

# Foundations of Psychodrama History, Theory and Practice, Fourth Edition

by Adam Blatner

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Reviewed by Jenny Hutt

Adam Blatner's new edition is a stimulating exploration of the underlying ideas at the foundations of the psychodrama method. It is an intellectual complement to his book *Acting-In: Practical Applications of Psychodramatic Methods* (1996). This fourth edition takes an expansive view over the last century, drawing from and referring the reader to the expanding literature on psychodrama as well as a number of interesting and related fields.

Blatner reviews the history of psychodrama including J. L. Moreno's origins, the precursors to classical psychodrama and the refinement and application of his methods. These are set within the wider context of developments in group therapy, social psychology, self-help groups, T-groups and the mainstream of psychoanalysis.

Blatner locates key people in the field in time and place. These include professionals working with Moreno in the

1940's and 1950's to develop the method in the fields of psychiatry, sociology, criminology and education, including pioneers in the USA, Europe, Canada, Japan and Cuba. The 'second phase', those who became teachers from 1960 to the mid-1970's in the USA, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, South America, Japan and Greece includes Max Clayton and Lynette Clayton.

Blatner explores why, despite the power of the method and its theoretical richness, psychodrama is not very widely appreciated in the field of psychoanalysis. While historical unreadiness and Moreno's personal idiosyncrasies are highlighted, other factors mentioned are still significant today. These include the fear of action; demands on time; distrust of the theatre; irresponsible use of the method by relatively untrained practitioners; and the demands of the method on practitioners who must be spontaneous and resilient, in contrast to the more protected role of the 'talk therapist'.

Blatner attributes the survival of psychodrama to "J.L. Moreno's courage, persistence and vision"; and to "the work of Zerka Moreno who moderated many of his faults and championed his work"(p.49). However he concludes that psychodrama has not yet achieved the popular or professional recognition it deserves. He says, "Moreno's ideas are basically valid, powerful and relevant, now more than ever. In a time of pervasive dehumanisation, his contributions to developing the value and individuality of each person through sociometry and spontaneity training principles are most timely" (p49).

I particularly enjoyed Blatner's accessible exploration of contemporary thought, including postmodernism, constructivism, narrative and hermeneutics, which illuminate and support Moreno's ideas. He contends that "Moreno's theology, his philosophy of creativity, spontaneity and surplus reality, and his social psychology all rest on assumptions essentially at odds with the conventional attitudes still prevalent in our culture" (p51).

In particular, concepts such as surplus reality, the place of play and the deeper meanings of creativity don't mesh with ordinary ideas about objectivity and rationality (p51). Hence psychodrama goes against the grain of much of our cultural conditioning. It requires some re-learning of fairly basic modes of thought, and a shift from tendencies to rely on what others have created to spontaneity, daring to create anew (p58).

In a chapter on Moreno's theology Blatner contrasts immanence (the idea that God acts in and through the creativity of every being in the world) with transcendence (the idea that God is predominantly if not completely transcendent, wholly beyond our being and wholly other). Blatner critiques Moreno's

theology as overemphasising immanence rather than recognising a balance between the two.

Blatner's explorations of a wide range of theoretical considerations include chapters on creativity; spontaneity, play, imagination and surplus reality; expression and action; catharsis; skills learning; therapeutic factors; role theory; and sociometry. These chapters are full of interest and some refreshing perspectives. However I found his chapters on role theory somewhat elusive and removed and think they would have benefited from case study material to adequately illustrate the living reality of roles.

Blatner also devotes a chapter to what he calls the 'related approaches' of role-playing and role training; action methods; sociodrama; bibliodrama; drama therapy; drama in education; interactive theatre; playback theatre and the art of play. He concludes his book with some general principles about the application of psychodrama techniques and an extensive compendium of psychodramatic terms and techniques.

In a chapter exploring the integration of psychodrama with other therapies he describes it as a tool which transcends any particular approach to therapy rather than a stand-alone therapy itself. From his perspective it may be integrated with most other psychotherapeutic methods. This belies the difficulties of meshing therapeutic frameworks, particularly for the student attempting to integrate these approaches as they learn them and for the psychodramatist working in a multi-disciplinary team. My own recent experience, as a psychodramatist learning to apply a psychodynamic approach to organisational consulting, revealed to me significant differences in philosophy, underlying values and therapeutic directions.

Blatner thows the reader plenty of inspiration and challenge. He emphasises the need for psychodramatists to learn from the general group psychotherapy literature, because there are many dynamics and strategies noted there that are not fully articulated in the literature on psychodrama. For example, he notes that the field of child development has made great progress and that psychodramatists should not base their

understandings on Moreno's speculations.

He also warns that J.L. Moreno's writing and Zerka Moreno's teachings must not be over-idealised and calls for readers to find their "own courage in creating, making up new variations, discovering new facets and building bridges to new fields of endeavor" (p88).