

Systemic Psychotherapy

Strategies for Managing Trauma and Stress

By

Mauro Mariotti

Systemic Psychotherapy: Strategies for Managing Trauma and Stress

by Mauro Mariotti

2026

Ethics International Press, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2026 by Mauro Mariotti

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (Hardback): 978-1-83711-745-1

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-83711-746-8

Many of the 70 exercises included in this book are rooted in the strategic tradition of systemic psychotherapy, drawing from well-established practices. However, a significant number of these exercises are original creations developed by Mauro Mariotti, Fabio Bassoli, the Iscra research team, and the teaching faculty, reflecting their unique contributions and innovative approaches. Mauro Mariotti is a Director of the Iscra Institute, child psychiatrist, psychiatrist and psychotherapist.

dottmauromariotti@gmail.com www.iscra.it

Table of Contents

Foreword	xi
-----------------------	----

Introduction: A Bridge Between Tradition and Innovation: The Digital, Analogue and Narrative (DAN) Approach to Well-Being in Relationships.....	xiii
--	------

Preface by Fabio Bassoli: The Space and Time of Emotions: Foundations and Evolution of Systemic and Relational Psychotherapy	xv
---	----

FIRST PART

Chapter 1: Branches and Roots of Systemic and Relational Psychotherapy - SRP	1
--	---

Chapter 2: Specificity of DAN: Digital Analogue Narrative Interventions	14
---	----

Chapter 3: Analysis of Trauma Theory in Three Generations: The Origins of DAN – Digital Analogue Narrative Model.....	30
---	----

Chapter 4: The Origins of DAN Hypotheses for a Brief Systemic Relational Intervention	51
---	----

SECOND PART

Categories of Exercises

Genograms	77
------------------------	----

The three-generational genogram; The photographic genogram,
The three-dimensional genogram: Geno 3D, The 3D genogram
for couples: concept and main features, The Holy Family

The Use of Drawings: Drawings as an Analogue Basis for DAN Exercises 92

The design of the house: exploring personal and family spaces, Drawing together: Creating shared stories through collaborative art, Drawing family routines and symbols, The pot of emotion: activity guide and theoretical references, The heraldic shield

Three-Generational Exercises 108

The three-generational collage, The RSP relational style profile: A clinical tool to promote reflexivity and mentalization in couples and families, The theatre of three-generational schemes, The ritual for the myth: Supporting life transition, Write a story about your great-grandfather

The Milan School 137

Role reversal: A fun and educational game, The hypotheses of the three generations, Curiosity: Facing the unexpected, How triadic questions work, Systems thinking and the transformative power of triadic dialogue

Systemic Dramatizations 156

Family sculpture, Joint dream, newly framed with a positive end, The theatre of emotions, The theatre of the parts, The three-dimensional family village, Friendship day: A 2 euro gift

The Therapeutic Power of Play 175

A systemic-relational analysis of role-playing games in family therapy, The reflexivity game , The game of positions , The qualities game, The game of themes to explore, The game of choices, Famigliopoly, The reflexivity game

Nostalgia and the Care of Positive Feelings 196

Gratitude recapitulation, The wish train, Laughing to exist, Cry for serenity, Prayer/Praying: A step-by-step guide

Storytelling to Heal..... 213

Joint poem: "Believe us! It's possible", The co-constructed metaphor: Practices and variations, The incomplete sentence, The interrupted friendship, A pill for pessimists: The story of when everything went well, Meaningful object & letter exchange: For couples or families, My favourite character's life story, Autobiography: Condensed and existential times, The happy ending story group exercise, Memory treasure hunt

Paradoxical Interventions for Children, Adolescents 246

Example of exercise and references , The magician's hat: Transformative family connections through systemic-relational play, The king's chair: Structure and implementation, Getting rid of headaches: A creative exercise for psychosomatic relief, Fighting stuttering with skier's breath, Eliminating stuttering through controlled breathing techniques inspired by footballers, Coping with nervous coughing in children, Cluttering a drawer, Tidying up a drawer, Using absurd and ridiculous songs to outsmart phobias in children and adolescents, Outsmarting sticky thoughts: Turning persistent ideas into play, Children make the bed and prepare breakfast for their parents: Family boundaries and role reversal, Today I am the chef. The chef for a day experience, Shared family meal: Reconnecting separated parents and children through guided experience, The tree of life: Individual systemic exercise, Breaking a plate and screaming: An exercise in emotional liberation

Ecopsychology and Ecological Learning Processes 293

Outdoor sailing, Outdoor experiences in the forests,, Outdoor in the mountains: systemic exercise to explore relational dynamics, Boundaries of closeness: Exploring intimacy and the fear of contact in groups and families

Digitalisation and Emotion Recognition. Make Emotions Digital: Talk About Them, Draw Them, Write Them Down to Recognize and See Them.....311

The road of emotions for the family, The wall of emotions, The diary of emotions, Magic ring: A group exercise for families and educational or therapeutic groups, The monthly exception day: Promoting flexibility and positive change in family life, The hiccups are gone!

Conclusions.....328

References.....329

Foreword

Systemic Psychotherapy offers key insights from the Iscra Institute on systemic-relational therapy. Written by Mauro Mariotti with a preface by Fabio Bassoli, the book introduces digital, analogue, and narrative exercises (DAN) for emotional understanding and relational development. The rich section of scientific contributions, the result of the patient and dedicated efforts of Iscra teachers such as Denis Ceccarelli, Achille Langella, Nicoletta Modena, Massimo Mengozzi, and Nicoletta Scaltriti, further enhances the volume. These contributions not only integrate theoretical knowledge and practical experiences but also offer fresh perspectives and innovative approaches. Their work deepens the understanding of systemic psychotherapy by bridging the gap between research and everyday practice, ultimately providing readers with invaluable resources for both professional development and clinical application. The text stands out for its practical approach: DAN exercises and tools are designed to be used both in clinical work and in training, involving the body, storytelling and technology to explore emotional experience and promote change. Through clinical cases, reflections and operational suggestions, the reader is accompanied in the discovery of new ways to give meaning and voice to emotions, enhancing listening, relationship and active participation.

With an accessible and rigorous style, *Systemic Psychotherapy* is aimed at therapists, trainers, students and anyone interested in deepening the emotional universe according to a systemic and relational model. A precious manual that combines theory, practice and innovation, capable of enriching clinical and personal work with creative ideas and concrete tools for psychological well-being.

The Iscra Institute, established in 1981 by Fabio Bassoli and Mauro Mariotti, is authorized by the Italian Ministry of University and

Research to grant psychotherapy specialization diplomas after a four-year, 2000-hour program. Iscra initiated the International Association of Systemic Mediation (AIMS) and has trained over 1500 psychotherapists and mediators through courses in regions including Emilia Romagna, Sicily, Lazio, Abruzzo, and Lithuania. More than 30 teachers contribute to its activities, with scientific output exceeding 15 volumes on mediation and psychotherapy. Iscra also founded the magazine *Maieutica*, now celebrating 30 years.

Introduction

A Bridge Between Tradition and Innovation: The Digital, Analogue and Narrative (DAN) Approach to Well-Being in Relationships

Imagine a path that combines the solid roots of systemic-relational psychotherapy with the vital energy of innovation: this is the spirit that animates the DAN model, developed by Iscra. DAN is not only a collection of exercises, but a real operational guide for anyone who wants to improve the quality of life and a useful and positive network of relationships. Through a skilful interweaving of bodily techniques, digital tools, narrative and analogue approaches, DAN offers concrete and versatile resources to psychotherapists, mediators, social workers, jurists and all people who wish to feel more in harmony with themselves and with others. The basic assumption is as simple as it is revolutionary: the most intense emotions and experiences are imprinted on the body and reverberate in relationships, often handed down through generations in the form of stories, rituals, silences and family roles. The added value of DAN lies in its attention to three-generational models and unresolved issues that can affect well-being, such as bereavement, trauma or secrets. Thanks to modular exercises, designed for family groups or significant people, you can rewrite boundaries, recognize hidden legacies and create new shared narratives, promoting growth, reflective thinking, the well-being of the body and the ability to sustain positive relationships. The DAN model is a valuable tool for recognizing and renewing the emotional “grammar” of families and groups, promoting authentic well-being that is

built from relationships. An invitation to look beyond, to discover new possibilities and to become promoters of change.



Figure 1 *A family playing with the Genogram in three dimension*

Preface by Fabio Bassoli¹

The Space and Time of Emotions: Foundations and Evolution of Systemic and Relational Psychotherapy

The origins of the mental research institute (MRI)

When Donald Jackson founded the Mental Research Institute (MRI) in 1958, his vision was to establish a research centre dedicated to developing a systemic approach to family therapy and the scientific study of human communication. In this innovative environment, Gregory Bateson, Virginia Satir, and Don Jackson emerged as central figures, each contributing significantly to the evolution of systemic and relational psychotherapy. Their collaboration and intellectual exchange at the MRI in Palo Alto played a pivotal role in shaping foundational perspectives on human communication and family dynamics. Bateson was known for bridging anthropology, systems theory, and communication, laying the groundwork for examining patterns of interaction within families and groups. Satir offered a focus on the emotional and experiential aspects of family therapy, highlighting the importance of communication and self-esteem in familial relationships. Jackson, serving as a psychiatrist and director at MRI, made significant contributions to understanding family systems, particularly through the concept of “family homeostasis”, which describes how families strive to maintain balance through their interactions.

¹ Psychiatrist, co-director of Iscra Institute

Collaboration and innovation at the MRI

Together, Bateson, Satir, and Jackson—alongside other influential colleagues—created a dynamic and fertile environment for research and innovation. Their collective efforts encouraged new ways of observing and interpreting human behaviour, moving beyond a focus on individual pathology to explore the relational and communicative processes within systems. This interdisciplinary and collaborative spirit not only pushed forward scientific research but also generated practical therapeutic interventions that retain their influence in the field today.

The shift to a relational perspective

The MRI in Palo Alto, situated near Stanford University, was housed in a building in the town. The project stood out not only for its innovation but also for its challenge to traditional intra-psychic approaches, placing emphasis on relational contexts. To articulate this significant shift, metaphorical language became essential. The “black box” emerged as the most prominent metaphor, underscoring the importance of focusing on the input and output within a system, rather than the internal processes.

The “black box” metaphor, by its very nature, highlighted an “empty” interior, as emotions continued to be expressed through relationships within the most meaningful systems—primarily, the family. The Milan Approach team, particularly Mara Selvini Palazzoli and mentors Luigi Boscolo and Gianfranco Cecchin, played a crucial role in this evolution. Through their study of Bateson’s work, they revealed the so-called secret hidden in the “black box”, reaffirming the necessity of considering the individual within their relationships, where emotions serve as communicative signals. This perspective aligned with Watzlawick’s group in Palo Alto, who emphasised the practi-

cal effects of communication and had already advocated for a holistic view of mind and body. They also drew attention to the distinction between analogue and digital communication, with the latter focusing more on the content of thoughts. At a conference of the Italian Society of Systemic Research and Therapy (SIRTS), founded and inspired by Milan's pioneering training group—including Iscra's directors—Boscolo shared that his use of the black box concept spanned from 1971 to 1975.

New ways of understanding individuals

It was only after reading “Steps to an Ecology of Mind” by Bateson that Boscolo recognised two fundamental ways of understanding individuals: the circular, which considers the individual mind within context, and the linear. Boscolo discusses the evolution of views on the ego—from seeing it as a subsystem within a mental circuit to viewing it as disconnected from context. Using the figure/ground metaphor, he observes that while attention was once directed at family relationships, it has now shifted towards behaviours and emotions. This also marks a transition from focusing solely on the present to incorporating past and future perspectives. In his work on Time, he encouraged educators to move beyond outdated scientific paradigms, such as Cartesian dualism and exclusive reliance on quantitative analysis.

Implications for Systemic and Relational Training

These insights remain highly relevant today, and systemic and relational training schools should integrate them into their approaches. The Iscra school remains committed to continually updating the systemic roots from which it originates, striving to propose new research and techniques in psychotherapy and mediation. Linear and deterministic models have proven inadequate for fully understanding both physi-

cal and living phenomena, which are shaped by primary creaturely needs and require new, inventive languages for comprehension.

Beyond dualistic contrasts: The systemic mind

The necessary languages are those that transcend dualistic oppositions (such as nature/culture, mind/body, individual/society, I/you), instead expressing themselves in the interactive dance of relationships, enriched by the contributions of all their constituents. Bateson's theory of mind provides a holistic perspective rooted in differentiation and interaction among parts. Moving past antithetical principles, the systemic mind metaphorically describes an interactive process not confined to any single component (such as the brain, soul, or personality), but rather to a broader unit intimately connected to the environment. This process is self-correcting and evolutionary, embodying the idea of an ecosystem where elements interact and form reciprocal bonds. In this vision, mental processes are seen as recursively interacting with humans, necessitating the inclusion of time and space in the transition from first order to second order cybernetics. This epistemological shift in the systemic model redirected attention from content to relationship, focusing on how and with whom behaviours manifest. Analogical languages—such as metaphors, stories, and games—activate indirect techniques in psychotherapy and mediation, relying on the implicit rather than instructive or predetermined change.

Innovative techniques and the DAN approach

These techniques are designed to help individuals discover alternatives to their habitual behaviour patterns. In recent years, Iskra directors, with input from the teaching team, have made significant progress in developing and refining indirect analogue techniques such as the 3D genogram and House Drawing. These methods have

enabled a reinterpretation of individuals' life narratives, supporting the identification and suggestion of improvements in both description and lived experience. A recent key development in this field is the introduction of DAN (digital analogic narrative) courses, which have been applied and tested in educational, clinical, and research contexts. As a result, Iscra's centres now incorporate expressive workshops in their programmes, emphasising body language and, most importantly, behaviours that convey emotion. Maestro Gianfranco Cecchin highlighted the essential human need to "be seen", noting that feelings of invisibility can sometimes prompt unusual behaviour as individuals seek recognition. This underscores the importance of recognising emotions as a central aim in clinical practice, training, and research within the systemic and relational framework. This book serves as a manual for DAN exercises, offering practical tools for professionals in the prevention of physical and mental health problems, and for anyone wishing to enhance their well-being and foster healthier relationships within their social networks.

First Part

Chapter 1

Branches and Roots of Systemic and Relational Psychotherapy - SRP

People see through their hearts, not just their eyes.

The innovations introduced by DAN contribute to the ongoing development of systemic-relational psychotherapy, incorporating expressive tools that enhance physical, digital, and narrative aspects. Through effective collaboration between research and clinical practice, the DAN model has become a versatile and integrated resource, well-suited to address contemporary challenges in mental and relational health. Within this framework, professional training benefits from a multidimensional methodology that encourages both personal and professional advancement, providing new perspectives for interpretation and intervention to facilitate meaningful change. SRP integrates both bodily and psychological aspects, focusing on the importance of relationships and emotions in therapy. DAN exercises, combine digital, analogue, and narrative tools to support individual and family well-being. This book introduces DAN, an approach that adapts exercises to patients' needs and supports emotional and relational health through mind-body practices. It covers both top-down and bottom-up therapies for understanding body-mind integration and highlights the complex interplay of relationships, experiences, and intergenerational factors. The overview explains DAN's integrated method and sets the stage for the concepts and techniques to follow, reflecting its blend of systemic-relational psychotherapy with various therapeutic approaches. In the end, the title Systemic Psychotherapy- Strategies for Managing Stress and Trauma prevailed over the previous

one, *Seeing emotions*. The former title evoked fond memories of my experience with Bandler, Grinder, and NLP. The significance of the visual channel highlights the influence of neurolinguistic programming (NLP) within the field of psychotherapy. My engagement with NLP began shortly after its inception by John Bandler and Richard Grinder. In 1978, Boscolo and Cecchin provided a letter of introduction that facilitated my entry into the esteemed Mental Research Institute (MRI) at 555 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto. With their endorsement, I commenced my tenure at MRI in May of that year, where I was received by Alma Menn. She subsequently introduced me to Carlos Sluzki, who became my mentor from that point forward.

Integrative dynamics and MRI: a crucible for psychotherapeutic innovation

Since the 1960s, the Mental Research Institute (MRI) has promoted dialogue between psychodynamic and strategic approaches, notably through influential figures such as Carlos Sluzki and John Watzlawick. MRI developed into a centre for multiple theoretical orientations, profoundly shaping systemic and relational psychotherapy. Gregory Bateson's passing in 1980 marked the end of a formative era for these integrative methods; by that time, MRI had already established itself as a leader in innovative thought and clinical practice.

Contributors such as Richard Bandler and John Grinder—authors of “*The Structure of Magic*”¹—as well as Francine Shapiro, the creator of EMDR, enriched MRI's dynamic intellectual environment during the mid-1970s. Other notable figures, including Virginia Satir, Don Jackson, and John Weakland, brought extensive expertise to MRI, furthering its influence on psychotherapeutic theory and global practice.

¹ Grinder J. & Bandler, R., (1976) *The structure of the magic, Vol II: a book about communication and change*

Their collaborative work focused on advancing beyond linear, positivist, and objectivist paradigms, studying the contributions of Milton Erickson, Ernst Rossi, Steve de Shazer, and Jay Haley. These efforts were integral to developing the MRI strategic current, which laid the groundwork for brief, solution-focused therapy and reinforced MRI's legacy as a driving force behind contemporary systemic and strategic psychotherapeutic models.

Carlos Sluzki² posited that systemic psychotherapy is rooted in the second-order cybernetics of the observing system, as theorized by Heinz von Foerster³ and can be categorized into strategic, structural, and epistemological streams.

This volume aims to simplify and integrate the systemic-relational approach in psychotherapy, removing unnecessary obstacles to progress. In Italy, fewer than 20% of accredited psychotherapy schools adhere to this tradition, with most favouring cognitive-behavioural, psychoanalytical, or humanistic-integrated models. While differing approaches may complicate therapeutic outcomes, synthesizing essential elements strengthens the discipline by clarifying key factors and enhancing effectiveness.

To achieve optimal results, contemporary psychotherapy should be characterized by efficacy, replicability, simplicity, cost-effectiveness, rigor, adaptability, and innovation. Central to this approach are robust narrative techniques and an ongoing consideration of physiological processes, particularly those connecting neuroscience and immune system functioning.

² Sluzki, C. E. (1983). Process and structure in family therapy. *Family Process*, 22(3), 469–476.

³ von Foerster, H. (1981). *Observing systems*. Seaside, CA: Intersystems Publications.

The three fundamental branches of systemic therapy

The strategic model

The strategic model includes a series of therapeutic approaches and techniques aimed at promoting well-being through targeted interventions. Included within this model are practices such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), Ericksonian hypnosis, and various body-oriented therapies. These body therapies can use movement, dance, relaxation techniques, music, massage, meditation, and mindfulness. Each of these methods contributes to the overall goal of promoting psychophysical well-being by involving both mind and body in the therapeutic process. The strategic model represents one of the fundamental approaches of systemic therapy, characterized by a set of techniques and interventions designed to promote the well-being of the person through targeted and specific actions. This model stands out for its attention to operational tools that directly involve both the mind and the body, thus allowing integrated work on the different levels of human experience.

Integrations

Within the strategic model are methods such as EMDR⁴ (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), NLP⁵ (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), Ericksonian⁶ hypnosis and a series of body-oriented therapies. These practices are united by the aim of promoting effective

⁴ Shapiro, F. (2001). *Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR): Basic principles, protocols, and procedures* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

⁵ Bandler, R., & Grinder, J. (1976). *The structure of magic II: A book about communication and change*. Science and Behaviour Books.

⁶ Erickson, M. H., & Rossi, E. L. (1976). *Hypnotic realities: The induction of clinical hypnosis and forms of indirect suggestion*. Irvington Publishers.

change, using tools that activate both cognitive and bodily processes and facilitate the integration of emotions. Body therapies employ techniques like movement, dance, relaxation, music, massage, meditation, and mindfulness to support stress relief, emotional balance, and overall well-being. These approaches engage individuals holistically, fostering new skills for handling personal and relational challenges. The strategic model offers a flexible, pragmatic framework that promotes well-being through integrated methods, facilitating deep mental and physical transformation.

The structural model

The structural model, developed by pioneers such as Minuchin⁷, provides therapists with a reliable framework for understanding and navigating the complexities of family dynamics. At the heart of this model are key concepts such as boundaries, hierarchies, triangulations, disqualifications, and secrets. By applying these fundamental concepts, therapists are provided with a clear reference map, which allows them to enter and work within the intricate “family labyrinth” without fear of losing their orientation. The structural model then serves as a guide for therapists to maintain direction and clarity during family interventions. At the heart of the structural model are some fundamental concepts:

- **Boundaries:** Boundaries delimit the relationships between family members and between the different subsystems that compose it. They regulate the proximity or distance between individuals and subgroups, influencing the overall functioning of the family system.

⁷ Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and family therapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- **Hierarchies:** Hierarchies refer to the organization of roles and responsibilities within the family. A clear hierarchical structure helps to maintain order and defines how parents, children and other members interact.
- **Triangulation:** Triangulation occurs when two family members involve a third party to manage tension or conflict, creating alliances that can temporarily stabilize the system, but often further complicate relationship dynamics.
- **Disqualifications:** Disqualifications represent the processes through which family members minimize or invalidate the experience or feelings of others, generating misunderstandings and sometimes reinforcing the rigidity of roles.
- **Secrets:** Family secrets are hidden elements that can profoundly affect relationships and modes of communication, helping to maintain precarious balances or perpetuate dysfunctional patterns.

The application of these concepts allows the therapist to build a real “map” of the family, useful for orienting oneself in the intricate labyrinth of relationships and internal dynamics. Through this map, the therapist can intervene in a targeted way, always maintaining clarity and direction during the therapeutic process. The structural model, therefore, not only provides theoretical and practical tools to understand family dynamics but also acts as a compass that guides the therapist in exploring the system, allowing him to intervene effectively and consciously without ever losing his point of reference.

The epistemological model

The epistemological model, characteristic of the first Milanese⁸ model, focuses on the constructive, narrative dimension and the generational context of family relationships.

This approach emphasizes the importance of family games, the dynamics of three-generational relationships, and mind maps that shape individual, generational, familial, and contextual references. The model uses sophisticated linguistic tools, such as hypothesis formation, maintaining neutrality, and employing circular or circular triadic questions in their various forms. These techniques help therapists explore and understand the deeper layers of family interactions and relationship patterns. A central aspect of this model is the concept of hypothesis, the promotion of reflective thinking through triadic and circular questions, the importance attributed to the so-called “family games”: repetitive and often implicit interactions that define the way in which family members relate to each other and to external contexts. These games manifest themselves in communication patterns, alliances, coalitions and oppositions that cross generations, giving shape to a complex network of shared meanings and handed down roles.

Three-generational relationships⁹ reveal how experiences, values, and behaviours are passed down in families, shaping self-perception and interpersonal dynamics. Mental maps are key to this process, forming the cognitive and emotional structures each person, generation, and family use to interpret reality. These maps serve as a reference for understanding personal and collective experiences, orienting the choices and methods of responding to events inside and outside the family unit. The epistemological model makes use of refined linguis-

⁸ Boscolo, L., Cecchin, G., Hoffman, L., & Penn, P. (1987). *Milan systemic family therapy: Conversations in theory and practice*. Basic Books.

⁹ Mariotti, M., Bassoli, F., & Frison, R. (2002). *Manuale di psicoterapia sistemica e relazionale*. Padova: ed Sapere.

tic tools to explore and understand the deepest layers of family interactions. Among these, the formation of hypotheses stands out, which allows the therapist to maintain an exploratory and non-judgmental attitude; maintaining neutrality, which avoids taking a position in favour of one or more family members; and the use of circular triadic questions, in all their variations. These linguistic techniques make it possible to investigate reciprocal points of view, to reveal the connections between the different generational levels and to bring to light the implicit relational models that guide family functioning. Through these strategies, the epistemological model offers therapists a privileged perspective to understand the complexity of family dynamics and to facilitate processes of change that involve not only individuals, but the entire generational and narrative system of the family.

Psychotherapeutic eclecticism and the search for coherence and flexibility

Over the past few decades, distinct approaches to psychotherapy have developed independently, often without recognition of their shared foundations. Historically, these different modalities have progressed along separate paths, but contemporary trends highlight their convergence within the broader field of psychotherapeutic practice. The rigid distinctions between the modalities are increasingly untenable; isolated approaches can no longer be maintained in such an interconnected landscape. While fragmentation has previously hindered progress, the current integration of different methods represents a positive evolution for psychotherapy: evaluation skills that avoid the drama of labels; the psychotherapist's competence to maintain a relationship in which there is awareness of the observing system and coupling (the more the client changes, the more I change); the security brought by knowing how to adapt and redefine contextual frames; the ability to create a care process that includes a before, during and

after with valid acceptance, treatment and discharge techniques. Most importantly, psychotherapy should address both the mind and body. The last sentence encapsulates the main meaning of this book. Our relational approach to psychotherapy recognizes that integrating body and mind enables clients to improve their lifestyle, reduce symptoms, and enhance empathy and reflective thinking. With increased knowledge and awareness of the body-mind connection, his tendency to see things as simply true or false, right or wrong, will decrease, and his body's reflexive reactions will become more intelligent and balanced. This can help prevent hypertensive episodes, diabetes, boils, gastritis, and even more serious conditions.

The convergence of psychotherapeutic approaches

From fragmentation to integration

In recent decades, psychotherapy has seen various approaches develop separately, but these distinctions are fading as integration becomes common. Today, interconnected practices make it difficult to keep modalities isolated.

Positive evolution through integration

Although fragmentation has previously impeded progress, the present integration of diverse methods signifies a positive transformation for psychotherapy. Key advancements include the therapist's ability to evaluate without resorting to dramatic labelling, maintaining an awareness of both the observing system and the dynamic process of change—recognizing that as the client changes, so does the therapist. This integration also brings the security of adapting and redefining contextual frameworks and enables the creation of a care process encompassing valid techniques for acceptance, treatment, and discharge across all stages: before, during, and after therapy.

Mind-body integration in psychotherapy

Most importantly, psychotherapy must be equipped to address both mind and body, working with each in tandem. This central principle underpins the systemic-relational approach: to contribute meaningfully to the broader discipline of psychotherapy, practitioners must understand that effective intervention comes from working simultaneously on body and mind. By fostering this awareness, therapy can help clients make the best use of their lifestyles, reduce symptoms—potentially to the point of disappearance—and enhance their empathic and reflective capacities.

Transforming dichotomies and bodily responses

Through this integrated approach, clients experience a reduction in dichotomous thinking—moving away from rigid true/false or right/wrong judgments. Bodily responses become more intelligent and modulated, helping to prevent issues like hypertensive crises, diabetes, furunculosis, gastritis, and more severe conditions. This transformation is made possible by new knowledge and awareness of the relationships between body and mind, leading to improved overall well-being and adaptive functioning.

Neuroscience and psychotherapy

Contemporary neuroscience underscores the importance of considering bodily interventions as an integral part of psychotherapeutic practice. It is widely acknowledged that, in some cases, introducing healthy stimuli may not be feasible without first addressing the body. Nevertheless, while massage, meditation, or other sensation- and emotion-focused methods can offer significant benefits, these approaches alone—if not supported by systemic techniques—

may have limited impact on the broader context influencing the individual's well-being.

Solely relying on somatic interventions, such as mindfulness, EMDR, or NLP, may provide temporary improvement; however, if the environmental factors that perpetuate symptoms remain unchanged, homeostatic forces often return individuals to their previous state. This dynamic is aptly illustrated by the anecdote referencing Dante's *Inferno*, where superficial relief is swiftly undermined when underlying conditions persist. There's an old joke that captures the irony of partial solutions: it's about a group of damned souls who are condemned to stand in a sea of foul water, but only up to their knees. They grumble, but at least it's not any deeper. Suddenly, a trumpet blares and a commanding voice calls out, "All right, everyone—go under now!" That reminds us that superficial fixes can be upended in an instant, urging us to embrace deeper, more systemic change.

Given these complexities, a comprehensive theoretical framework emphasizing the need for reformulating systemic-relational therapy is warranted. The objective is to unify mentalizing, relational, and contextual strategies with body-oriented methodologies. By integrating these diverse approaches within the context of contemporary neuroscience, therapeutic interventions can more effectively facilitate sustainable change. This integrated model addresses both mind and body, as well as the relational and environmental systems impacting overall health. DAN exercises, over 40 of which use body-based matrices, illustrate this holistic method. A key element of this approach is how it blends both bottom-up and top-down strategies in systemic-relational psychotherapy, giving the DAN model its unique, multidimensional viewpoint. This integration allows practitioners to address clients' physical and cognitive challenges, leading to deeper and lasting change.

The role and limits of brief techniques in systemic-relational therapy

Short techniques such as meditation, massage, dance, drama, and nature walks, among many others, are undeniably beneficial tools. These interventions can support individuals in managing symptoms and improving well-being. However, while they provide immediate relief and facilitate emotional regulation, they do not fundamentally alter the larger environment that sustains and perpetuates symptomatic patterns.

Understanding the fundamentals of systems models

At the heart of systemic models is the recognition that individual symptoms are often maintained and reinforced by relational, contextual, and environmental factors. Systemic-relational therapy is therefore based on the awareness that lasting change requires addressing not only the individual, but also the systems that surround him: families, social networks and broader contexts.

Bottom-up psychotherapy

Bottom-up psychotherapy focuses on addressing emotional experiences stored in the body. It uses techniques like breathing exercises, mindfulness, movement, and other somatic interventions to help patients reconnect with bodily sensations and process emotions physically. After somatic processing, these experiences can be cognitively integrated to support psychological healing. This approach recognizes that trauma, stress, and emotional disturbances are often not only psychological but are also encoded and maintained within the body's physiological systems. By working directly with the body's responses—such as muscle tension, breath patterns, and movement—

bottom-up psychotherapy aims to unlock and resolve these deeply rooted emotional experiences. For instance, practices such as somatic experiencing and sensorimotor psychotherapy emphasize the importance of bodily awareness and physical engagement in therapy, facilitating a pathway for clients to process unresolved emotions and trauma at a foundational level. This method complements traditional talk therapy by allowing for the integration of physical and cognitive experiences, leading to more holistic and sustainable psychological healing. The foundational work by Bessel van der Kolk¹⁰ highlights how trauma is stored in the body and underscores the effectiveness of somatic therapies in facilitating recovery.

Top-down psychotherapy

In contrast, top-down psychotherapy begins with the mind and cognitive processes as a starting point for addressing emotional and behavioural concerns. This approach is based on the premise that thoughts and beliefs play a significant role in shaping emotions and behaviours, and that changing these cognitive patterns can lead to significant change. The main techniques in top-down therapy include psychodynamic interventions, systemic-relational and cognitive-behavioural (CBT) therapies, cognitive restructuring, and other dialogic and reflective practices. The overall goal is to help patients identify and transform dysfunctional thoughts, thereby improving emotional and behavioural well-being.

¹⁰ B. van der Kolk 2014 *The body keeps the score*. Penguin,