
Theory and History

An Exploration of Scene Setting in Psychodrama: The Sociometry of Place

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The rich capacity of scene setting involves the five senses and an exploration of the nuances of place. Scene setting readies the protagonist for action, and connects them to others through the sociometric matrix and contains them in a safe and profound space. The power of setting a scene is often truncated in deference to moving quickly into the full action phase of the drama. Attention to the rich capacity contained within the building of a scene, involving the senses and exploring the nuances of place, can often not only ready the protagonist for action but also connect them to others through the sociometric matrix of surplus reality. Through the re-storying of memories and the opening of new neural network pathways, protagonists come to a richer understanding of the surplus reality of place being co-created in the sociomatrix within the group.

KEYWORDS: Scene setting; surplus reality; warm up; sense memory; EMDR; therapeutic spiral; concretization; here and now; future projection; sociometry; co-unconscious; sociomatrix; sand tray.

In the Same Place

The setting of houses, cafes, the neighborhood
That I've seen and walked through years on end:
I created you while I was happy, while I was sad,
With so many incidents, so many details.
And, for me, the whole of you has been transformed into feeling.

C. P. Cavafy, Greek poet

(Translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sharrard)

Even as I sit writing this, I am creating a scene. The position of my computer at my desk, the coffee I have prepared sitting steaming on its coaster, the room in which I write, my dog dozing in a chair beside me—all are a part of who I am

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in this moment. I incorporate—consciously or not—all my senses: the sounds I hear like the gentle inhale and exhale of that sleeping animal, the distance call of a bird, the view out my window, the smell of toast near ready emerging from the kitchen, and the knowledge I am not alone in this scene and that this scene expands to include this other sub-scene occurring in another room. Even the feel of the keys beneath my fingers and the weight of my body in the chair, my pause to pet the second dog as he comes to investigate my whereabouts, all are ingredients in this scene—this snapshot of domestic life. My feelings, emotions, thoughts, and associations to other days and other scenes expand meaning for me in this time, in this place, and in this moment. And because all the scenes meld and become part of a larger matrix, this scene will become part of a rich humus of experience that will impact every moment and every scene—real and imagined—that is to come.

SCENE SETTING IN PSYCHODRAMA LITERATURE

J. L. Moreno & J. Fox (1989, p. 7), the originator of psychodrama, wrote only briefly on the subject of scene setting and then within the context of space. Moreno stated:

I cannot emphasize sufficiently that in our research the configurations of space as part of the therapeutic process are of the utmost importance. It warms up the protagonist to be and to act himself in an environment which is modeled after that in which he lives.

He also alluded to this importance of place in his writings on the stage as one of the primary instruments of psychodrama. The stage space is an extension of life beyond the reality test of life itself. Reality and fantasy are not in conflict, but both are functions within a wider sphere—the psychodramatic world of objects, persons, and events (Moreno, 1993 [1934, 1953], p. 54).

Narrowing the concept of scene setting yields limited results. Psychodrama books typically devote small passages on the subject (Blatner, 1996; Dayton, 2005; Nolte, 2020), with some exceptions (Garcia & Buchanan, 2000) allocating a section of an article (Wilkens, 1999), an entire chapter, and Wysong (2017), who discusses scene setting in several contexts throughout his training manual. Several authors include scene setting in discussions of processing dramas, notably Kellermann (1992) in his psychodrama director processing checklist.

Articles devoted to scene setting came from Germany (Krüger, 2005) and Australia (Baakman, 1997). Krüger (2005), in fact, lists scene setting as one of his eight essential techniques of psychodrama, viewing the setting of a scene as going in both room and protagonist's psyche. The outer scene structure on stage is a creative expression of the protagonist's image of his conflict system and of his inner map of the conflict, and, therefore, also affects the inner imagination (Krüger, 2005, p. 255).

Others merely define the setting of a scene as a function of setting parameters for a protagonist, further warming them up to the action yet to come.

In scene setting, the protagonist is helped to regain a sense of the “there-and-then” by rebuilding the physical surroundings, describing colors, textures, furniture arrangements, etc. This helps to revive memory and increase involvement and makes the enactment more authentic (Kellermann, 1992, pp. 146–147). Most allude to the rising up of surplus reality in scene construction, acknowledging the tug and pull of the inner and outer world of the protagonist as they anchor a sense of place. Fundamental to psychodramatic action is the establishment of a scene, that is, the creation of a place and time, real or imagined, from the past, the present or the future within the confines of the group space.

Krüger (2005) drops deeper into the process, examining the internal and external processes co-occurring in the setting of a scene. Whether in a fairy tale or in internal conflict processing, or in a psychodrama, the aim and meaning of the scene construction, internally or on stage is always: (1) to create, as Winnicott (1971) professed, a potential space of imagination, or play, for all participants, in addition to the everyday reality of a scene, (2) to capture the elements and roles involved in the conflict and to concretize them in a staged, pictorial way, (3) to make them come to life by positioning them in a space as parts of a system of conflict in the “here and now,” and thus (4) to permit an energetic arc of suspense, characterized by attraction and repulsion, to develop in the space between them, which warms up the group to transition into action (Krüger, 2005, p. 249). Baakman (1997, p. 11) stated a similar belief: “Psychodramatists who direct someone to set a scene, in effect directs that person to make a display of themselves. All aspects of particular scenes set by protagonists, are reflections of the elements of which their inner world is made up.”

Anecdotal stories abound on the subject of scene setting and its past and present masters. Dale Buchanan experienced Jim Enneis, who stated by the time he was done with a scene, “you could hear the clinking of the ice cubes in a glass.” Rory Remer spoke of Carl Hollander, suggesting that a protagonist open the refrigerator when setting the scene at home, believing what was in there, and how it was organized said a lot about the family dynamics.

Yet often when scene setting is mentioned in the literature, it is marked as inconsequential, or warnings are sounded, not wholly unfounded, not to get caught in the trap of a protagonist who fears moving into action by lingering on scene setting, undoing their warm-up process. This seems to be the folly of a new director, who in their own reservations in moving from the comfortable realm of the client interview to the relative unknown of action hesitates by prolonging the protagonist in the setting of an inconsequential scene. It is this discrimination between when, and when not, that the development of a scene is important to the presented issue in a co-unconscious connection between director and protagonist that is created in the formation of the surplus reality of the moment.

Not all psychodramas demand the scrutiny and rigorous concretization and expansion of scene. Others do. In an interview with Karp (2011) later in her life, Zerka Moreno was questioned about her sometimes-abbreviated scene setting. Zerka explained that some scene setting feels nonessential or may distract from a protagonist’s warm-up. Yet in many examples, the scene itself or part of it

becomes one or several auxiliary egos, an essential concretization of something larger, enriching the experience with new insights that might have been overlooked without skillful scene expansion.

THE ROLE OF SENSE MEMORY IN SETTING A SCENE

The enrichment of a scene involves a connection between cognitive and sense memories. St. Augustine said that what we know of the world, we know through our senses, but more than the world, it's how we know ourselves. In connecting to the meaning imbedded in our sense memory, we discover more of who we are! Our neural system carries with it our emotional sense-memories from childhood. Familiar smells, sounds, or places can send a cascade of memories flooding through us that either wrap us up in their warmth or challenge us to maintain our composure (Dayton, 2005, p. 130). The undercurrent of connection and disconnection to ourselves and others is triggered by sense memories, either bringing us closer to our authentic selves or creating roadblocks to information we are unprepared to resolve psychically.

Eastern medicine considers the cooperation between mind, body, and spirit in exploring who we are in the world in the present moment. Traditional Chinese medicine considers that human beings are part of the unified, organic cosmos. The movements and changes in the cosmos and the surrounding natural world have direct or indirect influences on the human body (Gong, 2003, p. 36). Setting a scene is a slice of a protagonist's life that multiplies in meaning as each sense is engaged in its construction.

Blatner (1996), Lippe (1992), and others credit Stanislavski's sense memory techniques as a method to engage the senses and attach affect and emotion to the generation of a scene. Sense memory is exactly what the name implies. It is a *remembering* of the five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. The use of Sense Memory brings a feeling of life to every object that is associated with these five senses (Easty, 1981, p. 24). Krüger (1997) explains the sense memory process in setting a scene as a dance between ego position and perspective. The updating of the recalled ego-position and ego-perspective in space activates the nerve networks of the sensory, motor, visual, hearing, and speech systems and their interconnection opens the various memories belonging to them and allows their contents to flow into the action of the scene (Krüger, 1997, p. 90).

As we—director and group members—connect to the protagonist's scene through our sense memories, we are transmitting co-unconsciously every other scene that links our experience across our lives. Scene setting speaks to memory being state-dependent; that is, we recall more fully when confronted with the physical, psychological, or emotional locus in which the scene occurred (Dayton, 2005, p. 34). The connections deepen on a conscious, unconscious, and co-unconscious level once the scene is activated in our shared reality.

EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF SCENE SETTING

Doty (2001) devoted an entire book on the attachment to ordinary things and the emotion we invest in them. But it is not only the meaning we imbue in objects

but the history and associations that each of us has to an object, be it the first or hundredth time we have seen it. Doty (2001, p. 62) writes, “each is a trigger point of memory, as if packed within it were the very stuff of time.”

Objects in the scene can become auxiliary egos with dramatic relevance in a drama. Imagine the meaning embedded in the objects that fill the home of a hoarder. In one such drama, a protagonist encouraged group members to pile every available object in the room on and around him, creating a sense of what life was like for him in his overflowing apartment. As the objects were cast upon him, he shifted from standing and accepting items to sitting, to lying under a mountain of things, obstructed from view. When role reversing with the many objects he held onto, he battled with the call to let go of a beloved cracked vase, noting the need to leave the oppression of his things while clinging to their solace. From underneath his hoard, the protagonist spoke of the shame he was experiencing, yet beyond the shame laid a sense of security and calm that his “things” consistently brought to him. Only in honoring their value in his lonely world through role reversing could he begin the slow letting go process. What a protagonist experiences when becoming a chair, tree, clock, or dog, depends, to a large extent, on what it is in the inner life of the protagonist that calls for expression (Baakman, 1997, p. 9).

Other elements can also be crucial, such as the time or day, or year, or the approach to a scene, that can be an incremental warm-up to the scene. Wysong (2017) spoke of the importance of describing exteriors, as they can be the “scene before the scene.” Wysong (2017, p. 481) notes, it may be necessary to start the scene from the exterior, as in walking up to a childhood home, naming the families that live nearby, and their significance to the neighborhood and the drama about to unfold. This is particularly useful where childhood memories have been blocked through traumatic events, often erasing years of recollection, both positive and negative. Archibald (1999, p. 15) looked at the history of a place as a method of building connections necessary to create community in the shared recollection of a location. The landscapes and places of childhood are the sensory implants through which we view the rest of the world forever. Our shared reality of a place and time that is created through scene setting connects both protagonist and group members to a sense of place and shared reality of the scene that is enriched by group members own interjects into the time, place, and history of their scenes imposed on the setting. The protagonist does not only imagine or remember a scene but through enactment is enabled to enter the experience of an event (Baakman, 1997, p. 19).

Sometimes, the auxiliary work within scene setting propels the protagonist into the depths of surplus reality so efficiently that the scene setting and its expansion become the drama. I recall a drama that began with a trainee choosing to map out the interior of her grandmother’s kitchen in South America. Her description of the scene as a 5-year-old girl began as the family neared her grandparent’s home after a child’s seemingly forever car ride, as she watched from the window of the car, relishing the wisps of wood smoke rising from the chimney of the kitchen. The interior scene was rich with the aromas of the food

her grandmother (*abuela*) prepared so lovingly and the sound of her voice as she sang softly to herself in Spanish as she stood cooking at the woodburning stove. If this was not compelling enough for the protagonist, when asked to reverse roles with the massive table with its mismatched chairs, we heard the tale of the tree that was felled almost a century before by her grandmother's grandfather to create the table. The table held over a hundred years of stories of celebrations and tragedies that the table had hosted as her ancestors sat there. Waves of nostalgia and homesickness overtook the protagonist as she acknowledged her place in the succession of those who had been a part of that room, a part of that family, a part of that culture, and a part of that legacy.

Another drama involved a protagonist who took them through the elaborate room-by-room remodel of her home that would become a place to invite a partner into yet ended with the insight her home needed to be tailored to her needs, not a fantasy. Through thoughtful scene setting, she created a space where she was enough, and the need to have a conversation with a future partner acquiesced to her having a bubble bath in her "new" tub, content to be enough for herself.

Callahan (1989) has clients with eating disorders set up the room of potential relapse, walking through the scene as they express their thoughts in soliloquy. This scene exploration brings forward the thought and sense triggers they feel along the road to binge eating. Reversing roles with objects (the food, a mirror, and the refrigerator), all can yield rich information in the food battle. Corrective behavior is also presented in scenes where choices nurture the client through healthy behaviors. Carnabucci and Ciotola (2013) have clients with eating disorders set elaborate scenes in places that trigger them, such as kitchens and grocery stores, where it is often the voice of the cookie box or carton of ice cream that has a message of scorn or redemption for them. Through their thoughtful teasing out and concretization of the elements of a scene, Carnabucci and Ciotola (2013) create a careful and gentle restructuring through bringing significant objects in a scene alive.

A protagonist once enacted a scene attached to the feeling of dread he experienced as he walked from the parking lot, pressed the button, and waited for the elevator, rode the elevator up and moved down the hallway to his apartment each evening, knowing he would face the rage of his spouse waiting there. This walk of dread was integral to the issues he wished to confront with his spouse, and his body was already somatically preparing him for discord even before he walked through the door. Keying into this somatic information is often central to a drama, and acts as a spontaneity check at the close of a drama, where somatic information is revisited to note change. The protagonist could "re-walk" the scene with new information, noting the difference both cognitively and somatically after making a decision in the drama to leave their spouse.

Allowing the protagonist to mine their sense and emotional memories associated with a scene brought forth compelling and healing insight for them. Had a director hurried through or curtailed the setting of the scene, precious information linking the there-and-then to the here-and-now would have been lost. The scene became the drama.

SURPLUS REALITY, SOCIOMETRY OF PLACE, AND THE SOCIOMETRIC MATRIX

Although Moreno (1965) did not address scene setting in any expansive way, he did write extensively about the creation of surplus reality for a protagonist, an objective of scene setting and an extension of, and immersion into, a sense of place. Moreno (1965, pp. 212–213) most simply defined surplus reality as a mode of subjective experience beyond reality that is enhanced by imagination. This ability to perceive the world as connected to a healing space outside and at once within the boundaries of our perceived reality may be one of the true gifts of his legacy to psychotherapy. The autonomous healing center contains every aspect of every person and place across all that has ever existed; and all these resources, inner and outer, are readily available to the protagonist willing to explore surplus reality. Within surplus reality's framework, universal psychotherapy had been facilitated, where time, space, reality, and cosmos are considered (Telias, 2019, p. 140).

In sociometry we measure human contact and interaction (Z. Moreno, 2000, p. 18). In the psychodramatic world we are tasked as directors to monitor the sociometry of a group from the moment a person arrives. This sociometry: how we enter a room, whom we greet and in what order, who speaks to us, where we sit and who we sit next to, how we position ourself in our seat, our body language, and facial expression, all are a part of the scene we are creating in that moment. We are all, in every instance, in the many conscious and unconscious choices we make, setting the scene of our lives. And each of those decisions interweaves in the visible and invisible sociometry of the scenes we are co-creating. Each sociometric choice is also a portion of a warm-up to action. Within each scene we create an allegiance between director, protagonist, and group members that opens up surplus reality. This matrix of reality has the capacity to both achieve catharsis and move the shared story of a particular place forward to a new understanding rich in metaphor and meaning. Moreno (1978) viewed this social reality as made up of an external reality and an underpinning of a sociometric matrix made up of the constant dynamics of choice-making influencing each moment in time. Zuretti (1994, p. 218) looked at the linking of our social atoms to create a shared structure or sense of place. The individual social atoms, intricately related to each other throughout the matrices, create a network of social matrices connected to each other by human relationships, a sociometric network, which goes beyond the formal structure.

The social reality itself is the dynamic interweaving of an interaction of the sociometric matrix with the outer external society. Remer (2006) explored this importance of place in his research and its connection to Morenian thought. Enactment theory construct states the scene provides a matrix around which the action occurs on the stage (Moreno, 1978, p. 60). True scene expansion into the sociometric matrix of the group therefore expands the surplus reality of place to incorporate the elements of time, space reality, and all that is available from the cosmos. Psychodrama brings the entire cosmos into play (Moreno, 1965, p. 213). Moreno (1965) invites us into a limitless space, incorporating all that is

conscious and unconscious in our choice-making. In connection to each other, choices merge to create a scene informed by the sociometric web.

The sociometry of the scene is part of the sociometric matrix. All human culture is expressed through a “scene” in one form or another.

Just as we enter the psyche of the protagonist in a drama, relating to where the shared experience of their story and ours intersect, we also are revealing the experience a scene brings up for us, rich in the memories and associations it brings forth. Hale (2005) explored this aspect of sociometry in a workshop that she led, *A scene setting exercise with a sociometric twist*, at the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama (AGSPP) Conference 2005. In it, she had participants recall a significant scene and then asked for a volunteer to have their scene set for them. The protagonist then entered the scene, offering a soliloquy to explore the thoughts and emotions associated with the scene. Others were invited to enter the scene and to make it their own either by adding a component or role reversing with an element of the scene. The goal was to capture a sociometric connection through the scene, and ultimately to the protagonist, through attachment to the scene. Continued externalization makes concrete the situations, stories, and dynamics as if it is happening now, providing a stage for action, which is dramatic, for both individual and social network in which he/she relates (Hale, 1985, p. 7). The result is a connection within the group that existed but had not come forward prior to the expansion of the scene.

Scene expansion reinforces the multitude of sociometric connections stimulated before, during, and after any human interaction, a process placed under a sociometric microscope in enactment of a psychodrama. Through thoughtful attention to the details of a scene, we both construct and reconstruct intersychic and interpersonal scenes simultaneously for the protagonist, and, because anyone in the room enters surplus reality, the scene sparks spontaneity, creativity, and often sense memory for them too. When a group is created, there is already a tele structure existing before the group comes together that includes the personal history of all members (Zuretti, 1994, pp. 215–216). The expression that comes forward becomes part of the sociometry of the group, as each person present attaches their own meaning to the experience, tapping into their deep well of memories, sensations, and feelings.

The symbolic construction of the scene solidifies many different relationship experiences of a protagonist (or a group) in a specific field of conflict transcending place and time. This usually has a special cognitive value because it not only solidifies many different experiences in one image but also, in accordance with the principle of emergence (the whole is greater than the sum of its parts), creates an additional, completely new, holistic statement about the field of conflict, which re-stories the recollected individual experiences and gives them new meaning (Krüger, 2005). In scene setting, the point of connection between protagonist and group members can sometimes be found in the poignancy of place, where the sum of memory, cognitions, and feelings leads the group co-unconscious toward a new resolution of place.

SCENE SETTING AS A CO-CREATION BETWEEN DIRECTOR AND PROTAGONIST

As psychodrama directors we are tasked to at once connect to and empathize with a protagonist while bracketing any conscious psychic material that may interfere with the successful meeting of a psychodramatic contract. In a connection that is both conscious and unconscious, director and protagonist filter through the myriad materials moving between them to create and re-create a scene that allows new meaning to come forward in a scene. A central model of the universe hovers continuously in our minds, if not consciously then unconsciously, whether magical, theological, or scientific (Moreno, 1956, p. 359).

The depth of surplus reality is limited only by the spontaneity of a director in response to their protagonist. Protagonist and director co-create a reality that is unlimited by conventions of time or space. The director, in an act of co-creation that includes their view of the world, has some influence on the protagonist's set-up of a scene. The basis for setting up the scene is always the interaction of the protagonist's imagination and memory with the imagination of the therapist who is supporting the protagonist in setting up the scene (Krüger, 2005).

Z. Moreno (2000, p. 18) offered this explanation of setting a scene in surplus reality.

He [J.L. Moreno] knew he could not truly meet the psyche of the protagonist unless he lived in the surplus reality together with the protagonist. And he made us, the group members and auxiliary egos, live there as well and helped us live comfortably in our very own surplus reality. Once you tap into a person's psyche, you reach a dimension which is beyond subjective and objective reality. It has a timelessness and spacelessness about it that puts us in touch with cosmic powers.

As directors we are tasked with being the most spontaneous person present. Keying into the cognitive, emotional, and somatic aspects of a scene allows co-creation of a drama that utilizes the sociometric matrix and the conscious and co-unconscious of every person in the room.

EXAMPLES OF EXPANSION OF SCENE SETTING

It is our charge as psychodramatists to create a space that is contained enough for safety and has the capability of expansion beyond the current reality of the protagonist and group. Within these parameters, scene setting in psychodramatic enactment takes many forms.

Tapping into the cultural legacy of a scene allows a sociometric history to emerge for the protagonist and for the group members, deepening connection. Hudgins (2019, personal communication on the topic of scene-setting) stated:

We often use scenes of family values, or cultural traditions, or spiritual connections to start off a workshop when we are trying to build

our Prescriptive Roles of the Strengths—transpersonal, interpersonal and personal. Small groups will enact and playback a moment of a strength, value, culture, connection to concretize and bring alive strengths such as loyalty, intelligence, tenderness, legacy, etc.

An underpinning for sociometric matrix that includes place is the concept of our connection through our cultural lineage, connecting us both through a shared mutual past and a larger matrix of the collective past of our ancestors. All of human culture is expressed through a “scene” in one form or another. All socio-dynamic processes take place within a scene. Without a scene neither an individual nor a group has a way of expressing culture or conserving cultural values (Baakman, 1997, p. 18).

Bacallao and Smokowski (2017a, 2017b) explored immigrant families living in two worlds through exploring the elements of both cultural realities for the family members, often by placing them in a scene of the culture they had left behind, the one they were experiencing with varied success in the United States, or the in-between place of not being fully in either. Through their respectful look at the nuances of each reality, families were able to move through the mourning process of what had been taken away from them in their displacement toward reconciliation of what could be ahead for their immigrant family as they negotiated a new place.

This same phenomenon of connection within a group on countless levels is also explored in the sharing and exploration of images created by group members as the raw material of scene setting.

Both Gong (2003) and Peterson (2003) bring a client’s artwork “alive” through recreating it in action. Paying close attention to the nuances of color, shape, and space, both dynamic and empty, they create an alternative view for the protagonist fueled by the power of their artwork. Once image takes form, sociometry and the psychodramatic group process can operate more fully. Even before any words are spoken, a visual sociometry develops, that is, a network of connections among group members through their images (Peterson, 2003, pp. 84–85). The media itself (paper, clay, collage, etc.) can literally become the stage, and the emerging images become the auxiliaries (Peterson, 2003, p. 94). Just as a scene may be altered in a traditional psychodrama, a protagonist may wish to alter their artwork to realign their world, making tangible the changes they have made through their drama. This altering of visual art or sand scenes offers a tangible change in the surplus reality for the protagonist.

Similar explorations of scene setting are undertaken by many clinicians using sand trays with miniature figures. Notably, Toscani (1998) created scene in the sand with clients of the therapeutic spiral’s Trauma Survivor’s Intrapyschic Role Atom (TSIRA) in the containment of a sand tray. Setting a scene enrolling transpersonal, intrapsychic, and interpersonal resources in a scene in the sand gives a distance and objectivity while dealing with subjective material associated to traumatic experiences. Being outside the tray offers the protagonist a “mirror” position that allows for an incremental dive into the trauma work. Others use

blocks (Kruger, 2005), a chess board (Baakman, 1997), and puppets and stuffed animals (Carnabucci & Ciotola, 2013).

The building of a “safe place” is largely in the realm of scene setting. This concept of safe space is utilized in many forms of psychotherapy, perhaps the most known being in eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR). Shapiro (2001), in her groundbreaking book, *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)*, works to facilitate access to a client’s traumatic memory network so that information processing is enhanced, with new associations forged between the traumatic memory and more adaptive memories or information, beginning with the creation of an internal safe place. Many psychodramatists also are trained in EMDR and find the philosophies complementary.

As Shapiro (2001, p. 125) elaborates, the objective is for clients to create a safe place in their imagination before processing. This emotional oasis can be used for a temporary rest during processing, as an aid to closing down the disturbance in order to end a session, and as a way to deal with disturbing material that may arise between sessions. In EMDR, attention is placed on the minute details of an imagined place of safety for the client to process any negative thoughts or feelings about their psychic retreat. This safe place then becomes a resource for a client working through the process of healing from trauma. EMDR clinicians monitor the feelings and sensations of their clients all throughout their journey, carefully processing any negative association with the five senses, knowing that any of these might trigger a negative association.

Similar associations are recognized as part of the trauma bubble of the Therapeutic Spiral Model (TSM) (Hudgins, 2002). Trauma bubbles are encapsulated spheres of active psychological awareness that contain unprocessed experiences. These experiences are disassociated and split off from conscious awareness. Like bubbles, they can be popped unexpectedly, pouring images, sensations, sounds, smells, and tastes into awareness without words (Hudgins, 2002, p. 21). Essential to the TSM model is the establishment of an army of resources, intra-personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal, many with prescribed roles and functions, to support and guide a protagonist through a drama.

In TSM clinical practice, these strengths are first concretized (usually with colored scarves) in a safety structure, called the circle of strengths, which involves group members identifying their own and each other’s strengths in a ritual acknowledging the self and others. The circle of strengths reinforces group connections, acknowledges strengths, and creates a physical circle, which serves as both a container for the trauma and a stage for the psychodrama (Giacomucci, 2018/2019, p. 119). This circle—a scene of containment—provides the safe place of potential healing for group members, and a concretized surplus reality that incorporates the shared strengths of group members.

Hudgins (2019, personal communication through email on the topic of scene setting) notes:

The Circle represents your brain. Your brain in action. Scenes are not set in your living room, or a future projected place. Scenes are

taken from following the neural pathways in your brain and bringing them alive spontaneously on the stage. Often TSM psychodramas are created with a fully trained Action Trauma Team, several sub scenes will all be set in action concurrently, just as the brain is often aware of more than one feeling, scene, or outcome.

P. Remer and R. Remer (2019, Safe Place Workshop notes and personal communication through email) often utilize their own safe place concretization technique. Initially, it is a simple scene setting. Once it is established, the safe place scene has a host of uses and, in fact, is an invaluable tool in working with anyone, but trauma survivors in particular. The goal is to produce a calming and serene feeling that can be evoked quickly and easily whenever desired or needed. As with any scene setting, the impact is heightened by using all the senses to anchor a sense of calm and well-being in a controllable and concrete way. Safe place is akin to relaxation, (self)-hypnosis, visual imagery, and other similar experiences, all of which can be incorporated as desired to make the technique more effective and efficient (P. Remer & R. Remer, 2019, Safe Place Workshop notes and personal communication through email).

Amatruda (2003) created a ritual with children around a Magic Carpet—a space of safety and exploration they carefully created at the start of each session. Or she would encourage children to enter the place inside a kaleidoscope, a dream scene, or a hospital room to concretize their desires and fantasies.

Burmeister (2000, p. 210) in working with traffic accident victims creates a scene that involves personal items of a client to evoke positive memories and markers of their cultural identity to fortify a client even before taking them into the formation of a safe place. The subsequent safe place contains helpful body sensations and other positive sense memories along with interpersonal and symbolic resources brought forward from this initial empowerment scene. Psychodrama may thus symbolically transform tragic life scenarios in terms of both changing a traumatic event and allowing for a different emotional response (Kellermann, 2000, p. 31).

CONCLUSIONS

All events—all human experience—take place within a scene. This scene is both internal and external simultaneously, connecting us in our humanness to the social matrix that unites us all as one. The social reality itself is the dynamic interweaving and interaction of the sociometric matrix with the outer external society. The sociometric matrix does not exist by itself, just as the outer society does not exist by itself; the latter is continually pushed and pulled by the structure underneath (Moreno, 1993 [1934, 1953], p. 53).

Through tapping into the sociometric matrix of a protagonist and the group, the world is a rich interconnected place that offers vast possibilities leading to healing. Through scene setting, we have an opportunity to hone the immense depth of sociometric connection that exists in every drama, in every group.

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