"The Graphics of Ego States"

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Introduction

There is a generation of transactional analysis (TA) trained people who started their training in the nineteen seventies and early eighties when TA was at its peak of simplistic popularity. This was the time of 'Mickey Mouse' or 'pop-psychology' that was actually greatly damaging to TA concepts and methods and damaging to the place of transactional analysis in the field of psychology. The most fundamental example of over simplifying concepts was in the mixing up of models of ego states. Functional analysis was glibly explained as structural and vice versa. Many publications, even Eric Berne Memorial Award winning articles from that period endorsed this habit.

It is also important to state that it was originally Eric Berne himself who contributed to the mixing up of the models and this can be hard to realise and accept. Berne's biography (Jörgensen & Jörgensen 1984) shows how busy Berne was in the period of his growing popularity. He was frequently asked for speeches at lunches or short introductions to TA. This contributed to Berne himself losing the depth of his own model; the structural model started to live by its functional examples.

In the early nineteen eighties a counter movement from within TA started. The most important articles in that phase came from Trautman and Erskine (1981) and Hohmuth and Gormly (1982), aiming to bring back the origins and meaning of each of the models of ego states used. Subsequently there was less mixing up of the structural and functional models; theory began to be taught more seriously.

In written and oral TA exams it is nevertheless often necessary to question the candidate about the models he or she uses. Application of the same graphics for both models causes ongoing confusion and debate. It was in referring to this matter that one of my trainers once said with a big sigh, "If only he (Eric Berne) had drawn squares and circles separately". I then started using circles for the structural model and squares for the functional model. My paper today elaborates on this idea.

Visual Differentiation between Structure and Function of Ego States
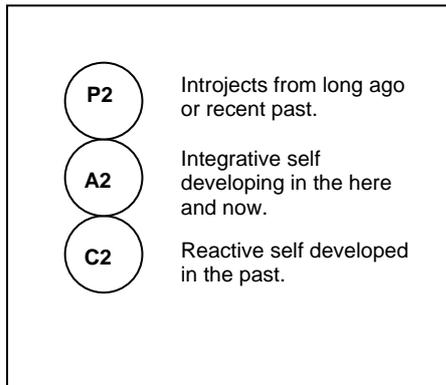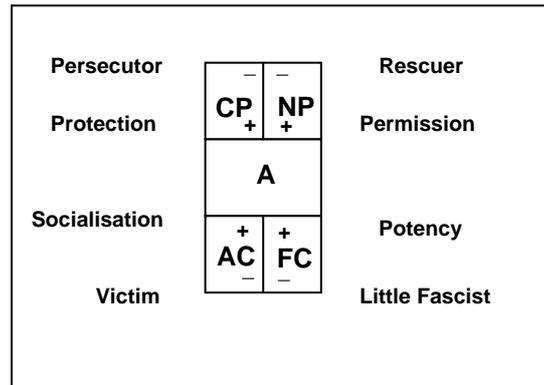
Fig. 1 Structural Model

P2	Introjects from long ago or recent past.
A2	Integrative self developing in the here and now.
C2	Reactive self developed in the past.

Fig. 2 Functional Model

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Persecutor	**CP**	Rescuer
Protection	**NP**	Permission
	A	
Socialisation	**AC**	Potency
Victim	**FC**	Little Fascist

Using the different shapes for the different models means that with one explanation it is clear forever. The difference can be seen at a glance. Any time a presenter explains something to do with ego states, she or he has to be aware of which model is in use and has to show that by choosing the appropriate graphic. This strategy also opens the way to making visual connections with other ego state related concepts.

Let me start with the relation between the two models. An ego state is defined as a coherent system of thinking, feeling, attitudes and related behaviour. It is the structural source of the three categories of ego state that differs. The Parent category of ego states is filled with introjects from the more or less recent past, its content having been taken in from parental figures. The Child category of ego states is filled with reactive patterns of thinking, feeling behaving and body language, self-developed in the past. The Adult category of ego states consists of up to date current thinking, feeling and behaving that fits in the here and now and that benefits from the capacity to integrate contents from both Parent and Child ego states (Trautman & Erskine 1981).

The structural Adult ego state manifests itself in various ways. Actually it has five functions. The following graphic shows this combination of models.

Fig. 3 The relation between structure and function of ego states.
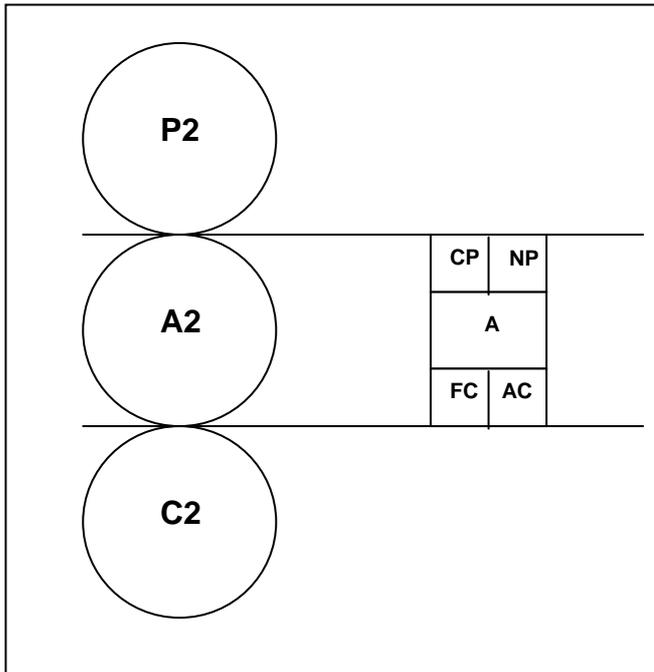
So far, nothing special. However, from this graphic, it becomes visible that functioning in the here and now is five fold. The Adult ego state has all these functions available, sets boundaries, nurtures, decides and processes information, can adapt and be energetic, all in A2. In the traditional functional model, these functions are given different names (critical parent, nurturing parent, adult, adapted child, free child). A2 has many more functions than 'adult' in the functional model. The 'functional adult' just functions like a computer (Berne 1961) and that's it. With these graphics you can **see** this difference. It can also be seen clearly that for diagnosis of ego states functionally it is enough to use behavioural and social diagnosis. For diagnosis of structural ego states, you need historical and phenomenological diagnosis as well. When Berne said that one needs information from all four methods of diagnosis in order to be sure which ego state is active, he meant structurally, using the structural model.

This brings me to contamination. The usual graphic with the overlapping circles makes sense, and shows how A2 is affected by the overlapping of either or both P2 and C2. This contamination is manifested in the way someone functions. For instance, when a person is talking about how difficult work is now and cries about it, then this could be diagnosed using the functional model as free child expression and be part of adequate here and now behaviour in A2. However, when this crying is actually triggered by a memory of how hard life has been on several earlier occasions for this person, then C2 becomes activated and contaminates the A2 expression of sadness. C2 'colours' A2 in this situation. This is shown in the graphic in Fig. 4.

Fig. 4 Child – Adult Contamination
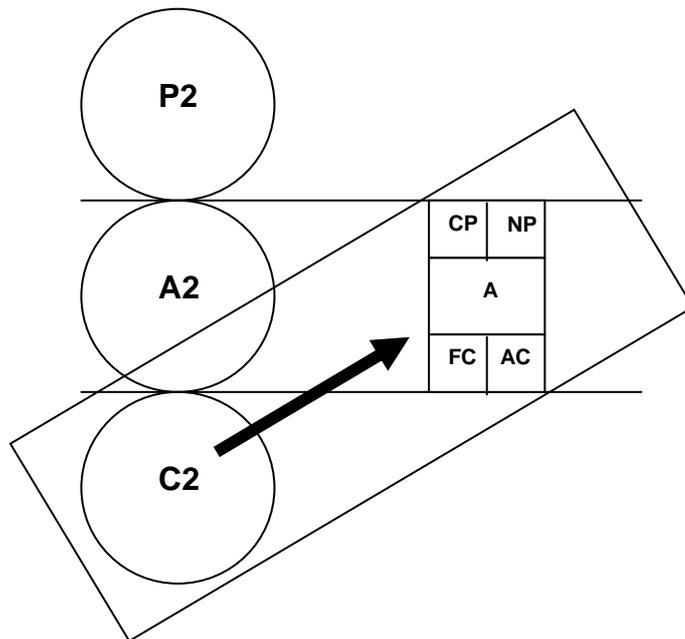
The same can be worked out if the contamination comes from P2. If the crying person is acting out his or her mother who was always crying and complaining about the harshness of life, the contamination is from P2. The difference can be found out by using historical and or phenomenological ego state diagnosis.

Other applications can be made with transactions, symbiosis, the script matrix (is the model functional or structural?) and so on.

This new use of graphics has many advantages, of which the most important is the direct visibility of the difference between the structural and the functional models of ego states. There is no need to ask and check out repeatedly which model presenters are thinking about. They have to be clear for themselves.

If transactional analysis had the guts to rewrite its theory, using this difference in graphics, it would ease the teaching of ego state concepts. It would also enhance theoretical clarity for transactional analysts as well as for those who are using other approaches. Last of all, it would benefit the image of transactional analysis in the world of psychology.

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Biography
Drs. Servaas van Beekum (1946 is a social scientist and TSTA. His professional identity is mainly in working with organisations as a consultant, and providing training for trainers and consultants, using theory and methods from transactional analysis, gestalt, system approach and group relations theory. He is past president of both EATA and the ITAA. He is the founder and director of the Institute for the Application of Social Science, IAS International, in Haarlem, Netherlands.