

Editorial

Writing about Psychodrama

This edition of *Self and Society* came about when Vivian Milroy was talking of his need for finding someone to replace him as editor. It occurred to me that a special issue of *Self and Society* on Psychodrama had not been put together and this needed to be done. It was also a good opportunity to see how I would respond to the role of editor! As time has gone on between the time that I first wrote this and the typing of it, I have come to the conclusion that I was not the most suitable candidate for this role because I have a love-hate relationship with the written word. Below I have tried to put down my reflections to date.

Writing is an activity I find particularly tortuous. I am much more at home with sculpture, mime and dance because they are three dimensional. It's this quality that I like in Psychodrama - figures, movement and sound in space, the spaces being as important as the figures. There is a fluidity that writing rarely captures. Psychodrama is like a kaleidoscope where one spontaneous act nudges along another. Psychodrama is life slowed down, to capture the power of the moment. It's like a film slowed down in three D. It's walking around a sculpture; at every angle you see it in space, where it keeps changing, then you decide which part to set before you, or you choose which frame to stop the film at, but the power in both is that you know the before and after. Writing, for me, has none of this dimension, so whilst I have enthusiasm for the idea, I find the activity restrictive and frustrating. Perhaps I don't trust or respect my own use of words; so I don't believe others.

I soon discovered encouraging others to write quite suited my own predicament until it came to my turn to make some contribution. Then I really appreciated the self discipline, and persistence needed as I fumbled around with scraps of ideas. Lots of things I would really like to explore, but can I get them down on paper? I thought no . . . but actually I have to say that I have surprised myself of late, by just how much writing I have done! I keep hearing Ken Sprague in my ear when he was talking about being terribly stuck with his art. He said that he took the Psychodramatic starting point and painted where he was at, stuck, not knowing what to paint. One picture led to another.

I have to ask myself about why do so many people balk at writing about psychodrama. As a reflection of life, it is so about change, controversy and risk-taking. It's not a comfortable occupation - it's a continual cycle of pregnancy, labour and birth - and whoever got that down effectively on paper? Yes, plenty of people talk about it but it is only by going through it that made me understand all those pictures of the Madonna and Child, and made me understand what was not being said in the space between the words of the stories I was told or read about parenting and childhood. So it is with Psychodrama. How can a medium which is about movement be put into the straight jacket of a cultural conserve? Loads of people dislike the writing of Moreno himself for that very reason. It just doesn't translate.

I had just the same trouble when I trained as a Montessori teacher. Even fewer people could stand Maria Montessori's writing. Like Moreno she also claimed her teaching method was a scientific method, and it was similarly extremely well thought out and all-embracing. But what her words could not reflect was the agony, the struggle and the joy, and maybe above all, love in pain. The written word cuts out the sensory experiences of sight and sound and can only cast a silhouette of experience.

The Black Hole

For the last nine months I have been practising as a freelance psychodramatist whilst getting close to completing my hours of training until the hours got put up! I've been working in a number of different settings, with completely different age ranges but all the time I have been aware of a grey gap of deadness which, rather than receding, has generally grown a shade darker and darker as time has gone on. I have even been frightened of it because I cannot see it coming until it has come. It's just occurred to me that it is exactly like a nightmare I frequently had as a child. In the dream I would go into a large hedged field with great relief, it would be sunny and peaceful. Then I'd see a small black dot in the corner. O, no, it's coming towards me - suddenly the black woolly bull is right up on me, I'm going to be stifled! Then I'd wake terrified.

Last April I went to Holwell thinking I would complete my hours as a psychodramatist. Far from feeling competent, I felt terribly anxious. The holes in my work as director were as black as ever. I was missing emotional cues. . . and walking backwards from catharsis into confusion! I was even told that I had no understanding of the techniques!

I have been forced to admit that this hole is my hole - the hole in my life that keeps appearing and I don't want to know about it. But there is no way around it. I've got to go through it. So that's where my training has got me to date. I'm going through it. I've stopped most of my work to try and make some regular income, whilst I look after my two small boys.

Training as a director, more than any of the other parts of the training, has had its own therapeutic power for me. How do I feel about it?

I feel really pissed off: things were really starting to happen, all sorts of exciting projects with interesting people.

I also feel unswervable about this decision; it makes the last few months look like a honeymoon on quick sand. For the first time I'm not struggling between home and work, between self and self. This is the first time Olivia is going to have a rest . . . stop and do nothing that could be called fashionably 'something'! This moment feels like the temptation in the wilderness. I know it's the reckoning that every man and woman has to go through. It is completely

ordinary and I am proud of that. I know the black hole is there waiting for me. The other day I sat down to reflect on my life script, I had not sat down more than three quarters of an hour and there it was all over me. I could not listen, and I could not talk. It's even closer to hand than I thought. I wasn't even asleep. But I'm not panicking. We'll meet each other all in good time. There is going to be a hell of a fight, that is how it feels, warrior and insidious dragon, but I'm going to win. And when I come back I shall somehow pick up as a psychodramatist. That is something I know. In the meantime the present . . . this issue of Self and Society on Psychodrama.

Therapy in the Streets

What excites me about Psychodrama is that, in my experience, it is the only therapy which can combine the individual and the group, the personal and the political. For that reason it has an important contribution to make outside a clinical setting. I know lots of work has been done to this effect in America. I'm not the best person to write about this as I don't have any first hand experience but I do hope it sparks something off.

Science was put into the hands of the powers that be when Galileo recanted. Psychodrama, in common with numerous other humanistic disciplines, is still caught in the grip of the establishment but it could bring therapy, ritual and celebration to the man in the street through the use of modern arenas, theatres, cinemas, churches, schools, market places, and public or sports halls. In a way it seems ridiculous to be saying such things in the oppressive climate of the 1980s, but there could be the equivalent of lunch time concerts, or extempore happenings. in non-elitist settings.

Earlier this year there was a memorial evening at a theatre about the inquest on Blair Peach. Many witnesses of the Southall riots were seated in a semi-circle. There were songs by a number of groups, and a poem by Edward Bond. By far the most moving part of the evening were the witnesses, each simply telling their own story. One teenage girl had written a poem to a boy, there present, who had nearly died. Another man was hardly able to hold back his grief and rage as he told his horrific story. But what gets written up in the paper is what a 'beautiful poem' Edward Bond wrote and he was not even there! To my mind this is where cultural conserve becomes a sledge hammer in the face of the creative moment of truth. Psychodrama could give the medium of theatre back to the people. As Galileo said "*Unhappy the land that needs heroes*". This is just a start to a lot more to come, and that for me is going to include a trip to the U.S.A. to see the public workshops I hope we will one day have in Britain.

Olivia Lousada