

Sociodrama and Action Methods: Tools of Innovation

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Contents	Page
Abstract	3
Section One: Widening Participation	4
Section Two: Beyond a Brief Encounter	8
Section Three: Designing the Future	11
3.1 The Sand Pit	12
3.2 Role Training, Income Generation and the Recession	21
3.3. Routes to Market	31
Section Four: Rolling out the Many Roles of a Sociodramatist	39
Section Five: Quests and Questions	42
References	43

Abstract:

Sociodrama and Action Methods (S&AM) have the potential to be used more widely in the areas of Design and Innovation. Mapping out the system and expanding it enables organisations and businesses to create processes through which they can identify and meet their clients' needs. Role taking and engaging in feedback, analysis and dialogue connects the organisation to the service user/customer/client in a meaningful and beneficial way.

This paper seeks to explore the ways in which I have employed S&AM in the areas of design and innovation with organisations, teams and businesses to encourage sustainability and growth in the private sector. It charts my journey from completing an MA in Applied Theatre and using it in the public sector to developing its usage across all three sectors. The paper also considers the impact that wider use of the methods in varying contexts could have on S&AM.

Section 1: Widening Participation

Time: 2000

Place: a male prison on West Yorkshire

Context: Bullying and Victim Awareness group

Fresh from an MA in Applied Theatre at the University of Manchester, I was asked to deliver workshops exploring issues concerning bullying and power dynamics. One of the most impactful activities in the three day course was a mapping out of the system that surrounds an offender. It was a powerful way of connecting a man who felt he was alone and isolated and ignored. The exercise had been adapted from one that was part of a programme devised by TIPP (Theatre in Prisons and Probation) which delivered the practical element of the MA. (see Appendix A)

Time: 2002

Place: Crucible Theatre, Sheffield

Context: Youth Theatre Sessions

After directing a youth theatre session at the theatre, I discussed my wish to find more training. The director of the youth theatre suggested that I consider the Sociodrama and Action Methods training school that met in Sheffield, literally yards away from the Crucible. 'In fact', he said, 'I think you're already using it in the prison work you do.'

Sociodrama has many definitions but Jacob Levy Moreno, the founder of psychodrama and sociodrama, describes it as 'a deep action method dealing with intergroup relations and collective ideologies'. (Fox, p. 18) Moreno's broad definition

left room for practitioners to define the boundaries and usages of sociodrama for themselves. How would he feel were he alive today to see the spread of sociodrama and action methods present so creatively in so many countries and contexts? Would he feel as though his dream were on the way to being realized? A whistle stop tour with the newly published *Sociodrama in a Changing World* (eds. Wiener, Adderley & Kirk 2011) takes us around the globe:

- Herb Propper's annual visits to Bangladesh bring sociodrama along with sociometry, playback theatre and psychodrama to 'promote greater socio-political awareness and community-building, not only among the large urban slum populace and rural villages, but also among other sectors of Bangladesh society'. (Propper in 2011, op. cit.p.195)
- The unique method of Sociopsychodrama created by Monica Zuretti in Argentina to confront globalization 'giving different groups with different structures a tool to understand their differences and complementary aspects'. (Zuretti in 2011, op. cit. p.61)
- The clarity of the description of sociodrama according to Rollo Browne in Australia brings further understanding of how practical a method it is: 'Sociodrama is a learning method that creates deep understanding of the social systems and social forces that shape us individually and collectively.' (Browne in op.cit., 2011, p. 12)

His integrating cross-cultural work with both black and white Australians, the understanding of what it means to be stuck in an educational setting, the examination of power relationships in a detention centre – all of these demonstrate the flexibility of the method and its aim to impact on all of 'mankind' does not seem

a goal too aspirational to reach. (Browne in 2011, op.cit, p.19)

- Liz White in Canada: 'Recognize that a sociodrama is a warm-up as well as a working through of an issue. People have strong feelings in relation to significant social issues.' (White,p. 117) She suggests an exercise introduced as 'an exploration in which each person is asked to stretch – to occupy a position different from the one most comfortable for him or her. There will be an opportunity to play two or three different roles in the exercise. Each will play the role as he or she wishes.' (White, p. 18)

Sociodrama is not a therapy but it can be therapeutic. It is not prescriptive yet it provides a structure to explore issues and offer people the freedom to hear and perhaps gain an understanding of alternative perspective. It is an examination of systems and the roles people play in the relationships within those systems.

Once I began to recognise its usefulness, I found a way to incorporate S&AM into everything I did which, to be fair, was not difficult since I was already a drama worker in the community trained as a specialist in Forum Theatre and all things Boal. What excited me most was using S&AM in places where one would never expect to find it, e.g. in a team building session with a group of bank directors as well seeing it work in settings where it was welcomed and expected, e.g. as part of leadership training with an NHS mental health trust.

I also felt as if I had found my tribe. A whole new world opened up for me as I met people on the MPV/SAM course using S&AM in a trade union, health settings, cross-cultural training, social work and political activism.

Di Adderley does point out in the final chapter of this book that the *British Journal of Psychodrama and Sociodrama, special Sociodrama edition* published in 2001 did contain 130 pages and the new book has over 350. (Adderley in 2011, op cit, p. 343)

The movement is growing and at the very core of its conception is innovation with

inspiration and passion as its legacy.

Jonathan Fox, one of the founders of Playback Theatre describes Moreno as ‘ a large man with a large vision.’ (Fox, ed. p. xiii) It is the responsibility of sociodrama practitioners today to develop new opportunities for using the method even in ways Moreno himself would not have imagined.

Section 2: Beyond a Brief Encounter

Moreno was an innovator of the highest order. He wrote in 1931,

“...the main category of a philosophy of the creator is the moment and the development of a technique which would steer the creator between the Scylla of crude spontaneity and the Charybdis of the finished work and its idolization and repetition. A procedure of this kind will lead gradually towards a re-evaluation of all past techniques, which deal with the training and mutations of the mental and nervous equipment of man.”

(Moreno, 2010, p.10)

Moreno recognized the ruts into which so many new ideas eventually fell when held aloft and away from possible criticism and continuous refinement.

Seventy-eight years later, Tim Brown, the CEO of IDEO, a global design consultancy responsible for standard-setting innovations in industry echoes this idea,

‘...a management philosophy based only on selecting from existing strategies is likely to be overwhelmed by new developments at home or abroad. What we need are new choices -new products that balance the needs of individuals and of society as a whole; new ideas that tackle the global challenges of health, poverty and education; new strategies that result in differences that matter and a sense of purpose that engages everyone affected by them.’

(Brown,2009, p. 3)

Both are certain that tapping into creativity alone is not enough. The access to people’s creativity as individuals or in teams, groups or organisations is dependent on inventing a process that allows them to channel their ideas on a continuous basis to build on what presently might be considered a progressive approach but in the

future may become a coping mechanism (Francis Batten MPV/SAM trainer, personal communication).

Both Moreno and Brown refer to a philosophy of creation as the starting point for the cultivation of these new ideas. The quest for new techniques and strategies must be continual as an approach to problem-solving.

There are many examples of precedence for these processes. Augusto Boal in his book, *Legislative Theatre*, speaks of 'a form of politics which is transitive – it proposes dialogue, interaction, change' (Boal, 1998, p. 22) in order to form a democracy that is participatory in a real sense as well as interactive. With this thinking, he invented a new type of theatre in which people became legislators in the same way that the Theatre of the Oppressed became a mechanism for moving theatre-goers into spectators, ready to assume responsibility for their actions as protagonists in their own lives. Boal recognised that 'Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it. (Boal, 1991, p.xxxi)

The Participatory Design movement could collaborate naturally with sociodrama and action methods. This relatively new movement (the conferences have been held every two years since 1990) collects 'principles and practices aimed at making technologies, tools, environments, businesses, and social institutions more responsive to human needs. A central tenet of Participatory Design is the direct involvement of people in the co-design of things and technologies they use.' (Bodker,K, Bratteteig, T, Loi, D., Robertson,T, 2010,p. xi)

As part of the Participatory Design Conference in Sydney, Australia in 2010, I

delivered a day long tutorial asserting that Sociodrama and Action Methods employs spontaneity and creativity to create effective spaces for enhanced participation of groups. The tutorial introduced delegates from across the world to the notion that the flexibility afforded by S&AM could make them key tools in Design and Innovation work. (Appendix B)

Section Three: Designing the Future

As alternative methods of facilitating groups are becoming accepted more readily into arenas in which they are not normally found, using S&AM can be more easily incorporated into a workshop plan. Design and innovation have an openness to new ways of working where S&AM can play a part. As a term 'Design and Innovation' was not coined until the last of these three examples. I use it here because I believe it adequately describes both the process and the outcomes of these case studies.

The following case studies describe an exploratory move I made into employing S&AM as a tool in design and innovation across a spectrum of disciplines. It is also an account of my journey as a practitioner who is growing in confidence around spelling out the benefits of S&AM before even naming the technique and believing in myself as a competent practitioner whose unorthodox way of working is nevertheless very effective.

3.1. The Sand Pit

Multi-disciplinary working has evolved into a meal ticket for the increasingly competitive race for funding. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council considered it so important that they offered a share of £3.5 million to research organisations who were interested in meeting their aims and objectives.

‘The aim of Bridging the Gaps (BTG) is to enable Research Organisations to build a programme of activities that will stimulate creative thinking, across disciplines, which reflect institutional strengths and strategies.’

(<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/about/progs/cdi/priorityareas/Pages/bridgingthegap.aspx>)

A local university answered the call and was awarded a grant of 10% of the entire programme budget for their bid to involve at least five research centres across the sciences and arts.

As the facilitator of the second of three multi-disciplinary idea generating events called Sand Pits, my task was to bring together researchers potentially from across the entire university for one evening and one day with the aim of helping them create cross-disciplinary projects, the sole criterion of which was that they would enhance people’s lives. As one of these events had already taken place and was facilitated by another company, the organising committee (made up of the five professors from each of the research centres known as PIs - Principal Investigators - as well as a co-ordinator and an administrator), had strong ideas about what they had felt was successful from the previous event - mainly the evening venue and the creative methods - which they wanted to keep.

The first meeting was also an opportunity to hear the list of things about which they had been unhappy:

- Lack of clarity about the event and the project and the timescale involved
- Lack of clarity about the roles of the PIs both at the event and the following weeks leading up to submission of proposals
- The evening event's exercise did not lead on to anything the following day
- The speaker's presentation at the evening event did not seem relevant.
- Some of the groups were too large.
- The daytime event venue was cold and unsuitable.
- Too many interruptions throughout the day resulting in some people ending up in groups to which they did not feel connected
- The best ideas were lost.
- They left the event not feeling good about it.

The first two of these were the responsibilities of the PIs and they accepted that these had been their shortfalls. The rest would become part of my brief along with the focus on Sports, Physical Activity and Medicine in contrast to the first event's concentration on Rehabilitation and Assisted Living.

There was also some role confusion. As I had been asked to come to a meeting to talk about the event, I entered the room as a Collaborative Contractor. When at the conclusion of the meeting I was asked to submit a proposal for them to consider, I realised that I was instead an Interviewing Candidate. Misgauging the purpose of the meeting was the first of a series of misunderstandings which would characterise our time together. 'The first moments of the client and the consultant meeting is a

significant fragment of time that frames the ongoing stages of the working relationship.’ (Eden in Chesner / Hahn (eds) (2002) p.110) As my clients and I had framed these first moments differently , I had to back track to write the tender from a role of less certainty than that which I had entered the meeting. Fortunately the proposal was accepted. I sought greater clarity through further meetings but with a very tight timeframe to plan and deliver the events, my principal learning was to come about through retrospective reflection.

The challenge as a practitioner was to bring S&AM to this forum with a structure loose enough to allow flexibility and also robust and safe enough to encourage spontaneity among those of different academic disciplines. In many ways the brief echoes a classic team building remit which Ron Wiener puts very simply: ‘You will usually be asked to perform a miracle, which is part of the fun.’ (Wiener, 2011, p. 272)

I recognised that some of the tools of the Innovation work recently added to my toolkit, especially CO STAR (which will be outlined in detail later) would also be helpful in this situation. This was not the first time that I had attempted to combine the tools of business management with those of S&AM; however, this was a much larger group of people in a system I did not wholly understand. Previously I had used sociodramatic techniques such as timelines, role reversal and systems mapping in coaching and mentoring creative entrepreneurs trading as sole proprietors or in very small teams. This helped them to see themselves within a broader system in order to access resources and harness support. As Brown sees it: ‘As design begins to tackle a wider range of problems, the lone designer...has yielded to the interdisciplinary team.’ (Brown,2009,p.26)

It was this principle – that the system was wider and deeper than they may have been aware – applied to the interdisciplinary arena that I hoped would enable academic researchers to also

access resources about which they were not aware or perhaps did not know how to reach or use in order to meet their brief of innovation.

But 'interdisciplinary' was not the word that is employed at the university – it's 'multi-disciplinary' and had I made that distinction – far greater than a semantic debate - before the event, things may have turned out differently.

'in a multi-disciplinary team, each individual becomes an advocate for his or her own technical specialty and the project becomes a protracted negotiation among them, likely resulting in a gray compromise. In an interdisciplinary team there is collective ownership of ideas and everybody takes responsibility for them.' (Brown,2009, p.27 – 28)

The academics learned from the first Sand Pit that in order to gain the seed corn funding they had to find someone from another department who could fit into the project team for an idea which had not been generated during that event but had been born sometime, in some cases, months before the event. Far from idea generation, it became a mechanism for finding money to fund a pre-existing idea, shoehorn it into the theme and win a bid – business as usual in other words! Their warm up had been the previous event. This had had such a strong effect that none of the planned creative events which had taken into account the dissatisfactions from the previous event, were able to realise the ambitious aims the organising committee had. Unfortunately, this was not clear to me until well after the event and with a good deal of contemplation. With the short timescale, limited information and a long list of complaints to address, the Pls' expressed needs took priority.

An evening event, booked in advance of my involvement, took place the night before the main occasion. Shifting academics from the usual researcher roles into roles open to new ideas not necessarily related to anything they were doing was a tall order for a warm-up. The space itself

was made of glass and granite, a potentially cold and hard environment. However, we had warm weather and a wish from the co-ordinators that this be a relaxing and social occasion as well as an introduction to the work ahead. With a Spanish guitarist playing at the arrival, good food, a relevant keynote speaker and some mingling exercises, designed to move the participants around, finally the space became a place for working together. The final part of the evening involved group work based around the question, 'what does a good multidisciplinary research project look like?'

This question had emerged from a discussion with the person who had suggested me for the work in the first place. She has a sociodrama background and it was her frustrations with the facilitation of the previous Sand Pit event that led her to put me forward. Her feeling after the first event was that most of the participants had no experience of working with people from other research areas and did not understand how to speak to each other. My first task, therefore, was to enable people to recognise their differing perspectives and begin to bridge the gap between them; indeed bridging the gap is the name given to the initiative by the ESPRC. We had included a cartoonist who collated those ideas onto paper and created images which would start the next day's discussions. While it was very busy, it offered an opportunity for me to watch and listen to the participants as part of my warm up for the following day, remembering Sternberg and Garcia's advice 'the more structure involved in the activity, the easier it is for participants.' (Sternberg and Garcia, 2000, p.30)

The following day began with a warm up involving new participants being briefed by those on hand from the previous night. We used action methods such as the continuum, open space technology and tableaux as well as the more complex sociodramatic technique of role taking to offer structured feedback. Project groups were formed and eventually eight were funded. These are outlined in Appendix C.

I had fulfilled my brief which was to form multi-disciplinary groups with the aim of writing cogent bids for the funding. At the back of my mind, however, was the other aim of this work – innovation. Many of the successful bids were put together by people who were already seeking funding. Project ideas were built upon at the Sand Pit but most were not created there. I had, with the instructions from the committee at the forefront of my mind, employed action-based techniques to facilitate new ideas. The message communicated to me from the committee was the importance of viable ideas that could form sound proposals within a short time frame. The independent evaluator noted also,

‘Where there is the greatest divergence of view centres on whether SP (Sand Pit) is primarily about ideas generation ‘from scratch’ or whether it is acceptable, preferable or indeed inevitable that participants will bring to the table ideas they may have been working on for some time which raises the prospect that they may be seeking funding to enable the extension/continuation of work they already had in place. The latter would not seem to be in the spirit of EfL (Engineering for Life) since the priority should be being given to stimulating new and novel ways of multi-disciplinary working around new and novel research ideas/proposals.’ (LaCourt,2010, p.15)

For S&AM to have played a bigger role and fostered true interdisciplinary work, the warm up would have to have started well before anyone downed a glass of cava at the evening event. As a practitioner, I could have identified this as classic team building territory.

From my first meeting with the committee where it was explicitly stated that the only two criteria were that the teams had to involve more than one research area and that the project had to enhance people’s lives, the novelty of the ideas was an afterthought. The aim of innovation needs to be embedded into the design of the workshop in order to have any hope of achieving

it. In this circumstance, there is a hidden flaw. At that first meeting we were at cross-purposes. I believed we were there to discuss the details of the event. They were there to meet me to decide if they wished to request a proposal. 'The team building process has started, without a contract being in place. Some of the dynamics operating in the team are already being exhibited, but these are difficult to comment on because the situation is classified as an interview for the job and thus there is no contract to delve deeper.' (Wiener,2011, p.272)

There were also a number of teams to build:

- The Co-ordinating Team
- The Principal Investigators
- Each research centre (many did not know each other due to the nature of their work)
- Finally, the delegates at the event from the varying research centres

In addition to the recognition that team building was the real agenda, recruitment of delegates was a significant issue. The casting of the net would have had to be handled differently to have built a multi or inter-disciplinary group. Instead of an email around every research centre at the university which was deleted by anyone who had no prior knowledge of the programme, the email would have had to be worded in an inviting way, explaining the value of the programme and why it was important to have input from other areas and exactly what was at stake (a bit of cash!).

They might have considered changing the name of the event from The Sand Pit, an enigmatic name certainly but one which had little meaning to the general audience. The interim evaluation echoes this thought,

'Several people remarked that the term 'Ideas Generator' was actually a good descriptor, especially those who were critical that some participants already had ideas in mind when

they attended.' (LaCourt,2010,p. 15)

The title could have been a question. 'A powerful sociodramatic question creates a unifying purpose in the group.' (Browne, 2005,p.19) The unspoken question to which this group was warmed up was *How can I get money to fund my project?* instead of something like *How can I find people from other disciplines with whom I can create a project that will enhance people's lives?* Or *What can I learn from working with people who work differently than me?* Such alternative questions would have appealed to the academic investigator role that attracted them to their university career in the first place and warmed them up to the rare opportunity that this situation offered as well as distinguish it from other funding opportunities.

Perhaps a certain selection process could also have taken place as Tim Brown suggests:

'To operate within an interdisciplinary environment, an individual needs to have strengths in two dimensions – the “T-shaped person”. On the vertical axis, every member of the team needs to possess a depth of skill that allows him or her to make tangible contributions to the outcome. The T is crossed when 'people with the capacity and the disposition for collaboration across disciplines' participate.' (Brown,2009 ,p.27)

This approach - cross sector, culture and discipline – is so frequently the way that we are asked to work and yet it can be so difficult and so painful at times as we struggle with different and often counter-intuitive definitions, agendas, jargon and targets. Does everyone have the same understanding of what it means to work in this way not to mention how? Investing in the pre-event warm-up, however, is not the way that organisations often distribute their resources. If the idea that warming up is a continual process, however, for which a participant is always warming to whatever comes next, we then see warm-up not as a series of joining instructions but rather 'a process of giving attention to someone or something and becoming absorbed in

that state.' (Browne 2005, p.15) As the warm up takes them from the social to the group and finally to the personal levels, they are in a position to learn and be affected by the work because it becomes important and relevant to them as individuals. (Browne 2005, p.17) From that point, spontaneity is present and ideas are generated with passion.

Months later, I found an article on the main EPSRC website about the successful Sand Pit events they periodically run which described them in greater detail. 'The purpose of the IDEAS Factory Sandpit was to inject innovation into contemporary science via a new platform to enable participants to transcend single disciplines, mindsets and institutions in order to produce ground-breaking proposals with the help of blue sky thinking.' (Malde, p.1) The EPSRC Sandpit is a five-day residential with a recruitment process which precedes it. To be included participants must commit to the entire time period. Naming our event the Sand Pit, therefore, became even more problematic given there is already an association with the term in this area of work and participants may have had experience of these events and warmed-up to our Sand Pit in a counter-productive way.

Although I was not selected to facilitate the next Sand Pit, I took these critical lessons, in particular the need to weave innovation into the warm-up, with me into future work. I had a strong belief that Sociodrama and Action Methods had so much to offer interdisciplinary work, both in academic and enterprise structures. This experience offered many lessons, in particular:

- Clarity around roles at the first meeting, those all important 'first moments'
- The need for appropriate warm-up throughout the process
- Defined contract (including a central question) agreed with all of those who would be present and/or responsible for the outputs of the work
- Agreement around language – a glossary of terms would be helpful!

3.2 *Role Training, Income Generation and the Recession*

The public sector has propped up the economy for some time now and it was not difficult to predict the government change nor the enormous adjustments that would accompany it. A study by Manchester's Centre for Research in Socio-Cultural Change asserts

'the public and para-state sectors accounted for 57% of the 2.2m new jobs created between 1998 and 2007 – including 81% of jobs for women (partly because there are more part-time jobs available), and up to three-quarters of jobs in ex-industrial regions. By comparison, the growth in private sector jobs was relatively weak – for instance, the financial sector may have contributed an increasing large slice of GDP, but the number of people it directly employed remained pretty flat over the period (and most of them were in the South-East).'

(<http://www.managementtoday.co.uk/news/979712/how-public-sector-propping-uk->

economy/).

The depth and breadth of the cuts the public sector is now experiencing are breath-taking and mean that there is further opportunity for using S&AM in organisations to help them manage restructures and new ways of working.

The convergence of need and practical tools is the basis of this next case study and the work that it describes.

The future of a well-established organisation offering music provision to disadvantaged children and young people was hanging in the balance as the arts world continues to reel from the government cuts to the sector. Fortunate enough to have access to an excellent facilitator who has been coaching the senior management team from the inception of the project, this facilitator was determined to involve the entire organisation, now nearly 60 people, in forming new ideas for sources of income within a governmental administration more hostile to arts activities. She enlisted the help of four others including myself to plan and deliver three days that would help shift the organisation from one dependent on statutory funding to one empowered to create their own opportunities in the commercial marketplace where their skills

and experience are valued and needed.

At the one planning meeting we managed to have prior to these three days, we set out the roles and responsibilities each of us would undertake. The contracting with the organisation had taken place through the lead facilitator and a contract between us as a facilitation team needed to be made. As the sociodramatist (in the midst of a PR/Marketing specialist, a digital IT wizard, a sustainability-focused trainer as well as the lead facilitator who has been coaching and training organisations through change for decades), I was asked to set up each day for the entire group with active exercises designed to help people transition from their journeys into each workshop ahead as a way of facilitating the organisation's transition as a whole.

Having heeded the warm up lesson from the Sand Pit, I asked for particular attention to be paid to the communication which would precede the work; it would need to be sensitive to the anxieties and fears that were present as well as the worry about taking three consecutive days out of one work week. The following letter was sent as a result:

Dear All

A short note to say how much we are looking forward to working with you next week.

It's not easy for an organisation to engage the whole staff group in its forward thinking with at one time: it's logistically challenging and demanding of individuals, and it's important you know we're aware of that. Leaving the desk for three days feels like an interruption, but sometimes we do have to stand somewhere else to get a better picture of what we need to do next.

We will be spending three days doing some hard practical thinking about plans to meet the needs of beneficiaries – especially in a changing climate. But there will also be a real opportunity for developing new skills and insights

individually as well as collectively.

Your thoughts and perspectives are crucial to this process and we look forward to sharing them....

We discussed opening exercises at length, understanding that they would need to be in different roles and we wished for them to choose these roles consciously as part of the process of change and also as an aspiration for them as individuals involved in change.

Moreno defined role as

‘ the actual and tangible forms which the self takes...the functioning form the individual assumes in the specific moment he reacts to a specific situation in which other persons or objects are involved.’ (p.62 Essential

Moreno)

Our clients had already identified the need to explore a shift in role. Our job was to help them recognize the skills they possessed that would enable them to make that shift, to honour the value of their work and believe that it had a market value. In three days...

‘Role training is a goal...Sometimes the purpose and contract of the group is primarily role training.’ (Sternberg & Garcia,2000, p. 76)

In the first mingle, we asked them to think of a creative person who could be someone they knew or someone famous like Einstein. In the role of this innovative person they would meet two others and introduce themselves and their expectations for the next three days. After this round, they would move on, still in the role of this person and meet other innovative and creative people and share the hurdles they expected to encounter and finally in the third round, the qualities of the innovative person that they were playing which would enable them to overcome these obstacles. These were recorded on post its around the room

and remained there for the duration as an aid to group process.

The most simple definition of group process is ' everything that goes on in the group besides the content of its task.' Or in other terms, the dynamics of the group which are ' the forces which cause movement.' (Houston, p.26) In asking people to identify a role that was perhaps different from that which they were currently holding, we were deliberately modifying their processes to enable change to take place as soon as possible.

We never asked them to de-role and they proceeded with the rest of the day. De-roling is a process necessary in sociodrama/psychodrama/Forum Theatre when the feelings that are evoked as a result of the drama are potentially negative, overwhelming or could be unhelpful for the person playing them.

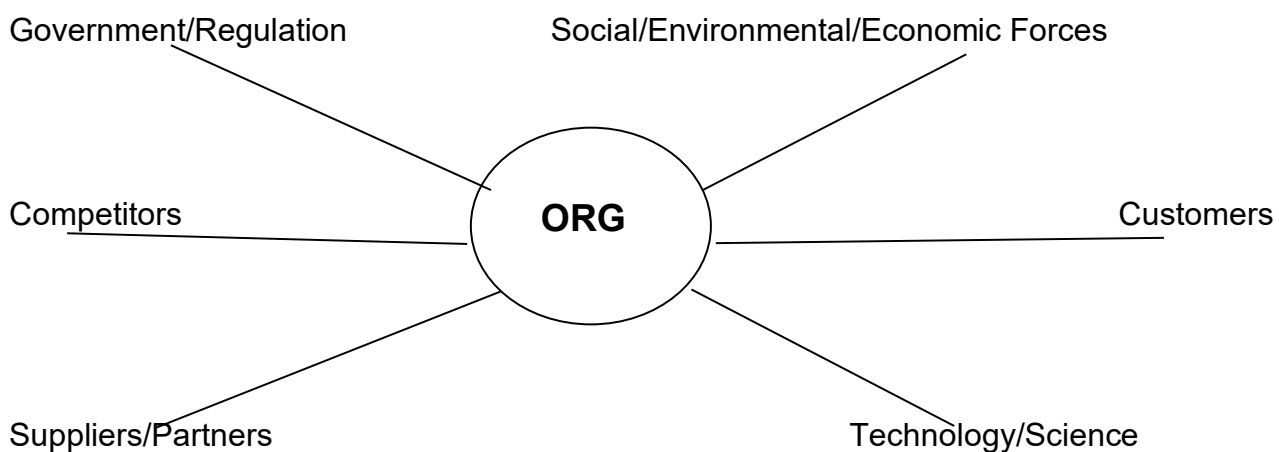
In this instance, the participants were not so strongly roled in and not in negative roles. We wanted that chosen innovative role to remain with them for the rest of the time we would spend with them.

In order to warm the group up to looking at their own place in the sector in a different way, we realized we would have to help people understand the world beyond their own organization and where the organization was placed within it. S&AM is uniquely placed to demonstrate this in an active way while helping people to recognize the roles they play in such a system.

We mapped this out in three groups acknowledging the trends occurring that affected their organization and its business and was called Mapping of the External Environment. It sets out the social tendencies that impact on an organisation and/or its customers from the perspective of the participants.

“A ‘social system’ is a loose description for the elements and inter-relationships around a presenting social issue. Systems can be as large or as small as the issue being described. Naming something as a system allows us to see it in a different way, and look for organizing principles, patterns of behaviour and points of leverage. It allows us to discuss complex issues in a way that can develop insight and understanding.” (Browne, Sociodrama Handout, BPA Conference 2008)

The External Environment mapping is a map of social systems external to the organization rather than individual players such as those found in social atoms, the ‘network of people to whom we feel connected and without whom we would feel out of balance’ (Sternberg & Garcia, 2000, p. 131-132).



In the same way that a social atom offers information on a broader scale about a person’s network and an opportunity to explore the role relationships within it, this mapping of the organisational atom identified the influences surrounding an organisation with the same construct:

‘Social atoms may be mapped in many ways: the first person represented would normally be the protagonist (or the organisation / group being mapped), as all other representations are *in relation* to this central figure; on paper, using circles for women, triangles for men, larger or smaller, closer or farther away from the ‘owner’ according to

a chosen criterion e.g. how emotionally close they are, how often they encounter each other in person or by other means, how much they interact in a given context. Objects may be used to represent people in a larger sculpture. People may be used to take on the roles (auxiliaries). Out of this short scenes may be set up to look at a part or the whole of an atom. Social atoms may be from different periods of a person's life, or of different collective groupings (networks) a person belongs to.' (SAM handout, February 2007)

The room was an insufficient size to hold the number of people and most certainly too small to have mapped this out with people; thus we were consigned to large sheets of paper on the walls. Ron Wiener considers these 'an essential tool' as 'they encourage sub-groups to think creatively'. They also 'help the group to identify with and own the room' as well as 'give feedback to the group as to how hard they have worked' and 'enables the trainer to refer back easily to earlier stages of the course'. (Wiener, 1997, p. 38) These maps remained on the walls for the rest of that day and the following two.

After mapping out these trends, we held a whole group feedback session to identify the common themes and the anomalies in order to:

- ground the upcoming ideas generating session in reality
- remember which of their service users' needs they were addressing
- root the participants in the realm beyond the walls

In addition to helping people identify new and useful roles in a map of the current world in which their organisation was functioning, other action methods that were employed throughout the three days were continuums and World Café (a cousin of Open Space Technology) as ways of getting people to vote on their feet. World Café espouses the following

principles which express the aims of the facilitation team:

- Set the context
- Create hospitable space
- Explore questions that matter
- Encourage everyone's contribution
- Connect direct perspectives
- Listen together for insights
- Share collective discoveries

(<http://www.theworldcafe.com/principles.htm>)

The move from World Café where groups were formed according to their areas of interest into actually creating a product or service that could be developed was another tool (the External Environment Map is their creation) invented by the Enterprise Development Group (EDG) called CO STAR. It involves role taking in a less explicit way than S&AM and it was CO STAR that persuaded me that the two approaches had some synergy:

‘CO-STAR stands for: Customer – Opportunity – Solution – Team – Advantage – Results.

These are the six elements that are central to the CO-STAR framework for crystallizing the thinking behind an idea. It is a vehicle for enhancing innovative ideas through constructive dialogue and a process for focusing attention on the fundamentals that make an idea valuable.

- Who are the intended Customers and what are their unmet needs?
- What is the full potential of the Opportunity?
- What is your proposed Solution for capturing the opportunity and satisfying a customer?
- Who needs to be on the Team to ensure the solution's success?

- What is your competitive Advantage over the alternatives?
- What Results will be achieved from your solution?

There are always many more ideas than those that can provide important value. Every element of the CO-STAR value proposition is essential for an idea "to grow up" to deliver value.

The continued insight and passion of an innovation champion and team is necessary to turn an initial idea into a value proposition worthy of investment. Value propositions then become the new currency of innovation, not simply the raw ideas. Venture capitalists have been using methods like this for years to reduce risk and maximize returns on their investments.' (Gyoffrey, p.92-93)

Enterprise Development Group (EDG) is a Palo Alto based company working globally. We were fortunate enough as a whole team to have been trained in the use of these tools as part of a transnational project. The similarities between some of the mapping techniques and S&AM were immediately apparent to me. S&AM is three dimensional and deals with the affective dimension as well as cognitive where EDG's tools are basically still rooted in the business jargon and a two-dimensional interface. Nonetheless, they provide a structure and a language that is familiar and accepted. The mention of roles is not explicit. For example, in the feedback session of the CO-STAR tool, known as the RIIS (Rapid Idea Improvement Session), the people listening, referred to often as an audience, are asked to take on the roles of Fans – who only feedback what they love; Builders – who only feedback on what they love and how it can be developed and finally Customers – who approach the feedback from someone who might use the product or service being proposed. One of our team members who works exclusively in the Arts Sector has found that Customers is not a term they feel wholly comfortable using and he changed it to Users. For the Sand Pit, I used the term Funder as that was more relevant to

that group.

Whatever the name, the purpose of the role is clear – it is a person listening to the pitch with a particular interest and perspective and not always the view of the person playing that role.

During this project, we found that the more developed the role of the User – as well as the more specific a role description, i.e. a Frustrated User, a Delighted User, the more comprehensive and more meaningful the feedback for the person pitching the idea.

As simple a concept as this is, it was one of the major learning points for the team during the three days. The need to role in the person holding the part became an absolute necessity.

This process was closer to sociodrama than classic role-play though the two are of course connected. With CO STAR, people held roles though they did not engage in dialogue with the presenters and these were not scenes. As each group at some point played both presenters and held the feedback roles there was an element of role reversal with each person playing both an Ideas Pitcher and a Feedback Giver. The roles themselves were assigned as social roles with each person choosing a more individualistic response.

We left with the staff feeling that the time they invested was valued and used well. A space for new ideas had been carved out of an open plan office with a static number of people in it who now knew each other better. The senior management team wrote to tell us that people were coming forward enthusiastically with new ways of working. A team of nervous and fearful people working in silos had been transformed into a dynamic force exploding with ideas and feeling positive about the future. Shift had happened.

The lessons of inter-disciplinary working from the Sand Pit had also been applied to our facilitative teamwork with each of us holding the role of the T-Shaped Facilitator in addition to contributing from our own unique skill set. This particular piece of work, where I was not the

overall leader but part of a team where I led according to my skill base, allowed me the space and time to consider my learning from the Sand Pit and how I was able to apply it in this situation. I could see where a sociodramatist fit into the programme and how my skills were uniquely suited to deliver the areas I led.

I also held the role of Learning Observer as I watched the Confident, Capable, Lead Facilitator manage the group process. 'It seems as if groups need to know and enforce some rules within the group, and to guard their boundaries. In other words, any group needs controls and is likely to look to the leader to provide them.' (Houston, p. 5) While providing a structure that was flexible enough to respond to the needs of this very large group, the Leader also helped the group feel able to progress and believe in those steps forward. Best of all, we knew that she would remain in a coaching capacity to help implement the actions agreed.

As a team of five people who had never worked together before, we also felt that a new social atom had been created, an outcome we had not foreseen at the outset, so focused were we on the clients' development. 'Role theory suggests that we are the creators not only of our experience, but almost of our existence itself. We do not make it up out of nothing, of course, but the storying of our experience...a collaborative effort between us and others in our social atom.' (Williams, p. 48) We had outlined a new way for the charity to work in order to survive in a recession. It was another chapter in their story, one that invited co-operation and relationship building and we had mirrored that as a smaller team, building our own story and our individual roles as well.

3.3 Routes to Market

Each piece of work that is well-received and fulfils its brief gives me more confidence to suggest using S&AM in the first place as well as expanding the ways in which I currently use them. The principles of Innovation welcome S&AM as a worthy companion into the spontaneous and flexible journey of developing new ideas that build on both the successes and lessons of current practice.

In addition to the need to move from the bid for public money to tapping into potential markets for valuable products formerly given as part of a public service, a separate phenomenon was emerging – an increase in business start-ups and the need to make smaller businesses work more efficiently with less resource, often requiring examination of processes, led me to this third case study.

I was approached by a delegate on the Sand Pit who felt that the facilitation of the event was in tune with her work on Design Thinking. With a background in industry and a position in a research centre of a university, this project leader was tasked with helping local industry weave Design Thinking into roughly four areas:

- Customer's Insights
- Creative Concept Development
- Low Res Prototyping
- Go to Market Planning

Wanting a term to describe this process she called it a Design and Innovation Workshop as she perceived the term Design Thinking to have already transcended its original meaning and was now viewed as jargon, i.e. it was greeted with eye rolling when she mentioned it.

She had no further resource (code word for money) for the client with whom she was working

but she asked if I could meet with her and a colleague from that university's business school and enable them to think differently about the process they were developing. My fascination in understanding better the potential connection between S&AM and the keen interest in innovation from all sectors was the reward for any efforts I would make.

After listening to the story of the client, I suggested that setting a scene for their client, mapping out his customer base and role reversing with his customers would provide him with an awareness of their needs which he could then address more readily. They seemed both excited and willing to try this out and it worked well by all accounts. They began to seek further funding to bring me in as a member of the team.

In the meantime, intrigued by Design Thinking, I began to read about that concept in *Change by Design*, the Tim Brown book previously quoted, as well as *The Design of Business* by Roger Martin who is the dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Martin's book is filled with words and phrases alarmingly familiar to the sociodramatist and yet, he is a director at Research in Motion (who created the BlackBerry) and has consulted global corporations:

“Actual dialogue at the senior levels of P&G (Proctor and Gamble) was exceedingly rare before Lafley became CEO. Rather than engaging in dialogue, executives devoted their time and energy to bulletproofing arguments and then advocating and defending them. Dialogue was different, foreign – and unnerving. Only after two or three cycles did it dawn on the presidents how invigorating and mind opening it was to engage in dialogue about what could be rather than what was. It was also great for their businesses.” (Martin, p. 91-92)

And a drama class could have done it for so much cheaper! I especially was pleased with the

part of the first chapter called 'It Starts with a Question'. (Martin,p.9).

It was somewhat disturbing to think that Moreno's ideals designed to help humankind deal better with social change could also be applied to multi-nationals harnessing even more power. Therefore, I was relieved when the first Design and Innovation project which I eventually became a part of was with a small, local web development company that worked with charities and social enterprises exclusively.

This company had been commissioned to design a new Content Records Management (CRM) tool for a local charity. Realising that the tool is both unique and useful for the sector, they approached us to assist them in exploring the best route to market for the product. In contrast to the lack of planning for the Income Generation work described above, we knew that we were not merely crafting a one-off workshop but creating a process which could potentially help other clients in need. For this we would need more planning to allow thinking to progress as well as build in evaluation time to reflect on successes and learning.

We decided that the CO-STAR tool which is actually a diagnostic to assess the viability of an idea would be essential here and so too would the systems mapping around the internal and external environments as we did in the Income Generation example. Setting out the organisational cultural atoms of the client could give us a picture of where the gaps in provision and support may lie.

We felt that more information about their potential client could be built around their knowledge about charities and the particular charity which had commissioned the work. Using the organisational cultural atom moved the workshop from a two dimensional visual aid to three-dimensional active engagement.

The concept of going to market sounded like a timeline and having a visual representation of that would be helpful. Inviting outsiders in to a RIIS also seemed like a great idea. We planned for about 8 participants for the whole day with a few outsiders feeding in for an hour after lunch.

We also looked at our team of three and thought about who else we would need, mapping out our organisational atom. By testing the tools we were asking our clients to consider on ourselves, we were able to identify who we would need on our team and also who would be useful to invite to the RIIS. With a longer period of time, we were able to give appropriate attention to our warm-up as a team engaged in developing a process rather than facilitators having too little time to react to a problem as in the previous examples.

Our team expanded to include a product-turned-service designer, a CRM specialist, an academic from the Business School specialising in voluntary sector research and a colleague from the Income Generation workshop the week prior. I felt his experience with the process would be very helpful; I didn't realise that he had also run a charity himself. We were able to include a marketing specialist from Designing Demand (a mentoring and support service offered by the Design Council that helps businesses to make strategic design decisions and set up and manage design projects) for the RIIS.

Each time we met, we were able to incorporate the research and further discussion with the client company into the planning until we arrived at a process we felt would address the needs of the client and warm him up to thinking about the possibilities of the route to market.

We began with the External Environment map in two dimensions. As in the former example, we

were restricted by a too tiny space despite the small number of people in the workshop.

Additionally, we felt that the group was constrained by the unfamiliarity and starkness of the room which was a communal space in the building in which they had offices. Warming them up required a significant effort. My experience of working with small groups, that is groups with five or less members in them, is that there are fewer places to hide and the chance that what you say will be heard, remembered, judged (or all of the above) rise substantially. However, 'the smaller the group the easier in general it is to maximise trust, but often it is difficult to generate a lot of energy.' (Wiener, p. 27)

We then moved onto the Customer, starting with the current client as a starting point. We set out an empty chair and explained it was a Hot Seat for anyone who could play the client and answer questions. When we felt confident we knew as much as we needed to know about the client, we mapped out the system around him, using the table to set out the organisational atom in post it notes and objects (due to the limited space!).

Identifying key players after which each person selected a player and spoke from that position, engaging in dialogue as it suited though in most cases, this stayed a hearing about rather than talking to session. This allowed the company to gain a better understanding of their customer's needs and also their customers' customer's or beneficiary's needs. We repeated this process with a hypothetical customer, starting with the rolling in of the client and mapping out the system around them. An acceptable business term I use to describe this is a Stakeholder Analysis 'on its feet'. (SAM handout, 2004)

From focusing on the Customer, we shifted to focusing on the product using the CO-STAR tool and preparing for the RIIS where they would present their pitch based on the information they had agreed upon using CO –STAR. Being web developers they took all of the lunch break to research and find exciting images to present their pitch. We welcomed the two newcomers who

would form part of the audience and explained the RIIS assigning the roles of a Fan, Builder and Customer. The woman who was the Builder found it difficult to offer feedback in role; I asked her to try her best to not 'fix' the problem but offer additional ideas to those presented by the Fan. Only after she deroled from the (Reticent) Builder did she comment as herself, in a role I named Determined Fixer. The company immediately saw the value of this structured process where concentrating on the positive led to enrichment of ideas rather than dismantling of them before they were fully formed.

The final section was the Route to Market and this was the least clear to me.

My colleagues created another map for this and despite this being the very aspect of the workshop requested by the client, it was the part with which I felt least able to help.

While we had agreed that I would lead the facilitation of the day, this was the area in which I had the least experience of the three of us core team members. They seemed much more experienced as this was their very field of expertise. Unfortunately, on the day, my other colleagues seemed just as flummoxed. I returned to my original idea of a timeline as opposed to a map. My feeling had been to leave them with an action plan that mapped out the route to market and gave them some control over how and when it would happen. I split them into two groups and asked them to create a timeline to commit to actions. Being rather visually inspired, one group created a matrix of time and person and action that outlined clearly and simply what needed to be done by whom and by when. This took into account the varying routes to market while assuring them that they wouldn't be beaten to the finish line with their innovative product.

An addition to this section could be hearing from the satisfied customer in the near future after they've used the product and the difference it has made to them. The client's vision of this is that it could speed up the time it takes to fundraise for a piece of equipment that would

change people's lives. We could hear from others whom we had already met through the mapping of the customer's system. This would neatly return to the customer's need as the focus of the product while ending the session with a reiteration of the value of the product.

‘Generating new choices and trying them out in action is a future projection technique that gives participants an opportunity to do trial runs in a safe environment. A work team that isn't sure which course to take may enact each of the unknown options, one at a time. As they enact each option in this way, they may become aware of benefits and/or drawbacks they had not considered. They may also generate new options that occur to them from enacting the possibilities they had been considering.’ (Sternberg & Garcia, p. 180)

The evaluations for this piece of work reflected the importance of the sociodramatic laying out of the system. In fact, the company director said that it was the most helpful part of the day. The RIIS was also pinpointed for being a particularly illuminating activity that highlighted the gaps in the thinking or presenting. The positive roles leading the feedback create a culture of constructive thinking that attempts to include viewpoints already mentioned. The participants are also encouraged to shape their opinions in a way they might not normally have offered. The woman who was given the Builder role would not have chosen that role when asked for her comments and she struggled to stay in role. Yet she evaluated it very positively, finding it useful to have a role as a filter for her thoughts.

The prospect of role reversing with the client in the future – will feature as an exciting new development in the next Design and Innovation Workshop.

As a sociodramatist, this was the most satisfying of the three examples as

sociodramatic techniques were more cohesively incorporated and served the needs of the client in a meaningful way. I was also hired specifically as a Curious, Experimenting Sociodramatist whose findings could provide a more active and experiential method for developing new products and more efficient ways of working for small enterprise in my own city.

Learning how to spot sociodramatic principles embedded in the jargon of business, industry and commerce is making it easier to use S&AM and frame it in a way that people can hear what it can do and not grow anxious over what it might entail for them as individuals. The evolving glossary of terms is shaping up:

warm up ----- effective communication prior to event

mapping out the system---- stakeholder analysis on its feet

role taking----- insight into customer's needs

role training----- action planning

While language is important and the misuse of it will certainly derail any potential professional (or personal!) relationship, my greatest lesson was in warming up and determining which role I would play in order to be connected to my own spontaneity and respond successfully to the groups' needs. My experience has shown me that the language will follow if the role and my listening is genuine and authentic.

As a book end to allocating appropriate time to warming up is the need to build in adequate reflection and debriefing time, giving myself a chance to hear and understand what has transpired in order to build on good practice. It is my own innovation process, enabling me to plan, design and deliver my own growth.

Section Four: Rolling out the Many Roles of a Sociodramatist

When I look at the start of this journey, over a year ago as I write this, I was in a fearful state – terrified about the deconstruction of the public sector despite knowing that it would happen, unsure how to make S&AM acceptable to a harsher world of private industry and yet certain that this would be beneficial. The shift in my role from Fearful and Worried Freelance Worker to Trusting, Confident and Proactive Self-Employed Person has been through recognising the variety of roles that a sociodramatist plays. Trying to sell myself as a sociodramatist right now would be self-defeating. As Adam Blatner writes in his chapter Reflections on sociodrama, ‘there was and is no money in doing sociodrama.’ (Blatner in Wiener, Adderley & Kirk, p. 47)

The role of responsible re-educator should also be considered by sociodramatists seeking acceptance from a wider audience. Establishing the value of the approach is the task of sociodramatists moving into different contexts. From there an introduction to the term sociodrama once clients understand the worth of the work is imperative if we are to build a profile.

While we are people who believe that showing and not telling is more potent, we need to find a way to tell also. How can we share good practice more widely in areas that naturally connect with S&AM such as the Participatory Design Movement?

Rebranding is not an option as the term is accepted throughout the world as highlighted by the recent publication of *Sociodrama in a Changing World* about its world-wide applications. Rather it is up to practitioners to find the ways in which S&AM connects to the other movements and practices around us.

Realising that sociodramatists are also participatory designers and welcomed into that movement as valid and valuable offered me the language and the confidence to focus on the impact of the work for potential participants and clients. We also call ourselves business trainers, organisational consultants, facilitators, group workers and a host of other job titles in a search for acceptance and a living wage.

My colleague at the university identified the activities as being compatible with design thinking, a buzz word hailing from the Silicone Valley in California. We know these tools would be very helpful with businesses in a tough economic climate; we need to help that community see it too.

Sociodramatic thinking IS design thinking. Everything we do is focused on helping people participate more actively, giving voice to those who normally don't speak and gathering the collective energy and talent of any group. Why would any organisation snub its nose at such an approach, particularly when techniques such as NLP and MBTI are so widely accepted? Who would have dreamed that NeuroLinguistic Programming and Myers-Briggs Training Indicator would evolve into such universally accepted ways of working? They are not exactly catchy names. Yet Sociodrama and Psychodrama strike fear into some of the most intrepid souls. If it's something to do with your brain and potentially scientific, we trust it; if it recalls any need to emote or expose yourself in any way, it's a scary thing. When people hear about sociodrama, they often ask me if it has anything to do with working with sociopaths. That's an improvement on the complete fixation on the latter part of the term where traumatic images of O level drama are mustered before the person shudders and responds, "I don't do role play."

The resistance to working with drama may be viewed as an excuse not to act, in any way, at all. Sternberg and Garcia offer this explanation,

“Whatever the overt reason, reluctance to act is connected with not feeling ready to put ourselves on the line and risk exploring our feelings, learning about ourselves, or trying something new. Moreno (1973) saw this as a diminishment or loss of spontaneity. This reluctance is to be respected. It is present because the person feels unsafe for some reason. When we can feel more confident that we will not come apart at the seams if we look at the underlying issue, we look at it.” (Sternberg & Garcia, p. 78)

Part of an appropriate warm up to spontaneity in a (British) workplace, therefore, may involve not using the words drama or role play given the assumptions people make when they hear these words. Moreno warned of the danger of those assumptions when he invented the term *cultural conserve*: ‘This event could only have occurred in our time, when cultural conserves have reached such a point of masterful development and distribution en masse that they have become a challenge and a threat to the sensitivity of man’s creative patterns.’ (Moreno in Fox, ed. p.40) He continues to explain how he created spontaneity training and this enables people to respond more freely, returning to the Latin root of *sponte* meaning ‘of free will.’ This free will is constrained when associated too closely with a previous experience, memory or understanding. To allow our potential clients to be liberated from a cultural conserve that may be hindering them, we need to ensure that our language is concrete and credible, sincere and aware of possible negative associations.

Is there duplicity, however, in expecting the world to accept us when our own professional organisation in the UK has another perspective on our place in this movement? Di Adderley writes in the final chapter, ‘And finally...MPV/SAM’, ‘sociodrama struggled for a number of years as a largely invisible younger sibling to psychodrama within the British Psychodrama Association (BPA) with the tiny number of individuals who might identify themselves as ‘socio’ as opposed to ‘psycho’ existing somewhere on the fringes of society, with no validated

independent role or existence, subsumed under the umbrella title 'psychodrama'...The BPA voted to augment the name of its journal...but making a similar change to the name of the organisation itself was voted down as a step too far. So, in the public title of my professional organisation, sociodrama continues to be invisible.' (Adderley in Wiener, Adderley & Kirk, eds. p. 341)

I do not suggest that the work of sociodramatists is sidelined or undervalued by the BPA and we do represent only a fraction of the membership of the organisation. But I also understand the importance of names as it was a vital lesson for me from the Sand Pit as a method of including and validating people and clarifying their shared aims.

Since part of our role as sociodramatists is to make the avoided explicit, the hidden seen and the unheard voiced, we need to be acknowledged by our own tribe before we can expect it universally. Perhaps the cultural conserve present here is the reluctance to take that 'step too far' which could include Sociodrama in the name of the professional organisation to which we all belong. And how do we deal with cultural conserves when they are challenged? A little spontaneity would go a long way here and we know how to do that.

Section Five: Quests and Questions

My quest for a way to embed innovation into businesses and groups has led me to the writings and philosophy of Moreno, a man born in the nineteenth century. My questions of how to incorporate Sociodrama and Action Methods into the varied forms of design have happily coincided with a book about practical applications of the methods used world-wide that indicate a growing movement and exciting stimuli. My thinking has progressed substantially from reading 20+ year old books that document the work of pioneers of this movement in addition to those travelling on similar paths in other areas of study and research. The quest, however, is far from over as new thinking leads to fresh enquiry and establishes a route to innovation that never ends.

Most importantly, though, is the realisation that the greatest tool of innovation is the sociodramatist herself.

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