

BRIEF REPORT

Report from the J. L. Moreno Collection

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“I am a prophet with a sense of humor.” The “I” is Jacob Levy Moreno, and the passage is located in some unpublished autobiographical sketches at the J. L. Moreno Collection in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, in Boston, Massachusetts. The existence of such a collection may not surprise those who know how intent Dr. Moreno was on setting the historical records straight about his original contributions to a global society as the father of group therapy. In 1978 Zerka T. Moreno and Jonathan D. Moreno donated, in all, 1176 file folders, 300-plus books and journals, 129 audiotapes, 51 films, and other assorted “Morenobilia” to the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department of the Countway Library.

Without sufficient funds for processing the collection, the proposal for an inventory and index remained only a blueprint for another four years. In 1982, the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama established the Moreno Fund, and in 1984, the collection finally embarked on its transformation from chaotic crusty boxes and folders into a marked, ordered, and preserved system. The project is nearing completion. With a full inventory of contents, indexed to correspondents and authors, the collection is presently accessible for research and reading.

The collection contains segments of daily correspondence and records from the late 1930s to the 1970s regarding Moreno’s vast and diverse personal enterprises at Beacon, New York, and New York City. The enterprises included Moreno Sanitarium, Therapeutic Motion Pictures, Inc., Beacon Publishing House, the Moreno Institute for psychodramatic and sociometric research, training, and public demonstrations, the World Center of Psychodrama and Group Psychotherapy for

the sponsoring of numerous international congresses and lecture tours, and the Moreno Consultation Center for psychiatric treatment. The collection also includes personal correspondence, protocols of public and private psychodrama sessions, manuscripts of unpublished material, early German publications, scrapbooks, audiotapes, films, and impromptu recording discs. The earliest manuscripts in the collection date back to 1906 when Moreno was a teenage student in Vienna. There are also such paraphernalia as the Doctor's bow ties and his honorary academic hood from the University of Barcelona.

Dr. Moreno's indelible mark of disordered order characterizes the collage of material in the collection, as if to assure his anticipated biographers that the files indeed belong to none other than himself. An apt description of the collection would be catalogued chaos, the veritable symbol of the unformed creative process, and the antithesis of the perfected finished product. Some of the most interesting items are fragments of handwritten notes scribbled in a fury on the backs of programs, folders, and correspondence. Hidden literally between the lines are autobiographical notes on the origins of J. L. Moreno's name, the significance of his Jewish heritage, and his early encounters in Vienna with Freud and a struggling Viennese painter allegedly named Shickelgruber (later known as Adolf Hitler).

The introductory autobiographical quotation evokes the image of a grandiose comedian destined to drift into anonymity. The first published psychodramatic protocol in J. L. Moreno's anonymously authored series of "Invitations to an encounter" (*Einladung zu einer Begegnung*) introduces this image in the title, "The Godhead as Actor" or *Die Gottheit als Komödiant* in German (1911). Fusing the roles of actor, comedian, and divinely inspired prophet, Moreno set out and subsequently claimed to have founded a science of human relations that encompassed the individual, social, and cosmic psyche. Within the rubrics of psychodrama, sociometry, and spontaneity, he respectively relegated Freud, Marx, and Jesus of Nazareth to the archive of primitive prototypes.

The collection and its portrait reintroduce several unanswered biographical questions that are central to the theory and practice of psychodrama, sociometry, and group psychotherapy. Who is this *Komödiant* who proclaimed quizzically, "I am God," and who used to "teach the people to play God" (Moreno, 1946, p. 6)? What was the significance of his personal dilemma of anonymity and the "paternity syndrome" (Moreno, 1953, pp. xxxvii-xxxix)? Should he receive universal recognition as the author of group therapy, the encounter movement, and the use of role playing as a method of professional therapy and training?

In sifting through the collection, it sometimes appears as though Moreno purposely mapped out his life as a young man and then meticulously followed each planned path so that his biographers would be struck by the creative continuity of his long, multi-faceted life. Moreno considered himself a genius of thought and action, and he intended to be remembered as one. In the autobiographical manuscripts of the collection, Moreno wrote that his autobiography

is written on the premise that its author is a genius; it is an effort to make him look like one, and an earnest effort not to prove that he is one, but to believe it.

The collection challenges the objective observer to measure this ingenuity by the foundations, associations, publications, and channels of communication that J. L. Moreno created. The test of his genius lies as much in what he has *done* as in what he has said.

In another unpublished manuscript about genius, he wrote in characteristically grandiose style, implicating himself:

Genius is the individual who gives in his [sic] life or work expression to the collective aspirations of the entire human species, or a substantial part of it. The better he [sic] does this, the more he [sic] is a genius. There are many dimensions of expression in every culture and many degrees of representation, therefore there are degrees of genius, minor and major geniusses [sic]. Absolute genius results from absolute universality.

J. L. Moreno's theoretical ingenuity and actual productivity present in the collection a remarkable portrait of a private intellectual and a public activist: a thinker and a doer. These are two roles rarely found so completely present in one person.

The collection at the Countway Library is a testament to J. L. Moreno's relentless commitment to putting the principles of spontaneity and creativity into action. It reveals how Moreno led his own family into his psychodramatic kingdom. The collection contains a significant amount of correspondence with Zerka T. Moreno, his wife and professional colleague. Their son Jonathan, reared in the psychodramatic household, and later trained as a psychodramatist, is also represented in the collection. The extent of William Moreno's involvement in his brother's Sociometric Institute is also indexed. The large index of J. L. Moreno's correspondents reveals a sociometric network and a social atom acquaintance volume that crisscross the globe and extend well beyond 2000 contacts. His books, published in over 15 languages, represent the intercultural exchange of information that is necessary for a worldwide social theory. The number of films, audiotapes, and phono-

graph records indicates his willingness to use any means of communication available to spread his gospel. The patient records and protocols from Beacon Hill and Moreno Sanitarium document the testing of his theories in therapeutic practice. His expansiveness and truly global aspirations are realized and fully recorded in the detailed organizational correspondence of several international congresses of group psychotherapy and psychodrama. Finally, the collection clearly shows how Moreno constructed a self-perpetuating organism by establishing workshops and training opportunities at the Moreno Institute, throughout the United States and the world.

Ironically, the J. L. Moreno Collection unavoidably tempts that habit of human nature Moreno found most ludicrous and dangerous: worship of the finished product, or worse yet, worship of a single, isolated creator. Did Moreno really want to be idolized as a one-time genius and prophet, ultimately judged, either positively or negatively, by his accomplishments? Above all, he sought those who would analyze and encounter a creative process that encompassed even the creator. In this spirit, Moreno's papers are not enshrined as stale relics inherently valuable in isolation; they are preserved for their usefulness as a richly conserved model of spontaneity. The preservation of this collection serves as yet another movement in the self-perpetuating creative process that Moreno felt was the fundamental element to happy, healthy, and cooperative social interaction. The conserved papers attend the spontaneous breath of new life.

REFERENCES

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