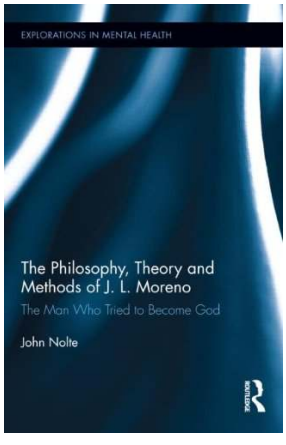
The Philosophy, Theory and Methods of J. L. Moreno: The Man Who Would Be God

by John Nolte
2014. Routledge.



Reviewed by Peter Howie

Nolte uses his personal lived experience of Moreno, and his extensive experience as a psychodramatist and trainer, as the grounding for this writing. He is not writing as an outside observer but as one embedded in Morenian philosophy, practice and theory. He begins with a strong introduction of himself as he entered into the world of Moreno and learned and grappled with the man and his teachings and how they were applied. That in itself makes the book valuable. There is a real sense that Nolte has enormous regard and respect for Moreno, while not glossing over the great man's many problematic idiosyncrasies. I enjoyed greatly Nolte's appropriate use of quotations from primary sources, his building on the work of earlier biographers.

It was a pleasing experience to read a complete explication of Moreno's wares from someone who enjoys them so much. He was able to criticise the ideas appropriately and present his own struggles with them.

The only clear addition of new material is the chapter where Nolte describes David Bohm's concept of implicate order as a favoured means for understanding the 'physics of spontaneity-creativity' and making sense of Moreno defining spontaneity as "unconservable energy". Not having the same problem as Nolte with Moreno calling spontaneity an "unconservable energy", I found this chapter unnecessary. Nolte admits that he may have tried to do too much in adding such a large piece of theory into the book. However, he keeps these ideas well contained and they do not affect the writing about Moreno in any substantial manner.

In summary, let me suggest that psychodrama trainers read this book with an eye on their trainees and those in training consider this book to improve their grasp of Moreno's philosophy, theory and methods. Practitioners will simply find it a valuable and enjoyable reminder of the breadth of their craft. While it is an expensive book it does give the 'good oil' and a firm basis for intellectually and philosophically grasping the prodigious and creative genius of J.L. Moreno.