

## Moreno

Psychodrama and sociometry are closely interwoven with the life-story of Jacob Levi Moreno. Moreno himself wrote: "The psychodrama of my life went hand in hand with psychodrama as a method. I was the first patient of psychodramatical methods, protagonist and leader in one. [...] The vitality and the drive to use such techniques with other people dated from my experiences and success with them" (*Autobiography* 1995, 39). A first synopsis on Moreno, his "Therapeutical philosophy" and the practices developed by him can highlight his beliefs and principles, which will be outlined briefly here.

## Anecdotes

Moreno was a man of narrative and Psychodrama is a narrative Method. It is hardly any wonder that there is also a rich treasure of stories and anecdotes about Moreno. These stories depict the role Moreno played in psychodrama and explain the respect he is held in by psychodramatists today. Two examples should help clarify this.

Psychodrama is cosmopolitan:

"I was born during a stormy night on the Black Sea, aboard a ship going from Bosphorus to Konstanza in Romania. It was dawn on the holy Sabbath and the delivery took place shortly before first prayers. [...] Nobody knew the nationality of the ship. It could have been a Greek, Turkish, Romanian or Spanish ship. The anonymity of the ship's nationality led to the anonymity of my name and the anonymity of my Citizenship. When the first World War broke out, nobody knew whether I was Turkish, Greek, Romanian, Italian or Spanish since I did not have a birth certificate. [...] I was born a citizen of the world, a seafarer journeying from ocean to ocean, from country to country" (*Autobiography* 1995, 14f).

Psychodrama supports those who want to make their dreams come true, although there is also the risk that they could be wrecked in the process: "The first psychodramatical session took place when I played God, which was sometime in the year of 1894 when I was four years old. One Sunday afternoon my parents went to pay some friends a visit. I stayed at home to play with some children who lived next door. We were in the cellar of our house, which was a big empty room apart from a gigantic oak table in the middle. Trying to think of a game to play I came up with the idea: 'lets play God and his angels!' 'Who will be God though?' was the question. 'I will play God and you can be my angels', I replied. The other children agreed. 'We must build heaven first though', one of the children declared. So we carried chairs from the rest of the house down into the cellar, put them on the big table and started building layers of heavens one after the other. This was done by tying several chairs together at one level and then putting another layer of chairs on top and tying them together, until we reached the ceiling. All the children then helped me to climb on to the topmost chair, where I could just manage to sit. The children then walked around the table using their arms as wings and singing. One or two of the taller children held on tight to the mountain of chairs we had built. One of the children suddenly asked me: 'Why don't you fly?' I stretched my arms out and tried to fly. The angels who held on to the chairs also flew away. Moments later I fell and found myself on the ground again with my right arm broken...

Psychodrama of the fallen God. As far as I can remember, that was the first 'private' Psychodrama session which I ever conducted. I was leader and protagonist at the same time. [...] That I fell when the children stopped holding

the chairs together, perhaps taught me the lesson that even the highest nature of others peoples 'helpfulness' is ego dependent and that a patient-protagonist relies on it for appropriate behaviour. Finally, I also learned that other children like to play God as well" (Autobiography 1995, 21f).

### **From Vienna to Beacon N.Y.**

A biographical line leads from Vienna to Beacon in New York State (USA). Moreno who was born in 1899 in Bucharest, spent his childhood and youth, his student days and his first years as a practising doctor in or in the proximity of Vienna. Here in the capital city of a visibly disintegrated imperial and royal monarchy and the first Austrian republic built after the first World War, was for Moreno a time of development and experimental examination of his therapeutical and philosophical visions. Beacon N.Y., where in 1936 he founded the sanatorium which was later named after him (the Moreno Sanatorium) and where he died in 1974, was the place which witnessed the further scientific development and institutional establishment of his triadical system, Group psychotherapy, Sociometry and Psychodrama.

In the year 1925 Moreno left Hamburg and emigrated to the United States of America. The reasons for his emigration were complicated and cannot be easily described. He himself wrote retrospectively: "I was driven by strengths which cared little for my personal welfare" (*Group psychotherapy and psychodrama* 1959, V). Beyond the purely idealistic motives, several circumstances together were a major influence. Moreno wrote in his autobiography that in Vöslau he was confronted with German nationalist power (*Autobiography* 1995, 99-101). Due to the increasing anti-Semitism in Vienna in 1925, there was a surge of emigration by the Sephardic Jews. Also, because Morenos projects met with a lack of success and remained in the shadows of those from other expressionist writers or therapists like Sigmund Freud, and as the extempore theatre movement was progressing too slowly, it was time for him to make some basic changes (*Autobiography*, 1995, 87). Last but not least, Moreno came under pressure through his disputes about the precepts of outlining dramas on stage and the ensuing processes.

Looked at in terms of Moreno's creativity and the comparison of his early work and his later work, the year of his emigration should be understood simultaneously as both a *connecting moment* and a *break*. There is clearly a large contrast between his religious-theological and his sociometric-therapeutical orientation, between the forms of his work in extempore theatre and in psychodrama, or the early documents represented by *Testament of the father* and the central late work *Who Shall Survive?* However, this contrast should not be put aside. Moreno and his way of thinking is just as firmly anchored in Vienna as in Beacon. Thus the return of Moreno's mortal remains, which were buried in the Viennese central graveyard in 1993, was a beautiful symbol. His grave is an expression of the continuing import his time in Vienna holds for the understanding of Morenos work.

### **Projects**

A second biographical line arose from the *projects* which Moreno had always been committed to in social and political *fringe areas of society*. Here Moreno gained experience through the forms he had built in his therapeutical philosophy and simultaneously, these fields of work were where his methods proved themselves. There are many examples of these:

- The work with children in the Augärten in Vienna (1907-1913).
- The *Meeting House*, a shelter for refugees, immigrants and the poor (1909-14).
- Morenos work with prostitutes in Vienna (1913/14).
- The refugee camp in Mitterndorf, where he worked as a doctor during the first World War (1915-17).
- The Sing-Sing Prison, which Moreno restructured in 1931/32 with the help of sociometric methods.
- A home for maladjusted girls in Hudson N.Y. where he worked as a sociometrist from 1932-38.
- Or the Beacon Hill Sanatorium which Moreno founded in 1936 and where in the following years he was able to develop his vision of a psychodramatical community and treatment centre.

### **Institutions**

The trouble Moreno went to with the institutionalisation of his thoughts can be identified as a fundamental motive in his biography. Up to the time of his emigration to the United States, besides the publication of his early documents we must also mention his foundation of the extempore theatre in Vienna and his involvement as joint-publisher of the expressionist magazines *Der Daimon* (1918), *Der Neue Daimon* (1919) and *Die Gefährten* (1920/21).

Moreno's involvement with publishing in the USA was with the development of the publishers Beacon House Inc. (1936) and the founding and future revision of the magazines *Sociometric Review* (1936, after 1936: *Sociometry*) and *Sociatry* (1947, after 1949: *Group Psychotherapy*, after 1970: *Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama*). In addition, the Beacon Hill Senatorium and the Sociometric Institute founded in New York in 1941 can be taken as the starting point of the international development and expansion of psychodrama. Moreno helped to build this expansion through international conventions for group psychotherapy (after 1954) and Psychodrama (after 1964), going on lecture tours, giving demonstrations and through the initiation of several national and international committees.

### **Moreno's social atom**

Moreno developed the model of the social atom. A social atom shows the people who are particularly important for a certain individual. Such a relationship map can also be made for Moreno. [THE SOCIAL ATOM IS ENCLOSED AS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT IN THE APPENDIX] Three areas of this atom are of special significance.

### **The scientific network**

In a few sentences we can outline a discourse about the multidisciplinary network which has fundamentally influenced therapeutical philosophy. The names Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche signify three complex themes (corresponding with Morenos basic ideas), which he analysed throughout his life. On the fringes of medicinal and *therapeutical approaches* (primarily to psychoanalysis) Moreno developed his own knowledge and understanding of healing. The close connection his methods and ideas had with psychoanalysis was often overlooked by Moreno himself.

With his sociological mediators and colleagues he strove to develop appropriate methods and structures of social analysis. From his time in Vienna, besides the Marxist theorists there were Max Scheler, Georg Simmel and advocates of utopian socialism. Then in America, the classicists Auguste Comte and Émile Durkheim, representatives of the emerging research into small-groups (Kurt Lewin) and pragmatism (John Dewey, George Herbert Mead).

Moreno pleaded for the necessity of religious outlines in a secularised world concerning the plausibility of the gospels of the death (and resurrection) of God. This is understandable given his background of religious socialisation and his philosophical links. Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson are the most important names here.

The grounding of these three discourses produced an intense awareness of life in Vienna, with its cafe-house society, expressionism and Bohemianism, the Viennese modern age, *des Fin De Siècle* and *Décadence* and Morenos meetings with *men of letters, artists and actors* of every different provenance.

Finally, we can mention the names Charles Darwin (whose darwinistic social misinterpretation Moreno challenges with his book title *Who Shall Survive?*) and Francis Bacon (one of the forefathers of empirical research) from the field of scientific research, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Fröbel and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (who Moreno named as witnesses for the crown for his educational *Reception of the Game*) from the field of educational discourse, although Moreno was very selective as regards their value.

Taking an overall perspective, Morenos cultural and scientific network was a very complex and an often exciting and suspense filled terrain, in which he associatively and eclectically picked up impulses and integrated them into his own way of thinking, without however referring to the system of thought as a whole.

### **Religious encounters**

Moreno wrote unequivocally: "Man is more than a psychological, social or biological nature. The restriction of the responsibility of a human being to the psychological, social or biological area of life makes him an outcast. [...] *Therefore I demanded that a theory of God should take first place*" (*Sociometry as an experimental method* 1981, 261). Thus again and again Moreno dealt intensively with questions concerning the interface of religion and psycho-social work. Moreno's socialization was influenced in at least three religious contexts, which he remained linked to through delimitation processes and intense emulative discussions over important examples from these traditions.

Morenos Jewish socialisation started with his attendance of the sephardic Bible school in Bucharest. His learning and appropriation of this tradition is linked to particular individuals during his life. Together with Sabbatai Zvi and Baal-Scheml, the main characters in the chassidic religion, the writings of the Dutch philosopher Baruch De Spinoza and theoretical and biographical points of contact with Martin Buber opened for Moreno the stimulating and provocative field of Jewish thinking which inspired and challenged him over and over again.

Although Moreno experienced the Roman Catholic environment in Bucharest and Vienna as an aggressive culture, his mother Paulina Iancu (who spent some

years in a Roman Catholic convent in Bucharest after the early death of her father) imbued great esteem in him for the Jesuanic message. Once again it was individual people who fascinated him (besides Jesus for example; Augustin, Francis of Assisi and Blaise Pascal).

Next to and very much interwoven with the Jewish and christian traditions, popular belief formed a third source of Morenos religious nature. His first important close relationship was with his mother and she frequently visited gipsies who made prophesies, interpreted dreams and predicted the future, who read from the coffee grounds and laid down Tarot cards. Again and again this religiousness left it's mark on his immediate social sphere. Rather unexpectedly at times, Moreno reported his memories of reading the Hebrew Bible, explanations over his fascination about the role of God, and over Piroshka, the family's Hungarian servant. For him she was a "Guru of mystical Animism", and she imparted in him "a deep respect [...] for simple cosmic events and for [his] place in the Universe" (Autobiography 1995, 21).

### **Women and men**

In her review of René Marineau's biography of Moreno, Heika Straub calls attention to a life subject of Moreno. It is his relationship with women which Straub picks out as a central theme of interest, emphasizing their part in the fashioning and formulation of his therapeutical philosophy. The first woman to mention is Marianne Lörnitzo who lived with Moreno in Vöslau near Vienna, where he was a general practitioner from 1918-25. This was also the time when he published the biggest portion of his early documents. It was through Beatrice Beecher that Moreno was able to stay in America, since after their marriage in 1928 he received his long-term residence permit for the United States. Helene Jennings was acknowledged by Marineau as "the driving force behind the development of sociometry and the publishing of *Who Shall Survive?*" Finally Zerka Toeman, Morenos third wife who he married in 1949, was respectively his partner, the inspiration of his creativity and co-therapist and co-author of many of his published works.

Also of interest is the relationship Moreno had with successful men. It would be interesting to examine further, in what way competition with other men (e.g. Harry Stack Sullivan or Kurt Lewin) thwarted cooperative possibilities, which were important in the inception of therapeutical philosophy and the development of psychodrama theory. (Moreno's Biography)

### **Chronology of important dates and essential publications**

1889	18. May: Moreno is born in Bucharest, the first of six children to Moreno Nissim Levy and Paulina Iancu
~ 1893	Lessons with the rabbi Bekhor Hayyim Ben Moses Bejerano
1894	The family moves to Vienna
~ 1905	The family first moves to Berlin and then to Chemnitz. Moreno stays behind with friends of the family in Vienna and works as a private tutor
~ 1906	Divorce of his parents
1907-13	Improvisational work with children in the Viennese Augärten
~ 1908/09	Origins of "Encountering Religion" The foundation of "The Meeting House"
1909-17	Studies medicine, psychology and philosophy in Vienna

- 1913 Work with the prostitutes from Spittelberg
- 1914 *Invitation to a meeting*  
The Meeting House is closed
- 1914-17 Service as first-aid attendant in the Austrian army in Tyrol
- 1915-17 Worked as doctor in the refugee camp Mitterndorf
- 1917 5. February in Vienna: Promotion to doctor in the medicine department
- 1918 Publication of the expressionist magazine *Der Daimon*  
*The Divinity as Author* (in: *Der Daimon*)
- 1918-25 General Practitioner and Medical Director of the "Kammgarn Fabrik" in Vöslau near Vienna
- 1919-25 Relationship with Marianne Lörnitzo
- 1919 Co-editor of *Der Neue Daimon*  
*The Divinity as Speaker* (in: *Der Neue Daimon*)  
*Explanation of Spartacus* (in: *Der Neue Daimon*)  
*The Divinity as Play-actor* (in: *Der Neue Daimon*)
- 1920 Co-editor of *Die Gefährten*
- 1921 Analysis of groups in the Diwan-Experiment
- 1921-25 Extempore theatre in Maysedergasse 2 in Vienna (Theatre of Spontaneity)
- 1922 *The Testament of the Father*
- 1923 *The Kings Novel*  
*Speech about the Moment*
- 1924 *The Extempore Theater*, 2<sup>nd</sup> 1970, english 1947  
25. September: Confrontation with Friedrich Kiesler at the opening of the international exhibition of new Theatre Technique in Vienna  
*Speech about the Meeting*
- 1925 19. January: Plagiarism process, Kiesler against Moreno  
*Speech in front of the judge*  
Emigration to the United States
- 1927 Moreno is awarded a New York medical license and is now permitted to work in the United States as a doctor
- 1928 31. May. Marriage to Beatrice Beecher
- 1929-31 Performances of the "Impromptu Group Theatre" in Carnegie Hall in New York city
- 1931 5. April: Official opening of the "Impromptu Group Theatre"  
Moreno coins the term and concept of "Group Psychotherapy"  
Cooperation with the "National Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor" (NCPPL)  
Sociometrical restructuring of Sing-Sing prison, Ossining, N.Y.  
5. June: Admission to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) during the meeting in Toronto  
Dispute with Dr. A. A. Brill about the lecture "Abraham Lincoln as Humorist"
- 1932 Sociometrical Projekt in the Brooklyn Public School 181, Brooklyn, N.Y.  
Symposium of the APA in Philadelphia: Discussion of the Sing-Sing Study
- 1932-33 Sociometrical Projekt in Riverdale Country School, Riverdale, N.Y.

- 1932-38 Sociometrical Study in the New York State Training School for Girls in Hudson, N.Y.
- 1933-38 Sociometrical support of the housing development experiments in Centerville and Freetown
- 1934 *Who Shall Survive?* (extended edition <sup>2</sup>1953)  
Moreno is granted American citizenship  
Divorces Beatrice Beecher
- 1936 Foundation of Beacon Hill Sanatorium and setting up of the first Psychodrama Stage in Beacon, N.Y.  
Foundation of the publishers Beacon House Inc.  
Foundation of the magazine *Sociometric Review*
- 1937 The magazine *Sociometric Review* is renamed *Sociometry*  
Moreno lectures at the universities of Columbia and New York
- 1938 Marries Florence Bridge
- 1939 Birth of daughter Regina Moreno
- 1941 8. June: Opening of a Psychodrama stage in St. Elisabeths Hospital in Washington D.C.  
Foundation of the Sociometric Institute in New York City  
*The Words of the Father* (much changed and extended edition of *The Testament of the Father*, <sup>2</sup>1970)
- 1942 Opening of the Sociometric Institute and the New York Theatre of Psychodrama in New York City  
Building of a third psychodrama theatre  
Foundation of the American Society of Psychodrama and Group Psychotherapy (in 1950 renamed as the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama)
- 1946 *Psychodrama I* (<sup>3</sup>1964)
- 1947 Foundation of the magazine *Sociatry*
- 1948 Mansfield Theatre (therapeutical sociodramatically oriented extempore theatre)  
Guest Lecturer at Harvard University  
Divorces Florence Bridge
- 1949 The magazine *Sociatry* is renamed *Group Psychotherapy*  
18. Dezember: Marries Celine Zerka Toeman
- 1951 *Sociometry, Experimental Method and the Science of Society* (German 1981)  
Beacon Hill Sanatorium renamed the Moreno Sanatorium  
Foundation of the International Committee of Group Psychotherapy in Paris
- 1951-66 Adjunct Professor of Sociology at New York University
- 1952 Birth of his son Jonathan D. Moreno
- 1954 *The fundamentals of Sociometry* (<sup>3</sup>1974, the third edition printed in 1996)  
1st. International convention of group psychotherapy in Toronto. Conventions followed in Zurich (1957) and Milan (1963)
- 1956 *Sociometry and the Science of Man*  
The American Sociological Society takes over the editing of the magazine *Sociometry*
- 1957 President of the International Council of Group Psychotherapy  
*Global Psychotherapy and prospects of a Therapeutical world*

- order*
- 1958 Journeys to Europe and the Middle East
- 1959 *Psychodrama II*  
*Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama* (<sup>4</sup>1993)  
 Journey to the Soviet Union with lectures in Moscow and Leningrad  
 Honorary Doctorate at the Medical Faculty of the University of Vienna
- 1960 *The Sociometry Reader*
- 1964 1st. International Convention of Psychodrama in Paris. Further conventions followed in Barcelona (1966), Prague/Baden near Vienna (1968), Buenos Aires (1969), Sao Paulo (1970), Amsterdam (1971), Tokio (1972) and Zurich (1974)
- 1968 14. Oktober: Honorary Doctorate at the Medical Faculty of the University of Barcelona
- 1969 14. Mai. Golden Doctorate at the University of Vienna  
 Honoured in Bad Vöslau  
*Psychodrama III*
- 1970 The magazine *Group Psychotherapy* is renamed *Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama*
- 1973 Founding of the International Association of Group Psychotherapy in Zürich
- 1974 14. Mai: Moreno dies in Beacon N.Y.
- 1981 *Sociometry as an Experimental Method*
- 1989 *Psychodrama and Sociometry* (ed. by J. Fox)
- 1993 Transportation of his mortal remains to Vienna; Honorary grave in the Viennese central graveyard
- 1995 *Autobiography*

## Literature

For supplementary literature to Moreno's biography you should refer to:

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- Geßmann, Hans-Werner (1994), "Megalomania Normalis or the Attempt of a Biography of J.L. Moreno", : *Humanistic Psychodrama III*, Bergerhausen, 23-56.
- Marineau, René F. (1989), *Jacob Levy Moreno 1889-1974. Father of Psychodrama, Sociometry and Group Psychotherapy*, Tavistock/Routledge, London.
- Moreno Jacob Levy (1995), *Extracts from his autobiography*, ed. by Jonathan D. Moreno, German trans. by Michael Schacht, in *Scenario Publishers*, Cologne.
- Schiferer, H. Ruediger (1996), *J.L. Moreno: His Social Work and His Expressionist Background*, : Barbara Erlacher-Farkas/Christian Jorda (ed.), *Monodrama. Salvationary Encounters. From Psychodrama to Individual Therapy*, Springer, Vienna.