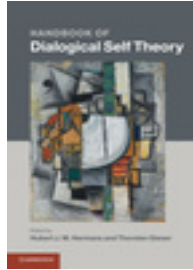


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### Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory

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## 7 Psychodrama: from dialogical self theory to a self in dialogical action

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*Leni M. F. Verhofstadt-Denève*

### **Introduction**

In a comparison of the theoretical and practical aspects of dialogical self theory (DST) (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010; Hermans and Kempen 1993) and *phenomenological-dialectical* theory and practice (Verhofstadt-Denève 1988, 2000, 2007), we will focus on a confrontation of two crucial key elements from both theories, namely the model of the ‘multivoiced self characterized by moving *I*-positions’, and the central ‘phenomenological-dialectical personality model’ (Phe-Di P model). This analysis aims to demonstrate that while the theories underlying both models show great similarities, there appear to be marked differences in the methods applied for exploring and stimulating intra- and interpersonal dialogues. Therefore, the theoretical analysis will be complemented by a comparative methodological-practical issue.

In various publications, Hermans has convincingly emphasized the connection between DST and the self-confrontation method (SCM) (Hermans and Kempen 1993), and later also with the construction of a personal position repertoire (PPR) (Hermans 2001b). Similarly, Verhofstadt-Denève described the strong relationship between the phenomenological personality model and experiential-dialectical psychodrama (Dillen *et al.* 2009; Verhofstadt-Denève 1988, 2000, 2001, 2003; Verhofstadt-Denève *et al.* 2004). A brief analysis of (1) SCM and PPR, and of (2) various types of dialogues activated in psychodrama aims to demonstrate that the application of action and drama techniques in addition to SCM and PPR would constitute an effective complement to the constructive stimulation of ‘internal and external imaginal dialogues’ and thus offer an added value to the service of DST. Moreover, psychodrama could also be enriched if used in conjunction with SCM and PPR. A deliberate combination of the SCM, PPR and psychodrama techniques therefore holds a real challenge for the future.

## Theory

### *Hermans' model of moving I-positions*

The self can be represented as a space composed of a multiplicity of positions, represented by dots in two concentric circles (Figure 7.1).

*Internal positions*, depicted by dots within the inner circle, are felt as part of myself (e.g. *I* as a mother, *I* as an ambitious worker, *I* as an enjoyer of life), whereas *external positions*, depicted by dots within the outer circle, are felt as part of the environment (e.g. my children, my colleagues, my friend John) (Hermans 2001a). Within the realm of internal positions, a distinction has been made between 'social positions' and 'personal positions'. Social positions can be equated with the traditional term 'role' (e.g. father, husband). Personal positions, on the other hand, receive their form from the particular ways in which individual people organize their own lives (e.g. *I* as a perfectionist, *I* as a dreamer) (Hermans 2001b). Many positions, however, are simply *outside* the subjective horizon of the self, and the person is simply not aware of their existence. As possible positions, however, they may enter the self-space at some moment in time depending on changes in the situation (Hermans 2001a).

In order to facilitate dialogical processes, positions were approached as voiced positions, able to tell their stories and implied meaning units. Three kinds of (imaginal) interchange can be distinguished: internal-external, internal-internal and external-external (Hermans 2001b).

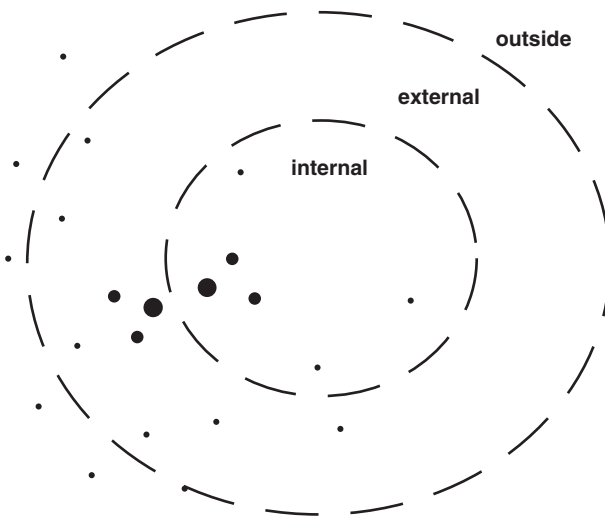


Figure 7.1 Positions in a multivoiced self.

Although intra- and interpersonal dialogues are strongly interwoven, it is necessary to make a distinction between imagination and reality as defined by a particular community. An imagined intrapersonal dialogue (*within the self-space*) may take an entirely different direction in from an interpersonal actual dialogue (*between different persons*). The actual words of the actual other may even force me to reconstruct my opinion as the interaction develops. In fact, the actual other questions, challenges and changes existing positions in the self, and is able to introduce new ones (Hermans 2001a). In the next part we will present a succinct analysis of the Phe-Di P model with systematic references to Hermans' model of moving *I*-positions.

### **The phenomenological-dialectical personality involved in 'intrapersonal' and 'interpersonal' dialogues**

Earlier publications give a detailed description of the basic principles of developmental psychotherapy and the underlying phenomenological-dialectical personality theory (Verhofstadt-Denève 1988, 2000, 2001). We shall confine ourselves to the main ideas here (see Figure 7.2).

In this model, *phenomenological* refers to the unique subjective content and meaning which all human beings attach to themselves and surrounding world. *Dialectical* refers to the underlying process which causes these contents to be created and to develop.

#### *The phenomenological content: intrapersonal dialogues*

The basic content of the model harks back to William James' *I-me* self-model, as does the view of the self proposed by Hermans. The Phe-Di P model views the person as a dynamic *I-me* relationship, in which the *I* (as subject) is capable of reflection on the *me* (as object). For example, a people can reflect on their capacities and weaknesses. The ability to reflect belongs to the *I*; the result of reflection (capacities and weaknesses) belongs to the *me*.

In the model, the *I* is the person's thinking, feeling, willing, acting, observing and evaluating component. It experiences, reflects, organizes, selects and integrates in terms of self-esteem and recognition by (significant) others (see below). The *I* is therefore more process than content. The *me* can be observed. It is a semantic system resulting from the reflection by the *I*. What is the result of the reflection process of the *I* on the *me*? The *I-me* relation creates several phenomenological self-constructions. The interpretations of the social and material world are also part of the *I-me* since they all involve personal constructions and (re)creations. The properties *I* attribute to my friend become part of myself. In the sometimes chaotic multiplicity of person and world

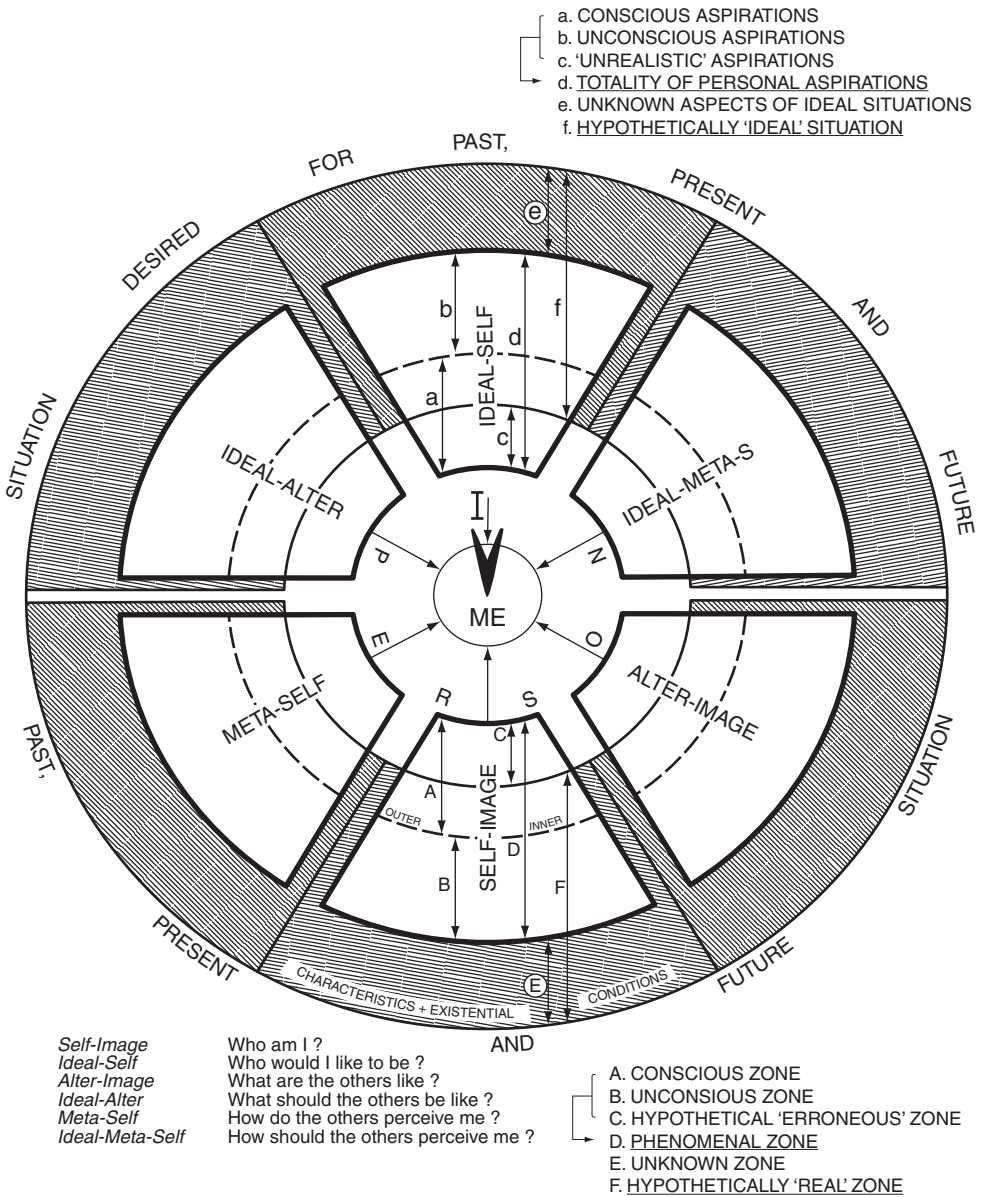


Figure 7.2 The phenomenological-dialectical personality model.

interpretations, we distinguish six *me*-constructions (or *me*-dimensions), each corresponding to a central question (see Figure 7.2):

### **Central I-questions**

1. *Who am I?*
2. Who would I like to be?
3. *What are others like?*
4. What should others be like?
5. *How do others perceive me?*
6. How should others perceive me?

### **me-constructions**

- self-image*  
 ideal self  
*alter image*  
 ideal alter  
*meta-self*  
 ideal meta-self

These six questions constitute the basis of a therapeutically practicable and ‘living’ personality model consisting of six *me*-constructions. For every human being, the starting point is a unique, subjective (phenomenological) interpretation of oneself and one’s surrounding social and material reality at different levels of consciousness, knowing, time and action.

The content of the personality constructions, as a result of the *I-me* reflection, will be briefly illustrated by self-descriptions from one of my clients. Kevin, a 17-year-old boy, had a fight with his drunk father in order to protect his mother; the father as a result was permanently paralysed, and Kevin suffers from extreme guilt feelings.

The first two constructions relate to the self:

1. *As I am in the world in which I am living (self-image)*: ‘I am Kevin. I’m 17. I have no friends. I no longer trust anyone. Everything used to be nicer in the past; we were a real family then and my parents loved me. I’m a bad son to them. Life has become meaningless and I don’t think this is going to change.’
2. *As I would like to be in a world in which I would want to live (ideal self)*: ‘I’m Kevin as I would like to be. I have friends I can trust, and a girlfriend who truly loves me. I get along well with my parents. Weather permitting, I occasionally take my dad out for a walk in his wheelchair. I often give my mum a hand in the household and sometimes look after my brothers. We love each other.’

The third and fourth constructions concern my creation of the other(s):

3. *As they exist as persons in their world (alter image)*. Kevin speaks as his mother: ‘I’m Kevin’s mother. I am 39 years old. I have a large family and my husband’s in a wheelchair. He has fortunately stopped drinking. I sometimes feel very tense, but I keep fighting for my husband and my children.’
4. *As I believe they should be in an ideal world (ideal alter)*. Kevin as his mother: ‘I’m Kevin’s mother and I feel quite happy. My husband has become

friendlier, gentler, also towards the children. We're again forming the warm family we used to be. I can better cope with the situation now.'

Both alter images relate to the construction of our meaningful material and social world. They are the 'others inside us', so to speak. These others are of course very closely related to our self-image. They contribute towards positive or negative self-esteem.

When thinking about the others in greater depth, I am inevitably confronted with the question of how the others view me and what I mean to them (meta-self). Basically, the meta-self is part of the alter image, but given its considerable therapeutic importance, this dimension is treated as a separate *me*-construction:

5. *My construction of the image others have formed of me and my world (meta-self)*. Kevin as his mother: 'You can't trust Kevin. He's much too quick-tempered, he doesn't control himself at all, and this caused this nasty accident. The police came. He ran away. How on earth can he do something like this to his parents! He's depressive now. I can't stand it any longer.'
6. *My construction of the way others should perceive myself and my world (ideal meta-self)*. Kevin as his mother: 'I think Kevin's a good lad – he loves me a lot and he protected me from my bullying husband, who used to beat me. He saved my life. If only my husband hadn't been so aggressive, Kevin wouldn't have had to stop him and he wouldn't have fallen! Kevin's certainly not to blame for the accident. Kevin has a girlfriend and he recently got a job at the post office. I know he's happy and this makes me happy too.'

In summary: the construction of the self-image and ideal self not only implies an active conversation with *oneself* about one's own qualities, weaknesses and strengths, but also includes social self-related questions (cf. 'social roles'): 'Who am *I* in relation to others? What is my task to them as a son, a brother?' Both contents are highly comparable to Hermans' 'internal personal *I*-positions' and 'internal social *I*-positions', respectively (see Figures 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3). In contrast, the four other dimensions, alter self and ideal alter; meta-self and ideal meta-self, are the result of our personal construction of these significant others – 'What are they like?, What do they think and feel?' and 'What image do they have of me?' – comparable to Hermans' 'external *I*-positions' (see Figures 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3).

It is important that the content of the six dimensions can be analysed by the same basic features such as time, location, consciousness, possibilities of alternative interpretations, and (un)known concepts (see Figure 7.2).

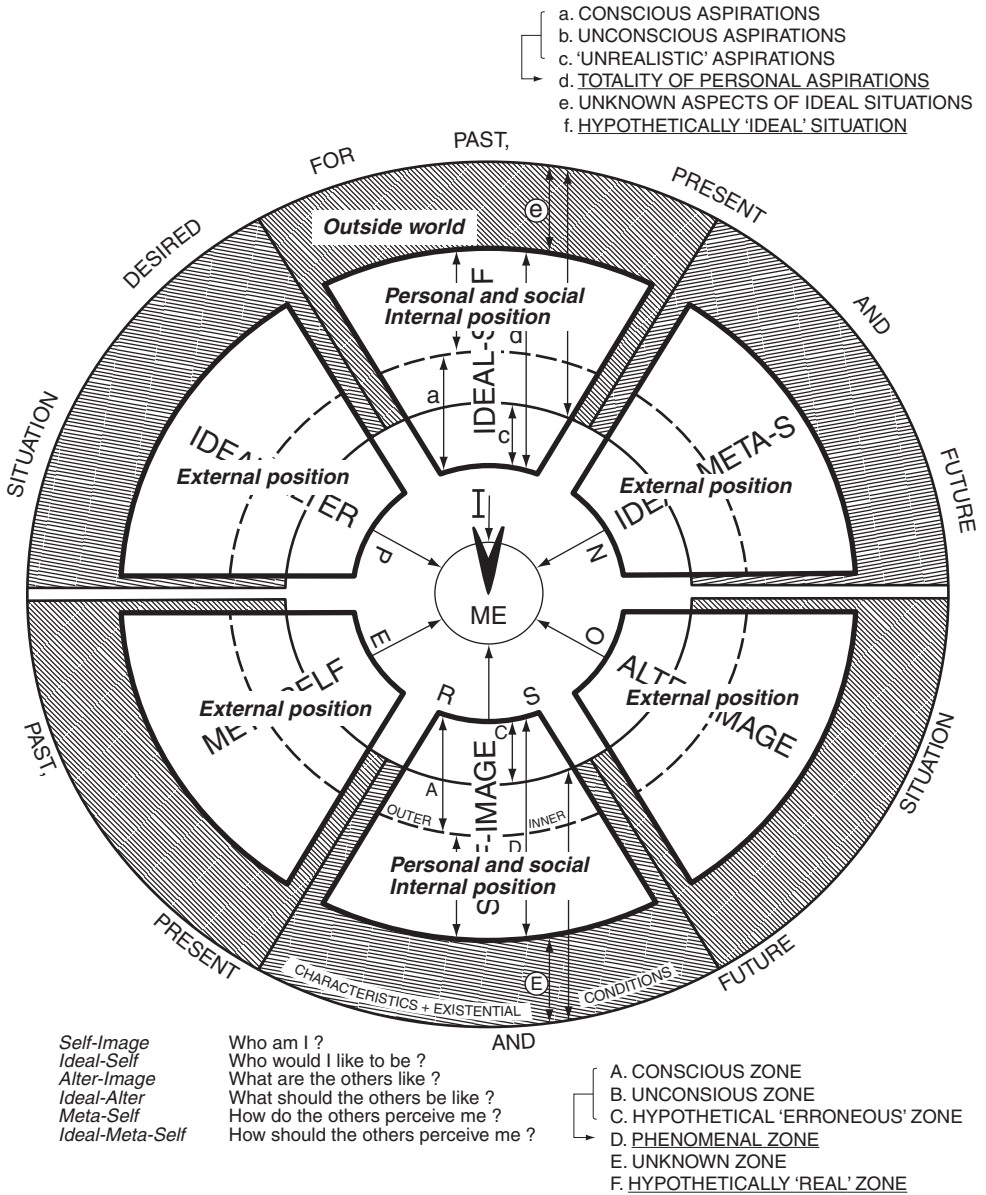


Figure 7.3 The multivoiced self-positions (see Figure 7.1) in relation to the phenomenological-dialectical personality model (see Figure 7.2).



Each of the six dimensions can be reflected upon from the three different *time perspectives*; for example, Kevin has an image of himself and of his father in the past, the present and the future. Moreover, in each dimension we can make a distinction between the *external(outer) aspect* (the things one says, and one's concrete actions) and the *internal(inner) aspect* (what one thinks and feels).<sup>1</sup>

For example, during a psychodrama session, Kevin said, shouting at his father:

K: *Oh shut up! Look at yourself! What did you do with your life? Misfit!* (external expression of alter image).  
 DIRECTOR: *What are you thinking of now? What do you feel? Go one step to the left and try to say what is going on in your mind – your father can't hear you now.*

K can now express his internal part, 'acting from a new *I*-position as if another person was speaking from a different space':

K (THINKING ALOUD): *I feel bad . . . guilty. Why am I saying all this? I know he feels miserable, and strangely enough I pity him. Sometimes I think I still love him?* (internal content of self-image).  
 K becomes emotional and softly weeps.

Therapeutic sessions should offer the possibility to work with external and internal hidden contents.

It is obvious that the *I-me* reflection is not confined to the *conscious* level (Figure 7.2, zones A and a). One need not be a convinced Freudian to acknowledge the huge impact of the *unconscious* on the development of the *me*-constructions (Figure 7.2, zones B and b).

As subjectively involved interpreters, 'errors' and 'gaps' can occur in the way we perceive and construe our own and other people's qualities and performances (Figure 7.2, zones C and c). It goes without saying that there are no strict criteria for assessing whether an interpretation is correct or erroneous. 'Erroneous' has a relative (situational) meaning largely determined by historical, cultural and social traditions. From a clinical-therapeutic point of view, it is essential that the therapist should unconditionally start from taking the client's subjective phenomenological constructions of himself and the others, no matter how bizarre and unrealistic these constructions may appear to be. Starting from here, and supported by a safe therapeutic climate, the client can himself discover more adequate, or at least alternative, interpretations of himself and the world.

In addition to the 'erroneous' interpretations of myself and my material and social world, there are the hypothetical characteristics and conditions upon which I cannot reflect because I do not know them (yet).

These so-called *unknown contents* are in keeping with Hermans' concept of the *outside world* (Figures 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3, zones E and e). Unknown elements are fundamentally different from unconscious ones. Unknown contents are literally those *I do not know*, those I have not yet been confronted with at whatever level of consciousness. Unconscious contents are those *I may prefer not to know*. Unconscious contents are dynamic forces which intrinsically determine our behaviour considerably. The influence of unknown contents may also be decisive, but essentially they do not belong to my person, such as social forces I am (not yet) aware of, but which I will possibly have to address later, and unknown elements inside or outside this world which we will probably never know, such as the infinitesimally large and the infinitesimally small in a cosmic reality.

#### *Interpersonal dialogues between 'real' persons*

So far, we have discussed intrapsychic phenomenological constructions and dynamics within one single person. Such subjective internal actions typically occur when we are alone, as when we are (day)dreaming, writing a text or driving a car. However, interpersonal contacts with other persons are highly frequent as well. Like Hermans, we distinguish imagined dialogues (within the self space) and actual dialogues (between different persons). We meet other people in the train, in the streets and so on. We sometimes learn from them and they at times make us correct our phenomenological contents. This is even more true for real-life contacts in discussions after a lecture, at work or with a friend, or in chat or email conversations. These interpersonal dialogues involve an intensely complex combination of intra- and interpsychic dynamics in both persons and offer scope for mutual corrections of intra- and interpsychic phenomenological constructions. These insights are essential for resolving conflicts between persons, groups and cultures.

#### *Dialectical processes*

As stated above, the six *me*-constructions of the person refer to the content or the result of the *I-me* reflection. The dialectical refers to the dynamic relationship between the constructions. The assumption is that the six personality dimensions need to relate to each other as dialectical oppositions moving through three stages (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) following a double negation (see also Verhofstadt-Denève 2000, 2007). For instance, there is an inevitable opposition between the self-image and the ideal self. If both were to coincide completely, the development process between these two poles would stagnate

(for elaborations, see Riegel 1979; Verhofstadt-Denève 2000, 2007; Verhofstadt-Denève *et al.* 2003).

How is the dialectical component materialized? During a psychodrama action, the protagonist (Kevin) can begin by presenting himself in the *I*-form (i.e. self image or thesis stage; cf. Hermans' 'internal personal *I*-position'). In a second stage, he moves into his ideal self and formulates in the *I*-form whom he would like to be or become (i.e. antithesis stage; cf. Hermans' 'moving to opposite internal *I*-position'). According to Fichte (1810, drawing on Hegel), this transition from the first to the second state implies the *first negation* – here the negation of the self-image in favour of the ideal self; or, formulated differently, the self-image remains historically present but is shifted towards the background in favour of the ideal self. In this stage, the opposition between the two images (or *I*-positions) is therefore felt most strongly.

However, after taking the role of the ideal self, this ideal self is negated as well by the return to the initial position: his self-image (this is the *second negation*) (i.e. synthesis stage, or as could be formulated as Hermans' 'a move to the initial *I*-position'). According to Hegel, the result of this triadic process is that the two poles concerned (self-image and ideal self) will be changed, 'aufgehoben', or raised to a qualitatively higher level of development, mainly through the experienced opposition between self-image and ideal self during the discordant antithesis stage (Verhofstadt-Denève 2000, 2007).

To conclude: in the phenomenological personality model (as in Hermans' way of thinking), the *me* is clearly a 'multivoiced self' with six main dimensions which can interact and be in conflict. Interestingly, the content of the six self-constructions shows a high congruence with the *I*-positions in Hermans' multivoiced self. As demonstrated above, both models have clear correspondences. Moreover, we think that differences do not so much relate to the basic theoretical assumptions as to the methodological-clinical field of application.

## Practice

*The self-confrontation method (SCM), the personal position repertoire (PPR) and dialogues with 'imaginal figures'*

Hermans' SCM involves a thorough self-investigation, which is of great diagnostic importance as a useful starting point for clinical practice. However, the self-critical Hermans discovered a number of limitations in the SCM which made this method inadequate to meet the versatility

of DST. For extensive information about this rich procedure and the development of practical examples, we refer to Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995). In his view, the SCM is too exclusively focused on 'self'-investigation, with clients telling their story as 'passionate storytellers' to a therapist, but from which two fundamental aspects are missing in relation to the DST.

First of all, the social aspect is under-represented in this investigation. The stories generally remain confined to pure self-descriptions *without focus on the external I-positions*. A second limitation resides in the fact that in the traditional use of the SCM, clients are not urged to *express and explore themselves in an actively dialogical way* in relation to the basic acceptance of a multivoiced, dialogical self-concept. Therefore, the PPR method was developed as a complement to the SCM. The PPR is a research tool in which both internal and external *I-positions* can be made explicit and be charted in a clear matrix (for a full overview of the procedure together with the development of a case, see Hermans 2001b).

The PPR definitely fulfils the social dimension of DST in its explicit focus on the external *I-positions*. The possibility which the PPR offers for determining an organized structure of the internal and external *I-positions* at different moments meets the basic DST principle of the self as a complex, narratively organized structure, *extended* to the *social environment* (Hermans 2001a). The PPR method was devised in order to assess the organization of *I-positions*, but in itself it does not explore dialogical relationships between the different positions. However, by inviting some of the positions to formulate valuations from their own perspective, and exchanging them with other *I-positions*, the method was further adapted in dialogical ways. As such, the PPR method can be used in better accordance with the dialogical aspect of DST: 'The voices function like interacting characters in a story, involved in a process of question and answer, agreement and disagreement' (Hermans 2001b). The combination of SCM and PPR seemed a good step towards real dialogues.

Like the SCM, the PPR can be administered repeatedly, thus revealing shifts in the hierarchy of *I-positions*. These shifts are discussed with the therapist, and from these discussions the main oppositions in the *I-positions* can be distilled. Some good examples can be found in the PPR study of Mary, who defined herself as a *witch* in certain circumstances, besides her ordinary position as *Mary* (see Hermans and Hermans-Jansen 1995). The innovative nature of this approach resides in the fact that the valuations which Mary formulated via the SCM were also evaluated by the witch. In other words, the SCM helps the client to

formulate valuations from a specific *I*-position and to subsequently answer them from another *I*-position. 'As the different affective profiles suggest, Mary and the witch were adversaries in some situations . . . but could cooperate quite well in other situations. . . As part of this strategy, the incompatible position is not "cured" or treated as an undesirable symptom, but taken seriously as a partner with whom it is possible to get "on speaking terms". Instead of removing a "maladaptive" part of the self, the position repertoire is enriched and broadened in such way that a health-promoting reorganisation of the self can take place' (Hermans 2006). What is essential here is that for the first time a real dialogue arises between the two internal *I*-positions. For instance, Mary moves into the position of the witch, who 'becomes a part of herself', and from this position she formulates a statement directed towards herself. As will appear below, it is this very dialogue which is systematically, and even more directly and actively, applied in psychodrama.

### *Psychodrama*

Almost all therapies stimulate self-reflection (cf. the *I-me* dynamic) in order to help the client to find a more adequate redefinition of self and significant others. We also suggest a stimulation of intense self-reflection, but with lively dialogues directly in the personal context of the phenomenological self space, through the deliberate application of action and drama techniques. This method differs substantially from other therapies (and from the SCM and PPR practice) in which the client – in a dialogue with a therapist – mainly tells a story *about* himself in relation to significant others, comparable to the position of an interested external observer. In a training group in which both a client-oriented experiential therapy and a psychodrama therapy were taught, participants formulated the essence of psychodrama as follows.

In experiential therapy, you are standing on *the bank of your self-river* and you reflect on the flow, which you watch and contemplate intensely, in dialogue with an empathic therapist. And of course this is highly valuable. Moreover, in psychodrama the therapist (director) helps you to *take the plunge into your flow of life* and to start 'real', direct intra- and interpsychic dialogues within a specific time frame and space, which is inevitably accompanied by a sudden, more intense, consciousness and emotionality. It is a dialogue rather with yourself and with the others in you, than with the therapist, who is constantly watching you from the river bank. The therapist does not take the plunge into the process together with you, so he can always save you from the current, and once in a while, when you risk becoming

flooded by the strong experiences, this is indeed what he does, after which you can watch and contemplate the process you are going through from the river bank, together with the therapist, from a meta-position, and you can decide whether you are ready to jump back into the river. It is an ongoing, challenging alternation of a *contemplation* from a meta-position and a *stepping into* your own flow of life, with an accepting director offering no content himself but constantly monitoring your strength.

The expert application of psychodrama techniques can enable the 'protagonist' to *really step into his/her own personal universe* (Moreno and Moreno 1969; Verhofstadt-Denève 2000). As a result, in a specific space and time frame, he can actually look round, feel, think, talk, dialogue, fight, reorganize power structures and integrate. The idea is that a direct, in-depth *I-me* action should enable participants to find alternative constructions and organizations in relation to themselves and their material and social world. The main task of the psychodrama director is to create an atmosphere providing the greatest possible feeling of security, unconditional respect and mutual acceptance from all group members. The director is a 'facilitator' who, through the creation of a safe and structured methodological framework, gives the protagonist the confidence to step into his or her universe.

We will try to illustrate this procedure through the elaboration of a number of dialogue types corresponding to Hermans' theory of moving *I*-positions, namely (1) internal-external, (2) internal-internal and (3) external-external interchanges.

*Some examples of possible dialogues between personality constructions*

*Dialogue between self-image and alter image or 'imaginal internal-external dialogue'*

Here Kevin (K) is the protagonist (as mentioned above) in a group of eight adolescents who work under the supervision of a director (Dir). Kevin starts to tell in the *I*-form who he is (self-image or an internal *I*-position) and creates a concrete familiar situation.

DIR.: *Kevin, you're going to see your father now. Where do you want to meet him? What time is it? What are you going to do?*

K: *He's in the kitchen in his wheelchair, it's 7 pm.*

DIR.: *OK, tell us what the kitchen looks like. Where's the door, where's the worktop?*  
K describes the kitchen, and a few chairs and a table are brought in. (These simple objects considerably enhance Kevin's affective involvement in this specific situation.)

- DIR.: *I know it's difficult for you to meet your father, but here you can safely give it a try. If you like, you can choose somebody from the group to represent your father ('antagonist').*
- K: *OK, I'll take Bob. Bob enters the inner group space.*
- DIR.: *OK, Kevin, come here and stand behind Bob. You will now try to become your father and tell us who you are, using the I-form (i.e. role-taking). Take your time, Kevin. Bob, you will listen very carefully so that you know how to represent Kevin's father.*
- K: *I am Kevin's father. I am 42. I am paralysed, tired. I've lost all my strength and vitality. I watch TV all day long, I feel angry and sad. The only reason I go on living is my youngest son, Jerry. He's the only one left who loves me (this is a part of Kevin's alter image, his father and brother – cf. the move to an external I-position – we now proceed to Kevin's meta-self, another external I-position).*
- DIR. (addressing Kevin in the role of his father): *Well, father of Kevin, what do you think about your eldest son?*
- K (still playing the role of his own father): *He is the cause of all this misery. I might have been dead. I wish I was. As a child he was such a lovely kid. But how much he has changed! (Kevin's meta-self). Kevin is finding it hard to cope and starts crying softly.*
- DIR.: *OK, Kevin, take your time. Come here, you can now be yourself again, you are no longer your father. Who are you now?*
- K: *I'm Kevin, I had a difficult moment just now. I don't know why, I don't usually cry, but it came so suddenly! (again Kevin's self-image; cf. the switch to the internal I-position and an example of a dialectical process: from the self-image to the alter image and meta-self returning to the self-image).*

The above example describes the experiencing of oppositions between dimensions (or *I*-positions) of the person. The following example illustrates oppositions within one dimension.

#### *Dialogue within the self-image or 'imaginal internal–internal dialogue'*

The following example comes from a psychodrama session with students in clinical psychology. They wish to learn psychodrama through personal experiences. Here is how Jane (the protagonist) formulated this experience.

The director asks who would like to be the protagonist. I feel like stepping forward but I hesitate. I wait a little, and suddenly I can hear myself say, 'Yes, I would like to!' My 'critical self' urges me to accept the challenge. The director asks me to take a chair which represents *myself as a totality*. During role-taking in the *I*-form, I discover various – even opposed – aspects in myself. First I choose a red chair for the enthusiastic, naive and somewhat foolish part in

me. With the help of the group members who double<sup>2</sup> me, I call this part my *wild exuberance*. In a dialogue between myself, as my wild exuberant part and my father, I feel a strong disapproval, strong emotions come up.<sup>3</sup> Returning to myself as a totality gives me a relaxed feeling. Then I choose a chair for my second component, the *critical and evaluating spirit*. I then step out of this system, looking at things from a distance, considering and arranging things (cf. mirroring technique).<sup>4</sup> Back into the system, I discover my third component, which I call my *emotional self*. I position myself, my totality and my three components in a specific meaningful place in the room. I consecutively become each component, and the director constantly asks: *Who are you? What would you want to be like? How do important others perceive you? How should the others perceive you? How does Jane perceive you? How do the other components perceive you? What do you think of them?* The fact that I give answers in the *I*-form, from each of the respective positions, has a highly clarifying effect, structuring the whole. The end of the action is now near, and by way of conclusion I can say something to my three components and to the whole self. I feel moved and I stammer something like 'I'm glad to have all of you!'

This result is completely in agreement with Hermans. Instead of removing a 'maladaptive' part of the self, the position repertoire is enriched and broadened in such way that a health-promoting reorganization of the self can take place (Hermans 2006).

*Dialogue between alter images or 'imaginal external-external dialogue'*

For instance, in one of the sessions, Kevin enacts an animated dialogue between his parents. He alternately becomes his father and his mother, always speaking in the *I*-form when filling in their respective alter and meta-images (i.e. role-taking), and in the *you*-form for the dialogue, while moving in space from one role to the other.

*Dialogue with deceased persons or 'imaginal dialogue with imaginal others'*

In principle, this is a special form of a dialogue of the first type, namely self-image vs. alter image/meta-self or 'imaginal internal-external dialogue', in which the significant other is a deceased person who in an imaginary way is constantly present for the person in an active dialogue and plays a supportive role. The training group consists of 15 therapists. Pierre (P), a 36-year-old clinical psychologist, suddenly said that he wanted to confide a closely guarded secret to the group. This was his story:



- P: *As you know, I lost my twin brother Serge in a car crash when I was 14. He was killed instantly, but I survived the crash. However, what you don't know is that Serge has always been with me. He's here now too. We often talk to each other, but he sometimes frightens me and makes me feel guilty, and that's what I would like to work on now, here in this group.*
- DIR.: *Pierre, would you like to choose someone from the group as a symbol for your brother Serge?*
- P: *Yes, Jean-Marc.* Jean-Marc steps forward.
- P (standing behind Jean-Marc): *I am Serge, I'm 14 years old, I was killed in a car crash, but I will always be there for Pierre.*
- DIR.: *Pierre, become yourself again, and if you wish you can say something to Serge.*
- P: *Serge, I'm glad you're here, it means I'm never alone, but sometimes I also feel fear and guilt towards you.*
- DIR.: *Pierre, become your brother Serge again.*
- DIR. (to Pierre as Serge): *Serge, you've heard what Pierre has said.*
- P (as Serge): *Yes, but I don't understand this; there's no reason why he should be afraid of me or feel guilty. He could have been killed instead of me. There's nothing he could have done about this, was there?*
- DIR.: *Pierre, become yourself again and listen to your brother Serge.*
- JEAN-MARC (group member playing Serge): *Yes, but I don't understand this; there's no reason why you should be afraid of me or feel guilty. You could have been killed instead of me. There's nothing you could have done about this, was there?*
- Pierre hears his brother's words and becomes highly emotional.
- P: *He's never said this to me before. This is completely new, and it's quite a relief (Pierre then moves over to his brother and embraces him).*

The answer of Pierre is remarkable, since these are the very words which Pierre himself used in the position of his brother Serge, and now he is surprised to hear these words via his brother as if they were totally new. This role-taking and dialogue process initiates a lively, exteriorized self-dialogue or dialectical movement between the self-image and an imaginary significant other (or alter image). There are clear correspondences between this dialogue and the dialogue that emerged between Hermans' (2006) client and the portrait, *Mercedes de Barcelona*, but with Pierre the internal action is supported vigorously by his personally becoming the other in a concrete spatial and temporal context.

### **Psychodrama and dialogical self theory**

It is clear that the DST supports a much broader and richer inter- and intrapersonal activity than what a client expresses through the SCM method, even in combination with a PPR investigation. The technique of the dialogue with imaginal figures was indeed a major step in a dialogical direction. However, psychodrama can probably play an even more important role here. Practice does show that the combination of speaking, thinking, feeling and acting provides a very strong stimulus within the complex process of self-actualization and self-reorganization.

Both the SCM and psychodrama can generate a picture of an individual's personality structure, while both can also engender personality development. But the two methods appear to have different accents. The SCM emphasizes a more systematic survey of the structure and process of the self at different developmental moments, whereas psychodrama, thanks to its strong affective-relational, emotional and cognitive involvement, probably has a more direct therapeutic impact. From this perspective, both methods are mutually complementary.

It would therefore appear useful to initiate a psychodrama series by means of an SCM and PPR investigation (by way of a diagnostically convenient pre-test) and to investigate the changes within the person on the basis of a second test after the final psychodrama session. Similarly, we would suggest that, after a SCM and PPR investigation, short action sequences could be inserted following the reflective conversations with the therapist in which the 'passionate storyteller' is encouraged by the therapist 'to really make the step into his/her story' and – based on the choice of the theme after an SCM/PPR investigation – to engage in real multivoiced self-dialogues in psychodrama.

In psychodrama the protagonist can really meet the antagonist. This encounter intensifies and surpasses the imaginary self-reflective dimension. The intense physical and mental action enables the protagonist to experience the self and significant others as part of a multivoiced self, not only in the mind but also by meeting and being those significant others in concrete situations in specific times and spaces. This experience makes the protagonist intensively feel not only the differences, disharmonies, power struggles and tensions, but also the similarities and harmony between self and other. Action gives personal identity a vivid relational component.

In this way, the quite diagnostic-organizational accent of SCM and PPR could be complemented by a more explicit social and therapeutic stance through the generation of powerful affective-emotional processes in the psychodramatical action. Therapeutically oriented learning processes also appear to be more lasting after emotional releases. Many

researchers have proposed that a focus on client emotion is essential for any therapy to produce long-term client change (Lyddon *et al.* 2006). In this context I can also refer to Greenberg's action-oriented, emotion-focused therapy (Ellioth *et al.* 2004).

To conclude, the SCM could, on the one hand, give a more objective diagnostic added value to psychodrama in keeping with the phenomenological personality model, while psychodrama, on the other hand, could be a useful complement to the SCM, when there could be effectively a move from one *I*-position to the other, in order to really meet *and become* the antagonists in a concrete time and self space as an exteriorization – a coming alive – of imagined *I*-positions. In other words, action and drama techniques give the client the opportunity to really enter into the personal '*society of mind*' (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010) and be directly involved in internal social processes such as the fight for dominance, dialogue and integration. These actions are completely in congruence with the richness of DST. A combination of the SCM, the PPR, *and* action and drama techniques thus appears to be a genuine challenge to clarify the inherent relationship between DST and a self in vivid *dialogical action* (see also Ho's chapter).

## NOTES

- 1 It should be noted that 'internal' and 'external' have another meaning here as in Hermans' model of moving *I*-positions.
- 2 Doubling is a typical psychodrama technique in which group members can help the protagonist by formulating statements in the *I*-form as if the protagonist herself was speaking. The protagonist can always deny or change the statements.
- 3 Refers to the part of herself that is most opposed to the father's view. Cf. Hermans: the narrow relationship between internal and external *I*-positions.
- 4 Cf. Hermans' meta-position (Hermans 2004: 23).

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