

## Book Review

# Contemporary Psychodrama, New Approaches to Theory & Technique

by Jose Fonseca

(2004) Brunner-Routledge, Hove

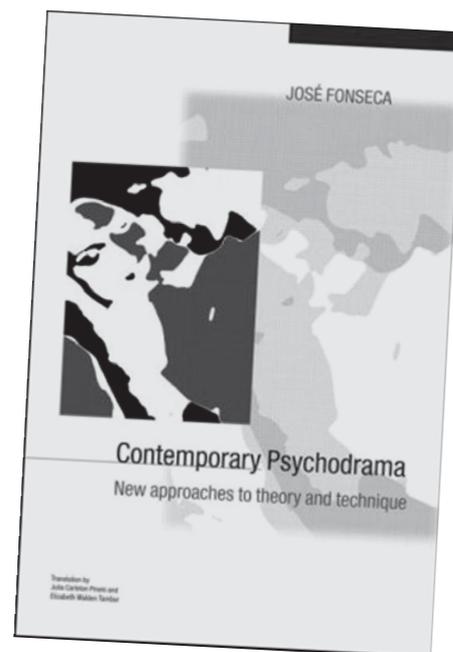
**Reviewed by Don Reekie**

Who would benefit by reading this book? Those who work one-to-one. Interested in psychoanalysis, object relations or attachment? You are likely to find Fonseca stimulating. Anyone who seriously wants to apply the method in group, organization or community will have much to gain because his primary focus is relationship, encounter and systems theory.

Those of us in Australia and New Zealand who take a superior attitude to psychodramatic approaches from the other continents might have to work in order to warm up positively to a Brazilian psychiatrist. However I revelled in his enthusiasm, cultural distinctiveness, conviction, openness, and 'bossa nova'. He builds from Morenian fundamentals while not being bound. He opens up his practice and thinking for the reader's consideration. He certainly writes a contemporary book. His grasp of 21st century philosophical and scientific thought is broad, inclusive and respectful.

### **Human Development**

One fundamental that he opens up early is the "scheme of human development". He attends to Jacob Moreno, Martin Buber and their interactions. Encounter and relationship are



quickly recognized as the book's theme. He lays out the phases of human development in diagrammatic form, providing a base for his choice of intervention and technique. There were times when I loosened my grip on what I take for granted in order to enter his language concepts and models. His diagramming of a continuum from sanity to mental disease and

autism was more than I would follow. I responded to his layout of developmental phases appreciating his simplicity and thoroughness, but I think in adult life all phases are capable of health or, by extremity or overuse, illness. What he describes as "*cosmic identity*" and "*indifferentiation*" (i.e. all-identity) surely provides a healthy foundation of security or meditational retreat. Hence its appearance in adulthood is not usually the infantile regression or autism that he suggests. While this model has problems of linearity, his prime argument is for a circular and systemic approach. Illness is not his focus. Relationship, creativity and spontaneity and production of greater community wellbeing are. Fonseca sees illness as a tendency that can be accepted and transformed in well-directed and satisfying relationships.

#### **Internal Psychodrama**

His exploration of "*internal sociometry*" has him introduce one-to-one approaches where the enactment is in the mind. In an "*internal psychodrama*" the therapist assists production of good theatre. The client's internal interactions are easily followed by the reader and the theoretical underpinning is explored thoroughly.

Fonseca discusses memory, calling on the work of both John Bowlby and Maurice Nicoll. He applies the word '*true*' to memory as if memory is capable of being '*true*'. I think that unfortunate but the advantage is that he alerts us to Bowlby's concepts of "*episodic*" and "*semantic*" memory which assist us to stay open to the value and instability of memory.

#### **Visionary**

He is appreciative and critical of Freud; recognising that his work was in the context of the cusp between the 19th and 20th centuries. He draws from Moreno as a visionary before his time who preceded the language and concepts

which would permit fluent expression of his ideas for our time. In exploring psychotherapeutic approaches he takes the classical casework of Freud and narrates a dramatic portrayal. Fonseca produces an imaginative scene where a client of Freud's encounters Moreno himself. He has Moreno propose his distinctively societal and familial responses to the client's discomforts. Fonseca does not describe what follows from the session, instead he evocatively cuts the scene. He leaves the reader speculating on the systemic approach Moreno had nearly 100 years ago and the way in which he anticipated much of contemporary practice we carry into 2005.

Fonseca considers "*tele*" and "*transference*" throughout the book, again drawing on attachment theory. He makes a strong contribution to clarity and wise application in discussing tele. His placement of attachment as a dimension alongside social atom and sociometric thinking promotes a sturdy understanding and appreciation of "*tele*" and "*relational psychology*". Fonseca frames his work in terms of the relationship of each self. Seeing each self relating to her- or him-self within the set of relationships that surround them.

Having acknowledged that Freud was extreme in making sex central to his understanding of personality Fonseca devotes a sixth of his pages to sexuality. This further extends his relational focus. He opens out developmental, telic, transferential, and societal construct influences on relationship and loving. It assists us to recognize the value of his ideas and action choices in a range of contexts.

Viewing psychotherapy from Brazil, Fonseca sees psychodrama capable of making a significant difference, not by providing useful techniques but in promoting a fundamental and healthy movement towards communal health,

relationship health, and preventative societal interventions. He recognizes powerful forces in the world's psychological health practice that exert pressures towards compromises or dominance. He sees psychodrama and group psychotherapy currently against the tide of psychological fashion. I am glad to have been invited to review a book I might not otherwise have read. It is a good book for a twenty-first century practitioner of psychodrama.

Don Reekie is a TEP, psychodramatist, role trainer and social psychologist living and practicing in Christchurch, New Zealand and in Queensland, Australia.

#### References

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