

Chapter 2

Spontaneity and creativity

Commentary

For those who seek to understand human relationships, psychodrama, as a way of working psychotherapeutically, can be both attractive for its spontaneity and threatening in its direct expression. Indeed, its potential for excitement and drama and its belief in lessening rigidity, reducing poisonous pedagogy and toppling antique totems of belief may, in part, explain the caution expressed by some over the years.

The psychodrama director, perhaps more than any other group psychotherapist can become a sort of lightning conductor, tapping into the latent energy of the group. In this chapter Marcia Karp powerfully demonstrates how the forces of creativity and spontaneity can be harnessed to bring about change.

The river of freedom
Marcia Karp

The essence of discovery is that unlikely melange of cabbages and kings, of previously unrelated frames of reference or universes of discourse whose union will solve the previously insoluble problem.

(Koestler 1989)

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago I was walking up the spiral of paintings at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. I had the good fortune of walking behind a young child enthusing about the pictures in front of him. He stopped in front of a Kandinsky and shouted, 'Look at those elephants, Mom.' 'What elephants?' his mother asked. He moved up closer to the painting, looked carefully, shrugged his shoulders and moved on. The moment was an opportunity both gained and missed. For me, I was grateful to see the elephants; for him, he will never see them again. He learned that his discovery didn't exist; I learned that his discovery did.

This chapter is about learning and discovery through creativity and spontaneity. It is spontaneity that catapults creative people and creative methods into action. Psychodrama is just such a method whose various techniques, when wielded with an inspired hand, promote a mutual spontaneity between the user of the tools and its subjects. Spontaneity is catching. We become both affected and infected with this release of free-flowing energy produced first by the director and then the group.

J.L. Moreno, in presenting psychodrama to a group of Berkeley University students, formed an unforgettable identification with the students who were some sixty years younger than he. A student stood up and asked, 'Dr Moreno, what is the difference between you and Freud?' Moreno looked at the multitude



of 1960s bearded faces in front of him. 'Freud had a close-cut beard, clipped by a barber; my beard was free

flowing and spontaneous.’ The students loved his cosmetic yet philosophical answer to a theoretical question. It spoke to them. The response was adequate for that moment, it created laughter and allowed others to enter equally into a playful and spontaneous moment. Moreno was excellent at warming up an audience of any size, small or large. He spoke from the moment. He spoke about what involved him that day or what he was contemplating. He gave the feeling that anything could happen. His authenticity hooked into those listening to him. He encountered them physically by sometimes shaking hands with members of the audience. This gave him a somatic sense of the person talking to him—whether the person was anxious or relaxed, ready or not ready for a profound encounter. With Moreno, the spontaneous warm-up was organic to the session. His talk to the audience, as the group began, was often poignant, funny, involving and was never the same. It was tailored to that group, that director and that moment.

One night, in the public theatre of psychodrama in New York, there was an obese woman who came up on the stage wanting to work on her relationship with her husband. She moved slowly and without motivation, seemingly trapped in a body of inactivity. The director asked her to run around the periphery of the wooden circular stage. She looked aghast. ‘I haven’t run in years!’ She picked up her dress and began to run. She looked like a car lurching forward after years of disuse. She ran several laps and without prompting from the director stomped up onto the stage, faced an auxiliary playing her husband and said in a loud voice, ‘I’m leaving you.’ The session which followed was about her preparation to leave an abusive husband. Her physical movement of running gave rise to her emotional movement. She finally told her husband what she felt. Her ‘stuckness’ was in body and soul and once the body could move, the soul could be freed.

INNOVATIONS

There have been uncountable inspired moments of authenticity and spontaneity in psychodrama groups throughout the world. The innovative moments that stand out are varied and wondrous. How and why they happen is ponderable but that they happen is fact. I shall describe some of these moments and work backwards to their roots in Morenian theory. The moments that are personal to me are written to remind you of yours.

Moment one—the empty chair

One hundred Brazilians, Uruguayans and Paraguayans stood in a circle and faced an empty chair. For most, it was an ordinary May morning in Rio de Janeiro. For me, it was not. Several hours earlier I had been told that my husband had collapsed and been taken to hospital for emergency abdominal surgery, thousands of miles away from the spot where I stood on that May morning. At the time I did not know the outcome of that surgery: later I learned he survived it. The personal and the professional role conflict I felt was monumental. In that moment, the two roles gently melted together and joined in the very marrow of my existence. They had to join or I would have been too split to continue. I held on to one idea, of Carl Rogers, that what is most personal is most universal.

I was both eager and frightened to stand naked with my personal dilemma. But ‘the moment fear enters your flesh, your chariot wheel plunges into earth’, says the hero in *Mahabharata*, the Indian tale.

I stood in front of the group, alone and quiet. ‘My husband was operated on earlier today. I am glad he is alive.’ I placed a chair in the centre of the large room. The audience was invited to stand up and form a circle around the chair. Think of someone for whom you simply feel grateful that he or she is alive.’ I began to feel braver, remembering that it is not important to be a hero but it is important to act heroically.

Within thirty seconds, heads were either bowed or focused on the chair and the profundity of silence was upon us. To my surprise, the first to speak was me. I spoke a few quiet sentences to Ken. The next to speak was a tearful Portuguese voice. She spoke to her daughter who had nearly died; a man spoke to his father who had survived a heart attack; a woman spoke to her sister dying of cancer, and on and on, people around the circle began to address the empty chair. Some people had their arms around each other, some were weeping, all were involved. I remembered a song written by a Chilean singer, Violetta Para, ‘Gracias a la vidas’— ‘Thank you for life’. As I began to sing the first few words everyone joined in and the song united us in an unforgettable way. As W.B. Yeats wrote, ‘God guard me from the thoughts men think in the mind alone. He who sings a lasting song thinks in a marrow bone’ (Yeats 1936).

The incongruity of ‘Cabbages and Kings’ strikes me most when remembering these moments in South America: incongruities such as that I was the expert who knew nothing; that there were huge cultural and language barriers and that there was great loss and great pain. If the essence of discovery is about previously unrelated frames of reference, we certainly had them. These factors contributed to resolutions in the experiential learning of a group.

Moment two—I deserve the shoes

The weather was hot as the director left for Finland. A friend had given her a pair of hand-made sandals that didn’t suit. She put them in her hands as they said goodbye. Days later she was doing a workshop in the countryside of Finland and she tried them on. They were beautiful but way too big for her feet. She brought them to the group and determined that she would give them to someone else, but who best suited them? She placed the sandals in a circle of eager students and asked them each to think of a good reason why the sandals should belong to them. One by one, people tested their case as to why they deserved the sandals. Most of them tried on the sandals as they spoke. Self-esteem ran high.

One said, ‘It isn’t that I need them. They are already mine.’ The group laughed at her cunning words. Another, a man, said ‘I need more colour in my life, a new image. The shoes are a reminder with every step.’ Another said she worked hard for the group and the group owed her the sandals. Another said, ‘I am about to split up with my partner. It seems impossible. I need your support and if I could walk a path with you all around me, the distance wouldn’t be such a lonely struggle.’ She got the shoes.

A protagonist emerged from this exercise who was touched by the handicraft that went into making the sandals. It reminded him of his home region in Northern Finland. His issue was how to keep the primitiveness of his roots in city life.

The discovery in this group work was again an incongruity: playfulness and deservedness. Each person was able to play with their own deservedness in a safe and honourable way. Each person created their own reason to deserve ‘the shoes in life’ and used their own spontaneity to show it.

Moment three—a backwards psychodrama

There was an expectation of brilliance building up around the conference evaluation forms which were presented to group members at the end of each workshop to evaluate the workshop leader. As the director prepared her own presentation, the evaluation form seemed an intruder in her spontaneous plan of action. She decided to get the damn thing out of the way both for the group and for herself. She decided to run the workshop backwards. Since the evaluation form had come first, they would deal with it first.

Evaluation

'Imagine', the director said to a room full of conference hopefuls, 'that you've just been to a helpful and memorable workshop.' She placed an empty chair in front of the group. 'Please tell the director sitting in the chair why it was such a fine session.' The group burst forth with superlatives. 'You've worked in a profoundly universal way.' 'Humour was woven into pathos.' 'There was humility and greatness. It was ours.' 'Everyone was involved. Your voice was like a river touching each person in the room.' The evaluation went on for a long time. Each person was able to give their view of a great session. The group members had only just met each other. No workshop had taken place and yet each knew what would have made it good.

Processing

'Close your eyes', the director said next.

Imagine you have just done the quintessential psychodrama. As protagonist you were finally able to work on an issue which has been lurking indeterminately for some years. It became crystallised in this session and you were able to shift some important blocks to new learning. Imagine what the session was about. See yourself in the session and visualise yourself making profound and new connections.

The group was silent. She placed twelve empty chairs in front of the group.

'If you are able to tell us the essence of what happened in your psychodrama, please come and sit in one of the chairs.' The disclosures that ensued were of monumental importance to each person who spoke. One woman resolved a long-standing rift between her sister and herself and briefly told how she was able to do it. One man said he finally confronted himself about surviving a war. During the war he had watched friend and foe die or become injured. In the session he owned responsibility for his participation. He mourned and he rejoiced in being alive. It became clear that these conference-goers, mostly advanced psychodramatists, when given the opportunity to do an internal psychodrama, grasped it with intelligence and worked hard at resolution.

Sharing

After each of the twelve sessions were processed, the director asked the group, 'Out of all that has been described, with whom do you most identify and why?' A tearful woman stood up and said that her sister and she also did not speak for years and on hearing one of the protagonists, she realised what she needed to do with her sister. Another war veteran came up and embraced the wartime protagonist and shared his thoughts and feelings as though he'd been with him for many hours. They met where their life experience joined. It was painfully touched off in a few key sentences from the protagonist. As is shown in full psychodrama sessions, when emotional content unites people, encounter is made on a profound and unforgettable level. The depth of encounter allowed two people to have protagonist-centred sessions during the workshop day.

Warm-up

After a resolution of the protagonists' work the sharing became the warm-up which ended the day's work.

Place a chair in front of yourself. Identify which issues the protagonists worked on are your issues. Tell yourself how you will deal with those issues when you leave this room. See yourself clearly and talk directly to yourself about how to handle those issues.

This lasted several minutes while people warmed themselves up to the issues awaiting them as they went into a wider world. People took their time to integrate what had just taken place in a large group with what takes place in the reality of their own lives.

Slowly the people took leave of each other, the room and the director. How does one actually evaluate such an experience? One could argue that the director's warm-up was the evaluation form. The evaluation became the group warm-up, leading to imagined internal psychodrama sessions which produced enactments in reality.

The universe is infinite creativity

I have used the above example to show that even with a creative method like psychodrama, there are always innovations round the corner. The most creative gifts can become prisons if we treat them as frozen concepts. Moreno, for example, was always making up words to meet a given situation. He once asked a woman in the audience, 'Are you married, single or "mingled"?' He spoke of people connected to the greater cosmos as 'cosmonauts' and mentioned them easily together with astronauts. Another word Moreno used, along with neurosis and psychosis, was 'normosis'. He thought that the bulk of humanity was afflicted with 'normosis' or the struggle to be normal.

Creating novel moments in the psychodramatic method keeps the practitioner fresh and inspired. There is nothing worse for group members than to feel that this has all been done before, and better. The director can model finding his or her own level of comfort and interaction, much like a spring vine finds its way to the sun and growth. The vine grows differently every year depending on the conditions. So, too, the director changes in each moment, depending on the conditions. It gives participants a chance to feel change occurring in the very model they trust. It can lead one to feel that if change can occur in the model, perhaps it can occur in them.

In discussing the spontaneity and functions of the psychodrama director, Moreno talked about the director as (i) a producer; (ii) a chief therapist; and (iii) as a social analyst.

As a producer he is an engineer of co-ordination and production. Unlike a playwright, he tries to find his audience and characters first, drawing from them the material for a plot. With their assistance, he turns out a production which meets the personal and collective needs of the characters as well as the audience at hand. His task is to make the subjects act on that spontaneous level which benefits their total equilibrium, to prompt the auxiliary egos.

As social analyst he uses the auxiliary egos as extensions of himself to draw information from the subjects on the stage to test them and carry influence to them.

(Moreno 1977:252)

The director has the opportunity for many novel uses of the psychodramatic method. Each has its roots in surprise, spontaneity and uniqueness of response which are characteristic of the creative act. Some examples are presented here to illustrate these opportunities for infinite creativity. The first is the spontaneous emergence of more than one protagonist within a psychodrama session.

Multiple protagonists in psychodrama

In classical psychodrama one protagonist emerges from the group as a representative voice. The warm-up phase of psychodrama often builds a readiness in group members to look at their life as it is, as it was or as

it could be. As the session unfolds, the action of that one protagonist can serve as a warm-up for others in the group. At certain moments, individuals become ready to express themselves through the process of watching and participating in someone else's emotions. In those moments, people are like ripe fruit ready to be picked; their emotions, ideas and thoughts are at the forefront. For me, there have been increasingly clear indications when it is appropriate for more than one person to participate as protagonist in the same psychodrama. These indications are (i) when the emotional pulse of the protagonist slows down and the pulse of a group member speeds up; therefore (ii) the act hunger of the group member is greater than that of the protagonist in a given scene; (iii) the protagonist is able to share his/her physical and emotional space with another person; (iv) when it is clear that the protagonist wants to express a particular feeling and can gain strength from hearing it expressed by someone else—it then re-activates the original protagonist; they spark each other off.

I shall discuss the first three of these points.

The emotional pulse of the protagonist slows down

Very nearly three out of four hospital births in the US are Caesarian. One of the reasons, it is postulated, is that if the baby dies the doctor may be involved in a legal suit. Since the baby's pulse rate drops before birth, doctors may take this as a warning sign that all may not be well and therefore unnaturally remove the baby by Caesarian section to make sure the pulse continues rather than stops. There is a parallel situation between director and protagonist. I think it is a natural development, prior to catharsis, that the emotional pulse may drop in the protagonist. Unsure directors may stop the scene because 'it isn't getting anywhere'. In fact, proceeding normally, it may be the lull before the storm. There are many ways to deal with the lull. Techniques can be used as the double, role reversal to produce counterspontaneity, interview, non-verbal expression, mirroring and many others can heighten or exaggerate the implicit feelings which can then be made explicit. Another intervention can be the use of an alternative protagonist just at the low-pulse point. The director must check out his/her perception to see if the group member is in fact about to give birth. The pregnancy in some participant observers is sometimes made clear by their crying, sitting on the edge of their chair, looking angry or, in one case, being asleep—complete denial often means just the opposite. The sleeping group member arose alert and ready to express himself, as do others when the time is ripe.

Act hunger of a group member is greater than the protagonist

If the labour pains of the group member are real, the person need only be brought onstage to face his/her own 'significant other' such as a family member or a concept, like death or fatherhood, for example. The true emotions which have been kept silent up until that moment are given their own timely birth. The original protagonist is still onstage, still part of the scene but the unspoken truth has begun. When the second protagonist is finished, role reversal may be indicated and also completed. If others in the audience are similarly warmed-up they may also ventilate what they are feeling, again with the original protagonist still onstage hearing their own particular version of a similar story.

The protagonist is able to share his or her emotional space

If the protagonist seems too stunned or overwhelmed by what is happening, it is wise to reduce rather than increase the number of protagonists. More often than not, the protagonist is encouraged by a sister or brother protagonist expressing similar emotions to their own, in a real-life situation, and spontaneously continues where the other left off. It is similar to the dovetailing that goes on in multiple doubling; however the concept is slightly different.

About the multiple double Moreno writes:

The protagonist is on the stage with several doubles of himself, each portraying another part of the patient, one as he is now, another as he was five years ago, a third as he was when at three years of age he first heard his mother died, another how he may be at twenty years hence. The multiple representations of the patient are simultaneously present and act in sequence, one continuing where the other left off.

The protagonist or patient in a psychodramatic production has as his purpose to portray scenes and incidents from his own private world which for each person is unique.

(Moreno and Moreno 1975:240)

Here, because each of the multiple protagonists is presenting his or her own feelings, not those of someone else, the details may in fact be different. I have found that the catharsis experienced by the second or third protagonist is as helpful a learning experience to each of them as if they had had their own full psychodrama. It assists the original protagonist by result not by design and gives permission.

In the New York ASGPP (American Association of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama) Conference in April 1981, I first demonstrated the use of multiple protagonists in a day-long training session. It was amazing to see how the primary protagonist could express deep feeling, then stop, listen to others' profound expression, and then easily slip back into her own uncompleted business. She seemed helped and continually sparked off by knowing and feeling that she was not alone in her struggle. As human beings we have a struggle to be the person we would like to be— to negotiate and navigate by continually recharting the route. How comforting it is to know that each of us is not alone in the vast sea.

Ways of unblocking spontaneity

Learning where the original flow of freedom becomes blocked is an excellent start in building new responses to old situations. The following are some examples of the ways in which spontaneity can be unblocked.

Russian Matrioshka dolls, which are dolls that fit one inside the other, can be used to focus on developmental blocks that prohibit spontaneous expression. As one doll is opened and taken off the stack of dolls, another is waiting to be opened. With the removal of each successive doll, a statement is made such as 'I can't show spontaneity because I won't show vulnerability.' When the next doll is removed the next statement might be, 'I won't show vulnerability because I might show need. If I show need, I might show hurt.' Tears and laughter become part of this exercise as the unexpected answers tumble forth.

The discovery of hidden agendas in each statement usually comes back to a point of stuckness in one's development. For example:

I show my neediness because I won't show my independence. I won't show my independence because I may lose support. I won't risk losing support because it would show my loneliness. I won't show my loneliness because I'd have to reveal my vulnerability.

In the above two examples, the quest leads back to the same spot— vulnerability—which may be a sticking point.

A psychodramatic exploration of the roots of the difficulty, vulnerability in this case, might release spontaneous expression which has become dammed up like old leaves in a stream. When the leaves are removed, the stream moves on in the direction of natural intention.

One participant found it helpful to connect with her shadow self. As she searched for what was blocking her spontaneous expression, removing each doll brought her nearer to her interior self. 'If I am spontaneous I show my vulnerability, I show fear; if I show fear I show need, and if I show need I may become spontaneous, and if I am spontaneous I will be annihilated.' Annihilation was a common block to spontaneity in this group. It led to a discussion of the need to draw on the light and dark sides of oneself for the fulfilment of spontaneity. But the fearful business of risking the dark and potentially destructive parts of ourselves seems to create intense fear of disappointment and therefore the self closes up or disappears. In the moment of fear, one is reminded of childhood attempts at spontaneity which were punished or not rewarded. The parental statement, 'I want, doesn't get' can be an example of this dampening effect.

We need to use both joyful and dark energies in spontaneous production. Another participant who connected with her shadow self later reflected:

In psychotherapy, while it is important to touch and understand the personal/historical origins of one's own angst, it is also essential to accept and own one's 'shadow' for this provides life-giving energy towards creativity and wholeness and liberates us from the continuing need to blame others or 'life' for our insufficiencies. To live creatively, then, is to live with paradox—to embrace the two sides of oneself mirrored in Joy and Despair, Life and Death.

(Elizabeth Ash 1989, unpublished manuscript)

A later use of this technique is to start with the largest doll already empty and go down in size with each revelation. For example, I will be spontaneous because I won't be annihilated. I won't be annihilated because I won't show fear; and so on, up the dolls as each is put together again.

The most common answers as to why 'I won't be spontaneous' were:

I won't belong.

I might be annihilated.

I might not be liked.

I might be a nuisance.

I might not be loved.

I don't trust myself.

Many people felt that the original message given by a parent figure was: 'Be careful not to react naturally because that will cause trouble.' The message later in life after entering therapy, becomes the opposite of that: Trouble exists because natural responses have been aborted. Be yourself.' It is interesting to note that the single most sought-after state for people asking for psychological help is 'to just be me'.

To 'just be me' takes courage and confidence. Courage and confidence can be trained in people, with the support of a group.

This curious conflict between being yourself in one situation and not being yourself in another situation restricts many people throughout their lives. Training for spontaneity, a seeming contradiction in terms, helps people reverse the negative dictum, 'Do not be you', to the positive one, 'Be you'. They learn both adequacy and appropriateness of a given response. Where spontaneity has been severely prohibited, the person may become anxious or hyperactive. He or she learns to do anything, just to be doing something. The opposite may also occur. The individual may close down entirely and be fearful of doing anything at all

in case the response is externally judged as wrong. Both responses require loving encouragement back to a place of authenticity where the river of freedom, spontaneity and creativity, can flow again.

The train (Merlyn Pitzele 1989, in conversation)

The train sequence can be used as a warm-up or a session in itself. It evokes the stages of one's life, the people in it and core events.

The person is asked to imagine their life as a long train; people get on and off; events happen; there are losses and gains, and the journey goes on until the end.

Birth

Chairs are put on the stage for the first carriage in the train. This represents the beginning of life. The director asks, 'Who was there with you? Who got off the train? What events occurred in the first ride of life?' The protagonist reverses roles with each passenger on the train and talks about their relationship with the newborn, the role each played and events that occurred. Grandparents, special aunts and uncles or nannies might be crucial to this period of time.

One protagonist used this carriage to experience profound love for a nanny who was as much a mother as her mother.

Childhood

The train of life lurches and chugs as the protagonist observes the years go by. The director may ask, 'Who is still on the train and who gets off?' The protagonist might role-reverse with a grandparent who dies and gives a final message before departing, or role-reverses with a special teacher who sowed the seeds of change that can be remembered by kindling the teacher's action in reverse role.

The train stops at many stations throughout one's life, youth, adulthood, marriage and so on. Projecting into the future may be important. If death is a preoccupation and time has fixed one's vision, then it is an important event to 'ride through', imagining who will be there and what their reaction will be.

Spontaneity-creativity, twin concepts

The 'Innovations' section of this chapter has described various ways of releasing spontaneity. The finished product of a creative effort, named by Moreno a cultural conserve (Moreno and Moreno 1975:268) such as a symphony, a book, or a song, has as its foundation a creative process. This process has links to the act, to the creator and to the spontaneity, which is the mulch or mixing ground of creative growth.

Spontaneity-creativity is often considered as a twin concept. One feeds the other and helps redefine a formal category of 'the present' into a more dynamic spontaneous-creative process called 'the moment'.

The duality of spontaneity-creativity is distinct from an impulsive or automatic spontaneity which neglects 'the deeper meaning of spontaneity, making it something uncontrollable and particularly characteristic for animal behaviour' (Moreno and Moreno 1975:268).

What is it, then, to be spontaneous? Is it dangerous? Where do the innovations that become invented in a moment of inspiration have their roots?

In *Psychodrama*, vol. 3, Moreno and Moreno state: 'Spontaneity is the variable degree of satisfactory response an individual manifests in a situation of a variable degree of novelty. The root of this word is the Latin *sua sponte* meaning of free will' [or from within oneself] (Moreno and Moreno 1975:270). It is interesting to note that in 1975 in the above book, psychodrama is listed in the glossary as:

a term coined by Moreno. It means full psycho-realization. Under this term are included all the forms of dramatic production in which the participants, either actors or spectators, provide: (a) the source material, (b) the production and (c) are the immediate beneficiaries of the cathartic effect of the production. Every session is a co-operative, communal act: no part of the production is supplied or produced by outsiders. Psychodrama can be exploratory, preventive, diagnostic, educational, sociological and psychiatric in its application. Three principal forms are differentiated: (i) the totally spontaneous psychodrama, (ii) the planned psychodrama in which the group and auxiliary egos may or may not include the subject of the session in the planning, depending on the need of the situation, and (iii) the rehearsed psychodrama in which a specific syndrome of a subject is worked out in detail, in dialogue, written and the parts assigned.

(Moreno and Moreno 1975:270)

The totally spontaneous form is what is most used and taught today in 1993. One may ask why did this particular form become popular and not the others. I think that the core of Moreno's work was the release of spontaneity rather than the planning or the rehearsing of it.

Moreno and Moreno described the spontaneous psychodrama as:

at least consciously, fully unprepared; a conflict is presented around which members of the group can develop a session assisted by a director and his auxiliary egos. Although extemporaneous, the directorial unit [director and auxiliary egos, Ed.] is usually carefully organized and trained to handle the situations.

(Moreno and Moreno 1975:269)

The next section of this chapter will continue to look at the roots of creativity and spontaneity as utilised in psychodrama.

ROOTS

'God was first a creator, an actor, a psychodramatist. He had to create the world before he had the time, the need, or the inclination, to analyze it' (Moreno 1953). The universe is infinite creativity. A child is a visible example of the creative act and the freshness with which the child enters each situation may be called spontaneity.

There were many more Michelangelos born than the one who painted the great paintings; many more Beethovens born than the one who wrote great symphonies, and many more Christs than the one who became Jesus of Nazareth. What they have in common is creativity and creative ideas. What separates them is the spontaneity which, in successful cases, enables the carrier to take full command of his resources, whereas the failures are at a loss with all their treasures. They suffer from deficiencies in their warm-up process. Creativity without spontaneity becomes lifeless.

(Moreno 1953: 40)

Creativity without spontaneity becomes lifeless

My husband Ken was lecturing to a group of local women amateur artists. As a warm-up to the event, we went to see their exhibition in a Barnstaple church hall. On entering the room you had the feeling that you'd

been there before and would be again. These were ‘token’ paintings, that is to say each painting was a copy of what had been done before. For example, a rose-covered cottage, a token seascape, a token still-life—none very interesting or having a feeling of inspiration.

Ken then gave a talk about the importance of using stories as a basis for their paintings. A farmer’s wife, who lived near us, asked if she could tell a story. Excitedly, she told us about the drunken sale of a pig. One night her husband had arranged to sell a pig. The buyer arrived and the two farmers began to chat and drink. After much drinking, at one o’ clock in the morning, by moonlight, the two farmers tried to push the pig into the back of the buyer’s car so that he could take the pig home. Both farmers, and their wives, laughed and shoved the pig into the back of the car. Margaret, the teller of the story, said she’d never forget the sight of squashing a pig into the back seat of a car by moonlight. What an idea for a painting! This idea became the basis for her new work and the spontaneity level entered her creation at last.

Spontaneity prepares the subject for free action. If the warm-up to an act is achieved and the person fails to complete the act, it is like being in labour forever without a birth. Anxiety occurs when the full state of readiness is aborted. When anxiety is high, spontaneity is low and when spontaneity is high, anxiety is low.

It is suggested by Paul Holmes that the presence of anxiety is the cause of a loss of spontaneity: ‘it is increasing anxiety, associated with physiological changes needed for an adequate physical response to danger which reduces spontaneity and the ability to find creative solutions’ (Holmes 1992:143).

‘Spontaneity is the state of production and is the engine that drives the creative act’ (Moreno 1953:334).

The creative act—four characteristics

In Morenian theory there are four characteristics (referred to as characters) in the creative act (Moreno 1977: 35). The first character is its spontaneity. The spontaneity prepares the subject for free action. The second character is a feeling of surprise, the unexpected aspect of the act. The third is breaking the existing reality in some way. And the fourth character of the creative act is acting *sui generis* or in a one-of-a-kind state. In order that the moment is *sui generis*, a change must take place in the situation, the change must give a feeling of novelty, and the perceived novelty involves activity from the subject, an act of warming-up to a spontaneous state (Moreno 1977:104).

Margaret’s story of the pig illustrates the four characteristics of a creative act. The novelty of pushing a pig into the back seat of a car in the moonlight creates an excitement to impart the tale. Producing the story is allowing it to call out and be released from the person who experienced it. This raw immediacy forms a process that demands telling. When that must-tell phenomenon is allowed to unfold, spontaneous expression occurs. The feeling of surprise is evidenced throughout the story. No money for the sale was ever mentioned, for example. The manner of selling the pig, the drinking and the socialising were the key surprise elements. The actual sale of the pig happened at the end of the story. It broke existing reality because one’s eyes see an illusion. It is hard to contemplate pig sales at this hour or in that light. It certainly was a one-of-a-kind state (fourth characteristic) as the business interreaction came as an aftermath of an evening’s enjoyment. The sale of the pig was a small detail in the larger backdrop of acres of farmland, farmhouse, cars, tractors, all drenched in moonlight.

Brueghel’s paintings of Flemish scenery have the same quality of spontaneity and surprise that break existing reality and create novelty. In *The Fall of Icarus* you see the foreground taken up with a farmer ploughing his field and in the very background of the painting is the small figure of Icarus falling from the sky. I like this painting enormously. It speaks of the most important subjects in life appearing as detail. In the novel work of Brueghel, his spontaneity allows him to take a huge subject—Icarus falling from the sky—and set it in perspective among the significant everyday acts of the Flemish peasants. Each act of theirs is

as prominent as the subject of the painting. Similarly, the foreground of our spontaneity allows the backdrop of creativity to take its proper perspective. Creativity does not live unless spontaneity feeds it raw material. It catalyses and fuels the process. Icarus, as a subject, does not live in the Brueghel painting unless seen against the background of an ordinary Flemish farmer going about his daily activity. Greatness against the small gives the eye a glimpse of peasantry at its greatest and the grandiosity of Icarus at its smallest.

Psychodrama, it seems to me, is a production of small stories drenched in the magnificent light of spontaneity, moving towards creative resolution. The creative resolution comes only after the subject is freed for action and the action is novel. Breaking the script, throwing away the lines of the old, creating new boundaries through which behavioural change can occur is often the task of a person seeking help in therapy.

Forms of spontaneity

In *Psychodrama*, vol. 1 (1977:89), Moreno talked about the forms of spontaneity as being creative, original, dramatic and having adequacy of response.

In the *creative* form of spontaneity there may be a new child, new works of art, social or technological inventions, or the creation of new social environments.

In the *original* form, a free flow of expression, for example, from the drawings or poems of children, adds to an original form without changing the essence. My young son Jackson, while playing and giggling one day, threw his head in the air and said, 'What would I ever do without myself?' He was delighted with his own presence and querying the impossibility of his own loss. Another configuration of his thought occurred when he was aged four and having a cuddle. The cuddle was pure and blissful for both Mum and son. He looked up and said, 'Oh Mum, how will I ever love anyone as much as you?' A dilemma of humankind spoken so freely and easily. My reply was, 'You'll love someone as much, but differently.' A creative act brought each of us into the world but our spontaneity expressed the state of our true selves at that moment.

The *dramatic* form has to do with the quality of response, newness in feelings, actions and in speaking.

The fourth form, *adequacy of response*, is about appropriateness of response to new situations. This form is the most diagnostic in the psychodramatic process. There may be three possible ways a person may react in meeting a novel situation: (i) no response; (ii) a new response to an old situation; (iii) a new or adequate response to a new situation. The inability to respond appropriately is of special interest to the psychodrama director.

Adequacy of response

Some roles in psychodrama render the protagonist speechless. The degree to which a relationship is pathological is often shown by the degree to which a person is able or unable to take on a particular role in opposition to their own. For example, in a difficult mother-and-daughter relationship the daughter may find it impossible to say anything in the role of the mother when playing it for the first time. This stuckness, or lack of response, in the role of the mother often manifests itself in expressions such as 'I don't know what she thinks or I don't know what she'd say.' The inconceivability seems an indicator of how entrenched the roles are and how the role boundaries are firmly set. In the original work done with children in Vienna, Moreno soon learned how easily children can fall in and out of role with parents and siblings. In pathological roles this is not the case. Particularly in abusive roles the protagonist should be protected from playing the role of the perpetrator. The protagonist's job is not to understand why the abuse happened but to concentrate on ventilating the feelings that have occurred because the abuse occurred (Karp 1992:109). The

same abusive reality may exist in the protagonist who cannot take on another's role. It is important to distinguish between the protagonist who cannot take on a role because it is abhorrent to them and a protagonist who cannot take a role because they simply can't understand or have never considered the other's point of view. The lack of a response in a psychodramatic role is discussed in the following example which utilises the principles of spontaneity.

A woman was working on the relationship between herself and her mother. Her mother was dying. The protagonist was unable to touch her for years. She could not give or receive a hug and wanted, after many years of analysis, to break these physical and emotional boundaries before her mother was dead and the possibility no longer existed. As we embark on the young woman's psychodramatic journey, let us review the principles of spontaneity. They involve the warming-up process, act hunger and catharsis, and an appropriate response to a new situation or a new response to an old situation (Moreno and Moreno 1948–77: 45).

The warm-up

The scene took place in the hospital room where her mother currently lived. It was a hospice and time was short; recovery was not expected. As the protagonist warmed herself up to meeting her mother she talked out loud, in a soliloquy, about her ambivalence. One part of her would be relieved if her mother died; another part of her felt stupid thinking this way and wanted to make amends before it was too late.

The more she spoke the more her fear in life became clear. It was that she would become like her own mother. She was afraid that the parts of her mother she detested were alive in her. Her warm-up to saying goodbye to a dying mother was the sneaking realisation that she may never be able to say goodbye. No wonder she would be unable to take the role of mother in the psychodrama. She simply didn't want it. Her warm-up began years before this particular session.

In describing the warming-up process, Moreno wrote in *Who Shall Survive?*:

Bodily movements were found to follow one another in a certain order of succession according to which is the initiating starter. If the succession is interrupted the temporal order is spoiled and the state of feeling released is confused.

(Moreno 1934:334)

Each of us, when we begin to act or speak, has a series of bodily starters. Clearing the throat, frowning, clenching fists, piercing eyes or shuffling feet may be ways that we propel the body into action. These preliminaries to the warm-up process were studied by Moreno and seen as part of the evolution of expression.

Since the body must get itself going, the protagonist often has several starts. One warm-up may produce part of the process and when completed almost begs the next step. Numerous techniques help this process such as role reversal, self-presentation and exaggeration of resistance.

The protagonist in the above example began to pace the room when faced with having to talk to her dying mother. Her body was full of tension, hesitation and anxiety. She clenched her teeth and warmed up to expressing the hatred she had. As she approached her mother at the hospital she began to face her ambivalence. As she moved into the scene her anxiety rose—her spontaneity was blocked. Her body shook, her voice became quiet. As one does normally in psychodrama, I asked the protagonist to show us the role of her mother. She looked at me quizzically. Her mind was saying, 'What a strange request'. Her emotions were saying, 'No, I can't do this.' She began, in the role of her mother, but couldn't think of anything to say. Then she began a distant chatter about her illness, about the inadequacy of her daughter, etc. The inability

of the protagonist to play the role soon revealed itself as not lack of insight but rather distaste at playing out the very behaviour she disliked. As herself, she spoke to her mother about how much she'd felt unloved throughout her childhood, how her mother wasn't the kind of mother she wanted and how, because her mother needed her now, she was expected to give love. She couldn't and she wouldn't.

Act hunger

The spontaneous expression of her anger and tears allowed the protagonist to participate in her real act hunger, that is, ventilating all the hurt that she felt towards her mother. As her anxiety mounted it had become evident that this was where her spontaneity was blocked. The act hunger to ventilate her real feelings took her to a birthday scene as a child where she felt abused and unloved.

Catharsis

The protagonist allowed these emotions to flow freely in a way that the child in the early trauma of her childhood was unable to do. She cleared herself of the core of dammed-up feeling. She could now participate in the relief of removing the block.

We then returned to the original scene in the hospital room. The protagonist was spent of her emotion and was now in a relaxed and free-flowing state. Using the principle that people are more spontaneous in another role, I asked her to reverse roles with her mother on the hospital bed. She did so and quite spontaneously held her arms out and said, 'I'm so sorry and now I'm dying.' She held her daughter and wept the tears of a lost childhood and motherhood. In the role of mother, the protagonist was free to choose a new response to an old situation. She had crossed the role boundaries and discovered spontaneously the response her mother wanted to give her which was physical closeness. It was impossible for the daughter to discover this in her own role but she was able to in the role of her mother. She then reversed roles and for the first time in years embraced her mother, something she'd wanted since she was a small child.

Act hunger

Another principle of spontaneity is act hunger or the action which the protagonist is hungry to complete.

The adequacy of response to a given situation needs to meet the act hunger. The desire for most people in psychodrama is to complete an act that has not been completed in life. The completion of this act may validate the protagonist's emotional experience and sense of active choice (Goldman and Morrison 1984).

Motivation is the key to behavioural change. Some protagonists need to do the session they want before they want to do the session they need. By this, I mean protagonists may decide the area of work they need is with, for example, their father. The session proceeds; the work may be adequate but the preconceived notion of what and how to work may have stopped a more natural warm-up to the real material. The session wanted, instead of needed, may have a somewhat stilted feel to it and often the director goes along with the protagonist rather than mutually co-operating. The difference is that of a bull being led by a chain rather than two horses riding together, unchained.

Completion of real act hunger is recognised by (i) the protagonist clearly indicating when the action is over—'That's it', or 'I've done it'; (ii) the protagonist spontaneously utters a sense of surprise or novelty at being able to create a new response—'I've never done that before', or 'I don't believe I did that'; (iii) clear relief in the body of the protagonist—'I feel like the cat who's got the cream'; (iv) the group applauds, supports and congratulates the protagonist. The group can end it by their own surprise —'I never thought you could really do it'.

The above are my observations. It is easy to recognise when the climax of expression is over. In act hunger, usually the level of spontaneity enables a creative result.

The level of spontaneity enables a creative result

Recently I worked with a protagonist who had been severely abused by an alcoholic father and emotionally abandoned by a domineering mother. In setting up the scene of her present bedroom she reversed roles with the most significant object in the room, her teddy bear. 'I've been with you thirty-two years. I've never betrayed you like they have. I will be with you during this next difficult period, as I always have been.' The protagonist looked rather shocked to think that this bit of worn fur was the most loyal and fiercely supportive member of her family. In later scenes, when she needed to trace the origins of her own drinking pattern, a fearful confrontation with her father was needed. She felt she hadn't the strength to stand up to him. 'Who could?' I asked her. She then took the role of her bear, bared her teeth at father and went to a scene where he beat her. In the role of the bear, she finally ventilated some of the rage pent up inside her and spoke of the gross indignity of her treatment by him. It was the first time a full-blown confrontation could occur and her hunger to act was completed. Her spontaneity in life had been blocked by her real fear and anxiety of further abuse. This new response to an old situation with her father was just what was needed to break through her role boundaries.

The phenomenon of spontaneity has effects in the body. The life energy that is created during the force of the spontaneous act can alter the mind/ body state. Spontaneity is the factor animating mental phenomena to appear fresh, new and flexible. This intense feeling of novelty seems to be the result of cognitive restructuring. The actor/thinker replaces known solutions with newly recognised behavioural possibilities. Spontaneity lies at the fountain of this transition. Leonard Laskow, a pioneering physician working on mind/ body medicine, states that the physical body is a field of energy that has taken a particular form and by restructuring energy patterns through focused intention and imagery we can ameliorate or even cure (Laskow 1992:189).

The relationship of spontaneity: creativity and how it fits into psychodrama directing

Spontaneity is the engine that drives the creative act. The process of psychodrama involves the movement from cultural conserves with stereo-typically prescribed roles to an increased role repertoire borne out of spontaneity. Protagonists develop greater role-taking skills and are released from their old frozen attitudes and roles, becoming more authentic and open. It seems reasonable to assume that as protagonists experiment with new roles in the psychodramatic situation, they begin to change feeling and thought in their new roles. Subjects report beginning to see their world differently and look at their own lives from a new perspective. Psychodrama presents an array of novel situations which require the total attention of the protagonist and group members for the production of adequate responses. The opportunity for the emergence of spontaneity is maximised in creating new behaviour.

The lead person in creating new behaviour is the director. The director should be a model of spontaneity for group members to emulate. Just as the protagonist sets the role of the 'other' in the session, the director sets the role of 'the spontaneous group member'.

Though issues of transference are minimised rather than maximised in psychodrama, the role of good parent or bad parent exists for many directors with a particular group member. It may be a conscious effort for a director to play a good parent for a damaged protagonist. This necessitates responsibility and

consistency on the part of the director. It is both dangerous and anti-therapeutic to have a damaged member let down yet again by an authority figure because of insensitivity or lack of therapeutic alertness. It may also be a conscious effort for the group member to thrust the director into a parent role. For whatever reason this may occur—to please, to irritate, to love or to hate—it is essential that the director continues to relate in a spontaneous way. Preconceived notions and calculation are soon felt and then copied. As soon as calculation is smelt, there are flames of avoidance and a raging fire of inauthenticity. The opposite is also true. If the emotional smoke is authentic, then spontaneity catches alight. The director may fail in his or her attempts to communicate with difficult group members in the early stages of the group. As a director, I have been told, ‘Don’t talk to me, don’t touch me, don’t look at me’ and so on. The best I could do was to acknowledge the other’s feelings and have mine equally respected. If the existence is respected in the group member, then so it must be in the director. Failure is momentary, it is the attempt that is most validated. As actress Mary Pickford said: ‘This thing we call failure is not the falling down but the staying down.’

The director continually starts again. As Peter Kellermann aptly states:

The psychodrama director is an ordinary person with an extraordinary, demanding job. He or she is not a magician but a reasonably spontaneous and creative individual, generally with more than an average amount of integrity. Being oneself with one’s limitations, role repertoire and authenticity seems to be a basic requirement. It is therefore possible to function as a psychodrama director without acting omnipotent.

(Kellermann 1992:66)

The long training of the director helps him or her learn to guide the action through minefields and poppy fields, with the director always agile and ready to go where the protagonist leads. Adapted from a psychodrama director’s processing checklist by Kellermann (1992:168) I include a few of the many tasks in which the director uses his or her spontaneity. For those who do direct psychodrama, congratulate yourself on the enormous task undertaken by you each time you stand together and alone.

- 1 The director builds sufficient cohesion and constructive working group climate.
- 2 The director stimulates individual group members sufficiently and warms them up to action.
- 3 The director establishes a therapeutic alliance.
- 4 The director identifies non-verbal messages of the protagonist as well as the verbal.
- 5 The director identifies central issues in the enactment and helps the protagonist show the group what happened rather than talk about it.
- 6 The director uses psychodramatic techniques such as role reversal, doubling, mirroring and soliloquy adequately to move the action from the periphery of the problem to the core of the issue.
- 7 The core of the issue may involve a catharsis of emotion, insight catharsis, catharsis of laughter or catharsis of integration, which the director maximises appropriately.
- 8 The director shares from his or her own life history.

THE RIVER OF FREEDOM, SPONTANEITY AND CREATIVITY

It has been said, ‘Don’t push the river’. Doing what you love brings you all the other things that you think you want.

The freedom to fail is vital if you are going to succeed. So, let the river flow, do what you love and don’t be afraid to fail.

One sunny day, a balloon seller handed a young girl a balloon with a long string. He looked her straight in the eye and said, 'Give it out and it comes back; you reap what you sow.'

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