

# **Traveling as Spontaneity Training: If you want to become a psychodramatist, travel the world!**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The experience of traveling has the power to provide us with rich experiential learning experiences and a deeper understanding of psychodrama theory. I offer this article as a personal discourse highlighting how traveling has offered me significant contributions in my evolution as a psychotherapist and psychodramatist. Both JL and Zerka Moreno provide us with role modeling throughout their lives as travelers and world therapists. It is this author's claim that through international travel one can exercise their capacity for spontaneity and creativity, learn to communicate non-verbally, and develop a trust for the universal presence of tele. Traveling provides us with a deeper awareness of ourselves and the world around us. Expanding our sociometry beyond our own social atoms, which is often limited in terms of diversity, allows us to experience the wisdom of Moreno's teachings and come to an acknowledgement of both the *humanness* and *godlikeness* of all people.

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## **Travel as Spontaneity Training**

Zerka Moreno famously exclaimed “If you want to see the world, become a psychodramatist” (Hudgins 2017, pg. 81). Before becoming a psychodramatist, I traveled the world - well, as much as I could while enrolled school and working full-time. I have come to believe that my experiences traveling have served as the most comprehensive spontaneity training that I have received thus far.

Long before the development of psychodrama, young Jacob Levy Moreno traveled and migrated around the Mediterranean Sea from Romania, Austria (Austria-Hungary), Italy, Germany, and Turkey (Ottoman Empire) before moving to New York in 1925 (Moreno, 2014). He claimed to have been born in 1889 on a traveling boat within the Black Sea (Marineau 2014), therefore the role of “traveler” was one he held from the day of his birth. Likewise, this article was born while on a trip to China in June 2017 with Dr. Steven Durost to attend psychodrama trainings offered by Dr. Kate Hudgins. During this trip, I had the honor of attending Zerka Moreno’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in Xiamen, China with the Chinese Psychodrama Association sponsored by Huaqiao University and Present Management Consulting Corporation. My spontaneity training through traveling started several years earlier, beginning with my first international trip to Mexico. At twenty years old, I was alone in a new country with a foreign language and a different culture, having no (known) sociometric connections and just my backpack – if I was not fully spontaneous, I don’t know that I would have survived. Maybe that is a bit dramatic, but Moreno did say that only the spontaneous will survive (1953). I found creative ways to travel cheaply and as often as possible. Colombia came two months later, followed by parts of Europe, Turkey, the Middle East, and North Africa on a solo tour around the Mediterranean. Within six months, most of my passport was full.

## **Spontaneity and Tele**

Fear is the biggest enemy of spontaneity (Moreno 1953; Tomasulo 2011). Don’t be afraid to travel, don’t be afraid of other peoples’ differences, and notice when you project onto others before even getting to know them. My friends told me that I would be kidnapped by drug cartels in South America, however I ended up making life-long friends (and later marrying a woman from South America!). My family insisted that, as an American, I would be killed by terrorists if I went to the Middle East; instead, through an experience of synchronicity (starting in Istanbul) I was welcomed as the special guest of a Bedouin chief in Jordan. In both cases, the *transferences*, “the pathological distortion of tele”, from my friends and family caused them to project negatively upon an entire group of people. It was the actualization of *tele*, “the socio-gravitational factor responsible for the degree of reality of a social configuration above chance”, which is “not projective but cooperative”, that made these life-altering experiences possible (Moreno 1947, pg. 24). In my travels, the most beautiful and unbelievable experiences always seem to occur when I am able to transcend my transferences and connect to others with shared tele. Zerka Moreno (2000, pg. 101) even describes tele as “the human’s compass to the world”!

Responding adequately to newness require spontaneity (Moreno 1953). Traveling to new places is the closest experience we can have to the state of a newborn child during which all objects and experiences are novel. The spontaneity needed by a child to respond adequately to so much newness is unimaginable! Likewise, the traveler is one who has demonstrated significant spontaneity, resourcefulness, and creativity. Moreno wrote that “God is spontaneity” (2011, pg.

15), and believed spontaneity to be cosmic energy (1953); the traveler who has accessed his spontaneity is indeed on a cosmic journey!

### **Communication Beyond Words**

Traveling is experiential learning. I learned about non-verbal communication long before my graduate school internships by trying to navigate foreign countries alone without speaking the language. The only communication possible becomes non-verbal. Tracking body language and somatic cues became essential to judge the safety of a situation. Using my hands, body movement, posture, facial expression, and tone of voice became the only way to convey a message without words and language. There were periods of multiple days during which I did not speak more than a few words, but nevertheless was able to communicate with my body. Traveling is an internship in non-verbal communication.

### **Uncovering Personal and Societal Histories of Suffering**

Traveling provides us with an education of histories, and offers us the chance for an encounter. As I walked the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, my imagination runs wild, seeing the leaders of the ancient world coming to speak to the oracle – I wondered what I would ask the oracle. As I wandered the streets of Konya, Turkey, my mind wandered, brining me to an imaginal encounter with Rumi. Experiences like these activate our capacity for entering surplus reality in a way quite similar to psychodrama. Traveling is just as much about exploring the outer world as it is exploring the inner world. Mankind is full of great suffering, which, in a strange way, doubles and mirrors the suffering within each of us. If one can travel to the scary, conflicted, and uncharted places in the world, then surely (s)he can explore the scary, conflicted, and uncharted parts of self as well. Travel is a deeply spiritual, shamanic, and revolutionary undertaking. Through traveling we learn about ourselves, develop trust in ourselves, and may even discover a *canon of creativity* within. “We travel because we need to, because distance and difference are the secret tonic of creativity. When we get home, home is still the same. But something in our mind has been changed, and that changes everything” (Lehrer 2010).

In some of my travels, I went to places on the planet where most people are told to avoid. Interestingly, these places are the ones where the sociodynamic effect has made the biggest impacts. It would seem as though we are told to avoid looking at the sociodynamic effect! In my development as a social worker, I learned more about the global manifestations of the sociodynamic effect by seeing it with my own eyes than by reading about it in a text book. This underlying social force influences larger societal problems including wealth inequality, class systems, war, military occupation, racism, apartheid, religious discrimination, collective trauma, and discrimination based on gender and sexuality. One may not even need to leave their own country to see most of the above, but when we stay in once place, we normalize our surroundings and we lose both context and perspective. The curious exploration of newness and difference challenged my beliefs about the world, myself, and about human nature. Moreno has called us to study and measure the sociodynamic effect, which we cannot do when we are busy avoiding the places where it is most active and has created the most consequences.

### **Expanding Our Sociometry to Magnify the Unity within Humanity**

Traveling provides us with new, direct experiences with other social groups. It helps us to expand our sociometry and cultural consciousness beyond our immediate family and community. Before the internet, *telephone*, and written word, traveling or meeting a traveler was the only way to learn of other social-cultural groups and gain knowledge of the world. Cultural exchanges provide us with rich learning experiences and offer new ways of doing things. In encountering different cultures, we can observe how social roles manifest similarly and/or differently than in our own culture. An exploration of the cultural influences on social roles provides with the opportunity to expand the perceived limits of our roles, role repertoires, and social networks. We have an opportunity to experience “the unity within humanity, what connects us to one another and to the whole of mankind” (Schreiber 2016, p. 76) only through an authentic exploration and expansion of our sociometry.

As I encountered different *forms* of culture, language, geography, politics, and religions, I came to realize that I understood less and less about the world. However, at the same time, I found a deeper understanding of the *formlessness*, or *primordial nature* (Moreno 2012, pg. 14) within each human. Although the content in our lives is different, we all share an existential commonality (Giacomucci, in press). The paradox is that as I encountered more and more of the universe of forms in a state of spontaneity, I came to experience the formlessness of the 1<sup>st</sup> universe, where all events and people are sacred (Moreno 2012, pg. 14). Traveling provides not only a deeper realization of our shared *humanness* (somatic, psyche, social), but also the realization of our shared “*godlikeness*” (Moreno 2012, pg. 22), which expresses itself through spontaneity and creativity. A few years later, when I read Moreno’s writings and began studying Sociatry, I finally had language to label many of the experiences and ideas that had been forming within me.

### **Psychodramatists as World Therapists**

Moreno called us to be world therapists (1953), which requires us to expand our sociometry beyond just our community or our country. “A truly therapeutic procedure must have an objective no less than the whole of mankind” (Moreno 1953, pg. 1). Our objective must be both the *whole* of mankind, and the *wholeness* of mankind. How can we set an objective of healing society, or the whole of mankind, if we haven’t first explored and seen the whole of mankind? Moreno’s famous opening of *Who Shall Survive?* was inspired by the story of a traveling physician who journeys to treat one patient but comes across so many others with the same malady and “finds that no man can be treated singly but all men together” (Moreno 1953, pg. 426; Moreno 1923)!

Zerka offers us her role-modeling of as a world therapist who “spread psychodrama worldwide, bringing together many cultures under the banner of spontaneity and creativity” (Hudgins 2017). And so I exclaim to you, if you want to become a psychodramatist, travel the world!

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