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## The Dialogical Self: Toward a Theory of Personal and Cultural Positioning

Hubert J.M. Hermans  
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**Abstract** The dialogical self proposes a far-reaching decentralization of both the concept of self and the concept of culture. At the intersection between the psychology of the self in the tradition of William James and the dialogical school in the tradition of Mikhail Bakhtin, the proposed view challenges both the idea of a core, essential self and the idea of a core, essential culture. In apparent contradiction with such a view, the present viewpoint proposes to conceive self and culture as a multiplicity of positions among which dialogical relationships can be established. Particular attention is paid to collective voices, domination and asymmetry of social relations, and embodied forms of dialogue. Cultures and selves are seen as moving and mixing and as increasingly sensitive to travel and translocality. Three perspectives for future research of self and culture are briefly discussed: the shifting attention from core to contact zones; increasing complexity; and the experience of uncertainty.

**Key Words** collective voices, complexity, dialogical self, multivoicedness, translocality, uncertainty

Hubert J.M. Hermans  
*University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands*

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## The Dialogical Self: Toward a Theory of Personal and Cultural Positioning

Self and culture are conceived of in terms of a multiplicity of positions among which dialogical relationships can develop. This view, at the core of the present issue, allows for the study of the self as 'culture-inclusive' and of culture as 'self-inclusive'. At the same time, this conception avoids the pitfalls of treating the self as individualized and self-contained, and culture as abstract and reified. Presenting a theoretical framework for the mutual inclusion of self and culture is the first aim of this contribution.

Another aim is to provide the theoretical foundation for a methodological approach (see Hermans, this issue) that allows for the study of self and culture empirically. Conceiving self and culture in terms of a multiplicity of positions with mutual dialogical relationships entails the possibility of studying self and culture as a composite of parts. This enables the researcher to move from theory to detailed empirical evidence and, back, from empirical work to theory.

A special feature of this issue is that the proposed version of cultural

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psychology is not an isolated field of scientific investigation. Rather, it is at the juncture of divergent disciplines and subdisciplines, such as social psychology, personality psychology, developmental psychology, clinical psychology, philosophy, sociology, cultural anthropology, linguistics and brain sciences. Altogether, these fields contribute to the understanding of the relation between culture and self.

The central concept, the dialogical self, is inspired by two thinkers, James and Bakhtin, who worked in different countries (the USA and Russia, respectively), in different disciplines (psychology and literary sciences), and in different theoretical traditions (pragmatism and dialogism). The dialogical self finds itself, as a composite term, at the intersection of these traditions.

## From James' Self to Bakhtin's Polyphonic Novel

### The Extension of the Self

For understanding the workings of the self, it is necessary to start from some assumptions proposed by James (1890), who provided a fertile basis for the psychology of the self as it flourished during the 20th century. Of particular interest is his distinction between the *I* and the *Me*, which, according to Rosenberg (1979), is a classic distinction in the psychology of the self. In James' view, the *I* is equated with the self-as-knower and has three features: continuity, distinctness and volition (see also Damon & Hart, 1982). The continuity of the self-as-knower is characterized by a sense of personal identity, that is, a sense of sameness through time. A feeling of distinctness from others, or individuality, also follows from the subjective nature of the self-as-knower. Finally, a sense of personal volition is reflected in the continuous appropriation and rejection of thoughts by which the self-as-knower proves itself as an active processor of experience.

In James' view, the *Me* is equated with the self-as-known and is composed of the empirical elements considered as belonging to oneself. Because James (1890) was aware that there is a gradual transition between *Me* and *mine*, he concluded that the empirical self is composed of all that the person can call his or her own, 'not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account' (p. 291). As this frequently cited quotation suggests, people and things in the environment belong to the self, as far as they are felt as 'mine'. This means that not only 'my mother' belongs to the self but even 'my enemy'. In James' view, the self was 'extended' to the environment. The extended self can

be contrasted with the Cartesian self, which is based on a dualistic conception, not only between self and body but also between self and other (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Self and other do not exclude one another (self versus other), as if the other is simply 'outside the skin'. With his conception of the extended self, James has paved the way for later theoretical developments in which contrasts, oppositions and negotiations are part of a distributed, multivoiced self.

### Bakhtin's Polyphonic Novel

In James' quotation we see a foreshadowing of several characters whom he sees as belonging to the Me: my wife and children, my ancestors and friends. Such characters are more explicitly elaborated in Bakhtin's metaphor of the polyphonic novel, which serves as a source of inspiration for later dialogical approaches to the self. The metaphor of the polyphonic novel was proposed by Bakhtin in his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929/1973). In this work he draws on the idea that in Dostoevsky's works there is not a single author at work—Dostoevsky himself—but *several* authors or thinkers, that is, characters such as Raskolnikov, Myshkin, Stavrogin, Ivan Karamazov and the Grand Inquisitor. These characters are not treated as obedient slaves in the service of one author-thinker, Dostoevsky, but are put forward as independent thinkers, each with his or her own view of the world. Each hero is perceived as the author of his or her own ideology, and not as the object of Dostoevsky's finalizing artistic vision. There is a plurality of consciousnesses and worlds instead of a multitude of characters and fates within a *unified* objective world, organized by Dostoevsky's individual consciousness. As in a polyphonic musical work, multiple voices accompany and oppose one another in dialogical ways. As part of this polyphonic construction, Dostoevsky creates a multiplicity of perspectives, portraying characters conversing with the Devil (Ivan and the Devil), with their alter egos (Ivan and Smerdyakov), and even with caricatures of themselves (Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov).

For Bakhtin, the notion of dialogue opens the possibility of differentiating the inner world of one and the same individual in the form of an interpersonal relationship. The transformation of an 'inner' thought of a particular character into an utterance enables dialogical relations to occur between this utterance and the utterance of imaginal others. In Dostoevsky's novel *The Double*, for example, the second hero (the double) was introduced as a personification of the interior thought of the first hero (Golyadkin). By externalizing an interior thought in a spatially separated opponent, a fully developed dialogue between two

relatively independent parties was created. Not only is such a dialogical narrative structured by space and time, but temporal relations are even translated into spatial relations. As part of his construction, temporally dispersed events are contracted into spatial oppositions that are simultaneously present. In Bakhtin's terms:

This persistent urge to see all things as being coexistent and to perceive and depict all things side by side and simultaneously, *as if in space rather than time*, leads him [Dostoevsky] to dramatize in space even the inner contradictions and stages of development of a single person. (Bakhtin, 1929/1973, p. 23, emphasis added)

The construction of narratives in terms of a polyphony of spatial oppositions, allows Bakhtin to treat a particular idea in the context of both interior and exterior dialogues, revealing a multiplicity of perspectives:

The intersection, consonance, or interference of speeches in the overt dialog with the speeches in the heroes' interior dialogs are everywhere present. The specific totality of ideas, thoughts and words is everywhere passed through several unmerged voices, taking on a different sound in each. The object of the author's aspirations is not at all this totality of ideas in and of itself, as something neutral and identical with itself. No, the object is precisely the act of passing the themes through many and varied voices, it is, so to speak, the fundamental, irrescindable multivoicedness and varivoicedness of the theme. (Bakhtin, 1929/1973, p. 226)

In this polyphonic construction, a particular theme (e.g. competition, love, crime) has no fixed, self-contained, unchangeable, continuous meaning. Instead, by leading this feeling through the various voices, and developing it in a field of dialogical relations, not only the potentials and multifacetedness, but also the richness of a particular theme can be brought to expressions.

### James' Rivalry of Different Selves

In James' work the *I* (self-as-knower) is portrayed as a unifying principle that is responsible for organizing the different aspects of the *Me* as parts of a continuous stream of consciousness. As such, James seems to emphasize the continuity of the self more than its discontinuity. In other parts of his foundational work, however, James (1890) speaks explicitly of the 'rivalry and conflict of the different selves' (p. 309), dealing with the inherent discontinuity of the self. Elaborating on this phrase he explains:

I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million

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a year, be a wit, a bon-vivant, and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher; a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a 'tone-poet' and saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire's work would run counter to the saint's; the bon-vivant and the philanthropist would trip each other up; the philosopher and the lady-killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay. Such different *characters* may conceivably at the outset of life be alike possible to man. But to make any one of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed (pp. 309–310, emphasis added).

As this quotation demonstrates, James certainly has an eye for the multiplicity of the self and for the mutual rivalry and domination of its parts. He even used the term 'character' to denote the different components of the self and, as such, his reasoning is well in agreement with the multitude of characters implied in Bakhtin's notion of the polyphonic novel.

At the same time, there are two important differences between James' and Bakhtin's views on the multiplicity of the human mind. First, in James' view the several parts of the self are kept together by a distinct, volitional *I*, which guarantees the self's identity through time and its continuity. Bakhtin, on the other hand, was no psychologist and not primarily interested in the psychology of the self. For him as a literary scholar, polyphony represented a multiplicity of divergent or opposite views of the world, and, as such, he emphasized the principle of discontinuity more than the principle of continuity. Second, there are significant differences in the treatment of the social aspects of the mind. James (1890) was very concerned about the social aspects of the individual self, which can be exemplified by his frequently cited quotation: 'A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him' (p. 294). Bakhtin, however, was very interested in the notions of 'voice' and 'dialogue', which enabled him to deal with both internal and external dialogical relationships (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Holquist, 1990; Morris, 1994; Valsiner, 2000; Wertsch, 1991).

In summary, James, as a theorist of the self, acknowledged not only the unity but also the multiplicity of the self. Bakhtin, on the other hand, as a literary theorist, elaborated on the multiplicity of characters in the polyphonic novel by introducing the notion of multivoicedness. Further, although James acknowledged the intrinsic social nature of the self in terms of competing characters, Bakhtin elaborated more extensively on the voices of the characters and their mutual dialogical relationships. Although James' thinking on the self certainly admitted the possibility of a multiplicity of characters, Bakhtin's polyphonic novel, if applied to the self, can be seen as a challenge not only to the

notion of individuality (the self as discrete from other selves), but also to the unity and continuity of the self. If the self is considered in terms of a polyphonic novel, the implication is a far-reaching decentralization of the self in terms of a decentralized plurality of characters. It is one of the purposes of this issue to explore the implications of this decentralization.

### **The Dialogical Self: On the Intersection between James and Bakhtin**

Inspired by the original Jamesian notions of the self and by the Bakhtinian polyphonic metaphor, Hermans, Kempen and Van Loon (1992) conceptualized the self in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous *I*-positions. In this conception, the *I* has the possibility to move from one spatial position to another in accordance with changes in situation and time. The *I* fluctuates among different and even opposed positions, and has the capacity imaginatively to endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. The voices function like interacting characters in a story, involved in a process of question and answer, agreement and disagreement. Each of them has a story to tell about his or her own experiences from his or her own stance. As different voices, these characters exchange information about their respective *Me*'s, resulting in a complex, narratively structured self. (For a more elaborate discussion of the relationships between *I*-positions, see Hermans 1996a, 1996b.)

A particular feature of the dialogical self is the combination of continuity and discontinuity. In line with James, there is a *continuity* between my experience of, for example, my wife, children, ancestors and friends because, as belonging to the 'Mine', all of them are extensions of one and the same self. In line with Bakhtin, however, there is a *discontinuity* between the same characters as far as they represent different and perhaps opposed voices in the spatial realm of the self. As *my* wife and *my* children, they are continuous; as *my wife* and *my children*, they are discontinuous. In this conception the existence of unity in the self, as closely related to continuity, does not contradict the existence of multiplicity, as closely related to discontinuity. The combination of unity and multiplicity was already discussed by early 20th-century critical personalism as represented by the writings of William Stern, who proposed the composite term *unitas multiplex* (unity-in-multiplicity). (For discussion of Stern's work, see Hermans, 2000; Lamiell & Deutsch, 2000.)

Another feature of the dialogical self is the combination of temporal and spatial characteristics. Sarbin (1986), Bruner (1986), Gergen and Gergen (1988), and McAdams (1993), main advocates of a narrative approach, have emphasized the temporal dimension of narratives. Bruner's (1986) sentence 'The king died, and then the queen' may illustrate this emphasis. Unquestionably, the temporal dimension is a constitutive feature of stories or narratives. Without time, there is no story. However, in the line of Bakhtin's emphasis on the spatial dimension, time and space are seen as equally important for the narrative structure of the dialogical self. The spatial nature of the self is expressed in the words 'position' and 'positioning', terms that suggest, moreover, more dynamic and flexible referents than the traditional term 'role' (cf. Harré & Van Langenhove, 1991). The spatial nature of narrative is emphasized by Bakhtin's (1929/1973) term 'juxtaposition'. This term indicates a narrative spatialization that supposes a plurality of voices that are neither identical nor unified, but rather heterogeneous and even opposed. As part of a narrative juxtaposition, characters are portrayed as conversing with other, often in opposition. Such characters may be part of the world that we define as 'outside', but they may also be part of our 'inside' world of imagination (Verhofstadt-Denève, 1999).

### The Dialogical Self versus the Cartesian Self

As argued earlier (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992), the proposed conception is a step beyond individualism and rationalism and differs essentially from the Cartesian *cogito*. The Cartesian conception of the self is traditionally phrased in terms of the expression 'I think'. This expression assumes that there is one centralized *I* responsible for the steps in reasoning or thinking. Moreover, the Cartesian 'I *think*' is based on a disembodied mental process assumed to be essentially different from the body and other material extended in space. (For a comparison of the separated Cartesian self and the dialogical self, see also Fogel, 1993.)

In contrast to the individualistic self, the dialogical self is based on the assumption that there are many *I*-positions that can be occupied by the same person. The *I* in the one position, moreover, can agree, disagree, understand, misunderstand, oppose, contradict, question, challenge and even ridicule the *I* in another position. In contrast to the rationalistic self, the dialogical self is always tied to a particular position in space and time. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) would have it, there is no 'God's eye view'. As an embodied being, the person is not able to freely 'fly above' his or her position in space and time, but



he or she is always located at some point in space and time. Even the most advanced arithmetical problem involves a system of numbers originally based on the counting of 10 fingers, which is in turn indispensable for the child to understand the activity of counting at all (we also measure in 'feet').

The dialogical self is 'social', not in the sense that a self-contained individual enters into social interactions with other outside people, but in the sense that other people occupy positions in a multivoiced self. The self is not only 'here' but also 'there', and, owing to the power of imagination, the person can act as if he or she *were* the other and the other *were* him- or herself. This is not the same as 'taking the role of the other', as Mead (1934) meant by this expression that the self is taking the *actual* perspective of the other. Rather, I'm able to construe another person or being as a position that I can occupy and as a position that creates an alternative perspective on the world and myself. The constructed perspective may or may not be congruent with the perspective that is defined as the perspective of the 'actual' other (which can be checked by entering into conversation with the other). It should be emphasized, however, that the other may be partly the product of my imagination, closely intertwined with the 'actual' other, and can be even completely imaginary.

### **Mind as Society**

In computer brain sciences there are developments that use 'society' as a model to comprehend the complexities of the brain. Such models may contribute to an understanding of the multivoiced and dialogical nature of the self. Computer scientist Minsky (1985), for example, considers the mind as a hierarchically organized network of interconnected parts that together function as a 'society'. In his model the mind consists of a host of smaller minds, called agents. Many of these agents don't comprehend one another because most agents are not able to communicate with each other at all. In this respect, the mind resembles a human society in which many agents have their own action programs and simply do their job without knowing all the other agents who are part of the community. However, at the higher levels of organization, agents may be involved in direct communication. Minsky developed a computer program for block building in which he describes the conflict between two agents at the same level of organization: a *Builder* and a *Wrecker*, who is only interested in breaking down what *Builder* has achieved. At this level, agents may agree or disagree with one another:

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Only larger agencies could be resourceful enough to do such things. Inside an actual child, the agencies responsible for *Building* and *Wrecking* might indeed become versatile enough to negotiate by offering support for one another's goals. 'Please, **Wrecker**, wait a moment more till **Builder** adds just one more block: it's worth it for a louder crash!' (Minsky, 1985, p. 33)

In this model, conflicts between agents tend to migrate upward to higher levels in the society of mind. If the conflicts between the disagreeing agents are not solved, the higher-level agent under which they are subordinated is weakened. If Builder and Wrecker, in the above example, cannot solve their conflict, they reduce the strength of their mutual superior (e.g. Play), with the result that this superior will then be surpassed by competing agencies on the same level (e.g. Sleep or Eat). If Builder and Wrecker are not able to settle their disagreements, the child stops playing and wants to sleep.

Another computer scientist, Hofstadter (1986), also uses the notions of voice and dialogue in his attempts to comprehend the workings of the mind. In his model the mind, with its billions of neurons, resembles a community made up of smaller communities, each in turn made up of smaller ones. The highest-level communities are called 'subselves' or 'inner voices'. In Hofstadter's view, each inner voice is composed of millions of smaller parts, each of which is an active part of a community. Under specific circumstances, these smaller parts are all 'pointing in the same direction', and at that moment an inner voice crystallizes and undergoes a 'phase transition'. The voice proclaims itself an active member of the community of subselves. If it is strong enough, it exerts pressure in order to be recognized and to get in touch with other voices. A hypothetical dialogue may take place: '... a dialogue between two persons both of whom are inside me, both of whom are genuinely myself, but who are at odds, in some sense, with each other' (Hofstadter, 1986, p. 782). If the disagreeing voices are able to solve their conflict, or when one of the voices becomes stronger than the other, the person is able to take a 'decision'.

Hofstadter (1986) and Minsky (1985) share the idea that the brain is a community of agents or voices that, at its higher levels, may entertain mutual dialogical relationships, with one voice being more dominant or active than the other voice. The multiplicity of voices, as postulated by computer scientists, is well in agreement with the original formulations by James (1890) on the 'rivalry and conflict of the different selves' (p. 309) and with the metaphor of the polyphonic novel as proposed by Bakhtin (1929/1973).

Moreover, the models of the two computer scientists share the idea

that the decisions that are reached do not result from a centralized and unified ego or *I* that, as an authoritarian leader, keeps its followers under control. Decisions are taken 'from the bottom up' rather than 'from the top down'.

Despite the apparent commonalities between the two computer scientists, it should be kept in mind that they use the notion of society, voice and dialogue more as metaphors for comprehending the workings of the brain than as means for understanding the social processes in actual communities of people. Dialogicality in the Bakhtinian sense is not restricted to 'inner voices' within the individual mind but also includes 'external voices'. Both dialogical forms are needed for a model of self and culture.

### A Model for Moving Positions

As argued so far, the spatial character of the polyphonic novel leads to the supposition of a decentralized multiplicity of *I*-positions as authors of a variety of stories. The *I* moves in an imaginal space (which is intimately intertwined with physical space) from the one to the other position, creating dynamic fields in which self-negotiations, self-contradictions and self-integrations result in a great variety of meanings (Josephs, 2000).

In Figure 1 the self is represented as a space composed of a multiplicity of positions, represented by dots in two concentric circles. *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). External positions refer to people and objects in the environment that are, in the eyes of the individual, relevant from the perspective of one or more of the internal positions (e.g. my colleague Peter becomes important to me because I have an ambitious project in mind). In reverse, internal positions receive their relevance from their relation with one or more external positions (e.g. I feel a mother because I have children). In other words, internal and external positions receive their significance as emerging from their mutual transactions over time. It should be noted that all these positions (internal and external) are *I*-positions because they are part of a self that is intrinsically extended to the environment and responds to those domains in the environment that are perceived as 'mine' (e.g. my friend, my opponent, my place of birth).

The large dots in Figure 1 indicate that specific internal and external positions are relevant to one another as part of a dialogical process at

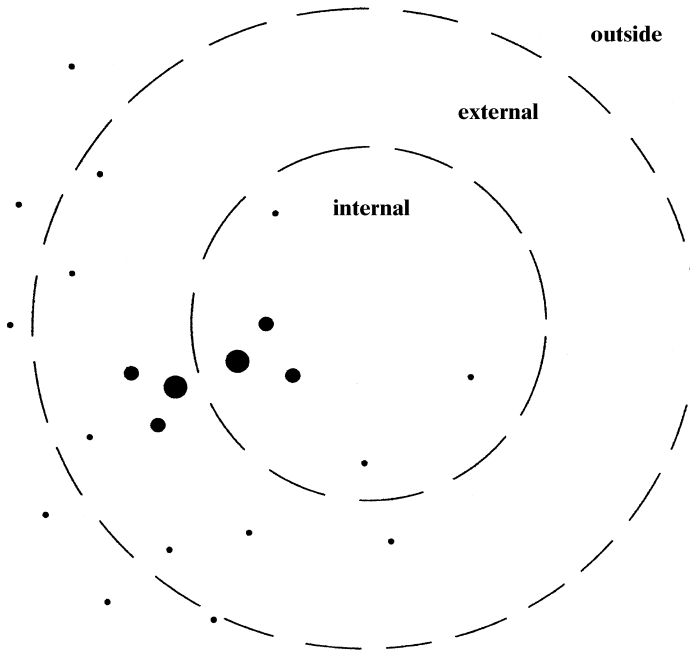


Figure 1. Positions in a multivoiced self

some particular point in time. The large dots represent the front of the system where the main activities take place. This field of activity is an arena for dialogue (Valsiner, 2000), where internal and external positions meet in processes of negotiation, cooperation, opposition, conflict, agreement and disagreement.

The circles in Figure 1 are highly permeable, suggesting open boundaries not only between the internal and external domains of the self but also between the self and the outside world. The self is not an entity that can be described in terms of internal positions only, as if they are monological traits, but should be described in the context of other positions and groups of positions.

The model doesn't consider positions as isolated from one another. Instead, the individual is involved in an active process of positioning in which cooperations and competitions between positions develop in a particular situation. For example, my children invite me to do something together and as a father I want to join them; however, as an ambitious worker, I have some tasks to do with a colleague and this conflicts with the joint activity with my children. I solve the problem by suggesting that my friend John, who always enjoys being with my

children very much, accompany them until I finish work, after which I will join them. In this example there are no internal or external positions abstracted from their mutual interactions. Rather, there is an active encountering of internal and external positions (I as a father—my children; I as an ambitious worker—my colleague; and I as an enjoyer of life—my friend) that together form a mixture of cooperative and competitive relationships. As this example suggests, a position always implies relations, that is, internal–external relations (e.g. as a father I'm invited by my children), internal relations (e.g. as a father I disagree with myself as an ambitious worker) and external relations (e.g. my children and my friend get on together quite well). Typically, a complex mixture of all of these relations is at work.

Some of the positions are represented by small dots in the circles, indicating that these positions are accessible as parts of the self (e.g. when my friend invites me for a game, the sports fanatic is aroused in me). These positions are accessible at some other point in time and they are pushed forward once there is an external position that activates them. 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 dependent on changes in the situation. For example, a child who goes to school for the first time encounters a new teacher (external position) and finds him- or herself in the new position of pupil (internal position). When, later in life, the person finds a partner and establishes a family, a variety of new external and internal positions are introduced as part of the developing self. It is assumed that some positions that are relevant in some earlier period of life may recede to the background of the system or may even disappear from the self entirely (e.g. some people lose their playfulness at a certain age). It is also possible that a particular position will return from the background of the system to the foreground later in life (e.g. an older person experiencing a growing affinity with children after an adult life of work and stress).

New people may create new positions in the self, on the supposition that they are admitted to the system. However, new positions often result from the combination of old ones. In general, the organization of positions is more relevant to processes in the self than are the workings of separate positions. Dynamic systems theorists (Kunnen & Bosma, 2000; Lewis & Ferrari, 2000) have argued that novel higher-order positions may emerge from recursive interactions among lower-order positions. Particularly, when systems are unstable, these interactions give rise to positive feedback loops that strengthen novel

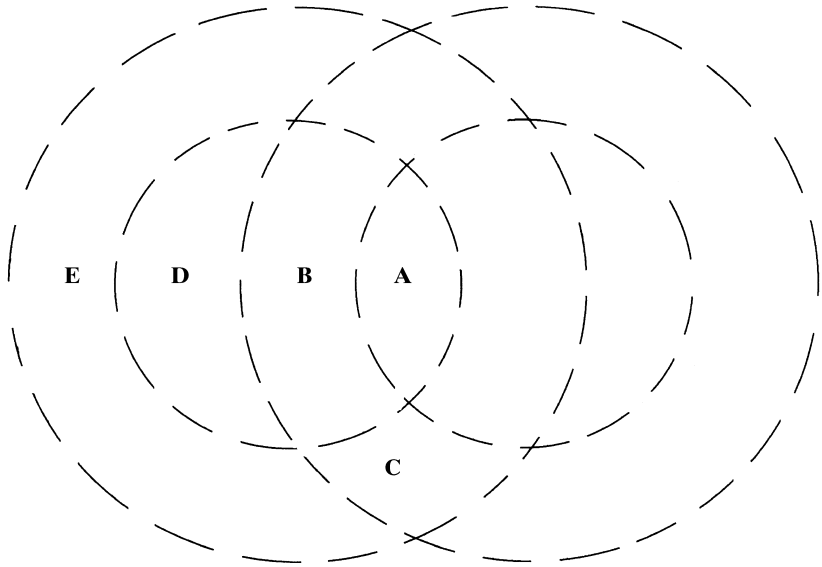
coordinations so that previous organizational regimes are replaced. These changes facilitate similar coordinations of positions on subsequent occasions, so that new habits become stronger and replace competing organizations.

As the above examples suggest, the dots in Figure 1 should be seen as moving positions. The movement of positions and their mutual relation is dependent on cultural changes. Our present era, often labeled as postmodern, is characterized by an unprecedented intensification of the flow and flux of positions moving in and out of the self-space within relatively short time periods. Some intriguing questions can be posed here, such as: does this flow and flux lead to an empty self (Cushman, 1990) or a saturated self (Gergen, 1991), or do they lead to a reorganization of the self in such a way that an intensified flow of positions is counteracted by an increasing need for more stable positions that guarantee a basic consistency of the self-system? Although we do not know much about such processes, it seems important that we develop theories and methods that allow us to study them.

### **The Actual Other and the Possibility of Dialogical Misunderstanding**

Central to the present theory is the assumption that inter-psychological and intra-psychological processes are equally important for dialogicality (Valsiner, 2000). In fact, the two processes are to a large extent intertwined. For example, if I have an argument with a colleague, I rehearse parts of the discussion with her when I'm alone, bringing in new elements and creating more convincing arguments in support of my point of view, thereby anticipating my colleague's response. If I enter the next meeting with her, I'm better prepared to defend my point of view, taking advantage of my preceding imaginal dialogues.

Although internal and external dialogues are strongly interwoven, it is necessary to make a distinction between imagination and reality as defined by a particular community. An imagined dialogue may take an entirely different direction in comparison with an actual dialogue. The actual words of the actual other even may 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. The actual dialogue between different selves is represented by the intersecting circles in Figure 2, which can be seen as an elaboration of the circles in Figure 1. That is, any position as represented by a dot in the external area of Figure 1 (e.g. my father, my children, my colleague) is a candidate for an actual dialogue. The intersection of the circles in Figure 2 is based on the notion of a



*Figure 2.* Two actual people in dialogue

- A = two-way internal sharing (e.g. I know something about myself that you know and you know something about yourself that I know and we are both aware of this)  
B = one-way internal sharing (e.g. I know something about myself that you know)  
C = external sharing (e.g. you and I, we have a common interest)  
D = non-sharing internal area (e.g. I know something about myself that you don't know)  
E = non-sharing external area (e.g. I know something about the world that you don't know)

meaningful dialogue that assumes a certain degree of common understanding of the other and his or her world, with a misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about the other and his or her view of the world as a possibility.

As Figure 2 indicates, five areas can be distinguished:

- Area A represents a *two-way internal sharing* between two people involved in a dialogue. Two people exchange knowledge on the basis of a common understanding of their internal positions. For example, two people recognize in themselves and each other a strong need to enjoy life and want to interact on this basis. This area is not necessarily based on agreement. The two interactional partners may have a common knowledge about their disagreements (e.g. I'm an enjoyer of life and you are a more achieving person and we both know our differences).

- Area B refers to a *one-way internal sharing* between two people in interaction. One person positions the other in a particular way and the other is aware of this. For example, a mother (represented on the right side in Figure 2) may see her daughter (on the left side in Figure 2) as egoistic and conveys this message to her in verbal and non-verbal ways, so that the daughter finally believes that she is an egoist.
- Area C refers to an *external sharing* of two people in interaction. Two people position somebody or something else in common ways. For example, two people may have a negative attitude towards a minority group and are aware of sharing this attitude.
- Area D represents a *non-sharing internal area* of two people in interaction. One person positions him- or herself in a particular way but the other person is not aware of this. For example, an adolescent boy (on the left in Figure 2) sees himself as quite independent, whereas his parents (on the right in Figure 2) don't know this and continue to see him as dependent.
- Area E refers to a *non-sharing external area* of two people in interaction. One person positions other people in a particular way but the other person is not aware of this. For example, a married man (on the left in Figure 2) has an extramarital relationship but his wife (on the right in Figure 2) doesn't know about this.

The overlapping and non-overlapping areas in the interaction between two people allow for a more articulated formulation of the problem of dialogical misunderstanding. People involved in contact with a particular other may act on the basis of common understanding as represented by the areas A, B and C of Figure 2. However, they may be unaware of the positions of the non-sharing areas D and E. Dialogical misunderstanding is caused by faulty assumptions as to the nature of the actual dialogical contact. More specifically, misunderstanding exists if there is an actual discrepancy between the dialogical areas in which the partners locate themselves and each other and they are not aware of this discrepancy. For example, person 1 sees himself as a lovable individual and assumes that he is, in fact, loved by person 2. However, person 1 is not aware of the fact that person 2 does not love him. In that case person 1 (left in Figure 2) assumes that he interacts with person 2 on the basis of area A. However, person 2 (right in Figure 2) interacts with person 1 on the basis of area D (note that the areas for the person on the left in Figure 2 are symmetrical to the areas of the person on the right). In other words, person 1 imagines that he shares something with person 2, but in fact he doesn't. As the contact between the interactional partners continues and they get to know each



other better, the areas that they share will increase in size and dialogical discrepancies are diminished.

The general assumption is that there are always areas that the interactional partners do not share because of the simple fact that they are usually involved in interactions with more than one person. A third person may introduce new positions in the self that increase the non-sharing areas of two partners in interaction. These areas are reduced and sharing areas are enlarged if we recount our new experiences with the third person to our interactional partner. This happens when we tell our stories to our family members and friends after a day of new experiences. As the result our sharing and non-sharing areas with other people are very dynamic: they increase and decrease depending on the frequency and content of dialogical relationships.

Cultural factors may contribute to the importance of dialogical misunderstanding, as is suggested by the increasing interest in biculturalism (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993) and multiculturalism (Fowers & Richardson, 1996). When people are raised in one culture and then migrate to another, they arrive in a situation in which two or more heterogeneous internal positions (e.g. I as Egyptian and I as Dutch) interact with a multiplicity of very heterogeneous external positions (e.g. the family of one's culture of origin and individuals and groups representing the host culture). Such positions (e.g. Egyptian versus Dutch) may be felt as conflicting or they may coexist in relatively independent ways or even fuse so that hybrid combinations emerge in the form of multiple identities (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). In all these cases, there is a high probability of dialogical misunderstanding because the phenomenon of multiple identities raises the challenging question how people, involved in a process of acculturation, organize and reorganize their self-system in such a way that they are able to share with other people cultural elements that may be highly divergent, partly unknown and laden with power differences (see also Bhatia & Ram, 2001).

## **A Dialogical Approach: Implications and Elaborations**

If the dialogical self is described as a dynamic multiplicity of positions, what are the theoretical implications, and how can this concept be elaborated in such a way that there is a basis for establishing a relationship between self and culture? Before dealing with the notion of culture more explicitly, three relevant topics will be discussed: the nature of embodied positions; the notion of collective voice; and the importance of power differences in dialogical relationships.

### Prelinguistic and Embodied Dialogues

As suggested earlier in this article, the concept of the dialogical self is conceived of as an embodied self. The embodiment of the self finds its basis in the assumption that space is not simply outside the self but also in the self (see Jaynes, 1976, who has treated the self as a 'mind-space'). Dialogue implies spatially located interlocutors involved in question and answer, and in agreement and disagreement. Even in purely imaginary dialogues, the self functions as a self-space with a variety of positions. Moreover, dialogical relationships should not be restricted to verbal dialogues. As some developmental psychologists have argued, there are already prelinguistic forms of dialogue in the first year of life.

Rochat (2000) has demonstrated that infants from birth, and even prior to birth, have perceptual experiences that enable them to specify their own body as an entity differentiated from the environment. Infants bring their limbs in contact with other parts of their own body. Doing so, they experience the combination of proprioception and double-touch stimulation: no one but the infant itself can experience the mutual feeling of its hand touching its cheek and inversely its cheek touching its hand. At the same time, this experience enables it to feel its own body as opposed to the body of someone else because the body of another person or object doesn't lead to double-touch stimulation. As Fogel (1993) has argued, double-touch stimulation enables the infant to be involved in an early form of embodied dialogical activity: when an infant brings its knee to its mouth, it opens its mouth before mouth and knee touch each other.

Imitation in the visual field, like the echoing in the auditory field, can be seen as the most rudimentary form of dialogical activity. As the pioneering work by Meltzoff and Moore (1994) and other developmental psychologists has shown, from birth onward infants are capable of imitating tongue protrusion modeled by an experimenter pausing a still face between tongue protrusion. It has also been reported that the phenomenon of neonatal imitation tends to disappear at around 2–4 months of age. Elaborating on those experiments Rochat (2000) tested in a group of 1- and 2-month-old infants the propensity to reproduce tongue protrusion in two conditions: one in which the experimenter modeled tongue protrusion with a still face for some seconds and then paused for some seconds without any interaction with the infants; and another in which during and after the tongue protrusion the experimenter interacted with the child and was actively engaging the infant in protoconversation. It was found that 1- and 2-month-olds responded differentially to either condition. The 1-month-olds tended to generate

an overall increase of tongue protrusion in the still-face condition compared to the communicative condition. In contrast, the 2-month infants tended to manifest the reverse: they increasingly showed tongue protrusion in the communicative condition. These results can be interpreted in the context of other developmental studies indicating an important change around 2 months of age: infants appear increasingly sensitive to the relative communicative attunement of the social partner imitating them. These results are consistent with the general finding in developmental psychology that the second month of life marks the emergence of intersubjectivity and the first clear sense that infants are actively sharing experiences with social partners. For example, infants begin to produce socially elicited smiling in face-to-face interactions with social partners around the sixth week of life (Rochat, Querido, & Striano, 1999).

Developmental psychologist Fogel (1993) studied the process of giving and taking between mother and child in the first year of life. When the mother gives a toy to the infant, she brings the object into the visual field of the child and moves the object in such a way that the infant has the opportunity to open its hands before receiving the toy. It is as if the mother says: 'I offer you a toy, do you want it?' The infant, in turn, orients its body to the toy and opens its hands as if to say: 'Yes, I want it.'

Although the infant is not yet able to use language, the interaction between mother and child is, without doubt, of a dialogical nature. The crucial point is that dialogue should not be restricted to verbal dialogue. It is evident that the infant does not understand the words produced by the parents, but it is able to understand the intonations. Moreover, the intonations that are exchanged between parent and infant can be understood as sequences of question and answer. Similarly, Fogel (1993) demonstrated that when the mother reaches out to help the baby into a sitting position, the relative amount of the forces exerted by both persons wax and wane in a co-regulated manner. When the mother pulling the infant into a sitting position feels that its forces increase, she responds by decreasing her own force. In turn, the infant increases its force as a response to the decreasing force of the mother. Such co-regulated movements can be described as a nonverbal invitation by the mother to the infant to change its position and as a cooperative response by the infant.

Developmental psychologists have also studied so-called 'pseudo-dialogues' in infancy. Using stop-frame and slow-motion microanalysis of films and videotapes, investigators have observed that mothers in their contact with infants are involved in turn-taking behavior from

the moment the infant is born. Mothers, sensitive as they are, tend to respond to the sucking pattern of their babies when feeding from birth onward. When the baby sucks, the mother is quiet, and she talks to the baby and touches it when it pauses. The mother treats the baby's bursts of sucking as a 'turn', in this way creating a dialogically structured pattern (Kaye, 1977). During this rhythmic process of turn-taking, the mother listens for an *imagined* response from the baby, as Newson (1977) and Stern (1977) have described, and she acts *as if* the baby is taking turns in an actual 'conversation'. Later in development, the infant actually answers with babbling, and the incidence of babbling increases contingent on the mother's responses (Bloom, Russell, & Davis, 1986). Some investigators (e.g. Clarke-Stewart, Perlmutter, & Friedman, 1988) have concluded from these observations that mother and child are engaged in a 'pseudodialogue', on the supposition that the child is still too young to engage in a 'real' dialogue.

As the term 'pseudodialogue' suggests, some researchers assume that the infant is *not yet* able to engage in real dialogue. This presupposition, however, reflects the traditional view that dialogue is equivalent to verbal conversation, and, consequently, there can be no dialogue preceding the maturation of language. However, as we have argued earlier (Hermans & Kempen, 1995), there is no convincing reason to restrict dialogue to linguistic dialogue. In fact, much dialogue between people develops through body language, facial expression, smiling, gazing, vocalizations and intonations. Mead (1934) explicitly referred to the workings of gestures as central to his theory of symbolic interactionism, and even actions can be symbolically laden (e.g. punishing a child as an indication of disapproval). The conception of dialogue as comprising both verbal and nonverbal extends its relevance to cultural psychology as people from different cultures use both forms in their communication as part of their dialogical histories (Lyra, 1999).

### Collective Voices Are in the Self

Contemporary psychology shows a growing interest in the relationship between self and collectivity. For many decades the group was considered as something external to the individual and research centered on the question: 'How do individuals behave when in a group?' (Miller & Prentice, 1994). This changed when researchers, typically those working on self-classification theory, started to ask: 'How do groups behave within individuals?' (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). These psychologists assumed that social categories to which people perceive themselves to belong have a profound impact on their psychological functioning. A similar shift can be observed in

the relationship between self and culture (Miller & Prentice, 1994). Whereas in traditional conceptions culture was perceived as *out there*, something outside the self, anthropologists and cultural psychologists are increasingly concerned with culture as structures and processes *in* the self (e.g. Shweder & LeVine, 1984).

From a theoretical perspective, the idea of the Cartesian individualist and centralized self, which is separated from group and culture, can be contrasted with a dialogical approach that opens the realm of collective voices. As Bakhtin observed, dialogicality includes, but also extends far beyond, face-to-face contact (see also Marková, 1997). Bakhtin paid attention to different 'social languages' (e.g. languages of particular groups) within a single national language (e.g. Russian, English), and to different national languages within the same culture. As examples of social languages he referred to professional jargons, languages of age groups and generations, languages of passing fashions, and languages that serve the sociopolitical purposes of the day. When speakers produce unique utterances, they always speak in social languages at the same time. Although the speaker may not be aware of the influence of social languages, these languages shape what individual voices can say. For this simultaneity of individual and collective utterances Bakhtin used the term '*ventriloquation*', which means that one voice speaks through another voice or voice type as found in social language. When Bakhtin refers to 'multivoicedness', he not only has in mind the simultaneous existence of different individual voices, but also the simultaneous existence of an individual voice and the voice of a group (Wertsch, 1991).

The question may be raised how individual and collective voices are related to one another. Empirical evidence suggests that the two voices function as relatively autonomous parts of the self. According to Prentice, Miller and Lightdale (1994), one's attachment to the group can be distinguished from one's attachment to the individual members of the group. Individual people may have a stronger attachment to their groups than to its members, or, conversely, some individuals feel stronger bonds with some other individuals than with the group to which they all belong. The relative autonomy of the personal and the collective parts of the self requires us to study their dialogical relations. As individuals people may agree or disagree with the collectivities to which they belong (e.g. 'As psychologists we are used to saying . . . , but I think this is nonsensical because . . .').

A central feature of collective voices is that they organize *and* constrain the meaning systems that emerge from dialogical relationships. Sampson (1993), for example, argued that societal relationships are

governed by polar opposites leading to 'social dichotomies', such as male versus female, young versus old or white versus black. Within these dichotomies, the master term (e.g. young) is defined as possessing particular properties that the opposite term (e.g. old) lacks. The consequence is that the opposite term is negatively defined rather than being defined in its own right. Because such opposites are loaded with power differences, the voices of some groups have more opportunity to be heard than others. As a result of the constraining influence of collective voices, people do not construct meanings in a free space with equal opportunities to express their views. On the contrary, meanings are organized and colored by the societal positions represented by the collectivities to which they belong. Because collective voices are not only outside but also in a particular individual self, the relationship between a collective voice may constrain or even suppress the meaning system of an individual, although the individual may fight back in order to be heard. An adolescent boy who feels homosexual desires may fight against these desires as part of a collectivity that forbids them. Later in his development, however, he may join the gay movement in order to redress this imbalance, not only in society but also in his own self. (For a discussion of gender identity in relation to the dialogical self, see Latiolais, 2000.)

The distinction between individual and collective voices corresponds to the distinction between two kinds of positions in which people may find themselves located: social and personal positions (see also Harré & Van Langenhove, 1991, for a comparable distinction). Social positions are governed and organized by societal definitions, expectations and prescriptions, whereas personal positions receive their form from the particular ways in which individual people organize their own lives, sometimes in opposition to or protest against the expectations implied by societal expectations. For example, when a person in a particular culture is defined as a woman, this social position carries specific expectations regarding the person's dress, movements, behavior and emotion regulation. However, from the perspective of her personal point of view, she may feel feminine in some situations (e.g. in dress), but masculine in other situations (e.g. in sexual behavior). In this case, the meaning system of this person is constructed in a field of tension between her social position and one or more of her personal positions (for a case study, see Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2001).

### **Dominance and Dialogicality**

From a young age, people are continuously involved in dialogues in which representatives of the community (mother, father, aunt, uncle,

teacher, peers) place them in particular positions (child, pupil, friend), which can vary according to the social situation the child is part of. In these interactions the child is addressed not in a neutral or abstract way, but rather in an approving or disapproving way by more powerful people. He or she is a 'good' child or a 'bad' child, a 'diligent' or a 'lazy' pupil, and a friend you can 'trust' or 'not trust'. Moreover, the child is able to transform 'you are ...' utterances from the community to 'I am ...' utterances in constructing a self-narrative. These positions, however, are not simply 'copies' of the views of others, but imaginatively constructed and reconstructed in the course of development. In other words, the other's view, although very powerful, does not fully determine the child's self, but certainly organizes it in the sense that the others' views are taken up in a continuous dialogical process in which the child, and later the adult, 'answers' to these influences.

In a study of the interplay of participants' initiatives and responses, Linell (1990) observed emergent patterns of symmetry versus asymmetry (or dominance). He argued that such patterns can be partly understood as reproductions of culturally established and institutionally congealed provisions and constraints on communicative activities. In the tradition of authors like Bakhtin and Vygotsky, Linell emphasized that meanings are not entirely constructed *ab novo* in interaction. Rather, they belong to a cultural capital inherited and invested by new actors through history. This heritage implies that the microcontext of concrete dialogical relationships cannot be understood without some concept of macroframes (organizational and ethnographic context). Every utterance has a history in preceding dialogues and an embeddedness in situation and culture (see also Lyra, 1999).

Linell even holds that asymmetry exists in *each* individual act-response sequence. Speakers have a certain privilege in being able to take initiatives and display their view. However, as part of this reciprocal process, the actors continually alternate the roles of 'power holder' and 'power subject' in the course of their interaction. There are many ways in which a party can be said to 'dominate', that is, to control the 'territory' to be shared by the interactants in communication. The territory is then the jointly attended and produced discourse. Linell distinguishes at least four different dimensions involved in dominance in interaction: interactional dominance, topic dominance, amount of talk and strategic moves:

- *Interactional dominance* deals with patterns of asymmetry in terms of initiative-response structure. The dominant party is the one who

makes the most initiatory moves: he or she strongly determines the unfolding local context. The subordinate party allows, or must allow, his or her contributions to be directed, controlled or inhibited by the interlocutor's moves.

- *Topic dominance* applies if one party predominantly introduces and maintains topics and perspectives on topics. The interlocutor who determines the topic of a conversation may achieve a high degree of dominance that may be visible not only in the content of the talk, but also in the direction that the conversation takes as a whole.
- The *amount of talk* also reflects dominance relationships. A person who talks a lot in a conversation prevents the other party from taking a turn (compare the interrogation of a suspect).
- Finally, *strategic moves* function as a special type of dominance device. One can have a strong impact on a conversation without needing to talk a lot. When one says a few but strategically really important things, the direction and the resulting insights may be heavily influenced.

On the basis of one's social position in an institution, some people have more opportunity to take the role of power holder than do others. Parents, for example, are in a position to extensively use the dominance aspects of the dialogue, so that children do not have much opportunity to express their views themselves. It is quite easy for parents to 'steal' the child's turn or to reformulate or correct the child's contribution. In a study of pediatric consultations in an allergy clinic, Aronsson and Rundström (1988) observed that parents routinely step in as the spokespersons for their children (age 5 to 15 years). Even when the doctor addresses the child, mothers simply grasp their child's turn or come in right after, reinforcing what the children said and explaining what they meant, implying that they could not, or did not get the opportunity to, express it properly themselves (see Linell, 1990).

As the preceding examples suggest, the notion of social power or dominance is an intrinsic feature of dialogical processes and, moreover, closely associated with the position a person occupies in a particular institution. As such, dominance is an indispensable concept for the analysis of cultural processes. Dominance relations organize and constrain not only the interactions *within* societies or groups, but also the interactions *between* different cultural groups.

## Cultural Positions: Moving and Mixing

In the preceding section it was argued that dialogical relationships are to be restricted neither to internal mental processes nor to verbal



communication only, but can be considered as embodied, spatialized and temporalized processes that start from the beginning of life. Moreover, it was illustrated how individual voices coexist and are interwoven with collective voices and that all these voices are located in a field of tension between (symmetrical) interchange and (asymmetrical) social domination. What does this mean for the process of cultural positioning and the construction of meaning?

### **The Problem of Cultures as Internally Homogeneous and Externally Distinctive**

In an earlier publication (Hermans & Kempen, 1998) we argued that the accelerating process of globalization and the increasing interconnections between cultures involve an unprecedented challenge to contemporary psychology. As Wolf (1982) has already argued some time ago, we live in a world with increasing *ecological connections* (e.g. the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl threatens Europe), *demographic connections* (e.g. Mexicans migrate to the USA), *economic connections* (e.g. Japanese build automobile factories in America and Europe) and *political connections* (e.g. wars begun in Asia reverberate around the globe). One could add to this list the increasing *educational connections*: an enlarging army of young people visit other countries to continue and enrich their education and professional training.

In apparent contradiction to the global scale of social transformation and corresponding complexities and dynamics in societal structures, many researchers in cross-cultural psychology have worked and continue to work on the premise that cultural differences can be conceptualized in terms of cultural dichotomies. Typically, these dichotomies have been presented as contrasts between Western and non-Western cultures or selves. Different researchers have used different terms for dichotomous distinctions that have been used to characterize Western culture or self as a whole against non-Western culture or self as a whole: 'individualism' versus 'wholism' (Dumont, 1985); 'egocentric' versus 'sociocentric' (Shweder & Bourne, 1984); 'independent' versus 'extended to significant others' (Marsella, 1985); 'primary control' versus 'secondary control' (Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984); 'self-contained individualism' versus 'enssembled individualism' (Sampson, 1988); 'individualism' versus 'collectivism' (Triandis, 1989); and 'independence' versus 'interdependence' (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). (See also Spiro, 1993, for review and criticism of cultural categorizations.)

We have challenged the tradition of cultural categorizations in cross-cultural psychology as viewing cultures as internally homogeneous

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and as externally distinctive. The three challenges are briefly summarized here. (For more extensive treatment, see Hermans & Kempen, 1998.)

First, the increasing cultural connections (demographic, ecological, economic, etc.) often entail the phenomenon of 'hybridization', which is based on the premise that intercultural processes lead to the recombination of existing forms and practices into new forms and practices (Pieterse, 1995; Rowe & Schelling, 1991). Hybrid phenomena result from the transformation of existing cultural practices into new ones and create 'multiple identities', such as: Mexican schoolgirls dressed in Greek togas dancing in the style of Isadora Duncan; a London boy of Asian origin playing for a local Bengali cricket team and at the same time supporting Arsenal football club; Thai boxing by Moroccan girls in Amsterdam; and Native Americans celebrating Mardi Gras in the United States. Pieterse (1995) has discussed such examples in order to object to the idea that cultural experiences are moving towards cultural uniformity or standardization, as is exemplified by the simplified categorization of the West versus the Rest.

The second challenge refers to the work of a group of researchers, mainly historians, sociologists and political scientists, brought together under the term 'global system theorists' (e.g. Robertson, 1995; Sander-son, 1995; Wallerstein, 1974; Wilkinson, 1995). Such theorists are interested not only in cultural evolution but also in economic, political, demographic and military changes so that they can study cultures and civilizations in the broadest possible terms. Wilkinson (1995), for example, has elaborated the thesis that today, on earth, only one civilization exists: a single, global civilization. This civilization is the direct descendant, or the current manifestation, of a civilization that emerged about 1500 BC in the Near East when Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations fused. This fusional entity has since then expanded over the entire planet and absorbed all other previously independent civilizations (e.g. Japanese, Chinese and Western). As part of his thesis, Wilkinson proposes a transactional definition of a civilization with a criterion of connectedness rather than uniformity. People who interact intensely, significantly and continuously thereby belong to the same civilization, 'even if their cultures are very dissimilar and their interactions mostly hostile' (p. 47). He adds:

. . . Israel and Judah, the Homeric pantheon, Congress, counterraidering tribes, the two-party system, the Seven Against Thebes, a Punch and Judy show, and the Hitler-Stalin pact are all antagonistic couples and collections of separate entities commonly recognized as internally antagonistic unities. (pp. 48-49)

The third challenge is in the increasing complexity of cultures. In a comprehensive treatment of this development, Hannerz (1992), for example, proposes the concept of cultural flow in opposition to the view of culture as having a single essence. He distinguished three dimensions of culture, which contribute to understanding culture as susceptible to global dynamics: (a) ideas and modes of thought: the entire array of concepts, propositions, values and mental operations that people of some social unit carry together; (b) forms of externalization: the different ways in which ideas and modes of thought are made public and accessible to the senses (e.g. science, art, interstate highways, computers); and (c) social distribution: the ways in which the ideas and modes of thought and external forms, that is (a) and (b) together, are spread over a population. The three dimensions are inter-related so that complexity on one dimension is influenced by the complexity on the others. Traditional anthropology and psychology have been especially concerned with the first of the three dimensions: understanding structures of (shared) knowledge, beliefs, experience and meaning of a particular group or society. To some extent, anthropologists and psychologists have dealt with the relationship between the first and the second dimensions: the ways in which ideas and modes of thought find expression in a somewhat limited range of manifest forms (speech, music, graphic arts or other communicative forms). On the whole, the least attention has been devoted to the third dimension, that of distribution.

Technology plays a major part in the second and third dimension (Hannerz, 1992). Media, in particular, are 'machineries of meaning': they allow people to communicate without being in one another's immediate presence. Cultures of complex societies make use of writing, print, radio, telephones, telegraph, photography, film, disk and tape recording, television, video and computers. This range of different modes of externalization simultaneously makes possible not only the construction of new meaning systems (impact of the second dimension on the first) but also the distribution of such systems globally (impact of the third dimension on the first and second). Given the interrelatedness of the three dimensions, there is an increase in complexity in each of them. This complexity creates a challenging problem for cross-cultural notions that view cultures in terms of homogeneous categories (for discussion see Holdstock, 1999; Smith, 1999; and Tweed, Conway, & Ryder, 1999, with a rejoinder by Hermans & Kempen, 1999).

### Travel and Translocality

The neglect of cultural complexity is closely related to another issue that is typical of much of the work in cross-cultural psychology: culture as geographically localized. Many cross-cultural psychologists take geographically localized cultures as the basic units of their research. One of the most comprehensive and influential studies in cross-cultural psychology (Hofstede, 1980) consisted of a comparison of 50 national cultures and three regions. Such an approach is in accord with Triandis's (1980) conception of culture as defined by three criteria: place (a local community), time (a particular historical period) and language (intelligibility).

Cross-cultural psychology's conception of culture as geographically located and centralized in itself is increasingly challenged by recent developments in social anthropology. Clifford (1997), for example, takes 'travel' as a metaphor for capturing the relationship between cultures. Since the pioneering work of Malinowski and Margaret Mead, professional ethnography has been based on intensive dwelling in delimited 'fields'. Such a field was a centered and circumscribed place like a garden, from which the word 'culture' derives its original meaning. Later generations of researchers, however, started to see ethnographic work not so much as localized dwelling but more as a series of travel encounters. Travel decentralizes the notion of culture because cultural action and the construction of identities takes place not in the 'middle' of the dwelling but in the contact zones between nations, peoples and locales. The metaphor of travel stimulates the interest in diasporas, borderland, immigration, migration, tourism, museums, exhibitions, international cooperation, pilgrimage and exile (Clifford, 1997).

### Rethinking Acculturation

Acculturation is an intercultural phenomenon *par excellence*, because it takes place on the contact zone between someone's home culture and host culture. Prominent in this area of research is Berry's (1980) model of acculturation strategies (assimilation, separation, marginalization and integration). The integration strategy can be viewed as the optimal strategy because it appears to be a consistent predictor of more positive outcomes than the other three strategies (Berry & Sam, 1997).

In an analysis of the acculturation model, Bhatia and Ram (2001) have criticized some of its underlying assumptions. One of the main assumptions is that, although there are considerable variations in the life circumstances of the cultural groups involved, the psychological processes that operate during acculturation are essentially the same for

all groups. This universalist perspective dominates current research on acculturation, and provides an important basis for much of the research carried under the larger rubric of cross-cultural psychology (Segal, Lonner, & Berry, 1998).

One of the main problems of the acculturation model is, as Bhatia and Ram (2001) argue, in the implication that the psychological processes are similar for individuals who migrate from Western European countries such as England or Germany and for individuals who migrate from previously colonized countries such as India and Kenya. Such an assumption can be seriously questioned on the basis of the consideration that these different groups originate from different historical backgrounds, a consideration that cannot be acknowledged by any model that starts from a universalist perspective.

The universalist perspective has an important implication for the relation between self and culture:

This kind of universalism assumes that basic human characteristics are common to all members of the species (i.e., constituting a set of psychological givens) and that culture influences the development and display of them (i.e., culture plays different variations on these underlying themes . . .). (Segal et al., p. 1104)

In this view, culture is separated from individual psychological operations and, moreover, the self has some natural properties that are already assumed to be given even prior to culture. The implication is that the self is a psychological given that has the nature of a core, essential self and represents an independent, objective, universal reality (Bhatia & Ram, 2001). In other words, the universalist perspective, which typically treats self and culture as 'variables', implies a self-exclusive conception of culture and a culture-exclusive conception of the self. This view corresponds well to what we have earlier in this article described as the Cartesian split between self and environment.

From a philosophical perspective, the problem of the separated self can be traced to a controversy between Descartes and his contemporary Vico. In a comparison between these two thinkers (Hermans & Kempen, 1993), it was observed that they function as protagonist and antagonist in a 17th-century philosophical controversy. Descartes was strongly committed to mathematical certainty and accepted only those insights that were beyond any doubt. Vico, on the other hand, was a historian and was by his profession interested to go back into the darkness of the remote past. Whereas Descartes was convinced of the power of lucid and clear (disembodied) thinking, Vico believed in the power of (embodied) imagination. For Descartes, space (*res extensa*)

was external to the self and could only be understood if it was subjected to the rigor of logical–mathematical analysis resulting in universal laws. For Vico, the historical world was constructed and reconstructed by people themselves and, since they made their own history, they had to study their own mind in relation to its products in order to comprehend the particular cultural situation in which they lived. Whereas Descartes was primarily interested in thinking, Vico was concerned with language. Descartes thought with closed senses and separated from other people. Vico studied the origin of language in order to comprehend the communicative processes among embodied people of different cultural periods. For Descartes, rational thinking was the starting point of philosophy. For Vico, rational thinking was a historical acquisition, not a constant component of human nature. (For a contemporary philosophical analysis of the relation between body and mind, see Johnson, 1987.)

### **Hyphenated Cultural Identities: Between Negotiation and Power**

As Bhatia and Ram (2001) observe, in the discussed acculturation model, the integration strategy is considered to be a linear trajectory that leads to an end-goal. However, what is not explained is how that goal can be achieved and how issues of conflict, power and asymmetry affect the acculturation process of, for example, immigrant and diaspora populations or those forming a minority group in any host culture. Integration in the model implicitly assumes that both the majority and minority cultures have equal status and power.

The notion of power is indispensable to understanding the phenomenon of multiple, hyphenated and hybridized identities (e.g. Arab-Jew, Asian-American, Algerian-French, Black-British). The asymmetry of dialogical relations is a challenge to the idea that there can be some kind of blissful marriage of the cultures that are part of the hyphenated identity. Radhakrishnan (1996) raises some insightful questions:

When someone speaks as an Asian-American, who exactly is speaking? If we dwell in the hyphen, who represents the hyphen: the Asian or the American, or can the hyphen speak for itself without creating an imbalance between the Asian and the American components. . . . True, both components have status, but which has the power and the potential to read and interpret the other on its terms? If the Asian is to be Americanized, will the American submit to Asianization? (Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. 211, quoted by Bhatia & Ram, 2001, p. 13)

As this quotation suggests, cross-cultural notions such as ‘integration strategy’ (Berry, 1980) and ‘bicultural competence’ (LaFromboise et al., 1993) overlook the contested, negotiated and sometimes painful,

rupturing experiences associated with living between cultures. This field of tension, where the person is somewhere between new chances and dangers, requires a shift from a focus on developmental end-states (like 'integration' or 'competence') towards a more process-oriented notion of acculturation that can account for situated, negotiated and often contested developmental trajectories. Postcolonial and diaspora theories dispense with fixed national and cultural boundaries and allow us to think more in terms of traveling cultures where here and there, past and present, homeland and hostland, self and other, are constantly negotiated with each other (Bhatia & Ram, 2001).

In summary, an increasingly interconnected world society requires attention to dialogical relationships between different cultures, between different selves, and between different cultural positions in the self (e.g. multiple or hyphenated identities). Cultures can be seen as collective voices that function as social positions in the self. Such voices are expressions of embodied and historically situated selves that are constantly involved in dialogical relationships with other voices. At the same time these voices are constantly subjected to differences in power.

### **Three Directions for Future Research**

I will now briefly discuss three areas for future research: the relevance of contact zones between cultures; the notion of complexity of self and culture; and the experience of uncertainty (see also Hermans & Kempen, 1998).

#### **From Core to Contact Zones**

Cross-cultural research is typically focused on the core aspect of culture rather than on its periphery. From a dialogical point of view, however, the periphery becomes salient as the meeting point between different cultures. This implies not that the boundaries between cultures are erased, but, rather, that they become more and more permeable. As a consequence, research should change from a comparison between countries or regions to the study of cultural processes on the contact zones as exemplified by the growing amount of international contacts, networks, organizations and institutions that are populated by people from different cultural origins (see also Appadurai's [1990] global landscapes that function as transnational contact zones). For example, research may deal with cultural changes in the meanings and practices of people who meet other cultural groups via immigration, diaspora, tourism and contacts with colleagues or friends from international

organizations, institutions and networks. How do the meanings and practices of the contacting partners change as a result of their communication, understandings and misunderstandings, conflict and power differences in these contact zones? Attention should be devoted to emerging internet communities and networks (see Hevern's [2000] investigation of fashioning online identities via homepage construction). What happens in the minds of people, and in their practices, when they entertain intensive contact with representatives of other cultures without any bodily, localized contact? What are their convergent interests and themes? What is the role of imagination, and how do people respond to discrepancies between realities defined as imaginal and actual? More and other research questions could be raised along different international contact zones. This research is not restricted to the relation between different nations, because within a particular nation different and even opposed cultural groups (ethnic, religious, racial or any emergent communities that share common meanings and practices) are part of a broader interconnected social system. Contact zones exist not only between different countries but also between different cultural groups in a broad sense of the term.

### **Cultural Complexity of Self and Identity**

Cultural complexity follows not only from the multiplicity of meanings and practices shared by a community, but also from the forms of externalization and the ways in which such meanings, practices and forms are distributed across a population (Hannerz, 1992). One of the implications is that meanings and practices are studied not so much as a learning, developmental or social process within a culture, but as an interactional meeting place of positions from diverse cultural origins. The mass media, for example, are not only used for the expression of people's meanings and practices, but, in reverse, the meanings and practices of many people are formed and changed by media communication. Media enable not only an expression of cultural meanings, but also their distribution (broadcasting and video storage permitting repetitive viewing and world-wide distribution).

The internet, in particular, enables the construction of multiple identities in close relation with the construction and co-construction of new meanings. Talamo and Ligorio (2000), for example, are concerned with the dialogical construction of the self via the creation of a particular interactive educational world. The focus is on collaborative learning and knowledge building in a shared virtual world. It is assumed that learners as active contributors in a virtual community construct their own knowledge. This knowledge is not pre-specified and transmitted



from one person to another, nor is it something to be emitted at one end, encoded, stored, retrieved and reapplied at the other. Rather, learning is situated in an emergent context that takes form as a co-construction of the participants. Indications coming from the community of learners are used to organize the task, to define the roles of the participants, and to guide the analysis of the data.

Such virtual environments open the door to new identity experiences. Participating in a virtual world where the real characteristics (both physical and personal) are not directly evident to others opens a field in which participants communicate with each other via photos, designs, pictures or animations. The concept of positioning provides a framework for studying the possibility of multiple identities that participants can assume within the same interactive context. The choice of which particular position is presented is driven by strategic moves in the mutual dialogical contact and dependent on which features are most relevant and most effective in a specific situation. The participants' positioning can be seen not only as an individual move but also as a process that is both context-shaped and context renewing (Shegloff, 1992). The context itself plays an active role in guiding and modeling the possible choices of the participants (Talamo & Ligorio, 2000).

### **The Experience of Uncertainty**

The processes of globalization and hybridization arouse a great deal of uncertainty, as Canclini (1995) has argued, and uncertainty is closely related to the experience of anxiety. From the present theoretical framework, the self involved in an increasing process of globalization and associated technological developments can be characterized by three features. First, the self is composed of a high *density* of positions, as a result of the unprecedented interconnectedness of communities and cultures on a global scale. Second, the positions of the self are relatively *heterogeneous*: groups that were homogeneous as relatively closed societies in the past become heterogeneous as partners in a broader interconnected social system. Third, the self is subjected to larger '*position leaps*' than ever before in history. The following continuum may exemplify the notion of position leaps: (a) I straighten my body in order not to look old; (b) I use some make-up; (c) I undergo a face lift; (d) an organ transplantation takes place; (e) I'm subjected to brain transplantation so that my self-consciousness has been changed. The range of these positions is not only very broad but there are larger shifts in some cases than in other cases (the leap from [d] to [e] is smaller than from [a] to [b]). A similar continuum exists from a cultural

point of view: shifting from contact with representatives of one business unit to contact with representatives of another unit within the same larger organization may imply a relatively small difference on a continuum. Shifting as a member of a marginalized group from Asian origin to contact with people from a dominating host culture in a Western country represents a much larger difference. It is supposed that the increasing density and heterogeneity of positions and the possibilities of larger position leaps contribute to the experience of uncertainty.

For future research, some significant questions can be posed: Under what circumstances do people experience uncertainty, and how do they respond to it? Do they react with forms of certainty reduction or uncertainty avoidance? What strategies are available to people who are faced with an increase of uncertainty? Do they prefer relativizing strategies or absolutizing ones? Or do they simply avoid uncertainty as part of a zapping-life style and prefer to travel through an endless series of fragmented cultural pieces?

Uncertainty can be studied, for example by comparing the positions people have in different global landscapes (e.g. financial, ideological, technological). When people participate simultaneously in different networks and these worlds are largely disjunctive, how do they deal with the uncertainties, contradictions, ambiguities and contrasting interests? How do they find their way when they move across such contact zones without any overall integrative knowledge system that might be helpful in organizing their lives intelligibly? Do they construct an individualized combination of some of the landscapes, do they superspecialize in one of them, or are they recombining elements from different landscapes into new hybrid constructions? For sure, uncertainty is not primarily in a culture's core, but in its contact zones.

## **Epilogue: The Voices of Montaigne and Seneca**

Much of the present contribution is an exploration of the implications of considering both self and culture as dynamic systems located in a field of tension between unity and multiplicity. Rather than thinking in terms of an essential core self or an essential core culture, centralized in themselves as they are, this article proposes a view that decentralizes both self and culture to a considerable degree without losing track with the notion of unity. Classic authors in the remote past have wrestled with similar thoughts. Montaigne (1580/1603) already challenged the unity of the self by concluding:

We are all framed of flaps and patches, and of so shapeless and diverse contexture, that every piece, and every moment plays its part. And there is as much difference found between us and ourselves, as there is between ourselves and others. (pp. 196–197)

And Seneca (c.65/1965) said it even more succinctly: 'Believe me, it is a major achievement to act as one person' (p. 516).

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## Biography

HUBERT J.M. HERMANS is Professor of Psychology at the University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands. His early work was on achievement motivation and fear of failure. Later he developed a valuation theory and a self-confrontation method, an idiographic procedure for assessing a person's meaning system. His most recent work is on the multivoicedness and dialogicality of the self (*Psychological Bulletin*, 119, 1996, 31–50). Amongst his

books are *The Dialogical Self: Meaning as Movement*, with Harry Kempen (Academic Press, 1993), and *Self-Narratives: The Construction of Meaning in Psychotherapy*, with Els Hermans-Jansen (Guilford, 1995). He is 'first international associate' of the Society for Personology and director of the Valuation Theory and Self-Confrontation Method Foundation. ADDRESS: Hubert J.M. Hermans, University of Nijmegen, Department of Clinical Psychology and Personality, PO Box 9104, 6500 HE Nijmegen, The Netherlands. [email: HHermans@psych.kun.nl; homepage: <http://www.socsci.kun.nl/~hermans/> or: [www.selfconfron.nl](http://www.selfconfron.nl)]