

A General Theory of Love (and) The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy

- T Lewis, F Amini and R Lannon

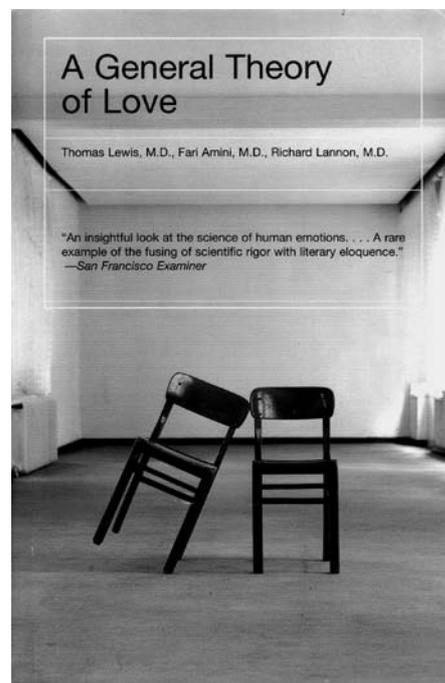
- Louis Cozolino

reviewed by Judy Broom

What a privilege, to be asked to read two good books in order to review them. Both of these books are rewarding. They are written in distinctly different styles, and neither is aimed particularly at psychodramatists, but they offer much to a thoughtful reader.

The authors of *A General Theory of Love* describe how their book was born out of the relationship between the three of them, hatched over breakfast meetings in California. I can almost see them waving their muffins in the air and shedding crumbs into their orange juice as they debate the finer points of neuroanatomy, and the power of human relationships. This is a very human book. It is a book about science and love, about the anatomy of brains and how they are shaped by relationships, and about why and how psychotherapy works. The authors build up their arguments piece by piece, leading the reader through the basic structure of brains, principles of memory and learning, properties of neural networks, and the impact of relationships on growth, development and living. They finish with a tantalising three chapters on healing and therapy that left me excited and engaged, but also wishing for more.

The book is aimed at a wide audience, and would probably not satisfy those who were

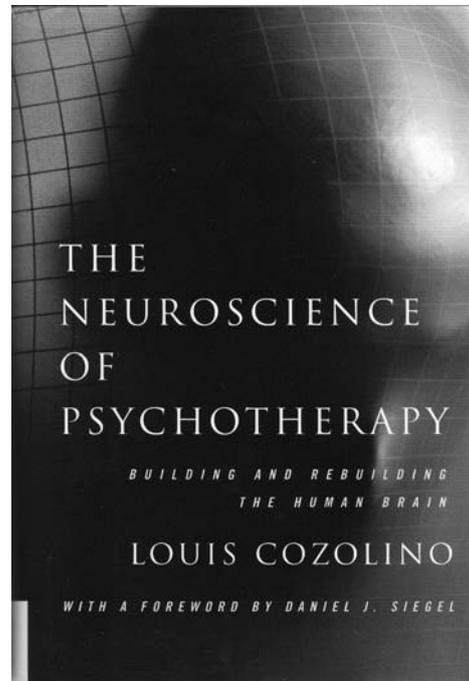


wanting a detailed scientific treatise. However, it is well referenced, and the interested reader can easily follow up their curiosity and delve into the scientific literature. The book is written in a poetic style - quite in keeping with the authors' premise that emotional connection is fundamentally important for any significant learning or change. Some people will find this a little over the top - lines like "*Humanity awaits the revelations that may glint through that open portal*" do take a little swallowing at times. But overall I found it delightful, full of passion and liberally sprinkled with whimsical little gems

like: “*insight is the popcorn of therapy*”. (I think I should frame that and hang it on my wall.)

So what does this book have to do with psychodrama? I think this is a book anyone could enjoy, but it spoke particularly to me about why it is that I am a psychodrama trainee and not a Freudian. It speaks about why passion and feelings are so important in our lives, and why social connection is so vital. Sociometry is the cornerstone of Moreno’s thinking: *A General Theory of Love* comes to some of the same conclusions from a completely different angle - arguing from biological and psychological principles that people need to be connected up, and that the quality of those connections both reflects who we have been and who we are, and influences who we will be. For example in Chapter 7, drawing from research on attachment by Bowlby and later writers, the authors essentially set out the value of doubling and mirroring. The ideas in the book support the co-created nature of identity, the immense value of groups for people, and the power of shared events that are full of feeling and beauty to bring about constructive change. It’s not a long book, my copy is only 230 pages, and it is easy to read. If you are at all curious about modern neuroscience and psychology, start here, read this book. I guarantee something will pique your interest.

The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy, as its title suggests, is a little more traditional in style, and in many ways launches in where *A General Theory* leaves off. The author, Louis Cozolino, is a Clinical Psychologist and Professor of Psychology at Pepperdine University in the US, and according to his website holds degrees in theology and philosophy as well as in psychology. The book is part of *The Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology*, edited by Daniel Siegel.



This book is a more detailed and less poetic book, and specifically addresses psychotherapy as a means of altering brain function. The author covers a lot of ground, including neural networks, brain anatomy, neurotransmitters, evolution, memory and attachment. The book is structured differently from that of Lewis *et al.* in that Cozolino provides clinical vignettes throughout linking successful interventions with hypotheses about what might be going on in the brains of his clients.

In Chapter 3 he surveys several schools of psychotherapy and how the elements of their ways of working may relate to neural development and change. Sadly psychodrama is not among them. This is not so surprising. Psychodrama is still not well known or appreciated in either the medically oriented or the psychodynamically oriented communities. We remain a little outside the mainstream, on the whole. It seems to me that in part this is because we have not managed as a community

to articulate a well-defined explanation of why psychodrama works, in language that can appeal to those outside the discipline. (Whether the narratives articulated by other, more widely accepted schools are truly explanatory is a moot point.)

I was very excited by Cozolino's book, and also felt quite tantalised. I was excited because many of the ideas articulated here are directly applicable to psychodrama. Cozolino views psychotherapy as the provision of an enriched environment within which the individual can increase their integration. Simply, psychotherapy works to change brain function. He emphasises the importance of narrative in shaping our view of ourselves and our world, and the need to have both thinking and feeling active together, or in rapid sequence, in order for change to be effective.

Consider this little story. A woman stands on stage, facing an auxiliary in the role of her overbearing father. She is accompanied by another auxiliary, doubling her. She is frozen and fearful. Reversing roles with the double, she unfreezes, and is able to comfort her scared self with a touch and a few words. Back in her initial role, she is able to articulate, perhaps for the first time in her life, a point of view that differs from that of her father. In psychodrama terms, a new role is emerging.

In Cozolino's terms, the protagonist has experienced a 'safe emergency' within the enriched environment of the psychodrama group. She has experienced enough stress to make her ready to learn effectively, but not so much as to immobilise her and cause further

dissociation of functioning. She has experienced herself both feeling intensely and thinking, in relation to a situation that in the past has resulted in overwhelming feeling. Integration has been promoted.

In every psychodrama group, something like this happens.

This early part of the 21st century is a time of great opportunity for psychodrama. The paradigms on which psychotherapy has been based are changing. Moreno was ahead of his time - neuroscience is now catching up. Warm up, the importance of sociometry, the value of role reversal and of the full expression of roles are all represented here in this book, under different names. The challenge to us all is to take psychodrama into the new century. We should be ready to translate our concepts into language that will allow others to warm up to psychodrama as an effective and intelligent method of promoting personal change. The Therapeutic Spiral method goes some way along this path, but there is much more to do. I recommend *The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy* to anyone who is interested in either field, and look forward one day to reading *The Neuroscience of Psychodrama*. I wonder among us who will write it?

A General Theory of Love by Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini and Richard Lannon was published in 2000 by Random House, New York.

The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy - Building and Rebuilding the Human Brain by Louis Cozolino was published in 2003 by W W Norton & Company, New York.

