



## KATE'S THEORETICAL MUSINGS

Hello, dear friends.

As you'll notice in our workshop flyers, we're definitely concentrating on the transgenerational and multi-racial/gender aspects of trauma work this year. As I think about why I chose this theme for the year, it seems clear that it has to do with spontaneity and creativity—themes that I talked about in our first newsletter last November. I find it important to remind myself as well as others that, no matter the issue the protagonist or group deals with, the aim of psychodrama is to help people reach a state of spontaneity so they can create, and co-create, their lives. The often quoted definition, that spontaneity is 1.) an adequate response to a new situation, or 2.) a novel response to an old situation, holds true as a baseline clinical theory on which we can ground our therapeutic interventions.

Going back to when I first “found” psychodrama at the original Beacon Asylum, where the first psychodrama stage was built and used for decades, it was this concept of humans as creative beings that have the right and ability to co-create their lives with others that drew me to psychodrama. It is still one of the draws along with the concept of Surplus Reality.

Surplus reality is a psychodrama term that, when translated into everyday language, means the organizing and experiencing of a reality that exists in our own subjective awareness at any moment in time. This surplus reality can include any ideas, wishes, and dreams of the near and distant future—i.e., anything out of what is actually happening in the moment. Yet it is based on the moment. Each person has their own surplus reality of thoughts, feelings, instincts and values, all the while interacting with others who have their own sets of different surplus realities. Just writing this I see an entire universe of chemical reactions with atoms bouncing off one another. It can be quite chaotic, or quite exciting, with all those possibilities for growth and change. How one reacts in any moment changes the surplus reality so that in some moments thoughts might be dominant, in others emotions may take over. Our spontaneity shows itself in situations as we adapt to the here-and-now with ourselves and with others, thereby

developing an ever-expanding role-repertoire. We can use these newly developed roles in other situations, but the roles themselves will have to change to address each new situation. If they don't change, we're not being spontaneous and we become stagnant, redundant, and predictable (not necessarily stable). So, there is a never-ending and exciting cycle of interaction between spontaneity and surplus reality.

This brings me to one of the unique contributions of the Therapeutic Spiral Model—the Trauma Survivor's Intrapsychic Role Atom (TSIRA)—a simple clinical map that actually defines the roles needed for the internal personal organization to be stable, yet spontaneous and creative. We have long called the roles of stability and strength the TSM Prescriptive Roles. The TSM director *prescribes* (just as a doctor prescribes a curative agent) the creation of these Prescriptive Roles in order that people, individually and collectively, can come together and actually be able to experience and understand others who are different. These Prescriptive Roles, when depicted appropriately for an individual protagonist and/or for a group of people, provide a stable base for enactment of spontaneity (healthy adaptation) in the here-and-now. There are three categories of psychological functioning that are addressed in the TSM Prescriptive Roles:

- 1) Cognition: we first enact the cognitive-based Observing Ego Role, a primary psychological developmental role.
- 2) Next, we help people experience their Restorative Strengths of individual, personal vitality, interpersonal connections, and transpersonal beliefs.
- 3) Finally, TSM says that spontaneity is about being able to hold, in the moment, unknown experiences that still need to be processed safely through Containment. In the TSM Prescriptive Roles we have the clinical action interventions of this healthy containment—the Body Double, the Containing Double, and the Manager of Defenses. Each one is enacted as needed to help protagonists, families, groups, and even cultures stay in a present here-and-now state of conscious awareness, where new creative options are available to consider.

It is this interest in spontaneity, creativity, and surplus reality that guides me further this year in exploring how they apply to the healing of transgenerational trauma. By the time you get this newsletter I will have finished my 2nd collaborative workshop with

Armand Volkas, MFA, BCT, LMFT in Emeryville, California, where we combined his collective approach to trauma called *Healing the Wounds of History* with the TSM focus on the effects of trauma on individuals, couples and families. It has become even more apparent to me that, while we carry the collective traumas of the past, we also can focus on the strengths that those who went before us developed in order to survive.

An example at the collective level may be the many immigrant families who have come to America with the determination, courage, and creativity to survive major differences in languages and customs, and even changes in livelihood. The second and third generation family might experience their elders as being overly strict, inflexible, or stuck in the past. But when that past is carefully examined, succeeding generations can learn to be thankful for the opportunity and freedom to pursue their own dreams in America.

On a personal level with our own clients, many men and women who have experienced sexual abuse as an individual trauma, find that in healing their bodies, minds, and spirits they can help stop this trauma in the new families they create. Last Fall at the Women's Salon, we addressed *Releasing Shame in Interpersonal Relationships*. From the deck set into the woods behind my house, this small women's group was screaming out their pain from being abandoned by their mothers. And then a true miracle happened. One of my neighbors, who is long used to me doing psychodrama and to the strange goings-on that often occur, heard the screams of these women. She came over and knocked on the door to see if everything was alright. We all were clearly struck by this instance of Surplus Reality: my neighbor turned out to be the tangible interpersonal strength of a caring mother, neighbor and friend, offering help. From that healing experience, each woman took home their own developmental repair to their families, determined to break the patterns of transgenerational trauma.

To continue this powerful work, I have created the Women's Salon of May 20-22 on *Finding Your Strengths from Transgenerational Trauma*. We will look at individual and collective legacies that contain strength and power, as well as trauma and abuse. I hope you will join me in my home for a small group of no more than 8 women to release past trauma from the deepest level and to find hope for ourselves and future generations. In short, to experience creativity, spontaneity, and surplus reality.



## **TSM PSYCHODRAMA TECHNIQUE**

While Role Reversal is a cornerstone of psychodramatic techniques, it can be used in many different instances and for many different reasons. Above, I spoke of the need for spontaneity in expanding our role repertoires. Role reversal is a perfect avenue to do this. The following example shows how it expands personal awareness, as well as instilling a connection of similarities and respect for differences. It certainly expands the role repertoire through spontaneity and surplus reality and, in this instance, speaks to transgenerational issues. But most of all, the connection made through role-reversal adds the Prescriptive Role of interpersonal strength, creating additional safety for deep personal and collective issues.

### **Technique: Role Reverse with a Photo**

Group leader or therapist will have an assortment of photos available. Each person in the group will choose a photo with the instruction to pick a person in the photo that seems different or the same as you. Then place the picture in an empty chair for individual work, or chose a person to play the role if you are in a group.

1. Speak from your own role to the person you have chosen. For example, "I am not of your race, but I want to understand and connect with you as I know from psychodrama we are all cosmic beings that can co-create our lives."
2. Then begin to role reverse with the picture/person in the chair by placing something—a scarf or an object of your own—to represent you on the chair you were just in. Or, if you have chosen a person, she or he will now sit in the chair you just occupied, in classic role-reverse style.
3. Now, speak from the role you have chosen/just taken on. For example, "As an Asian woman I have been taught the importance of family and the connections across the generations in a way you probably weren't as a white American woman. I bring a rich history that goes back 5000 years or more. I am truly blessed

to teach you one thing..." And then say what that is. In this case it might be, "Treasure the past to appreciate the present."

4. Return to your own role. If you have role-reversed with a person, then that person repeats to you what you had just said, as in classical role reversal. You take in the truth of the person who is the same or different from you and tell the picture, or person, how you can apply their words to your own life.

In this example, as Kate back in my own role, I might say, "Thank you. Since I am adopted, I often feel my life script, my own surplus reality stops with my adopted parents. You have just made me realize that I can claim to be part of a longer and larger history by remembering my Irish Catholic mother's struggles as a second generation immigrant. I am remembering her attention to prayer, her dedication to my father, and her love for me resulting from her long sought-after role of being a mother. I guess you can say that I, too, have a history."

