

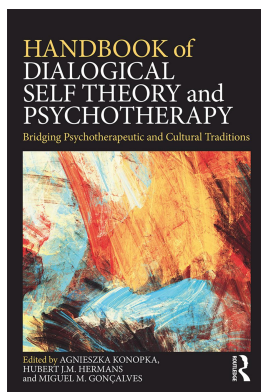
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Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory and Psychotherapy Bridging Psychotherapeutic and Cultural Traditions

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2 The dialogical self as a landscape of mind populated by a society of *I*-positions

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

The dialogical self has been described as a landscape of mind inhabited by a multiplicity of *I*-positions (Hermans, 2001). *I*-positions are understood as characters or parts of the self that are distinguishable and often divergent or even contradictory. *I*-positions represent a society of mind in which, like in regular society, a variety of positions enter into dialogical interactions with each other. There are many possible relations between *I*-positions, from self-love and self-compassion to self-conflicts and self-devaluation, as there are many forms of self-organization, with authoritarian or democratic forms of organization as particularly significant ones. *I*-positions are more or less powerful in the organization of the self and in different degrees influence the whole community of the self. The metaphor of landscape of mind reflects the spatial, multidimensional character of the self, picturing its depth and breadth, as well as the potential accessibility of the different areas in one's inner world.

In the context of these two metaphors, i.e. society of mind and landscape of mind, change in therapy can be seen as a reorganization of this society, directed towards a more free, dialogical, and democratic community of mind. It can be seen as a change of the mind's landscape from a frozen or limited space to a more open and lively process. These reorganizations can be characterized as an increase of dialogicality and freedom as opposed to living in a limited, isolated space of one's self, called an *I*-prison. The above developments are facilitated by the therapeutic relation, a dialogical space emerging between client and therapist, which creates a fertile and facilitating environment for the therapeutic process as a whole.

Positioning, counter-positioning, and repositioning

In Dialogical Self Theory (DST), the *self* is *multiple*. A person potentially has many facets (*I*-positions) from which he or she can face the other, himself, or herself. Positioning is *placing* oneself to the other or to oneself. "*I*-position is a spatial-relational act" (Hermans, 2018, p. xvii). When a person positions herself, there are always other positions involved – explicitly or implicitly – which function as counter-positions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). I can position myself toward a part of myself, or even towards my own emotion, towards an imagined other in myself or towards a real other. I may reach out to

an imagined other in my mind or take a distance; I am critical towards myself or I am accepting myself and embracing my weaknesses. This is not only about the place I take in the “space” but also *how* I take it.

It is important to note that an *I*-position is not a trait or a thing. It is a dynamic process of positioning, counter-positioning, and repositioning. It is not an abstract, cognitive act but rather an embodied relational act that takes place within the self and between selves. A person can potentially relate to the same issue, problem, or aspect of himself from one position or from a variety of different positions and in this way create the opportunity to perceive a problem from more than one perspective. This can also be a source of ambivalence. According to Ribeiro et al. (2014) ambivalence that appears in psychotherapy can be seen as a cyclical movement between two opposing parts of the self (*I*-positions): the part that favors change and another one that opposes change.

Internal versus external positions

We distinguish between *internal* and *external I*-positions. Internal positions are aspects of one’s self, like e.g. “I as competent,” “I as artist,” while external positions are voices of others, e.g. “my critical mother” or even metaphorical voices of imagined or imaginary figures, like “my idealized lover” or “my spirit.” I can position myself not only in my internal positions, but I can also take the (external) position of my critical mother or accepting friend towards myself. This can have very different consequences. For instance, positioning myself as a competent person (activating this internal position) is very different from speaking to myself with my mother’s critical voice (and probably feeling it as my own voice).

While the voices of significant others in the self have the potential to create problems when they are critical or destructive, the activation of supporting external positions may have advantages for the self. Working with external positions in therapy allows relating to people that are actually present in one’s real life or even deceased ones. Including the voices of deceased ones creates an opportunity to work on relations with unresolved problems and even to reestablish a new bond (one of the purposes of grief therapy; Neimeyer, 2012). Moreover, introducing external *I*-positions enables working on unfinished business with significant others as well as activating growth promoting resources related to others, including imagined or fantasy figures.

Contextual nature and bandwidth of *I*-positions

Positions have a *contextual character* (Hermans, 2001), which means that in different relations different positions are coming to the fore and in different degrees. People are different versions of themselves in different relations. In one relation a person can easily position herself as playful while in another relation as controlled or anxious. Probably the most dialogical and therapeutic relations are those in which one is able to show also those faces that are usually covered and hidden so that one can feel accepted with these difficult or rejected aspects

of one's self. When two or more people are involved in a good dialogue, they feel the emergence of a common space in which they feel respected as dialogical partners and feel the freedom to express their views and experiences. The "bandwidth" of such a space is broad and a diversity of positions can receive a voice (Hermans & Gieser, 2012). An effective therapeutic relationship allows a broad bandwidth of positions, creating a relational space that can hold and allow a variety of voices to be acknowledged, heard, and involved in a dialogue.

I-position is a *flexible* concept allowing the broadening of the bandwidth of one's repertoire of personal resources. Every form emerging in the landscape that has some personal or social significance can potentially become an *I*-position by being voiced. In this way it can be further explored, encountered, and enter into dialogical relations with other positions. Just as *I*-positions in their most known forms like "I as a man" or "I as mother" can be a part of the society that inhabits the landscape of mind, so can positions that emerge from direct embodied experience like e.g. "forest in my belly" or a "mosaic in my head" be treated as *I*-positions, giving them voice, and initiating dialogue with them, exploring their unique qualities and history. A dark feeling in the belly that one of our clients calls an "ugly frozen frog" can become an *I*-position and tell its own story. It enters into a dialogue and after being heard, it can become relaxed and melting. Important different aspects of a dream can be personified, placed on two chairs, and invited to enter into a dialogue. A character from a favorite story can be invited as an *I*-position and enter into a dialogue with an internal position of the client; for example, I as anxious. Moreover, as Rowan (2009) suggests, work with *I*-positions allows working on many levels, including the transpersonal, when positions as God, Buddha or soul can receive a place in a client's landscape and sometimes make his or her wisdom and resilience accessible.

Society of mind

The judge who sits over the murderer and looks into his face, and at one moment recognizes all the emotions and potentialities of the murderer in his own soul and hears the murderer's voice as his own, is at the next moment one and indivisible as the judge, and scuttles back into the shell of his cultivated self and does his duty and condemns the murderer to death.

(Hesse, 1963, p. 71)

I-positions are not collections of unrelated parts or processes, but rather interact with each other in a way similar to how people relate in society, a group, or a family. The quality of their relations determines the functioning and organization of the self. *I*-positions, like members of a society, can entertain a variety of relations, such as conflicts, wars, or cooperation. Some positions can create coalitions and support each other. For example, the position of "I as spiritual" can create a coalition with "I as professional" so that a deep meaningful ideal or spiritual value is realized via professional work. In some cases, transforming a conflict into a coalition can become an important therapeutic task. Such processes

can be supported by introducing a *third position* that can encompass and integrate two different or even conflicting positions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). An example of use of a third position can be “I as an artist,” which integrates “I as enjoyer of life,” and “I as a hard-working professional.”

Personal and social positions

Another relevant distinction can be made between personal and social positions. *Personal positions* are expressions of personal preferences, needs, and characteristics, e.g. “I as dreamer,” “I as anxious.” *Social positions* are those that are more defined by social and cultural rules. They can be, for example, “I as manager,” “I as mother,” “I as therapist.” Such distinctions may be relevant in therapy when we need to differentiate between personal and social aspects that play a role in the self, as well as between personal voices and voices of others that are active in one’s self.

The combination of personal and social positions reveals how a person is giving form to the role he or she is playing in society. Saying that somebody is a “teacher” is giving only superficial information about the way this person is doing her job. We know more when somebody is defining herself as an “inspiring teacher,” or as a “teacher with a sense of humor,” or as a “supportive teacher.” Typically, social positions, such as teacher, mother, professional, employer or employee, and other roles defined by social expectations and prescriptions, receive their characteristic expression by their coalition with one or more personal positions.

From a psychotherapeutic perspective, a fit or misfit between personal and social positions is particularly salient. When a catholic priest falls in love with a woman, his personal position of “being in love,” and certainly its public expression, contradicts the public expectations of his social environment. When the priest feels increasingly alienated from his celibate status, and perhaps from his position of being a priest as a whole, there emerges an irreconcilable conflict between his social and personal positions that may end in his exit from the Church. Thus, there can be situations in which a misfit between social and personal positions exists or emerges to such a degree that they may induce important turning points in people’s lives. Exploration of the extent of fit or misfit allows therapist and client to explore conflicts between one’s societal position and personal inclinations.

Promoter positions and their role in the self

From a DST perspective, *promoter positions* play a central role in the organization of the society of mind (Hermans, 2006; Valsiner, 2004). They act as supporters and facilitators for the development of the self. Promoters are those positions that operate as innovators, imply a considerable openness towards the future, and have the capacity of organizing and producing a diverse range of more specialized positions. They give a sense of direction to the self and in this

way provide a “compass function” (Hermans, Konopka, Oosterwegel, & Zomer, 2017). There can be many different promoter positions, both internal as well as external ones. External promoters are those people who help us to embrace a variety of sides of ourselves, often including those that were neglected or marginalized. Internal promoters are those aspects of the self that help to integrate a variety of different *I*-positions and add to the sense of a meaningful direction in life, for example, I as compassionate or I as creative. A promoter position stimulates a more complete sense of the self, which, as in a Tibetan mandala, requires allowing not only the positive and strong aspects of ourselves, but also the dark ones, which in DST terms, are called shadow *I*-positions. Promoter positions are often sources of development and healing, which people may not be aware of. They may need to be discovered and cultivated in psychotherapy. A psychotherapist optimally acts as an external promoter position in the self of a client, who stimulates the development of other internal and external promoters. For example, an empathic attitude towards a client can lead to the development of self-empathy and self-compassion. The therapist can also stimulate a client to discover and develop relations with other external and internal positions that have promoter functions.

Landscape of mind

One always sooner or later, comes upon a city which is an image of one's inner cities. Fez is an image of my inner self. This may explain my fascination for it.

(Nin, 2014, p. 74)

Landscape of mind (Hermans, 2001) is a metaphor that pictures the self as a spatially organized multiplicity of *I*-positions involved in mutual interchange. Some *I*-positions can be more central, visible and accessible, while others are hidden or not accessible at all. Positions are dynamic processes of positioning in the space of the extended self, including distance, centrality, and movement. The self can be seen as a spatial dynamic whole in which *I*-positions are composed and recomposed in the mind space. The spatial metaphor invites thinking about processes that are happening in the self in a simultaneous rather than a sequential way. It helps to understand interconnections between aspects of the mind landscape and allows seeing them in a broader context.

Horizontal versus vertical movements in the self

As Guttenplan (2000) argues, the advantage of the landscape metaphor is that it allows not only horizontal but also vertical investigation of the mind. On exploring the landscape of mind at first you can see the surface of the self, analogous to a map with its seas and continents. In order to understand why it looks this way, you may need to gain insight into the layers that lie under the surface, enter the underground that forms the shape of the terrain. If you move

further in this “geological adventure,” “you may discover how the whole landscape is supported on the deepest layers, on the tectonic plates of the bedrock” (Guttenplan, 2000, p. 2). *I*-positions are not only horizontally (e.g. opposed to each other), but also vertically organized, and the positions on the surface can be influenced by deeper, not immediately accessible, positions that may be, for example, sources of resistance that need to be addressed in psychotherapy.

Landscape of mind offers a *metaphorical language* for capturing the richness of personal experience, as expressed in images of a volcano, a sea, a swamp, heaven, or hell as well as an imaginary flora and fauna. These metaphors allow transcending the linear and logical language and relate to the dimensions of the self that go beyond the verbal, or as Huxley (2014) portrays it, they reach the antipodes of mind that are outside the system of conceptual thought.

Otherness in the self

The geographical metaphors also express the essential otherness of the mind’s continents, and the relative autonomy of their inhabitants (Huxley, 1956), which in DST is not seen as a sign of dysfunction but an expression of dialogicality and differences within the self. *I*-positions may significantly differ from each other and have their relatively autonomous perspectives. Self-otherness points to a state when we can experience “elements of our own being as mysterious, enigmatic and transcendent to our ‘self,’ just as we can experience the being of another person” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Like a landscape, the self can have its mysteries, hidden treasures, or even unknown exotic lands. *Self-otherness* (Cooper & Hermans, 2007; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) acknowledges difference and diversity in the self, including those aspects that are felt as strange, not known, or even “not mine.” Self-otherness can also be an outcome of internalization. Parts of the self-landscape that originally belong to somebody else became internalized (Hermans, 2001), or in terms of psychoanalytic or Gestalt theory, introjected (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951).

Dialogical self in psychotherapy

For psychotherapy it is imperative to acknowledge that spatially located *I*-positions are *living dynamic processes rather than entities*. Let’s think about a natural landscape as part of a living process. Seasons are changing and the atmosphere of the landscape is changing dynamically from day to day or even from moment to moment. Sometimes it is nostalgic and foggy, at other times the sun brings such optimistic and sparkling energy that you feel its light as joy in your heart. This landscape is varied and alive. Imagine another landscape, an industrial terrain with many buildings that have been designed and located a hundred years ago. Over time it has not changed very much but become older and more desolate. Sometimes it feels oppressive to be inside the building and one may want to escape. It is a limited space and one has no view outside its walls. One lives in an *I*-prison.

The first described landscape is a living, changing process. It is characterized by naturalness and spontaneity. Positions that appear in this landscape are dynamic processes that come and go. They interact with each other and the landscape is open. The second landscape is fabricated and not flexible and can be called a landscape of artificial structure. It lacks freshness and openness and its space is limited and enclosed. It serves as a metaphor for an *I*-prison in the form of a reified self, centered around a fixed and rigid concept (e.g., I am not worthy). It is defined by a rigid and dominant narrative, rather than based on the interactive experiential process in which a variety of different positions can emerge and dissolve.

Therapeutic change from the perspective of the dialogical self can be seen as moving from a limited inner space (*I*-prison) towards a living, open, and varied landscape of mind. It is a movement from a frozen landscape to a fluid one, from a self as a reified thing to a self as a living process (Mamberg & Bassarear, 2015), from identifying with a rigid narrative towards one that is open to new experiences (Gonçalves & Ribeiro, 2012). It can also be described as a movement from a totalitarian state dominated by one powerful *I*-position, a self structure dominated by rigid non-evolving monologues or cacophony (Lysaker & Lysaker, 2002) to a more dialogical and democratic organization of the self (Hermans, 2018; Hermans et al., 2017).

This change represents a movement from a limited experiential space that, as in schizophrenia, can be experienced as barren, desolated, and emotionally dead (Lysaker & Lysaker, 2002) to a more varied space marked by a greater emotional richness. Such greater emotional range can be described according to Hermans as a “health promoting emodiversity” (Hermans, 2018) that is characterized by more differentiation *within* the domains of both positive emotions and negative emotions, where also negative emotions, including their differentiations, receive their place and value.

Landscape, or “landscaping” as a process, is defined by flexible movement of *I*-positions. In Morioka’s terms: “Psychotherapy is conducted to facilitate the reconstruction of the client’s repertoire of *I*-positions such that the client is able to move flexibly between positions” (Morioka, 2008, p. 82). Flexible movement in the landscape of mind implies accessibility to varied aspects of this landscape and is a feature of mental health. From this perspective, *I*-positions need to be seen and treated as dynamic processes, not as traits or self-concepts. *I*-positions, for example, “I as depressed,” “I as hurt,” “I as in grief,” can be fixed and reified in one’s mind when approached as fixed concepts. Such positions can be frightening if people believe in their solidity, or if people believe that they exist as entities with which one identifies.

In the process of therapy, positions can be experienced as embodied felt experience that can become more fluid and changeable. For many clients it may be liberating and empowering to experience dominant *I*-positions and negative emotions as transient processes that come and go. This can be stimulated by moment-to-moment embodied attention as, for example, introduced in mindfulness-based practices (Mamberg & Bassarear, 2015) or in Gendlin’s (2003)

focusing-based interventions, or even in analogical listening (Neimeyer & Thompson, 2014). Difficult positions and emotions are like a stream that people are afraid of and block off, so it becomes more ingrained and more frightening, more pressing, or just frozen. But the water can flow and go only if it is allowed to come and go and if one can hear the subtle voice of the stream that in some cases whispers about new meanings and indicates where it needs to flow.

Society of mind: towards a more dialogical, democratic society

When the society of mind is in a state of war or when relations between its members become hostile, voices become rigid and monological (Lysaker & Lysaker, 2002). Or, when one member dominates the whole organization and creates a totalitarian state (Hermans et al., 2017), such situations become seriously limiting for one's development and threatening for one's well-being.

According to Lysaker and Lysaker (2002), loss of dialogical capacities in the society of mind can be observed in schizophrenia:

With only the barest dialogical opportunities available, a self might arise that is defined by a radically limited number of inflexible self-positions [...]. These self-positions may be expressed as brief monologues or entrenched positions whose relations and relative standing do not change.

(p. 212)

According to those authors, psychological disturbances are a function of diminished dialogues with others and between *I*-positions that support a sense of self. When previously constructive dialogues among multiple internal and external *I*-positions have weakened or failed, the self is experienced as similarly reduced. The dialogue can be interrupted in three different ways (Lysaker & Lysaker, 2002); namely in a barren, monological, or cacophonous mode.

In the barren mode, dialogue disappears when varied *I*-positions are not expressed or when they are absent. What follows is a barren state, one in which persons experience themselves as distant observers, not engaged in their lives, experiencing themselves as blank or empty.

In the monological mode, dialogue disappears if one or a few *I*-positions assume a lot of power in the self and dominate most other ones. In this process, a single and reappearing *I*-position evolves, but it lacks interaction with other internal and external *I*-positions.

In the cacophonous mode, dialogue would disappear because different *I*-positions were expressed without relation to one another. Such persons would be overwhelmed by the chaotic appearance of a multiplicity of affectively varied *I*-positions interacting without any organization.

Thus, a loss of sense of self reflects a diminished capacity to bring both internal and external *I*-positions into dialogue. In Lysaker and Lysaker's (2002) view, that sense of self recovers when dialogue within the self and between the self and others is reestablished.

It is worthwhile to note that relations between *I*-positions can take different problematic forms. Parts that are hostile towards each other are sources of emotional pain and can block adaptive actions (Elliot, Watson, Goldman, & Greenberg, 2015). Rigid self-criticism, an example of a conflictive relation between parts of the self (Whelton & Greenberg, 2004), is one of the relevant issues to be addressed and reworked in psychotherapy. According to Whelton and Greenberg (2004), the goal of such work is to create “a sense of harmony and peace developed through an emotional shift that allows for a shift in perception and meaning on both sides” (p. 115).

Positions differ in power and in some cases the society of mind can be organized by dominant *I*-positions silencing other *I*-positions. Some clients in therapy habitually act from such dominant positions, not being aware of the whole spectrum of possible other positions. Such self-organization is limiting and impoverishing, since most of the positions are silenced and do not receive a possibility to express their voices and needs. Self as a totalitarian state is full of tensions, and there is an unrealized potential of suppressed positions.

Facilitation of dialogical relations between the members of the society of mind as well as moving from the totalitarian organization of the self towards a more democratic one, where all members are respected, acknowledged, and heard, can be an important therapeutic aim. This also includes members that are “unusual,” “weird,” or “strange,” or are a minority in the society of mind and are treated as shadow members that are rejected or exiled.

Some relations between positions need to be transformed in a dialogue in order that “problematic members” would be able to give a constructive contribution to the inner society. Carefully chosen forms of inner dialogue may also address issues of unfinished business (Perls et al., 1951) and help to deal with problematic voices of significant others.

Dialogical space

Morioka (2015) suggests that space is an important factor in therapy: “The transitional psychic space between *me* and *mine* is the basis of the subject’s experience. It is the container that accepts the movement of meaning in the ongoing here-and-now situation” (p. 83). Space between *I*-positions has been described in the context of Japanese culture as “*ma*” (Morioka, 2015). *Ma* is described as space between one thing and another or between one moment and another moment. It can be a distance of (one part of) the self towards (another part of) the self. As Morioka (2015) argues, facilitating space between two different *I*-positions is an important aspect of therapeutic process:

According to the dialogical self perspective, the client’s narratives are concerned with dialogue between the characters in his or her story. When self-narratives are created gradually in the therapeutic process, a significant

distance will appear between the different voices of the self. Change in psychotherapy includes a process of distancing oneself from oneself.

(p. 91)

This space gives freedom to “answer” instead of automatically “react.” Stepping back from a dominant position and creating an experiential space between “I” and a particular position can be a liberating factor. Such space is the basis for dialogical relations within the self. A dialogical relation requires differentiation between two spatial positions. Without this space, a dialogue is not possible. One of the most important issues in psychotherapy is differentiating and creating space between dominant social or cultural voices and one’s personal positions, so that a person can respond from his own standpoint and strengthen his or her “response-ability.” Response-ability, understood as an ability to give one’s own answer, is empowering and provides a basis for being an agent and a subject rather than an object in relationships of social power.

Taking a meta-position

Another form of creating space is taking a meta-position. According to Dimaggio (2012) a meta-position is a specific part of the metacognitive system. He emphasizes the role of the meta-position in psychotherapy arguing that, “psychotherapy is about forming meta-positions able to reflect upon the more crystallized aspects of the self and provides new solutions to problems” (p. 358). A meta-position, as presented by Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010), permits a certain distance toward the other positions.

It provides an overarching view so that several positions can be seen simultaneously, and their mutual relationships become visible [...] It also facilitates the creation of a dialogical space [...] in which positions and counter-positions engage in dialogical relationships and gives a broader basis for decision making and for finding one’s direction in life.

(p. 147)

Facilitating a meta-position in the process of psychotherapy supports the development of the transitional space and helps to see the landscape of mind from a broader, relatively free, perspective.

Externalization

Externalization can be seen as creating “space between.” Its role in psychotherapeutic change has been presented by White and Epston (1990) in the context of narrative therapy. According to them, “externalizing” helps people to “objectify and sometimes personify the problems” (p. 38). During the process of externalization, a problematic experience becomes “a separate entity and thus external to the person or relationship,” which helps to create a situation of dialogue rather than monologue

about a problem (p. 38). In the process of externalization, client and problem are put in contrast; they become separated and get their own identities, which helps to create and explore the relationship between them. From the perspective of DST, a problem can be potentially personified and treated as an *I*-position in a dialogical space and considered from a meta-position.

Externalization stimulates an optimal working distance, as in the task of clearing space as introduced in the practice of focusing (Gendlin, 2003). According to Leijssen (1998), it allows the healing power of the observing I. It enlarges one's space of freedom towards what is observed and supports one's agency toward problematic or oppressive experiences. In a method based on DST, "Compositionwork" (Konopka & van Beers, 2014), externalization receives a nonverbal spatial form, in which personal experiences are symbolized (by the client) in a concrete composition of stones in sand. In the form of stones, *I*-positions are placed "out there" in front of the client, which creates an optimal condition for taking the broader perspective of a meta-position.

Positioning and emotions

The role of emotions in therapy has been explored in many schools of psychotherapy and described by leading authors in the field (Freud, 1963; Greenberg, 2002; Perls & Andreas, 1969; Rogers, 1951). There is a great body of knowledge regarding this subject. Psychoanalysis highlights the role of neglected affect; client-centered therapy emphasizes the connection between therapeutic change and a full experience of feelings in awareness. In Gestalt therapy, emotions and their expression are seen as critical to change and fear of undesired emotions is considered to be a source of many problems (Perls et al., 1951). Special emphasis on emotions as factors of change has been presented in emotion-focused therapy by Leslie Greenberg and colleagues (Greenberg, 2002; Greenberg & Watson, 2006). DST acknowledges, as Greenberg (2002) holds, that emotions are foundational in the construction of the self and a key determinant of self-organization.

In this chapter we will not address the broad subject of emotions but will look at the relation between the self and emotion from the perspective of DST. Seeing this relation from the angle of positioning and multiplicity can help to explore its complexity and dynamism. From a dialogical perspective, the self and emotions are described as interconnected in a bi-directional dynamic relationship that can potentially be dialogical (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Emotions necessarily involve the whole sense of self in a complex way. They may position the self towards others, for instance "I as angry" or "I as anxious," and towards one's self in the form of self-criticism or self-loathing. Emotions can be described as ways of positioning. At the same time, the self is an agentic factor that can influence or change emotions by taking a position towards an emotion. The relation a person has with his or her emotions can be seen as a complex process of positioning. In the process of positioning oneself towards one's emotions, two basic aspects can be distinguished: spatial and qualitative. This concerns *where* one stands in the landscape of the mind towards his or her

emotions and *how* one stands and moves from or towards them. The spatial aspect of positioning refers to the distance one takes towards emotions: is one coinciding with one's anger or looking at it from a distance, or maybe pushing it away? How great is the distance? Is it still a living creative field or is there no experiential connection with the emotion?

Creating some distance and dis-identifying from a dominant emotion can be an important step in increasing a person's agency and ability to use emotions as sources of information but not as sources of absolute truth. The value of this kind of dis-identification is strongly appreciated in contemplative traditions, also including mindfulness-based practices. The process of dis-identification can take the form of taking some distance towards an emotion, taking a meta-position, externalizing, appreciating space in Gendlin's task of clearing space, or in the form of a more profound shift in the sense of self. The last one is typical of systematic contemplative training (Hayward, 1999), where the sense of self becomes reallocated more in one's "background awareness" than in the content of the emotional experience. In terms of DST, this can be called "de-positioning" (Hermans-Konopka, 2012). However, especially in the case of people who overregulate emotions, stimulating a more immersed experience can be an adequate and necessary way to access and intensify emotions. In these cases, entering emotions in an embodied way, positioning one's self in them, to knowing them from within or to being transformed by them can be an important task in therapy (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Both ways of dealing with emotions (depositioning and immersed positioning) are relevant in different contexts. It is rather the ability to move in a flexible way between immersed and detached ways of relating with one's emotions than the preference for one of them.

Developing dialogical relations with emotions can be one of the major goals of psychotherapy, since only if a person can allow an emotion, acknowledge its message, and provide an answer to it, can he or she use it as important information. Dialogical relations with one's emotions enhance the use of the adaptive potential of emotions by openly receiving their message and allowing them to be supportive for one's adaptive actions. Emotions show what is personally important to the self. People who silence their potentially adaptive emotions are likely to be dominated by voices of others since they cannot recognize their own needs.

Dialogical relation as a fundament of therapy

The quality and strength of the therapeutic collaboration is reliably and significantly associated with positive therapy outcomes (Ribeiro, Ribeiro, Gonçalves, Horvath, & Stiles, 2013). A dialogical relation seems to be the carrier and the basis for a growth-promoting therapeutic process. Decades of research indicate that the provision of therapy is an interpersonal process in which one of the main curative components is the nature of the therapeutic relationship (Wampold & Imel, 2015). DST points to the fact that interpersonal processes cannot be seen separately from the intrapersonal ones. The dialogical space in a therapeutic relation encompasses a multiplicity of *I-*

positions that can be engaged in both internal and external dialogues. From this perspective, the therapeutic relationship is a dynamic, multiple, complex organization of *I*-positions emerging from the dialogue between therapist and client. Optimally, such relation needs to be characterized by “good dialogue,” which according to Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) has the following features: it is innovative, allows a broad bandwidth of *I*-positions, has tolerance for misunderstanding, creates a dialogical space, recognizes power differences between *I*-positions and recognizes their differences and alterity, and profits from moments of silence. In such dialogue, the presence of the therapist creates a holding environment for the process of therapy to unfold (Neimeyer, 2012). For a healing dialogue to evolve, such presence needs to be connected with emphatic engagement and attunement (Elliot, Bohart, Watson, & Greenberg, 2011; Neimeyer, 2012) as well as acceptance of the client’s experiences. As Staemmler (2011) notes, “A therapeutic relation without empathy is hardly conceivable. How could therapists respond to their client’s mental situations if they were not, to a certain extent, able to enter into their subjective worlds?” (p. 4). Particularly, empathy and acceptance also need to be directed towards the client’s shadow positions that are not fully expressed and are at risk of being held back in contact with the therapist.

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