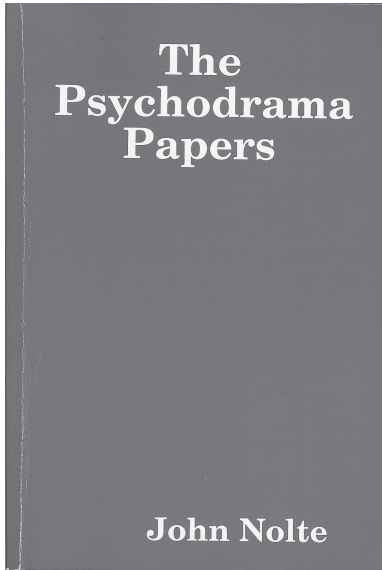


Book Reviews

BY JOHN FAISANDIER



The Psychodrama Papers

By John Nolte

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This collection of 14 papers written by John Nolte, is intended for psychodramatists and students of psychodrama. Spanning 35 years, the papers cover a wide variety of topics that Nolte has considered in depth. In the first five pages, he provides thumbnail sketches regarding the context and stimulus that prompted him to write each paper. This section is personable and chatty, and warms the reader up to the writer as a person. John Nolte, who by my calculations must now be about 80 years old, began training with Jacob Moreno in 1962. In the final chapter he tells the story of his involvement with Moreno during his final days. I found this section very readable and was enlightened about Moreno the man, and about John Nolte himself.

The Psychodrama Papers includes theoretical and practical aspects of psychodrama, as well as clinical and non-clinical applications. For example, there is a paper focused on the use of role training in the preparation of trial lawyers. Another paper regarding the training of doctors, prepared for the dean of a medical school, is simple, clear and written in ordinary language. I enjoyed Nolte's description of the way in which trainee male doctors were able to experience a pelvic examination using psychodramatic techniques- simple and basic techniques but with a profound effect on those male doctors and hopefully their female patients.

The practical papers cover strategies for directing, production of dreams and role reversal with God. There is a brief one paper focused on the direction of a protagonist without a problem. This is an ideal stimulus for anyone considering open sessions to introduce psychodrama in the community. 'Script Walk' is a lovely little exercise that the writer developed from a sense of desperation when he was teaching a class and

could not warm his students up to the topic. So often the case when doing things in psychodrama, one's spontaneity and creativity come to the fore.

Nolte also includes papers with a more clinical focus, such as the use of psychodrama in the treatment of incest and other forms of sexual abuse. He presents a psychodramatic perspective on rage. Overall, the papers provide a wide array of practical suggestions and theoretical considerations.

Of more significance are the papers that address some of the bigger theoretical issues. Nolte spent a substantial amount of time with Moreno, listening to him, discussing ideas with him and exploring his teachings. He is himself an academic and uses his vast knowledge of the many different approaches to the human mind and behaviour, to explore and critique Moreno's theories. Two papers in particular caught my attention.

In a paper called 'Psychodrama and the Dimensions of Experience', Nolte poses the question, 'How does psychodrama work?' As a way of proceeding, he compares Moreno's concept of catharsis with other theorists and practitioners. (In fact he has a whole paper on the history of catharsis.) Whereas others see catharsis as a 'purging', Moreno viewed it as 'restoring emotional disequilibrium and increasing the spontaneity of the protagonist'.

Nolte examines the meaning of 'experiential method' and explores the concepts of perception, taking-in — the prototypical creative act. Nolte ponders cognition, comparing reality — that which members of society agree it is — with surplus reality — that which the individual knows to be true and therefore leads to a fuller revelation of the self. In understanding memory, Nolte notes that, as far as human experience is concerned, only the present exists. Thus all memory is in relation to the present. He considers the Morenian perspective on emotion, the function of which is to change our relationship with our environment as we perceive it. Nolte argues for the importance of defence mechanisms, claiming that they protect the person from facing things that they are not yet ready to address. It is important that the director of a psychodramatic enactment appreciate that, for now, a protagonist does not have to reveal everything.

In the second paper, on the Canon of Spontaneity and Creativity, Nolte traces Moreno's development of the idea throughout his life. His provision of a reasonably clear explanation of how the canon works has helped me to understand more fully this fundamental Morenian concept.

Nolte's writing style tends to be dense and slightly awkward. At times I had to work hard to read it. On the other hand, it is not nearly as difficult as reading Moreno's writing. And as always, the effort is well worth it. Some of the papers have obviously been scanned from hard copies and thus there are funny typos to contend with that require a little more effort as well.

Overall I consider these papers a gift from an elder of our international psychodrama community. I remember John Nolte being the guest speaker at the ANZPA conference in 1990 in Christchurch, New Zealand. It is reassuring to know that he has brought together these papers as part of the cultural conserve that itself will be a catalyst for increased spontaneity and creativity in future generations.