

Book Review

***The Psychodrama Papers.* By John Nolte. Encounter Publications, 2008. (Only available at http://stores.lulu.com/john_nolte)**

Rob Pramann, PhD, ABPP, TEP, CGP, BCPCC

John Nolte, a prominent first-generation student of Moreno, records highlights from his many years of association, practice, and learning with J. L. Moreno and psychodrama. He provides theoretical summaries and elucidates practical applications available nowhere else. His reflections provide valuable perspective. Though there is logic in his ordering of his papers, it is loose and this is reflected in the organization of this review.

“A Psychodrama Protocol” recounts an actual prototypical open session Nolte directed at the Moreno Institute in 1972. I appreciated his detailing of how sessions happened and his list of the prominent mental health luminaries who attended and were influenced by the sessions. This is how psychodrama was popularized.

“Catharsis, from Aristotle to Moreno” addresses the concept of catharsis, the controversy surrounding the term, and Moreno’s subtleties in his use of it. I agree understanding these subtleties is important in understanding how the method works and for our dialogue with others outside the psychodrama collective.

“Psychodrama and Dimensions of Experience” describes how psychodrama can be understood and utilized as a phenomenological method of exploring personal and collective experience. Here Nolte breaks down “a typical psychodrama” in terms of the different categories (perception, cognition, memory, etc.) that psychology uses to understand experience. I appreciate his explication of how it works.

“The Canon of Spontaneity-Creativity” outlines Moreno’s development of the concepts of creativity and spontaneity, his intuiting based on his personal mystical experience, and his development of the spontaneity test. The conserve can be the source of dissention and violence and has the potential for the destruction of the human race. A sociometric investigation can resolve these difficulties. This is an intriguing exploration of Moreno’s conceptions and I appreciated his connecting of Moreno’s ideas and methods.

“Strategies of Directing” identifies different ways to formulate and address the issue presented by the protagonist: psychodynamic, sociometric, psychodramatic, and sociodramatic. He identifies the director’s focus, indications, and the

advantages and disadvantages for using each. This analysis prompted a thought-provoking review of my own practice and that of others.

“Psychodramatic Production of Dreams” describes Moreno’s approach to dreams, gives an example, and provides a discussion of the process. It describes the dramatic impact this session had on the protagonist’s life, which has been my experience too.

“Role Reversal with God” explores the theoretical–philosophical foundation of psychodrama, often missed by practitioners of the method, that “. . . almost always provides a salutary effect for the protagonist” (p. 12). It includes description of a session and the reflective dialogue between the protagonist, a group member, and himself. I, too, have found this method to yield beneficial outcomes.

“Psychodrama in the Treatment of Incest and Other Kinds of Sexual Abuse” includes a perceptive and sensitive introduction and discussion, a moving account of an adult–child sexual abuse session, and provides suggestions and cautions on the treatment of victims and perpetrators. John’s considerations are experience-proven.

“A Psychodramatic Perspective on Rage in Group Psychotherapy” is a reworking of his participation in an American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA) panel discussion and presented workshop. He elaborates on what rage is, how to direct a psychodramatic session addressing it, and presents an example. His suggestions are insightful.

“Protagonist without a Problem” is consistent with Moreno’s intent that his method is more than a method of psychotherapy. Nolte recounts this approach has resulted in “some of the most deeply touching psychodramas that I have directed . . .” (p. 14), which has been my experience as well. It is a partial solution to the problems of the open session.

“The Script Walk” describes a psychodramatic exercise that leads to self-understanding and warms up participants to unfinished issues. He suggests ways it might be used. I find it an intriguing possibility for future sessions.

“Role Training in Medical Education” describes how professional education leaves learning role behaviors to chance observation and the likely imitation of both the strengths and weaknesses of instructors and preceptors. John outlines the benefits of intentional role training and suggests various approaches to it. He describes the use of psychodrama to train physicians to optimally involve patients and families in making complex ethical decisions. I was impressed by Nolte’s suggestions here. I have envisioned instituting regular use of this approach as part of training for and working with physicians.

“A Brief History of Psychodrama at the TLC” describes the evolution of Gerry Spence’s use of psychodrama at the Trial Lawyer College. It is now the primary modality for skill training and is used for discovering the story and preparing for trial. Nolte tells the story of how psychodrama became so important and gives suggestions as to how psychodrama is useful to attorneys. This review has been helpful as I have also begun to work with attorneys.

Nolte was profoundly affected by Moreno and this is reflected in “Remembering J. L. Moreno.” His respect and admiration is reflected throughout.

He provides examples of Moreno's deep respect for his patients, his "genius," lack of respect received from colleagues, tremendous sense of responsibility, and yet humility.

I highly recommend this rich collection. Nolte addresses these topics in a personally relevant way, including warm-ups—stories, details, and background—that bring to light his and Moreno's passion and creativity. He is clear and articulate. The typography reflects the fact that he self-published this book. In most instances, the reader can readily recognize and resolve these imperfections.