Psychodrama and Sociodrama - Roots and Shoots: From Moreno to the Future

BPA Conference 2020

Jacob Levy Moreno brought an innovative and groundbreaking perspective to philosophy, religion, psychology, sociology, psychiatry, education and theatre. He was a pivotal contributor to the existentialist philosophical movement of his day, as well as being a key figure in the artistic scene. Moreno drew his inspiration from many deep wells, such as religion and mysticism, Greek philosophy, classical drama and his own Sephardic Jewish roots, to name but a few. Tackling subjects such as cosmology, existentialism and interpersonal relations, Moreno brought a seemingly endless flow of dynamic creativity and spontaneity.

While Moreno’s contribution to this vast array of subjects is unquestionable, Moreno himself has become largely forgotten outside of the fields of psychodrama, sociodrama and sociometry. In a therapy landscape dominated by cognitive-behavioural therapy and a neo-liberal agenda for health and social care, has psychodrama been plundered for all of its best tricks and left to decay in the shadows? Over several decades there has been a tendency to separate Moreno’s theory and philosophy from his methods. Peter Kellerman (1992 p.33) acknowledges that, “Psychodrama seems to be known more for its applications than for its theories” and Rozei Telias (2019 p.2) agrees, writing “psychodrama is erroneously perceived as a therapeutic procedure rather than a method based upon theoretical principles”.

Have we as practitioners unwittingly added to this deterioration by cutting off the roots that feed and anchor us or should Moreno’s intellectual, philosophical and theological contributions be treated like any other cultural conserve?

Zerka Toeman Moreno (1969 p.5) wrote, “Substitute theories are false and misleading as they abrogate or abort the complete execution of the methods, Moreno’s position was therefore, “Take my ideas, my concepts, but do not separate them from their parent, the philosophy, do not split my children in half, like a Solomonic judgement, Love them in toto, support and respect the entire structure upon which they rest. Make them your own as I do. Role reverse with me and put yourself entirely into my position”.

The 2020 annual conference of the British Psychodrama Association looks to the future of Psychodrama & Sociodrama in the UK and beyond. In doing so it invites delegates and presenters to re-examine the roots of Psychodrama & Sociodrama in the revolutionary work of Moreno. Equally, we invite presenters to help us explore the ‘shoots’ that represent the potential future development of psychodrama and sociodrama across many domains of human endeavour. One hundred years on from Moreno’s first anonymous publication of Das testament des Vaters (The words of the father), we will ask:

- Has psychodrama become praxis with no theory?
Can the concept of ‘existentialism’ serve as a unifying framework for all of Moreno’s core ideas?

Do Moreno’s core principles of spontaneity, creativity, warming up, cultural conserve and tele have something more to offer in the 21st Century?

In addition to the ‘roots’ of psychodrama and sociodrama, where are the developing ‘shoots’ that represent future development and connect psychodrama and sociodrama with many domains of human endeavour?

