A PORTRAIT OF A DIALOGICAL SELF: IMAGE SCIENCE AND THE DIALOGICAL SELF

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ABSTRACT. In the dialogical self (DS), temporal and spatial characteristics of the self are considered of equal importance. Nevertheless, the spatiality of the self has received little interest in the research practice of the dialogical self, which still analyzes meaning predominantly as a temporal phenomenon. Image science, by contrast, deals mostly with the spatiality of meaning for the pictorial mode of representation is constituted by the spatial relations between depicted elements. We present a method of image analysis that may retrieve the spatiality of the self on an empirical level. We then interpret a self-portrait by the Mexican paintress Frida Kahlo as a portrait of two I-positions and induce challenges pertaining to dialogical self theory from this analysis: on a theoretical level the interplay of temporality and spatiality and the role of culture in DS theory; on an empirical level the analysis of 'silent' positions and cross-cultural analyses of dialogical relations; finally, we address modes of visualizing DS theory itself and suggest a more bottom-up approach to generate diagrams.

Keywords: planimetric analysis, imagery, I-positions, *Übergegensätzlichkeit,* silent voices

In the wake of the *linguistic turn* within the social sciences, psychology has witnessed a *narrative/discursive turn*, too (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001). Narrative has been discussed as a new root metaphor (Sarbin, 1986) or a new paradigm (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001) for psychology. While the dialogical self (DS) is rooted in a narrative approach to the self, too, Hermans and Kempen (1993) have pointed out some of the shortcomings of a narrative perspective for understanding the self. In their view, narrative accounts of the self tend to overestimate the role of a *central narrator* telling the developmental history of the self (e.g. Sarbin, 1986) and the role of *time* for understanding dynamics of the self (e.g. Gergen & Gergen, 1983). DS theory is explicitly designed to overcome both shortcomings (Hermans, 2001a): in a postmodern vein, the assumption of a central executive function within the self is discarded; furthermore, DS theory wants to take into account both temporal and spatial dimensions of the self.

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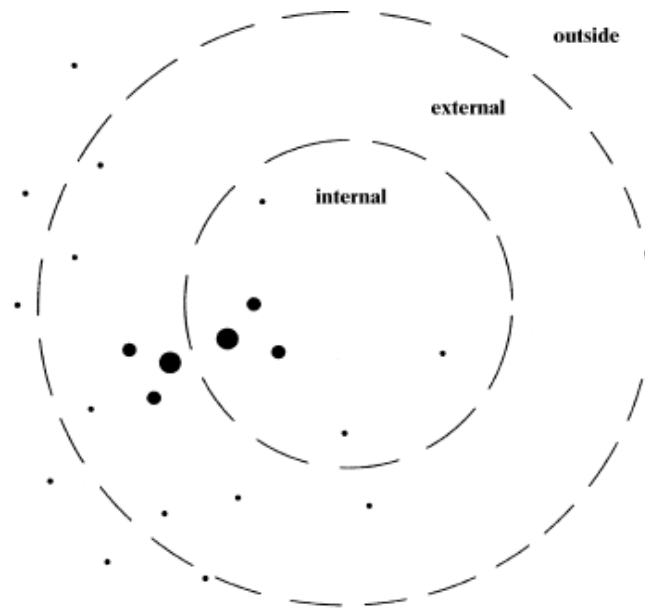
Figure 1. Positions in a multivoiced self (Hermans, 2001a, p. 253)

In a dialogical self, we do not find a single centralized story-teller at work. DS theory retains James' (1890) view of the self as consisting of different constituents: I and Me. The I refers to the reflexive parts of the self (the self as subject, knower, thinker, etc.), whereas the Me is described as the sum of everything someone can be said to own (the self as object, as known, thought, etc.). The dialogical self amounts to a 'narrative translation' of James' distinction. Each Me, however, is endowed with a voice to tell its own story. A central narrator telling the life-story of the self is thus rendered obsolete. The dialogical self is but a process of dialogical positioning and re-positioning within the *imaginal landscape* of the mind. At each moment in time, multiple positions can be simultaneously present within this landscape; and at each moment in time, several I-positions are involved in dialogical relations, too.

As can be seen in Figure 1, DS theory distinguishes between internal positions, external positions, and the outside. Internal positions are felt as part of myself (e.g. I as a scientist), whereas external positions are felt as part of the environment (e.g. my colleague). External positions refer to people or objects that are relevant from the perspective of one or more internal positions. Following this rough sketch of DS theory we will discuss central features of the dialogical self that will be of vital importance in our final analysis: the role of space and culture in the dialogical self, and the way images have until now been conceptualized and empirically used in DS theory and research.

Specific characteristics of the DS theory: The spatialization of time in DS theory

The spatialization of the self in the dialogical self is developed via a historical argument: Hermans and Kempen (1993) claim that their conception of the self(-narrative) is largely in accordance with the so-called modernist movement in literary science. This movement is characterized by (1) a retreat of the omniscient author, and (2) the spatialization of time. The authors discuss the so-called *architectonic novel* (Spencer, 1971) as a prominent example for this trend. This label applies to such works as Nin's *Cities of the Interior*, Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Fuentes' *Change of Skin*, Robbe-Grillet's *In the Labyrinth*, and Lowry's *Under the Vulcano*. What they have in common is the abandonment of 'traditional' principles of narration in their coherent and continuous ordering of events from the perspective of a single author. Instead, the composition of the architectonic novel works by means of 'juxtaposition', i.e., seemingly unrelated events or story parts are set beside one another. Thereby, a subject can be exposed from different an even opposing angles, for example via fact *and* fiction, observation *and* imagination, etc.

Following Spencer, Hermans and Kempen note that the architectonic novel has much in common with cubist paintings, for they depict a single object from different angles as well. More generally, "[t]he architectonic novel has clearly a pictorial quality: It invites the reader to see reality as exposed at a glance" (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p. 53). The architectonic novel has a further equivalent in the technique of montage typical for film. Also here, different or even contrasting pieces are shown without explanation or transition. From these coincidences the authors infer that

> [t]he technological advances of film and television in the twentieth century have had a strong influence on novelistic literature. Spencer argues that the swift language of visual images in film and television have shown us new ways of organizing what our senses receive: We take in sensations and words all at once instead of sequentially. (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p. 53)

Quite obviously, the conception of narrative in DS theory has not only been shaped by developments in modern literature, but also by the technological advances of film and television. According to the principle of juxtaposition, which they find characteristic for both these fields, Hermans and Kempen (1993) develop the conception of the self as a multitude of different I-positions fluctuating within the imaginal landscape of the mind.

Culture in the DS theory

Comparable to James' (1890) Me, an I-position can refer to anything a person can be said to 'own'. In this line of reasoning, culture as well is interpreted as an I-position (Hermans, 2001a). Culture can manifest itself as an I-position in two different manners. It can in itself constitute an I-position, as in the example of the position

'Dutch woman' (Hermans, 2001b); or it can 'speak through' another I-position. The last example is a showcase of the Bakhtinian (1929) *ventriloquation*, which means that individual speakers always speak in the social languages of their time, thereby expressing the position of the group they belong to.

Interestingly, this conception of culture as an I-position seems to have backgrounded another conception presented in the very first American Psychologist article of Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon (1992). Therein, the authors endorse the view that 'Western' culture, with its individualistic and rationalistic ideals of selfhood, influences the entire *organization* of dialogical selves, restricting its full potential and resulting in centralistically organized selves dominated by one or few voices. The dominant conception of culture in DS theory today, however, stresses the existence of self and culture as a "multiplicity of positions among which dialogical relationships can develop." (Hermans, 2001a, p. 243). In this conception, culture is a voice that may speak for itself or speak through another position. It does not necessarily organize dialogical relations per se, though.

Images in DS theory

Even before the first article on DS theory (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992), Hermans has used pictorial material as a stimulus for an empirical study combining idiographic and nomethetic research principles (Hermans, 1988). He presented five subjects with a series of paintings by the Spanish artist Francisco de Goya on the capture of a notorious Bandit called El Maragato. The bandit once broke into a house and threatened the inhabitants with a gun. Before leaving the house he demanded a pair of shoes. A monk offered him his shoes and finally defeated El Maragato when he accepted them. Hermans defined the first picture in the series as 'winner position' (El Maragato breaks into the house) and the last one as 'loser position' (he is defeated by the monk). The participants in the study were asked what El Maragato felt in each of these pictures. From their answers, Hermans then developed a winner-affect pattern and a loser-affect pattern. Obviously, he was not so much interested in the pictorial material per se but in the story told by the series of images.

In 1993, Hermans and Kempen again used pictorial stimuli. They drew on Murray's TAT procedure, "one of the first systematic attempts to develop an assessment technique using people's narratives" (p. 158). TAT plates are originally construed in such a way that the portrayed persons do not 'make' eye contact with the viewer. Hermans and Kempen, however, used a picture which invited eye contact in order to trigger an "imaginal dialogue with the viewer". They chose *Mercedes de Barcelona* (1930), a painting by the Dutch artist Pyke Koch. Koch's pictures in general are characterized by a strong foregrounding of the depicted figures, which strongly seem to approach the viewer.

In the empirical study, subjects were asked to generate valuations. Valuations refer to anything people may find important when telling their life story. They are units of meaning with either a positive, negative, or ambivalent value in the eyes of the individual. In a next step, subjects presented the woman in Koch's picture with their valuation and imagined her response. In many cases, the subjects altered their original view after having entered into imaginal dialogue with the depicted woman.

The two studies reflect the change in Hermans' oeuvre from narrative to dialogue. Whereas Goya's picture series was used as a representation of a narrative, Koch's portrait was treated as a dialogical agent. In both studies, however, pictorial material is used as a *stimulus for generating valuations*, albeit the first example aims at a quasi-nomothetic foundation of feeling patterns whereas the second example is purely idiographic. To our knowledge, pictorial material has never been used as material to be analyzed in its own right in DS literature.

Hermans and Kempen provide us with a possible explanation for this neglect. In their short treatise on differences between language, pictures, and movies, they conclude that "pictures have no tenses and, therefore give the impression of continuous presentness, although they are less suited than the novel to the exploration and projection of inner states of consciousness" (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p. 53).

In contesting this argument, we attempt to demonstrate, that pictures or *images* [Note 1] do offer a *particular* path into states of consciousness and that time and space may be interrelated in an image. We suggest that images may provide a methodical tool for capturing the spatial organization of a dialogical self, i.e., the relations of different I-positions, at a particular moment in time. To develop our argument, we first introduce theoretical assertions pertaining to differences between language, writing, and images as well as to the particular pictorial logic of images. In a next step, we develop a key element of pictorial logic, i.e., the capacity of the image to transcend opposites, along a classical example. Building on these theoretical reflections, we present a method of image analysis. By this method, we finally arrive at an interpretation of a self-portrait of the Mexican paintress Frida Kahlo by virtue of which we hope to substantiate our proposals for DS theory.

Images in Image Science and Semiotics

The following arguments are embedded in a contemporary, interdisciplinary movement referred to as *image science* (see, for example, the journal *Image: Journal of Interdisciplinary Image Science*). In particular, we here draw on semiotics (Kress, 2001) and art history (Böhm, 2004, Imdahl, 1988). In contrast to art history as a discipline, however, image science does not exclusively deal with pictures in art, but more generally asks for the essence of images and the particularity of pictorial meaning (compare Note 1).

Image science is spawned by the ever broader prominence of images in everyday life, and also within science – in the form of diagrams, modes of visualization etc. Kress (2001) refers to this development – in a vein similar to McLuhan's (1962) announcement of the 'end of book-culture' – as a cultural shift in the dominant media and modes of representation/communication: the former constellation of *medium of book* and *mode of writing* is giving way to the new constellation of *medium of screen* and *mode of image*. Scholars interested in image science have reacted to this shift by ever more urgently posing the question what images exactly are (e.g. Mitchell, 1987, Böhm, 1994). For Böhm (2004), a general theoretical approach to images needs to take its starting point in a critique of language. In more conciliatory terms, image scientific efforts need to consider the differences between language and images in order to unveil the specific representational functions and affordances of images in contrast to those of language.

Differences between speech, (alphabetic) writing, and images

Speech and writing – in particular of an alphabetic kind – are similar in their logic of representation in that they are governed by the logic of *sequences of elements in time*. Both modes orient thought toward specific before-after relationships (Kress, 2001). In contrast to speech, writing fosters activity of the eye rather than the ear. Ong, therefore, calls the vocalic alphabet, in particular, a "ruthlessly efficient reducer of sound to space" (Ong, 1982, p.99). The spatiality of the vocalic alphabet, however, still carries with it the temporal organization of language. Reading depends on the decoding of sequentially arranged elements – one after another. The meaning of a text derives from the arrangements of the syntax, i.e., from the position of elements within a temporal sequence. The *particular* spatiality of the vocalic alphabet is, thus, sequential and linear.

The developments in modern literature refered to by Hermans and Kempen (1993) present a deconstruction of the logic inherent in alphabetic writing, and it is not by coincidence that this deconstruction occured at a moment in history when the media landscape was profoundly reconfigured by the invention of television and film. The differences between language, writing, and images, as elaborated by Kress (2001), reflect *tendencies* of the various modes of communications. Kress, in obvious reference to Gibson's (1979) ecological approach to visual perception, calls them *affordances*. I.e., modes of communication offer specific possibilities of how to act with them, without however fully determining actions or perceptions. Modes and media of communication, thus, do not represent closed systems: they interact with each other and with human agents.

The affordance offered by the spatiality of the image differs from the one of the vocalic alphabet. The meaning of an image derives from the spatial relations and organizations of the depicted elements, i.e., from the way they refer to each other in

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their simultaneous presence. The organization of the image is "governed by the logic of space and by the logic of simultaneity of its visual/depicted elements in spatially organised arrangements" (Kress, 2001, p.2). Even a slight change in the spatial organization of an image may thus produce profound changes in the perceived relations of elements, and in the meaning assigned to these relations. In order to substantiate this assertion, we will revive a visual experiment by the art historian Imdahl (1988) in some detail.

A Concrete illustration of pictorial logic

The object of the experiment is a miniature from the late tenth century. This miniature is part of the *Codex Egberti*, one of the most renowned evangeliaries from the Ottonian period. Evangeliaries are lectionaries containing the Gospel readings for the liturgical year. The written text is supplemented by illustrations. In the Ottonian period, some artists were particular fond of representing scenes from the life of Jesus, as in this depiction of the encounter between Jesus and the captain of Capernaum (Figure 2), which draws on an episode narrated in Matthew, Chapter 8 (Note 2).

Figure 2. The Captain of Capernaum (detail), ca. 980 A.C., Codex Egberti, Stadtbibliothek Trier.

There are two main figures in the miniature: Jesus and the captain (or centurion), each with their following. They appear as main figures, because they are slightly moved away from their following; and because the followings are dressed in the same manner as their leading figures, respectively. Nonetheless, the two main figures differ from each

other in their importance within the organization of the picture, for Jesus is taller than the captain. His tallness is further extended through the halo around his head. The figure of Jesus appears also more dynamic than the other figures. The captain turns to Jesus with a request, marked by the posture of his right hand. Jesus, however, is oriented *both* towards his own following *and* towards the captain. He points at the captain with his left hand in order to guide his disciples' attention to him. At the same time, his head turns to the disciples. Thereby, the posture of his head parallels that of the captain and of his following.

By this dynamic activity, Jesus is related to both groups: to his own following and to the captain with his respective following. In order to further clarify the pictorial logic influencing our perception of the interpersonal relations between the figures of the miniature, Imdahl (1988) experiments with the arrangement of the figure of Jesus. In Figure 3, Jesus has been moved further to the left, resulting in a pictorial order that is dominated by a bipartite structure. Jesus now clearly belongs to the group of his disciples. The image is split into halves that are, on the level of pictorial organization, much less related to each other.

Figure 3. Montage of the image: Jesus has been moved further to the left (Imdahl, 1988, p.303).

This organization again changes dramatically, when Jesus is moved further to the right.

Figure 4. Montage of the image: Jesus moved further into the middle. (Imdahl, 1988, p. 304)

In Figure 4, a tripartite structure is created, with Jesus standing apart from both groups. He appears somewhat isolated. The two groups are flanking Jesus rather than being dialogically related to him. Against the background of these variations, the particular spatial structure of the original miniature (Figure 2) becomes evident. In the original, both a bipartite and a tripartite structure are present at the same time. The two structures are, in fact, *interfused* by the figure of Jesus. Jesus is associated with both groups, not isolated from any of them. Relative to the other figures, Jesus seems to be drawn out of the picture and towards the observer. He thus also appears to stand out of the two groups. Likewise, he is a part of the scenery while transcending it at the same time. Hence, Jesus' position unites two opposites which are of crucial importance for (medieval) Christian ontology: association with a group versus standing apart from it; involvement in a scenery versus transcending it.

Imdahl (1988) calls such paradox an *Übergegensätzlichkeit*, a German term denoting the particular capacity of the image to simultaneously sustain *and* transcend opposites. He concludes that language is not able to capture such an ambiguity, for it has to present opposites one after another. A possible transcendence of the opposites has to be presented at yet another moment in time. This is the way the architectonic novel works. Different perspectives on one and the same subject are presented after another. The *simultaneity* of juxtaposing these perspectives is activated only in the imagination

of the reader. An image, by contrast, may itself depict the simultaneity of opposites *and* their transcendence at the same time. Imdahl notes that it is because of the coincidence of different levels of seeing in the contemplation of an image that we are able to perceive such *Übergegensätzlichkeit*. We return to this question in the methodological section of our paper in some more detail.

In a similar vein, for Böhm (2004) the notion of *iconic difference* is key to understanding the logic of images. Iconic difference means that thematic foci, by virtue of their tension with the background, direct our attention to a field that is non-thematic at first glance. Thus, we only perceive the relation between Jesus and the other figures as different, once their pictorial organization is changed, because the relation between *figure* and *ground* is changed as well. We usually do not focus on the ground, but we need and presuppose the ground in order to perceive objects in the field as what they are. Likewise, the ground allows us to perceive *relations* between objects as what they are: as proximity or as distance, for example. In figure 3, we perceive the relation between Jesus and the disciples as a proximity-relation and the relation between Jesus and the centurion as a distance-relation. In figure 4, Jesus is distanced from both groups. In the original miniature, however, the relation between Jesus and the disciples is perceived as *both* a distance- *and* a proximity-relation.

The method of image interpretation

Steps of analysis: pre-iconographic, iconographic, iconologic, and iconic levels of interpretation

The following interpretation is guided by a method adopted from art history and adapted to the social sciences by the German sociologist Bohnsack (2001). The method combines principles formulated by the art historians Panofsky (1955) and Imdahl (1980, 1988). Panofsky (1955) divides the process of interpretation into three different steps: At the *pre-iconographic* level, we are occupied with lines and colors as such in order to identify figures or entities in the picture. The *iconographic* level assigns socially constituted meaning to these things and figures. Bohnsack (2001) also calls this iconographic understanding the level of *common sense typologies*. In this step, the elements of the image are classified into types of actors or types of actions, thereby depending on the prevailing generalizations – and more broadly speaking: on the knowledge base – of a certain community. The previous example of the Ottonian miniature, for example, requires knowledge of the evangeliaries in order to subsume the scene under the narrative 'encounter between Jesus and the captain of Capernaum'. In the light of this narrative, then, all the actors of the scene can be typified: as Jesus, his disciples, the captain of Capernaum, and his following. Both pre-iconographic and iconographic analysis do not move beyond the *content* of an interpreted image.

The *iconological* analysis, however, seeks to transcend the content in order to grasp the particular mentality – the "basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion" (Panofsky, 1955, p. 55) – as it expresses or documents itself in a particular image. According to Panofsky, this mentality would not only manifest itself in images of a certain period or culture, but in all its material and symbolic artifacts and efforts, e.g. in architecture, philosophy, literature, religion, etc. In this view, images do not offer any insights that could not be deduced from other resources as well.

In contrast to Panofsky, Imdahl (1988) insists on a specific logic of images: on its iconic meaning. He retains Panofsky's three-step analysis but extends the iconological level by taking into account the specific logic of images, too: its planimetric order (the formal composition of the image), perspective, and scenic choreography. These genuinely pictorial dimensions together constitute the *iconic* level of interpretation.

Iconic interpretation: planimetric composition, scenic choreography, and perspective

We here by and large neglect the analysis of *perspective*, because it plays only a minor role in our interpretation. In general, the reconstruction of an image's perspective amounts to the reconstruction of the point of view suggested by an image. The most prominent example, central perspective, allows for one point of view alone. The most important form of central perspective is characterized by a single vanishing point, which can be easily reconstructed via three dimensional figures within the image. For example, the extensions of parallel angles of, a depicted table coincide in a single point that may lie inside or outside the image (for a detailed treatise of perspective see Panofsky 1924/25).

When discussing the miniature *Captain of Capernaum*, we introduced the concept of *Übergegensätzlichkeit* and made a short reference to Imdahl's mention of different levels of seeing. It is now time to explain these in some detail. The formal composition of the miniature, which was modified by displacing the figure of Jesus, allows us to perceive Jesus as standing apart from both groups. Yet, we also perceive Jesus' connection with both groups, which is conveyed to us mostly by his body language: his hand pointing to the group on the right, and his eyes directed at his own disciples to the left. In Imdahl's terms, to elaborate on the first aspect is a matter of understanding the *planimetric composition* of the miniature, whereas the relation between the figures that is, among others, constituted by their body language, belongs to the analysis of the *scenic choreography* of the miniature. Analyzing the scenic choreography of an image means to reconstruct the scenic constellation of the depicted figures, which act and relate to another in a specific manner. Note that scenic choreography and formal composition are intertwined, however! Were Jesus to stand in

a different place, his body language would not be able to establish the strong connection with both groups of people.

Imdahl speaks of two different levels of seeing that make for the complexity of perceiving an image. The scenic choreography amounts to a 'recognizing seeing' [*wiedererkennendes Sehen*], whereas the planimetric organization requires a 'seeing seeing' [*sehendes Sehen*]. 'Recognizing seeing' is preoccupied with the content of an image. It tries to recognize *what* is depicted. 'Seeing seeing', by contrast, tries to understand the structures governing the depiction. It thus wants to understand *how* something is made to appear to us as what it does. In order to understand the planimetric composition of an image (seeing seeing) it is not sufficient to recognize what is depicted; we must understand the abstract principles governing the formal composition of the image.

In principle, the first steps of interpreting the *planimetric composition* amount to a reduction: i.e., we try to bracket the experience we usually make on the pre-iconographic level of understanding where we recognize lines and colors as figures and things. Imdahl speaks of a *planimetric reduction* [planimetrische Reduktion] (Imdahl, 1980, p.66). In order to trace the planimetric composition of an image, we have to direct our attention to the structures and dynamics constituted by lines and colors which we would otherwise straight away recognize as figures or things. Imdahl notes that the planimetric organization of an image is constituted by what he calls, in reference to a notion adopted from field theory, *lines of forces*:

> The abstractions of the transscenic system of lines of forces are, however, those lines and values of direction that are contained within the total shapes of the depicted figures and things and that constitute and articulate both their actional and local, i.e., both their scenic and spatial, context. The abstract lines and values of direction underlie the very concrete scenic depiction and its complexion of meaning as realized in an image. (Imdahl, 1980, p. 45; translation by N. Ruck)

He then goes on to assert that

> [i]ts forces are – partly as real contours, partly as ideal lines indicative of directions – grounded within the very concreteness of the images. To make them visible means to extract the guidelines of visual perception: The system of lines of forces exposes the correlating forces the concrete elements of the image assign to each other… (Imdahl, 1980, p. 48; translation by N. Ruck)

Imdahl fails to reconstruct the system of lines of forces in the Captain of Capernaum. At this point it is helpful to turn to his reconstruction of lines of forces in another picture: the *Presentation of the Infant Christ into the Temple* (ca. 1320) by Giotto (see figure 5), which belongs to a cycle of frescos in the Arena chapel in Padua

(Figure 5). The fresco is based on an episode narrated in Luke 2 [Note 3]. Main figures in this fresco are Jesus, Maria (reaching out for Jesus), and Simeon (holding Jesus). The formal composition of the picture, according to Imdahl, sheds a specific light on the episode narrated in the New Testament (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Giotto, Presentation of the Infant Christ into the Temple, ca. 1320, fresco, Arena Chapel, Padua.

Figure 6. System of lines of forces in The Presentation of the Infant Christ into the Temple. (Imdahl, 1980, Figure 20)
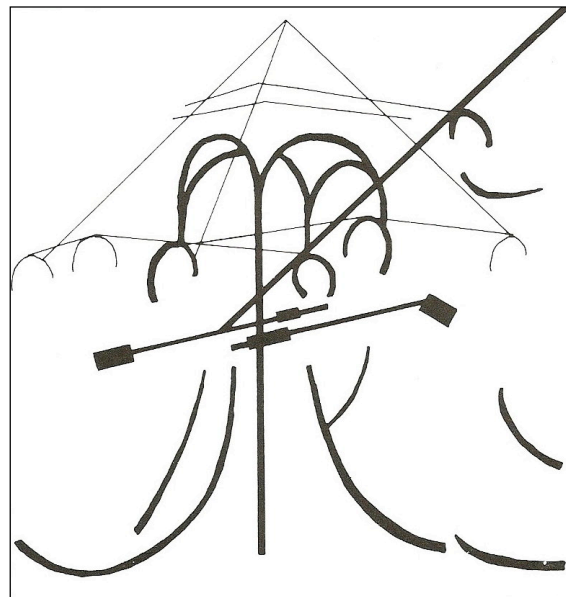
The ciborium of the altar obtains a prominent position in Imdahl's sketch, for it highlights the main figures: Maria, Jesus and Simeon. It furthermore structures their relation. The left front arch isolates Maria from the other two, whereas the right front arch connects Jesus and Simeon. The heads of Jesus and Simeon are, furthermore, connected by the right back arch. The left back arch, however, connects the heads of Maria and Jesus. Again, we find an instance of *Übergegensätzlichkeit*. Jesus' and Maria's separation contains in itself their connectedness as well; Jesus' and Simeon's connectedness, however, also contains in itself their separatedness.

We have concentrated on the role of the ciborium because an exhaustive analysis would be beyond the scope of this paper. The plausibility of Imdahl's full sketch should be contemplated visually by the reader. Note, in conclusion, that the inclusion of an iconic interpretation does not render the other levels of interpretation obsolete but, on the contrary, presupposes them! It is still necessary to collect context information about the circumstances of the image's production – be they social, cultural, historical, political, or biographical. Adding an iconic interpretation may, however, provide us with a surplus of information that we may not be able to deduct from mere textual or narrative sources.

Interpretation of a portrait of a dialogical self

So was ähnliches wie: In the previous section, we took considerable effort to prepare the method(olog)ical ground for the analysis of a famous portrait, by virtue of which we finally want to return to the theoretical issues from which we have departed.

Frida Kahlo's *Tree of Hope*

The Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) is well-known for her self-portraits. In some cases, she even depicted herself several times in the same portrait. In 1946, she painted a picture which may be considered a 'portrait of a dialogical self' (Figure 7). Both women in the picture represent Frida Kahlo – they may be considered as two of her I-positions. We will refer to the two positions as 'rear position' and the 'front position' with regard to the view of their body given to the observer, and try to reconstruct the possible relations between these I-positions. We will call these two I-positions and their relations a self-subsystem of Frida Kahlo's dialogical self. Thus, we single out two possible positions out of the entire range of her dialogical self.

Before starting off with the interpretation of the picture, some background information about the paintress, the picture, and its production is needed. Frida Kahlo was born in Mexico City in 1907 as the daughter of a Jewish German immigrant father and a devout catholic Mexican mother (Herrera, 1983). As a little child, she had an indigenous Mexican wet-nurse which she later often depicted as a symbol of mythological motherhood. The paintress was severely injured at the age of eighteen, when a two-car train ran into the bus on which she was riding. Her spinal column was

Figure 7. Frida Kahlo, Tree of Hope, 1946, Oil on canvas, © Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, México/VBK, Vienna, 2007.


then broken in three places, her collarbone was broken, as were her third and fourth ribs. She never really recovered from the consequences of the accident. In 1929, she married the Mexican painter and muralist Diego Rivera. They had an excessive relationship and separated several times only to reunite again, until, in 1939, they finally divorced. None of them could ever let go, though.

Although Frida had had a special affinity for her Mexican heritage already in her youth, it was her relationship with Diego which further stimulated her active participation in the Mexican revolution. Much of her work reflects her preoccupation with indigenous Mexican themes and with her own existence on the borderline between different cultures. In 1946, shortly before she painted *Tree of Hope*, she had to undergo a serious operation on her spine. After the operation she had to wear an orthopaedic corset for several months. The operation is said to have marked the beginning of the end (Herrera, 1983). Her condition got only worse afterwards, and she died in 1954, after a long trajectory of suffering.

Planimetry of the background

In its planimetric order, the picture is dominated by a change of color along a vertical line roughly in the middle which cuts the picture into halves (see Figure 8). The change of color is not accounted for by changes in the landscape, but by the lighting conditions caused by the sun and the moon. The planimetry is further marked by two almost horizontal lines along the horizon and along the brim of the edge in front of the women. They are thus situated within a square constituted by the brim of the edge, the horizon, and the sidelines of the picture. At the same time, however, the women stand out of this planimetry of the landscape for two reasons: the front position – the seated woman – transcends the horizon with the rose on her head; moreover, the two I-positions constitute their own planimetric order.

Figure 8. Planimetry of the background
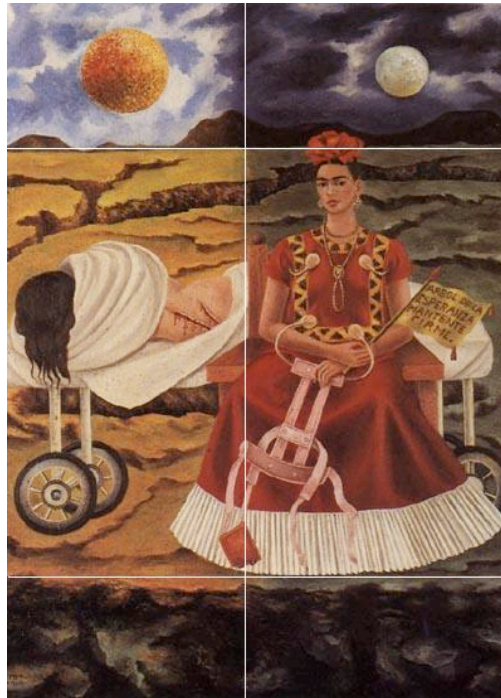
Planimetry of I-positions

The spatial order constituted by the two women is dominated by diagonal lines running along shapes of the figures or objects or along parts of objects. In this picture, there are at least 14 such lines
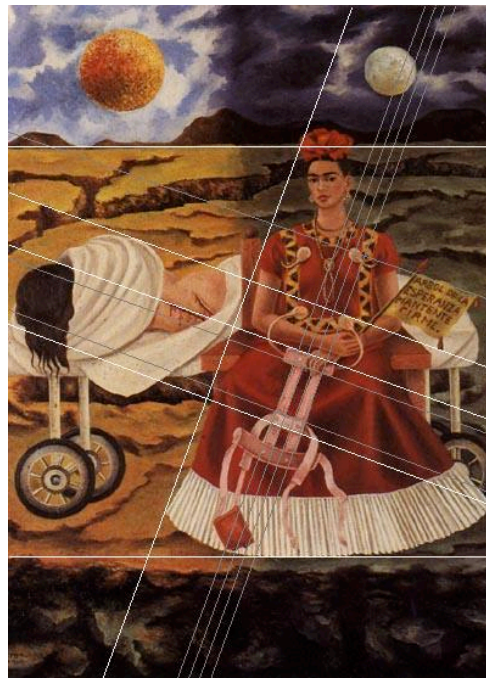
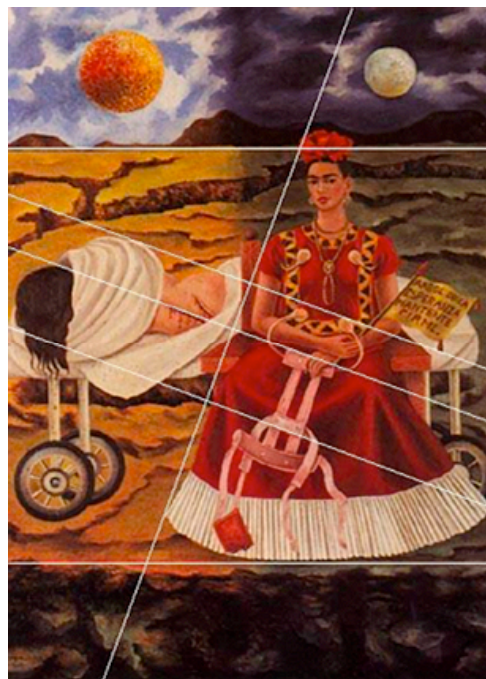Figure 9. Planimetry of I-positions

Figure 10. Dominant lines of the planimetry of I-positions.

Some of the lines appear more dominant than others – we have marked them white. Figure 10 shows the dominant lines alone. The outer diagonal lines falling from left to right enclose the exposed torso of the rear position. They establish a planimetric relation between the two women. The lines enclose only a part of the sitting woman, though: her hands and the orthopaedic corset she is holding. The inner line runs along the rear position's spine and scar. It constitutes a direct planimetric relation between the spine, the scar, and the corset.

The I-positions' imaginal landscape

The two women find themselves in a waste, desert-like tableland, covered with deep trenches and bare of vegetation. According to Frida's biographer Herrera (1983), the trenches symbolize Frida's scars – physical and psychological as they were. We may, however, also interpret the trenches as symbolizing a suffering social representation: as referring to the oppression and expropriation indigenous people in Mexico have experienced not only in the course of the Spanish Inquisition but also at the time when Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera fought for the re-appreciation of indigenous Mexican art and heritage in general. The division of the picture in two halves corresponds, furthermore, to dualities typical for indigenous Mexican mythology: between sun and moon, day and night, eagle and serpent etc. The whole scenery is, thus, culturally coloured – not in the colours of Frida's parental heritage (which is rather European and catholic), but in an indigenous Mexican manner. Whereas the scenery in toto symbolizes indigenous Mexican culture, the trenched ground also constitutes a 'field within the field', i.e., a personal history of scars and suffering.

The relation between the two I-positions

How can the relation between the two positions be interpreted? On the level of the picture's *scenic choreography*, the two positions are not involved in any direct dialogical interaction, neither on the level of verbal dialogue nor in gesture: The two Fridas are, by contrast, completely motionless and turn their backs on each other. Probably, the rear position has just been operated, given the circumstances of the picture's production, and given that the blood is still pouring out of the wounds. The static body posture of the front position suggests that she is waiting for the rear position to awake and to recover. More precisely, she is keeping watch at her bedside.

The front position is *supportive* to the rear position in a variety of ways: She is providing mental support by the inscription on the banner, saying "tree of hope, stay firm!" She is further holding the rear position's corset, thereby providing the physical support the rear position will need once recovered from the operation. To a large extent, these supportive media are key to the enveloping the rear position. The lines running along the stripes of the corset and along the banner determine the planimetric order. The planimetric connection between rear and front positions only captures a part of the

latter, though: the corset she is holding with her right hand and the hand holding the banner. The relation, hence, doesn't involve her as a whole person, but only in her supportive functions or capacities. Both picture content (banner and corset) and planimetry, thus, stress that the relation between the two positions is built upon the support provided by the front position.

On a content level, the two positions do not have much in common: one of them is naked, the other one is wearing a Mexican traditional costume; one of them is lying, the other one is sitting; one of them is shown in a rear view, the other one is shown in a front view. The only thing they do have in common is some injury on the back: the rear position has just been operated, and the front position is wearing an orthopaedic corset suggesting an injury on the back.

In sum, both the planimetric and the content level emphasize that a particular facet of *Frida's disability* is constitutive for the relation between the two I-positions. The content level does so in a double sense: It stresses the communal experience of the injury by depicting it as the only common feature of the two women, and it shows the front position as a supportive one who is not only keeping watch at the rear position's bedside but providing mental and physical support as well. The planimetric order also helps to identify the relation between the two women as one between a supportive (lower) part and a supported (upper) one. Both positions are thus injured – one of them is stronger and more supportive, though. A detail deserving further attention is the clothing of the supportive position: a traditional Mexican costume. The supportive position is, thus, intrinsically related to indigenous Mexican culture.

The separation of the I-positions

Apart from their relatedness, the two positions are also planimetrically separated and, thus, appear to exist in different worlds. They are separated because not only by the horizontal difference in brightness but also by the line running along the silhouette - from upper right lo lower left. Furthermore, the front position is at the same time involved in the relation and standing out of it, for the bigger part of her body is outside the planimetry connecting them.

The planimetry both unites and separates the I-positions. Finally, the positions exist in different worlds, as both of them provide their own vanishing point (Figure 11). Whereas the figure of the rear position leads the eye of the observer to some point outside the picture, the figure of the front position directs the attention to her heart region.

Figure 11. Perspective on two worlds of I-positions

The dominance and non-dominance of the front position.

The color difference of the landscape highlights the rear position in the light (left) part of the picture. She may be Frida's 'here-and-now'. Although the rear position is probably more present in the here-and-now, she is *absent* in a variety of ways: most of her body is hidden, either by the blanket or by the front position; she is turned away from the observer; she is very likely to be asleep or otherwise absent; and her vanishing point lies outside of the picture - she, thus, seems to be striving – or dissociating – to some place outside the depicted world.

In part, the front position may illustrate some future that is yet to come. In the picture, however, her presence is striking. She is the *dominant position of the interpersonal sphere* for several reasons: Firstly, she is in front of the rear position, hiding the lower part of the rear position's body. Secondly, she is spatially extended by her dress, the rose on her head, and the banner. She thus appears bigger than the rear position and even transcends both the horizon and the brim of the edge before her. Finally, she is the centre of planimetric activity, for she includes yet another branch of parallel diagonal lines. The rear position, by contrast, only takes part in the planimetry she shares with the front position. The front position also appears more present than the rear position because she is shown from a front view and literally confronts the observer. Her entire posture is directed at the observer, as is the banner. She is, thus,

communicating the message on the banner to the observer: 'Tree of hope stay firm!'. Finally, her presence is stressed by her vanishing point, which is situated at her heart region.

Short summary of the interpretation

Although the rear position, the one that is so obviously wounded and retreated from the world, is – by virtue of lighting conditions – likely to be most present in there here-and-now, Frida's self-subsystem constituted by the two positions is not dominated by this position. On the contrary, while she is retreated from the world, she is at the same time keeping watch for herself and supporting herself, probably from an anticipated future or collective position. The two positions are both related and divorced from each other. Moreover, the front position is both involved in the relationship and transcending it. The same goes for the positions' relation to the background: they are involved in the whole scenery, but at the same time they stand apart from it. As could be witnessed in the *Captain of Capernaum*, it is the simultaneous existence of opposite relations *at the same time* that may better, or even only, be conveyed pictorially than verbally. It is this simultaneousness which gives rise to that particular *Übergegensätzlichkeit* and non-exclusiveness of opposites which is foreign to the sequential mode of representation in language.

Temporality in the analysed portrait

Our analysis unveils a specific kind of pictorial simultaneity, though. *Tree of hope* provides a complex pictorial organization of the *temporal* dimension of the self, too. It depicts a self extended both into the past and into the future: The scars on the body point to the operation but also to a personal history of suffering in the past, to which both the corset and the symbolic scars of the background relate as well. We consider the front position, on the other hand, an *agent of the future* within the timeline of the picture, (1) because she already wears the corset Frida will have to wear after the operation, and (2) because the message on the banner – "tree of hope *maintain* strong" – refers to the future.

In her here-and-now, Frida seems to be frozen – the captive of a motionlessness that wouldn't allow her to engage in a dialogue. In a way, she seems much too exhausted to speak out and tell her story. That she is voiceless doesn't mean that she is not engaged in any interpersonal relations, though. In order to understand the relations involved, it is indispensable to interpret the spatial relations of the two figures in the context of their pictorial *(back)ground*. This ground is constituted by a (typically Mexican) landscape full of trenches. This landscape bears a temporal component as well, as it may be related to a Mexican history of oppression. On a more personal level, the landscape signifies Frida's scars, resulting from an almost life-long history of physical pain and suffering. It is the history of pain and therefore the past that the I-

positions share and that allows their relations to emerge as what it is: a relation between a supportive position and another one in need of support.

The role of culture in the analysed portrait

The pictorial environment of the positions, however, also exemplifies the role of culture in a dialogical self. The front position is associated with Mexican culture – among other features, for this very position can also be associated with the future. Culture, here, becomes a part of the signification complex of an I-position. It is, so to say, Frida's alliance with indigenous Mexican culture that helps her remain strong.

Even more importantly, though, the whole self-subsystem is culturally coloured. The scenery takes place in a traditional Mexican landscape coloured by Mexican mythological dualisms. As Frida Kahlo has experienced many cultural subsystems (the catholic devotion of her mother, the European descent of her father), we might expect that other self-subsystems be coloured differently – the relation between the two I-positions depicted in *tree of hope*, however, is profoundly coloured by indigenous Mexican culture. We may conclude that Mexican culture, along with the shared experience of pain, provides the *conjunctive space* (a term we will return to in the conclusion) for the two positions to meet and relate.

Potential challenges to the DS theory

Our analysis points to three related challenges. The first one concerns the potential of image interpretation for the dialogical self. This potential is not limited to case studies, but is also of theoretical relevance: it may help to explain the role of culture in the dialogical self as well as the ways in which temporality and spatiality interconnect. The second challenge addresses possible empirical applications. The third challenge pertains to visualizations of dialogical self theory.

Theoretical insights

Culture as field: Bridges to the sociology of knowledge. As a first theoretical challenge, our analysis calls for heightened attention to the *field* in which I-positions emerge as I-positions. In the analyzed portrait, it is the semiotic field of Mexican culture and history, together with the semiotic field of a personal history of suffering, that lets the two I-positions as well as their relation emerge as what they are. Hence, culture cannot be equated with particular I-positions, as suggested by Hermans (2001a). In our analysis, culture emerges both as part of the signification system of one I-position and as part of the field. The first instance may be an illustration of how culture 'speaks through' an I-position. The second instance, however, may illustrate how culture works more indirectly in a dialogical self: by providing a common space in which dialogical relations may take place.

This conception of culture is resonant with Karl Mannheim's (1922-1924) notion of *conjunctive experiential spaces*. This theoretical position is in fact similar to DS theory in that the individual is regarded as a layering of different socialization histories that vary for example according to categories like gender, milieu, generation, etc. As Bohnsack and his colleagues put it in regard to gender,

> [i]n the perspective of the sociology of knowledge gender relations are always the product of the participant's socialization history, which is a history of (sedimented) situated practices. Through struggles with gender relations, gender-specific experiential spaces are established among those who are habitually characterized through these relations in a homologous manner. (Bohnsack, Loos, & Przyborski, 2001, p. 179)

It is assumed that members of certain groups sharing certain experiences dispose of a kind of experiential knowledge called *conjunctive* knowledge by Mannheim. This kind of knowledge is hardly ever explicitly expressed among members of a community because it is too obvious to be mentioned. It is of an incorporated kind and manifests itself in each 'objectivation' of a person or community: be it cultural objectivations like science, literature, images or expressions like life-stories or even body language.

The crucial difference between the sociology of knowledge and DS theory is that the sociology of knowledge focuses on *common structures* characterizing various *conjunctive experiential spaces* between various social agents. It thus focuses on the common structures bringing about relations between social agents as what they are, and underlying meaning as expressed by these agents. Note that the conception of experiential spaces bears strong resemblances to the early conception of culture promoted by Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon (1992) and discussed at the beginning of this article.

Interrelation of time and space: Bridges to Valsiner's notion of promoter sign. Our case-study contests Hermans and Kempen's (1993) claim that images have no tenses. It rather demonstrates how the temporal and spatial dimensions are interwoven in the pictorial representation of a dialogical self.

The front position, i.e., the one we have associated with the *future*, may be considered in the light of what Valsiner (2004) has called a *promoter sign*. Promoter signs owe their existence to the fact that human beings are extended beyond the present and can *imagine* their future. This imagination, however, is tied to signs or semiotic mediators. These signs do not promote specific future meanings but the *ranges* of possible future meaning. Specific meanings are, then, included in the scope afforded by promoter signs. The range of meaning promoted by the front position in the analyzed portrait is related to the strength provided by her: she bespeaks the rear position to remain strong and she is herself already stronger than her. She thus offers support to the

rear position from the position of an imagined future in which she will already be stronger.

The front position extends the self across the here-and-now to some anticipated – i.e., *imagined* – future. Note that she also transcends the scarred field symbolizing the personal history of suffering, thus exhibiting an imagined possibility of overcoming suffering in the future. The extension into the future takes place in a manner typical for the logic of images: The image freezes the temporal extension and development of the self into a simultaneity of past, present, and future, thus allowing for an analysis of the spatial relations between different moments in time.

Possible empirical applications of image interpretation

Cross-cultural analyses of cultural fields. Culture influences the relations between fields and objects/ figure and ground. Cross-cultural psychological research, for example, shows that the Asian pictorial tradition directs attention to the field: in Asian art works, the average size of human figures is smaller and the average horizon is higher (Nisbett & Masuda, 2003). As a result, more room is given for the background of the human figure. The European tradition, by contrast, has developed iconographic tools for emphasizing the distinctness of objects and human figures: central perspective and portrait, among others.

The genre of portraiture has only developed in Western culture. It has its predecessors in Christian icons that have become more and more individualized over the course of time (Belting, 1994). The Italian Renaissance, then, developed pictorial means to foreground the individual and its psychological character (Böhm, 1985). This genre of *autonomous portraiture* is intrinsically related to the development of the modern individualized subject. It is not only embedded in this historic move, however, but has itself helped to shape our perception of individuals as possessing psychological traits and as being isolated from their context. It certainly belongs to a cultural tradition that highlights figures and objects at the expense of their dialogical relations and the field in general.

Intercultural image science is still in its infancy (Mersmann, 2004), and cross-cultural psychology has not moved beyond comparing averaged measures of artworks (e.g., Nisbett & Masuda, 2003). Scholars with a strong background in dialogical science may contribute to the understanding of the embedding of external dialogical relations in an overall cultural matrix and clarify the role of culture in DS theory via image interpretation, analysis of art works or of other visual material from popular culture.

Dealing with silent positions. Image interpretation, furthermore, may allow for a reconstruction of relations between positions that are – as it is the case with the two Fridas in our example (apart from the message conveyed by the banner of the front position) – relatively silent. In such periods of relative silence between two positions, a

narrative-dialogical method like the self-confrontation method (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995) or the Personal Position Repertoire (Hermans, 2001b) may not be able to capture the manifold relations present between the positions. Image interpretation of e.g. client's illustrations of relations between different I-positions, thus, may instead help to unfold relations between such I-positions that are not or cannot be involved in verbal dialogue. Another possibility would be the interpretation of family- or other photographs in order to reconstruct the relations between internal and external I-positions.

Visualization within dialogical self theory

In times, in which visualizations of psychological models and theories proliferate, another challenge pertains to scientific images used to illustrate the dialogical self. Unfortunately many of these visualizations do not reach up in sophistication to the theories they want to illustrate. On a theoretical level, psychology has evolved ways of scientific self-reflection. It has also developed ways of detecting ethnocentrisms lingering in the subtexts of scientific treatises. Roland (2001), for example, pointed to the individualistic bias pertaining to the very notion of *I*-position. Scientific knowledge, however, is carried forward not only by theoretical efforts but also by diagrams. Till now, there aren't any means of scientific self-reflection in psychology on the level of diagrams, though. We endorse the view that we need such means. Parallel to meta-theoretical reflections, psychology may profit from developing meta-pictorial reflections as well.

The popular diagram by Hermans (2001a; see figure 9), for example, carries a cultural bias regarding the relation between objects and their field insofar as it displays a strong tendency to reify the objects depicted: it shows the I-positions as dots in two concentric circles (the first including internal positions, the second external position; the third area concerning the realm outside the self). This version neglects the ground of the figures altogether and expresses the relations between the positions as mere relations between objects – largely without stipulating the question where these relations emerge from. Such diagrams entirely miss the possibility that the relation between I-positions and culture may be more about figure-ground relations than about figure-figure relations. Valsiner (e.g. 2002, 2004) pays more attention to the field in his diagrams of the dialogical self. Like his theoretical claims, his graphics bespeak an attempt to overcome scientific preoccupations with mere objects. Yet, his diagrams still do not exploit the full potential of pictorial logic. We, thus, suggest a different approach to scientific diagrams, i.e., a bottom-up approach supplementing top-down approaches. The analyzed picture, *tree of hope,* does help to generate, bottom-up, a more abstract diagram of a particular self-subsystem, with two I-positions, a field (more accurately, two fields), and several relations involved (Figure 12). As it is abstracted from the portrait, the verticality in Figure 12 does not indicate a hierarchy of fields or positions.

Figure 12 makes use of the pictorial logic inherent in the analyzed portrait, but it does so in a more abstract and generalizable manner. Such diagrams make it possible to locate the I-positions in a field – here two fields – and to visualize their relations. The relation is clearly a proximity relation, but also one entailing distance between the figures. It also becomes cogent that the relation between the two positions takes place in both a field of culture and of a personal history. Nevertheless, one of the positions (the promoter position) transcends the field of personal history, i.e., the history of suffering. This position also transcends the relational field spanned between the relational lines.

Figure 12. Bottom-up generated diagram of a dialogical self-subsystem (Abstraction from the analyzed portrait).
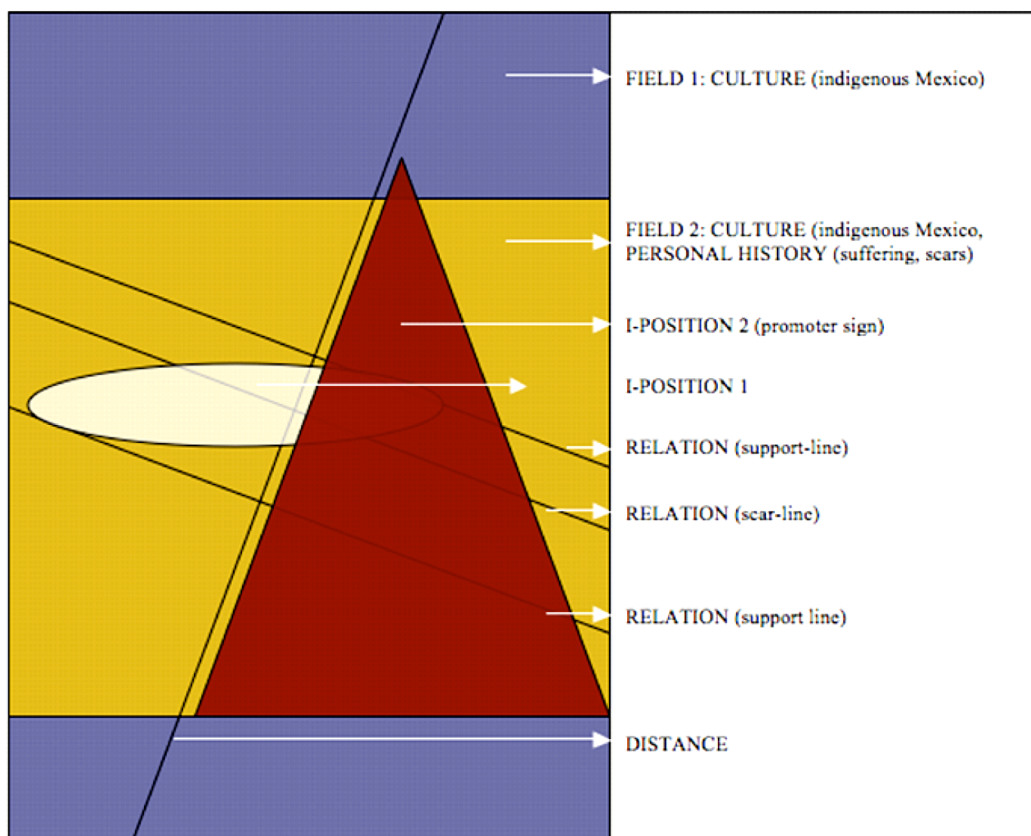
In a more methodological vein, creating diagrams circulating between buttom-up and top-down processes, by abstracting from pictorial material and generalizing over several cases, would allow for diagrams grounded in the particularity of pictorial logic and, thus, would lead us towards a *pictorially grounded theory*.

Endnotes

[Note 1] We use the term *image* when referring to the pictorial as a specific mode of representation. The notion of image goes beyond the concreteness of the term picture, which is mostly reserved for artworks. This is also why the interdisciplinary project of image science, which deals with images of various kinds, is not called picture science. However, when dealing with concrete pictorial material, e.g. our own interpretation of a concrete art work, we use the term *picture*.

[Note 2] When he came into Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking him, and saying, "Lord, my servant lies in the house paralyzed, grievously tormented." Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." The centurion answered, "Lord, I'm not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am also a man under authority, having under myself soldiers. I tell this one 'Go,' and he goes; …" When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to those who followed, "Most certainly I tell you, I haven't found so great a faith, not even in Israel. …." Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way. Let it be done for you as you have believed." (Matthew 8: 5-13)

[Note 3] Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord`s Christ. He came in the Spirit into the temple. When the parents brought in the child, Jesus, that they might do concerning him according to the custom of the law, then he received him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Now let you your servant depart, Lord, According to your word, in peace; For my eyes have seen your salvation, Which you have prepared before the face of all peoples; A light for revelation to the Gentiles, The glory of your people Israel." (Luke 2: 25-32).

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