

J. L. MORENO: DAS STEGREIFTHEATER, SECOND EDITION

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This review is simultaneously being published in the following German journals: *Der Nervenarzt*, *Zeitschrift für Psychotherapie und Medizinische Psychologie*, *Praxis der Psychotherapie*, and *Gruppenpsychotherapie und Gruppendynamik*.

There is hardly any other book which has accomplished that, after forty-seven years, a second edition is released, and there is hardly any other author who experiences such a new edition while himself still active in midst of his work.

This has been accomplished by *Das Stegreiftheater (The Theater of Spontaneity)* and its author, J. L. Moreno. This book was first published in 1923 in the Kiepenheuer Verlag, Berlin, and has been republished in 1970 by Beacon House, a publishing house in the USA. It was then, forty-seven years ago, in the beginnings of psychodrama therapy in Vienna and has experienced its rebirth today, when this form of therapy has begun to be rediscovered and to be integrated into the institutions of the German-speaking countries. It is probably not purely by accident although it has not been referred to specifically in the scientific press, that also in 1970, the first organization of German psychodrama therapists is being founded, "The Psychodrama Section within the framework of the Deutscher Arbeitskreis Für Gruppenpsychotherapie und Gruppendynamik.

"Every true second time is the liberation from the first." This is written in the original text of the book, p. 77, of the new edition. With this the "catharsis," the liberation through play, an essential moment in psychodrama therapy is indicated. No other phrase could better signify the historic background for the long interval between the two editions; *The Stegreiftheater (The Theater of Spontaneity)* is not only a book. It was also an actual theater, which Moreno directed between 1921 and 1924 in the Maysedergasse in Vienna. It had as its "central task to bring about a revolution of the theater, to change completely the character of the theatrical event." In the Introduction to the new edition it is stated that this change failed: "hundred percent spontaneity in which actors and public were involved, the essence of the Stegreiftheater faced the greatest resistance from the public and from the press. They were accustomed to rely upon the cultural conserves of the drama and not to rely upon spontaneous-creativity. When, therefore, in the Stegreiftheater, good theater, honest artistic spontaneity was offered, the

matter appeared suspicious, the Stegreifplay appeared carefully prepared and rehearsed, in other words, a swindle. But when a play was miserable and lifeless they concluded that genuine spontaneity is not possible. We lost the interest of the public and it became difficult to maintain the financial stability of the theater." That is what Moreno reports. Moreno came to the highest points of the crisis when he began to lose his best players. He did not see any other alternative except "to change the attitudes of the public and of the press and newspaper reporters. This appeared to be impossible without a total revolution of our culture."

But this crisis was the moment of birth for the therapeutic theater, because "it was easier to tolerate imperfections and irregularities in an abnormal person, in a patient. It was easier to fulfill hundredpercent spontaneity in a therapeutic theater." The crisis explains, however, why the psychodrama is not only a therapeutic method but also, beyond the medical framework, a worldwide movement: spontaneity and creativity are, according to Moreno, the essential attributes of men. They are not only blocked in the psychotic individual, but they represent a universal symptom. They are, however, more easily released in mental patients because we are more easily inclined to accept unusual behavior from mental patients. As a matter of fact, it is easier to warm up groups of patients in a psychodramatic way than in so-called normal individuals, unless also these are motivated to present their own experiences. The great crisis of today, in the variety of social structures, reflect the question which is widely discussed among psychotherapists and psychiatrists, whether the psychologically ill individuals are symptoms of a "sick society." This thesis was raised by Moreno already fifty years ago when he demanded and insisted upon the necessity for a cultural revolution. Is it possible that the current wide spread of interest in psychodrama and in its application is closely related to the general crisis in culture and society?

Many critical assessments of the "global importance of the psychodramatic world movement" may have to be re-evaluated from this point of view. This, however, does not relieve us from the responsibility to apply psychodrama in its many variations as a means of medical therapy for mental patients, with the aid of groups, only with clear indication and well organized methods. The liberation from the first objective, the therapy of the theater, paved the way for going beyond the therapy of mental patients in psychodrama to the "sociodrama" of entire groups and of social systems. The new edition signalizes this liberation. The sociodrama is therefore closer to the spontaneity theater which tried to involve large collectives, than the psychodrama.

The new edition appears also at the right time insofar as the aim of the Stegreiftheater, which one may call a liberation of the masses from passivity, has moved much closer to the actual goal of many political groups in varying life contexts and countries. One could see in this a continuation which goes far beyond the original aim of starting a revolution of the theater. Nevertheless the Stegreiftheater has also here influenced the course of many developments as Moreno explains in his Preface. However, the actors are even today tied down to proscribed roles, and the public so far as it is involved in the modern theater is still guided by the actors. Therefore, we have not overcome the drama conserve, the repetition of the theme in the play, and we have not yet achieved the stage of total spontaneity.

The value of the book lies in the tendency towards emancipation, a motive which is better understood in our time than at the time of its first appearance. The closing of the Viennese Stegreiftheater and Moreno's emigration to the USA was a regrettable development because our cultural realm thus lost an original impetus. These circumstances are again being brought to our attention in the sketchy link to actual, societal processes.

The value of the original establishment of the Stegreiftheater in Vienna lies however, thanks to the indestructible initiative of the founder of the beginning of psychodrama and of group psychotherapy in their true essence, that this resulted in the discovery of man as a social being in the medicotherapeutic field. That this discovery was unknown for a long time in central Europe where it originated, remains a tragic event. It was not only due to the series of catastrophic political developments. There was and still is today, a resistant mentality which assigns to the single individual a disproportionately larger importance when compared to that of groups and thus ignores the effect of groups and masses. In this perspective a change is now taking place. The new edition could accelerate this change because it indicates that constructive and collective communication—here in the realm of the theater—is at least a possibility and the start of the group as a medium for therapy.

Perhaps the stamp of the original text dealing with the chapters on "Konflikttheater," the "Weihetheater," the idea of a "Theometrie der Orter" and the "Theometric Locus of the Book," as well as the extensive theory on the Stegreiftheater due to the selfcentered and stubborn influence of the biography, the person and the styles of thought and language of the author prevent a broader influence of the new edition. It is difficult to enter into the written world of ideas then extant. This would probably be true even if the style of diction were the best for if not of essence to all originality that it can not be comprehended with common schemes of thought? The book itself

ends with the sentence: "This book about the perfect theater is an illustration of a poorly written book. It is a report of imperfection." Indeed, the presently written Preface to the new edition of the original book presents the ideas of Moreno far more clearly. Indeed, the presently written Preface to the new edition of the original book presents Moreno's ideas far more clearly. The final sentence in the book, "Therefore, it demands cure through the Encounter" is an imperative that the communication through the written word be restored to its element, the deed. This happened not only through the spread of psychodrama therapy in which many of the categories described in the *Stegreiftheater* (especially techniques of spontaneity and spontaneous production), reappear partly unchanged; impromptu notes and impromptu diagrams, erstwhile attempts at written recording of the relations of impromptu players among one another, are actually early forerunners of Moreno's sociometry and even of Kurt Lewin's topology. Psychodrama, sociometry and Lewin's field theory, however, each have undergone a branched-off development, and now belong to the foundations upon which rest contemporary group psychotherapy and social psychology. The *Stegreiftheater* was therefore a wellspring of new sources of ideas; it is a milestone in the history of these disciplines. From this viewpoint the book may attain today perhaps still more recognition and approval than it did forty-seven years ago. We therefore gratefully acknowledge the new edition.