

COURSE SYLLABUS FOR 4TH YEAR WEEKEND PROGRAM CANDIDATES

**TITLE: “A Relational Psychoanalytic Approach to Couples Psychotherapy” and
“Psychoanalytic Play: Dramatization, Narration and Improvisation in Field Theory and
Metapsychology”**

INSTRUCTOR: Philip Ringstrom, Ph.D., Psy.D.

Dates 2020 – 2021 : Sundays 2:30 – 5:00 pm

September 11, 2020, October 23, 202, December 6, 2020, January 31, 2021,

March 21, 2021, May 2, 2021

Hours: 2.5 /class meeting, 15 hours total

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will be taught in two parts: the first is in the Fall term in which its first three sessions will be based on my book on couple’s psychotherapy titled ***A Relational Psychoanalytic Approach to Couples Psychotherapy*** (Routledge, 2014). The second part will be in the Spring term, involving three sessions on my new manuscript (under contract with Routledge) titled ***Psychoanalytic Play: Dramatization, Narration and Improvisation in Field Theory and Metapsychology***.

The three sessions of the Fall Term, will analyze and illustrate my six-step model for practicing a relational psychoanalytic approach to conjoint therapy, which is organized around three themes: *self-actualization in an intimate relationship, mutual recognition, and the “relationship having a mind of its own.”* Session One will involve an introductory overview of the model as well as taking us through one case (Ch. 8 in my book) which illustrates the clinical ideas and therapeutic action of all six steps. Sessions Two and Three respectively, will cover a) the Steps One, Two and Three of the model, known as the *symmetrical approach*, followed by b) the Steps Four, Five and Six, involving the *asymmetrical approach* based upon the model’s *relational turn*.

The three sessions during the Spring Term, will cover the topic of *psychoanalytic play* in my new book. Play is a topic Winnicott implored us to engage in, though he provided little

guidance as to what that means, or how to do it. Our first session will be on Part One of my new book, which involves the *drama, narration and improvisation*, embodied in the **therapeutic action** of *psychoanalytic play*. Our second session will focus on Part Two of the book, involving my model of the *three-dimensional field*. This pertains to ideas about the evolving **context** of the *therapeutic action*, including how the *field* is both experienced and interpreted, in ways which illuminate the “dialectical tension” between “constraint” from and “possibility” for change. Our third, and last session, of the Spring term is on *contemporary metapsychology*. We will be analyzing the radical **epistemological** shift in psychoanalytic theory away from Freud’s psychic energy theory of causality and change as determined by energetic forces, to a contemporary *metapsychology* in which our current theory of change is about information patterns. Ramifications of this include the legitimization of many creative ideas in psychoanalysis especially exemplified in the topic of *psychoanalytic play*.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Fall Term:

Re: Conjoint Psychotherapy

Week One:

- 1) To learn about how the three organizing themes: *self-actualization in an intimate relationship, mutual recognition, and the “relationship having a mind of its own”* bridge important elements of contemporary psychoanalysis, namely self-experiencing in a complex nonlinear system leading to the principle of “thirdness” in long-term intimate relationships – marital and otherwise.
- 2) To learn how these three themes are practiced in terms of the model’s six steps, including the delineation of the first three Steps in terms as involving a *symmetrical approach*, which shift in the second three steps, following a “relational turn” leading to an *asymmetrical approach*.

Week Two:

- 3) To learn how the first three steps enable a deeply empathically attuned engagement in the partners' subjective sense of truth, including how their "hopes and dreads" lend to "vicious circles of engagement, which the therapist points out in an effort to create a "third point of view" relative to their binarily opposed perspectives.
- 4) To learn how this process is further augmented by teaching the couple about "perspectival realism" and by gathering background information about them that enables greater insights into the roles of culture, gender, race, trauma, and attachment styles have had in influencing their perspectival senses of truth.

Week Three:

- 5) To learn how following the "relational turn" in the therapy, especially in relationship to *enactments* - "dissociated" multiple self-states, that have been unconsciously concealed, erupt in manners which reveal internal conflicts now readily available to the more consciously attuned work of Steps One through Three.
- 6) To learn how recognition of these multiple self-states within each partner can lead to greater resolution or at least recognition of internal conflict, that is a shift in each one's intrasubjective view of themselves to augment greater mutual empathy.

Spring Term:

Drama, Narrative and Improvisation in Psychoanalytic Field Theory and Metapsychology:

Week Four:

- 1) Participants will learn how to apply a dramaturgical framework for assessing and analyzing what is occurring in the interactional of each therapy session. In so doing, they will learn how to cultivate the "play space" Winnicott challenged analysts to cultivate, though never described how.

2) Expanding on objective #1, participants will learn the advantages of applying the rich theoretical system which drama avails us in considering the therapeutic “field” as the ongoing, recurring “stage” of any analysis. Additionally, they will learn to recognize and work creatively with how the therapeutic “field”, is occupied by themselves and their patient as “players” on a recurring “stage”. Along with recognizing their respective “character” is recognition of their “sub-characters” in accordance with a “multiple self-state” theory. All of this coalesces in their co-created narrative, which takes form in *dramatic repetition*, laying groundwork for the novelty of *improvisation*. These are just a couple of examples of how the framework the participants will learn will powerfully augment their more imaginative and creative engagement in the field.

Week Five:

3) The session will teach participants how to the participants experience and discern the Three Dimensional Field as well as how the field influences both constraint as well as possibility in the treatment.

4) Illustrative of this, they will learn to discern patterns of *information processing* which exhibit what is “impermissible” versus “permissible” to entertain in any given therapy along with how this view informs the “laws” of 1st Order Change (keeping the system the same) versus 2nd Order Change (creating novel change).

Week Six:

5) Participants will learn how all of this lends to a view of *Relational Metapsychology* which undergirds all theories of Contemporary Psychoanalysis, as well as how it applies to a contemporary, relational view of psychoanalytic treatment.

6) Further, the participants will experience how employing this framework, leads to a corresponding diminishment in their becoming judgmental, as well as diminishing the foreclosure of play due to their countertransference.

SIX SESSIONS SYLLABUS:

Fall Term (Couples Psychotherapy):

Session One: September 13, 2020

This session will focus on an overall theoretical view of my relational couple's psychotherapy model. We will cover my handout, outline of "Three Themes and Six Steps" augmented the Preface, Introductory chapter, and the theoretical overview Chapter One of my book.

Required Reading:

Ringstrom, P. (2014) *A Relational Psychoanalytic Approach to Couples Psychotherapy* (Routledge Press). Preface, Introduction and Chapter One.

Supplemental Reading:

Ringstrom, P. (2018) "A Relational Psychoanalytic Perspective on Couples Psychotherapy." *Psychoanal. Inquiry*. 38(5): 399-408.

Ringstrom, P. (2011) "A Relational Intersubjective Approach to Conjoint Therapy. In: *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology, in press*. Ed. W. Coburn, A Taylor and Francis Group.

Session Two: October 25, 2020

This session will focus on the *symmetrical approach* of the first three steps of the conjoint treatment model with Step One focusing primarily on attunement to the couple's partner's bi-dimensional transferences as well as vicious circles of engagement between these transference dimensions. Step Two emphasizes the development of "perspectival realism" a lynchpin concept to this model of treatment. And Step Three involves how to gather and how to utilize background data germane to the couple's relational styles, i.e., what each brings to their relationship including multi-generational transmission processes, the influence of such elements as cultural attitudes (collectivist versus individualism), racial, gender, and finally immigration issues. These first three steps are embodied respectively in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

Required:

Ringstrom, P. (2014) *A Relational Psychoanalytic Approach to Couples Psychotherapy* (Routledge Press). Chapters Two, Three and Four.

Supplemental:

Chapter Nine, Appendix A and B.

Session Three: December 6, 2020:

This session will focus on *asymmetrical approach* of the “relational turn” captured the last three steps of the conjoint treatment model. Step Four involves enactments and their resolution. Step Five focuses on the enrichment of each partner’s *self-actualization* through an increased capacity to self-reflect. Step Six involves each partner’s increased capacity to attune to and support each other’s self-actualization. Steps Five and Six converge under the axiom that *It is impossible to negotiate between two people, that which has not been negotiated within each one*. These three steps are embodied respectively in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. (All of this manuscript material will be distributed by the instructor directly to the candidates).

Ringstrom, P. (2014) *A Relational Psychoanalytic Approach to Couples Psychotherapy* (Routledge Press). Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Supplemental:

Chapter Nine, Appendix A and B.

Spring Term (Drama, Field and Metapsychology):

Session Four (January 31, 2021):

Will provide an overview of the course, linking how the three parts of the book, all connect regarding the influence of *drama* and *narrative* in understanding and influencing clinical practice. Following Shakespeare’s dictum, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts,” we will investigate how ideas from the world of *drama* become a part of

a meta-theoretical framework for *assessing, analyzing and engaging* the interactional *field* of every psychotherapeutic session. This will entail the examination and illustration - through case material - how analyst and patient become characters in an emerging drama. One which breathes life into their emerging *narrative* understanding of what the therapy is about. We will also address the inescapable “performative” nature of psychotherapy. We will develop a keen sense of how the analytic participants assume many roles as they become “players”. Each “player”, also, mostly unwittingly showing up in “character” not infrequently broken into multiple “sub-characters” emblematic of multiple self-states. In this session, we will turn our attention to how, over time, each analytic treatment unwittingly co-creates “dramatic themes”. These become that which I refer to as *dramatic repetitions*. Patterns of repetition produce *narrative* themes, looming larger over the course of treatment culminating in a kind of “master drama”. At other times there arise “mini-dramas” for example *enactments*, which inform the larger drama. The *principle of salience* is important here. It pertains to experiences which “stand-out” from *repetitive drama*, reflective of some heretofore unrecognized part of the co-created narrative that might be played with *improvisationally*. Hopefully, thereafter, fostering something novel in the midst of repetition. Elements of what fosters cultivating *improvisation* in the *field* will be explored and played with in illustration.

NOTE: While much of the reading and discussion will arise from the sections of the manuscript apportioned to each class, the presentation and discussion will also be supplemented in each class by the Symposium in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* between Dr’s Yadin-Gadot, Fosshage and Gabbard and myself, relative to the original title of overall project “Three Dimensional Field Theory: Dramatization, and Improvisation in a Psychoanalytic Theory of Change.” All five articles were published in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* in 2018, Vol. 28. No. 4.

Required Reading:

Ringstrom, P. (manuscript in preparation) *Dramatization, Narration and Improvisation in Psychoanalytic Field Theory and Metapsychology*. (Routledge Press – under accepted contract). Part One.

Supplemental Reading:

Ringstrom, P. (manuscript under contract) *Drama, Narrative and Improvisation in a Psychoanalytic Field Theory and Metapsychology*: London/New York: Routledge Publishing

Ringstrom, P. (2018) "Three Dimensional Field Theory: Dramatization and Improvisation in a Psychoanalytic Theory of Change". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 379-396

Yadlin-Gadot, S. (2018) Psychoanalysis in Three Dimensions: Ringstrom's Relational Metapsychology: Discussion of "Three Dimensional Field Theory". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 411-421.

Gabbard, G. (2018) Something and Nothing, Aliveness and Deadness: Discussion of "Three Dimensional Field Theory". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 403-410.

Fosshage, J. (2018) Discussion of "Three Dimensional Field Theory". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 397-402.

Ringstrom, P. (2018) "Relational Metapsychology in a Three Dimensional Field Theory of Change: Reply to Gabbard, Gadot and Fosshage". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 422-431.

Session Five: (March 21, 2021):

In this session we will focus on my "three dimensional" (3D) version of field theory comparing and contrasting it with existing versions of *field* theory. In addition, we will examine how we attend to the *field* in terms of how we experience it bi-hemispherically, that is the right (RH) versus (LH) manner in which, in the former case (RH), we are primarily consumed with the *raw, experience of relationality and contextualism*, while in the latter (LH) breaks down the "wholeness" RH's experience into versions of text making it more measurable, predictable, and communicable, notwithstanding what gets left out. We will also examine how we arrive at our sense of "truth" in the field, with particular attention to "six axes" of truth.

In this session we will examine emerging elements in any psychotherapeutic *field* which indicate where constriction versus possibility is likely to arise. This includes the emerging exhibition of the “permissible” versus the “impermissible”. This session also introduces varieties of human communication theory especially germane to clinical process, along with what is meant by “semiotics”. Practically speaking, this will relate to subjects like “rules of engagement” sometimes called the “frame” which *de facto* play a role in constraint versus possibility through both clinical “prescriptions” and “proscriptions”. Finally, we will investigate how processes like “enactments” serve a key function in revealing the heretofore concealed.

Required Reading:

Ringstrom, P. (manuscript in preparation) *Dramatization, Narration and Improvisation in Psychoanalytic Field Theory and Metapsychology*. (Routledge Press – under accepted contract). Part Two.

Supplemental Reading:

Ringstrom, P. (manuscript under contract) *Drama, Narrative and Improvisation in a Psychoanalytic Field Theory and Metapsychology*: London/New York: Routledge Publishing

Ringstrom, P. (2018) “Three Dimensional Field Theory: Dramatization and Improvisation in a Psychoanalytic Theory of Change”. *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 379-396

Yadlin-Gadot, S. (2018) Psychoanalysis in Three Dimensions: Ringstrom’s Relational Metapsychology: Discussion of “Three Dimensional Field Theory”. *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 411-421.

Gabbard, G. (2018) Something and Nothing, Aliveness and Deadness: Discussion of “Three Dimensional Field Theory”. *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 403-410.

Fosshage, J. (2018) Discussion of “Three Dimensional Field Theory”. *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 397-402.

Ringstrom, P. (2018) "Relational Metapsychology in a Three Dimensional Field Theory of Change: Reply to Gabbard, Gadot and Fosshage". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 422-431.

Session Six (May 2, 2021):

We will discuss key differences between Freud's metapsychology based on *psychic energy theory* versus *information processing theory*, the basis for *Relational Metapsychology*. This will cover a radical shift in epistemology along with "theory of change". Especially regarding the idea of **1st and 2nd Order Change**. Also, it pertains to the two extremely evocative ideas of **a)** that ***all the information needed to access change in the treatment is in the field of every therapeutic session***, laying open the question of how do we access it? and, **b)** How "nothing" can be as powerful a source of causality as something, an idea undeniable to Freud's version of *metapsychology*.

We will discuss *basic information* processing architecture of human beings pertaining to "modularity" in the human personality allowing for multiple-self-states, and how these ideas relate to *organizing principles, transference, and schemas* that also unpin all the basic tenets of *drama and narrative* and ultimately *improvisation*.

Required Reading:

Ringstrom, P. (manuscript in preparation) *Dramatization, Narration and Improvisation in Psychoanalytic Field Theory and Metapsychology*. (Routledge Press – under accepted contract). Part Three.

Supplemental Reading:

Ringstrom, P. (manuscript under contract) *Drama, Narrative and Improvisation in a Psychoanalytic Field Theory and Metapsychology*: London/New York: Routledge Publishing

Ringstrom, P. (2018) "Three Dimensional Field Theory: Dramatization and Improvisation in a Psychoanalytic Theory of Change". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 379-396

Yadlin-Gadot, S. (2018) Psychoanalysis in Three Dimensions: Ringstrom's Relational Metapsychology: Discussion of "Three Dimensional Field Theory". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 411-421.

Gabbard, G. (2018) Something and Nothing, Aliveness and Deadness: Discussion of "Three Dimensional Field Theory". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 403-410.

Fosshage, J. (2018) Discussion of "Three Dimensional Field Theory". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 397-402.

Ringstrom, P. (2018) "Relational Metapsychology in a Three Dimensional Field Theory of Change: Reply to Gabbard, Gadot and Fosshage". *Psychoanal. Dial.* Vol. 28, No. 4. Pp. 422-431.