

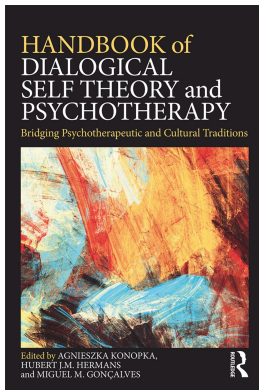
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 08 Dec 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory and Psychotherapy Bridging Psychotherapeutic and Cultural Traditions

Agnieszka Konopka, Hubert J. M. Hermans, Miguel M. Gonçalves

Compositionwork

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315145693-13>

Agnieszka A. Konopka, Wim van Beers

Published online on: 20 Nov 2018

How to cite :- Agnieszka A. Konopka, Wim van Beers. 20 Nov 2018, *Compositionwork from: Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory and Psychotherapy, Bridging Psychotherapeutic and Cultural Traditions* Routledge

Accessed on: 08 Dec 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315145693-13>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

13 Compositionwork

Working with dialogical self in psychotherapy

Agnieszka A. Konopka and Wim van Beers

Compositionwork (Hermans, 2014; Konopka & van Beers, 2014) is a contemplative-artistic method of work with identity and emotions, used in therapy, counseling, coaching, and training. It is based on Dialogical Self Theory (DST) (Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), as a creative way of working with the landscape of mind populated by the multiplicity of *I*-positions. The method is also inspired by contemplative traditions, especially the tradition of Japanese Zen gardens (Berthier & Parkes, 2000). The contemplative aspect encourages an attitude of openness and receptivity to the multiplicity of self as it emerges in one's experience. The artistic aspect is a process of expressing and shaping this plurality in a creative form, within which different elements are *composed*. Emphasized in contemplative traditions, and later on in Gestalt therapy (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951), the present moment oriented, receptive attitude comes together here with acknowledging an agentic role in creating one's experience, as in constructivist perspective (Neimeyer, 2009). Taking into account the important role of emotions in self organization and change (Greenberg, 2011), the method also incorporates some recent developments in the psychology of emotions as presented in emotion-focused therapy and the dialogical view on emotions, as part of DST.

In Compositionwork the multiplicity of *I*-positions (Hermans, 2014) is often accessed via direct embodied experience, or via choosing *I*-positions from a narrative or a standard list. Then it is symbolized and externalized by non-verbal natural elements, typically stones, which are positioned, re-positioned and 'composed' in a space, usually a box with sand, sometimes on paper. The emerging composition reflects the quality of the separate elements, their interrelations and the overall pattern. The nonverbal language of stones and sand and their spatial arrangement allows for the expression and exploration of the complexity of the dialogical self in a figurative, nonlinear, simultaneous, and dynamic way. This symbolizing way of working aims to also involve those *I*-positions that are not yet verbalized or voiced, in order to address the unspeakable in the self, which can be a source of deep and transformative meanings (Neimeyer, 2010).

The process of externalization, central in Compositionwork (Konopka & van Beers, 2014), facilitates a working distance, which helps to regulate emotions and creates optimal conditions for taking a meta-position (Hermans, 2003).

Moreover, looking at a composition from a meta-position a client can see every element in the context of its broader pattern (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Such a pattern has features of abstract art and may facilitate an aesthetic, metaphorical way of approaching one's experience. Seeing a composition may evoke a new bodily felt appeal, which often encloses a message, a question that facilitates an unfolding dialogue between nonverbally and verbally depicted *I*-positions, which co-create the polyphony of the dialogical self.

First we will describe how DST is introduced in Compositionwork. Next we will discuss the affective and contemplative aspects of work with the dialogical self in Compositionwork. Finally we will present a case example that illustrates the micro-processes of positioning and repositioning in process of Compositionwork.

Basic theoretical concepts guiding Compositionwork

The landscape of mind as a composition

DST depicts the self as a *landscape of mind* populated by a multiplicity of *I*-positions (Hermans, 2001). Compositionwork introduces the landscape of mind not only as a concept or metaphor, but also as a concrete creation, in which multiple *I*-positions are symbolized, externalized, composed, and re-composed. Clients are invited to express their inner world by creating a symbolic landscape using a variety of stones that represent *I*-positions and that are placed in a box of sand or on a sheet of paper. In this way the landscape of mind is *externalized* with the effect that it can 'speak back' to the person who created it. It speaks back in colours and forms, structures, and overall pattern, which may gradually 'come to words', expressing their personal meanings. When the landscape of mind is externalized in the form of a composition, this also creates optimal conditions to take a meta-position (Hermans, 2003), what permits an overview of juxtaposed positions and their patterns. The meta-position results from making one's inner world physically placed in front of oneself, by looking at it from some distance and seeing different positions simultaneously. From this perspective the client can explore their interrelations and its total pattern.

'Landscape of mind' introduced in metaphorical and concrete form in Compositionwork offers a rich spectrum of related natural metaphors. The richness of geographical images, words like 'volcano' or 'storm', fosters the use of a poetic pictorial language that transcends the descriptive language and invites one 'to speak poetically, rather than prosaically for maximum impact' (Neimeyer, 2012, p. 8). Compositionwork is an invitation to an artistic dialogue that takes place on a nonverbal and verbal level and in which one's inner word can be differentiated, enriched, and transformed.

Creating a landscape of mind via Compositionwork can take two basic forms: (a) as an identity focused landscape, in which *I*-positions are derived from a narrative, or from a list of *I*-positions; and (b) as a 'now-scape', a direct-

experience focused landscape, in which *I*-positions derive from present moment experience. In this chapter we will focus on the latter.

The micro-process of positioning

In DST the self is seen as a dynamic process of *positioning*, *counter-positioning*, and *repositioning* (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). In this process *I*-positions come to the fore and go. We see developmental and therapeutic change as a shift from a fixed, rigid, usually conceptually based sense of self, to a sense of self derived from dynamic direct experience of positioning. In order to enhance this shift we pay attention to this dynamism on the micro-level by addressing the process of positioning and repositioning, based on moment-to-moment experience. Working on this micro level allows for *I*-positions to be addressed in a relatively direct way, as experientially accessible in a moment and bodily felt.

Implicit, bodily felt I-positions

In present moment oriented Compositionwork, *I*-positions are accessed via direct embodied experience and not from a narrative or a list of *I*-positions as it is practised in a more identity oriented way of working. Focusing on the embodied experience stimulates access to *implicit I*-positions and emotions. These parts of the self may not yet be fully available through one's narrative, and not yet verbalized. They may be at the edge of one's awareness, but can already be bodily sensed. These partly known *I*-positions can be especially rich sources of new meanings, growth, and innovation. In Compositionwork implicit positions are explored by contacting embodied affective experience, especially on the level of the felt sense (Gendlin, 2012) in a way that is similar to 'analogical listening' (Neimeyer, 2012), which will be further elaborated on later in the chapter.

Emotional aspects of dialogical self in compositionwork

Bi-directional relation with one's emotions

The way a person relates to his or her emotions is of utmost relevance in therapy. As described in DST (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) this relation has a bi-directional character. Emotions influence, organize, and reorganize the self. At the same time a person relates to his or her emotions, by reacting/answering to them. Pathology can be based on problems in emotion regulation, like for example avoiding or suppressing affective states. On the other hand, acceptance of all emotions can have a healing effect, which has been emphasized in therapeutic approaches like acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012), mindfulness-based interventions (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), or emotion-focused therapy (Greenberg, 2004).

In Compositionwork the awareness of one's relation with emotions is facilitated by externalization, which helps to notice impulses towards symbolized and externalized emotions. Simply observing how people react to, or what they tend to do with stones that symbolize their emotion may be quite revealing. Some clients may express aggressive impulses and actions towards particular emotions, like a client who smashed a stone representing his anxiety with another heavy stone, crushing it to pieces. Another client covered his *sadness stone* deep down under a layer of sand. Such symbolic actions often reflect the ways in which people relate to their emotions. Moreover, the feeling one has towards an externalized emotion can help to make one become aware of a secondary emotion, that is an emotion felt towards another emotion, like for example anxiety about one's sadness (Greenberg, 2004). It is important to notice that there can be a difference between what people may *do* with an emotion and the *need* connected with an emotion. When for example one rejects a part of oneself that needs soothing, it only increases psychological suffering. Compassionate presence and listening to the voice of a need that is enclosed in an emotion can often be a way to transform one's relation with it into a more dialogical one. In this way we also facilitate our 'inner democracy' (Hermans, 2018), in which all parts of our selves can receive a voice and be heard in the society of mind.

Emotion regulation

According to Greenberg (2011) emotion regulation is an important aspect of emotion change and Compositionwork supports emotion regulation in several ways. Externalization and taking a meta-position helps to create a working distance and thus supports emotion regulation. Symbolizing emotions by stones and giving them a place in the larger context of other emotions not only allows them to be acknowledged but also helps to contain them. When a person can see an externalized emotion in the context of his larger *I*-position repertoire, this may also influence how it is experienced. A client expressed the experience of giving a place to her fear as follows¹:

Now my fear has a place . . . [*When you are seeing it, what are you feeling?*]
It is a relief . . . I see that I have more: here is a tender feeling, here an angry one. Here is my creative side. I am not alone with my fear. [*How is it to be not alone with your fear?*] I am stronger, not so afraid anymore.

When people are less afraid of their emotions, they become stronger, as they see that they have enough resources to regulate and deal with these emotions. Labelling on the verbal level also has a function of emotion regulation (Greenberg, 2011). Giving an emotion-position a form and a place in a composition has a similar supportive function on the nonverbal level.

I-position and emotion scheme

The dynamic and flexible notion of the *I*-position is closely related to emotion. First, every *I*-position has an affective connotation. At the same

time, emotions, organizing the self in specific ways, can be seen as temporary ways of positioning (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). It may be useful to look at *I*-positions from the perspective of emotion-focused therapy (Elliot, Watson, Goldman, & Greenberg, 2015). Any *I*-position can be seen and explored in terms of an *emotion scheme*, which consists of the following aspects: motivational, bodily expressive, perceptual-situational, and conceptual, organized around the particular emotion. The advantage of such exploration is that all elements related to an emotion can be more differentiated. We select here the motivational aspect to illustrate it. In Compositionwork the motivational aspects of an emotion scheme can be explored by experimenting with moving the stone symbolizing an emotion. This movement happens in the context of other positions, so that any movement simultaneously has contextual meaning. An example: ‘[*Where does that energy want to be or move?*] It wants to move up. Closer to this white restful stone in my chest. It wants to connect with my peace’. In Compositionwork every other aspect of an emotion scheme is seen in the context of its surrounding dynamic multiplicity.

External positions and emotions

A composition can be organized not only by emotions of the client but also an emotion of a significant other. From the perspective of DST external *I*-positions are seen as parts of the extended domain of the self (Hermans, 2003). Likewise, emotions of significant others can also be relevant parts of this extended domain. Including an influential emotion of a significant other in a composition helps to explore and map its impact on the organization of the self. Some clients can be dominated by such internalized emotions in a way that their own adaptive emotions are silenced. An emotion of a significant other can have a lot of power and influence on the organization of the *I*-position repertoire and significantly influence the pattern of a composition.

Dialogue and emotional change

Differences and oppositions between *I*-positions are a common characteristic of the multiplicity of the self and are not seen as a problem. However, for example, hostile relations between *I*-positions often lead to severe psychological suffering. Like in regular society, in the society of mind (Hermans, 2002) good dialogue and understanding between involved parties is crucial for well-being, creativity, and growth. Compositionwork acknowledges the innovative potential of dialogue as it has been extensively described in DST. In emotion-focused therapy (Greenberg, 2011) the dialogue between emotions has also been defined as a fundamental factor of change, but no dialogue is possible if two emotions or *I*-positions are not separated and clearly distinguished from each other.

Compositionwork helps prepare the ground for such a dialogue by concrete spatial differentiation of the two parts: giving them distinguishable places and

symbols. An externalized emotion can receive a voice, just by letting its symbol (a stone) speak for itself. Things that people do not dare to say while talking themselves can sometimes more easily be said when they are voiced by a stone. Giving voice to a stone can also be a preparatory step for other forms of dialogue, like for example two-chair dialogue.

Emotions as an artistic composition

Inviting an artistic attitude in Compositionwork can support further differentiation of emotions and also promote a more constructive attitude towards one's emotional experiences. The artistic vision on the self is a way to look at the self as an artistic project (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Acknowledging the uniqueness of one's self-composition may lead to a greater integration and self-acceptance.

By approaching emotions as a form of 'inner art' we try to discover their unique richness and complexity that can be caught by artistic forms and metaphorical language. In their turn, emotions differentiated in an artistic form can become richer experiences. Artistic attitude and expression potentially help to celebrate experience in its uniqueness and discover its health-promoting aspects, which may also be latent in negative emotions. Stimulating an artistic attitude can reduce defensiveness towards emotions and invite a greater openness and acceptance.

The role of figurative, nonverbal elements in Compositionwork

Nonverbal elements introduced in Compositionwork (Konopka, Neimeyer & Jacobs-Lentz, 2017) can support differentiation of emotions, helping one to become aware and express not yet verbalized, implicit emotions and those aspects of emotional experience that are not easily caught by words. By introducing nonverbal materials the process of naming an emotion can slow down and become more nuanced. This can be especially important in case of vague feelings and for people who are used to intellectual processing of experience, quick labelling, and in this way run a risk of losing contact with the bodily felt level of experience. When an emotion is symbolized by a stone, it 'speaks back' with its nonverbal qualities, like e.g. size, colour, texture, or position in the space.

As Neimeyer (2010) points out 'the deepest meanings with which our clients struggle, as well as fresh possibilities for constructing and doing life differently, are typically elusive and call for articulation in figurative rather than literal forms' (p. 73). Stones and their compositions act as a non-verbal, figurative vocabulary that may be very helpful in accessing deep, illusive, sensed but not yet verbalized meanings and differentiate vague and complex feelings. Stones are useful materials because of their sensoric nonverbal qualities (Konopka & van Beers, 2014). According to Jaffé and Jung (1964), stones can be used as universal symbols of the psyche. They had symbolic meaning for ancient and primitive societies, and they still speak to the psyche of modern humans.

According to Jung (Hannah, 1997) stones can act like bridges between unconscious and conscious levels and in our view they help to access implicit not yet verbalized *I*-positions and emotions. In this sense Compositionwork can be a complementary method to more verbally oriented approaches, which tend to address more explicit and verbalized levels of experience.

Contemplative aspects of Compositionwork

The now-scape of mind

In contemplative traditions waking up from ‘the dream of thoughts’ to the present moment is often seen as part of the awakening or enlightenment process. From a therapeutic perspective, contacting the present moment experience is also an important factor for well-being and psychological health. Present moment focused attention is cultivated in mindfulness training (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006), both for spiritual and psychological purposes. Gestalt Therapy (Perls et al., 1951) emphasizes that people often build a wall of thoughts and concepts that isolates them from the environment and themselves. Contacting present moment, direct experience can be liberating from narrowed concepts and a mentally constructed world. According to Stern (2004), therapeutic work focused on the here and now has the greatest transforming potential. Direct contact and relation with feelings and life in fact only happens in the present moment. At the same time ‘it is remarkable how little we know about experience that is happening right now’ (p. 3). Contacting present moment experience can increase the quality and richness of life and self. Moreover, as Stern emphasizes, the micro pattern of the present moment often reveals a broader pattern in which a person functions and in this way it can be a source of important insights.

Present moment oriented Compositionwork focuses on a special type of landscape of mind, the ‘Now-scape’: the affective landscape that emerges from moment to moment, out of direct embodied experience. In making a composition in this way, present moment experiences are symbolized and externalized and create a symbolic landscape of mind that reflect aspects of the self that come to the fore from direct experience.

Affective now-scape and felt sense

Attention in present moment oriented Compositionwork is often directed towards the inner areas of the body, the places where people usually feel their feelings. This aspect of the practice is partly based on focusing as developed by Gendlin (2012). According to Gendlin (2012), therapeutic change can happen if a client can make contact with his or her inner experience on the level of their ‘felt sense’. Felt sense is often experienced as an atmosphere, like a vague feeling, accessible in the inner spaces of the body. When contacted and attended to it may become a source of implicit emotions and *I*-positions. Approaching the felt sense allows one to work with the dialogical self on the implicit level. In this process

implicit positions can unfold, gradually ‘ripening’ towards becoming a verbal expression. According to Leijssen (1998), attention directed at the felt sense has a contemplative character, similar to Zen or Taoist traditions. It enhances a presence and receptive openness to not yet verbalized or formed aspects of experience emerging in the present moment.

There is a difference between the focusing attitude as introduced by Gendlin (2012) and approaching the felt sense in Compositionwork. While focusing practice often starts from addressing a variety of problematic experiences and then focuses on one specific personal problem, Compositionwork puts more emphasis on a Zen like ‘not-knowing’, open, curious attitude in the present moment without conceptualizing any experience as problematic or otherwise but rather trying to temporarily put aside any assumptions about it. Anderson and Goolishian (1992) proposed a not-knowing approach to therapy, in which the development of new meanings is based on the therapists’ attitude of not knowing. The therapist practices asking questions from a position of not knowing, communicating curiosity. In an analogical way we facilitate a not-knowing attitude of the client towards his own experience. The not-knowing attitude of the therapist and his curiosity can stimulate a similar curiosity and not-knowing attitude of the client, which create a space for newness to emerge.

Mindful awareness and self as process

According to Marnberg and Bassarear (2015) nonjudgemental attention focused on unfolding moment-to-moment experience (mindfulness) enhances an experience of self as process. Mindful attention introduced systematically in mindfulness-based stress reduction training (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) helps to shift the sense of self from a fixed, reified self to a sense of self as a changing process. Likewise Gestalt therapy highlights the value of present awareness understood as spontaneous sensing of what arises in one’s self, in contrast to an evaluating, correcting, or in any way manipulating form of dealing with experience (Perls et al., 1951). This kind of awareness is invited in Compositionwork. One of the purposes of it is to enhance a sense of self based on the dynamic process of experience, which is in contrast with a sense of self based on fixed concepts. We see the shift from a reified self to a self as a dynamic experiential process – or from the identification with a rigid narrative about one’s self to one that is open to new experiences (Gonçalves, Matos, & Santos, 2009) – as the core of therapeutic change and a source of psychological health.

Externalization and the ‘depositioned self’

In mystical, contemplative traditions increasing inner freedom is not related to solving one’s problems or changing negative emotions, but rather to enhancing the differentiation between the content of mind and awareness itself. This is reflected by many authors in relation to psychotherapy. Deikman (1982) distinguishes between an ‘observing self’ (awareness as such) and an ‘observed self’

that in his view is the content of mind. From this position a new, freer, and more spacious relation with experiences, including painful ones, can be established.

From the perspective of Japanese culture, such relation with experience can be characterized by expanding ‘*ma*’ (space between), which, according to Morioka (2012), is an important factor of therapeutic change. Likewise in the practice of focusing (‘clearing space practice’) enhancing such space is

an attempt at establishing a better relationship, whereby the client gets more space to look at problems instead of coinciding with them and whereby the energy and healing power of the observing self becomes free to face the problems and get a hold of the situation.

(Leijssen, 1998, p. 132)

In Compositionwork the act of externalization emphasizes the distinction between the content of the mind and the awareness of it (as in acceptance and commitment therapy; Hayes et al., 2012). Just by the act of placing experience in a concrete, symbolic form ‘out there’, a person may move from coinciding with the experience towards relating to it in a freer and more spacious way, that allows to answer to it rather than automatically react on it.

The ‘not-knowing mind’

Compositionwork invites the contemplative attitude of ‘*not knowing mind*’ towards one’s experience. In Zen tradition this is sometimes called ‘beginners mind’ (Suzuki, 2010). ‘Not knowing mind’ is a way to relate to one’s experience characterized by openness and receptivity. New experience and new emerging *I*-positions can only be received if there is mental space for them. Suzuki (2010) argues that a full cup cannot receive more tea and relates this metaphor to the mind. If we are full of concepts about ourselves we cannot receive the fresh liquid of new direct experience. Beginner’s mind ideally has no assumptions, apart from the following: ‘I know that I do not know what will emerge in my experience in the next moment’. It is an experimental, ‘child-like’, ‘curious way of being’, similar to White’s ‘exocitization of the domestic’ (White, 1993), when usual experiences are specially attended to and examined, and reveal something unusual, special, uniquely distinctive. It is also the readiness of the mind to encounter experience directly and the ability to be with the uncertainty of the not yet known or not yet formed. The beginner’s mind can also be seen as a gap in one’s narrative, a window that allows the novelty of experience to come in. According to Morioka (2015) such a gap can be important for therapeutic change: ‘We may say that the turning point in a personal narrative does not have a linear form. Paradoxically, it is the gap [...] in the language of linearity’ (p. 88). The gap that is opened by not knowing increases contact with direct experience by reducing the tendency to impose knowledge on experience. As a result the self can be experienced as a process that is changing from moment to moment. Not knowing mind can also be seen as the door to the knowing body,

which is the source of implicit positions and emotions. When explicit knowledge about one's self can be put aside, this helps to contact the implicit. New, innovative positions that are sources of new personal meanings can be accessed via the gap of 'not knowing mind'.

Procedure

Working in a present moment focused way we access *I*-positions by giving attention to the bodily affective experience. A person is invited to turn his attention internally, in a curious, 'not-knowing' way, trying to put aside what he already knows, as if entering a new continent, taking a receptive position by staying inside, and openly waiting for any feeling or sensation to arise. Emerging experiences can be differentiated by questions until they take a form that can be symbolized by a stone. *I*-positions can also be accessed via choosing stones that spontaneously attract attention. The variety of stones symbolizing positions are externalized and composed in the box of sand (or on paper). By placing every position in the box, a client gives it a place in the context of other *I*-positions. All *I*-positions can be further differentiated and explored in terms of their qualities, focusing on (a) single *I*-positions, (b) their interrelations, (c) the pattern they form. The qualities of every emotional *I*-position can be further differentiated in terms of its emotion scheme (Greenberg, 2011). When a person is looking at his or her composition and experimenting with movement of positions this may evoke further experiences. New elements often appear and are added to the existing composition and a person can take a meta-position that encompasses a broader bandwidth of *I*-positions.

Case example

Miriam (pseudonym) suffers from lack of energy and motivation in her work. She has lost her enthusiasm and interest. During 11 sessions we practice Compositionwork in combination with two-chair work (Elliott et al., 2015). The trajectory also includes homework exercises (recorded by the therapist, Agnieszka Konopka), meant to increase Miriam's 'emotion awareness' and mindfulness. In order to present some relevant micro-processes specific for Compositionwork, here we focus on two sessions and then reflect on the process.

Compositionwork session 3

The client makes a composition starting from her direct bodily experience. I ask her to slow down and turn her attention inside to focus on the feelings that emerge in the inner areas of her body.

In the first phase of the session the following parts are emerging: (1) '*frozen rock*', a heavy feeling in the belly, represented by a big dark stone; (2) '*peaceful warmth*' in her chest, represented by a pink stone; (3) a small vivid warm feeling

in the belly represented by a small red stone, defined later as ‘*my life power*’; (4) a ‘*cool, fresh feeling*’ represented by blue and yellow stones (see Figure 13.1). After all those parts have emerged, her attention goes to the *frozen rock*. It appears to be ‘almost frozen, no emotion inside’. Under the *frozen rock* is blocked a small red stone (*life energy*). When she sees it she feels a tension inside and an impulse to remove the frozen rock. There is a lively energy in the red stone that wants to expand. I ask her what it needs to expand. She indicates that something needs to happen with the *frozen rock*. I invite her to give it attention. She describes it as ‘dense and complex’. It contains many ‘not naturally glued together parts’. The parts need to be disconnected: ‘There needs to be more space between them, so this little red can come up’. In order to differentiate the parts of the stone we explore which part of the stone needs attention first. It appears to be the lowest part of the *frozen rock*, the ‘*bedrock*’. It is the ‘oldest part’ and it needs warmth. It is possible to give this warmth from: the *peaceful warmth* stone. We focus on warming the *bedrock* stone with the help of the *peaceful warmth* stone. In this process the *bedrock* is changing: disconnecting from the *frozen rock* and moves to the left. Here we can see that a compassionate interaction between two *I*-positions can change an *I*-position and stimulate a new movement in the composition. While looking at this composition a new feeling is evoked. The *bedrock* is now felt as warmer and more

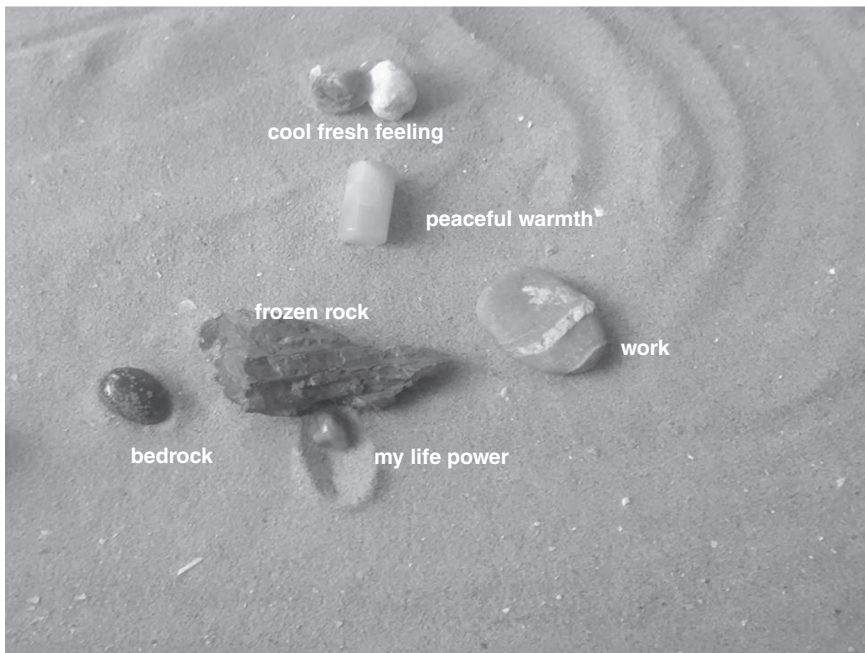


Figure 13.1 Compositionwork session 3

restful. The *frozen rock* needs to be warmed slowly, piece by piece. In order to work with such metaphors we need to be sure that a person has access to a position. Giving attention to bodily sensations helps to check and facilitate access to a position from direct experience. A person also needs to be able to stay involved in the metaphor as if it were real, which was possible in this case.

Further, I ask her what the *bedrock* is about. An image that relates to the sickness of her father appears, when she had to take care for him, not receiving any support. The need of support is still there, in her present situation. She is moved realizing this. I validate the pain that is related to this unmet need and we explore it further, which leads to the insight that she also needs self-support and care and to become milder towards herself. This mildness is accessible in the *peaceful warmth* position.

Slowly the *frozen rock* becomes differentiated, developing into a small composition in itself. The upper part of the frozen rock still needs attention. It is as if it is glued on the main body of the *frozen rock*. It is rather new and is not very hard. I check if it still resonates in her body and she indicates an uncomfortable feeling in her belly related to it. There is some plasticity in it, but it feels ‘not mine’. Miriam’s work feels like this stone. She feels tiredness related to this stone (*work stone*), which tells her that she is going against her needs doing things for others and not for herself. (The demanding voice is addressed later and included in a two-chair dialogue in the fifth session. In Compositionwork an inner conflict can be made explicit and differentiated. A person deepens the embodied awareness of the split and learns to take a working distance to it. A two-chair dialogue can be a necessary continuation of this process to transform the relation between two conflicted *I*-positions).

She feels self-alienation looking at her *work stone*, expressed as ‘it is not me’. ‘My work is not really mine’, she says. It is opposite to the *peaceful warmth* stone that relates to a feeling of ‘being me and just me’. There is a genuine feeling, warmth, and aliveness in this stone. She needs to nurture and follow this feeling. We explore how to do this: ‘By feeling it, by feeling what I need here . . . giving it attention’. It seems to be an adaptive feeling that includes the very important need of self-care and creativity. The voice given to the stone says: ‘I would like to make music, to be creative again’. There is a strong, creative impulse in this pink stone. Since it seems to be a promoter position (a position that has the capacity to organize other positions of the repertoire and is even able to generate new ones; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). I try to acknowledge and support this position in her. Miriam comes for the eleventh session after having made the decision to stop with her current job. The composition includes the following positions: *my life/power*, *gradual action*, *creative*, *my new place*, *I as compassionate*, *I as weak* and *I as dynamic* (see Figure 13.2). Her decision relates to a feeling of a relief, regaining her life and energy. This position, called *my life/power*, is represented by a big red stone. She feels strong in her upper body, her arms also feel strong and she has a feeling that she can use them to shape her life. The red energy of *my life/power* radiates to her arms. It is the same energy that she felt before (see Figure 13.1, *my life power*) but then it was



Figure 13.2 Compositionwork, session 11

smaller and blocked by the *frozen rock*. Now it is stronger and makes her feel stronger. This energy wants to move to the world, gradually . . . (*gradual action* stone). She needs to feel the movement of this energy, but not press it. She does not want to be in the old position when she was pressing herself. She sees two colours in the *gradual action* stone: a yellow/orange tone, which is related to nurturing herself, being soft and a red one related to a need for action. She wants to get a new job, but do it in a way that is soft to herself. ‘Now I need time to find *my new place* (. . .) It is not yet clear what this place is, but what I feel is that I can act from what *I want*, not automatically’. This evokes a feeling of peace. She realizes that she was used to doing things as expected by others. Now she wants to ‘give myself space to feel what I want for myself’. The *life/power* position is related to her growing agency, in contrast with her earlier reactive way of approaching life. The symbol of an egg of *life/power* relates to a perspective of new life. She places the stone deeper in the sand. This movement evokes a feeling of peace, symbolized by the sand. *Life/power* needs to be grounded, it needs to feel more support of her body. We explore which parts of her body need attention. The feeling in her belly is like a soft material. It is weak, has no resistance and can easily be pushed (*I as weak*). She places a white stone to represent *I as weak* and feels tenderness. *I as weak* needs care.

She is able to relate to it from her *compassionate* position represented by a yellow stone. *I as weak* has something to do with food: ‘I was not eating good enough. I need a good diet, sports’. She is contrasting two positions towards herself: ‘Some time ago I did not care, but now I am much more *compassionate* with myself: it is like the sun’.

The *life/power* position also needs something that is symbolized by a lazur stone. It turns to be her *creative/social* side. ‘It also has been neglected in my life, so it was not able to grow’, she comments. When she is looking at it she feels a soft energy in her chest. It is about the possibility of learning something new that expresses her creativity, ‘living my creativity and connecting with others’. She would like to make a new study to nurture this side.

Reflections on the process

Various *I*-positions emerge from direct experience in different areas of the client’s body. Using stones as symbols for these emerging positions helps to carry the process further. Looking at the composition easily evokes new feelings, which, if attended to, often facilitate the process. Externalized *I*-positions become further differentiated by giving them attention, exploring their qualities and feelings and the needs related to them. Such differentiation creates a more sophisticated internal map of inner multiplicity. Differentiation of an initial *I*-position can lead to the reorganization of a composition, e.g. when the *frozen rock* became differentiated, the *life energy* stone was able to change position for a more suitable place. In Compositionwork work one *I*-position is easily related to the broader context of the other positions, since they are composed in one space.

Differentiation between an impulse *towards* a position and an impulse/need *enclosed* in this position helps to change the relation with this position (e.g. from rejection to compassion towards the *frozen rock*). As a consequence the organization of the self becomes more democratic (Hermans, 2018). Focusing on differences among stones in the composition the client becomes aware of contrasts between her own *I*-positions. By attending to the feelings and needs enclosed in the various, spatially distinguished positions the client develops a new, more compassionate relation with herself, which may act as a promoter position (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

The *life/power* position has a promoter function, being a source of many adaptive needs, which were attended to in the therapy. *My life/power* is like a gravity point in her self where she could become anchored and feel her needs, neglected in the earlier period of her life. Some adaptive needs are more easily accessed by symbolization via a stone, before they are ready to be named. In this way a stone became a bridge between not yet verbalized experience and its verbal meaning.

Change in the organization of the self is also facilitated by attending to relations and space between different internal *I*-positions and experimenting with movement of stones (e.g. *my life energy* wants to meet the *peaceful warmth* so that they could merge together as one strong river).

The composition vividly reflects the qualities of different positions and their dynamic relations, e.g. the coalition between *I as dynamic* and *I as compassionate* in session 11. It facilitates the possibility to work directly on the relations between *I*-positions (e.g. one position can symbolically care for the other).

A change in the pattern of the composition can be observed that reflects the change in the organization of the self. The last composition is more centred, which suggests that a centripetal movement in the self has become stronger (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). While the composition from session 3 showed more conflicts (e.g. between *life/strength* and *work*), the last composition shows coalitions between many positions (e.g. *life/power* and *new place*).

Conclusion

People develop themselves in a dynamic movement between openness to experience and its co-creation. Receptivity and creativity are sources of change and growth that often need to be restored and enhanced in the process of therapy. Compositionwork typically invites receptivity to the inner process, needed for the discovery of experience; on the other hand it stimulates creativity inviting the client to be ‘a composer’, who has an agentic role in giving form to his own self. Enhancing receptive openness to embodied experience facilitates the emergence and accessibility of a broad bandwidth of *I*-positions. Some positions, which are not yet verbalized or restricted by a dominant narrative, can be accessed via embodied experience and be expressed in nonverbal forms. Compositionwork is a dialogical process of unfolding and composing one’s inner landscape. It helps to access, experience, and relate to the complexity of the inner world by spatial and symbolic differentiation of *I*-positions, bringing them in relation and placing them in an artistic encompassing gestalt. Compositionwork helps to get an overview of the complex relational field of the society of mind and differentiate it.

Creation of new meaning takes place in a process of com-posing. It results from relating to the multiplicity of internal and external *I*-positions and bringing them into a dialogue. The relational and complex field of the dialogical self, the landscape of mind – which is not easily depicted in linear speech – can become more accessible in a pictorial form where *I*-positions are juxtaposed, simultaneously seen and placed in the context of its broader *I*-position repertoire (Hermans, 2003).

Compositionwork can be a complementary method to more verbal and linear methods of work with the dialogical self. It can easily be combined with, or be a preparation for other methods and interventions focused on work with the multiplicity of self, like e.g. one- or two-chair work (Elliott et al., 2015) or the more verbally oriented personal position repertoire (Hermans, 2003).

Note

- 1 Italic text within square brackets in this and later dialogues in this chapter are spoken by the therapist.

References

- Anderson, H., & Goolishian, H. (1992). The client is the expert: A not-knowing approach to therapy. In S. McNamee & K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Therapy as social construction* (pp. 25–39). London: Sage.
- Berthier, F., & Parkes, G. (2000). *Reading Zen in the rocks: The Japanese dry landscape garden*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Deikman, A. J. (1982). *The observing self: Mysticism and psychotherapy*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Elliott, R., Watson, J. C., Goldman, R. N., & Greenberg, L. S. (2015). *Learning emotion-focused therapy: The process-experiential approach to change*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Gendlin, E. T. (2012). *Focusing-oriented psychotherapy: A manual of the experiential method*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Gonçalves, M. M., Matos, M., & Santos, A. (2009). Narrative therapies and the nature of ‘unique outcomes’ in the construction of change. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 22, 1–23.
- Greenberg, L. S. (2004). *Emotion-focused therapy: Coaching clients to work through their feelings*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Greenberg, L. S. (2011). *Emotion-focused therapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Hannah, B. (1997). *Jung: His life and work*. Wilmette, IL: Chiron.
- Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2012). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2001). The construction of a personal position repertoire: Method and practice. *Culture & Psychology* [Special Issue: Culture and the Dialogical Self: Theory, Method and Practice], 7(3), 323–365.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2002). The dialogical self as a society of mind introduction. *Theory & Psychology*, 12(2), 147–160.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2003). The construction and reconstruction of a dialogical self. *Journal of constructivist psychology*, 16(2), 89–130.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2014). Self as a society of I-positions: A dialogical approach to counseling. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 53(2), 134–159.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2018). *Society in the self: A theory of identity in democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hermans, H. J. M., & Hermans-Konopka, A. (2010). *Dialogical self theory: Positioning and counter-positioning in a globalizing society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Jaffé, A., & Jung, C. G. (1964). *Man and his symbols*. New York: Dell.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156.
- Konopka, A., Neimeyer, R. A., & Jacobs-Lentz, J. (2017). Composing the self: Toward the dialogical reconstruction of self-identity. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 1–13.
- Konopka, A., & Van Beers, W. (2014). Compositionwork: A method for self-investigation. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 27(3), 194–210.
- Leijssen, M. (1998). Focusing microprocesses. In L. S. Greenberg, J. C. Watson, & G. Lietaer (Eds.), *Handbook of experiential psychotherapy* (pp. 121–154). New York: Guilford Press.

- Mamberg, M. H., & Bassarear, T. (2015). From reified self to being mindful: A dialogical analysis of the MBSR voice. *International Journal for Dialogical Science*, 9(1), 11–37.
- Morioka, M. (2012). Creating dialogical space in psychotherapy: Meaning-generating chronotope of ma. In H. J. M. Hermans & T. Gieser (Eds.), *Handbook of dialogical self theory* (pp. 390–404). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Morioka, M. (2015). How to create ma – The living pause – In the landscape of the mind: The wisdom of Noh theatre. *International Journal for Dialogical Science*, 9, 81–95.
- Neimeyer, R. A. (2009). *Constructivist psychotherapy: Distinctive features*. New York: Routledge.
- Neimeyer, R. A. (2010). Reconstructing the continuing bond: A constructivist approach to grief therapy. In J. D. Raskin, S. K. Bridges, & R. A. Neimeyer (Eds.), *Studies in meaning 4: Constructivist perspectives on theory, practice and social justice*. New York: Pace University Press.
- Neimeyer, R. A. (2012). *Techniques of grief therapy: Creative practices for counseling the bereaved*. New York: Routledge.
- Perls, F., Hefferline, G., & Goodman, P. (1951). *Gestalt therapy*. New York: Souvenir Press.
- Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2006). Mechanisms of mindfulness. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 62(3), 373–386.
- Stern, D. N. (2004). *The present moment in psychotherapy and everyday life* (Norton series on interpersonal neurobiology). New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Suzuki, S. (2010). *Zen mind, beginner's mind*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- White, M. (1993). Deconstruction and therapy. In S. Gilligan & R. Price (Eds.), *Therapeutic conversations* (pp. 22–61). New York: W.W. Norton & Company.