why*?' is not a particularly useful question. '*Why*?' demands reasons behind a situation and usually evokes rationalisations and blame. The implication is that once we have a reasonable explanation we can then relax. The possibility for action declines. '*Why*?' holds understanding as the primary goal; action, if it happens, is secondary.

By contrast, a much more useful question is '*how*'. This warms us up to our curiosity, ingenuity and exploration. '*How*' lets us focus on our response to the system in question and on action to move things

along. '*How*' leads to a role that is more concerned with transformation. A sociodramatic question is more powerful when '*how'* and '*we'* are used.

It is through such refinements in the use of language that aspects of warm up are brought to bear in creating a unified group ready to do the work they are there for.

You will have noticed that the descriptions of systemic thinking and warm up above are not set out as, nor are they intended to be read as, a series of formal principles for sociodrama. These are assumptions and understandings that are fundamental to my practice and as such form the framework from which I operate. As mentioned in the last chapter each sociodramatist has to make their own sense of and articulate the principles that work for them. I list some of the working principles that I hold dear in a later chapter.

In summary, by drawing on systemic thinking and warm up the director is in a powerful position to create an effective environment to direct a sociodrama. In the next chapter I discuss what is involved in directing sociodrama in practice.

Chapter 4   Sociodrama In Practice

While a sociodramatist might never actually direct a group sociodrama, there is considerable learning to be had from a well directed enactment. This chapter outlines the structure and steps of a sociodrama, various techniques and interventions, what signs to look for and recognise, and generally what a director might do in directing a sociodrama. This chapter organised under the following three headings.

- Agreeing on Aims & Objectives: identifying the purpose of the sociodrama.
- Planning a Sociodrama: deciding how to use Morenian methods to achieve your goals.
- Conducting The Session: what the director pays attention to in a sociodrama.

4.1   Agreeing On Aims and Objectives

The first step is to work out the purpose of directing a sociodrama in the specific context you are working in. There are two main contexts here. Firstly, someone asks you to do some work in their organisation or community group. Your starting point is what the organisation wants to achieve. The second context is where you offer a workshop and define the purpose based on who you want to attract and what you want to achieve. You can then go straight into the planning phase. The section below focuses on negotiating with a client organisation.

4.1.1   Negotiating The Brief

Before planning a sociodrama the director has to meet with the client organisation to take the brief and work out a contract. They outline the context and what they want to achieve and in discussion this gets refined so that you have a workable contract. A workable contract is one where you both know what is expected and where there is a good chance of success, taking into account the context, the relevance of the issue, the people who need to be involved, their willingness to address the issue and the learning required.

The contract you reach with them must also be one that the intended participants can support otherwise it will need to be adjusted or renegotiated when the group meets.

During the discussion I am assessing whether a sociodrama will achieve what is required. For me the most crucial question is: What is the objective of doing a sociodrama on this topic with this group of people? It is here that the working assumptions I make about what sociodrama is and how it works influence whether it can be effectively used with this group. The second question is "Will participants warm up to valuing action-insight from their experience of the social system as it is?" This indicates whether they are likely to mobilise their own spontaneity to intervene in that social system and reconfigure it. The third question is "What is the sociodramatic question?"

At a meeting with the manager at a large engineering workshop I learn that team dynamics in the senior team keep getting bogged down in recrimination and blame. The brief is to clarify roles and communication in the team. As a sociodramatist I picture the system surrounding the team and imagine who might be involved and what consequences might be. I ask the manager if the team dynamics are having an effect on the way the maintenance workshop operates and on their customers and if this too is part of the brief. "I hadn't thought of that, but yes" is the reply. So the brief is expanded beyond the senior team. When I picture what it would be like to set out the key players and customers in the system and have them interact I realise I need to find out a bit more about their business. For example, what ongoing issue really gets the team dynamics polarised around recrimination and blame. As the meeting progresses I further refine whether a sociodrama will serve their needs.

Once there is a workable contract then I can make a plan for the session on how to achieve the outcome and whether to use a sociodramatic enactment.
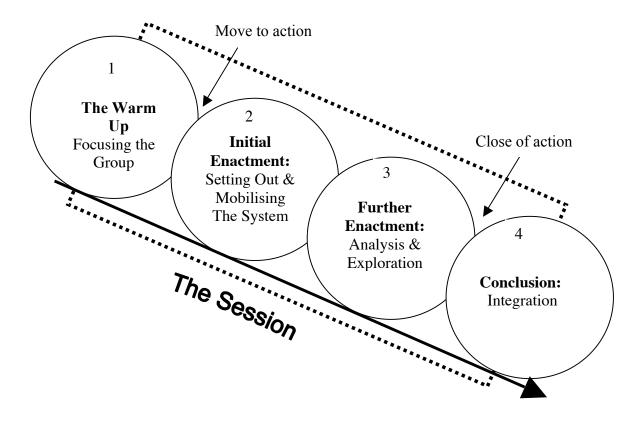
4.2   Planning a Sociodrama

There is a structure to a sociodrama that is similar to enactments in all Moreno's applied methods. The sociodrama typically unfolds in a sequence of four phases from the warm up to the integration of learning, see diagram 3 below. This diagram assists both in planning and in the conduct of the sociodrama.

It is not possible to plan much beyond the warm up phase because the drama will be a co-creation. The director pays particular attention to getting the warm up right so that the objectives can be met. The director plans the initial events to create a positive environment and sustain a suitable warm up to doing the work of the group. As outlined in the previous chapter the director builds the warm up around the

work focus of the group, the degree of warm up, how people will hear about the session, the roles to evoke in participants, the language to use and the sociodramatic question.

Diagram 3   The Four Phases of a Sociodrama

In the Warm Up (Phase 1) the director is concerned with heightening the attention of group members on those things that are relevant to the purpose of the group. Some of the warm up occurs prior to the session and some occurs at the beginning of the session itself.

In the Initial Enactment: Setting Out & Mobilising The System (Phase 2) the action begins. Those involved in the sociodrama, the stakeholders, are 'brought onto' the stage using auxiliaries, and the system is set out. Group members see how these stakeholders interact. This continues to deepen the warm up in the participants.

In Further Enactment: Analysis and Exploration (Phase 3) the participants make an analysis of the system. Group members draw on their spontaneity and enter the surplus reality of the enacted system.

The enactment takes on a life of its own and the unexpected can and often does emerge before our very eyes. At a suitable point the director ends the enactment.

In the Conclusion: Integration (Phase 4) the group members make sense of what happened, what was learned and how this might apply to their everyday lives. The session concludes although integration of the experience continues afterwards.

In the following sections, these phases are discussed from the point of view of the director.

4.3   Conducting The Sociodrama Session

4.3.1   Phase 1   The Warm Up

At the beginning of the session the director builds on the warm up started prior to the session, links participants together, warms up group members to their purpose for being there and how they will work together.

The director makes an introduction that frames the session and outlines the sociodramatic question and then conducts the warm up phase so that members are engaged and warm up fully to the work they are there to do. The warm up phase can be done either as a *director-directed warm up* of structured and sociometric activities towards a specific presenting issue or through a *group-centred warm up* where the director identifies the issue or theme from participants' interests or concerns. Once the group has a unified focus and the warm up to purposeful action is sufficient the group moves into an exploration of the issues.

In organisations I typically conduct a director-directed warm up to emphasise the purpose and orient the group to working together. With 60 leaders of a large utility company focusing on leadership challenges we enacted a short sociodrama about a situation that faced a typical manager. This session followed work on their leadership charter, what it meant and on the values they wanted to carry forward into the next phase of the organisation. The purpose was carried in the sociodramatic question "How can we better manage conflicting pressures so that our leadership is based on our values".

In this phase I have found it helpful to stay aware of

- Managing the warm up so it is both personal and socially focused
- Maintaining my purpose as a director

4.3.1.1 Managing The Warm Up

After framing the session the director works with what the participants bring forward in the context of the purpose of the group. The director refines the sociodramatic question so that there is a clear group focus.

The point is that the director manages the level of warm up so it is congruent with the group purpose. In the example of the utility company the level of work is with them as leaders. There is a social focus on them as leaders in their organisation and a personal focus in the situations they face. In the warm up they discussed in pairs a situation they faced that challenged their leadership and the kind of pressure they were under as they did so. In the large group a number of them spoke about situations they faced. This oriented the group to the reality of leadership and to working together. The paired discussion emphasises their personal link to the question and in the large group they warm up to the situations they have in common. I subsequently select the scene we will enact so that it carries the social focus and the sociodramatic question.

Sometimes individuals warm up in ways that are counter to group norms or the purpose or something unexpected happens. When this occurs it is important to maintain your purpose as the director so that the warm up phase continues and the group reaches agreement about how the work will proceed.

4.3.1.2 Maintaining Purpose As Director

> "W*arm up is quite often incongruent. To get a congruent warm up you* [the director] *need to fill yourself with a single purpose*". (Parry 1985)

As we have seen, focusing on a sociodramatic question is a way to fill the group with a single purpose. This is also true of the director who at any moment has to be able to build on what is happening in the group and link everything back to the work.

I find that once I am clear about the sociodramatic question and how it links to the purpose of the group I am less easily distracted by the range of things that occur in group life. What helps me is to be prepared to articulate the purpose of what we are doing at the drop of a hat. This acts as a compass that assists me as the director to hold that purpose as 'magnetic north' amidst the chaos of group life, the multiple possibilities inherent in a scene, and the sheer complexity of social issues. Knowing 'magnetic north' helps me assess where and how to intervene in the enactment.

4.3.2   Phase 2   Initial Enactment: Setting Out & Mobilising The System

4.3.2.1 The Move To Action

Once the group is unified around a single purpose the move to action occurs. Often the starting point for exploring the sociodramatic question is a scene where the social dilemma is acutely felt. This may be the real life situation of one of the group members. If the presenting situation is carried by (known to) a single individual the enactment is a *protagonist-centred sociodrama*. If the situation is more generally shared across the participants then the enactment is a *group-centred sociodrama* (Parry 1985). This influences how the director makes the move into action and how the elements that make up the social system being investigated are set out. In a protagonist-centred sociodrama these elements are drawn from the individual protagonist. The protagonist is working on behalf of the group. In a group-centred sociodrama these elements are drawn from group members. In that case the group itself is the protagonist.

4.3.2.2 Setting Out and Mobilising The System

The purpose of the Initial Enactment is to set out the system and mobilise it so that the group can experience it. The director uses the full range of dramatic production techniques (such as placement on the stage, interview for role, asides) to bring out and make visible the situation as it is. Once the scene is set and the roles are clear, the director mobilises the system by asking everyone to act their role simultaneously. This is a depiction of the cultural conserve around the presenting issue or dilemma in the group so that the group can make an analysis. In this phase it is important to bring out all significant elements in the system otherwise the analysis will be inadequate and so will any intervention into the

system. These may include aspects of surplus reality such as absent or 'ghost' elements that are nonetheless present, for example, people who have been sacked or the ideals of a long dead founder[6].

The setting out, the mobilising of the system are experienced in action. In itself the setting out of a system is a powerful event and contains both thought and deep feeling. However the mobilisation of a complex system is often chaotic and can be daunting.

In my experience this is the phase where many sociodramas fail. This is because the director loses his or her nerve in holding the group long enough to experience deeply the system as a whole, especially if that experience is unpleasant or depressing. For example in a scene about the aged care system there were participants with parents in care and who found the enactment excruciating because they felt they could do nothing to change how aged care works.. The director experienced the anxiety of the group and its desire to move on but did not do so. By holding the group at this point and asking participants to stay in touch with their responses to the whole system the group was faced with its despair at changing large bureaucratic systems. Only when the depth of feeling was acknowledged at a group level could the group mobilize its spontaneity and resourcefulness to address issues in a way that was enabling. The initial impatience with the enactment and the speed with which blame was being passed to someone else are some of the restrictive solutions that may be enacted by group members to avoid experiencing the discomfort.[7]

One of Moreno's operating principles is that group members experience the social system as-it-is in order to mobilise the spontaneity and creativity needed to begin healing, learning or generating options for change.

If in setting out the system, the director only sets out limited aspects of the system as a whole this reduces the ability of the group to get in touch with their hopes and fears about the situation and will therefore skew the group's ability to release creativity and spontaneity into creating enabling solutions. Sociodrama offers a method of experiencing both hopes and fears deeply enough to apply these life processes to larger social issues – as long as we directors can hold our nerve. This involves the director

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[6] Surplus reality is a concept of Moreno's that has been taken up or reinvented by other writers. For example, 'Ghost' roles are also found in Process Oriented Psychology (Mindell 1995).

[7] Restrictive and enabling solutions are part of the Focal Conflict Model of group behaviour developed by Whitaker and Lieberman (1964). Restrictive solutions are driven by discomfort arising out of hopes and fears around presenting issues.

holding his or her role in the face of the potential chaos of the mobilised system, the sheer unpredictability of what might emerge and the disturbance of deep and perhaps unwanted responses to the system and then linking what is happening in the group back to the purpose for being there.

4.3.3   Phase 3   Further Enactment: Analysis & Exploration

This phase involves the analysis and exploration of the system. The direction of the exploration depends on the analysis but in practice these run hand in hand. The logic of a sociodrama is clear enough. The system is set out and mobilised, the group members experience the system as-it-is, make an analysis and then further explore the system on that basis. The purpose of this phase is to release the group spontaneity so that group members find a new response to the situation that goes further than existing conserved responses.

The purpose of the analysis is for group members to make collective sense of their experience of the system, understand how social forces shape system behaviour and develop a fresh perspective. Actually participants begin to experience, be affected by and think about the social forces and systemic patterns on the stage as soon as the enactment starts. Once enough of the system as a whole is mobilised the director seeks to bring out the group's responses to the system as-it-is. The question for the director is at which point to focus the group on analysis. The extent and quality of the analysis may vary but the point is that the group comes to an awareness of what is happening and what their responses to it are. They may or may not have ideas about what to do about it.

It is important that there is a collective analysis. If the group is not involved in the analysis then participants are less likely to warm up to collaborating around an effective response to the issue. Any subsequent exploration becomes skewed, most likely away from deep feeling. A full response to the system as a whole is part of an analysis and is part of bringing the spontaneity of group members to bear on the group issue.

At times the director has already made an analysis about what the system needs and therefore sets out only that aspect of the system that fits his or her conclusions. In this case the director is making a more targeted intervention consistent with 'sociodramatic role training'. There is nothing wrong with this. It may be perfectly in tune with the purpose of the group and exactly what is needed.

In practice the logical sequence, outlined above, of analysis followed by exploration is not always so clear cut. Once the system is mobilised the enactment often evolves organically as group members act from their roles and new aspects of system life emerge. Group members respond, make their analysis on the run, bring their understanding into their roles and a fresh interaction develops. This is all 'grist for the mill'. Analysis is going on all the time, the point here is to make collective sense of what is happening in the system. There can be several points of analysis each followed by further exploration.

In one sociodrama, after the system in an office was set out and mobilised several participants immediately began trying interventions to address the core issue as they saw it. They had clearly formed their own individual analysis and were acting on it. The group appeared interested in what might happen. As director, I followed their warm up and as a group we then focused on the response of office members and the system as a whole to their intervention. In that case there was no collective analysis beforehand, we had moved quickly to test some interventions and learned about the office system as we went along. In this case, exploration first, analysis afterwards.

There is no one right way to do this. Each sociodrama director needs to find their own way. Social systems are dynamic, and individual and group responses do not follow a logical sequence, so the director, while clearly holding the purpose for the group, needs to stay fluid about the way the system is explored.

4.3.3.1 Interventions to Deepen Understanding of Social Systems

Nevertheless the loose sequence of analysis followed by further exploration is useful because it allows us to clarify how we deepen our understanding of a social system. There are a number of interventions available to the director. The first three more obviously lend themselves to collective analysis.

- Systemic Statements
- Focusing On Subgroups & Their Relationships
- Stop and Reflect
- Continuing the Enactment
- Testing The System
- Trialling Interventions

a)   Systemic Statements

The director creates an awareness of the culture being enacted through the use of systemic statements. Participants benefit from developing their role as systems analyst through making sense of what is going on. One powerful way to warm them up to their experience of the system as a whole is for the director to make systemic statements about what is being enacted. Group members also make their own observations of what they see happening in the system. Observations take a number of forms. They may:

i)   relate to posture and distance. *"There are four subgroups standing a long way from each other. All are facing inwards.*"

ii)   name explicit behaviour, *"There is a lot of glancing around but little contact." "Everyone is looking for someone else to speak first.*

iii)   name values and worldviews in different parts of the system. *"This is a world in which ... suspicion is rife." "The world works best when ..."*[8]

iv)   speak the unspoken. *"Tension has suddenly risen. No-one is prepared to name the real issue.*"

v)   link the experience in the enacted system back to their workplaces. *"This is exactly what happens in your executive meetings. Everyone shuts down and bitches outside the meeting."*

b)   Focusing On Subgroups & Their Relationships

The director can deepen the exploration by explicitly drawing out the worldview and values of significant subgroups about how they see themselves, others and the system as a whole. Typical questions might include: *"Who are you? What do you promote? What do you stand for? How do you relate to others?"* This intervention brings out some of the patterns in the group that will assist group members make a running analysis of what is going on.

c)   Stop and Reflect

At times the multiple interactions happening at once can be confusing or even overwhelming. One way to contain this is to stop the action and have the participants take stock of what is happening. The director can use a series of questions to focus participants on what they need to progress the drama or

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[8] This is a potent intervention discussed in the context of working with cultural diversity issues by Jenny Hutt (2002).

in some other way link to the sociodramatic question. As participants discuss their experience they are of course making an analysis of what is going on and clarifying their response to the system.

During this discussion participants clarify their responses to the system as it is and in so doing have made some analysis of the patterns of behaviour and system dynamics, perhaps deciding what interventions to make to reconfigure the social system or adjust the roles they have taken. This does not always need to be expressed to the group as a whole. The action can simply continue. In this case the next step is to set a scene to explore how the system responds to these developments.

d)   Continuing The Enactment

Once the system as-it-is is mobilised the simplest thing for the director to do is to get curious about what is happening and produce further enactment. In this way the values and dynamics of the system become more evident. This is done using the range of Morenian dramatic techniques, such as placement on the stage, interview for role, building interaction between elements of the system and creating a new scene. The central techniques of doubling, mirroring and role reversal are used to extend awareness. However these look different in a sociodrama.

As the focus is on working with social forces and frequently subgroups, doubling occurs when a subgroup gets together and works out their core values. Having a number of people enter the social role of, say, irate parents at the closing of a child care centre, allows those people to extend their experience and learn more about that world than by simply using a single person in the role. Likewise mirroring and role reversal occur in entire subgroups so that the collective as well as the personal nature of the role is experienced.

e)   Testing a System

A lot can be learned about how a system operates when a system becomes stressed. One method is for the director to introduce a crisis into order to see how the system as a whole responds. For example, in a hospital scene, evidence is found that a batch of blood they have been using is contaminated. Subsequently, a demonstration takes place outside the entrance to demand change. The press and TV cameras arrive. How will the subgroups and the system as a whole respond?

Or, in a workplace restructure, the boss announces that 4 positions will be cut and that the team should decide who will go. The staff members hold a meeting. *"It's just before the scheduled time, in your roles warm up to yourself and the situation and come and take your place in the meeting room."* These stressors are designed to bring out more of the underlying characteristics of the system being explored.

f)   Trialling Interventions Into The System

A staff group decides that the thing to do is to send a delegation to the boss about the restructure. A new scene is set and the interaction is played out. There is a lot of learning here as it refines the issues the delegation needs to take account of in planning to take effective action. This is a similar phase to the role test in a role training session. Does the group have the necessary roles to transform the social system, reconfigure it or learn how to manage it better? Such roles may emerge naturally out of the group experience or the group may want to experiment with a variety of approaches and learn from each other. For the director, the choice of this intervention depends on whether this will meet the objectives of the session. At this stage we are very near to the close of the action phase of the sociodrama.

4.3.3.2 The Critical Moment

Sometimes during an enactment the unexpected emerges. A moment of magic where in the controlled environment of the sociodrama the group produces something so true that it captures the life of the system being investigated. The director's role here is to bring this out and have the participants pay attention to it. The key is to name what is happening and link it to the purpose of the exploration. About 40 minutes into a sociodrama on bringing spontaneity back into life in the classroom, a participant in the back of the class burst into tears. At this point the director takes up the role of 'social systems teacher' pointing out what is significant and why.

> *"So this is it. This is exactly what happens in schools. There is a lot of grief here and nobody seems to know what to do with it. We are all shocked. And we're about to carry on as if nothing has happened."*

These kinds of moments are like jewels in the life of a sociodrama if the director can grasp them sufficiently to anchor the whole experience back into the life of the group. There is deep feeling and there is insight into the system as a whole what can be crystallised into significant learning. I know this

because while I have missed many such moments, the few times I have named it the profundity of learning is palpable.

The director links what happens in that moment to the individual and collective concerns of the group. At that point the sociodramatic question again becomes a potent guide. *"Yes. How can we bring life back into a system where we are engaged in just surviving?"*

From this point the sociodrama may move into further exploration, or even trialling of various interventions to see what might be learned about how to reconfigure the social forces involved.

4.3.3.3 Ending the Action

The director ends the drama when the exploration has reached its peak or after there is some action-insight related to the purpose of the drama and the sociodramatic question. Sometimes it is not easy to tell, which usually indicates that the level of the drama is not very deep. One of the beliefs I have had to develop as a director is that whatever happens in the enactment there is sufficient learning that is of value for participants. It is part of the role of the director to be confident that participants will learn from their experience. The articulation of learning occurs in the next phase of the sociodrama.

4.3.4   Phase 4   Conclusion

Following the enactment the phase of integration occurs. This brings closure to the piece of work by reconnecting group members together, reminding them of the purpose of the exploration - the sociodramatic question, by anchoring the experience through sharing about what was learned and insights into the situation explored.

In a sociodrama the director invites a range of sharing from participants including
- from their personal experience in role. *"As a student I got overwhelmed by all the others."*
- from their experience in role about the system and social forces: *As an isolated student I began to realise how important the teacher's perception of me was. I felt trapped by my peers judging me and no-one else realised this."*
- from themselves as a group member relating to their personal life. *"While it was going on I found myself getting more resentful and rebellious. This relates to my conflict with authority figures – a pattern in my working life."*

- from themselves as a group member relating to social systems they are part of. *"As a parent I see that my school is not that interested in feedback. Parents like me, who are concerned about what happens in class, end up acting alone. It's the same in my workplace. Even when I know that I ought to tell my manager about the effect of his decision, I hesitate because it's too easily taken as criticism and then dismissed as my problem to solve."*

Although the group is the protagonist, it is helpful to bear in mind that each participant learns as an individual. Hence learning will be maximized when group members bring out the implications of what the sociodrama means to them and the next steps they might take. Often this requires extensive small group discussion to make sense of their experience of the system as a whole and to make action plans.

Integrating the learning from a sociodrama requires reflection time for each individual. The director can allow for this when planning the session otherwise the learning from the experience will be diminished.

This chapter summarises the steps that a director might take when directing a sociodrama and what they pay attention to in each step. However it is not meant to be prescriptive. In practice the director, while grounded in Morenian principles and methodology, improvises and shapes the work to suit the group and its purpose. In the end every director has to work with the group and its concerns in the moment. In the next chapter I consider the implications for practitioners.

Chapter 5   Implications for Practitioners

Having outlined some the basic assumptions that make up a framework for sociodrama and set out the structure and steps in directing a sociodrama, I now turn to considering some implications for practitioners.

Firstly in planning and directing a sociodrama the director is able to draw from a framework and consider such questions as

- What is the purpose of doing sociodrama with this group?
- What is the appropriate level of warm up to use?
- Have I warmed participants up to adequate roles for this exploration?
- Are the participants warmed up to both personal and social concerns?
- What is the sociodramatic question?
- Have we had sufficient enactment of the system for participants to make an analysis?
- How does what is happening in the enactment relate to the presenting issue in the group?
- How will I draw on action-insight to assist the integration of learning for participants?
- Have I returned to the sociodramatic question at the end?

However, no list of questions alone will ensure that a sociodrama is successful. As in all Morenian methods the spontaneity of the director in maintaining his or her role and working with the warm up of the group is an essential part of sociodrama. Nevertheless, these questions assist the director to pay attention to elements that are part of a sociodrama.

Secondly being clear about the working assumptions behind sociodrama assists the director to stay anchored as a sociodramatist. The implication for directors is that clarifying these assumptions means they articulate for themselves their working principles. This is part of grounding their identity as sociodramatists. As an example, the working principles that I hold most closely include:

- The purpose of sociodrama is to assist a group to learn about the social forces that shape their behaviour.
- The director clearly holds the purpose for the group during the exploration. Everything is done to serve that purpose.

- Sociodrama has a structure that is designed to enable the release of the creativity and spontaneity of the group as a whole.
- The director maintains a dual warm up in group members to both social and personal concerns around the presenting issue.
- The director holds the group in the experience and exploration of the system until action-insight emerges.
- The director grasps the critical moment to bring deep feeling and insight into learning

Lastly, one of the roles of the director is to adjust the form of the sociodrama to serve the needs of the group when the context, focus question or the level of warm up changes. However, this can only be done if the director is grounded in the principles underlying the method. If, on the other hand, the sociodramatic method is learned as a collection of techniques without reference to underlying principles then the director doesn't have the capability to adapt the form of sociodrama.

> *"You can create with form when you* [the director] *are anchored in principles. But if you only know the form then when the context changes you can only keep rigidly applying the method"*
>
> (Parry, personal communication, 2004)

Chapter 6   Conclusion

This thesis is a summary of the sense I have made about the practice of sociodrama: what it is, the purpose it serves, how it works and what the director pays attention to. In essence it is a work in progress. I do not pretend to have identified all the basic assumptions behind sociodrama or that the framework I outline is complete. Simply, these are the ones that have shaped and deepened my work in social systems and organisations.

As we have seen, Moreno never elaborated the methodology and techniques for putting sociodrama into action to the extent he did in role training, psychodrama and sociometry. He left the elaboration of sociodrama to those that followed him. Further articulation of the principles underlying a methodology of sociodrama would build on his original vision as well as assist the role development of sociodramatists.

I hope that sociodrama continues to evolve. I would like us to continue building a methodology for sociodrama that is both dynamic and accessible to the many professionals working in the education, community, organisational and health sectors.

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