

Manfred Gellert

From one who moved out... or:

A Declaration of Love to Psychodrama and Sociometry

A cornucopia of new approaches and opportunities

In 1973 I started my first job as a lecturer for social psychology at Burckhardthaus Gelnhausen. Having studied social sciences in Göttingen, I wanted to finally get into practice. I had previously studied theories of group dynamics and group therapy intensively. The name **Moreno** already appeared in connection with sociometry in specialist articles.

At Burckhardthaus, a central national institute of the Evangelical Church for Youth and Social Work, I conducted seminars on methods for working with groups and noticed that I was, in fact, lacking a lot in terms of these methods. So, I began to search. In the 1970s and 1980s, many new methodological approaches had been imported into Germany, mainly from the Netherlands and the USA. There was a cornucopia of offers with renowned trainers who offered these approaches in Germany.

I undertook a "taster trip", lay in a Samahdi tank in order to find myself in the solitude, let myself moan bioenergetically and glide into deep processes of self-discovery, tackled the TZI triangle, spent time in a group-dynamic laboratory, got to know systemic advisory approaches - and went to Hilarion Petzold to learn about integrative therapy and gestalt work.

Three days in Stuttgart - a revelation

In 1976, the Moreno Institute in Stuttgart offered an introductory seminar in psychodrama under the direction of Sarah Kirchknopf and Dr Rainer Bosselmann. The three days became a revelation for me! The lightness and yet simultaneous depth of psychodramatic and sociometric work both with single protagonists and in group work convinced me that psychodrama and sociometry should become my method of choice. This decision was to shape my entire life from then on. One scene in particular remains in my memory to this day: A participant with paraplegia was in the group in her wheelchair. She wanted to work on coping better with her handicap in everyday life. Rainer Bosselmann suggested that she carry out a role swap with her wheelchair and I was deeply impressed and touched by how the participant spoke to herself in this role swap and how she effectively gave herself advice in the process.

Then it really got going - in Überlingen

At that time, the Moreno Institute in Überlingen offered a basic training group. Already at this point it was very important to me to search out the "best leaders" for my training and further education. The psychodrama world was still rather clearly structured at this point. Following in the footsteps of the original mothers and fathers, the second generation, who had all been personally consecrated by Jacob Moreno, had founded their own institutes and

were in the process of building up their own groups of psychodrama leaders. This second generation included Grete Leutz, Hilarion Petzold, Ella Mae Sheron, and Heika Straub.

Number 1 at the Moreno Institute Überlingen was Grete Leutz' crown princess, Ildikó Mävers. What could seem more natural, therefore, than for my esteemed fellow graduate of the foundation training and later colleague Kersti Weiss and I to ask Ildiko if she would admit us to an advanced-level group. She said yes and so we went on to complete further years of training in a newly-put-together upper school.

Ildikó's ability to empathise, her great analytical clarity, and her methodical diversity in what were often very difficult protagonist games and complex group-dynamics had a great influence on me at this time and made sociometric methods the focus of my interest. In the Morenoic sense, Ildikó always had the balance between psychodrama, sociometry, and group therapy in mind while leading her training group and did not shy away from strong sociometric interventions.

A sexogram creates clarity in the group

To this day I still remember a so-called "sexogram" which she suggested to the group and which revealed the erotic and sexual attraction between the participants through a series of votes. She brought this topic into the group in this way because a love relationship between two participants had repeatedly led to gossip and unease. Attraction and affection could now be named by all participants and became the topic of the group. What this triggered in the further education group and the consequent strong protagonist plays to which it led need not be elaborated here.

During this advanced-level education I completed special seminars with Dr. Erich Franzke on creative design methods in psychodrama, with Prof. Hans-Carl Leuner on Katathym image life, with Karin Elias on psychodrama and Jungian fairy tale work, with Dr. Reinhard Krüger on psychodrama in individual therapy, and with Ildikó Mävers seminars on sociometry. I took part in large group psychodrama events in Reichenau, Gelnhausen, and Tschagguns.

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Ildikó Mävers, at the time a highly esteemed training director and supervisor at the Moreno Institute in Überlingen, then asked me one day whether I was interested in co-leading her special seminars on sociometrics. I felt honored - and it was the beginnings of a wonderful collegial collaboration and a long-lasting deep friendship. Parallel to this, Kersti Weiss and I began to establish psychodrama as an organisational specialty in the Burckhardthaus's continuing education program.

"Who is who" - a legendary event

In the years following 1983 the Burckhardthaus became a central venue in Germany for psychodrama training groups and special seminars, especially for the two Moreno Institutes in Stuttgart and Überlingen. One legendary event remains an unforgettable memory today: The Institute invited all training leaders to a plenary meeting under the title: "Who is who". The event was chaired by Prof. Raoul Schindler from Austria, who was probably the most renowned sociometry specialist at the time.

An anonymous questionnaire was used to gather the opinion of employees of the institute, including questions such as: "With whom from the Institute would you like to lead a self-experience group?" and "Who would you like to see take a stronger role in the leadership of the Überlingen institute?" The resulting rankings were then published in plenary, and this meeting was probably one of the most confrontational in Überlingen's institute history because both self-perceptions and the perceptions of others concerning individuals' personal status were ruthlessly uncovered and, of course, these did not always match.

This meeting was not to be without personal consequences. In the following years, I worked closely with Ildikó and we developed special seminars on a range of particular topics, including the special seminar "Fundamentals of Sociometry", which has in the meantime become a "must". These topics were often chosen because they were those which occupied us a lot. Thus we offered a special seminar to the Überlinger Institut with the title "One does not speak about money". The initial reactions were rather restrained. "Who would sign up for such a topic?" It became a bestseller in the history of the institute. Soon afterwards, we developed another successful advanced seminar entitled "The **eros** of money".

Loss of the psychodramatic homeland - and a new beginning

Ildikó, who had been doing further training for the Moreno Institute in Hungary for some time, asked Grete Leutz at a staff meeting whether the Institute would pay travel subsidies for these events. Grete categorically rejected this. This led to a split between Grete and Ildikó and also to a split among the teaching staff of the Überlingen Institute. Some went with Ildikó while others wanted to keep the Überlingen Institute as their home institute.

I decided wholeheartedly for Ildikó and her idea to found a European Psychodrama Institute. However, this decision also resulted in the introduction of an "incompatibility principle" by the Überlingen Institute which meant that it was not possible to work simultaneously for them and for the Psychodrama Institute for Europe. As a result, I lost my psychodramatic home during this time. That was very painful. But as the saying goes, "There's magic in every beginning."

In the following period I worked at many events of the Psychodrama-Institute for Europe e.V. in Germany and also in Hungary and Poland. Together with Ildikó I participated in several final colloquia for those graduating from the advanced training course in Budapest. I conducted special seminars on the basics of sociometry for the "PIfE".

I would like to mention two major events that have had a major impact on my work at PIfE: The two European Psychodrama Congresses, in Gelnhausen in 1995 and in Berlin in 2007. At the latter, myself, Dr. Angela Janouch, Charlotte Sturm, and Bernd Fichtenhofer formed the organizing committee.

What else I have to say...

- In psychodrama and particularly in sociometry I found the method of my choice, developed it, extended it, and used it in various fields of application. Of course, this

Kommentiert [Office2]: Noch ein Begriff, mit dem ich nicht vertraut bin: "Triebstruktur". Dies habe ich im Internet mit "eros" übersetzt. Alternativ könnte hier "attraction" benutzt werden.

was never psychodrama and sociometry alone but always a combination of these with other approaches from change management, organizational psychology, systemic consultation, project management, etc..

- Moreno speaks of psychodrama as an "invitation to an encounter". I have experienced this myself and have tried to pass it on to future psychodramatists in a lively way. It was always important for me to regard psychodrama and sociometry as an approach and to integrate them into my own personality and professional challenges.
- Moreno calls sociometry the method of fathoming the truth of the group. This has proven to be my preferred technique in the areas of team development and organisational consulting, and I don't know of a better or more efficient tool for analysing and developing groups, teams, and organizations.
- An important psychodrama teacher of mine, Sarah Kirchknopf, once said: "Nothing human is alien to a psychodramatist!!" For me, this describes a fundamental attitude, namely to take people's issues seriously in psychodramatic work and to accompany them without being patronising.
- In retrospect, it is clear to me that my encounter with psychodrama in 1976 set the course for the development of my personality as a human being and for as a professional, for which I am grateful. Psychodrama and sociometry are both life-affirming concepts for me on which I can still draw to this day.

Three people who were important for my identity as a psychodramatist and who served as role models for me as psychodrama teachers unfortunately left my social circle far too early. They deserve my very special thanks for all the many experiences we shared, for the way in which they shaped me, and ultimately for the psychodramatic perspective and competence which I have today:

- Dr Rainer Bosselmann, deceased 29.12.2008
- Sarah Kirchknopf, deceased 20.6.2013
- Ildikó Mävers, deceased 17.11.2015

Dr Manfred Gellert

Treasurer of the Psychodrama Institute for Europe e.V. from 1993 - 2000