

The Foundations of Sociodrama: Reflecting on Our Past and Looking at the Future

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Sociatry treats the diseases of interrelated individuals (psychodrama) and of interrelated groups (sociodrama). Moreno's life and environment prepared him for both a search in individual and social life (Moreno, 1953). Psychodrama and sociodrama became complementary tools to induce broader changes, individual, and social. The challenges of sociodrama today are the same that remain true of most social conflicts (Marineau, 1989).

KEYWORDS: Sociodrama; sociometry; sociatry; psychodrama; social conflict; biology; physiology.

The practice of sociodrama is what brings us here to Argentina. We share this common desire to prevent and cure social conflicts. From a sociodramatic perspective, this Third International Conference is relevant and timely.

On the surface, the world around us may look relatively quiet and secure. But there are signs all over the planet that large numbers of individuals are hurting, that many countries are isolated, that natural or manmade disasters are destroying environments and populations alike, that international conflicts remain unresolved: Mankind, to use a Moreno quote, is far from achieving "a social and organic unity" (1937, p. 5). Problems are numerous and diversified—poor health, poverty, exclusion, racism, lack of freedom, illiteracy, to name only a few. These problems not only touch individuals but contaminate the core connections between sub-entities, groups, or nations. It is the task of sociodrama to address these issues.

As we will see, sociodrama is both a science and an art: It focuses on the roots and meanings of intergroup relations and conflicts, as well as ways to transform them, when necessary. Sociodrama encompasses prevention and treatment.

Emergence of Sociometry, Sociatry, and Sociodrama

Reflecting on the roots of sociodrama will necessitate that I rely on Moreno's heritage. Sociodrama is part of a science developed by J. L. Moreno while living in

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Austria but was perfected after his immigration to the United States. Its aim, as stated, is the prevention and cure of social conflicts.

I will present some landmarks since they are still relevant to our thinking. To put it in its proper perspective, let's go back to the creation of the journal. When creating *Sociometry: A Journal of Inter-Personal Relations* in 1937, Moreno and one of his associates, Professor Gardner Murphy from Columbia University, gave a good summary of their views. Here is an excerpt from their first editorial:

The integration of the social sciences is not an achievement likely to be carried to completion in our generation, or by any single method. The departmentalization of the sciences which deals with man has been a necessary feature of the intensive researches of recent years, and the protest against the resulting narrowness of research minds is scarcely likely to check such specialization. Integration will not come by fiat, neither can integration be achieved through a random juxtaposition of fragments of information from many friends, a glib scrambling of fashionable texts from biology, psychiatry and ethnology. . . . Perhaps even now the attempt at integration is immature. The test [of integration] will lie in the quality of research which actually comes from the minds of those who have exposed themselves long and seriously to material from both the biology and the social history of mankind.

It becomes evident indeed that the biology of man is, in a thousand ways, a reflection of his surroundings, that human evolution is going on apace, that variation, selection, differential fecundity and differential death rate are biological realities affected by the social situation. . . . Civilized man is an organism forced to make a very exceptional and special type of adaptation, and no physiologist, no psychologist, can study man as an organism except in the light of his ecology, and his broader social antecedents.

The journal which we launch today with this number is one among many attempts to draw research workers in the field of inter-personal relations together; to enable the human biologist to get light on his problems from the ethnologist, to guide the sociologist in the understanding of the biological peculiarities of human groups, to enable psychologists to see the interplay of economic, geographical, and political facts in shaping the personal development of the individual human subject. Perhaps above all, the primary task is to see the contribution of the arts as well as of the sciences to the understanding of human nature; a broadening of the recognition that man is approachable, not only from the avenue of biochemistry and genetics, but from the avenue of comparative linguistics, mythology, religion, and the history of the arts and sciences.

We welcome the reader to attempt with us a step in the direction of seeing the life of a man in modern society as a single great problem which, however complex, calls always for a generous and flexible

recognition of his social as well as his biological needs, in the concrete unity of each individual personality. (Moreno and Murphy, 1937, pp. 5–7)

This editorial, written in 1937, could be signed by many of us today, when the gap between neuroscientists and social scholars seem as wide as it was a century ago. Naturally, this *Sociometry* journal was intended to be the backbone of these new approaches developed by Moreno, which included sociometry, sociatry, axiodrama, psychodrama, and sociodrama. Moreno and his colleagues were hoping to tied together academics and practitioners alike, bringing the laboratory into people's houses, to the streets, to the workplaces, in government offices—or, simply said, in locations that were the *locus nascendi* of real or potential individual or social conflicts. Very rapidly, most well-known social scientists published their research findings in the journal; but in spite of his ideal, Moreno was unable to reach out to or attract scholars from biology and physiology. One main component of Moreno's theory, the importance of biology, was already absent from this forum.

The journal, when one looks back at the articles, was successful otherwise. Hundreds of articles from all horizons were published: Sociologists, psychologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, and educators contributed in numbers and contents. Sociometric tests entered the mainstream of research methodologies, and hope ran very high. But this new and integrated approach did not last, partly due to the absence or reluctance of what we would call today “the neurosciences” (physiologists and neuropsychologists). Another reason for this relative failure was that Moreno was involved in another project (as we will see), this time centering around sociatry and therapy, an area in which he was to meet and compete with psychiatrists. So, for strategic reasons, Moreno divided his energy on two different battlefields. (This division remains today: As psychodramatists meet in Sao Paulo, I am observing a fact—not judging it—that reflects a basic difficulty and challenge for unification that still needs to be met.)

Moreover, for reasons that I have presented elsewhere (Marineau, p. 140), Moreno could not keep pace with the challenge of orchestrating researchers and practitioners, people in universities and people in the fields, uniting sociology and psychiatry, bridging psychodrama and sociodrama, disseminating his new science both in United States and in the world at large. The task was too much for one person and would have required the creation of an “international sociometric army” or an International Psychodrama and Sociodrama Center. This challenge was never met but remains a possibility worth exploring for the future.

In spite of having many significant people around him—both from academia and the fields of practice—Moreno was too much of a loner in his own way: He believed that as a genius, a creator and a builder, he could manage every aspect of the development and implementation of his ideas, as long as he had dedicated followers around him. Having been deprived of the ownership of his creations while in Vienna (see, for example, his controversy with Kessler) and suffering from a paternity syndrome (which he himself acknowledged), Moreno carefully chose his collaborators, who needed to follow in his footsteps. He slowly lost many clever

colleagues—Murphy, Allport, and Cantrill, to name a few—who were creators of their own, colleagues ready to contribute to the edification of an even richer integrated approach to solving interpersonal conflicts but seeking recognition of their own.

However, in spite of his personal limitations, Moreno's views, let's remember, were the construction of a new world order, a fascinating new body of knowledge, a real utopia—uniting and reuniting people and nations. Such an ideal construction, rooted in real observations and embodied by an eager postwar young generation, was frightening to many, to say the least. Then it is fair to recognize that beyond his own person, beyond Moreno's failure to bridge all sciences into a new epistemology, lay the resistance of so many individuals or subgroups who were afraid to lose their power over their fellow citizen, their control over the world.

The reason I am bringing along this piece of history is that sociodrama is part of Moreno's legacy, the part that suffered most on the short- and long-term development of his ideas. After spreading out a whole integrated theory that included axiodrama, psychodrama, and sociodrama, Moreno engaged its implementation. But he remained mainly committed to psychodrama, developing it as a full-fledged therapeutic method throughout the world, while sociodrama remained underdeveloped. For example, in 1955, after being fully committed to sociodrama for 20 years, Moreno transferred the journal *Sociometry* to the American Sociological Association. Gradually, the journal entered a different path, and sociometry and sociodrama lost their most important channel and voice.

Meanwhile, in 1947, Moreno created, another journal, *Sociatry: Journal of Group and Intergroup Therapy*. The journal was also an important outlet for his philosophy and his work. However, the intended audience was somewhat different: *Sociometry* targeted sociologists and social scientists, while *Sociatry* was aiming mainly at mental health practitioners. "Sociatry" was a new name for a new science, the opposite of psychiatry. Moreno (1947) states in the journal:

Psychiatry is the branch of medicine that relates to mental disease and its treatment; it treats the individual psyche and soma. Sociatry treats the diseases of interrelated individuals (psychodrama) and of interrelated groups (sociodrama). It is based upon two hypotheses: 1) The whole of human society develops in accord with definite laws; 2) a truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an objective than the whole of mankind. (p. 11)

Theoretically, sociatry encompasses the whole scope of psychodrama and sociodrama. However, in the journal's content, psychodrama was represented in 90% of the articles, with sociodrama a mere 10%. Yet, in the definition of *sociatry*, Moreno (1947) included on equal footing: "diseases of interrelated individuals and of interrelated groups" (p. 11). But Moreno's thinking and actual practice evolved in such a way that sociodrama was left way behind psychodrama. One reason is certainly that sociodrama is very demanding—both in training and practice—and is time consuming. I will come back to this observation later.

Let's remember that at the origin, Moreno saw the need for a re-education of society that involved everyone, from the individual to communities, from nations to the whole of mankind. In that perspective, sociodrama was to be as important as and on equal footing with psychodrama. It should still be today. But it is not the case, and our meeting here, separate from psychodramatists, is a testimony to this fact.

By revisiting the foundations of sociodrama, I hope to put it in the forefront so that the original Morenean idea—"a truly therapeutic procedure for the whole of mankind"—could be restored and addressed for what it should be: an essential part of the development of mature individuals and societies, based on creativity and rooted in meaningful encounters.

Revisiting Moreno's Life and Ideas

The creation and development of sociodrama cannot be separated from the contexts in which Moreno grew or from his personal or *private* life. Moreno's parents were Sephardic Jews. In addition, they had roots and experiences that linked them to Turkey, Bulgaria, Rumania, and then Austria and Germany. The father traveled extensively through the Balkans while the mother was influenced by the French as a nation and Catholicism as a religion. During the course of their marriage, both parents experienced relationships conflicts, economic hardships, cultural intermixture, and geographical displacement. They needed to adapt constantly, and Moreno, in his own words, grew as a cosmic person.

Moreno himself showed the same kind of cosmic spirit and adaptability. As an adolescent and then a young man, he put his spontaneous states at work while studying at the university where his Romanian roots became a risk; then he claims his Turkish origin. He was able to side with minorities when participating in research with prostitutes or opening a house for refugees. He was a first-line observer of the communication difficulties in a refugee camp at Mitterndorf. He heralded full participation of people in the theatre and in the Church, looking for ways of replacing cultural conserves. He challenged the relationship of parents with their children. Following the war that left millions of young people dead or seriously wounded, he had friends who were anarchists, socialists, and communists, while he searched for a new order in society. This search made him explore the foundations of society through theatre (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), religion (confronting the Bishop of Vienna) and education (work with children): He termed his quest "axiodrama," and he saw it as the foundation of a new society that would herald a new approach to education, culture, and mental health. Moreno's axiodramatic world was rooted in his personal life, his family and social atom, and as an outside observer of a need for a new social order. Moreno's life and environment prepared him both for a search in individual and social life. His own "ecology" and social antecedents prepared him to be a psychodramatist and sociodramatist.

It is in line with his own life's context that Moreno created his first public sociodrama on April 1, 1921. In this actual sociodrama, Moreno attempted to find new ways for the Austrian people to organize themselves as a nation and give voice to everyone in the process. The experience was somewhat a failure, but it gave

Moreno a clear diagnosis of the people's state of mind after the war, revealing to him conditions pertaining to real and deeper social changes: Set up a real sense of equality among people, do away with cynicism, and confront the perpetual need of leaders for control and power. But social changes are not enough, neither are individual changes. There is a simultaneous need for individual changes (link to clinical psychology and psychiatry) and social changes tied up to clinical sociology. It is here that Moreno's views on personal and social changes take all their meanings, simultaneously integrating both individuals and groups changes. Let me quote more extensively from *Who Shall Survive*:

A truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an objective than the whole of mankind. But no adequate therapy can be prescribed as long as mankind is not a unity in some fashion and as long as its organization remains unknown. It helped us in the beginning to think, although we had no definite proof of it, that mankind is a social and organic unity. (Moreno, 1953, p. 3)

After his first experience with sociodrama in 1921, Moreno went on to create and develop psychodrama, the twin brother. Psychodrama and sociodrama became complementary tools to induce broader changes, both individual and social. Moreno was convinced that social and organic unity could not happen without each individual revisiting his own life and choices, or without subgroups challenging their own social structures.

In my presentation, I first dealt with a Moreno that challenges the basis of society, Moreno the axiodramatist, the social activist. From a perspective of radical social and individual changes, we then encounter a Moreno acting as a *sociodramatist* (healing society) and a *psychodramatist* (healing the individual)—a united and all-encompassing approach.

Foundations of Sociodrama

I now turn more specifically to the foundations of sociodrama. We will take three different perspectives, all necessary and complimentary: the philosophical, the sociological, and the psychological. In all fairness to its founder, I will continue to rely on Moreno's thinking and practices.

Moreno's basic philosophy states that every human being strives for unity (biological and social) and that the same model is true for every institution or organization (being a couple, a family, a community or a nation). Let's quote again from Moreno (1953):

It helped us in the beginning to think, although we had no definite proof of it, that mankind is a social and organic unity. Once we had chosen this principle as our guide another idea developed of necessity. If the whole of mankind is a unity, then tendencies must emerge between different parts of this unity drawing them at one time apart and drawing them at another time together. These tendencies may be

sometimes advantageous for the parts and disadvantageous for the whole or advantageous for some parts and disadvantageous for other parts. These tendencies may become apparent on the surface in the relation of individuals or of groups of individuals as affinities or disaffinities, as attractions and repulsions. These attractions and repulsions must be related to an index of biological, social, and psychological facts, and this index must be detectable. These attractions and repulsions or their derivatives may have a near or distant effect not only upon the immediate participants in the relation but also upon all other parts of that unity which we call mankind. The relations which exist between the different parts may disclose an order of relationships as highly differentiated as any order found in the rest of the universe. (p. 3)

In other words, in all relationships (intra-individual as well as interpersonal) there is a structure and a meaning that are there to be discovered. This is the task of sociometrists to uncover these structures, this is the task of researchers. These structures are multidimensional and demand a good knowledge of biology, sociology, and psychology. For example, one needs to know the basic motivations that make a group act, its dynamics. It is complex, but among the basic variables we find values and prejudices, loyalty, identity, history, culture, attractions, and repulsions: Uncovering and challenging these structures and meanings are at the core of Moreno's views since after having a proper knowledge or diagnosis, we can apply treatment and cure.

Identify and Uncover Basic Structures

The first aspect to take into account in the foundations of sociodrama is to identify and uncover basic structures as they relate to the actual question or conflict being explored. Sociodramatic rules for group-to-group's understanding are the same and parallel individual rules.

Roles: Shared by All People

The second perspective is sociological and is best represented through Moreno's role theory. In observing people, Moreno chose to represent their behaviors using the way they internalize different roles. Moreno distinguished diverse roles, the more primitive being physiological. The role of the "eater" is the template from which a child forms its matrix of identity. However, roles are learned early, as are combined needs, emotions, and cognitions. There are—in addition to the physiological roles—the psychological and social roles. The psychological roles are defined through our way of experiencing a particular role, especially the feelings associated with this role. The social roles (the ones that interest the sociodramatist) deal with a person's relationship to issues such as gender, mother, father, child, color of skin, religion, nationality, education, work experience, and so on. These categories of roles (physiological, psychological, and social) represent the person's identity, and this identity has two levels: a personal and a social. The

social roles are the ones to be explored in sociodrama, but not in the perspective of individual or *private* experiences (me as a father) but rather in ways that they are internalized and shared by the whole group (our social perspective on the role of the father). Good examples of sociodrama are addressing the relationships of white persons when meeting black individuals, or how men as a group relate to women. Social roles develop through actions and relationships but are based often on transmission of values, history and prejudices. Moreno developed many techniques to come to term with group to group explorations and conflicts, techniques quite similar to those used in psychodrama.

The second aspect linked to sociodrama's foundations is the recognition that social roles are not only integrated in individual behaviors but are shared, to a certain degree, by all people included under these roles: being a man or a woman, a black or a white person, an American, or a Chinese citizen, and so on.

Tools: Creativity and Encounters

The third point of view is related to Moreno's two pillars within his theory; namely, the concept of creativity and encounter. Even though these concepts find their application in psychodrama, they are as important in sociodrama. Moreno claimed that to survive and develop, one needs to do away with cultural conserves, biases, and prejudices. Since roles develop and become conflicting in relation to their counter-roles (father-child, for example), a place for these roles to meet and confront has to be offered: It is the psychodramatic stage in psychodrama and the sociodramatic stage in sociodrama. The stage then becomes the place for exploration and encounters (intrapsychic as well as interpersonal). To achieve a true meeting, groups—not only individuals—need to review their behaviors and make sure to examine reality in relation to recapturing a state of spontaneity that will account for renewed creativity. Doubling, role reversal, chorus, and score of other techniques contribute to this aim. Opportunities for true meeting need to be made available. To do away with prejudices and to re-evaluate values and behaviors, one has to meet the other, experience or re-experience an encounter. Sociodrama, as with psychodrama, aims to recapture the experience *in situ* and to heal conflicts by revisiting the *locus nascendi*, the conflict's place of origin. How did the conflicts arise? One important aspect to understand in sociodrama is the fact that group experiences are sometimes rooted in thousands of years, and that change will require a long and demanding process. I will come back to this, since it remains the main pitfall of the method—back then when Moreno created it and now—in a period when we look for quick fixes. To survive, society needs to offer its members an opportunity for its members to be creative and encounter each other.

The third aspect is to apply tools to gain access to organic and social unity, and this implies fostering renewed creativity in communities and nations alike and to facilitate real encounters among groups, however diverse they might be, using techniques that will enable everyone to experience the other point of view.

When we look at these three perspectives, we have to realize that they are linked closely together and that basic and deep changes cannot occur without a plan that takes into consideration all three of these aspects. Ideally, Moreno followers should all be axiodramatists, psychodramatists and sociodramatists.

They should all understand the range of issues that our society faces and (to take a Moreno expression again) be all part of “an army of sociometrists.”

Challenges of Sociodrama Then and Now

What was the fate of sociodrama during Moreno's era and after? First, through its journals, we could see the progress that was made in the years following the Second World War. Hundred of studies were done and published, and social psychologist, sociologists, anthropologists, and sociometrists worked hand in hand in identifying problems and securing tools to solve them. However, sociodrama develop quite independently from psychodrama and, by 1955, when Moreno transferred the *Sociometry* journal to the American Sociological Society, it lost many contributors and faded away, while psychodrama, under the helm of Moreno, continued to grow. In a way, the Moreno's integrated philosophy was buried in a world of individualism, and the supremacy of psychodrama over sociodrama was but a sign of this. Remember that Moreno said that the 20th century would belong to Freud and psychoanalysis (individualism) and that the 21st would belong to him (sensitivity to social issues). Now might be the time for sociodrama to regain its place in the society. This is our challenge.

We meet now for the Third International Conference. Even though I could not be present for the two previous conferences, I followed the report quite closely. I was very impressed by the content but also by the bold commitment of participants. Sociodrama is alive and wants to progress, to develop. In fact, there is an urgency to rediscover it, to put it back in place and use it as a tool for the solving of social issues.

When we connect to the world around us, we need to worry about the future and continue to offer our knowledge and skills to solve some of the problems we are all facing: problems pertaining to democracy, to religion, to health (both physical and mental), to education, to isolation and alienation of groups, to treatment of minorities in all corners of the world, to the control and power exercised by pressure groups or politicians, and more. The list is long and getting longer by the years.

Coming back to our conference, we are addressing some of these issues, including domestic violence, problems of refugees, communities building, and equality in citizenship. But we are few when compared to the task ahead. The magnitude of unresolved issues is gigantic. We need to revive sociodrama, to grow in numbers and competencies. We need to update the vocabulary, to adapt the issues to the world we lived in. The challenges remain the same as 100 years ago.

Here are a set of suggestions that I would make as they relate to my views on the foundations of sociodrama.

1. We all need a place and a time to voice and discuss our views in order to share a common ground and acknowledge our differences. This awareness needs to start here.
2. We need to explore how to bridge sociodrama with psychodrama, since the fate of humanity does require simultaneous work with individuals in relation to their private self and interventions with groups and

subgroups that make up the entirety of the world in which we live (organic and social unity)—a forum for discussion not only of psychodramatists or sociodramatists (like this one) but a place where both methods can be reunited again.

3. We need to recapture the view that knowledge about the organic perspective of man (physiology, neuropsychology, or psychiatry) is as important as the understanding of contexts (sociology, social psychology, ethnology, education, anthropology). A big gap now separates the organist and the champions of a more social approach, which we mainly represent. Nowadays, neuroscientists have evolved too much in their own realm, giving much needed attention to heredity and physiology of the brain but too often brushing apart the role of the contexts in which a person is born or develop. The importance of social psychology, of anthropology, of ethnology, and sociology need to be reaffirmed and taken into consideration but in a climate where the discoveries in neuroscience cannot be put aside. The words, the spirit, and the wisdom of Gardner Murphy (1947) in *Personality: A Biosocial Approach to Origins and Structure*, a close associate of Moreno, need to be restated since we all need to strive for greater integration.
4. Sociodrama, while deepening its own theories, also needs to connect with other social methods that are based on alternative theories. The world is a big container of different views, and we need to integrate them all.
5. Sociodrama needs to reconnect with the research community to assert its validity and respectability among the scientific community. However, we need to recapture the spirit that once existed about sociometric research, in addition to various methodological approaches that contribute to reveal hidden social phenomenon and structure. Beyond experimental research, attention should be given to action-research.
6. Training in sociodrama needs to be reviewed. For reasons that I have difficulties in understanding, training in sociodrama is seen and experienced as less demanding than training in psychodrama. Why would changes in individuals be more complicated than changes in groups? In my view, both trainings should parallel and take up the same amount of time. For example, if we want to achieve unity and complementarism, the training of sociodramatist could involve two-thirds curriculum in sociodrama and one-third in psychodrama, while the training in psychodrama would be the reverse. But, above all, we need to do away with this perception and practice of a lesser-demanding curriculum for sociodramatists.
7. We need to engage in long-term practice rather than to focus on short-term intervention. Because sociodramatic change involves appreciation of basic values, exploration of prejudices, knowledge of history and involvement of much larger groups, it takes more time. It is an illusion to think that we may change perceptions of Jews or Palestinians in a

limited time: We need to go back to the core, work with techniques of social regression, and visit the *locus nascendi* of this very complex conflict. This remains true of most social conflicts. Time is the best tool for cure if used properly. We need to develop a whole array of techniques that can address both short-term, temporary solutions, and then intermediate and long-term settlement of conflicts. We need to develop a brand of sociodramatists ready to invest at all levels, on a timeline that goes from immediate exploration to long-lasting solutions—sociodramatists whose training and resources are rooted in creativity and who are ready to commit themselves to long and demanding processes.

If we are going to make a difference in the world, we need to reflect on our foundations and to reassess our strategies. This is a challenge. A challenge for all of us.

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