



The Body Alchemy of Psychodrama

By Rebecca M. Ridge, PhD

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Reviewed by Annette Fisher

Dr. Rebecca Ridge has been practising the psychodramatic method for 30 years. During this time she has also studied, taught and incorporated a broad range of somatic therapies into her work. This book is the culmination of her therapeutic practice, academic studies and extensive research. It is presented as a text book-cum-manual to assist psychodrama practitioners develop and integrate their abilities in somatic therapies.

The author addresses and references the alchemy of mind and body, psychodrama, somatic therapies and neuroscience fully. Her central hypothesis is that by integrating an ability to work with the body, a practitioner increases their effectiveness as a therapist, particularly in the area of healing and transformation. The theme running through her writing is that psychodrama and somatic therapy combined will assist the protagonist and the director to gain a deeper understanding and expression of the 'self' or psyche/soul.

Dr. Ridge makes many important points regarding the current recognition of J.L. Moreno's intellectual stature. He is acknowledged as the founder of the humanist movement, his views regarding the transcendence of time, space and reason, sociometry, tele relationships and spontaneity now scientifically backed by neurological research. His seminal ideas regarding role development are widely supported by neuroscientific brain imaging. Moreno's original conception of the psychodramatist collecting physical and emotional information as experimental data is matched by current research into brain functioning, where 'mirror neurons' have been discovered. These are the neurons whereby we gain the ability to experience compassion and to role reverse.

In Chapter One the writer provides us with an interesting history of alchemy, going back beyond Ancient Egypt, Arabia and China to the Iron Age. Dr. Ridge describes how alchemy, which has a strong link with metallurgy, was a predecessor of modern science. As well, there is a description of alchemy's use in psychotherapy. Jung, who rediscovered alchemy in the 20th century, drew on Greek mythology, Hinduism and Buddhism. Along with a case study, the author presents a clear description of the connections between alchemy, body responses, healing, transformation and the work of the psychodramatist.

Chapter Four is a scholarly work on sociometry, in which the author refers to

the writings of Anne Hale and Moreno's *Who Shall Survive*. She makes a connection between body alchemy and the development of tele. Dr. Ridge discusses research that links current attachment theories with neuroscientific discoveries related to the measurement of psychological development. She concludes that there is a connection between specific somatic activities that stimulate brain development and an increase in positive tele relationships between group members that lead to enhanced group cohesion.

Descriptions of yoga, shiatsu and cranial sacral therapies, grounding exercises and the importance of boundaries when working with the body provide further background to the use of somatic therapy in psychodrama. The author includes suggestions regarding the application of postures and specific exercises that can be used during a psychodramatic session.

The book goes on to present a well-researched foundational history of body work. Dr. Ridge describes somatic therapies and their interface with psychodrama. Activities are presented to assist the psychodramatist to work with both the mind and body of their clients. The area of touch and its importance in the therapeutic process is discussed. This comes as a breath of fresh air considering all the social forces that make touch problematic in contemporary society. She advocates that the psychodramatist develop an awareness of their own body and learn to read intuitive and neurological responses, so that they are able to develop a positive relationship and abilities to double and 'tune in' with the protagonist.

An accurate history of the development of psychotherapy and the linking of Moreno's theories with current neuroscientific knowledge is very satisfying for the psychodramatist. The writer has respectfully acknowledged Moreno's contribution and has documented the developments in psychodrama and somatic therapy up to the present. This has been done in a scholarly fashion with many references. A concern is that the manual aspect of the book may lead to the unwitting misuse of the activities. In employing them, practitioners who have not been adequately trained in body work may create an unexpectedly deep warm up that leads to fragmentation in a group. One hopes that by the time a psychodrama trainee becomes certified, they have an ample understanding of the warm up process, a well-grounded somatic knowledge and the experience to work with the evolving warm up. A psychodramatist with adequate role development will gain much from using relevant activities from this book.

The Body Alchemy of Psychodrama will be a stimulating read for psychodramatists, sociodramatists, role trainers and sociometrists, and is a must for psychodrama libraries. In reading this book one is awakened to the importance of a holistic body mind approach, which adds further dimensions to the practice of the psychodramatic method.

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