

Film Review

***Psychodrama: A Cinematic History*. By Kelley Brower (Director) and Robert Siroka (Executive Producer), 2018.**

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The film is a professional, polished production and a heroic attempt to convey a noncontainable, mystical essence in a concrete and confined way.

To begin, the title is misleading. The film is partially a history but more an overview (à la Ann Hale's and/or Rory and Pam Remer's Structural Diagrams [personal communication] coupled with areas suggested by the American Board of Examiners written examination questions). The Jonathan Moreno interview, plus some of his personal commentary, sheds light on the history. It seems to provide the rest of the presentations with stimuli for sharing personal anecdotes of and reflections on longtime and somewhat noted psychodramatists. (Even though I know them to a greater and lesser degree, if I were seeing the film without such familiarity, I would ask, "Who are these people talking to us? Why should we listen to them?") However, with the problematic title, viewers are left to guess from beginning to end what they are being exposed to and, more important, why. I was not sure of the target audience.

Segments seemed fragmented and amorphous, perhaps as the stimulus for going wherever. I did not like thinking I was supposed to go somewhere specifically intended by someone else without some clue as to where that might be. Many segments seemed to be fragmented "lecture(s)" fleshed out and vividly energized. As a lecturer (speaker) you are told (a) tell them what you are going to say; (b) say it; (c) tell them what you said. The film struck me, in psychodramatic terms, as (a) no warm-up (so no tele, no personal connection on which to build); (b) hit and miss concretization of enactment and relating of scenes to themes and each other; and (c) a strong sharing/analysis, if brief.

So, this film is a collage—almost a kaleidoscope. It interested me because it triggered connections to many areas of my experiences applying psychodrama. It was as if each speaker identified an aspect of psychodrama and related to that specific area through a personally connected experience, hoping this would relate to the importance and potential of a psychodrama opportunity.

Understanding, if not appreciation, of the presentation requires some rudimentary exposure to both the terminology and the process, if not the theoretical system. Also, segments require someone with enough exposure to that

specific area or related areas to make the connections suggested (e.g., sharing personal reaction), particularly psychologists, mental social workers, psychiatrists, and health workers.

Back to the question of audience, I don't know how to fairly evaluate that. I would go so far as to say I fear what impact it might have on a novice audience viewing the film as a first exposure to psychodrama.

Given the observations so far, the crux of the matter, from my perspective is how spontaneous is this creation? My frame of reference regarding its spontaneity is Carl Hollander (noted for the Hollander Psychodrama Curve). He offered insights about criteria for judging spontaneity (and the Canon of Creativity) that are conveyed by the acronym PANIC:

- parametric (structuring by focusing on the demands of a particular situation)
- adequate (creating action meeting those demands)
- novel (developing and applying an approach to supersede action that no longer works well enough)
- immediate (affecting creation in the moment)
- creative (leading to a new, updated, more functional conserve)

Without parameters specific to a situation, judging the application of the other criteria and the impact of their gestalt (the outcome of the resulting act) is a guess at best.

To me the film was like poetry, at once the riskiest of endeavors, showing personal vulnerability, and, at the same time, the most egocentric, believing you can move someone to reexperience and appreciate your experience while labeling it for them (telling them what they are feeling and/or are to feel). Was the film an attempt at spontaneity? Maybe yes, maybe no. In many ways it seems more impulsive (self-satisfying) and lacks parameters, focus, coherence. This can be appropriate or not, depending on aim.

In struggling with writing this review I panicked, but not in a good way. I hope the product does evidence PANIC.