

CHRISTCHURCH INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING IN PSYCHODRAMA



# Psychodramatic Couple Therapy Training

## HANDBOOK

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Current online version is here: <https://psychodrama.org.nz/PCT-Training-Handbook>

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*"... an active form of psychotherapy in which the personal and interpersonal problems ... are treated at the same time."*

Moreno, 1977:233.

*"Forms of treatment are necessary which are able to reach the interpersonal syndromes as deeply, if not more so, than it would a single person. Interpersonal therapy represents a special category; it might well be classified apart from individual and group psychotherapy"*

Moreno & Moreno, 1975:45.

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In the case of a social situation, such a love relationship, for instance, the status nascendi exists when the lovers meet and begin to warm up to one another. The last phase, the phase before the anti-climax, in a love-relationship (marriage, for example) is all too likely to be a stereotype, and in many social relationships similar stereotyped institutions are the end products, parallel to the cultural conserve stage in a work of art. Moreover, in the contemplation of, say, the marriage relationship between two people, the consideration of all the phases leading up to it is omitted. It is not to be assumed, however, that processes of human relations cease to exist when a cultural conserve or a stereotyped relationship enters the picture. In either case, a new social situation is begun which requires special methods of investigation. The social sciences have been too much preoccupied with studies of processes after they have become cold. The status nascendi has been neglected. Most of the studies of man-woman relationships occur when the anti-climax has been reached — when the flow of feeling between the man and woman has dried up and the love which brought	

them together is over. The study of finished products, of cultural conserves and of stereotypes has, of course, its place and its meaning in a system of social science. The preoccupation with them is not surprising. It is much easier to study a relationship when it is finished and established and when it has the deceptive appearance of being an end-result. Perhaps this is why sociology has been chiefly concerned with the study of the tangible structures in society. But it is from the social situations in statu nascendi that the more important inspirations and decisions come. Their deep impress upon all human interrelations has been demonstrated. The problem has been how to get at these intangible, esoteric phenomena — how to study them. It is, of course, important that they be studied systematically. A human society without these phenomena in statu nascendi would present a lifeless appearance. Therefore, social research which does not give its main attention to these phenomena must be sterile. Any plan for the betterment of society, for the improvement of human relations, is hopeless without them. Therefore, theories and methods had to be found. It is at this cardinal point that sociometric and psychodramatic studies have stepped into the breach. The results to date are meagre, it must be admitted, but the road is now open.	19
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## Preface

Statement from the Outline for this Course:

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Outline.pdf>

"In 2009 I wrote an article in the AANZPA Journal called *The Imago Affair*. I concluded with the intention: "... to explore how we can develop relationship therapy beyond what we know today. I think we can use the psychodrama process to expand and to enrich couple therapy, to explore possibilities and to consciously learn and evolve." Since then, I have been practising and teaching couple therapy using psychodrama. It is a comprehensive and holistic approach. In May 2018 I was ready to offer this course.

"Couple therapy is a form of group work and psychodrama. This training is a form of group work and psychodrama. In this course we apply the same values and methods as we do in the work with couples. We produce encounter. The relationship is a drama. Each partner learns to be the protagonist, auxiliary ego and to be collaborative co-leaders in the relationship. We understand the process through role theory. We think in terms of warm up, action, sharing. The therapy room becomes the stage. These technical terms are rich and useful in the training but we don't use them so much with couples, nor should we. We keep our theory backstage and relate to the couple in a way they understand, and feel at home. Approaching a couple with the theory and practice of psychodrama as a guide in the background is a delight. I'm enthusiastic to offer a course which trains people in psychodrama by focusing on one application of the method. I am sure the course will be of value to new and experienced therapists and psychodramatists.

"We live in a time of emergency on the planet. I am reminded of J.L. Moreno's book, *Who shall Survive?* (1978) as I write this. He was dismayed that survival was approached by biological and technological means and not by social means. He developed new relational tools and they remain vital for the survival of humankind. This vision motivates me to bring this course in psychodramatic couple therapy to your attention. My hope is you will be inspired and take up the call."

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to psychodrama colleagues who have collaborated with me in the application of psychodrama with couples. Thanks to Imago colleagues who have listened to me so well as I reflect on couple therapy.

Thanks to Claire Guy, Brenda Rawling and Sylvia Israel who have co-led couple therapy training workshops with me in the past.

Thanks to

Claire Guy — Centre for Experiential Learning and Development, Nelson

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These trainers offered to be a backup in case illness etc. Thanks to the trainees in Psychodramatic Couple Therapy (PCT for short) who have made such a bold step in learning. Thanks to the many couples who have explored and experimented with me as they deal with some of the most important moments in their life.

## Introduction

Please read the Outline for a concise summary of the course.

The course is offered by the Christchurch Institute for Training in Psychodrama (CITP) <https://psychodrama.org.nz/citp> Successful completion of the course leads to a certificate in psychodramatic couple therapy. Training involves attending workshops, reading, writing, peer practice and supervision. Participants will attend a minimum of 12 days (90 hours) of workshops over two years. (See Part 3 for details)

The PCT course is psychodramatic in two ways. One way is that we apply the principles and practice of psychodrama to working with couples. The second is that the training is psychodramatic. Psychodrama is effective experiential learning by discovery and experimentation. It is learning by doing. The course is a training in psychodrama. Psychodrama is highly relational so fittingly the basis for couple therapy. Moreno's seminal book "Who Shall Survive?" had the subtitle "A New Approach to the Problem of Human Interrelations" (Leopold Von Wiese, 1949) In 1978 the subtitle was "Foundations of Sociometry, Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama".

## About PCT

Psychodrama can be applied in almost every sphere of human endeavour, couple therapy is one application of the method. Psychodramatists have been active in couple therapy and the application of the method is evolving. Trainees can expect to be part of that evolutionary, experimental process.

## The Aim of the Course (From the Outline.)

Is for participants to

- Gain confidence and competence in working with couples.
- Develop a vital and responsive therapeutic stance with couples.
- Discover the value of working with couples.
- Enjoy the challenges of couple therapy.
- Learn the fundamentals of couple therapy based on the large body of psychodrama theory and practice that has developed over almost a century.
- Be part of a group engaged in training and collaborative learning in couple therapy.
- Develop the curiosity and the capacity to be a lifelong learner

## Workshops (from the Outline)

Workshops involve teaching, demonstrations, enactments, supervised practice, writing and group interaction. Psychodramatic methods including group work, sociometry, sociodrama and role training will be used. We will get to know each other and connect in new ways. We will collaborate and learn using the same methods we bring to the couples we work with.

Workshops are multilevel, suited to new as well as experienced practitioners. The workshops will have one or two trainers. Participants are asked to bring forward relevant content from their work and development and relate their concerns to the material in the Handbook. We will then work together with central concerns of the group.

### **Training and Supervision Plan (from the Outline)**

Trainees in the early stages of training will make a plan indicating areas of development they will work on, workshop attendance, peer practice, writing and supervision. *The plan will be updated at each workshop.*

### **About this Handbook**

This handbook is for participants in the PCT training, it serves as a warm up to the experiential training. The handbook includes links to reading material and “handouts”. The handbook describes the course requirements.

There are four sections in this Handbook

Part 1. Psychodrama Philosophy and Methods

Part 2. Psychodramatic Couple Therapy in Practice.

Part 3. Requirements for Certification. An expansion on the Outline.

Part 4. Resources

This handbook is best used in conjunction with the *AANZPA Training & Standards Manual (TSM)*

<https://aanzpa.org/download/aanzpa-training-and-standards-manual-january-2020/> , an essential overview of psychodrama training in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. It is available online to AANZPA members and physically to trainees, from the CITP.

## **Part 1. Psychodrama Philosophy and Methods**

The central concepts and methods of psychodrama are described in this section with an emphasis on how they contribute to working with couples. There are links to resources.

Explore the psychodrama resources for trainees: <https://psychodrama.org.nz/resources>

### **1.1 Forms of Psychodramatic Practice**

The word "psychodrama" is used to cover many forms of practice. PCT can be considered as a subcategory of Interpersonal Relationship Therapy<sup>1</sup>. PCT is an

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<sup>1</sup> Moreno used this term for psychodramatic relationship work (Moreno xxxx:xx)

application that uses every *form* of psychodramatic practice, in the context of working with a couple. The main forms psychodrama takes are:

- Group psychotherapy
- Classic psychodrama
- Role theory and role training
- Sociometry
- Sociodrama
- Interpersonal psychotherapy
- Spontaneity training

Couple therapy includes all of these forms some are more obvious than others, three are discussed in this section.

A dyad is the smallest group. A couple, people in a marriage or a long term loving partnership, is a ‘natural’ group<sup>2</sup>. In that sense couple therapy can be viewed as a form of group therapy.

Sociometry is important in couple therapy in several ways. First an overview from Moreno:

*The essence of sociometry lies in the idea that groups have an internal life of their own and that this life can best be understood by examining the choices members make at any given moment with regard to each other. Such knowledge—who is rejected, who is the “star,” where are the cliques—can then be used to institute a program for positive change. Every group, Moreno insisted, has underneath its visible structure an internal, invisible structure that is “real, alive, and dynamic.” Furthermore, Moreno believed that all groups have the capacity for a transcendent interconnectedness. This state of loving and sharing can rarely be accomplished, however, without a skillful management of sociometric processes.*

Fox, 1987:xiii

This underlying dynamic consists of the *tele* relations. The term has its own section (1.4) below. The sociometric process is distinct (though intertwined) with the role relations. In couple therapy “skillful management of sociometric processes” is vital and thus couple therapy includes sociometry.

Sociodrama is defined clearly by Rollo Browne:

*Sociodrama is a learning method that creates deep understanding of the social systems and social forces that shape us individually and collectively.*

Browne 2011:12

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<sup>2</sup> “I differentiate between a natural group, like the family, from a synthetic group like therapy and training groups and further, the encounter group which is neither, although it has elements of both.” (Moreno, 1957:348)



In couple therapy, understanding the social forces is important, this enables the couple to grasp that each partner is in the midst of forces outside of their own making.

### **1.2 The Relational Paradigm — why have a special emphasis on couples?**

The philosophy, theology and methods of psychodrama are relational and have a holistic, systemic perspective.

*The change in locus of therapy which [psychodrama]... initiated means literally a revolution in what was always considered appropriate medical practice, husband and wife, mother and child, are treated as a combine, often facing one another and not separate.*

...

*Sociometric methods have demonstrated that therapeutic values (tele) are scattered throughout the membership of the group, one patient can treat the other.*

Moreno 1977:316-317

A tenet of psychodrama theory is that “the smallest living social unit, itself not further divisible, [is] the social atom.” In a couple, these atoms combine and create a unique chemistry. It is in the relationship we see romance, power struggle and all sorts of turbulence. It is also in the relationship we see the power of collaboration, creativity, healing and love.

As a couple develop a more loving relationship they are also healing the original social atom. It is as if the ‘child’ watches the adults love and be loved and that is healing. The child learns they are loveable.

Psychodrama is a forerunner in the emergence of relational thinking. Moreno was clear a couple has to work on relationships together:

*However great a genius of perception one partner of the ensemble (couple or family) might have, he or she can not produce that episode alone because they have in common their co-conscious and co-unconscious states which are the matrix from which they drew their inspiration and knowledge.*

Moreno, 1977:vii

### **1.3 Encounter**

Encounter, or meeting is the English translation of the German *begegnung*. It is a central concept of psychodrama. In 1914 Jacob Levy Moreno (1889–1974) the founder of psychodrama wrote in a poem called *Invitation to an Encounter*:

*“A meeting of two: eye to eye, face to face...  
I will look at you with your eyes  
and you will look at me with mine.”*

Moreno saw a continuum between theatre on the one hand and *real life*, i.e. encounter on the other. Psychodrama straddles between those two, leaning towards encounter. One of the central features that is relevant to couple therapy is that it is not in an artificial enactment using auxiliaries to be the others in people's life. Couple therapy is *real life*, encounter.

*"Encounter' is a rough translation of the German word 'Begegnung'. Actually, Begegnung is difficult to translate. It has attained many connotations which no single Anglo-Saxon word conveys; several English words must be used to express its atmosphere. It means meeting, contact of bodies, confrontation, countering and battling, seeing and perceiving, touching and entering into each other, sharing and loving, communicating with each other in a primary, intuitive manner, by speech or gesture, by kiss and embrace, becoming one - una cum uno. It encompasses not only loving, but also hostile and threatening relationships. It is not only an emotional rapport, like the professional meeting of a physician or therapist and patient, or an intellectual rapport, like teacher and student, or a scientific rapport, like a participant observer and his subject. It is a meeting on the most intensive level of communication. The participants are not put there by any external authority; they are there because they want to be - representing the extreme authority of the self-chosen path. The encounter is extemporaneous, unstructured, unplanned, unrehearsed - it occurs on the spur of the moment. It is 'in the moment' and 'in the here,' 'hic et nunc.' It is the sum total of interaction between two or more persons, not in the dead past or imagined future, but in the fullness of time - the real, concrete, and complete situation of experience. It is the convergence of emotional, social, and cosmic factors, the experience of identity and total reciprocity."*

Moreno, 1975

Encounter is a practice. Here are some phrases used in practice, to warm up the therapist and the couple:

Be who you are with all your strengths and flaws.

Be with your partner with all their strengths and flaws.

\*

Listen so the other will talk

Talk so the other will listen

\*

Listen to the pain behind the blame.

#### **1.4 Tele**

*Tele* is the truthful, real connection between people. Tele includes the attractions and rejections. It is tele that we measure in sociometry. Tele does not refer to the transference or carryovers from other relationships. The immediate role relationships

such as a fight or a moment of mutually interesting discussion are distinct from the tele, which is the persistent attraction and repulsion found experimentally to be mostly mutual.

Relationships do the healing, i.e. there is such a thing as *therapeutic tele*. (Moreno 1977:3xx) See “Scientific Foundations of Group Psychotherapy”, the passages by Moreno from Psychodrama Vol 1, well worth reading.

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/resources/scientific-foundations-group-psychotherapy.pdf>

*The encounter is a telic phenomenon. The fundamental process of tele\* is reciprocity —reciprocity of attraction, reciprocity of rejection, reciprocity of excitation, reciprocity of inhibition, reciprocity of indifference, reciprocity of distortion....*

Moreno in Fox, 1987 Chapter 1

*Moreno decided that tele is the cement which binds people together in a reciprocally satisfying relationship.*

Zerka Moreno, 1985

See also:

Moreno, Z.T. (2000), The Function of “Tele” in Human Relations,

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/resources/moreno-z-tele-human-relationships.pdf>

In PCT it is part of the process to work with the *tele*. In ordinary language this is the love story, not the life story with its day to day tribulations.

## 1.5 Role theory

*Every individual, just as he is the focus of numerous attractions and repulsions, also appears as the focus of numerous roles which are related to the roles of other individuals. Just as he has at all times a set of friends and a set of enemies, he also has a range of roles and a range of counter-roles. They are in various stages of development. The tangible aspects of what is known as “ego” are the roles in which he operates. The focal pattern of role-relations around an individual is called his cultural atom. We are here coining a new term, “cultural atom”, since we know of no other which expressed this peculiar phenomenon of role relationships. Obviously, the term is selected as an analogue to the term “social atom”. The use of the word “atom” here can be justified if we consider a cultural atom as the smallest functional unit within a cultural pattern. The adjective “cultural” can be justified when we consider roles and relationships*

*between roles as the most significant development within any specific culture. The socio-atomic organization of a group cannot be separated from its cultural-atomic organization. The social and cultural atom are manifestations of the same social reality.*

Moreno, "Who Shall Survive?" P70 1977

Here is a passage on role theory that also has a comment on couple therapy from a book by John Nolte:

*“In psychodrama language, problems in marriage arise when psychodramatic roles of one partner have no adequate counter-role in the other. A majority of psychodramas feature interpersonal role conflicts in which one or both partners of a relationship expect actions from the other that are not forthcoming. Many also portray ... role conflicts, such as social pressures to take unwanted roles.”*

Nolte, John. (2014). *The Philosophy, Theory and Methods of J. L. Moreno: The Man Who Tried to Become God (Explorations in Mental Health)* (p. 215). Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition.

More from the same section in Nolte:

<http://www.psybernet.co.nz/working-with-couples/nolte-role-theory.pdf>

Handout: Role Theory and Psychodramatic Couple Therapy: Assessment and Intervention

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Role-Theory.pdf>

Has a useful reference section.

### ***Role Training***

The couple will often want "communication skills", and they need them. However the overt issue is not the deeper issue, nor is their assessment of better communication skills the issue. Those things are important, but what will enable issues to be dissolved and communication to improve is ***connection***.

We invite couples into a space of the possible, a stage. There they can learn to "dream again" (Moreno, 1977:5-6)

“Well, Dr. Freud, I start where you leave off. You meet people in the artificial setting of your office, I meet them on the street and in their home, in their natural surroundings. You analyze their dreams. I try to give them the courage to dream again.

Paradox. Some role training will assist. Roles of learner, student, guest, roles that include curiosity, openness and calm in the face of ferocity of the guard dog.

“Ah, I'd like you to be a student in the subject of me - I want you to have a PHD!”

### ***Role Gestalts***

Progressive, coping and fragmenting roles.

Fragile vulnerable roles. Where do they fit in. Depth roles — psychodramatic roles.

“The way we have been influenced influences the way we are, but it does not determine it.”

Don Reekie— pers com.

Role cuts through 4 major disciplines:

Psychology  
 Anthropology  
 Physiology  
 Sociology

Don Reekie personal communication 2 October 2018

See first 20 pages of Psychodrama Volume One (Moreno, 1977)

\*

Roles move to the progressive as the vulnerable aspects of the roles are expressed.

## **1.6 Experiential Learning**

Couple therapy is taught in a practical way using the psychodrama structure of warm up, action and sharing. You learn by being an active participant.

Psychodrama is a form of experiment. See “Moreno’s Scientific Methodology: by, of and for, the People” (Logeman: 2015)

<https://aanzpa.org/wp-content/uploads/1512-AANZPA-Journal-Walter.pdf>. The experiential method of training is parallel to the developmental process a couple go through in the therapy.

In the group training and the peer practice groups you will have the opportunity to relate the psychodrama concepts such as warm-up, spontaneity and creativity as well as techniques such as mirroring, role reversal and doubling to your participation and experience.

### **1.7 Spontaneity-Creativity**

There is a section in "Who Shall Survive?" (Moreno, 1979) on the Doctrine of Spontaneity-Creativity (page 39)

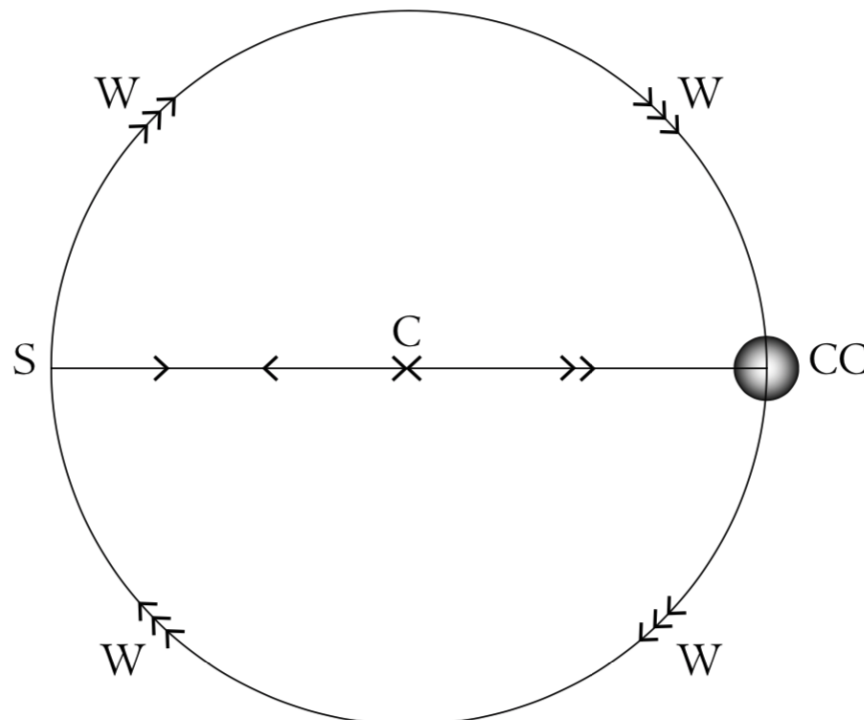
<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/spontaneity-creativity-wss.pdf>

This section includes a description of the Canon of Creativity, a useful tool to see the relationship dance. The Canon of Creativity is the psychodramatic theory of change.

*Spontaneity operates in the present, now and here; it propels the individual towards an adequate response to a new situation or a new response to an old situation. It is... the least developed among the factors operating in our world; it is most frequently discouraged and restrained by cultural devices.*

Moreno 1978:42

**DIAGRAM: THE CANON OF CREATIVITY**  
**SPONTANEITY-CREATIVITY-CONSERVE**



*Field of Rotating Operations Between  
 Spontaneity-Creativity-Cultural Conserve.*

Moreno, 1953:46

The canon IS the process of relationship change:

Cultural Conserve -> Warm up -> Spontaneity ->Creativity

*The difficulty is that one cannot store spontaneity, one either is spontaneous at a given moment or one is not. If spontaneity is such an important factor for the human world why is it so little developed? The answer is: we fear spontaneity, just like our ancestors in the jungle feared fire; they feared fire until they learned how to make it. Humans will fear spontaneity until they learn how to train it.*

*Moreno, 1953:47*

**Five elements of spontaneity:**

Adequacy, Creativity, Vitality, Originality and Flexibility.

**Cultural conserves:**

It is often useful to concretise the powerful forces that come from the culture that rule the psyche and impact on the relationship.

\*

In couple therapy it is useful to assist the couple to warm up together to spontaneity and creativity. When a couple are spontaneous and creative there is a reciprocity of the roles. The partners complement each other.

### 1.8 The Five Psychodrama Instruments

Moreno's distinctive contribution is to use theatre as the laboratory for investigation and change. This ensures an experimental and holistic approach where people are in the context of life itself. People interact in roles — ways of being — that include thinking, feeling and action. The theatrical approach brings in:

- Stage
- Director
- Protagonist
- Auxiliary
- Audience.

It is useful to be conscious of how these 'five instruments' apply to couple therapy and how the functions shift between the three individuals present in couple therapy. When is one person a protagonist for the relationship? How can the other be an auxiliary? When is the director an auxiliary?

See Handout: The Five Psychodrama Instruments and Couple Therapy.

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-five-instruments.pdf>

See Journal article by Hirschfeld, Brigid; McVea, Charmaine "A Cast of Thousands":

Working with the Five Instruments of Psychodrama in the Therapeutic Relationship (PDF, 503.4 KB) [https://aanzpa.org/wp-content/uploads/ANZPA\\_Journal\\_07\\_art09.pdf](https://aanzpa.org/wp-content/uploads/ANZPA_Journal_07_art09.pdf)

Psychodrama and Group Psychotherapy — J.L. Moreno (Five instruments)

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/resources/psychodramagroup-psychotherapy.pdf>

### 1.9 Three phases of a psychodrama session

- Warm up
- Action
- Sharing

Warm-up is the path to spontaneity and creativity. The couple is a 'natural group'<sup>3</sup>, with dynamics that pre-date the therapy. The couple already have a warm up that is not visible to the therapist in the early stages.

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<sup>3</sup> "I differentiate between natural groups, like the family, from synthetic groups like therapy and training groups and further, the encounter group which is neither, although it has elements of both." (Moreno, 1957:348)



Action, and all expression in couple therapy, as in psychodrama, is in the service of the whole group, i.e. the couple.

In classical psychodrama, the protagonist does not share, the audience shares. In couple therapy both participants share. Sharing may be as simple as the couple answering the question: How was this session for you? Sharing then serves as an evaluation.

### **1.10 Psychodramatic Techniques**

Psychodramatic techniques are used in the training. The therapist uses psychodramatic techniques with the couple. These techniques are also taught to the couple. The main techniques are:

- Mirroring
- Role reversal
- Doubling

These are three distinctly different ways of being with a person. In a classic psychodrama these techniques have an action form that defines them. In a *natural group* such as a couple or a family the techniques may be used in a more natural form.

*All my interactional techniques, including role reversal, double, mirror, etc., as here described can be used within the strictly verbal systems of psychotherapy...*

Moreno & Moreno vol 2 Lulu ed p 65

The three techniques mirroring, role reversal, and doubling, when used in the *verbal* still retain their distinct quality.

#### **Mirroring**

Mirroring is the main technique we teach the couple. The person is presented with aspects of themselves as in a mirror by their partner. Initially we are focussed on the accurate, and neutral mirror. Simple accurate mirroring can lead to new insight. It can lead to acceptance or self rejection.

Mirroring can also be validating. The validating mirror shows the protagonist how their experience is related. "Of course if you feel sad, and you don't trust me to hear that, you would feel lonely and angry."

Action forms of mirroring can be used in couple therapy when the couple are ready to do so, and when the director thinks it will be beneficial. The auxiliary can create action sculptures showing the protagonist in their life.

#### **Doubling**

The main doubling in couple therapy is done by the therapist.

“The conversation the couple would be having if they were not fighting.”

Dan Wile

### **Role reversal**

This plays a big part in the training as trainees role reversal with the “clients” and step into their shoes and experience someone else take up the role they were in as the therapist.

More detail about techniques in a separate document (under construction!):

Handout: Mirroring Doubling and Role Reversal in Psychodramatic Couple Therapy.  
<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Mirroring-Doubling-Role-Reversal.pdf>

### *Other techniques that can be used in couple therapy*

- Soliloquy
- Concretisation
- Asides
- Future projections

## **Part 2. Psychodramatic Couple Therapy in Practice**

The section describes PCT from the initial engagement through the three phases of a couple therapy session to the closure of the therapy. This section also covers work with couples under various conditions.

At the heart of PCT is the encounter. It is useful to think of all that happens before and around those encounters as part of PCT. Sometimes a couple both want to be in the relationship and they both want to attend sessions. There are many couples who are more complex, and connecting with each of them, their relationship and the purpose of the work is a challenge.

The first sections are about engaging with couples and warm-up to the therapy as a whole. Warm-up to a typical couple therapy session is discussed in section 2.5 This is followed by the action phase.

This section of the handbook is well covered in *Encounter: The heart of Psychodramatic Couple Therapy* (Logeman, 2019)

<https://aanzpa.org/wp-content/uploads/AANZPA-Journal-28-2019-Art3-Logeman.pdf>

## **2.1 Warm up to the Therapy as a Whole**

### ***Initial Contact and Engagement***

The engagement phase is often by phone, text or email. The engagement phase can continue into the initial sessions. It is complete when:

- Each partner and the therapist have formed a working relationship.
- There is a plan for the work ahead.

The plan includes the fee, and plan for at least one more session.

### ***Grasping the big picture of the relationship.***

Paradoxically the big picture may be evident early on, even in the initial email or phone contact. At least at a surface level. Moreno always talks of the visible obvious level and the hidden “sociometric matrix” that is revealed upon investigation.

The following passage is a long one, it is from *The Foundations of Sociometry* (Moreno, 1941), I will refer to it regularly. He refers to the original tele in the moment of birth of th relationship (the status nascendi). The passages also refer to a stereotyped relationship. This is one that has been shaped by the cultural conserves of society, as all relationships are to different degrees. He recommends starting at the moment of birth of the love in the relationship. Then the quote ends with the dialectical idea that even in the ending the beginning is evident and vice versa. This quest to see the true nature of the relationship will be present in many stages of the therapy.

*In the case of a social situation, such a love relationship, for instance, the status nascendi exists when the lovers meet and begin to warm up to one another. The last phase, the phase before the anti-climax, in a love-relationship (marriage, for example) is all too likely to be a stereotype, and in many social relationships similar stereotyped institutions are the end products, parallel to the cultural conserve stage in a work of art. Moreover, in the contemplation of, say, the marriage relationship between two people, the consideration of all the phases leading up to it is omitted. It is not to be assumed, however, that processes of human relations cease to exist when a cultural conserve or a stereotyped relationship enters the picture. In either case, a new social situation is begun which requires special methods of investigation. The social sciences have been too much preoccupied with studies of processes after they have become cold. The status nascendi has been neglected. Most of the studies of man-woman relationships occur when the anti-climax has been reached — when the flow of feeling between the man and woman has dried up and the love which brought them together is over. The study of finished products, of cultural conserves and of stereotypes has, of course, its place and its meaning in a system of social science. The preoccupation with them is not surprising. It is much easier to study a relationship when it is finished and established and when it has the deceptive appearance of being an end-result. Perhaps this is why sociology has been chiefly concerned with the study of the tangible structures in society. But it is from the social situations in statu nascendi that the more important inspirations and decisions come. Their deep impress upon all human interrelations has been demonstrated. The problem has been how to get at these intangible, esoteric phenomena — how to study them. It is, of course, important that they be studied systematically. A human society without these phenomena in statu nascendi would present a lifeless appearance. Therefore, social research which does not give its main attention to these phenomena must be sterile. Any plan for the betterment of society, for the improvement of human relations, is hopeless without them. Therefore, theories and methods had to be found. It is at this cardinal point that sociometric and psychodramatic studies have stepped into the breach. The results to date are meagre, it must be admitted, but the road is now open.*

*A study of human interrelations proceeding forward from their status nascendi, instead of proceeding backward from their end-product, has great theoretical advantages. A study of this sort is able to do away with the dualistic character ascribed to social processes. There is no true dichotomy between, for instance, underlying and surface structures, or between genetic phenomena and symptoms. Just as every cause is a part of its effect and every effect a part of its cause, every underlying structure partakes of the peripheral and vice versa.<sup>29</sup> This is the case if we begin with the status nascendi of a situation and follow its warming up process through stage after stage. Dual constructions such as cause and effect become, then, illogical.*

29. *On the sociometric analysis of home groups, for instance, we find that some relationships on the formal level are identical with those on the underlying level and vice versa.*

### ***Individual or Couple Therapy?***

A referral may be for individual therapy but couple therapy may be indicated if there is a partner, and they may be co-creating the syndromes. For example the initial presentation may be depression and then on inquiry the relationship is a key factor and both partners can be engaged. Traditional diagnoses are of individual ‘pathology’, however the individual exists in a context: the immediate social atom. In making assessments a commitment to systemic thinking is needed.

*A system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something. If you look at that definition closely for a minute, you can see that a system must consist of three kinds of things: elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose.*

Meadows, Donella H.. Thinking in Systems (p. 11).  
Chelsea Green Publishing. Kindle Edition.

### ***Note on Phone, Email and Texts***

All three have their place. Phone calls or texts from one partner can be followed up with email, when appropriate, to both partners. Avoid the communication going through one partner. Email is a useful way of speaking to both partners at once.

### ***Engaging the Other Partner***

With guidance and permission from the willing partner contact the other partner to engage them. Sometimes the willing partner will want to warm up their partner to a call from the therapist.

Or, if the willing partner does not think this will work:

See the willing partner and role train them to engage their partner. This can happen over several sessions. With the agreement of the willing partner, inform the other partner: frame the work as couple therapy so it is not confused with individual psychotherapy.

[Handout on warm-up for couple therapy](#)

## **2.2 Assessment and therapy**

Warm-up, engaging the couple, are part of the assessment. Assessment and therapy are interconnected. For example, describing early on how their roles are interrelated, that the relationship is a “third entity”, with a co-conscious and co-unconscious will help

make sense of the relationship (assessment) but may also impact the quality of the connection (treatment).

Psychodrama is a powerful lens to assess and treat relationships. The main psychodramatic ways of looking at the relational process is with:

- Tele
- Role

These concepts are described in Part 1 above. Tele is the more persistent sociometric one of the two. If this is weak it probably always was. For example, “I married out of a sense of duty. My parents were more in favour of the marriage than I was.” Role relations are more amenable to change. “Since we had children we have been too busy to enjoy the music we used to enjoy.”

### **Assessing ambivalence**

Couples may fail to engage if one or both have an agenda for divorce. Couple therapy requires commitment to work on the relationship. It requires a wish that the therapy will work out.

Ambivalence may be secret e.g: “I’m giving therapy a try to show I’m not all bad, but I’m secretly contemplating divorce.”

How can we know their secrets?

If you, as the therapist, have an inkling one or both partners are not sure if they want to be in the relationship, structuring sessions to have individual time with each partner is indicated.

This may include separate sessions with each partner. Or sessions where there is a brief meeting with both followed by time with each of them separately and then a time together.

The aim of these sessions<sup>4</sup> is to reach an understanding pursue one of the following three:

- Do couple therapy with ending the relationship off the table for at least 12 sessions.
- To clarify that the relationship is over and that there will be no couple therapy.
- Or that they continue the status quo or work on the relationship without therapy.

In the handouts for the couple, (there is a handout for the *leaning out*, and the *leaning in* partner. The purpose of this phase of the work is described:

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<sup>4</sup> This phase is often called the *discernment phase* a term coined by William Doherty who has written extensively on the subject.

- Clarity and confidence in a decision about the future of your relationship
- Understanding of what has happened to your relationship and the part each of you has played in the problems
- A plan for change if you decide to work on the relationship
- Learning that you can carry with you into future relationships if you end this one, and a better chance to be good co-parents if you have children.

### ***Clarifying and doubling***

Individual time with the therapist is confidential, except for those things the therapist writes down and has explicit permission to share. During this time the therapist reframes blame into self-responsible statements. For example: “I’m looking at other people with renewed interest.” This may not be shareable. “You look back with some sadness to the time you were close.” This is a form of doubling. If accurate this is written down and may be shareable. I usually share these statements at the end of a session when the partners come back together. I make a copy and email it to them after each session. (A snail’s pace dialogue.) This is a good example of assessment and treatment happening at the same time.

### **Discernment Counseling Steps**

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/discernment-counseling-steps-wl.pdf>

### **Article by William Doherty**

In or Out? Treating the mixed-agenda couple. — Psychotherapy Networker:

<https://www.psychotherapynetworker.org/magazine/article/315/in-or-out>

Another version online:

<http://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/william-doherty-discernment.pdf>

A handout for therapists by Lavelda Naylor - steps:

<http://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/discernment-counseling-protocol.pdf>

A research paper:

Discernment Counseling For “Mixed-agenda” Couples, (Doherty 2015)

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280220710\\_Discernment\\_Counseling\\_for\\_Mixed-Agenda\\_Couples](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280220710_Discernment_Counseling_for_Mixed-Agenda_Couples)

Handout for couples (Walter Logeman)

***Thinking of ending your relationship?***

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Thinking-of-ending.pdf>

### 2.3 Creation of conditions of safety for couple therapy

One partner may disclose violence, rape, suicide or harm to self or others.

The couple therapist will think sociodramatically about the case. And may make interventions that go beyond the work with the dyad.

*See handout: Systems Approach to Social Networks*

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/Systems-Approach-to-Social-Networks.pdf>

If there is danger then the couple may need to live apart. Each partner may need shelter, protection, drug or other individual treatment. The Māori term for such wrap-around care with an element of authority from the systems around the couple is *whakaruruhau*.

A similar process to the discernment therapy (see section 2.2) may be used to build the safety conditions. Individual sessions can assist partners to disclose danger and create plans for safety.

#### **When there is danger in a love relationship:**

1. Build a social wrap-around to create protection.
2. Provide couple therapy once social protection is in place

#### *Supervision*

Supervision that assists the therapist to concretise the social systems around the couple is important.

#### *Referrals and liaison:*

- GP
- Social services
- Refuge
- Drug rehab
- Police



### ***Points to keep in mind about referrals:***

1. If you have learnt about the problem, that means someone has trusted you with it. That trust is the basis for ongoing work. Keeping the relationship alive may help keep the person alive. That partner may be the “action system” that initiates the safety building project.
  
2. A referral for treatment of one partner may create a sense that the relationship problem is the fault of one partner, this could hamper the relationship work. For example a referral for drug treatment for one partner may involve a referral to Alanon for the other partner. A co-creation perspective does not mean an absolution of individual responsibility.

## **2.4 Affairs**

Esther Parel, is an author and therapist who specialises in affairs. Her two books may be of interest: *Mating in Captivity: Unlocking Erotic Intelligence* (2006) asks: “Can we desire what we already have?” “Does intimacy always make for hot sex?” “Reconciling the Erotic + the Domestic”. *The State of Affairs: Rethinking Infidelity* (2017) “Love is messy; infidelity more so. But it is also a window, like no other, into the crevices of the human heart.”

Worth watching to get her perspective in a nutshell:

Esther Parel, TED talk — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2AUat93a8Q>

Ellyn Bader and Peter Pearson offer practical guidance in a PDF, <https://www.couplesinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Guide-To-Working-With-Infidelity-HH2019.pdf>

The discernment approach in affairs is useful if there is ambivalence.

Decisions about their life are up to the couple — yet the couple often come to seek opinions. The ability to be present, with values and with respect for each partner and other lifestyle values is enhanced by being well informed and having discussed these matters in depth with peers, trainers and supervisors.

## **2.5 Warm up in the early phase of a session**

There are many ways of conducting the warm up. The aim is to set a good tone and establish a purpose for the session. This can happen quickly or could take some time. It is important that the warm up is inclusive of the main issues but also that the main issues do not overwhelm creating a constructive frame for the work. While written for a

different context it may be useful to read this short paper on Levels of warm up in Sociodrama:

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/resources/levels-warm-up-sociodrama.pdf>

The warm up is complete when:

- Each partner has identified a hope and if possible the relationship between the hope is identified.
- There is a frame for the next phase of the session that includes the protagonist, auxiliary structure.

### ***Therapist warm up***

The therapist warms up to the session in their own way. It can be by looking at previous notes and making a plan. Find a way to look forward to the session. Attend to self in some way if this is not the case. Supervision can be vital, and so can a good long walk, reflecting on the clients.

### ***Conversation***

The process of identifying each person's concern and the relationship between them will include conversation. The conversation can be a three way one and include the couple talking to each other. This will work if there is a high level of goodwill and skill. However interactions between them are usually best left for the interaction/action phase. This means each partner is guided to talk to the therapist. This structure is known as "*spokes of the wheel*", with the therapist at the hub.

The therapist looks and listens to each partner during the conversation. The art is to connect with each partner and to the relationship at the same time. The aim is to have the partners more collaborative and ready for the action at the end of the conversation. One way to do this is to reframe.

### ***Reframing***

The therapist reframes blaming statements so they mirror one partner and can be heard by the other.

The conversation will include ***their hopes*** and the therapist may offer 'psych ed' such as:

- Value of difference
- Potential for healing and growth
- Childhood fueling the relationship dynamics
- Cultural factors, gender role pressures
- Turns at talking and listening
- Value of mirroring
- Identifying intention

The couple are in a horizontal, non hierarchical relationship (though there may be dominance and submissive dynamics.) There is not a lot of training about how to communicate horizontally. We learn how to be counsellors, teachers and parents and leaders, but where do we learn to be together with our partner?

### ***Modelling***

The therapist models the interaction with each client using the techniques they will teach the clients.

### ***Director directed warm-ups***

#### *Physical warm up*

The couple face each other. Breathe together. The couple may be instructed to walk or move. Or make sounds.

#### *Warm-up questions*

In the warm up the therapist can introduce useful questions:

“What are your wildest dreams for this relationship?” In the terminology of Brief Solution Focussed Therapy this is a ‘miracle question’. A more sober form of the question: What are your hopes for coming to this therapy? Or “What are your best hopes for this session?” It is useful to identify early in the therapy and make a note, it can read like a poem! It can be useful to return to these statements if the going gets rough.

The point is to stay future focussed. i.e. not to be problem focussed. “What brings you along?” Is especially unhelpful in couple therapy because as well as focusing on the problems, it is likely to enlist blame of the other partner.

“What are you moving from and what are you moving towards?” This can lead to action cues leading to concretisation.

### *Narration*

The therapist may sum up the work so far or share the story of the relationship struggle as it has unfolded. This involves the ability to make sense of the relationship dynamics. Role theory is a useful tool.

Handout: Dialectics of Intimacy — Walter Logeman

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Dialectics-of-Intimacy.pdf>

### *Appreciations*

“I appreciate...”

This is a good time to coach them to mirror. The purpose of the appreciation is to set a relational tone for the session. If this is achieved, move on. A follow through may be used if it seems there is a shadow of conflict in the appreciation that leaves one or both partners conflicted...

“Let him/her know what you liked about the appreciation. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience as you heard it?”

### *Enactment*

Concretisation can be introduced at the warm up stage. For example, the couple may be talking about the relationship and one says “the spark is gone”. The therapist introduces a cushion. “This a fire with no spark”, then invite each partner to describe what they see, or the history of the fire. This introduces the notion that the relationship as the “third entity” that the couple can collaboratively talk about. More complex sculptures can be introduced.

Role reversal is another form of enactment. For example, each partner standing up and looking at themselves in the empty chair can be very useful. It may be helpful to identify a wise person of some sort. The focus here is on forming the relationship with self. It is useful to have a cushion in the empty chair and then move that in the role reversal. The therapist can take the auxiliary role, usually speaking for the role but not fully in the position of the role, this means there is a sense of the director being present as director, not fully immersed in the client’s role. The “wise persons” can remain concretised throughout the session and called on when needed. This form of enactment has been termed the H.

The H can be used in the next phase of the work. In the warm up phase it is part of resourcing each partner. They are about to go into difficult places and so they can bring all the help they can.

### *Identifying the focus*

The couple may begin by talking about ‘examples’, the particular aspects of a daily life where they experienced something painful. It is helpful to go beyond the details to the deeper experience of pain and frustration.

Marshall Rosenberg talks of unmet needs, universal and non-specific. Hedy Schleifer names this as a ‘neighbourhood’ in the person’s world that the partner can visit. Notice how this goes beyond the examples to the relational love story.

One partner may come to see their concern is feeling alone. The other might name their ‘neighbourhood’ as not feeling worthy. The inter relation of individual concerns can be

identified. If the couple can see that they are working on something they co-create then the work is more collaborative.

Once concerns are identified a plan is made on how to proceed. They can be invited to work out who goes first. The therapist can adjust this if one partner is often reluctant and another often eager.

## 2.6 The Action Phase — Producing Encounter

*“There is one misunderstanding which must be carefully avoided. Psychodrama is not an “acting” cure, as an alternative to a “talking” cure. The idea is not that the subjects act out with one another everything on their minds—off guard, in a limitless exhibitionism—as if this sort of activity, in itself, could produce results. Indeed, it is here that the experience of the director in the art of the psychodrama will count most. Just as a surgeon who knows the physical state of his patient will limit an operation to the extent which the patient’s condition can withstand, the psychodramatic director may leave many territories of his subjects’ personalities unexpressed and unexplored if their energies are not, at the time, equal to the strain.”*

*Moreno, Psychodrama vol 1, p33*

*I have come to think of couple therapy as a ‘group’ process, which follows the psychodrama structure of warm up, action and sharing, with encounter as the action phase, the drama at the heart of the process.*

(Logeman, 2019)

This quote is from an article “Encounter: the Heart of Psychodramatic Couple Therapy, available in the AANZPA Journal site:

<https://aanzpa.org/wp-content/uploads/AANZPA-Journal-28-2019-Art3-Logeman.pdf>

*Listen so the other  
will talk*

*Talk so the other  
will listen*

### ***Producing Interaction***

The therapist/director is proactive in the production of the interaction. The art is to be present in such a way that the therapist engages both partners with every intervention.

\*

Seen dramatically the action is in the body, the eyes, the breath, the tones and the rhythm. The psychodramatic techniques are all present in a form suited to the face-to-face-interaction. Action may be looking into the eyes or breathing in rhythm, leaning forward or leaning back, holding hands or embracing.

Within this interactive drama other forms of psychodramatic enactment can be introduced. This is within the frame of one partner being the protagonist and the other an auxiliary.

The therapist can notice the most subtle action cues and then offer production instructions, invitations for maximisation, such as:

- Feel your intention, let it fill your body, show your intention with your body.
- Breathe
- Let your eyes speak
- Let the sound be there
- Notice your movement and stillness
- Pause, feel what is in your body
- Look into her/his eyes
- Do that more fully, with your whole body
- Slow down, feel what you feel...
- Look her in the eye...

We can think of this work as dramatic production. The training with couples will benefit the trainee in conducting psychodrama groups more generally.

### ***Invitations***

Hedy Schleifer coaches couples to begin the interaction by asking:

I would like to invite you into my world (across the bridge) while I explore the neighbourhood of (for example) loneliness

We ask the other partner to take time to respond, to become curious, willing.

Yes I will do that. ... I am with you.

The talking is to get behind the words to the experience

The translation from blame to experience is to increase connection with the experience - and to be more cathartic than the blame.

What is behind the words?

Help the couple with that translation.

Pain is always somewhere behind the blame.

It is like translating a language...

*“Why? Because true translation is not a binary affair between two languages but a triangular affair. The third point of the triangle being what lay behind the words of the original text before it was written. True translation demands a return to the pre-verbal”*

— John Berger, *Confabulations*

### ***Protagonist and auxiliary***

The couple can decide who will be the talker and who will be the listener. Who is the protagonist in couple therapy? Sometimes it is useful to think it is ‘the relationship’ but when one partner is expressing themselves and the other is listening, then thinking of the protagonist and auxiliary structure fits well. Hedy Schleifer uses the term ‘host’ for the listener, the host invites the ‘visitor’ across the bridge into ‘their world’. These are words that denote the intention of an auxiliary in someone's drama. In Imago the terms ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ are used. This is a different, and occasionally useful metaphor. The ordinary english words come naturally to people: talker and listener. The therapist can introduce the more evocative words as needed.

Conversation is fine but it can easily become “two protagonists” which is unproductive. Communicate to clarify the roles of protagonist and auxiliary.

### ***Mirroring, Role Reversal and Doubling***

The action phase in couple therapy is always an *interaction*. This is probably true of all psychodrama - a drama is interactive. Both partners are present in the one drama, as themselves, as protagonist and as auxiliary. This is often not the case in psychodrama groups where one partner chooses someone to be the other. Role reversal to reveal an absent person is not needed. Role reversal in couple therapy happens to create connection.

*A group member, whom we will term the auxiliary, portrays what he observes the protagonist doing. This auxiliary virtually repeats what the protagonist has already said and done. In this case the auxiliary does very well. He is able to*

*warm up within himself to the meaning of what the protagonist has been saying as well as to the feeling tone. He is also able to warm up to the physical expressions of the protagonist. He looks and sounds as the protagonist did. His portrayal has an air of reality. It is done with conviction. The different elements of role, the map of the universe, that is revealed by the verbal content and sentence structure, the physical actions, and the set of feelings are congruent. The portrayal carries weight and assists the protagonist to warm up to herself in response. These are vital things, for if the auxiliary does not accurately portray the role, they may not be accepted in the role by the protagonist.*

(Clayton 1992:27)

Handout: Mirroring Doubling and Role Reversal in Psychodramatic Couple Therapy.

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Mirroring-Doubling-Role-Reversal.pdf>

### **Concretisation**

#### *Using objects to make sculpture*

While the 'in-the-chair' drama proceeds the therapist can use cushions or other objects to bring the themes to life in a sculpture. The director can also ask the protagonist or the auxiliary to concretise in this way.

#### *Expression to the concretised entity.*

Perhaps there is concretisation of a child or another person. The protagonist can be asked to express themselves to that entity.

Note how this entails a move away from the eye-to-eye dialogue. The purpose for this must be clear and articulated to the couple. This involves maintaining the connection with both parties. For example:

Avery, how about you tell your mother what you did not tell her as a child. I think that will help you open up so Riley can see what goes on for you when you are silent. Be that 6 year old's advocate.

Riley, as she does that be an observer, so you can accurately describe what unfolds.

The couple return to the eye-to-eye form of the dialogue as Riley relates the story of the drama.



*The third chair.*

Concretisation maybe with a cushion in a chair, that way role reversal is easier to produce.

### ***Constraints to action and interaction in couple therapy***

Gottman identified four horsemen of the apocalypse in relationships:

- Criticism
- Defence
- Contempt
- Stonewalling

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-four-horsemen-recognizing-criticism-contempt-defensiveness-and-stonewalling/>

In psychodrama we think of roles, and these are aspects of coping or fragmenting roles. They come in pairs, usually a form of attack and defense. They can be active and overt or passive. However they come, they are at the root of the pain the couple experience in the relationship. They are usually deeply ingrained. The aim is of course to develop new roles.

The old dance, if it comes into the therapy, means the couple are repeating what they do at home. In some ways this is inevitable, however it is important to prevent it, so the couple immediately experience something new, even in the first session.

The usual free reign to act and express that we are used to in classical psychodrama, and that we want to develop in the couple will not come easily if they enact their fragmenting and coping styles. Daniel Weiner puts it this way

*...the willingness of protagonists to accept doubling offers or role-reversed renditions of themselves from their relationship partners is considerably more stringent and qualified than from unaffiliated partners. The same doubling statement, uttered with identical tone, is more likely to be challenged or rejected by the protagonist if the speaker is a partner that the protagonist perceives as hostile, indifferent, untrustworthy or having ulterior motives at variance with the best interests of that protagonist. Similarly, a performance of oneself by one's role-reversed partner is frequently perceived as a disrespectful caricature, further complicating the therapist's task of promoting psychological safety and collaboration.<sup>1</sup>*

Daniel J. Wiener (2015)

“Staging dramatic enactments to resolve conflicts in couples.”

[https://psychodramaaustralia.edu.au/sites/default/files/staging\\_dramatic\\_enactments\\_to\\_resolve\\_conflicts\\_in\\_couples.pdf](https://psychodramaaustralia.edu.au/sites/default/files/staging_dramatic_enactments_to_resolve_conflicts_in_couples.pdf)

Action is primary in psychodramatic work. People learn by acting. The art of being with a couple and producing their action and interaction is to overcome these constraints and many forms of doing that are available some are described below. The action or interaction can take many forms. Work with each transaction so it is expressed from the heart, without blame and lands and is fully grasped.

### ***Action in the context of the relationship***

#### ***Third entity***

From <http://www.corinneblum.com/relationship-coaching/third-entity/>

*“What is the Third Entity?”*

*The Third Entity is what two individuals coming together create; it has a form and an energy of its own. It is very important to see that the relationship is made of three parts, not just two. When we acknowledge the existence of the Third Entity we are able to be more objective when challenges arise. We often get wrapped up in our own perspective, forgetting that we are a part of something that extends beyond us as individuals. In order to have a healthy, long lasting relationship, we must nurture and support not only each other but the relationship itself. We believe that finding our ideal partner and loving them to the best of our ability will guarantee a successful relationship, but it is vital that both individuals are taking care and being part of something that is greater than they are.*

*Working with the Third Entity*

*Together we will discover what your Third Entity looks like and find ways to nurture and help it grow. We will point out what each individual brings to the table, where you meet and where you collide or slip past each other. We will look at your individual goals, as well as the goals of the relationship, and find ways of supporting each other in achieving them. By working as a team and maintaining a consistent connection with your Third Entity, you will be building a solid foundation and the possibility for longevity and fulfillment in your relationship.”*

The couple can collaborate to build on progressive roles in the relationship.

- Relationship with self Joint enactment - such as “memory lane”
- Role reversal with the relationship
- Role reversal with the “therapist”
- Future projections

- Diamond of opposites

### ***Paradoxical double-bonding role reversal***

The constraints can be overcome. In the Weiner article Weiner footnote <sup>1</sup>. Describes a technique developed by Anne Hale:

1. Anne Hale(1985:94), recognizing these contraindications, has proposed an ingenious combination of classical doubling and role-reversal in what she termed 'paradoxical double-bonding role reversal'. To illustrate Hale's technique, male client A speaks in the role of his female partner, B, to an empty chair representing A (himself). During this process B stands alongside and slightly behind A, doubling for A as herself. This gives B considerable input to lend accuracy to A's portrayal of B (who, after all, knows B better than B herself?) and gives both partners the experience of an alliance in the task of authentically portraying B. During the process A can be directed to reverse roles with the empty chair, thus responding as himself to the character of B. Working together, A and B can now co-create an encounter between the characters A and B that is meaningful, respectful and authentic.

Anne's handout about this approach is here:

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/Ann-e-Hale-double.pdf>

### ***The dramatic framework***

In classical protagonist centered psychodrama we see the unfolding of one person's 'world'. In couple therapy, two people share their 'world', so one partner can't produce it alone. The drama is an encounter, a dance.

If the dramatic structure is clear then it can hold conversation and enactments. The plan might be to have short turns at speaking, i.e. a facilitated conversation. Thinking about one transaction at a time is useful. Ensure a flow of meaning is complete in each transaction. At the other end, one person may be the protagonist for a whole session. Authentic flow of meaning is evident when the listener nods as they see the other get it.

### ***Protagonist techniques***

In a classical psychodrama we don't think of the protagonist as using techniques. It is somewhat different in a 'natural' group like a couple. The protagonist is facing the most significant person in their life. While it's great if the auxiliary could be there unconditionally, that is a big ask. The protagonist can be a good 'host' to be well heard. This means learning to speak from the heart.

The therapist can use lead lines to ensure this happens. See the article *Encounter, the Heart of Psychodramatic Couple Therapy* for examples (Logeman, 2019)  
 Communication skills such as those from Non Violent Communication (NVC) can be taught. I recommend this Marshall Rosenberg video — its three hours long and worth watching several times. :) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7TONauJGfc&t=2647s>)

## **2.7 Naming the Dance, role theory with couples**

Throughout the work with couples the language they couple use for their relationship and the language the therapist uses will have an impact.

Role names

## **2.8 Sharing**

### ***Conducting the sharing***

These lead lines can be used at the end of a session.

Thank you, I appreciate...  
 The impact on me the way you listened to me...  
 The impact on me the way you told me about...  
 One thing that touched me...  
 In this session I've appreciated that you ....  
 One thing I will reflect on...  
 One thing I've learned about you ...  
 One thing I'll take away...  
 One way I'm like you...  
 An insight I have about the way forward...  
 I look forward to...  
 One thing I might do differently...

### ***Sharing by the therapist***

Keep it short, and genuine. Its about your experience, not the content or stories about your life.

***Being with each other***

If the session has been such that the couple are not close, and there may be silence. The therapist can not that and maximise:

You have been respectful in this session (if that is true) and you can continue that respect as you leave here.

If the couple have moved closer in the session and are showing it...

Its ok to have a hug.

Resources about sharing:

Sharing — handout Hudson

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/Joseph-Romance-sharing-handout.pdf>

Tom Wilson: Sharing in psychodrama as a Directed Experience.

<https://aanzpa.org/wp-content/uploads/theses/013.pdf> (AANZPA members)

[Dan Wile - Questions at the end of a session - on his blog](#)

**2.8 Other topics that may be covered**

- Parenting, finances, sex
- Cultural factors in couple therapy
- Gender fluidity

**2.9 Ending couple therapy and evaluation****Part 3. Requirements For Certification**

Applying psychodramatic concepts to couple therapy is the main focus of this section. The section also has a collection of quotes and references to a wide range of material

that will enrich the psychodramatic approach. An effective couple therapist will deeply reflect on the nature of relationship.

### **Training Plan**

The aim of the plan is to orient you to the training as a whole. The plan can be reviewed at any time with the trainer. Update the plan before each training block as part of your warm up to the training. Training plans are filed in the CITP records and some New Zealand trainers may have access.

Please send a training plan to the trainer and supervisor early in the training. The plan will include:

- A current learning aspiration.
- Workshop plans, what you know so far.
- Plans for supervised practice. Seeing couples and your plan for supervision.
- Peer Practice. Group(s) you are a part of or planning
- Some thoughts about your writing plans and process.

### **Workshops**

Participation in a minimum of 12 days of workshops.

### **Supervised Practice**

A minimum of nine couple sessions. The sessions do not all have to be with the same couple. These sessions are discussed with your supervisor. The amount of supervision for the sessions is decided with the supervisor. A letter from the supervisor stating the participant is able to practice psychodramatic couple therapy.

Practice opportunity and supervision will be planned during the workshops or in a session with a trainer.

Trainees will choose a suitably qualified supervisor. The supervisory relationship is most important. Their ability as a supervisor is important, not so much their qualifications in psychodrama or couple therapy. Please ask the supervisor to include these points in a supervision agreement (written or verbal) with the trainee:

- The trainee agrees to discuss *all* their couple work - even if briefly - with the supervisor.
- The trainee will name their supervisor in their training plan that is posted to the CITP trainer.
- The supervisor is willing to become familiar with at least the PCT Training Course Outline.  
<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Training.pdf>
- Within a maximum of two years the supervisor will be asked to write a letter to the supervisee's trainer in the CITP that includes comments on the trainees work

with couples. The standard we are looking for is adequacy. Headings for the letter may include:

- Use of supervision for at least nine sessions of work with couples.
- Ethical conduct with clients.
- The effectiveness of work with couples.
- The degree to which the supervisee is developing an adequate sense of identity as a couple therapist.
- The supervisee's satisfaction with their own work
- Any other comments.

## **Writing**

There are a *minimum* of three assignments, one from each of the three sections: Theory, Practice and Personal/Professional Development. Length: 500 to a maximum of 1500 words for each assignment.

### ***1. Theory***

Choose ONE of the following:

Write a reflection on a concept relevant to psychodramatic couple therapy.

OR

Initiate a reading group for an article relevant to psychodrama couple therapy. Sum up the group discussion and findings.

OR

Propose a change or addition to the Psychodramatic Couple Therapy Training Handbook, with a rationale. The proposed change may not be accepted but the assignment will. Changes to the Handbook will be acknowledged.

### ***2. Practice***

Write about a moment from a session you have conducted with a couple using this structure:

- Background
- Description of the moment in the session
- Make an analysis of the couple's dynamics and/or make some observations about your work and experience as a therapist.

### ***3. Personal/Professional Development***

A statement about your development as a couple therapist. Include your experience before and during this course, including peer practice. Comment on your readiness to continue your practice as a couple therapist.

## **Peer Practice Groups**

Collaborate with other trainees to develop ability in couple therapy, outside of the workshop hours. These groups can meet face to face, by video link or email — usually a combination.

This could take the form of

- Discussion
- Reading group
- Writing groups (Google doc)
- Role play
- Peer supervision

You may have energy for more than one of the above, in a larger group not everyone may wish to do everything.

The subject matter for the peer work will emerge from the warm up.

Groups may be planned in the workshops. All groups will be reviewed during a workshop.

Please send a brief report on the group from time to time in the PCT Online group.

[PCT-Training@googlegroups.com](mailto:PCT-Training@googlegroups.com)

### **Practical Assessment**

This assessment takes place once the other requirements have been met. Timing for the demonstration is planned with the trainer.

Demonstrate in a workshop the ability to work with a couple and discuss the rationale for interventions. The demonstration will be with a sociodramatic couple already created in the group. The demonstration will focus on a *moment* in a session rather than the whole session.

The session commences with some reflection on what the couple may be ready for and a plan for an intervention. The trainer will attend to the group process if needed and such things as asides from the auxiliaries in the role of the couple.

The demonstration is followed by a brief discussion by the trainee about their interventions. Following discussion in the group the trainer(s) will decide if further work is required or if the trainee has passed. The trainer will write a brief report outlining strengths and work for the future.

## **Part 4. Resources**

### ***Psychodrama Resources***

Website:— <https://psychodrama.org.nz/couple-therapy-training/>

This Psychodramatic Couple Therapy Training Handbook is online here:

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/PCT-Training-Handbook>

A4 Flyer for this Course

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-training-flyer.pdf>



Outline for this Course

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Outline.pdf>

AANZPA Training & Standards Manual (TSM) (AANZPA members only)

<https://aanzpa.org/download/aanzpa-training-and-standards-manual-january-2020/>

Articles

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/resources>

AANZPA Journal

<https://aanzpa.org/journals/articles>

AANZPA Thesis (members only)

<https://aanzpa.org/theses-list/>

Psychodrama Australia Resources

<https://www.psychodramaaustralia.edu.au/resources>

AANZPA Videos — especially one from Zerka Moreno

<https://vimeo.com/281572113>

### ***Handouts for this Course***

These are mentioned above in relevant sections

Role Theory and Psychodramatic Couple Therapy: Assessment and Intervention

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Role-Theory.pdf>

The Five Psychodrama Instruments and Couple Therapy.

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-five-instruments.pdf>

Mirroring Doubling and Role Reversal in Psychodramatic Couple Therapy.

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Mirroring-Doubling-Role-Reversal.pdf>

Dialectics of Intimacy — Walter Logeman

<https://psychodrama.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/PCT-Dialectics-of-Intimacy.pdf>

### ***Writing Resources***

<https://opentextbc.ca/writingincollege/chapter/constructing-the-thesis-and-argument-from-the-ground-up/>

### ***Of General Interest in the Relationship Field***

Maya Kollman — Imago therapist

<https://soundcloud.com/user-105902714/maya-kollman-on-2018-02-02-at-0939>

***Anna Dostoyevsky — Brain Pickings***

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2016/02/15/anna-dostoyevsky-reminiscences-marriage/>

***Hedy Schleifer - Encounter Centered Couple therapy***

<https://hedyschleifer.com/>

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcmRoUS8dovMA\\_WoLx3myCQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcmRoUS8dovMA_WoLx3myCQ)

“My life’s work has crystallized into one single overarching idea. It is the idea of the three invisible connectors: the space, the bridge and the encounter. When people make these three invisible connectors visible in their lives, and embrace them fully, the “miracle” of connection happens. The space is the relational space “between” people. In order to honor that space, one must cross the bridge, and bring one’s full and authentic presence to the world of the “other”. And in doing so, the perfect conditions are established to create a true “meeting”, an encounter of the souls. Once the space has been honored, and the bridge has been crossed, a genuine, nourishing and fulfilling relationship is established.”

### ***The healing power in relationships.***

"A microcosm of the universe trying to repair itself."

I had a breakthrough moment when I realised that the partners in a couple can heal each other simply by being themselves. That was at an Imago training (2005) with Maya Kollman. Maya characterised a couple relationship as "A microcosm of the universe trying to repair itself." You’d think I’d know that from 25 years of psychodrama training and practice. This is a central concept in psychodrama. Psychodrama is group therapy, not individual therapy in the group. “Why do you see individuals, Walter, when the couple is so perfectly evolved to be a healing crucible?” Over the years since then I

have come to see that the relationship paradigm shift Maya was talking about had been pioneered by J. L. Moreno and in psychodrama for a century.

Walter Logeman



### **Podcast**

Walter Logeman was interviewed in 2018 on the Couples Therapy Couch podcast about this course, you might like to have a listen. You can subscribe to the podcast on an app on your phone and search for couplestherapistcouch.com

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