

INNOVATIONS IN
TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS:
THEORY AND PRACTICE

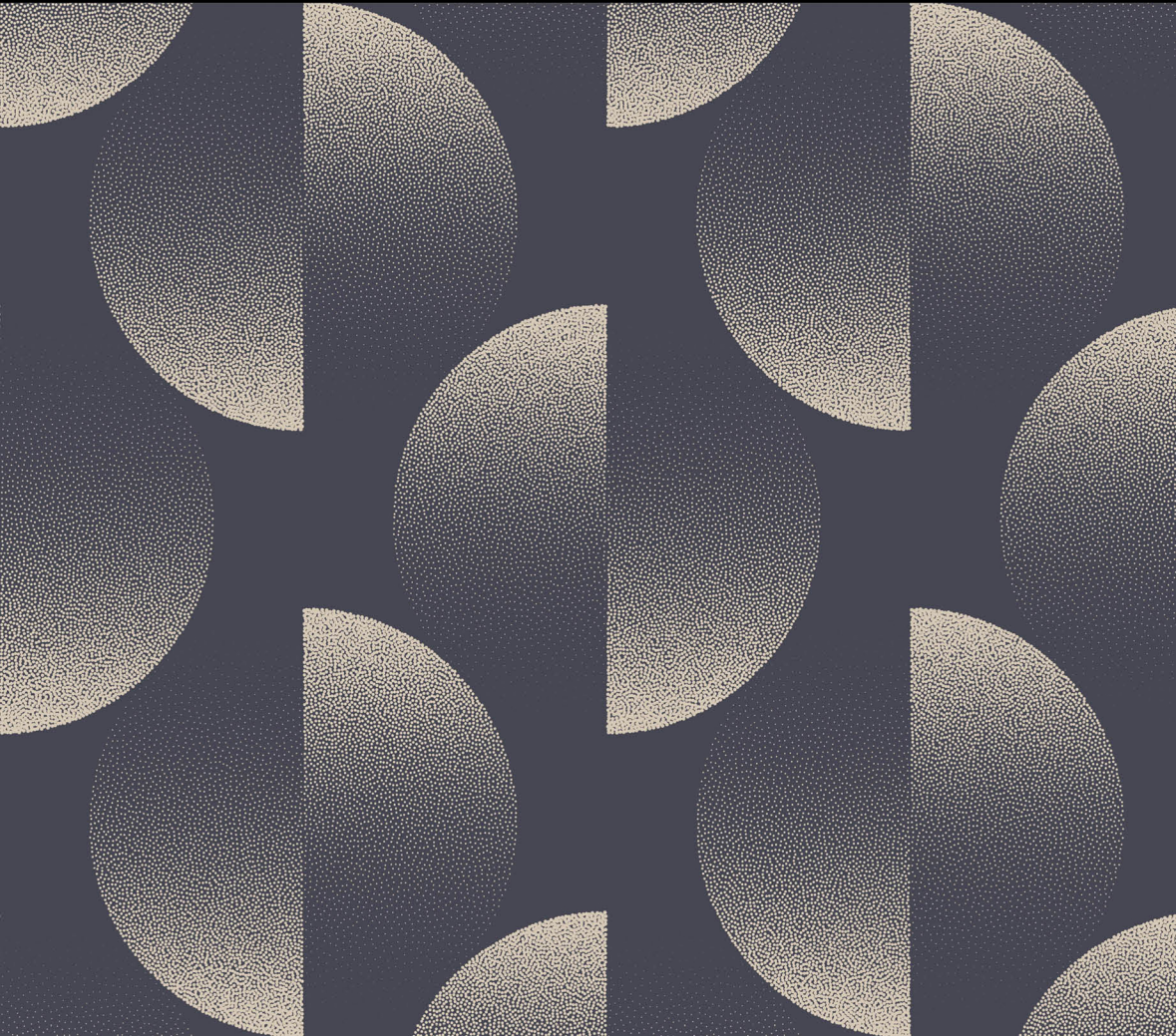
ROUTLEDGE



Conceptualizing Ego States in Transactional Analysis

Three Systems in Interaction

José Grégoire



CONCEPTUALIZING EGO STATES IN TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Within this book, Grégoire reviews and extends the founding concepts of ego states in Transactional Analysis, starting with Eric Berne's foundational thinking about ego states and then examining and integrating the evolution of subsequent models and thinking.

The ego state theory describes extensive aspects of human existence, exploring phenomena belonging to very diverse dimensions, for example, the person, their inner being, their relationships, their past and present, amongst many others. A conceptualization of the three ego states is newly presented within this book as systems which are constantly in mutual interaction, each with its specific psychological functions: the Child experiences subjectively, the Parent internalizes aspects of the external family and social worlds, and the Adult allows contact with reality. This complex but necessary process is always in evolution and lasts throughout the phases of growth, permeating every aspect of the internal, external and relational life of the person. The book also further explores emotions, grief, groups, relationships and empathy through the lens of ego state theory.

Providing a greater comprehension of Berne's texts and the multilevel concept of ego states, this book will be a valuable resource for transactional analysts, both in practice and in training.

José Grégoire is a psychotherapist, an EATA Certified Clinical Transactional Analyst and a Teaching and Supervising Transactional Analyst. Besides his work as a therapist, teacher, supervisor in TA and translator of the French TA review *Actualités en Analyse Transactionnelle*, he has worked in an interdisciplinary therapeutic team for the therapy of persons wanting to cure addictions.

INNOVATIONS IN TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Series Editor: William F. Cornell

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José Grégoire

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Three Systems in Interaction

José Grégoire

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

José Grégoire's *Conceptualizing Ego States in Transactional Analysis: Three Systems in Interaction* was first published in French as *Les états du moi: Trois systèmes interactifs* in 2007 (Editions d'Analyse Transactionnelle) and republished in 2019 (NORPPA). This book has long had an important influence within the French-speaking TA communities, recognized there for its important contributions to TA theory. Sadly, it has taken more than a couple of decades for it to find its way to English publication. One might ask why we are publishing a book nearly 25 years old within the series "Innovations in Transactional Analysis". Finally having arrived in this wonderful English translation, I have no doubt as to the innovations it brings to transactional analysis and, hence, to this series. As editor of this series, I have become aware of numerous innovative texts that await translation into English. It is with pride and pleasure that I welcome *Ego States in Interaction* to the Routledge "Innovations" list.

Now retired, Grégoire practiced as a transactional analytic psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer for nearly 40 years. Before his involvement in transactional analysis, Grégoire earned degrees in mathematical sciences, philosophy and the history of religious theory. The depth of his scholarship is richly apparent here, as he delves deeply into Eric Berne's foundational theory of ego states, laying the ground for a radical extension and revision of Berne's original work. Berne's own thinking about ego states was in many ways a work in progress, often containing apparent contradictions as his thinking evolved over the course of a decade, so typical of a creative thinker. Tragically, his writing and teaching came abruptly to a halt by his untimely death at age 60 in 1970. His final two books, *Sex in Human Loving* (1970) and *What Do You Say Hello?* (1972) – a compilation of manuscripts he was working on at the time of his death – were published posthumously. The three "schools" of TA (Barnes) emergent at the time of Berne's death shared an emphasis on the structural and historical/repetitive nature of ego states, while proposing radically different styles of therapeutic intervention. Those closely associated with Berne at the time of his death became advocates for "classical" TA, which sadly concretized many of his ideas. In the half century since Berne's death, second- and third-generation transactional analysts have proposed various (and often competitive) models of ego states in nature and function.

Grégoire returns to Berne's writings about ego states with eyes both respectful and critical. He takes up the subsequent models of ego state theory in a manner equally thoughtful and critical, as he seeks to integrate these various theoretical and clinical models into a comprehensive theory, written in such a way that readers are invited to explore their own thinking and practice. Grégoire rightly criticizes Berne for his preoccupation with distinguishing transactional analysis from psychoanalysis, which had the inadvertent and unfortunate consequence of concretizing what was, in fact, a rather complex investigation of the nature and functions of ego states. Grégoire offers the example of Berne's wry comment about realizing that "each individual is three different persons, all pulling in different directions...so it is a wonder that anything ever gets done" (1970, p. 103), which made it all too easy for psychoanalytic critics to dismiss TA as a "pop psychology". He goes on to argue that "Berne is so fascinated by the degree to which repetitive ego states sometimes resemble their origin that he seems to refer to personality systems as three persons in one individual". The tension throughout Berne's model(s) of ego states between an emphasis on the repetitive aspects of ego states (as well as games and scripts) and the more forward/generative/developmental functions of ego states is a recurrent theme in Grégoire's reflections on Berne's writings. This was – perhaps inevitably – a tension that filtered through much of the debate about the nature of ego states in the decades since; this is the tension that Grégoire seeks to creatively synthesize in the pages of this book.

Grégoire wrestles with the theoretical debates within the evolution of TA theory. There are those who conceive of the Child ego state as an archaic, fixated structure within the mind. Grégoire, while acknowledging that the person's very first learnings through infancy and early childhood are founding strata of the Child ego state, argues that the essence of the Child is the home of one's subjective experience, lived and living emotional realities, quite capable of being engaged with and influenced by here-and-now experience. He posits the Parent ego state as the essential complement to the Child, i.e., the memory and carrier of the experiences and beliefs granted through one's encounters with significant Others. Often cast with a negative, limiting valence within much of the TA literature, here in Grégoire's conceptualization, while the Parent ego state may at times be problematic, the Parent system situates one within the world of Others, situates the individual within one's cultural, social and relational worlds. Grégoire characterizes the Adult ego state as one's capacity to recognize and engage with reality, referring to the Adult as the "reality system", a necessary (though sometimes disappointing or frustrating) complement to the Child and Parent. It is "the job", the function, of the Adult ego state system to cope with the reality that life often falls short of both Child hopes and wishes, as well as the demands and expectations of the Parent. While this may at time seem like a hapless function, it is vitally necessary. Key to Grégoire's vision is the capacity of the ego state systems in the ongoing interaction and influence of each system upon the others. The mid-section of this book then engages in the description and reflections on the diverse theories within TA with regard to ego states. At times, Grégoire offers critique, but more

often he seeks synthesis, and in so doing models his premise of the interaction and influence of one system upon another.

Grégoire situates his elaboration of ego state theory within a frame juxtaposing structures and systems, the notion of structure, i.e., something organized and bounded, held alongside a sense of systems, more fluid and interactive. What I have found radical in Grégoire's articulation of his understanding of the nature of ego states is his conception of ego states as *systems* within the psyche, both underpinning and informing psychological development. Each ego state is, on the one hand, a specific and rather unique aspect of psychological organization and perception (structure) while at the same time living, changing and interactive, mutually influencing system of experience and knowing. Ego states are reframed here as three fundamental psychological/perceptual systems that interact with each other and with the world at large, subject and author of one's experience. As such, the ego states may at times, especially under stress and uncertainty, infiltrate the present day with the beliefs and potential rigidities forged in past experiences and yet, at the same time, have the vitality of living systems capable of seeking and incorporating novel experiences and fostering developmental maturation. This, to my mind, is Grégoire's stunning extension of ego state theory into a model that is thoroughly engaged with our contemporary interests in the relational and social fields that can inhibit, inform or enliven our capacities for psychological and emotional robustness. In so doing, to my reading, he anticipates – in a text written 25 years ago – the contemporary shift from the epistemological emphasis that had dominated psychoanalysis and early models of transactional analysis with an emphasis on history and the question of “why?” to that of an ontological perspective that asks “how?” and leans into the future.

Berne developed transactional analysis as a method of psychodynamic psychotherapy, and as such, there was a nearly inevitable emphasis on the fixated and repetitive aspects of the past – the psychotherapeutic viewpoint tending to look to history. Since then, TA has found rich and important applications in the fields of personal development, education and organizational consultation in which the primary orientation is more overtly towards the future. Grégoire argues that in any field of application, it is the central task of the professional to open spaces for reflection and learning, writing that the interactional systems perspective he develops in this book “gives room to the past without confining itself to repetition and is open to the present, and the future to be built; it keeps within sight access to autonomy and creativity for the person, the group, or the institution”.

The evolution of theory, especially within its foundational premises, demands what can be a daunting, even painful, process of letting go of cherished ideas. Through the pages of *Conceptualizing Ego States in Transactional Analysis*, José Grégoire invites the reader to question and let go. But in that letting go, he does not leave the reader in a void but offers a rich and enlivening re-conceptualization of these foundational concepts in transactional analysis, a leaning into the future.

William F. Cornell

FOREWORD

The ego states theory describes extensive aspects of human existence. It does not describe them all, because some belong to other theories, present or future, and a great number will undoubtedly never be described theoretically. However, it gathers and relates phenomena belonging to very diverse dimensions: the person, their inner being, their relationships, their past and their present, their deep tendencies and their manifestations, their communication and their action, their body, their thought, their affects and their imagination.

Theoretical clarifications are like spotlights projecting a light beam that originates from a specific angle and illuminates one area only, big or small. This is especially the case in psychology. Not surprisingly, therefore, theories have a history. In each era, theorists have their own perception of practical necessities, of the prevailing theoretical conjuncture and of their theory's requirements; with them in mind, they adjust the beam's position or width or direct it towards still unexplored areas. To understand what our research on the ego states theory is aimed at, here is a brief recall of its evolution's main stages.

Eric Berne

It all starts with Eric Berne: although the term "ego states" comes from Paul Federn,¹ Berne gives it a meaning, or rather a series of "blended" meanings, which are fundamentally innovative²:

- *Meaning 1:* An ego state is "*the total behavior and experience of the individual at a given moment*"³ with all their internal and external aspects. Berne condenses these into "feelings and behavior"⁴ or "feelings, thoughts and behavior".⁵ This concept is well suited for describing a person's successive reactions.
- *Meaning 2:* Berne divides these experiences associated with behaviours into *three groups*: some come straight from the person's childhood (Child ego states), others reproduce parental figures' experiences (Parent ego states), and others are presumed to be "adapted to the current reality"⁶ (Adult ego states). These categories, as we can see, are especially suitable for the identification of repetitive experiences.

- *Meaning 3*: The term “ego states” also designates structures, which Berne calls “*personality systems*”⁷ or “*psychic organs*”. He introduces them to account for the constitution, organization and implementation of the three ego states. Each system is always present and acting simultaneously; each provides an irreplaceable contribution to the person’s development and activity. These concepts allow the analysing of non-repetitive dynamics.

After a creative phase, from his first articles on ego states in 1957 and 1958⁸ to *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*⁹ published in 1961, Berne became more interested in other concepts; he only occasionally returned to the ego states theory. His work shifted towards fine-tuned behaviour observation with psychological games,¹⁰ then returned in force to the intrapsychic with the concept of script.¹¹

“Meaning 2”, which directs thinking towards repetitions of past experiences, remains predominant for Berne. During his lifetime, in theoretical presentations, “Meaning 2” already overshadowed “Meaning 3” (even though the latter, crucial to analyse many dynamics, never disappeared completely). This is especially the case in TA’s first presentations: in the second version of Berne’s book *A Layman’s Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis*,¹² the chapter about transactional analysis, written by J. Dusay at Berne’s request, speaks only of “Meaning 2”.

The “classical TA” period

After Berne’s death in 1971, this trend became more pronounced in the so-called Berne school. A significant element appears: the ego states “descriptive model”¹³ (so-called functional). The heuristic clues¹⁴ that Berne mentions in *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*¹⁵ to identify repetitive ego states¹⁶ become a general list of “options”, i.e., of possibilities for the person’s reactions in the here and now. In the 1970s and 1980s, this list, fully valid for its own purpose, will take on more and more importance in TA theory and practice, to the point of sometimes overshadowing the structural model, which will lead to reactions later.

During this time, a sort of “classical” and stereotyped TA image jells. We call “classical TA” this sequence of formulas extracted from Berne’s texts; this becomes even more important when it is defined as the official program of introduction to TA.¹⁷ It includes, in addition to the descriptive terms now gathered under the name of “functional model”,¹⁸ a structural model whose elements are exclusively defined by “Meaning 2”. Classical TA sets side-by-side concepts describing repetitions of the past (the structural model) with elements designed to look for behavioural options (descriptive terms), leaving a gap in the *formulation* of the theory about what is happening intra-psychically in the present.

The redecision school,¹⁹ whose theory is centred on the concept of impasse, i.e., intrapsychic conflict between personality systems, and the reparenting school,²⁰ where the central place is given to the relational concept of symbiosis, both use classical TA nevertheless.

Unconscious and transference are concepts absent from classical TA; however, transactional analysts from psychoanalytic training or inspiration have already

begun their integration with TA, as shown by the publications of C. Moiso²¹ and M. Novellino²² on transference and counter-transference concepts, or M. Haykin and M. and K. Woods²³ on splitting, a notion which comes from object relations theory. Many others, no doubt, have asked themselves practical and theoretical questions about how concepts of psychoanalytic origin could be integrated into TA. But this would only come to light in the following period.

Transition and debates

Classical TA's predominance ended around 1988. *TAJ's* January issue about ego states includes several important articles²⁴ that highlight the structural model (defined in "Meaning 2") both in Berne's thinking and in the understanding of psychological dynamics. In retrospect, it is mainly a return to Berne and a reaction to an unduly expanded use of the "descriptive model". But the argumentation shows that the wind is changing: R. Erskine introduces the concept of unconscious defence mechanism and makes it the very foundation of the Child and Parent ego states.

Over the following years, the debate on the ego states theory splits transactionalists into two groups. On one side, a traditional group, represented by C. Steiner and S. Karpman²⁵ among others, proclaims its attachment to Berne's "accessible" presentation of classical TA and displays an increasingly radical aversion and opposition to any psychoanalytical concept. On the other side, many authors are increasingly critical of the type of relationship such a theory induces between the practitioner and the client (or the group). They criticize its exclusive focus on the preconscious and conscious, on external observation, on verbal explanation and on the possibly "decisive" intervention".²⁶ Some see it as a way to avoid taking into account unconscious experience and bypassing a real in-depth commitment to the relationship; others see it as a source of power games.²⁷ All affirm the need to pay attention to unconscious dynamics if one really wants to help patients.

Since classical TA supporters did not recognize how valid this opening could be, nor how complementary with their own values, the debate became stuck on an "either/or" attitude, with some emphasizing the need to take the unconscious into account, and others fidelity to Berne's theoretical style or to the intentions attributed to him. It is presumptuous to rely on Berne's supposed personal reactions on this point because, despite his virulent attacks on the psychoanalytical *institutions* of his time²⁸ and the assertions of some practitioners²⁹ personally involved with him, a closer analysis of Berne's written works reveals that *the thinking they convey is "neither focusing on the unconscious, nor excluding the unconscious"*.³⁰

In such a context, many transactionalists belonging to recent TA trends have chosen Erskine and Trautmann's ego states theory as a tool and a symbol of this opening to psychoanalytic concepts and a practice inspired by them. However, as far as ego states are concerned, this theoretical formulation was probably neither necessary nor inevitable,³¹ as we will see.

TA's recent trends

Here are some recent TA trends,³² to which we will often refer:

- R. Erskine and R. Trautmann's *Integrative Psychotherapy* is a theory based on the new concept of "integrated Adult" and on the reduction of Child and Parent ego states to defence mechanisms; in practical terms, it is centred on respectful inquiry, attunement and the therapist's personal commitment.³³
- M. Novellino and C. Moiso's "*transactional psychoanalysis*" highlights transference and counter-transference analysis, and unconscious communication.
- More recently, H. Hargaden and C. Sills' *relational TA*³⁴ focuses on bringing largely unconscious relational processes into the interpersonal sphere in order to change them through the relational process.³⁵

In their view of development, these authors are inspired by D. Stern.³⁶

- In a similar direction, G. Summers and K. Tudor's,³⁷ "*co-creative TA*", describes the therapeutic relationship as a joint creation between the person and the therapist.

These four trends adopted Erskine and Trautmann's ego states theory as a working tool.

- W. Cornell integrates contributions from various neo-Reichian, transactional and psychoanalytical trends in an approach centred on relationship, body and healthy development.³⁸ His thinking includes non-psychotherapeutic fields of application.³⁹

Not all recent transactional orientations are psychoanalytically inspired:

- D. Stern's concept of "interactions' generalised representations" applied to ego states⁴⁰ is not; this concept makes it possible to understand the person's development in an evolutionary perspective through increasingly extended ego states combinations.
- Neither is the constructionist or narrativist trend, whose leader is J. Allen⁴¹; it focuses on the narratives or elements of narratives that the person has developed about their existence.

Choices and values

Here are some of the choices made in writing this book:

- First choice: work with a theory *based on healthy functioning and healthy development* rather than on pathology.⁴² This implies highlighting personal development mechanisms, which classical TA leaves aside in favour of repetition mechanisms, which must be situated in a wider context.

- Second choice: avoid the trap of making TA a simple duplicate of other theories, because these theories undoubtedly have much to offer us. In the long run, *integrating two theories* only makes sense between two elements that do not coincide with each other and *each of which retains its own specificity*. There is no need to be locked in the antinomy between the conscious and the unconscious: the ego states theory must make room for both dimensions.

These choices are part of a conception of psychotherapy which, despite the importance it necessarily gives to working through early or archaic obstacles, also includes support for empowerment, actualization of resources and release of creativity. What W. Cornell describes stands along the same lines: according to him, clients need interventions, thinking and relational attitude of their therapist to be open to multiple levels of intervention and able to go back and forth between different topics and processes, such as daily life concerns, intrapsychic conflicts, transference and counter-transference.⁴³ That suits an integrative conception of psychotherapy⁴⁴ and opens the theory to applications in the fields of education, counselling and organizational intervention.

For all these reasons, we chose the TA concept of personality systems (“Meaning 3”) for this book. They include both unconscious and conscious aspects throughout the development process and, as such, comply with the criteria detailed above.

We hope this book will invite readers to re-engage personally with *seminal theoretical texts*, by Berne or by other theorists. For this reason, most chapters end with a collection of commented texts, which the reader can skip if they wish, but which form an integral part of the book’s reflection. Without this, texts are reduced to ready-made formulas, taken out of context, and their strength is lost. It is better to be aware of where we deviate from what the founders thought; it is better to ask ourselves why we do so than to assume that they thought as we do by relying on a few words to which it is all too easy to attribute the meaning that suits us. For Berne, and many others for that matter, could well take up the words of a classic author: “Sir, I write books, not sentences!”.

TRANSACTIONAL TEXTS

In the second part of most chapters of this book, various former transactional texts are summarized and commented on, to put the ideas asserted in the first part of the chapter in concordant or contrasting relation with them, and to include these ideas in the broader context of TA theory. Most notably, some controversial or forgotten texts of Berne’s are analyzed.

Notes

- 1 FEDERN, P., 1952.
- 2 These three meanings, and the theoretical perspectives from which they derive, are discussed in [Chapter 1](#).

FOREWORD

- 3 BERNE, E., 1961, p. 48.
- 4 BERNE, E., 1961, p. 1. Berne will detach thought from feeling only in his last book: BERNE, E., 1972, p. 11.
- 5 BERNE, E., 1972, p. 11.
- 6 BERNE, E., 1961, p. 52.
- 7 This expression, which comes from Berne (BERNE, E., 1961, p. 18 “systems of the personality”) will be used throughout this work in preference to “psychic organs”, which connotes Berne’s hope that one day, “zones” corresponding to the three organs will be found in the brain: see SCHLEGEL, L., 1993^{ES}.
- 8 BERNE, E., 1957b, 1958.
- 9 BERNE, E., 1961.
- 10 BERNE, E., 1964a.
- 11 BERNE, E., 1972.
- 12 BERNE, E., 1968.
- 13 In the literature (but probably not in the collective creation process of the San Francisco Transactional Analysis Seminar, see HOSTIE, R., 1987), the starting point is Steve Karpman’s article “Options”; KARPMAN, S., 1971. Karpman himself does not intend to create a new “model”, but a new pedagogical way of introducing patients to the structural model (Meaning 2).
- 14 Heuristic: which helps to discover.
- 15 BERNE, E., 1961.
- 16 See BERNE, E., 1961, pp. 51–53. In his last book, Berne rightly calls them “descriptive terms” (BERNE, E., 1972, p. 13). In this text, he does not use the term “model”, nor the terms “function” or “functional”.
- 17 This formal introduction is called “TA 101”. It is a quick overview of transactional theory and is mandatory for anyone wishing to engage in recognized training.
- 18 It is not in fact the function, the specific contribution of personality systems, but the “functionings” that may be manifestations of them.
- 19 See GOULDING, R., and GOULDING, M., 1978. GOULDING, R., and GOULDING, M., 1979.
- 20 See SCHIFF, J., and others, 1975.
- 21 MOISO, C., 1985^{ES}.
- 22 NOVELLINO, M., 1984, 1985, 1987.
- 23 HAYKIN, M., 1980^{ES}. WOODS, M., and WOODS, K., 1981^{ES}.
- 24 CLARKSON, P., and GILBERT, M., 1988. ERSKINE, R.G., 1988^{ES}.
- 25 E.g., C. Steiner’s position in: STEINER, C., and NOVELLINO, M., 2005 and the letters from S. Karpman in *Script*, 1998–1999.
- 26 The expression is from BERNE, E., 1972, p. 365.
- 27 See the critique by BARNES, G., 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, which draws its inspiration from Bateson but not from psychoanalysis.
- 28 BERNE, E., 1972, p. 365.
- 29 F. English’s contribution, for example, is a completely different way of understanding and interpreting Berne’s thought. ENGLISH, F., 1977^{ES}.
- 30 GREGOIRE, J., 2007a^{ES}, p.11, and passim.
- 31 See on this point GRÉGOIRE, J., 2007b^{ES}.
- 32 See GREGOIRE, J., 2007c.
- 33 See ERSKINE, R.G., and TRAUTMANN, R., 1996.
- 34 HARGADEN, H., and SILLS, C., 2002.
- 35 SILLS, C., 2004, p.26.

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- 36 STERN, D., 1985.
- 37 SUMMERS G., and TUDOR K., 2000 ^{ES}.
- 38 See CORNELL, W.F., 1988, 1998, 2000. CORNELL, W. F., 2003 ^{ES}.
- 39 CORNELL, W.F., and HINE, J., 1999.
- 40 STERN, D., 1985. GILBERT, M., 1996^{ES}. HINE, J., 1997 ^{ES}.
- 41 See ALLEN, J.R., and ALLEN, B.A., 1997.
- 42 See CORNELL, W.R., 1988.
- 43 CORNELL, W.F., 2006.
- 44 PAGÈS, M., 1993.

THREE PERSPECTIVES ON EGO STATES

The concept of ego states in Berne and his successors consists of various articulated meanings because several perspectives are joined together, which happens very often with psychological theories. Although these perspectives have many points of contact, they do not coincide with each other, and they do not relate to one another; they are usually neither equivalent nor incompatible. In Berne's case, neither are they linked to distinct stages in the development of his approach, as is the case with Freud.¹ On the contrary, they intertwine; part of the history of transactional theory is the result of the divergent interpretations this situation has generated.

The sequential or descriptive perspective

First the *sequential* perspective: it is used to describe phenomena from the point of view of their sequence. In an imaginary theatre play, this perspective would be appropriate for a series of disconnected monologues: one actor leaves, the other returns. The fact that a play entirely made of such juxtapositions would be missing a sense of direction to the point of chaos makes us sense that the sequential perspective is meant more to describe sequential occurrences than to explain their mutual links.

Berne uses this perspective especially when he analyses ego states in patients' reactions. Ms "Primus",² for example, moves between three quite different "states": sometimes she behaves like a little girl and giggles nervously, sometimes she delivers information clearly, sometimes she is absorbed in listening to imaginary "voices".

Berne is interested in these three specific types of reaction because they correspond to the three great types of ego states he listed and named, respectively, Child, Adult and Parent. In the purely sequential perspective, these three terms still have a vague meaning: "Child" means that Ms Primus' first attitude *seems like* that of a child, Adult means that her behaviour in the second phase *is what one would expect of* an adult, and Parent means that the "voices" deliver orders and judgements as some parents would.³

Ms Primus' successive "ego states" can be said to be strongly contrasted and of diverse types, and to replace one another in an abrupt and transition-less way. The sequential perspective is the one that naturally comes to mind to describe such a succession of phenomena. We can also see why it can be equivalently called *descriptive*: faced with a succession of manifestations that appear "in bulk"

and whose underlying link has not yet been unravelled, the first step is to describe them. The second step is to classify them, starting with an intuitive criterion: here, their likeness. As Berne states, this likeness is only a gateway towards a more precise and enlightening criterion, i.e., their starting point; it follows that the descriptive perspective leads to the next one, the origin perspective.

In the sequential or descriptive perspective, the light that theory brings can be *more or less wide* in the sense that the term “ego state” does not always designate precise and concrete behaviours at a given moment but sets or modes of reaction. Berne and Mr. Segundo used to distinguish between two terms, “the lawyer” and “the little boy”, which included for them a great number of concrete manifestations of Adult and Child.⁴

In this context, the identification of each ego state, or *diagnosis*, is based on two sources: the person’s observable behaviour (behavioural diagnosis) and the social impact that their/her behaviour and reactions have on others (relational or “social” diagnosis).

Interventions at the sequential level seek to change the sequence when it is unsatisfactory, for example by looking for alternative behavioural options.⁵ Overall, the approach focuses on the behavioural and cognitive dimension; it enables the person to make an initial sorting out of what they are experiencing, if only by learning to classify their own reactions into at least three categories. It can involve emotional awareness and learning, as in emotional literacy.⁶

While the implementation of this perspective requires a relationship of acceptance and trust, it does not involve the analysis of transference and countertransference which, in principle, are not used as a source of information. Of course, the practitioner has to free themselves from aspects of their own script that might hinder the process; this said, the alliance is more like the relationship between a service user and a specialist. Nevertheless, the sequential perspective serves as a gateway to the other perspectives; in any case, this is necessarily where the first contact with the person takes place.

Berne was interested in the sequential or descriptive perspective as a gateway to the repetition perspective. For him, the transition from one to the other is mainly made through “descriptive terms”, for which today we use “normative, nurturing, adapted, rebellious and free”.⁷ There is another attitude directed towards reality, unnamed by Berne or classical Transactional Analysis (TA), but which they designate by the name of the corresponding ego state: “Adult”.⁸ Originally, these descriptive terms are always hypothetical⁹ diagnostic clues for an initial identification of repetitive ego states. They take a more or less systematized form only in Berne’s last book, together with their corresponding diagram,¹⁰ though Berne does not mention it as a systematic tool in the rest of his book. It is only later that these terms will be used as a list of “options”¹¹ in the here and now.

The origin perspective: Evolution or repetition

The second perspective is the *origin* perspective. It focuses on the antecedents of the present situation. If it were a theatre play, it would be one with many

“flashbacks”, where each character tells of past events that explain why they are there and what they came to do. As viewers, we do not yet have a single narrative but fragments of narratives which we expect to come together at some point through interactions between the characters. The comparison with a theatre play lays the ground for the idea that the origin perspective shows the same fragmentary character and calls for a more global perspective, i.e., the interaction perspective.

In real life as in a play, the origin perspective is usually an *evolution perspective*. Usually, if Madame’s maid says how naive and foolish she was when she was hired as a young maid, the audience discovers later that things have changed a lot since then and that perhaps she is now in fact running the house. Berne rarely uses such an evolutionary perspective with ego states.¹² But he puts a great importance on one of its forms, the repetition perspective, as do most psychoanalytical and psychodynamic trends. Among all the diversity and multiplicity of experiences, this perspective selects a very particular category, because of the key role it plays in psychological problems: re-enacting past experiences. In the case of Child ego states, these experiences belonged to the person; in the case of Parent ego states, to one or more parental figures. In this approach, the aspect of progressive evolution is considered absent or negligible. The maid, after 25 years, is still naive and foolish. You might think this play would not be particularly good and you would be quite right: the repetition perspective usually concerns experiences which, because they are repetitive, impoverish existence and inhibit creativity.

In the repetition perspective, the Child and Parent ego states are much more precisely defined than in the sequential perspective. The Child ego states are no longer simply those that *seem like* a child’s behaviour, but those that reproduce the internal reactions and behaviours of the specific child that person once was. Similarly, the Parent ego states are no longer simply those that *seem like* a parental attitude, but those that reproduce the behaviours or behavioural type of other real persons, mainly parents or parental figures. Berne very often goes from one perspective to the other and insists on how important that is¹³: “The person who stole chewing gum was not called the Child for convenience, or because children often steal, but because he himself stole chewing gum as a child with the same gleeful attitude and using the same technique. (...) The Parent was not called the Parent because it is traditional for philanthropists to be ‘fatherly’ or ‘motherly’, but because he actually imitated his own father’s behavior and state of mind in his philanthropic activities”.¹⁴

Even though Berne presented the three ego states symmetrically in this passage, his definition of the Adult ego states *does not refer to their origin*: “The Adult was called the Adult, not because he was playing the role of an adult, imitating the behavior of big men, but because he exhibited highly effective reality-testing in his legal and financial operations”.¹⁵ This is because the concept of Adult ego state has a particular status in the repetition perspective, due to it being defined “by default” as an ego state unmarked by repetition: “Since the Adult is still the least well understood of the three types of ego states, it is best characterized in clinical practice as the residual state left after the segregation of all detectable Parent and Child elements”.¹⁶ Interestingly, Berne immediately adds: “Or it may be more

formally considered as the derivative of a model of the neopsyche".¹⁷ This represents a shift towards the interaction perspective, which we will address shortly.

Since classical TA presents the ego states theory from the repetition perspective, this difference has become very significant. For Erskine and Trautmann, it becomes the central opposition on which their ego state theory is based: the evolution perspective is implemented only for the "integrating Adult", whereas the Child and the Parent are reduced to the repetition perspective.

Like the sequential perspective, the repetition perspective applies not only to experiences that have taken place at a particular time, but also to larger or smaller sets of reactions, provided they generate reproduction rather than creative use. In this case, the emphasis is on the fact that the person is now exhibiting the same general patterns of reaction as when they were a child of this or that age (Child ego states) or the same patterns of reaction as their parents or parental figures (Parent ego states). According to Erskine, these general patterns comprise "needs, desires, urges, and sensations; the defense mechanisms; and the thought processes, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors"¹⁸ related to a past stage of development (Child ego states) or emanating from another person (Parent ego states).

The origin perspective adds two new dimensions to the behavioural and relational (or social) *diagnoses*: the historical diagnosis, which seeks information about the person's past, and the phenomenological diagnosis, which is based on the person's phenomenological experience or at least on their emotional experience of it when they remember. In the "phenomenological experience", the person feels as if they are in a particular moment of their past at the same time as in the present, as if the two experiences are overlaid or superimposed. Penfield, who was Berne's Neurophysiology Professor at McGill University in Montreal, had induced such experiences in the laboratory by electrically stimulating certain areas of the cortex in epileptics.¹⁹ What interests Berne above all is that the same result can be obtained in the therapeutic relationship, as shown by Ms Enatosky's experience²⁰ (see the collection of texts at the end of this chapter).

Berne insists that all four dimensions are necessary²¹; he starts from the outside layer, i.e., from the behavioural diagnosis towards the phenomenological diagnosis. Erskine²² reverses this order: he states that the patient's experience comes first, both chronologically and by order of importance; that leads him to give first place to the phenomenological diagnosis, a term which then gains a broader meaning for Erskine than for Berne, for whom it simply refers to "reliving" a past situation. This key position emphasizes the need to avoid a one-sided emphasis on behavioural diagnosis and to give priority to the person's core experience.²³

As for *interventions*, the repetition perspective leads to working through either the Child or Parent repetitive experiences, or the relationship from which they emanate. In *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*,²⁴ Berne describes the stages of this work as he thought it should be: become aware of the repetition process (decontamination of the Adult), work on options in the present to obtain "social control"²⁵ and then, if the patient wants it, lift the Child's confusion.

The re-decision perspective, on the other hand, has generated many other more emotional and more creative methodologies. In the parenting approach or in the