

EXPLORATIONS IN MENTAL HEALTH

The Philosophy, Theory and Methods of J. L. Moreno

The Man Who Tried to Become God

John Nolte



The Philosophy, Theory and Methods of J. L. Moreno

J. L. Moreno, M.D., is recognized as the originator of sociometry and psychodrama, and was a prodigious creator of methods and theories of creativity, society, and human behavior. The methods and techniques he authored have been widely adopted; the theories and philosophy upon which the methods are founded have not, as they are frequently couched in language which is not easily understood. Moreno's sociometry, his theory of society, is kept alive only by a handful of psychodramatists. Group psychotherapy and psychodrama are both widely practiced but often based on non-Morenean theory, probably because of the inaccessibility of Moreno's work.

This book outlines Moreno's early years (his religious phase), the philosophy on which his methods are founded, and the theories upon which Moreno's three major methods, psychodrama, sociometry, and group psychotherapy are based. The book provides a more systematic presentation of Moreno's work and presents his philosophy and theory in a clearer, more understandable manner.

John Nolte has a doctorate in clinical psychology from Washington University, and was trained in psychodrama by J.L. and Zerka Moreno. He served as Director of Training for the Moreno Institute after Moreno's death. From 1994 to 2008, he was a training consultant and staff member of Trial Lawyers College, Dubois, Wyoming.

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The Man Who Tried to Become God

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To:

**Beth,
Cathy,
Mike, and
Jane**

who have taught me so much about spontaneity and creativity.

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I felt for a long time a deep obligation to Dr. J. L. and Zerka Moreno for what they had given me, a new way of life and a new way of practicing my profession as a psychologist. I wondered how I could repay them. The money I had spent in training, even though it was a lot for me, seemed insignificant compared with the gifts I had received. What could I give to them? I asked myself over and over. The answer was simple when it struck me: I can best express my appreciation by passing along to others that which I have received. I believe that I have had some success in doing that through the many psychodramas I have directed over 50 years and the many participants I have met in training workshops. This book is acknowledgment of that debt as well as a tribute to both J. L. and Zerka Moreno.

The American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama and its president, David Moran, have generously given permission to quote extensively from the following books by J. L. Moreno:

Words of the Father
Psychodrama, First Volume
Who Shall Survive?

And from the journal, Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama & Sociometry:

The Autobiography of J. L. Moreno, MD

Paul Hare's "Bibliography of Work of J. L. Moreno" (1986) was of substantial assistance in locating Moreno's articles, books, and edited works. The online *Bibliography of Psychodrama* (<http://www.pdbib.org/>), originally compiled and updated by Jim Sacks with contributions by Valerie Greer, Jeanine Gendron, and Marie-Therese Bilaniuk, and now updated by Michael Wieser, was also a great help, especially in finding articles not by Moreno. I also made generous use of René Marineau's 1989 biography, *Jacob Levy Moreno 1889–1974*, Paul and June Hare's *J. L. Moreno* (1996), and Rosa Cukier's *Words of Jacob Levy Moreno* (2007) during

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I owe the greatest debt to my wife and life partner, Nancy Drew. Without her substantial encouragement, I would never have completed this book. She contributed to my efforts in many ways. She is a recognized contributor to the field of qualitative research and it is because she shared her knowledge of philosophy, especially phenomenology and existentialism, that I came to understand how important Moreno's existential philosophy was to understanding his work. In addition, Nancy served as an excellent editor, reading draft after draft and repeatedly identifying passages that needed more work. To the extent that this book is readable, much credit goes to her. Nancy also encouraged me, at times prodded me, to keep at it in spite of the fact that writing sometimes interfered with other activities that we both would have preferred to be doing.

Introduction

Jacob Levy Moreno (1889–1974) was a prodigiously creative individual whose self-assigned life mission was amelioration of the problems of human society. From an early age he was sensitive to injustice and inequality and believed that all people should have an opportunity for the fullest expression of their talents. As a teenage tutor of the children of wealthy Viennese bourgeois families, he encouraged his charges to give their toys to poor children who were not as fortunate as they. As a university student, Moreno, along with four chums, established the House of Encounter in Vienna, where they provided both shelter and assistance to poor people from all over the Austro-Hungarian Empire who were trying to emigrate to other countries. As a scientist, he became an inventor of methods through which he hoped to better the plight of marginalized, excluded, and disadvantaged groups of people as well as treat mental illness.

Moreno first founded a spontaneous form of drama that he considered to be a social therapy. He was the originator of the methods of sociometry and psychodrama and is also credited, along with others, as one of the fathers of group psychotherapy. Each of his methods, at one time or another, was widely received and appreciated, but the philosophy and theory upon which they were based, including the *raison d'être* of the methods, generally got left, in Moreno's words, on the back shelves of the library. Moreno was perturbed that his methods and techniques were so readily adopted while the philosophical and theoretical origins from which they came and the aims to which they were dedicated were brushed aside. This book reflects my understanding of Moreno's philosophy, his methods, and the theory upon which they are founded.

My introduction to psychodrama came in the fall of 1959 when I was a relatively new clinical psychologist on the staff of Missouri State Hospital #1, in Fulton. Several staff members from the St. Louis State Hospital were visiting to demonstrate the psychodramatic method. Leon Fine, who had been a fellow graduate student at Washington University, Abel Ossario, and Barbara Seabourne, both of whom I knew well and considered good friends, led this team. I attended the workshop only because of my positive connections with the presenters. I was not interested in

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psychodrama and, from the little I had read, I considered it a superficial and gimmicky process.

To my surprise, I found the first session quite engrossing. Three hours passed by quickly. I walked across the campus to lunch with my friend and fellow staff psychologist, John Miller. We were talking animatedly about what we had seen and what the director had done and speculating why. Suddenly, realizing how caught up I was in the session we had just come from, I stopped. "John," I said to Miller, "if something gets me this riled up, I think I need to learn more about it."

It took me two years to arrange for a two-week visit to the Moreno Institute, the only official training center at the time. Before that happened, I met the Morenos when they presented a program at the Psychiatric Receiving Center in Kansas City. Dr. Moreno gave a brief talk and then Zerka, his wife, directed a psychodrama. The chief psychologist of the center volunteered to be the protagonist. Afterwards he told the group, "That was worth six months of analysis." The staff had lunch with the Morenos and I was invited. I was seated next to Zerka and was invited by her to cut the meat on her plate, one of the few activities that she had not mastered after the amputation of her right arm. I told her that I had been quite impressed by the session that she had directed, and that was the truth. Inwardly, I reaffirmed my intention to train at the Moreno Institute.

I finally arrived at the Moreno Institute in June 1962. The Institute was an accredited psychiatric hospital at that time, and a woman had been admitted as a patient the day before the training workshop began. She claimed that she had been divorced from her husband of many years and remarried to a doctor by radio waves. Her complaint was that her first husband would not let her go live with the doctor. The initial stages of her treatment were part of the training workshop.

Although by 1962, Zerka was responsible for most of the training sessions, J. L. Moreno came to the theater from time to time, and only he directed the sessions in which Dorothy, the newly admitted patient, was the protagonist. She was unwilling to stay voluntarily and was to be legally committed at the request of her husband. That is usually accomplished by having a patient examined by two psychiatrists, who then attest to the need for psychiatric treatment. A standard psychiatric examination is typically a threatening and uncomfortable process. Moreno had a different plan. He invited two colleagues to make the examination. They came to the theater, as did the training group and Dorothy. Moreno introduced her to the group and invited her to show us, onstage, some activities of her daily life. Among other things, she worked as a clerk in the drugstore owned by her husband (her ex-husband, according to her). Several of us in the group took the roles of customers and she graciously attended to our purchases. After some action, Moreno interviewed her. She told her story and Moreno promised that he would do his best to help her. It was obvious that she had absolute trust in him and believed him implicitly. It was also obvious to the

two committing psychiatrists that she was delusional, a fact that justified commitment in 1962.

This was the first evening of training, and I received my first lesson from Moreno. The psychologists from whom I had learned the skills of my profession were all good people. They were not only intelligent, but considerate, thoughtful human beings. They had taught me to be respectful of the patients that I saw, no matter how emotionally disordered they might be and they taught by example. I had, however, never seen the best of these good professionals listen to the delusions of a patient with the respect and concern with which Moreno listened to this woman. He offered no skepticism nor did he challenge her account of what had happened. He did not try to convince her of the absurdity of her story. Instead, he promised to help her in every way that he could. He was sincere, and she realized this. I realized that I had been taught to be polite; Moreno demonstrated what it meant to be caring.

The training group had two sessions a day in the theater and I was amazed by what happened on the psychodrama stage under Zerka's direction. Events in people's lives were explored in astounding detail. Painful experiences were revisited, the hurt drained out and emotional wounds healed. Monsters were slain. Demons were exercised. Shackles were struck off. This was the type of psychotherapy that I could appreciate and one I wanted to master.

We met in the evening in the Moreno living room, where we would discuss the day's activities. Moreno used our discussion as the stimulus to talk about his ideas and often his experiences. On the two weekends of the training workshop, additional people came to the theater. Jim Enneis, director of the psychodrama program of St. Elizabeth Hospital, the federal psychiatric hospital, brought his first training group to the Institute. Don Clarkson was a member of that group, and he and I have been close friends since. In addition to Enneis, Hannah Weiner and Dick Korn, early leaders in the psychodrama movement, appeared for a day or two. I was tremendously impressed by their skills as psychodrama directors. I hoped that I could become as skilled someday.

On Friday evening of each week, the training group went into New York City for the open session of the New York City Moreno Institute. The New York City Theater was in a small building on West 78th Street. Open sessions, conducted by Moreno Institute graduates, were held nightly. Twice a week the Morenos presented a session that was open to anybody who wanted to attend and pay a modest fee. J. L. Moreno would give a short talk about his work and then warm up the group by engaging with individual members, one of whom would be invited to explore a problem situation through psychodrama. He would then call on Zerka to direct, and a full-blown personal psychodrama session would ensue.

Like many conventionally trained psychotherapists, I found this practice unsettling. We are trained that the privacy of the client is sacrosanct. In the

public psychodrama session, the protagonist very likely has no previous experience with the method and is unaware of how powerfully the method facilitates self-revelation of very private, personal information. Done before a group of people whom the protagonist does not know seemed like a violation of confidence and ethically questionable. Today, open sessions have virtually ceased, and the Morenos' son, Jonathan Moreno, a bioethicist, has written that it is indeed unethical by today's standards.¹ Since then, I have talked with a number of protagonists of open sessions and have yet to hear anything unfavorable about the experience. Several have acknowledged being taken aback immediately after the drama was over, but feeling quite all right after hearing from group members during the sharing phase of the session. And I have conducted many open sessions myself.

When Zerka Moreno first invited me to be the protagonist of a session, I politely declined. I had come to the Institute to learn how to direct, not to do my own psychodramas. I did not then know how much of psychodrama had to be learned from the role of the protagonist. Eventually I was persuaded to take the stage. After a few minutes, Zerka, who is renowned for her intuition, asked me a question. Without warning a huge ball of pain welled up, entirely filling my body. I had no control over it no matter how hard I tried, and I sobbed for minutes. It was a pain connected to a failed relationship from 10 years previously. I had my first lesson in the immense power of the psychodrama stage.

I spent an intense two weeks in a different world. I had been working as a psychotherapist for several years, but for the first time, I saw emotional healing taking place in minutes right before my eyes. I wished that I could stay in this magical milieu forever. It wasn't possible, of course. I had obligations, a job, a family elsewhere. I did not yet see that the ultimate goal of this training was not to remain in this freedom-enhancing culture of the Moreno Institute, but to spread that culture where I lived.

Upon returning home, I started two psychodrama groups in the hospital, applying the basic psychodrama skills that I had picked up at Beacon. I was a long way from being a competent psychodramatist, yet the groups accomplished a great deal, more than I had been achieving in my other activities as a psychotherapist. In addition, the sessions were interesting to the group members and to me, a quality not always found in conventional talk psychotherapy. My attempts at directing also prepared me to learn when I returned to the Moreno Institute for more training. This was the Moreno model of training: a period of training followed by an interval of practice, then another training experience. I continued to return to the Moreno Institute many times until Moreno's death.

I not only wanted to learn the skills of directing psychodrama; I was intensely curious as to how and why psychodrama accomplished what it did. It was clear to me that in psychodrama sessions I was learning more about human functioning than I had been taught in all my university classes, and more than I had learned through conventional psychotherapy. I read

Moreno's books and articles and I listened to him very closely when he discussed his ideas with a training group. I struggled with *Who Shall Survive?* and the first two *Psychodrama* volumes, finding many of the ideas intriguing but often not completely understandable. I read *Words of the Father* and was deeply moved by some passages. I could relate some to them, but I did not understand their importance to Morenean oeuvre.

Although Moreno was a prolific writer with nearly 300 citations (Hare, 1986), nowhere does he produce a clear, well organized, and straightforward account of his triadic system (sociometry, group psychotherapy, and psychodrama). The second edition of *Who Shall Survive?* (1953c) has the most complete presentation of his ideas and methods, and the autobiographical supplement (1953a) helps understand Moreno. However, I suspect that there are few people who can claim to have carefully read the whole 724 pages; fewer still, including myself, can claim to have thoroughly understood everything in this volume.

I became convinced that Moreno had seen deeply into the workings of the cosmos and I wanted to know what he had perceived. He answered most of the questions that I asked by quoting or pointing out passages that I had already read in his books and articles. He died before I knew how to ask him the questions I really wanted him to answer.

When I was introduced to phenomenological and existential philosophy, much of Moreno's work became more comprehensible. Based on that experience, it is my hypothesis that one reason for poor reception of Moreno's work is that psychotherapists and most methods of psychotherapy are informed and formed by a positivist, objectivist philosophy. The medical model of mental illness prevails and is concretized in the diagnostic and statistical manuals (DSMs). Even humanistic and existential psychotherapists make use of the latest DSM. They also tend to think about their clients in terms of a personality theory or a theory of psychopathology that comes from a positivist, objectivist point of view. Moreno is much more understandable from a phenomenological, existential perspective.

NONCLINICAL PSYCHODRAMA

Moreno had known from the beginning that psychodrama was far more than a method of psychotherapy. He encouraged and engaged in nonclinical applications, beginning with his search for the king of Austria. He encouraged students to engage in the employment of psychodrama in nonpsychotherapy settings even though he largely wrote about psychodrama as a method of psychotherapy.

I looked for opportunities to use psychodrama outside the hospital. Over the years, I have done such things as team building in business organizations and role training with doctors, nurses, and psychotherapy trainees. I once conducted a workshop for nursing school instructors on the use of

action techniques in teaching student nurses. This group figured out how to teach the cardiac electrical system in action in a way much more interesting than lecture and diagrams.

In 1994, an opportunity to conduct personal growth psychodrama with a group of lawyers came my way. The situation was this: Gerry Spence, a well-known and very successful lawyer—some of his colleagues consider him the best contemporary lawyer in the country—put into action a longtime dream to establish a postgraduate course in trial law. He called it the Trial Lawyers College. Spence (1998) charged the law schools of this country with neglecting to teach trial skills to their students. He pointed out that doctors go through years of internship and residency before they are allowed to practice on their patients. On the other hand, a young lawyer just out of law school who has passed the bar exam is allowed to represent anybody who will hire him, no matter how important or complex the case. His idea was that he and a group of other famous and successful older lawyers would teach their skills to younger lawyers.

Spence had himself developed a unique style of courtroom practice—as have most highly successful trial lawyers—and wished to pass this along to younger colleagues who were struggling to master the complex skills involved in trial work. Spence's approach to trial practice had been inspired by his participation in activities of the human potential movement in the 1960s, into which he had been guided by his close friend, social worker John Johnson, the head of the mental health program in the Wyoming county where Spence had been the county attorney. Spence had also sampled psychodrama at programs sponsored by John Ackerman, president of the National College for Criminal Defense. He believed that the self-understanding obtained through personal growth work was critically important to the system that he had developed, and the Trial Lawyers College began with three days of psychodramatic personal growth activity. Don Clarkson, with whom Spence had previously worked, and I were engaged to conduct this work. The college was a month long course, situated on Spence's ranch in high desert country of Wyoming.

As time for the college approached, I became concerned about the response we might have to psychodrama, especially as the group members were of a very different profession and were attending the college to learn the skills of trying lawsuits in courtrooms, not to participate in psychodrama. It was wasted concern. After the initial shock of being thrown into something most of them had never heard of, the lawyers dived in with great gusto. They seemed more enthusiastic about psychodrama than many mental health professionals. Having never heard of psychodrama, they were curious why it was not more widely known and applied. They were especially curious why more psychotherapists did not use it. The most common theory they put forward was that it was too

effective and psychotherapists were afraid they would cure their clients too quickly and lose out economically. I assured them that this was not the reason.

When I recognized that the purpose of the college was training in professional skills, I suggested to Spence that psychodrama might have more to offer than just personal growth. I had role training in mind, of course. Spence was quite open to the idea and welcoming to me. I spent the next 14 years attending Trial Lawyers College events. The lawyers, both staff and students, were appreciative of the action methods that Clarkson and I introduced and found many creative ways of using them in trial preparation and even in trial. Some of them recognized the value of personal psychodrama to better understand themselves and others. They also recognized how much they learned about group dynamics through the psychodrama sessions. Most saw the usefulness of psychodrama in understanding their clients' experiences. They also learned the importance of looking at the trial situation from the perspective of the other participants, the judge, the jurors, the opposing counsel, and even the clerks and bailiffs. Many attended psychodrama training workshops, sometimes for personal growth and usually to learn enough of the method to conduct reenactment interviewing as a means of learning about their clients' experiences at a deeper level than conventional interview can accomplish.

I was associated with the Trial Lawyers College from 1994 to 2007. Psychodrama became an integral component of the program. Two more psychodramatists, Kathryn Larimer and Kathryn St. Clair, were added to the staff. During that span of time, we introduced psychodrama to more than 2,000 people. Many of the graduates of Trial Lawyers College are making use of the psychodrama method in one way or another.

The Trial Lawyers College was one of the most rewarding undertakings in my life. It also confirmed for me that, because psychodrama is so widely perceived as a method of psychotherapy, there are an infinite number of possible nonclinical applications of psychodrama just waiting to be discovered.²

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Hundreds of people have contributed to the sociometric, psychodramatic, and group psychotherapy literature. Many books on psychodrama and several on sociodrama and sociometry have appeared in the last 40 years. Because my purpose in writing has been to explicate J. L. Moreno's ideas, especially his philosophy and theories, I have relied heavily on his articles and books. This is not to be taken as a dismissal of the work of others.

I have gone beyond Moreno's original thinking in only one place. That is the addition of David Bohm's interpretation of quantum theory, which, in my opinion, solves a major issue of Moreno's Canon of Spontaneity-Creativity. In explaining spontaneity, Moreno invokes the notion of non-conservable energy to explain spontaneity. As I explain in a discussion of this entity, conventional physics has no place for such an energy. Bohm's concept of the implicate order provides an explanation, a physical basis for Moreno's theorizing.

Adam Blatner, in his several editions of *Foundations of Psychodrama*, the fourth of which was published in 2000, has made the most ambitious attempt to present a full picture of Moreno's work. However, Blatner's major aim seems to be relating Moreno's thinking to mainstream philosophy, theory, and practice of psychotherapy and group psychotherapy. His motivation seems to be making Moreno more palatable to conventional thought and practice in the hope of enticing more people to get involved in psychodrama. In doing so, he has, in my opinion, overlooked or downplayed some of Moreno's most creative contributions.

The major sources for this book are Moreno's articles in the journals *Sociometry* and in *Group Psychotherapy*, as well as the books Moreno either wrote or edited. Fortunately, all issues of *Sociometry* can be found online through a service called JSTOR (<http://www.jstor.org/>), a digital library that makes more than 2,000 journals available through college and university libraries. Unfortunately *Group Psychotherapy* is not among them. In addition to the above resources, there is all that I have learned from both Morenos during the 12 years that I was a student of the Moreno Institute. Finally, there is what I have learned from the practice of psychodrama.

CONVENTIONS

Three Morenos are mentioned in this book: Jacob Levy Moreno, Zerka Toeman Moreno, and Jonathan D. Moreno. Whenever the name Moreno stands alone without initials, it refers to J. L. Moreno. I use J. L. Moreno only when it is needed for clarification or sometimes at the beginning of a chapter or section.

NOTES

1. I have found an approach to demonstrating psychodrama that I believe to be ethical. A description can be found in my book, *The Psychodrama Papers*.

2. I also learned to have great respect for a badly maligned group of people: the trial lawyers who represent people as plaintiff lawyers in civil trials and defense lawyers in criminal trials. These are the only kinds of lawyers trained by the Trial Lawyers College. Instead of sly, conniving, unscrupulous manipulators, I found the large majority of the students to be thoughtful, highly ethical, caring professionals who worked against the odds to see that their clients received justice.

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Part I

The Religious Phase

It was in the early part of our century that a young man tried to become God. The place was Vienna; the period of his appearance was between 1908 and 1914. He made a deep impression upon his contemporaries. He had his gospel, his apostles, his apocrypha. The religious books in which his doctrine was expressed had profound reverberations throughout the intellectual world. The cruel wars and revolutions through which mankind has passed since have destroyed or dispersed most of the original witnesses, but some of them are still living and I am one of them.

—J. L. Moreno, *The Autobiography of J. L. Moreno*, MD

1 The Man in the Green Cloak

Vienna, just after the turn of the 19th century, was an exhilarating city in which to live—as long as you were a member of the well-to-do merchant class. Vienna was second only to Paris as a European center of culture and the arts, and an extraordinary profusion of intellectual and scientific productivity emerged in the city in the years just before and after the turn of the century. It was also the city of social movements, including Zionism, Austro-Marxism, German Nationalism, and Existentialism. Anti-Semitism was also rampant. Paris was known as the City of Lights, Vienna as the City of Dreams.¹

Anyone living in Vienna in the years between 1908 and 1914 might occasionally have come across a young man wearing a dark green cloak. One of the places where he frequently appeared was the *Augarten*, the grounds of the palace of Emperor Franz Joseph that served as a public park for the people of Vienna. This was a place where nannies and nursemaids took their young charges, and where older children often came to play.

A mysterious youth who came to be recognized as the Young Man in the Green Cloak could often be found sitting at the foot of a tree, making up fairy tales to tell the children who came to play in the *Augarten*. They gathered around him, eager to hear what wondrous story he would next invent. He never told the same story twice, and often he engaged the children in creating with him new stories or new versions of old stories. Moreover, he had this air of mystery about him. Nobody knew his name or where he lived. Though he might make known when his youthful audience would expect to see him again, he often showed up unannounced. He was like one of the characters from the fairy tales he told.

The Young Man in the Green Cloak was Jacob Moreno Levy, who would later rearrange his name to become J. L. Moreno, and whose methods, philosophy, and theories are the subject of this book. About 18 years old at the time of his engagement with the children in the *Augarten*, he had been emancipated from his family for several years, supporting himself by tutoring the children of bourgeois families of Vienna. In the *Augarten*, he not only told fairy tales. He engaged the children he met there in creative play. He saw himself as removing these children from their everyday drab

surroundings (they were mostly children of the working class for whom Vienna could be and more often was a city of nightmares than the City of Dreams) and taking them bodily into a fairyland of unlimited wonder.

It was here, observing the spontaneity and creativity of children, that his theory linking spontaneity with creativity began to take shape. "In children," Moreno says:

you see spontaneity in its living form. It is written all over the child, in his act-hunger, as he looks at things, as he listens to things, as he rushes into time, as he moves into space, as he grabs for objects, as he smiles and cries. In the very beginning, he sees no barrier in objects, no limits of distance, no resistance or prohibitions. But as objects hinder his locomotion and people respond to him with "no, no, no," he starts on his reactive phase, still reaching out, but with growing anxiety, fear, tension, and caution. (1989a, p. 37)

Moreno later claimed that he was instigating a revolution among the children, a revolution against social stereotypes and class distinctions, a revolution for spontaneity and creativity. What he observed was that as children grow older, they became less spontaneous, less creative, more anxious and cautious. He wanted to teach them how to retain their spontaneity and remain creative in the face of society's attempt to mold them into its templates.

THE RELIGION OF ENCOUNTER

Even if one did not frequent the *Augarten*, by 1914, the Man in the Green Cloak might have been seen in the company of one or more of his four close friends, all students at the University of Vienna. They were constantly walking the streets and roads of Vienna, always talking, always engaging with everyone they met along the way. Although they affected anonymity in their time, we now know their respective identities. The tall member of the group was Chaim Kellmer, a philosophy student. A man with many questions about life in general and his life in particular, he had come from Romania to the university to seek answers. Like Moreno, he, too, supported himself as a tutor. He was considered by many to be a wise person and many sought his counsel and advice.

When Moreno and Kellmer met, both found a deep kinship of spirit that initiated what Moreno later described as the Religion of Encounter. Three other like-minded students joined them to form a unique group. There was András Petö of Budapest, a medical student who eventually achieved renown for developing new methods of treating handicapped children. Jan Fedá from Prague, who became a friend of Thomas Masaryk, founder and first president of Czechoslovakia, also became one of the group.

The third was Hans Brauchbar of Vienna, also a medical student who later moved to Russia and, in Moreno's words, "disappeared." These five comprised the total membership of the Religion of Encounter. They were indefatigable talkers, preoccupied with ideas about the nature of God and the Second Coming of Christ. In spite of their constant conversation, they were absolutely dedicated to the notion that their actions were far more meaningful than their words.

Moreno describes the group in his autobiography:

We were all committed to the sharing of anonymity, of living and giving, living a direct and concrete life in the community with all we met. We left our homes and families and took to the streets. We were nameless but were easily recognized by our beards and our warm, human, and gay approach to all comers. None of us would accept any money for the services we rendered to others, but we received many gifts from anonymous donors. (1989a, p. 42)

Vienna, in addition to being a hotbed for modernism in the arts, was a hotbed of movements. Nazism, Zionism, Communism, and Existentialism. Moreno and his group belonged to the latter. The first principle, he wrote, was the all-inclusiveness of being and the constant effort of maintaining the natural spontaneous flow of being from one moment to the next without interruption. The second principle was that all existing things are by nature good and blessed. Other ideas include the concept of the moment as a category in itself rather than as a function of past and future, and the notion of the situation, which is to say that we always find ourselves in a setting that has meaning for us and that challenges us or demands that we act. A further principle is spontaneity and creativity as the guides of ethical conduct rather than the social rules of cultural conserves.

In the pre-World War I years, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was becoming increasingly unstable and, as a result, hordes of people from its many nationalities poured into Vienna on their way to more promising countries. America and Palestine were particularly high among their destinations. These emigrants were most often poor and uneducated. Making their way through governmental bureaucracy was nearly impossible without help. Shelter and sustenance were often even more urgent problems.

The five members of the Religion of Encounter procured a house in central Vienna and opened it to all comers. They refused payment from those who found their way to the house and who seldom had the means to pay anyway. The House of Encounter not only provided food and shelter, but also helped the emigrants understand and fill out their emigration papers and deal with the government bureaucratic agencies. Moreover, the emigrants, far from their homes and native countries found much desired comfort in companionship and mutual emotional support. The house was supported entirely by donations received by Moreno and his friends.