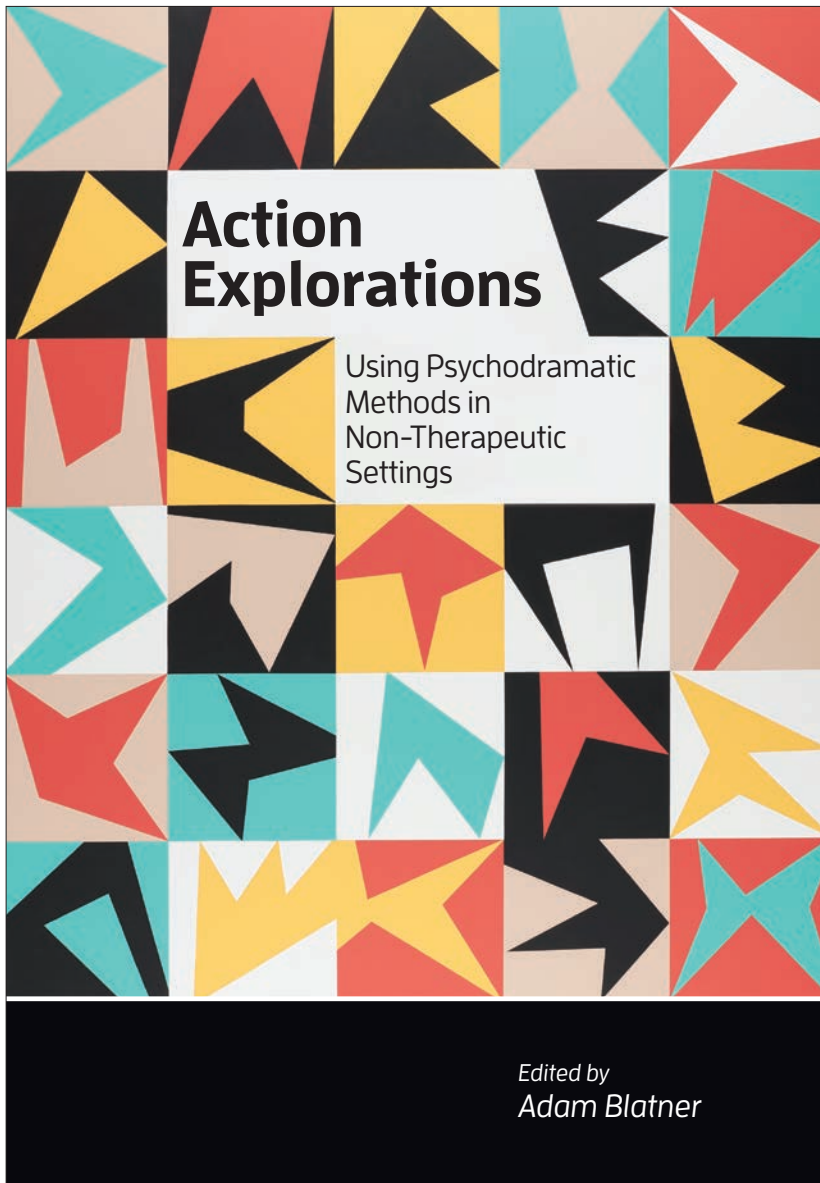


Where The Rubber Hits The Road

Vignettes From The Application of Morenian Methods
When Coaching In Organizations

Jenny Postlethwaite

an excerpt from



Action Explorations: Using Psychodramatic Methods in Non-Therapeutic Settings

©2019 Adam Blatner and Parallax Productions

ISBN 78-1-7335520-0-4

www.ActionExplorations.com

www.Parallax.Productions

www.blatner.com/adam/

Where The Rubber Hits The Road

Vignettes From The Application of Morenian Methods When Coaching In Organizations

Jenny Postlethwaite

My education in the use of JL Moreno's psychodramatic methods has been anchored in the production of "classic" psychodrama. There's a group, a group leader/producer, a stage. From a period of warm up a protagonist emerges. An enactment of some sort begins, auxiliaries and audience engage. The action is followed by integrative sharing. The work is often deeply personal and, given the nature of the method, involves at least some degree of feeling and emotional expression.

As a scholar of the method I have found much of the focus in the literature relates to its application in the therapeutic sphere. Similarly, many of my psychodrama professional association colleagues practice in the therapeutic field, where free ranging group work is a well recognized and commonly utilized modality.

By contrast, the world in which I professionally practice — individual, team and group coaching in organizations — is far less familiar or comfortable with such relational approaches. It is a world generally characterized by a valuing of cognition and logic over feeling, and impersonal professional interaction over relational expression.

So, when initially considering for myself how to apply Morenian methods in my work, I had two hurdles to clear. The first was to get myself comfortable with transposing the method into a non-therapeutic environment and context. The second, to do so in a way that would be adequately received by an unfamiliar and potentially unwelcoming audience.

For the first hurdle, Moreno himself provided my inspiration, in the opening words of his opus *Who Shall Survive*. ‘A truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an object than the whole of mankind.’¹ Within the context of ‘the whole of mankind’ I found a freedom, a license and indeed an encouragement, to apply the method in my non-therapeutic context.

In practice, my organizational client base is broad. I work with people at all organizational levels, from naive workplace ingénue to seasoned CEO; with individuals and with groups; with front line teams and with corporate executives; with those transitioning through management and leadership; with people eager for more influence and with those for whom ‘bosses’ are the ‘enemy’; with under-performers and with high achievers.

When it came to seeking adequacy in practical application of Morenian methods across such a diverse population, the rubber hit the road for me through bold experimentation.

The anecdotes which follow provide some snapshots, vignettes of my experience with this endeavor. I offer them not as a lesson in “how to,” but rather in the spirit of “what can be,” warming us all up to our spontaneity and creativity as practitioners.

Starting with two anecdotes in which I am the protagonist, I then move on to my work with groups and with individuals. Names and details have been changed to protect the confidentiality of those involved.

Spontaneity Starts At Home

A professional coach is expected, in partnership with their client, to focus on defining and achieving goals, to deliver results, to ‘maximize the client’s potential’.

Pursuit of the client’s desired outcome—skill development, behavior change, role transition, workplace conflict or other problem resolution, confidence building or whatever other performance enhancement focus it may have—is the anchoring purpose, particularly so when working in an organizational context.

To be effective in this pursuit the coach is expected and required to access a range of core competencies—to set a foundation and build relationship with their client, and to communicate effectively in order to facilitate learning and results.²

In practice, the coaching dynamic is typically verbal and cognitive, characterized by a cycle of question and answer between the coach and their client. Indeed, I was taught from very early in my professional training as a coach,

1 Moreno, 1993:3

2 International Coach Federation Core Competencies: <https://www.coachfederation.org/credential/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=2206>

that the basic skill of a master coach is their ability to ask questions. Powerful questions.

Discovering and then incorporating Moreno's philosophies and action methods into my coaching practice put an impactful new slant on this picture for me.

You Don't Ask Many Questions Do You?

I am here with Barney, telling him how excited I am to have just signed up for psychodrama training. I am almost completely naive in the field, having attended only a single workshop before deciding to take the plunge as a trainee. Barney, on the other hand, is an experienced psychodrama practitioner, but we also have something in common—like me he is an organizational coach. He is to be my supervisor, and this is our first one on one session together.

We talk about how our supervision will work, my existing coaching practice, what my interest is in psychodrama and what I am hoping for in my development as a practitioner. There is a fruit bowl on the table, full of passionfruit, which somehow or other make their way out of the bowl and onto the table as auxiliaries to our conversation. My emotions are more to the fore than usual. I am enthused, excited, worried about my naivety and lack of knowledge, yet happy and hopeful.

In the midst of the session I suddenly wake up to the dynamic between Barney and I, and to how he has been proceeding. I look at him, puzzled, head tilted to one side, eyes narrowed.

Jenny: Gee, you don't ask many questions, do you?

Barney: No.

Jenny: You make lots of statements.

Barney: Yes.

Without even realizing it I've just received my first lesson in the use of doubling and mirroring. It is a powerful personal experience which immediately heightens my appreciation of a different way—a less question and answer centric way—in which I might approach a coaching conversation.

In this first session with Barney my spontaneity is flowing and I have experienced and taken into my being the powerful difference between being doubled for affect . . .

Barney: It's exciting and enlivening to be a trainee.

Jenny: Yes!!!!!!

and being questioned . . . *How is it, being a trainee?* . . . pause for thinking . . . *Well, it's exciting.*

My Purpose?

It's supervision time, and I am here again with Barney. We are discussing two coaching clients, Alan and Karl, that I am experiencing some difficulty with.

Jenny: They have both been sent to me by their boss to be “fixed.” He's been unable to clearly articulate to them what he is dissatisfied with, so he's sent them to me instead! He wants me to “assess” them and come up with goals for their coaching. (Barney raises one eyebrow.)

Jenny: Alan and Karl aren't committed to doing what it takes. I'm the one stuck holding the baby!

Barney: What is your purpose with them?

Jenny: My purpose?

Barney: Yes, your purpose. The purpose that anchors your warm up.

Jenny: Oh.

His question challenges me to separate myself from the goals of the coaching and to focus on my own warm up. After some discussion I arrive at a purpose for myself. Stepping back from coaching's goal centric focus, I instead take inspiration from Moreno's Canon of Creativity.³

Jenny: My purpose is to warm my clients up to spontaneity, to enable their adequate functioning in their world.

This purpose warms me up to my own being, as well as to that of my client. I like that it inherently mirrors the relational nature of our coaching—I must first be able to access my own spontaneity, in order to support my client to access theirs. It is a crucial prerequisite and a vitalizing complement to our goal oriented work.

Working with Groups

My application of action methods with groups in organizations has a sociodramatic focus.

“Moreno's methodologies inherently engage the group as the vehicle for change. In psychodramatic work the group is engaged in service of an individual protagonist; other group members in turn benefit from their involvement and experience. However, Moreno identified the limitations of psychodrama in dealing with collective issues, and in response created sociodrama as a vehicle

³ Moreno, 1993:11–20

to ‘focus its dramatic eye upon the collective factors.’ In an organizational context it is the interests and issues of the group, the team as a whole, which is paramount. As such, a sociodramatic approach is advantageous as ‘the true subject of a sociodrama is the group. . . . it is the group as a whole that has to be put on the stage to work out its problem.’”⁴

The Stage As An Enabling Structure

It is my first session working with this executive management group of twelve men. For a long period they have been operating as independents, disconnected from one another. Their lack of collaboration has diminished the effectiveness of their organization. My brief is to develop their cohesiveness as a leadership team. They are used to engaging across a meeting table, or in some other formal environment, where the space is dominated by furniture. Power and status is important to them. Their culture is highly competitive and authority focused.

I have set our work room with no furniture in it other than an arc of chairs. My intention is to create an open space between individuals, a stage on which we can interact and create without physical obstacles.

As each participant arrives and enters the room, I observe his reaction. Most do a very visible double take, pausing mid step, unsure of the open space and where to place themselves in the absence of a table.

The signal is clear for everyone that this gathering will be a different experience for them. Holding my nerve and leadership in the face of their initial discomfort, we go on to have a productive day of discussion and sociodramatic exploration.

During one session we are exploring how the various departments managed by each executive are interacting with each other. There are objects scattered about the stage, representing the departments, and several of the executives are actively engaged in tweaking their position in relation to one another. One man is on his knees on the floor, fine tuning the way each object is facing. Others are giving helpful directions from their seats—“*a little more to the left, yes that’s it.*”

Their mood is light and playful—a few of the objects they are working with are children’s toys and this is generating a little amusement—but at the same time the group members are focused intently on their task, interested and intrigued by what they are producing on the stage.

I am struck, as I observe from the edge of the space, how very different the quality of this interaction is from their typical meetings. They are relaxed with each other and there is no sign in this moment of their usual power and authority centric behaviors. Setting the stage has provided an enabling structure for a different quality of engagement, warming them up to spontaneity.

4 Postlethwaite, 2015:6. The source text contains references for the Moreno quotes.

Another moment from the day stands out for me in relation to the simplicity and elegance of utilizing action methods in practice. We are all seated and I am encouraging the men to express themselves to each other across the group, as to how they perceive they have been functioning as a team. I sense that one man in particular, although participating in the discussion, seems to be holding back, so I rise from my seat and move behind his right shoulder.

Jenny: I am going to say something that might fit here for you. If it's not right just ignore me. If it does feel right for you then you can pick it up.

I make a couple of doubling statements and his demeanor lifts noticeably. He proceeds to express himself in a more forthright manner. The man to whom he is speaking listens closely, then sits very still, not speaking. I move around behind the listener and double again.

Jenny: I'm surprised by what you've said. I don't know what to say in response.

It is enough to get him started and the conversation deepens to a new level. This small amount of judicious doubling, to bring out what is not being said, provides a springboard to more open expression, and has a significant impact on the quality of the ensuing discussion.

Cue Action!

In my experience, work groups in organizations often default to discussion and story telling. Their communication norm is language dependent and heavily cognitive. By contrast, a psychodramatic approach values action, concretisation, kinesthetic and spatial intelligence and an integrative experience of thinking, feeling and acting.

So, when working with organization groups I am listening for, within the context of my brief and purpose, produce-able action cues.

Sacred Cows

I am working with a senior management team as they discuss a vexed issue of resource allocation. They want to branch out with some new products but feel constrained and frustrated by "the system." The discussion has become bogged down in detail. The group's spontaneity is low.

Hilary: (Shoulders slumped forward) It's all too hard.

David: There are so many sacred cows.

(Others nod their heads in agreement.)

Jenny: Sacred cows, eh? Where are they? (Looking around)
Let's have a look at them.

I invite David to join me on the stage and we proceed to concretise the sacred cows. One by one, group members are enlisted as auxiliary cows. Each auxiliary becomes more animated and playful as they enact their particular "sacredness." We end up with ten cows in all. They make for a noisy herd, physically imposing, each looking confident of their sacred standing in the system. David stands looking at the herd, shakes his head and then moves to sit down. His initial spontaneity has ebbed in the face of the herd.

Jenny: Hang on there David. The herd seems a bit restless.
Maybe we need a vet to check them out. How about you be the vet?

David accepts the invitation and tentatively proceeds to inspect each of the cows. The cows are playful, some resisting the vet's examination, others happily raising their feet for a hoof inspection. The vet interacts with each cow and, with a little direction from me, interviews each cow to explore its relative health in organizational terms. How fat is it? That is, how big an obstacle is it in actuality. Can it be put out to pasture? That is, can we afford to ignore it. And so forth.

By the end of the veterinary inspection the cows have been divided into different paddocks, according to the nature and extent of their constraining impact on new product development. The energy level in the group is high. They return to their discussion with rekindled spontaneity and a purposeful focus on how to move ahead with their product development objectives.

The Chasm

Two dozen senior and middle managers are gathered for a team development workshop. I am aware, through previous work in their organization, that there is a disjoint between the most senior management group and the next layer of managers. This disjoint is an open secret in the organization, oft whispered of in the corridors and behind closed doors. There is some individual variation of perspectives within the two sub-groups, but in general the senior managers are puzzled and perturbed by the dynamic, and the second layer are frustrated and angry, feeling they have been let down by the senior leaders.

My brief for the day is to create an environment in which this issue is publicly and jointly discussable.

We are in a large room, some ten meters square, with the group sitting in a wide arc of chairs. The discussion has been progressing in fits and starts. Only a handful of people have expressed themselves, mainly those individuals with the most forceful views, who typically are also the dominant influencers in the

sub-groups. The mood in the group in this moment is one of awkwardness and simmering agitation. Peter, one of the senior managers, speaks up.

Peter: It feels like there is a chasm between us. I don't understand it, we've come here today and people aren't saying what they really think and . . .

Rather than let him launch into a potentially long winded exposition I interrupt and move to produce the immediacy of what he is expressing.

Jenny: Peter how about you show us rather than tell us. Use this space (pointing to the stage). Show us how big or small the chasm feels for you.

The group laughs nervously, teasing Peter—“*That'll teach you to speak up*” and “*Now you're on the spot, ha, ha*”—but Peter, nothing if not courageous, steps onto the stage, accepting the invitation to concretise the chasm. He does this by placing two objects, one on either side of the room, some ten meters distant, just about as far apart as they can physically be. One object is for the senior managers and the other represents the second layer of managers. Group members are watching Peter closely as he moves about on the stage.

Jenny: That feels right for you?

Peter: Yes.

Jenny: It's a *big* chasm.

Peter: Yes

We both sigh audibly. The emotional mood has shifted.

Jenny: I wonder how it is for others.

Peter: Me too.

Jenny: Okay, let's find out.

All group members are invited to place themselves somewhere along the continuum of the chasm, according to how big or small they personally experience it. The spread of bodies is surprisingly large, from those in full agreement with Peter, to those who barely experience a gap. I invite the individuals to share, first with their neighbors and subsequently with the full group, what led them to stand where they are and what is their actual experience of the dynamic between the two sub-groups.

Producing Peter's chasm has unlocked the door to public discussion of the group's dynamics. And requiring each person to take a stand on the chasm

continuum has set an expectation and norm of active individual involvement. There are no whispering spectators in this production, only participants.

During the course of the day much ends up being expressed within and between the subgroups and across a broad emotional spectrum. There are moments of conflict, appreciation, surprise, panic, anger, sadness, helplessness, dissatisfaction and delight.

This day was the first step in a developmental journey for the group, which still continues, years later. It was an impactful kick start which has subsequently entered the folklore of the organization. *“Hey, remember the day we did the chasm?”*

Reverse Roles with the Child

The enactment, a scene from the everyday work life of group members, is in full swing.

They are nurses and practice managers from a private health organization and we are gathered for a training day in emotional intelligence (EI). As part of teaching them about the EI skill of Understanding (of the blends, causes and transitions of emotion over time), I have asked them to set a scene of an everyday situation which they struggle with. They nominate “working with difficult doctors.”

So here we are. There is a young child, laying on a gurney in a doctor’s surgery. The child is here to have a minor surgical procedure. On one side of the gurney is the doctor and on the other side is the assisting nurse. The child’s mother is sitting off to one side.

In the surplus reality of this enactment, the participants are expressing more fully the tension which is felt but not voiced in their real life situation. The nurse is annoyed and frustrated with the doctor, who isn’t following what she believes is the correct procedure. They are arguing with each other. The mother gets increasingly alarmed, but is unsure about how to intervene to comfort and protect her child in the midst of the tension. The child lays, body tense and stiff, looking anxiously from one to the other of the adults.

It is a scene all the group members claim familiarity with and this is visible in the fullness with which they take up their roles. I role reverse the various auxiliaries at different points, as the tension between the doctor and nurse continues to escalate.

The experience of taking up and extending the roles of the mother and child is significant, both for the auxiliaries directly involved and for the rest of the group watching from the edge of their seats in the audience. In the sharing following the enactment, it is the mother and child that are most referred to.

Group Member A: I was thinking about it only in terms of the doctor being the problem. I hadn’t thought about how stressful it was for the child and mother. She looked so helpless, so

caught in the headlights, worried but not knowing how to stop it.

Group Member B: The poor child was so scared. The doctor and nurse didn't even notice!!

Group Member C: We were so caught up in our own frustration we forgot about the child.

They are deeply impacted by the enactment and reflective as to what they have been contributing to the dynamic and how they want things to be different in the future. The enactment, and particularly the role reversing, has awakened a new system awareness for them and rekindled their natural empathy in relation to all characters in the scene.

I Had No Idea You Felt Like That

The group of eight men in front of me has only recently been formed. They are an amalgamation of two separate executive groups, originally from different arms of their corporation. This new group has been charged with responsibility for the entire organization and our purpose here today is to begin the work of knitting them into an effective leadership team.

All the individuals know each other to some extent, but they are not practiced in working collaboratively together toward a common purpose. There is a history of competition and friction between some of them, and so my initial focus has been on exploring the degree of trust present and their preparedness to be vulnerable with one another.

The conversation in the group is feeling somehow peculiar to me in the moment, as if the individuals are speaking different languages at one another and yet assuming a shared understanding of what they are expressing and hearing. I decide to move to action, producing aspects of the group's sociometry.

We have plenty of space in the room to work with and I set out a continuum—*to what extent am I confident that the group will not use or hold my weaknesses and mistakes against me*. In other words, *how comfortable am I showing my vulnerabilities in this group?* The group readily responds to my invitation, taking up positions along the continuum.

Brett stands alone toward the 'very uncomfortable' end, some three metres distant from the next closest person. Michael is also standing alone, at the other pole, 'completely comfortable'. The rest of the group is clustered together on the 'comfortable' side of the midway point.

I invite people to express themselves. Michael speaks first, talking about his confidence in dealing with the others and praising them as an open and trustworthy group. He doesn't understand why the others aren't standing with him. James, from the middle of the cluster, responds to Michael, reminding

him of some instances of past conflict. Michael counters with stories of their past successes.

So far, the pattern of not quite hearing one another is still in play. And the attention has all been toward the top end of the continuum—no one has addressed Brett and neither has he spoken. It seems that they are playing it safe, a restrictive response to the provocation of the continuum. I invite Brett, who is standing stiffly, arms folded tightly across his chest, to speak.

Brett: I don't feel confident at all. I see what happens. We aren't straight with each other, we complain about each other behind backs, not face to face. I don't speak my mind because I don't trust that you won't give me a hard time.

He stops abruptly, head slightly bowed but eyes fixed firmly on the rest of the group. They appear shocked, momentarily dumbstruck. Brett's openness and preparedness to be vulnerable in this moment, despite the relational risk, has cut through the fog of safety, inviting others to a more frank exchange of views. Alan, the recently appointed leader of the team, finally breaks the silence, speaking quietly but surely across the gap to Brett.

Alan: I had no idea you felt that way. (*He appears genuinely puzzled and perturbed by what Brett has said.*) We need to talk more about this. (*Taking a couple of small steps toward Brett as he speaks.*)

In this crucial moment Brett has not been rejected. Alan has accepted and moved toward him. They continue talking and others progressively join their conversation. The tone is now significantly changed, as group members work at understanding Brett's perspective and at being more frank in their own expression. "*Well now that you mention it . . .*" The continuum is also progressively reforming itself, its center of gravity shifting down to below the midpoint. Group members reflect openly that this now feels a 'truer' picture for them of their existing relations.

Concretising group members' perspectives on trust and vulnerability—a symbol of the quality of their relationships—has surfaced a lot of unstated assumptions of common thinking. It has made the friction that was unspoken and invisible suddenly visible and discussable. This is the beginning of a new path for this team. From the seed of this simple sociometric production they have subsequently gone on to become a tight knit, highly effective leadership team.

Working with Individuals

When coaching an individual there is obviously no group present to draw on as a resource in applying action methods in the classic style. However, the

absence of a group certainly doesn't preclude utilizing Moreno's philosophies and methods in one on one coaching practice.

No, You Can't Take That Spoon!

Helena and I are well into our coaching session. We are sitting in a café, discussing a difficult conflict she is wrestling with at work. The conflict is complex and fraught and Helena is emotionally agitated as she shares her story with me.

"How about you set this out on the table here," I suggest. *"Choose something to be you."* *"Ok,"* she replies, choosing a salt shaker and placing it in the middle of the table. Other objects are progressively added to the scene—the pepper, a coffee cup, sugar dispenser, her purse, a pen—representing various characters and aspects of the situation.

Setting out her story is providing Helena with a fresh perspective. We have effectively stepped up into the mirror position of Moreno's balcony. Whilst she is still full of feeling, her thinking has engaged, providing her with a more integrated sense of her situation.

Key to the issue is the relationship between Helena and her boss. He is concretised in the scene as a teaspoon. Although we are working only with the basic objects available to hand on the café table, concretising the situation has been effective in deepening Helena's warm up and fueling her spontaneity. She is moving the teaspoon and salt shaker around the table exploring different options for what she might do to resolve the issue.

We are both leaning forward, fully involved with the concretised scene, when a waitress appears and reaches out to begin clearing the table. She sees only our dirty cups and plates, not the living scene in which Helena is immersed.

"No!!" exclaims Helena. *"You can't take that spoon. That's my boss!!"*

Name That Role

It is our first coaching session together and Yvette is looking for new ways of responding to work colleagues she is clashing with.

Yvette: I get so frustrated with them. I've been made responsible for this project but I haven't been given any authority over them. We have completely different ideas about the right things to do and we just keep butting heads. I turn into a goat!

We talk further and it becomes evident that part of her difficulty lays in an ethical clash with her colleagues. She is disturbed by what she sees as their unethical decision making, but feels helpless.

Yvette: The only thing I could do is go to the boss and dob them in, like a snitching do-gooder.

Using the objects we have to hand, Yvette sets out the situation on the table in front of us and as she does so her frustration with the questionable ethics of her colleagues continues to be expressed.

Yvette: I become a demented crusader. (Waving her arm above her head, as if wielding a mighty sword.) I want a public hanging!! Nothing else will suffice!!

Yvette's stuckness and lack of spontaneity is clearly evident. She is caught in a series of coping roles, moving against her colleagues. These roles are evident in her language and her physical movement and I move to mirror them for her by highlighting some of her expressions.

I continue on, providing a simple overview of the concept of a role and how roles can be categorized as coping or progressive.⁵ She is attentive and interested in what I am describing, quickly catching on, and is now re-hearing the story she has just shared with new ears. We explore this together, beginning with Yvette naming some of her roles for herself.

She settles on Block-Headed Goat, Powerless Goody Two Shoes, Righteous Judge and, her favourite, Demented Crusader. She is visibly pleased with the names she has chosen. Amused and softer in her being, her spontaneity has lifted. Having her experience synthesized through these simple metaphors, which she readily identifies with, opens the door to a deeper exploration of Yvette's actual experience—the quality of her thinking and feeling—in the moments when she engages with her colleagues.

Seizing on her elevated spontaneity, our focus returns to Yvette's original goal—developing new responses, new roles from which to interact with her colleagues.

Jenny: If you weren't a block headed goat, who would you be?

Yvette: Hmmmm. I'd be a lyrebird.

She goes on, warming up to the role qualities of a lyrebird which appeal to her, but then she has a new idea.

Yvette: I want to be Galadriel!! (the Elven leader from JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*)

Jenny: Wow! What qualities of Galadriel's would help you here?

Yvette: She is calm . . . Wise . . . Strong and steady . . . Very fair and just . . . Full of grace . . . She sheds light on things.

5 Clayton, L (1982) The Use Of The Cultural Atom To Record Personality Change In Individual Psychotherapy. In *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry*, 35. Heldref Publications New York

Yvette continues, warming up further to developing aspects of this role for herself. Our session concludes with a clean statement of her new intent.

Yvette: It's time for my demented crusader to take a back seat.

Our shared adoption of a role development mindset has been effective in this coaching session and provides a reliable platform for fostering Yvette's spontaneity in all our subsequent work.

I Can See Straight Through It

Working in action demands a practitioner's attention to the phenomenology of the here and now moment. Working with *what is*, in the real time here and now, provides a rich complement to working with a client's story.

Vi, a supervision client, is telling me about a group she has recently experienced a difficulty with in her workplace. As it is a supervision session, our focus is primarily on her functioning, rather than on her client group. Using a tray of figurines and other small objects, Vi has set out the group on the table in front of us. As she does so she is speaking rapidly, describing how each group member behaved, how she experienced them and how difficult she found it to work with them.

Jenny : Where are you in this scene?

Vi : Oh yes (laughing) I had better be there.

Vi quickly chooses a large standing figurine, taller than all the others, with its arms outstretched, placing it well out and offset from the group. And she speeds on with her story. I focus on slowing her down, working moment by moment with the scene, rather than rushing on.

Jenny : Slow down, slow down, back up a bit. The group is here, but you haven't started yet. What are you aware of?

Vi : (Pauses and takes a deep breath) Everyone is waiting. Waiting for me to do something. I have to fill the silence. I have to take care of everyone. I am responsible for everything. It is my job to perform as the leader.

Jenny : Choose something to be you the Carer.

She chooses a bright yellow tab and places it close to the group.

Vi : I like this role. I feel playful and warm. I really do care about these people.

Her body has softened and her breathing steadies as she warms up to her Carer role. We sit in silence for a little time.

Jenny : This is deeply important to you.

Vi : Yes

Jenny : Here is the group . . . (gesturing to the figurines)

Vi shakes off her calm and warm hearted self-appreciation, her body stiffens as she speaks.

Vi : They are waiting for me to start. I have to put on a performance for them.

Jenny : Choose something to be Vi the Performer.

She looks at the objects available and chooses a sparkly, lightly tinted, transparent glass bead, placing it on the table in the middle of the group. I notice the placement—its as if she is ‘center stage’—but my attention is more immediately taken by the bead itself.

Jenny : Wow, it is so sparkly.

I smile at her and then return my gaze to the bead and make a simple descriptive statement.

Jenny : I can see straight through it.

Vi breathes in sharply. Goes still. Her eyes tear up. After a moment or two she speaks.

Vi : Oh my goodness. That’s it. I’m worried they’ll see right through me. I want everyone to like me. I feel this pressure to perform, to put on a show

Jenny : The surface is quite reflective.

Vi : Yes!! It reflects everyone else, but you can’t see inside it. I can’t be seen for myself.

She continues on, to further tearfully express what this is about for her, the genesis of this Performer role, where it sits in her system and how it impacts her moment to moment experience and spontaneity with the group. It is a deeply cathartic experience for Vi to become fully aware of and reflect on this aspect of her functioning.

After a time, she lifts her head from her pose of tearful reflection, straightens in her seat and becomes quite spontaneous, deciding upon a new role she would like to develop and access for moments when the group has gathered, waiting expectantly for her. She is now excited and bubbly in expressing herself and contemplating future encounters with the group.

Vi's spontaneity and creativity have been rekindled through slowing down into the here and now immediacy of what is present in front of her and within her in the moment.

Conclusion

In writing these vignettes to share with you I warm up to my own spontaneity and creativity as a practitioner. These stories provide a deeply satisfying mirror for me of how my professional practice, and my being, has been enriched through the integration of Morenian philosophies and methods. And of how this benefit ripples out into my clients' worlds and beyond.

Jenny Postlethwaite

Jenny Postlethwaite is an accredited Sociodramatist (Australia Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association) and a Professional Certified Coach (International Coach Federation). She has her own organisational coaching and consulting business, Reach Coaching. Since first encountering psychodrama in 2010, Jenny has enthusiastically integrated and applied Morenian philosophies and methods into her practice and actively promoted the method in her professional coaching community, through delivery of professional development sessions and Action Methods In Coaching training workshops.

Contact her at jenny@reachcoaching.com.au or reachcoaching.com.au

References

- Clayton, L (1982) The Use Of The Cultural Atom To Record Personality Change In Individual Psychotherapy. In *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry*, 35 Heldref Publications New York
- Moreno, J.L. (1953/1993) *Who Shall Survive? Foundations of Sociometry, Group Psychotherapy and Sociodrama*. (Student Ed.), Beacon House: New York.
- Postlethwaite, J.L. (2015) *The Naked Sociodramatist — Critical Moments In A Team Building Workshop*, Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association Thesis