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## The Dialogical Self in Movement: Reflecting on Methodological Tools for the Study of the Dynamics of Change and Stability in the Self

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Recently, dialogical self theory has presented an appealing alternative theoretical tool for the study of identity and self (cf. Hermans 1996, 2001b, 2003). Within social sciences, several authors have applied this perspective to explain different phenomena in multiple settings (see d'Alte et al. [2007], for an elaboration). However, the way this notion of dialogical self has been theoretically addressed and empirically used is rather heterogeneous. In this chapter, we will reflect and comment upon several characteristics of the dialogical self and how these have been highlighted and applied in some of the most recognized methods in this field. We will also draw attention to some questions that are still difficult to address in this domain, both at theoretical and empirical levels. Particularly important to us is the difficult task of describing and explaining the personal experience of consistency and continuity in the dialogical self, being it multiple, multifaceted, and multivoiced—as it is usually depicted by several authors. We will proceed to present our own efforts in addressing these issues through the development of a specific microgenetic methodology and conclude with an illustration from a case study.

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### From the Semiotic Condition of Human Life to the Dialogical Self

There is an old tradition of intellectual debates between those who favor individualistic descriptions of human affairs and others who give privilege to social accounts of human life. This is only one example of dualistic debates in psychology (as well as other social sciences), in which this kind of struggle takes place. If we take a central notion for psychology—such as meaning—we can say that sometimes it is pictured as a phenomenon of an inner mind, while on other occasions it is defined as a social event. In other words, meaning can be treated either as a representation of an individual (a thing, a substance) or as an activity between people (a deed, an act).

In recent years, we have been involved in an effort to surpass these old dichotomies that still permeate psychology nowadays (see Ferreira, Salgado, and Cunha 2006; Salgado and Gonçalves, 2007). To us, the dialogical alternative may be conceived of as one framework in which these tensional traditional dualities are integrated in a holistic account and we will now try to clarify the reasons that lead us to defend this position.

#### *Meaning as Semiotic Activity Located and Created Between People*

Human life, most would agree, is always a matter of relating with the world. However, this relation is not just material, such as the type of relationship that takes place between two physical objects (e.g., a chemical reaction). Our lives, even though lived through a material body, also involve meaning. Volosinov (1986) used the term *ideological* to refer to this dimension of human life. Although always associated with some material form (such as sounds or images), psychological life involves this nonmaterial domain; more specifically, a dimension populated by *ideas* in which meaning plays a central role. Thus, we argue that psychology is about the understanding of this constant process of getting in touch with the surrounding world in a meaningful way.

Meaning is, as we have said, a disputed concept. To the dialogical theories inspired in the Bakhtinian tradition (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986; Volosinov, 1986), meaning is generated through the semiotic activities taking place between humans. According to our view, there are three features that should be highlighted to account for this process: Meanings (1) always imply a reference to a certain object (or content); (2) are the product of semiotic relations originated from social coordination; and (3) constitute our psychological inner worlds.

First, meaning is always “about” something. There is always content or a reference in a meaning. As Volosinov (1986) stated: “Everything ideological possesses meaning: it represents, depicts, or stands for something else lying outside itself.” (9). This “aboutness” (or “intentionality” in the philosophical sense) implies an agent referring to something else (cf. Linell, 2009). In this sense, we can depict a disjunction between what is said (as the content) and what is done, performed (in a given relationship) with a certain meaning. This disjunction within meaning-making processes will remain constant throughout human life: the agent will no longer coincide with the created meaning. In other words, there are always two levels of meaning-making going hand by hand but never fully coincident: the level of the process (the agent producing meaning) and the level of the content (the produced representation).

Second, signs are vital elements in this process. Since meaning transcends the mere material relation between subject and object, that transcendence is brought into being through the inscription of that relation in a sociocultural background. In turn, sociocultural contexts are structured through the joint action of their members, rendered possible by the use of semiotic means that enable a common ground for understanding and action. As Volosinov (1986) claimed:

Signs can arise only on *interindividual territory*. It is territory that cannot be called ‘natural’ in the direct sense of the word: signs do not arise between any two members of the species *Homo sapiens*. It is essential that the two individuals be *organized socially*. (12, emphasis added, italics on the original)

Thus, a sign makes a connection between a communicational agent and an addressee (see Bakhtin [1981, 1986], on addressivity) in a socially organized way. However, this connection is not necessarily peaceful. Meaning is something brought to being through a tensional and semiotically regulated contact with the world and with others. Therefore, the material relation with the world becomes organized through the social articulation of sign-mediated relations between a sign produced by an agent and something else—other signs or objects in the world. In sum, we portray human beings as agents who produce semiotic relations between signs and segments of the symbolical and material surrounding world, in a social process of co-construction.

Furthermore, we could be left with the impression that this co-construction allows sharedness and attunement of meaning between the

agents. However, self and other never coincide—they are the extreme poles in the communicational act. Contrary to the assumption that total sharedness is a possibility, there is always a gap, a difference, and it is this difference that implies and fosters communication or dialogue and keeps it going (see Jacques, 1991; Linell 2009; Rommetveit 1992).

Nevertheless, even though we are calling attention here to the core role of difference and non-coincidence in dialogue, we should also acknowledge that, in order to engage in dialogue with the other, we must act as-if this difference could be surpassed (although this aim is never completely achieved). In more simple terms: if, on the one hand, we need to depart from the assumption that co-construction and attunement between self and other are pragmatic goals of communication (although never fully attainable), on the other hand, we argue that it is because of this fundamental difference that resides between self and other that we are kept dialoguing. Thus, difference and dialogue go together as mutual and interdependent processes, as “two faces of the same coin” (Jacques, 1991; Linell, 2009).

As a corollary of this reasoning, we add that dialogicality is a core feature of the human mind. Thought, action, feeling—all human psychological activities are embedded in meaning (and brought to the realm of consciousness) through a dialogical articulation with others (Volosinov 1986). To us, dialogicality and otherness are basic human conditions that appear intertwined (see also Salgado and Gonçalves, 2007; Salgado and Valsiner, 2009).

Third, we assume that the chains of signs and their specific forms of organization (e.g., narrative forms) are acquired in an intersubjective process of development that follows Vygotsky’s sociogenetic law: the semiotic tools appear first in the interpersonal domain and only later organize intrapsychological activities (Valsiner and Van der Veer 2000). This position is also highly consistent with a Bakhtinian framework (Salgado and Valsiner 2009; Valsiner 2007; Wertsch 1991). Thus, we are born in a socially constructed world, but this socially organized world appears to every newborn as a given, and each of us has the task of recreating this given into something new through our social engagement.

Moreover, this world is compounded by several forms of organization and different contexts. As multiple actors have different views on the same subject, intense disputes are always taking place; it is a plural, complex, dynamic social environment. As Bakhtin (1981)

said, referring to the existence of multiple sociolinguistic forms or worldviews, *we live in a heteroglot world*:

For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have a ‘taste’ of a profession, a genre... a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (Bakhtin 1981, 293)

Meaning is always achieved through this tension created by different orientations that meet in a specific time and space in an embodied way. Multiple voices are heard simultaneously in a given situation, since responding to the world (assuming a position) takes place in the dialogue between those different audiences implied in the situation.

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it—it does not approach the object from the sidelines. (Bakhtin 1981, 276–77)

At any single moment in life, multiple voices are meeting or avoiding encounter, clashing or deviating, fighting or agreeing, acknowledging each other or silencing others’ views. At the same time, throughout the process of sociogenetic development, the person develops and appropriates different voices that go together with the same dialogical and tensional relation. In its contact with the surrounding world and in its contact with oneself, human life is always developing as a social and dialogical arena.

In sum, we endorse a perspective in which semiotic and dialogical activities are given a central role in psychological processes. Thus, at each moment, everyone is facing a situation and this situation is semiotically and dialogically regulated. We will say that a person in the here and now assumes a position toward the world and this position is always and simultaneously personally and socially organized. This position is a semiotic position (Leiman, 2002) both directed to material aspects of the world and to potential or real audiences. This is a

never-ending process, involving a constant repositioning of the self toward an other and an object (Salgado and Ferreira, 2005).

### *The Dialogical Self-Theory*

Human agency is clearly rooted in this possibility of assuming a position—or in the impossibility of avoiding positioning (Bakhtin, 1993). The world is constantly addressing us and our answer to the lived moment is our position—therefore, we cannot avoid being positioned (Cunha and Salgado 2008). The agent, the I, emerges in this process of constant positioning toward others and objects in the world. Thus, addressivity and referentiality are constant dynamic features that link the I with the Other, bounding them together (Marková 2003).

The dialogical self theory introduced initially by Hubert Hermans (Hermans 1996; Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon 1992) and further developed by other contributors (e.g., Salgado and Gonçalves 2007; Valsiner 2007) clearly stands upon this notion of positioning, presenting the self as multiple and multipositioned. As it was originally stated:

... we conceptualize the self in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I positions in an imaginal landscape. [...] The I has the possibility to move, as in a space, from one position to the other in accordance with changes in situation and time. (Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon 1992, 28)

Inspired in Bakhtin and also in William James' proposals (1890/1993 in Hermans 1996), the self is characterized in time and space, as a highly dynamic process. The notion of "I-position" implies a spatial metaphor that places the person in a specific place within a surrounding context. Time is also taken into consideration, since the self is dynamic and potentially changing from moment to moment. Hence, the self is portrayed as a chain of I-positions that succeed each other in time. This definition goes further, stating that:

The I fluctuates among different and even opposed positions. The I has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. (Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon 1992, 28)

Here we see some of the basic dialogical features integrated in the operation of the self. The process of repositioning is unstable ("fluctuates") and may imply inner tension and contradictions ("opposed

positions"). Moreover, each position may have a "voice" through which dialogical relations are established. In this definition, the notion of voice is no further elaborated, but it highlights the process of relation and dialogue between positions.

This perspective also allows one to characterize the self as multiple and multifaceted, although united and integrated as a whole. As Hermans claims:

In many psychological discussions unity is not conceived in dynamical terms and is typically considered as a desirable end state. Its opposite, fragmentation, is generally perceived as an aberration. The implicit or explicit purpose is often to avoid fragmentation and to foster unity. In marked difference to this view, the term *I* position allows the inclusive opposition between *unity* and *multiplicity* instead of the exclusive opposition between *unity* and *fragmentation*. (Hermans 1999, 1210)

As we can see here, dialogical self theory provides a way out from the dualistic debate between a traditional view of a consistent, coherent self or the opposing postmodern fragmented self. In this view, the self is assumed as multiple, dynamically multipositioned, and multi-voiced; yet, it still becomes organized as a structured whole (Cunha and Gonçalves 2009a; Salgado and Hermans 2005).

Finally, the dialogical self is characterized as a complex, multiple, and narratively structured self. Drawing on Bakhtin's work (1984), Hermans applies the polyphonic metaphor to the realm of self. Bakhtin (1984), as a literary critic, distinguished the novels of the Russian writer Dostoevsky as "polyphonic novels." In this type of novel, the author expresses the capacity to assume, voice, and orchestrate different voices, not only from different characters in the story, but also to give life to several voices within the same character. In contrast to other types of novels where the author is usually omniscient and detains all the knowledge a priori that is revealed as the story unfolds, in the polyphonic novel, the author's consciousness and worldview may appear, but always in confrontation with others' voices: "For the author, the hero is not 'he', and not 'I' but a full valid 'thou', that is another and other autonomous 'I'" (Bakhtin 1984, 63).

In the same way, Hermans (2001b; Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon 1992) considered the self as a polyphonic structured narrative, in which different voices engage in dialogical relations. Tension and discontinuity are placed at the core of the self, but not eliminating the

possibility of continuity, provided by dialogical interchanges. The self appears as an organized society of voices (Hermans 2001b):

the voices function like interacting characters in a story.[...] Each character has a story to tell about experiences from its own stance.[...] The dialogical self, in contrast with the individualistic self, is based on the assumption that there are many *I* positions that can be occupied by the same person. The *I* in one position can agree, disagree, understand, misunderstand, oppose, contradict, question, and even ridicule the *I* in another position. (Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon 1992, 29)

In this sense, Hermans claims that each *I*-position works as a character that voices a specific story and, as it happens with the author of polyphonic novels, the self is a complex Gestalt of several characters and corresponding voices that express their particular, sometimes opposing, world views.

### Ambiguities on the Dialogical Self-Theory

This theory of the self appears to us as highly compatible with the general framework previously outlined about the dialogical and semiotic condition of human life. Furthermore, this version of the dialogical self has become the most popular application to psychology of Bakhtin's heritage. Our own work has been highly inspired, rooted, involved, and tied with Hermans' original proposal (see Hermans and Salgado 2010; Salgado and Hermans 2005). Nevertheless, our ongoing reflections have led to some possible points of disagreement with the original definition that we will elaborate now.

First, the original definition of the dialogical self seems ambiguously committed with a notion of self as inner life. We say "ambiguous," because the theory seems to be moving back and forth on this aspect, as we shall see. Nevertheless, that commitment seems quite unnecessary and misleading to us. A dialogical version of the self is always a version that places the person in a given lived situation in time and space, as Bakhtin always emphasized the embodied and lived nature of utterances. By the same token, we should emphasize the lived moment to approach human life as it is lived in a specific here and now. This implies contextualization, and therefore, inner psychic life (private) and outer psychic life (public) must go together. Thus, we argue that psychic life—or the self—is neither inner nor outer: it is an embodied ideological and sign-mediated zone of interchange

between a living human organism and his or her surroundings. This dialogically articulated interchange has an inner expression (or inner dialogicality—not necessarily in the form of inner dialogues) and, likewise, it has an outer expression (or outer dialogicality—in the form of a being in the world). If these two dimensions do not go together all the time or, in other words, if inner and outer dialogicality are separated and collapse, the person finds herself or himself lost in the world. Severe psychopathology can be better described as an extreme difficulty in articulating these forms of dialogicality (see Seikkula and Olson 2003).

It can be appropriately claimed that Hermans' proposals do not exclude the possibility of describing the relation with the actual other. For example, he stated that:

Central to the present theory is the assumption that inter-psychological and intra-psychological processes are equally important for dialogicality... 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. (Hermans 2001b, 255)

Nevertheless, we may ask: where is the "actual other" in this formulation? Most of the literature regarding the dialogical self seldom accounts for this kind of interaction and, as Linell recently argued:

there is possibly a danger in some recent developments within 'dialogical self theory' too (e.g., Hermans 2002), namely, that the interaction with others gets too far backgrounded, so that the theory in fact may reconstitute the individual as a self-contained system which has incorporated different voices ('I-positions'). Instead of giving due attention to the interaction with real others (sociodialogue), dialogue runs the risk of being recast as interaction between internal I-positions and 'inner audiences' in the mind. (Linell 2009, 113)

In fact, most of the literature portrays the dialogical self in that way. We do not oppose this taking into consideration the analytical purposes of specific lines of inquiry with a focus on inner dialogicality. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that inner dialogues only take place in a certain ongoing interaction with the surrounding world, and

therefore, it would be a mistake to restrict our view of dialogicality only to that inward dimension.

Second, and adding to this tendency to forget the “actual others” and the actual situation in the world (that would mean a return to a solipsistic mind, something quite opposite to the purposes of this theory, see Salgado and Ferreira 2005), we also feel an absence of a more solid commitment with alterity and otherness as defining points of a dialogical self. In the original definition, otherness was absent. Later on, as a development of the model, the role of others was taken under consideration through the notion of “external positions” (e.g., Hermans 2001b, 2004):

For a proper understanding of the dialogical self, it is important to note that the theoretical term *I-position* is not exclusively used for the internal domain of the self (e.g. ‘I as father,’ ‘I as a sports fanatic,’ ‘I as a piano player’). External positions, as parts of an extended self (e.g., ‘my father,’ ‘my wife,’ ‘my friend,’ ‘my enemy’), are also conceived as *I-positions*, as the other person has the potential to function in the self as ‘another I.’ (Hermans 2004, 19–20)

The notion of external position acknowledges that there is something bigger than oneself surrounding the individual. However, since the other is considered “another I,” the radical difference between I and Other collapses again and the theory leaves the dreamer alone with his or her dream. We believe that this theory would benefit from a clearer distinction between the other-in-the-self (also referred to as inner other or inner alter) and the actual other: the other lives in me (in Hermans’ phrasing, as an external position), but in a way that is always different from the actual other that I face. Moreover, the actual and the inner other are simultaneous in terms of time (they happen at the same moment), but disjunctive in their space, since they occupy a different position in the world (for a development of this argument, see Ferreira, Salgado, and Cunha [2006]; Marková [2006]; Salgado, Ferreira, and Fraccascia [2006]).

Returning to the original definition of the dialogical self, we may now wonder about the meaning of the expression “imaginal landscape,” the theatrical space or stage in which dialogues between different I-positions take place. Again, it is an ambiguous expression. Probably referring to the mind, it can be conceived of as a Cartesian stage—something completely rejected by this theoretical framework. However, as it was originally stated, this notion is rooted in the

constructivist tradition that considers social reality as construction. Thus, in our view, the metaphorical expression “imaginal landscape” tries to depict the semantic or ideological dimension of human lives. Meaning, as dialogically based, is always a creation, a product of conventions and interpersonal articulations. However, one point needs to be clear: in this framework, imagination and meaning are based in dialogicality, and not the other way around.

Another difficulty usually associated with dialogical self theory concerns the overall emphasis on the internal multiplicity of the self. In fact, most studies that have emphasized this multiplicity and tension between different parts of the self, have portrayed several phenomena and objects of study in a close empirical derivation of the original definition indicated above (Hermans and Hermans-Jansen 2004; Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon 1992). However, as some authors claim, in some studies it is difficult to understand how personal agency and self-recognition are achieved in an individual inhabited by so many different and contradictory facets: “Thus, in the end, it seems that this version of the dialogical self might amount to an assemblage of essentially unrelated fragments almost entirely lacking in agency and responsibility” (Richardson, Rogers, and MacCarrol 1998, 513). It seems then, that more attention is needed to empirically demonstrate how the dialogical self incorporates unity and sameness in the midst of multiplicity, as it is theoretically emphasized by Hermans and others (cf. Hermans 2003; Valsiner 2002). This question has been pivotal in our empirical work and will be elaborated below (cf. also Cunha and Gonçalves 2009a).

Finally, there is sometimes a confusion regarding the notion of “dialogue” and “dialogicality.” From a Bakhtinian framework, these two concepts are different (Linell 2009). Dialogue is usually an interpersonal event, in which at least two parties discuss one topic. We can also have “inner dialogues,” referring to those situations in which a person discusses one topic with oneself, assuming different positions, very closely to what would happen in an interpersonal situation. In turn, dialogicality does not imply dialogue: instead, it is a general property of meaning-making, based on human semiotic and communicational processes. Wherever there is human meaning, there is dialogicality. Utterances are always addressed to someone—real, imaginary, or only potential—and it is this addressivity to others that renders meaning possible (as well as self-consciousness, we would add). Thus, the dialogicality of the self is not only about dialogue between different

I-positions (even if this is probably constant)—it is about the dialogic general features of meaning, of which the relationship with oneself is one important aspect, but not the only one.

### Reflecting on Dialogically Informed Empirical Methods

After elaborating on the theoretical depiction of the dialogical self, it is now time to address how these notions have been methodologically applied. We have selected two methods to concentrate on: the Self-confrontation Method (SCM) and the Personal Position Repertoire (PPR) that we consider the most well-known dialogically informed methods used within this framework.

The SCM was originally developed in the late 1970s by Hubert Hermans and collaborators in the Netherlands within the scope of valuation theory (some of the earliest international publications about the SCM are Hermans [1987]; Hermans, Hermans-Jansen, and van Gilst [1987]); nevertheless, a few years later it was integrated in the dialogical self theory (Hermans 1999; Hermans and Hermans-Jansen 1995). Originally departing from a phenomenological and narrative framework, the SCM emphasizes the story-telling nature of human lives and the important role of self-narratives in the construction of identity (Hermans 1999). It assumes that every act of living leads to meaning-making processes that give sense to the world—each meaningful unit of our personal experience can be captured in a specific “valuation.” Valuations are micronarratives usually expressed in sentences that reference personal narratives or episodes that are elicited in a dialogue between interviewer and participant, carrying a specific meaning and affective connotation (Hermans 1999). They can be distinguished from each other both at a manifest level (by the content they refer to) and at a latent level (through their affective profile). The affective connotation of a valuation varies along two dimensions: (1) the search for self-enhancement (motive S) or for contact and union with others (motive O) and (2) the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the experience they refer to (in more simple terms, if they refer to positive or negative experiences; Hermans, Hermans-Jansen, and van Gilst [1987]). The affective profile of each valuation allows the exploration of the correlation between affective profiles of different valuations, drawing some possible connections between different experiences and meanings. The method assumes that the constructed set of valuations are organized in a structured whole that concentrates the historical life of the individual (Hermans 1987).

This idiographic method can be applied in numerous counseling and psychology settings and leads the participant to perform several self-investigations (Hermans 1987, 1999). Following the subsequent integration of this method within the scope of the dialogical self theory, Hermans (1999) specifies:

When psychotherapist and client decide to perform a self-investigation from the perspective of more than one position in the self (e.g. “I as an open person” vs. “I as a closed person”), the described procedure is followed separately for each position. The client starts with the position that is most accessible (e.g. “I as an open person”) and formulates a specific set of valuations with their affective properties from the specific outlook of this position. Then the client probes a separate set of valuations and rates the associated affect from the perspective of the second position that is less accessible (e.g. “I as a closed person”). The discussion is focused in the different set of valuations separately and on their mutual relationships. (Hermans 1999, 1200)

As we can see, this method is empirically highlighting several theoretical characteristics of the dialogical self that we mentioned before. First of all, it departs from the assumption that the self is constituted by multiple I-positions and that the individual can pinpoint the perspective of a given I-position through the construction of a set of valuations specific to it. Hence, the several positions of the self are grasped through a process of self-reflection: there must be an awareness of the client (and of psychologist or researcher) that a given I-position is part of the dialogical self and is relevant in its dynamics. Second, through the study of the affective profile of the valuations that are part of a given perspective of an I-position, dialogue can be initiated between them. Hence, the metaphor of dialogue or theater of voices is actually used to invite the participant to imagine how those dialogues flow. Third, the dialogical dynamics between I-positions are visible in the changes that emerge between self-investigations. In this sense, through self-reflection, I-positions become accessible and recognized to the individual in the dialogue.

The PPR has been developed by Hubert Hermans (2001a, 2001b) as a tool specifically devoted to study the dialogical self. In his own terms, it aims at “the study of the organization and reorganization of a person’s position repertoire with attention to the personal meanings that are associated with the different positions” (Hermans 2001a, 323). The general idea is to depict significant positions held by a person,

each one voicing a specific point of view, and to explore the dialogical patterns between those positions. The method heavily relies on the distinction between internal and external positions. Following Hermans (2001b):

Internal positions (...) 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 (...) 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. (Hermans 2001b, 252)

In this sense each internal position triggers (and is triggered by) a specific set of external positions. At the same time, each internal position is more typically related with other internal positions, as well as with external positions which, in turn, have relations between them. For instance, a person may hold an internal position of "I as relaxed" in competition with the internal position "I as a hard worker" (internal relations). Each of these positions will be associated with some external positions: for example, "I as relaxed" may be triggered by external positions such as "My children" or "My friend," while "I as a hard worker" may be associated with external positions such as "My business partner." These external positions may also have some particular relation between them (e.g., my business partner may criticize the time I spend with my children). These relations may be harmonious or cooperative or, otherwise, they can be tensional or competitive and each moment is probably characterized by a complex mixture of all these kinds of relations.

Departing from this distinction between internal and external positions, the PPR procedure is based on two standard lists, one referring to internal positions and the other to external positions, previously elaborated (see Hermans [2001a], for access to the standard lists). Then, the person is invited to choose from those lists the self-positions that seem relevant, as well as to add some other relevant positions to the list. Then the method proceeds by inviting the person to estimate, with a Likert scale, the extent that each internal position is prominent

(i.e., invoked or triggered by) in relation to the external positions. Repeating the same steps for the entire set of internal positions, the result is a matrix of the relation between internal and external positions in terms of their correspondent prominence. This will allow quantitative analysis (such as the calculation of the overall prominence of each position or the correlation between profiles of prominence), as well as qualitative analysis (e.g., discussing the relationship of some positions with daily problems). Therefore, this instrument feeds the conversation between the person and the psychologist in order to illuminate, through a self-reflexive exercise, how self-positions are organized, articulated, and connected to specific outcomes in life. Moreover, the person may be invited to give voice to particular positions and to develop dialogues between positions.

It is far beyond the scope of this work to fully analyze the potentialities and limitations of this method (for a more detailed analysis of the PPR, see Gonçalves and Salgado [2001]). Nevertheless, we would like to highlight some key aspects of both methods. Interesting and full of potential as they are, both rely heavily on the self-reflection of the person. This is not good or bad—it is a fact. The important question is if we are tackling or not all the questions that we want to address.

The extent to which these methods alone are able to answer specific research or practical questions depends on the purposes involved. Nevertheless, we would like to highlight some issues that are becoming more and more pressing in this field. Relying almost solely on self-reflexivity and self-report to determine self-positions undermines the possibility of analyzing some experiences that are somehow not completely accessible or understandable to the person and, therefore, not captured through one's self-reflections. Furthermore, the relation between self-reflection and life is not linear. The person may believe something about one's life and act otherwise. We are not claiming that the content of self-reflection and the process of life are independent—we are only saying that between the researcher (and this type of research methods) and the life of the person, we are imposing another meditational level: the personal self-reflective processes.

As a consequence, we may ask if it is not possible to access the dialogical processes as they are unfolding—instead of working with the person's self-reflection upon past dialogical processes. Imagine that we are analyzing a therapy session. Following the two previous methods, we would have to ask the person which positions are or were involved in the session and to reflect about the (actual or potential)



dialogues between those different positions. Nevertheless, we are more interested in asking if it is possible to have finer distinctions that do not depend on personal self-reflection; namely, to study the positions that therapist and client are occupying in the session based on the observation of the actual session and the client–therapist dialogue as it unfolds.

In our view, even if this means losing the active participation of the person on the research process (something that can be compensated for later in a different way, for example, by inviting the person to discuss the results), it will open the scientific endeavor to the poetics of the moment—to the actual moment of creation and recreation of each position by a person. In other words, actual time and dynamism of processes is something that is lost in the SCM or in the PPR—what we obtain is a picture of that time, already filtered through the self-reflective abilities of the person. Thus, we argue that these two methods do not satisfy entirely the goal of studying the process of positioning and repositioning in a moment-by-moment basis and that we need methodological instruments more suited to these goals.

As a result of these dissatisfactions with the SCM and the PPR, we have been developing methods of research with the following principles in mind:

1. To study the temporal dynamics of the dialogical self and not only its self-reflective description;
2. To assume dialogicality as an essential feature of human experience and not only as a methodological invitation;
3. To study dialogical processes of meaning-making as they unfold and not only their output; and,
4. To use these methods to clarify not only how change and multiplicity are achieved in the dialogical self, but also how sameness and unity are achieved in the dialogical self.

We believe that these questions are vital in order to complement the actual research on the field and also to fully understand the self as a never-ending emergent process of becoming.

### **The Value of Microgenetic Designs to Capture the Moving Self**

In recent years, our interest in the dialogical self theory has been focused on the dynamic features of the self in its process of irreversible becoming (Valsiner 2002) and on how to empirically grasp its genetic movement. If we follow our phenomenological experience, we have

to recognize change and stability as two interdependent processes in life: on the one hand, we are confronted with novelty at every moment of existence and, on the other hand, we are always recognizing and constructing a temporal continuity that unites our lives and ourselves in the past, present, and future (Cunha and Gonçalves 2009a; Valsiner 2002). We can put this idea in a more simple way: whereas at a microscopic level of felt experiences, our lives are always presenting us with new challenges, feelings, and events at every unrepeatable temporal moment; at a macrolevel, we typically remain pretty much the same as time goes by.

In this sense, we can talk about different levels of change or development that have been captured quite nicely by Fogel et al. (2006). The first level of change encompasses the “natural” variability that is related to real-time experiential dynamics and is common in all living organisms (this level corresponds to the microgenetic level of analysis in Valsiner [2007]). At a second level of change, we have the recognition or awareness of differences in the midst of common variability that may, nevertheless, lead to “sameness” or more profound changes (these novelties may be noticed at a mesogenetic level of analysis; cf. Valsiner [2007]). According to these authors, third-level changes (noticed at a macrogenetic level of analysis, according to Valsiner [2007]) relate to a profound reorganization of a given system, being the only one called “developmental.”

This microgenetic approach to a given object of study, characterized by a fluid yet organized nature, seems to us as the most adequate to grasp the dialogical self in its process of becoming and emergence on a moment-by-moment basis. Applying this approach to our object of interest—the dialogical self—we can say that at a microgenetic level, the dynamic process of positioning and repositioning of the self (level 1 microgenetic variability) may lead either to the emergence of something new—for example, a new position (noticed at a mesogenetic level as a second level change) which can be reintegrated in the usual self-functioning, through a process of auto-regulation of differences (Valsiner 2002) or, instead, trigger a developmental change, leading to a significant transformation or reorganization of the self (third-level change). The issue of the construction of sameness and self-stability is quite central in human beings and characterizes most of our meaning-making activities, since we tend to automatically employ familiar solutions to solve new problems (Valsiner 2002). But according to

Shanahan, Valsiner, and Gottlieb (1997), developmental changes always result from tensions that break a given prior homeostatic equilibrium in the system. It is at the articulation of the second and third levels that we can spot these shift events, as “a difference that makes the difference,” according to the famous remark by Bateson (1999). Developmental changes imply a significant and clear transformation in the self, leading to a new state of balance or new forms of self-functioning. And although these changes are not so common in everyday life, they are however frequently the aim in therapy (see Gonçalves et al. 2010, for a description upon the evolution of second- and third-level changes in psychotherapy). Nevertheless, every time we are faced with profound identity changes or self-ruptures (Zittoun 2007), we immediately involve ourselves in meaning-making efforts that try to restore a previous or a new continuity in the self, from the *there-and-then* to the *here-and-now* (cf. Cunha et al. [forthcoming], for an elaboration upon the key role of reconceptualization narratives in the identity changes achieved in psychotherapy).

Microgenetic methods have been considered particularly useful whenever we want to arrive at a developmental and holistic account of phenomena (see Abbey and Diriwächter [2008], for an elaborated demonstration of its diverse applications; and also Diriwächter and Valsiner [2006]; Siegler and Crowley [1991]). This type of method requires a focus on the dynamic aspects of developing phenomena and, most importantly, emphasis on the relational dynamics between the elements, in a hierarchically and temporally organized fashion. That is the way the notion of trajectory appears as quite suited to illustrate these dynamics of emergence, self-organization, and transformation (Shanahan, Valsiner, and Gottlieb 1997; Valsiner 2002). In other words, microgenetic methods allow the moment-by-moment analysis of how something new emerges and unfolds, being progressively developed and either assimilated in the usual organization or initiating a new form of complex organization (Valsiner 2007).

In this sense, and following a vertical consistency (between assumptions, theories, constructs, specific goals and methods) that has been argued as the most adequate way to construct scientific knowledge (cf. Branco and Valsiner 1997; Valsiner 2006), we will present now a specific method for accessing the movement of positioning and repositioning of the self that we started developing a few years ago (Cunha 2007a, 2007b).

### The Ongoing Development of a Method: Presenting the *Positioning Microanalysis*

We should begin by reporting that the beginning delineation efforts of this method presented by Cunha baptized it as *Dialogical-Discursive Microgenetic Analysis* (cf. Cunha 2007b) and focused its application to the analysis of interviews about personal problems. Nonetheless, our ongoing reflections upon the central notions of this theory and method, along with the further clarification and development of procedures and the contribution and feedback of other interlocutors and audiences, has led us to rename it more simply as *Positioning Microanalysis* (Cunha et al. 2009).

The *Positioning Microanalysis* (hereafter PM) derives from our efforts to capture the dynamics of the positioning and repositioning of the self in its process of becoming, taking place in the irreversible flux of time and experience. According to Salgado and Cunha (forthcoming) it assumes the notion of positioning as the central object of analysis at the microgenetic level. More specifically, it is claimed that each specific and particular lived moment brings a new and unrepeatable experiential position to the foreground of meaning-making (i.e., expressing a voice that conveys a particular meaning). We assume that these positions emerge from and can be inferred through the analysis of the specific utterances of a person in a given context. Utterances, to us, are the basic constitutive elements of broader discursive activities of meaning-making (Shotter 1992, 1993). Through utterances we participate in social life and through social life each person creates the possibility of relating to oneself. Furthermore, human relations and meaning-making are based in recursive and generalized patterns that enable some stability (or “sameness”), something leading to the construction of familiarity and continuity of the self in the midst of situational and experiential novelty. Therefore, at a microlevel of analysis, a person is always changing, but this process of modification tends to assume regular patterns at a mesogenetic or even macrogenetic levels of development. This constructed stability of selfhood is, then, generally perceived, leading the person to recognize oneself as the same (Salgado and Hermans 2005). Hence, a certain “sameness” is generally perceived, even though everything the person says or does in the present moment entails difference and novelty at its core.

Thus, we have been developing PM as a way of depicting the movement taking place from moment to moment in self-positions.

By a thorough and systematic analysis of each utterance, the method distinguishes and categorizes each position taking place, and by their systematic comparison, we are able to identify personal positions that emerge at different levels of development. In this sense, these initial micropositions are grouped into more abstract or higher-order categories, based on their commonalities, producing a hierarchy of positions (that corresponds to micro, meso, and macrogenetic levels of analysis).

For this process of abstracting categories of personal positions, we highlight the framing of PM within the general procedures of consensual qualitative research (cf. Hill, Thompson, and Williams 1997). Whereas the first studies with this method reported findings deriving from the sole perspective of a researcher involved in the analysis of the data (i.e., *researcher reflexivity*—Morrow [2005]), we are now privileging the consensual analysis of a team of researchers involved in the discussion of the material (i.e., *social validity* of interpretations—Morrow [2005]). What seems important to emphasize, for us, is the process of dialogue between researchers as a way of not only creating a higher validation of the results, but also as a process of dialogically enriching the interpretation of data. Furthermore, given its idiographic nature and its suitability for the analysis of different case studies (clinical interviews, therapy sessions—either transcribed or audio/video recorded), each new research project may lead to different goals and to the specification of particular aims that, nonetheless, depart from PM as the basic methodological procedure.<sup>1</sup>

#### *First Step: The Process of Unitizing*

First of all, if we are looking to detect and distinguish personal positions in lived discourse, we must adopt some kind of unitizing procedure that captures changes between positions in the flow of conversation. For this, we depart from the Bakhtinian notion of utterance, as a basic responsive and interactive unit (Shotter 1992, 1993). According to Shotter (1992):

The utterance is thus a real social psychological unit in that it marks out the boundaries (or the gaps) in the speech flow between different 'voices,' between different 'semantic positions' – whether between people or within them. (Shotter 1992, 14)

However, an utterance can be quite difficult to define; hence, for pragmatic reasons, we are adopting the unitizing procedures of the

transcripts of Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997, based on the original work of Auld and White [1956]), that allows two trained independent judges to select "response units" as equivalents for utterances. We are aware that focusing on "response units" represents, most of the time, a deviation from the original notion of utterance. Nevertheless, pragmatically, it allows a more clear empirical segmentation that facilitates consensus between judges while not affecting final categorization of positions (for a further elaboration, see Salgado and Cunha forthcoming).

#### *Second Step: Analyzing Utterances*

Subsequent to unitizing material, we proceed to a categorization of all units, according to certain criteria that we consider necessary for a dialogical account. By now, it is assumed that both judges have a familiarization with the whole material that is going to be further analyzed that will facilitate the following steps.

We consider it is necessary to identify, primarily, communicational agents (the voice of the interlocutor in a given social role, a given affective experience being communicated or a person's voice being expressed by an interlocutor). Furthermore, each message has a specific content, which is also linked with certain communicational purposes and speaker intentions (for example, the same sentence can be uttered by one speaker as a sincere message and, by another speaker, in mockery or irony). Finally, we have to understand which are the addressees, or recipients of the message in a specific relational movement toward a specific matter or subject (they can either be present, or even absent or imagined, yet psychologically addressed—for example, while writing a letter to a deceased spouse, the agent can express loss in a specific moment and rage in the next).

Thus, the resulting task is to find a way of observing agents, addressees, and messages relating while dealing with some segment of the world (an object, some task). To put it more concretely, this is equivalent to analyzing each unit according to the following questions (see also Salgado and Cunha forthcoming, for a more detailed illustration):

1. Who is speaking/acting?
2. To whom is the person(s) speaking/acting?
3. What is being said/done?
4. How is this said/done?
5. Why is it said/done?
6. Where does this take place?

We must add here that, to arrive at a codification of positions through these criteria is by no means the end of the task. These following steps are more focused on understanding the dynamics between positions and the mutual relations established between them.

### *Third Step: Constructing an Hierarchical Organization of Personal Positions*

This step is inspired by the codification of data that occurs in Grounded Analysis (e.g., Glaser and Strauss 1994). Through the systematic comparison of micropositions, we are able to regroup them into more abstract categories based on their commonalities and differences (for example, personal positions referring to the same relational contexts, positions referring to the same objects of discourse), in order to arrive at a hierarchy of positions that become connected in a network.

We recommend that this systematic comparison of each position and their integration in the hierarchy occurs right after its categorization in the second step. Through our experience, we realize that this enriches the articulation between identification (step two) and integration (step three) of positions.

This whole phase of the procedure relies, again, in the consensual discussion of data (cf. Hill, Thompson, and Williams 1997) carried out by the judges, since we consider that these dialogical processes lead to tensional dynamics that, frequently, are more creative and deepen the understanding of data.

### *Fourth Step: Analyzing Positioning Dynamics*

This stage of the procedure focuses more specifically on the evolution of positions in time, trying to capture the dynamics between them. For example, the recognition of a repetitiveness of similar positions helps to depict a self-organization pattern revolving around a specific theme. Furthermore, novelty and self-innovation can also occur, since new positions can appear around the same relational context or object under discussion. These new and emergent positions of the self can create new meanings that may lead to developmental changes and reorganization in the self. The intention, at this moment, is to understand which auto-regulation processes are involved in dealing with difference and self-innovation in the dialogical self and to comprehend how innovation leads to reorganization.

At the end of this procedure, we are able to depict the illustrative trajectory of different positions presented during that analyzed material.

### **The Case of Joan: The Dilemmas of a Young Woman Devoted to Her Career**

Joan was a twenty-six-year-old young publishing assistant, a college graduate, that participated in a study intended to explore change and stability of perspectives around a personal problem (Cunha 2007a, 2007b). When she volunteered to participate in a single interview, she chose to reflect upon her beginning professional life, defining her problem as “*I am currently worried about the work environment and the work conditions we have in our office*” [sic]. Her interviewer was the first author, at the time a master-student in clinical psychology. The specific semistructured interview used, called *Identity Positions Interview*<sup>2</sup> (cf. Cunha 2007a), presents certain semiotic devices (as-if imaginary movements—Valsiner [2007]) that clearly shape this dialogical encounter aiming to facilitate processes of self-innovation and creative meaning-making. These as-if movements are twofold in the process of this interview: in a first stage, the participant had to imagine a conversation between her and several significant others (either real or imaginary) presenting their contrasting views; and, in a second stage, the participant imagined a leap into a projected positive future—where the problem is already solved or dealt with—and imagined a conversation between then and now, exchanging advice, resources, and messages. These imaginary positioning and repositioning movements—both in the social positioning phase (first part of the interview) and in the future projection phase (second part of the interview)—attempt to lead to the emergence of novelty in the way of facing the problem and enacting changes and self-innovation in the personal perspective taken. Thus, this case study is rooted in this specific dialogical encounter, with this specific structure and goals, which shaped this relationship in a historically irreversible way.

The analysis of this interview that will be presented in the following sections is based on the PM, as it was described before. It will be more focused in showing how the first microanalytical division of the interview in (microlevel) positions can be then synthesized in meso or even macro understandings of the processes involved in change and in stability, than in microanalysis only (for further details, see Cunha [2007a, 2007b]). Furthermore, we will be focusing on of the following issues:

1. Self-organization patterns in the dialogical self that become visible through the dialogues between parts of ourselves and dialogues with others concerning a given issue (e.g., a problem);

2. Emergence of novelty and self-innovation that can appear through the enactment of dialogues; and,
3. How the self regulates and deals with difference and innovation emerging—either by transforming a pre-given status quo or by maintaining it.

### *A Microgenetic Look at Joan's Interview: The Initial Exploration of the Problem*

During the initial phase of exploration of her professional concerns, Joan assumes this situation as the most important problem in her present life. This happens because she presents herself as someone that is very passionate toward her profession and deeply values her career. This feeling takes over other areas of her life, since she assumes that her present “*goal in life is professional fulfilment above everything.*” She adds, however, that although the interpersonal environment in the office is very bad for the development of her duties and her psychological well-being, she feels that she has not reached yet an unbearable limit that would force her to seek professional help. In this sense, in the initial part of the interview, the (microgenetic) position of *I as worried about my work and working environment* appears more central and repeated. Nevertheless, she also repositions herself several times as *I as deeply valuing my career* and *I as suffering with my working environment* and *I as striving to cope with it*. These several positions voice perspectives that emerge from addressing and reflecting on the problem through different angles, grounded in different values, and evidence the ambiguity and ambivalence lived in the situation; even though they appear in the shadow of the first perspective (*I as worried*).

### *A Microgenetic Look at Joan's Interview: Social Positioning Phase*

In the Social Positioning phase, Joan chose five significant others to imaginatively enter in conversation with concerning this problem. A male friend expressed his opposition toward the cordial attitude she has been adopting in the work-place, arguing for a more confrontational approach. This view is immediately rejected by Joan in her reply, although at times she wishes to be less passive in her reactions. Her older brother defends arguing her position with moderation, clarity, and self-control. In her turn, Joan objects and replies—tired of waiting—emphatically saying: “*I want a resolution for yesterday!*” The perspective of her History teacher (a man whom she greatly

admired) emphasizes that the most important thing of all is to love what we do because, if that passion is present, all else is minor. This idealistic perspective undervalues the environment and places emphasis in the self-fulfilment brought by the job itself. At this instance, Joan addresses herself, saying: “*Support yourself only in what you do and all around is secondary...*”; but, in the following moment, she confesses that she is incapable of achieving this and is currently feeling overwhelmed by the hostile and competitive interpersonal environment. Another female friend, later on, argues for a distancing and devaluation of the importance of work in her life: in her view, Joan should invest more in her friendships, boyfriend, family, and hobbies that could provide well-being and fulfilment outside the work sphere. Through her eyes, Joan feels too obsessed by her work and too radical in the way she conceives it, but she replies that she cannot change how she deals with her career since she feels deeply rewarded by her professional successes. She admits, in the end, that a balancing is needed between both perspectives. Finally, when reflecting about the perspective of her parents, Joan states that they would emphasize a rational attitude stressing the positives of her professional situation and the privileged technical conditions that she has in the company to develop her work. Joan agrees with them, although, saying that usually when they actually talk about it, she reacts impulsively, rejecting moderation and rationality, and expresses her protest filled with disappointment and hopelessness.

In this stage of the interview, we can notice a wide exploration of alternative views and perspectives toward the problem that, by being enacted in the interview, lead to a multiplicity of voices toward the problem and ways to address it, accompanied with a greater elaboration of the inter-and-intrapersonal experience and impact that it carries. The several perspectives can be outlined as follows:

1. Perspectives that do not validate Joan's emotional experience and ambivalence, treating the situation as nonproblematic;
2. Perspectives that, although acknowledging the emotional impact of the problem, suggest a more active attempt to address and resolve the issue; and,
3. Perspectives that conjugate these two alternatives by stressing a certain attempt of resolution of the problem, while framing the difficulties as usual experiences in professional life after the confrontation with the no-longer-idealized real world (and in this sense, leading to a *normalization* of current complaints).

Joan systematically rejects each new perspective immediately after it appears, even though, later on, she might admit to identify with several of the divergent perspectives. We assume this as evidence of an internal conflict between a multiplicity of positions that Joan sometimes adopts toward the problem. In this sense, we have the participant sometimes defending a more passive attitude and at, other moments, arguing for an impulsive acting-out—in a constant movement of opposition to her imagined interlocutor(s) that leads her to assuming quite discrepant positions.

Nevertheless, if we look at this process globally, we can realize that the expression of otherness in the voicing of alternatives leads to an exploration of alterity that introduces creativity and multiplicity in the semiotic field of meanings associated with the problem and generates other forms of looking at it and acting with it. Addressing this process, we view this as a polyphonization of voices that result from a proliferation of I-positions that are assumed by the participant (Valsiner 2002). These become emergent due to the exploration and shift between opposite meanings (e.g., *Calm* and *Impulsive*; cf. the elaboration upon meaning opposites in the A and non-A semiotic fields in Josephs, Valsiner and Surgan [1999]; see also Santos and Gonçalves [2009], for similar work with these semiotic fields). To illustrate this, we will now analyze and comment on a few excerpts of the imagined dialogue between Joan and her significant others.

Reflecting on the dialogue with her brother: "...he would advise me to be calm, and I think that he would also give me incentive to argue a little for my rights and to move on, but always with moderation." [sic]

Replying to her brother: "... I'm tired of being calm, and... it's not easy. [...] I think I would contest and say: I want a solution for yesterday! And I'm like that pretty much, it would go like that." [sic]

As we can see through these excerpts, the exploration of the semiotic field [ACTING CALM] leads to the shift to an opposing semiotic field [ACTING IMPULSIVE], and Joan adopts a contrasting position to her brother's—presenting herself as *I as tired of being calm/I as impulsive*, which is manifested with a high emotional expression (note the emphatic use of direct speech).

To summarize, the Social Positioning phase leads to a proliferation of voices that emerge by the exploration of opposing views that are imaginatively expressed by significant others. Hence, the initial central

position toward the problem "*I as worried about my work and working environment*" unfolds in a multiplicity of positions toward the self and the interlocutors such as "*I as devaluing assertiveness*," "*I as tired of being calm*," "*I as rejecting my work*," "*I as rejecting being rational and moderate*," and "*I as calm*." These different positions, that apparently seem contradictory, translate into an ambiguity and multiplicity that destabilizes the problem and the personal perspective usually adopted, making it difficult to decide how to address or act upon it and leaving the participant with no clear solution or path to follow.

Nevertheless, this apparent multiplicity can be understood as a movement between positions that either support a position of securing her job (being calm, moderate, ...) or positions that appeal for a more active and confrontational style. Thus, this polyphonization does not seem to bring significant novelty in terms of the solution of the problem (being level 1 changes or variability). On the contrary, and because polyphonization of positions still maintains the same functional relation between the contrasting fields (Valsiner 2002), she seems stuck in this back-and-forth movement, and whenever a voice is heard from one position, she moves to an opposite counterposition, sustaining the problem. Despite that, polyphonization seems to create some instability in the initial formulation of the problem, brought by this constant movement to different perspectives. Thus, even if this may be seen as an illustration of polyphonization as something contributing to "sameness," as it was argued by Valsiner (2002), the contrast of that polyphonization seems also to bring some movement and differentiation from a initial apparently uniform state (worried about work, in this case). Thus, these dynamics of rejection/disengagement of certain messages and identification with opposing meanings in several back-and-forth movements combined create a *process of constructive elaboration of positions* (Josephs 2000) that—dialogically transforming—can create an opportunity to originate something new (the emergence of a second level change).

#### *A Microgenetic Look at Joan's Interview: Future Projection Phase*

When Joan is asked to imagine the possibility to travel ahead in time into a point in the future where the occupational problem has already been solved, she envisions a projection of four years into the future. She interrogates if, at this point, justice has been accomplished and in the following moment replies (adopting the future voice) that there has been the recognition of her work and dedication, a constructive critical

appraisal of her performance, and a fulfilling professional evolution through learning and experience. At this point, Joan understands that she wants to actively create opportunities to learn more and get the critical appraisal she needs to be better. She also realizes that what is really bothering her is not the working conditions—but the relationship with her colleagues and superiors—and restricts the formulation of the problem to that.

We consider that this is an interesting development in the status quo of the problem: the questioning for justice in the future leads the participant to a clearer definition of what she needs to change in the current situation. Thus, she starts expressing some insecurity about her performance (*I as wanting some reassurance about the work I develop*) and realizes that she can actively seek some external judgment. A more proactive attitude emerges, translated by different positions that start appearing repeatedly: *"I as determined to seek external assessment"* and *"I as pro-active in changing the working conditions."* This stage culminates with the reformulation of the initial problem in a more restricted way that excludes further facets of work from a problematic view.

At this point of the interview, the participant is asked to formulate other alternative perspectives that she could be adopting in the present toward the problem and also to imagine the dialogues that she could entertain between these alternative present perspectives and the future. Joan develops two alternative views toward the situation: *"I love what I do"* (first alternative view) and *"I love what I do but sometimes I don't trust my results"* (second alternative view).

On the one hand, the first alternative view restores the expression of her passion toward her work associated to the central role it occupies in her life. When she imagines a dialogue between this perspective and the future, she hopes that four years from now she has already been able to become more proficient at her job and also to find a stability that allows her to fully experience and assume her passion for what she does. On the other hand, the second alternative refers to her self-doubts due to the fact that she feels too young and inexperienced for acting too often based on her common sense and intuition, since she never had prior training in the publishing business. These two alternative perspectives appear as facets and meanings associated to Joan's job that, nonetheless, are shadowed by the more lively concerns about the interpersonal working environment.

However, this part of the projection of alternatives into the future also presents an interesting aspect in terms of meaning-making evolution: by presenting and elaborating two alternative positions toward the problem—*"I as passionate by my work"* and *"I as doubting the quality of my work"*—a new position is synthesized and emerges: *"I as passing through a learning, maturing process."* This new position, which is accompanied by a positive feeling of hope for the future, results from a reconceptualization of the professional experiences that Joan is currently living. This new, more benign position is even immediately grounded in her prior experiences, as she contemplates situations of exception to the *dominance* of the problem: *"like this morning [a Saturday]: I went to work alone and I was very well."* [sic]<sup>3</sup>

Yet, this new position toward her professional experiences is only temporary since it does not persist until the end of the interview. As the dialogue between interviewer and participant progresses, Joan retracts to a more conservative and more familiar position: *"I as evaluating carefully the current difficulties and alternatives."* In this sense, the interview ends with Joan adopting a self-reflective stance, as she ponders alternatives in case the working environment gets too unbearable to cope with.

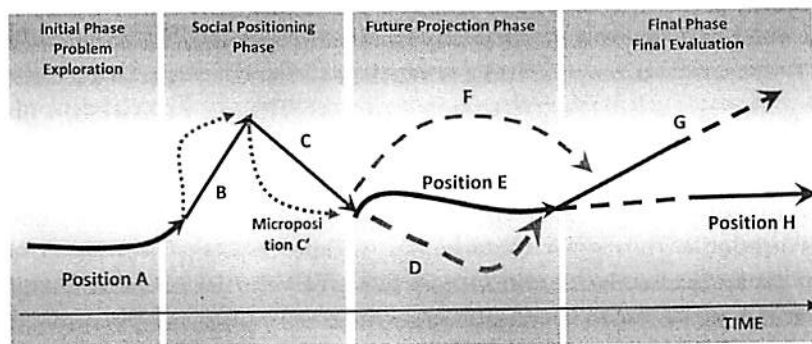
#### *What can We Learn from Joan's Case? An Integration of Findings*

The several positions assumed by Joan—and its reappearing redundant forms—throughout the interview, allow us to select some as the most salient and prevalent for a schematic representation of the trajectory of this participant. Therefore, we portrait Joan's evolution throughout the interview according to Figure 3.1.

As we have said, during the initial part of the interview, the position that is most salient and central is position A: *I as worried about my work and working environment*. Nonetheless, in the Social Positioning Phase, a proliferation of positionings occurs and this results in a multiplicity of perspectives being voiced and addressing the problem. Joan moves systematically from position to counterposition, rejecting the contrasting prior views of significant others and exploring alterity in opposing semiotic fields of meanings. As an example, microposition C': *I as calm* is immediately rejected and emphatically neutralized by position C: *I as tired of being calm*.

This suggests that the problem, voiced by the position "worried about work" is actually decomposed in an inner conflict between opposing perspectives regarding the attitude to take when facing

Figure 3.1  
The Trajectory of Joan along the Interview



Position A: *I as worried about my work and working environment*

Position B: *I as devaluing assertiveness*

Position C: *I as tired of being calm*

Microposition C': *I as calm*

Position D: *I love what I do but sometimes I do not trust my results*

Position E: *I as worried about the working environment*

Position F: *I as proactive in changing the working conditions*

Position G: *I as passing through a learning, maturing process*

Position H: *I as evaluating carefully the current difficulties and alternatives*

problems at work. This goes along with the very common idea in dialogical theories that enduring problems can be described as a conflict between positions or voices.

In the Future Projection Phase, other alternative positions emerge toward the problem, expressing voices that are often shadowed by the more familiar position adopted toward the problem. This leads to a progressive differentiation of the initial position A and to a restriction of meanings expressed as problematic; even though, very close and dependent from the original voice (position E: *I as worried about the working environment*). The further projection of alternatives into the future (positions D and F) leads to the synthesis of a new position that is possible due to a reconceptualization of the experiences discussed (position G: *I as passing through a learning, maturing process*). Up until now, we were noticing a *crescendo* in the emergence of novelty and self-innovation that showed a destabilization of the formulation

of the initial problem and could be a window of opportunity for a new reorganization of the self in relation to the problem. However, this transformation process is not completed and sustained, being abandoned when Joan retracts to a more familiar position that is maintained until the end of the interview (position H: *I as evaluating carefully the current difficulties and alternatives*). This position, despite its derivation with the original positions adopted, combines a more benign emotional tone and proactive stance.

This trajectory of Joan allows us to illustrate, empirically, the assertion of Valsiner (2002): "In the polyphony of loosely related 'voices,' the dialogical self may look very complex, but actually it is not." (259), since it rapidly finds ways to balance and neutralize novelty and restore familiarity. In this sense, the original pattern of self-organization of the self toward the problem, characterized by an intense and unstable multivoicedness that destabilizes the initial position adopted by the participant, evolves in the direction of a progressive stabilization of its multiplicity, organized around a single, more central position (and their resembled variations).

### Concluding Remarks

The dialogical self theory has been considered a promising theory in terms of deconstruction of the traditional ideas of self and as an alternative route to develop knowledge about the human psyche. However, we need to go further, not only in deconstructing old and traditional ideas: it is necessary to bring new constructions to the field. This claim applies to the entire field of psychological science. According to Valsiner (2009), in order to develop psychology in this direction it means to create universal knowledge:

The post-modernist turn in psychology is now over, and it is an interesting task to return to creating a universal science of psychology that is context-sensitive, and culture-inclusive. The latter goal entails a renewed focus upon qualitative analyses of time-based processes, close attention to the phenomena under study, and systematic (single-system-based—usually labeled idiographic) focus in empirical investigations. (Valsiner 2009, 1)

In this work, we have presented the up-to-date results of our own efforts to use the dialogical self theory as a conceptual tool for the study of dynamic processes of change and stability. Starting from there, we believe that this method—Positioning Microanalysis—is



a promising path to explore different dynamic processes of the self, since it is compatible with the general basic axioms of the theory and it tries to fulfill the basic requirements of a developmental approach to the phenomena: it is idiographic, time-sensitive, and contextually and culturally inclusive. Moreover, the presented case analysis also allows us to make some specific contributions to our knowledge about dialogical processes, namely:

- Enduring problems seem to create overgeneralized meanings that characterize the person as “stuck” in some repetitive pattern, originating a kind of apparent steady state or stable identity (macrolevel of analysis).
- Those overgeneralized meanings are fed by repeated patterns or cycles of positions and counterpositions, which create opposite directions that annihilate each other and prevent the person from achieving the desired goals (mesolevel of analysis).
- These cycles, by themselves, are compounded by a complex set of different personal positions and audiences (microlevel of analysis).
- By activating these different positions, it is possible to escape from the usual point of equilibrium (the overgeneralized meanings), even if it only resembles the activation of the dual conflict of position and counterposition.
- The case also suggests that this progressive differentiation of positions and respective audiences or semiotic contexts facilitates the movement toward some alternative perspectives about the problem.

In sum, it is our conviction that PM can make a significant contribution to the psychological science. We might add that in our view it should not be taken as “the” method but only as a possible pathway to study dynamic processes in time, while staying close to the phenomena. Nevertheless, the method can and should be enriched by future developments and, even more important, it should be always adapted to the specific research questions one is trying to address.

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### Notes

1. We have developed a coding manual for Positioning Microanalysis (Cunha et al. 2009) that can be requested directly from the authors.

2. It is not our goal here to describe extensively the *Identity Positions Interview*—for a further explanation we refer the reader to Cunha (2007a, 2007b).
3. This contrasting experience would be considered an *unique outcome*, according to White and Epston (1990), or a *reflection innovative moment*, according to Gonçalves, Matos, and Santos (2009).

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## A Dismantled Jigsaw: Making Sense of the Complex Intertwinement of Theory, Phenomena, and Methods

Mariann Märtsin

In this chapter I want to revisit the debate concerning the intertwining of the phenomena, theory, and methods. While being a well-known problem in psychology, the complex dialogues within this triangle as they are played out at each corner of our research effort are always important to consider anew when we face the challenge of conducting research. This chapter is my attempt to think through and reflect upon these issues in light of a recent study.

My engagement with this topic relies on two ideas. On the one hand, I see the intertwining of these three aspects of the research enterprise as an ongoing process of continuous oscillations which blurs their boundaries. The image that comes to mind is the one of jigsaw, where all the pieces are interlocked and make sense only in relation to each other. On the other hand, I will try to portray this process of meshing in a somewhat linear manner in this chapter. That is, I will try to take out some pieces from the jigsaw and show how they are connected to other pieces. I will discuss three crucial instances of this intertwining: the emergence of the phenomenon through theory, the choice of the methods based on the conceptualization of the phenomenon, and finally the emergence of novel theory through movements between data (i.e., phenomenon) and theory. In each of these crucial instances the focus is on the relationship between two aspects of the triangle, while the third is always present as a silent listener of the dialogue. The aim of the linearization of this messy entwinement is to show the