

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Action Methods in Group Psychotherapy: Practical Aspects*,  
by Daniel Tomasulo. New York: Hemisphere Publishing, 1997.

A few years ago at a meeting, I attended a session directed by Dr. Tomasulo and was quite caught up in his enthusiasm for employing action methods to a rather neglected population, the severely mentally retarded. In this book, he has embodied and extended the ideas he was developing at that time and, in particular, has reached out to practitioners working with those populations to familiarize them with action methods. The author seems to have been motivated by his awareness that many clinicians stumble into role playing to amplify their work, not being well oriented by the body of extant knowledge that could help them succeed.

Tomasulo wrote the book because "many people . . . asked for a collection of my work on applying action methods and establishing inpatient and outpatient groups." Thus he developed the book to focus "the direct application of action methods in a wide variety of contexts." Indeed, there has been a need in the literature of action methods for more discussion of ways to adapt such methods to the seriously handicapped populations like the severely mentally retarded and the chronically mentally ill. Tomasulo's practical guide partly fills that need. The book is a primer, a practical guide that is an introduction for the uninitiated, entrant group clinician, and is also a handbook for the experienced, veteran practitioner. The book's content is mostly basic information, of which much has been said before in the literature, but its virtue is in being slanted toward the scene encountered in contemporary practice. Here is the real contribution. The book covers three related and overlapping spheres: group psychotherapy for the entrant practitioner, psychodrama, and adaptations to the mentally retarded.

The author's view of group psychotherapy is interesting. It is contemporary, addressing itself to the current exigencies of the group therapy world, in particular, the problem of time-limited group processes. For group therapy practitioners in many institutional clinical environments, there is an unfortunate assumption on the part of administration and sometimes on the part of the practitioners themselves, that, when working with groups, there is "noth-

ing to it.” As a consequence, there has been a misuse of clinical resources, and there developed a hunger for skills and methods with which to improve the lot of the clients. In his book, Tomasulo has addressed that population in particular, but also those in the group therapy field who feel the need to expand their repertoire of skills and approaches.

The book begins with practical advice, a tutorial on basic action methods, then goes on to discussions and illustrations of therapeutic factors and presents a basic handbook targeted to the entrant group practitioner. For people just starting out in group psychotherapy, action methods are powerful tools, and the basic concepts of the craft are set forth here. The case examples are generally very good, especially the more elaborated case examples of chapters 4 and 6. The author uses it well to put the prospective director in the context of a working group, illustrating the therapeutic factors. Although it is a training group, and not illustrative of his more mentally and emotionally challenged populations, the example becomes very real and existential and is most illustrative, moving into action rather easily because the group was obviously well experienced in action methods. Many of the smaller case example vignettes are interpretations from the point of view of a director’s reflections on the core dynamics of the group and serve to model that aspect of the director’s role.

In its theoretical aspects, the book contains what has been said before. For example, in the middle of the book, the author noted how psychodramatic methods can foster the healing elements listed by Yalom (1985) in his classic group psychotherapy text. The Blatners did that more specifically back in 1988. For the application of psychodramatic methods to the mentally retarded, Tomasulo makes a persuasive argument. He has urged the use of action methods for clients for whom such methods had been thought contraindicated in the past, and he has included guidelines for their application. There is much useful new material on how group techniques informed by lightly applied and highly modified action methods can help the developmentally disabled build social skill. Because of his work in this frontier field, Tomasulo received the ASGPP Innovator’s Award for his adaptation of action methods (primarily psychodrama) to mentally retarded groups. His theories, called Interactive Behavior Therapy (IBT), are explained in chapters 8 and 9.

My only criticism of the book, and it is slight, is that it attempts to address too diverse a readership. It is, however, an excellent book for the clinician wanting a transition into group practice. I highly recommend it for the entrant practitioner who is laboring bravely in the contemporary agency scene.

#### REFERENCES

- Blatner, A., & Blatner, A. (1988). *Foundations of psychodrama: History, theory, and practice* (3rd ed.). New York: Springer.

Yalom, I. (1985). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy (3rd ed.)*. New York: Basic Books.

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*Scripture Windows: Towards a Practice of Bibliodrama*, by Peter Pitzele.  
Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1998.

All of a sudden everyone is doing bibliodrama! Rabbis, ministers, teachers, therapists; my Aunt Sadie did one for her 90th birthday. Some of those (not Aunt Sadie) have been students of Peter Pitzele or students of his students. Sometimes the results are powerful, sometimes banal or confusing. Now with Pitzele's new book, *Scripture Windows: Towards a Practice of Bibliodrama*, we have a control for authenticity that is exemplary and generative for anyone who wants to learn what bibliodrama is and how to lead one.

Bibliodrama is a psychodrama by-product that involves entering the spaces in the biblical narrative and expanding on them, maneuvering in the ambiguities of the text to create new understandings and personal meaning. The classic rabbinic interpretation of the Bible is *midrash*, the Jewish hermeneutic process that has become popular in modern literary theory (Holtz, 1984). Bibliodrama is a form of psychodramatic midrash.

In recent years, biblical stories have been dramatized in various ways to plumb their depths and release (or construct, if you will) their implicit meaning, enabling participants to make personal connections to the text (Krondorfer, 1992). Pitzele's qualifications as psychodramatist with a doctorate in English literature serves as his entrée to this intriguing enterprise.

Anyone who has participated in a bibliodrama directed by Pitzele knows that he is a master director and the foremost American practitioner of the art. He has evolved his own version, building from his experience with groups and his extraordinary personal spontaneity. Pitzele's first book (1996), *Our Fathers' Wells*, stressed themes that emerged in bibliodramatic explorations with various groups. In the report of those dramatic sessions, the weight is more on content than on method, on the intense issues that unite and tear apart the generations; the psychodramatically informed reader can recognize the implicit techniques.

Pitzele's new book explicitly presents the methods he has developed for conducting bibliodrama. First, varied techniques are introduced with many examples, followed by a long, fully articulated bibliodrama of the Joseph story from *Genesis*, which brings together all of the foregoing. Especially illu-