Playing in the City of Axen
Ferdinand Cuvelier's Interaction Model

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1 Opening Reflections

We live in an age in which people increasingly assert themselves as individuals. Because of this, it is sometime said that we live in the age of the 'me generation'. Most often, this moniker is used disapprovingly. It refers to personal needs being expressed much more openly than was common in the past. It is seen as a regrettable loss of social orientation and equated with a lack of social responsibility.

Each person is a unique individual. In other words, it's impossible to find two people who are exactly alike in every way. People do not only differ in physical appearance, but also in their potential and skills, needs, viewpoints and desires.

To state that each person is unique, however, is nothing but an empty phrase unless each person has the opportunity to express his or her own uniqueness by means of or through their behavior. Only by doing so does a person become truly aware of his or her specific individuality. This is when it turns out that one's own needs, viewpoints, and desires, while seeming so natural to oneself, may well conflict with those of others. This sounds so obvious to us that it is easy to forget that modern Western thinking has come a long way before this was generally recognized.

In the Middle Ages, a person's individuality was severely constrained by the conventions of the social group to which he or she belonged. A person was expected to occupy the position that was his or her due, by virtue of birth or age. That position was pointed out by those who 'were in charge'. The 'self' of subordinates has known a long history of oppression. Not only did subordinates have to bow and nod their assent at all times (and in fact, in many countries this is still the case); they even had to address their superiors with downcast eyes, as described by Paulo Freire in 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1).
Contrary to what is often assumed, the self of the oppressors is not particularly well-developed either. It molded itself into the predefined pattern in a similar way. In addition, it is a well-known fact that power corrupts, thereby blocking further personal development.

In the course of Western history, a whole range of factors has contributed to man's ability to free himself from the primacy of the social structure. People have devoted themselves to the struggle to break these bonds and the power of the authority that prescribed obedience. Through the Enlightenment, revolutions, and ongoing struggle, labor unions have been able to form, the right to vote has been won for all, and we enjoy greater sexual freedom. Equal rights and opportunities in relation to gender-specific roles are still won every day, and more democratic pedagogic patterns have been developed. Combined, these achievements have led to a veritable flash-flood that has significantly undermined the power of the former stronghold of the establishment, i.e. church and state. Modern Western history thus is also the history of man emerging as an individual from his cocoon and expressing his new found individuality by using the words 'I' or 'me'.

Should we now be afraid that this will inevitably lead to greater selfishness? In my opinion, such fears are groundless. A comparison with early childhood development may be helpful here. Just as a two- or three-year-old learns to fully appreciate the power of the word 'I' by saying 'No' to the previously unchallenged authority of his or her surroundings, modern man learns to assert himself as an individual by challenging the established order.

Vechten voor emancipatie van sexegebonden rollen

De Wys/Rocky Weldon

It's only a first step. Saying 'I' and 'No' leads to confrontation with one's surroundings, and this in turn leads one to progress from goal-oriented to goal-conscious actions. Gradually, the individual learns to appreciate how choices made have certain consequences. As a result, most people will not stagnate in excessive, that is one-sided, orientation towards one's self.

And in fact, others would not continue to put up with this. The space claimed by individuals to assert themselves will invoke a response from those interacting with them. They will expect and demand a willingness to answer for one's own behavior.

When I was young, children were taught in school never to start a sentence with the word 'I' and never to say 'No' to their parents and other figures of authority. Socially acceptable behavior was equated with social obedience. If too much emphasis is placed on the need for obedience, however, any sense of personal responsibility is nipped in the bud.

What is gained by the new orientation towards one's self is that it is no longer possible to hide behind statements such as 'I was only following orders' with regards to anything important. On the contrary, with growing independence, people increasingly learn to question whether or not their own actions make sense.

Goal-consciousness and confrontation lead to growing self-awareness. If an individual is to be increasingly able to answer for him or herself, growing self-knowledge is an absolute must. It is impossible, however, to know oneself without reference to others.

People do not form an image of themselves in any direct way. Initially, a person's self-image arises because significant others such as parents act as a mirror, by responding with approval or disapproval. People then learn to use others as mirrors. In short: people always experience themselves in a social environment, within which they may form an assessment of themselves by means of comparison.

An additional complication is that people consciously and unconsciously have an effect on their environment by means of their behavior. Indeed, people even purposely try to manipulate others' opinion of them. People may lie, and even those who rarely do so, still frequently present themselves as better than they are. For example, when seeing photos of themselves, many people dismiss perfectly faithful pictures as 'ridiculous'. Only particularly flattering samples are considered good representations of one's self.

By doing so, people are not just fooling others, but often also themselves. Some people avoid the tension created by having deviating ideas and opinions by only being receptive to kindred spirits.

Drawing by Gallagher; courtesy Cartoon Features Syndicate.

"You're the kind of man we need around here"

At the very least, this leads to one-sided information. Thing gets worse when flatterers find a better audience than those with sincere constructive criticism. Numerous fables and fairy tales expose this common human phenomenon in every possible way. Viewing oneself through the eyes of others, whether with disapproval or adoration, leads to distortion. Fairy tales deal with many aspects of this, such as the ugly duckling that turned out to be a swan, and the emperor who paraded around not in his new clothes but in his birthday suit. And consider the words of Snowwhite's stepmother. 'Mirror, mirror, on the wall, am I not the fairest of them all?' It's the same old temptation and downfall of rulers and potentates throughout the ages, but it's also very recognizable as a common human weakness.

In summary, the social mirror by definition reflects a more or less one-sided image, and this complicates the acquisition of self-knowledge. People discover that they as individuals cannot possibly be viewed separately from their personal embedding as social beings.

One of the founders of modern psychiatry, Harry Stack Sullivan (1892-1949), made an important scientific contribution to this viewpoint. In his practice, he encountered patients whose abnormal behavior followed certain patterns, which could usually be explained by referring to the sick nature of their personality. He examined what the concept of 'personality' actually entailed, and how a person's 'character' is formed. He observed that a person's relationship with others always plays a crucial role in this.
Sullivan stated that, from infancy onwards, biological and physiological needs force man to enter into a relationship with his surroundings, and that the imprint of a person's situation during infancy leads to the development of a more or less durable system of reciprocal patterns.

Sullivan calls these patterns 'self-systems' or 'self-dynamisms'. He observes that infants develop a number of more or less durable self-systems in response to the self-systems of

the significant others on which he or she depends. According to Sullivan, what may be called 'personality' is in fact a collection of these systems (2).

Sullivan's ideas are now widely hailed as the foundation of modern psychiatry. Sullivan himself was primarily interested in good communication with his disturbed patients. He could sit with them for hours, to bring about some form of communication and thereby coax them out of their isolation.

He gave many lectures to develop and disseminate his ideas. His public manner, however, was often sarcastic and bitter. He could deliver scathing criticism of colleagues who, in his opinion, talked traditional psychiatric nonsense.[1]

He often held lectures while partly turned away from his audience. In such cases, he would address himself to his dog, who usually accompanied him. This was perhaps attributable to a certain shyness, but was also rather demonstrative in nature. Sullivan was averse to any false objectivity and was at all times acutely aware of the interpersonal situation.
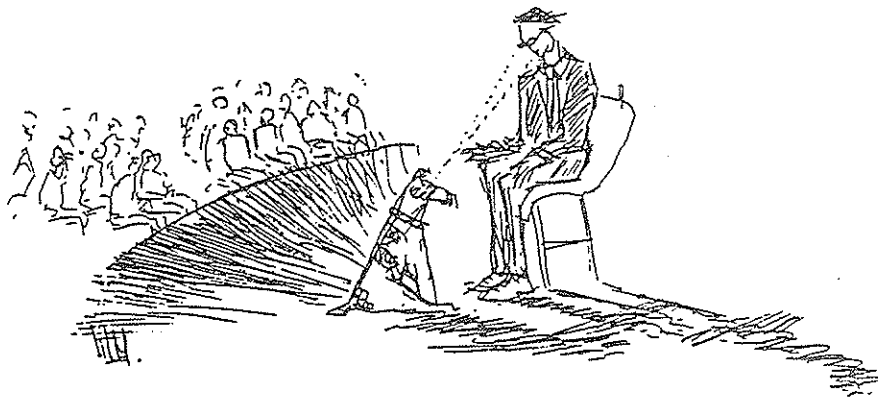
Sullivan, altijd menselijk tegenover de 'underdog', houdt een van zijn befaamde lezingen.

He disseminated his thoughts on the development of personal needs in relation to demands from one's environment through articles and lectures. He did not, however, elaborate on his ideas to form a cohesive model. Others did attempt to do this.[2]

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[1] Note for readers interested in psychodrama: Sullivan knew of Moreno. In the last of five lectures which he delivered to a small audience in 1939 and which were later published in 'Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry', he discussed the use of non-verbal expressions in resolving a disorder. He then mentioned that Moreno also appeared to have utilized this principle in his psychodrama technique. In more or less controlled circumstances, the patient 'enacts' persons and behaviors as they were originally related to his or her personal conflicts. After this dramatization of the conflict, the patient is encouraged to voice his or her experiences. Sullivan's experience with adolescents and adults had taught him that voicing one's experience was usually, if not always, necessary to achieve a lasting, positive result (11).

[2] Interested readers may consult 'Interaction Concepts of Personality'(3), a book in which Robert C. Carson describes in detail how various scholars define the connection between interaction and personality .

Elaborating on Sullivan's ideas, Timothy Leary and Hubert Coffey, two of his students, developed a model of related modes of communication (4)(5). In the 1950s, they presented a map that illustrated their interpretation of Sullivan's theory. This map is known as 'Leary's Rose'.

'De roos van Leary'
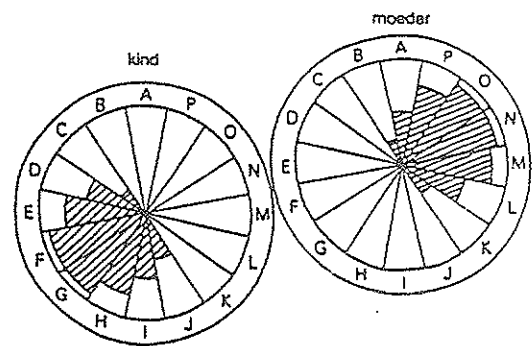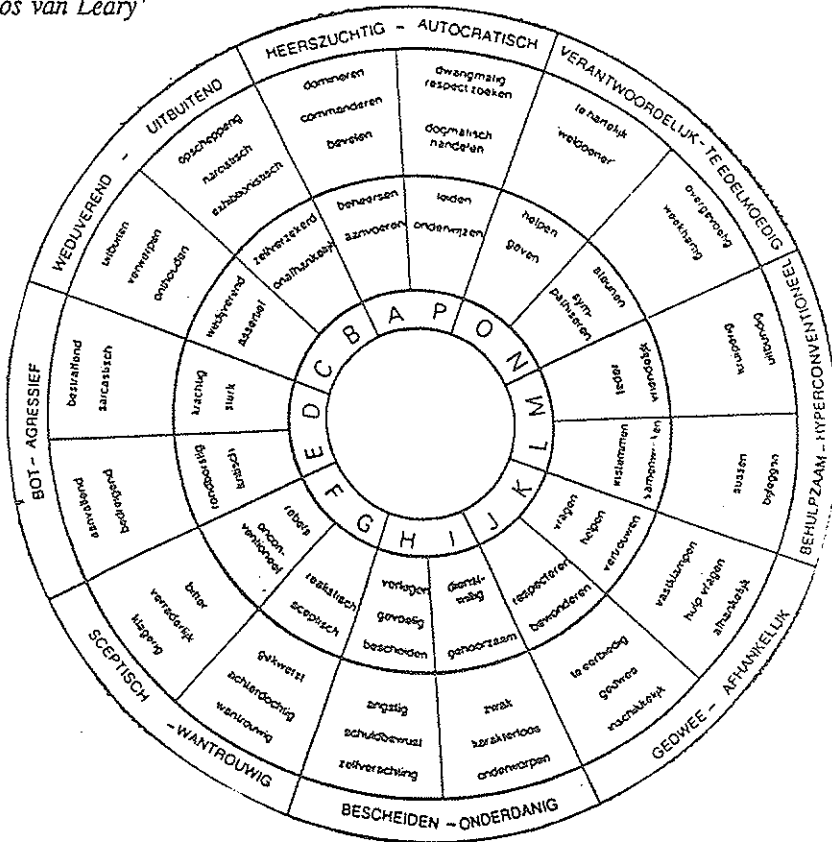
Leary's Rose consists of a circle divided into eight sectors. The dynamism sector that is most dominant in a person calls forth the sector from the opposite side of the circle.

1.2 Objective Knowledge Versus Subjective Experience

For a decade, Leary focuses intently on refining communication patterns and making them objectively measurable. He wants to test his models, and to this purpose he develops the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)

While Sullivan, and Leary following in his footsteps, is averse to anything that reduces vulnerable individuals such as psychiatric patients to objects of science, thereby stripping them of their dignity, lectures and discussions show that Leary's rose is increasingly being used as such. Because of this, Leary discontinues his research in the 1960s and moves away from the field of alienation, the field of objective, detached science, in which individuals appear to be no more than the plaything of interpersonal patterns. Once again, he focuses his intellectual curiosity on the origin of human experience.[3]

That he chose to study a new and later sharply criticized topic is irrelevant in this discussion. The reason he gave for this choice, however, does appear relevant. He shifts his attention to the origin of human experience, the area where man becomes aware of his own uniqueness. And he's not the only one. Many others in the 1960s and 1970s also experience this alienation. Their awareness results in critical movements in the areas of psychiatry, psychology, and pedagogics.

I would like to dwell for a moment on this area of tension between objective, abstract social science and people's subjective, actual experiences. Ferdinand Cuvelier himself has pointed out on several occasions that a one-sided emphasis on what is explicit and rational in interpersonal relations creates a sense of alienation. Cuvelier repeatedly underlines that man is first and foremost an inspired and inspiring being who wants to give meaning to his existence. A one-sided emphasis on rational thinking may be at the expense of important qualities such as imagination, empathy, and spiritual solidarity.

In 1964, this was articulated by the communication expert Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan feared that impoverishment and alienation would result if people attempt to use logical thinking and written language to find solutions for the fact that they are different. He was of the opinion that purposeful, rational behavior, guided by abstract armchair learning, has a detrimental effect on man's capacity for observation and empathy. For people who attempt to live in this way, he coined the term 'Gutenberg Man' (6), referring to the inventor of the printing press.

The findings of the social sciences arouse resistance, not only among scientists of the hippie era but also among many of our contemporary scientists and laymen. Self-knowledge is important, but modeling one's behavior on the theories and models of psychiatrists and psychologists does not seem like an appealing substitute for the authority of former times. The abstract, objective (supposedly non-normative) and one-sided appeal to reason turns out to be too smooth and artificial to engender trust.

1.3 The City of Axen
In his first book, 'De stad van Axen' (The City of Axen) (7), Ferdinand Cuvelier elaborates on the work of Sullivan and Leary, as well as others such as Longabaugh, whose work is discussed below. Ferdinand Cuvelier's interaction model can be seen as a continuation of Leary's Rose.

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[3] This leads to the much-discussed experiments with LSD, in the context of a study of the relationship between consciousness and religion.

One of Cuvelier's great merits is that he offers a logical and explicit model without reducing man to an abstract object. He does this by presenting his scientific model in a very human way: in the form of an autobiographical travelogue, in which he invites the reader to follow the first-person narrator on a surprising trip through the unknown.

Using the metaphor of a city, he paints a picture of a number of reciprocal communication patterns. Modern man's individual development has caused him to lose the old social structures as his obvious point of reference. By means of the city of Axen, with its distinctive neighborhoods and its central meeting place, Ferdinand Cuvelier creates a space for 'Gutenberg Man' to experience himself once again as an inhabitant of the 'Global Village', to use another one of Marshall McLuchan's evocative terms (8).
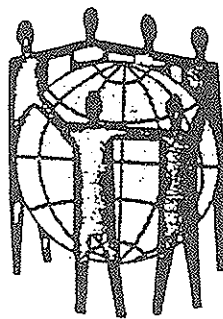
Cuvelier's work reveals the sincere desire for people to experience themselves less as the plaything of a social force field, and more as players in an 'interpersonal interplay of forces'.

In a playful way, he offers his readers a model which may help them to:
- Better understand themselves and others
- Better determine their own personal style of social, interactional behavior
- More effectively take their position in the interpersonal interplay of forces

Since most of us would like to have greater insight into the behavior of our fellow man (as well as our own) and would like to increase our effectiveness, it would seem appropriate to learn to use this model.

With the narrative structure of his book, Cuvelier protects the reader from the risk of alienation from the reality of his fellow man. Thus, he appeals not only to his readers' capacity for rational thinking, but also to their imagination. By using a first-person narrator, he challenges his readers to identify with the protagonist, and enables them to experience his travel adventures first-hand. In my opinion, he tries to free the social sciences from their isolation by presenting their findings in a form which integrates art and science. Whether he succeeds in doing so is for the reader to decide[4]. Cuvelier does in any case succeed in portraying man as an inhabitant of his own inner world, and as a co-inhabitant of the social

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[4] A 17th unedited reprint of the book was published in 2003.

world. He does so by conjuring up sensory images which, in a way, make man 'come to his senses'.

Marshall McLuhan became famous for his well-known statement 'The medium is the message'. In summary, we can now state that it is not the findings of the social sciences in themselves, but the supposedly non-normative presentation of these findings which arouse resistance.

Even the most modern insights often appear just as 'inhuman' as the old-fashioned statements of those psychiatrists whose seeming objectivity so alienated them from those who they were supposed to serve that Harry Stack Sullivan preferred to address his dog instead.

2. RELATION MODES

2.1 Transaction and Interaction - the Bi-Focal Approach to Relation Modes

As mentioned above, Cuvelier's model of interaction is a continuation of the work of Timothy Leary. Cuvelier himself indicates that his theory was also influenced by several articles by R. Longabaugh (9), who focused not only on the relation and communication modes **(interaction)**, but also on the goals intended by communicative actions **(transaction)**.

When we observe people interacting with each other, we can see how people do that, i.e. in what way they communicate. From the exchange we observe, we try to deduce how these people relate to each other: what their relationship or connection is. Alternatively, we can also focus on the practical purpose of the same communicative action and consider the action using economic principles. In that case, the exchange is called a transaction. In short:
- An interaction serves to express something to each other
- A transaction serves to do something with or for each other

From a business viewpoint, each transaction between people always has a useful value. In this sense, relationships are a form of bartering.[5]

In his model, Ferdinand Cuvelier encompasses both empirical functionalism and rational structuralism. Although this seems to speak for itself, most of us find this dual outlook on social reality actually hard to achieve in practice. We usually attribute ourselves motives of a very different nature than those we ascribe to others.

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[5] These two methods of observation were developed in the study of other peoples, i.e. anthropology. The oldest method of observation primarily focused on people during this 'bartering'. This method became known as 'empirical functionalism'. All studies of other peoples were originally conducted in this way. When people observe others as outsiders, apparently the transaction (what actually happens, or the practical level) is the first thing that catches one's attention. As the observer starts to feel more involved with others and approach them with more of an empathic attitude (also known as 'participatory' observation), what catches the attention is the method of communication (how things happen, or the symbolic level). The anthropologist Levi-Strauss developed the thought that each interaction results from a historic-symbolic relational structure. He called his vision 'relational structuralism'.

Of course, Levi-Strauss also had his predecessors. In the 18th century, Giambattista Vico, widely regarded as the first modern historian, already stated that human relationships are more poetic than economic in nature.

Opvoeden is ook: informatie overdragen

Cuvelier's premise is that every social action involves both a *transaction* and an *interaction,* in other words: the action pursues certain practical, economic goals, such as obtaining **goods** or **information**, but this takes place within an existing relational structure which is associated with a specific *interaction mode* or structured action, such as **accepting** or **rejecting** goods or information. Cuvelier always emphasizes the interplay between the two:

On the one hand, the transaction 'gives rise to' the interaction; on the other hand, the interaction more or less automatically elicits the transaction from the interacting participant: my implicit request causes you to give. (Of course, this does not always apply; the cartoon below is funny exactly because the 'automatic' transaction is not elicited.) [6]

Drawing by Whitney Darrow. Jr. © 1972 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

'Hang in there, old man. There's bound to be a Good
Samaritan along any time now.'

In the city of Axen, there are six 'stakes'. In addition, there are six 'interaction modes' or 'relation modes'. Together, this results in thirty-six distinct varieties. To facilitate a clear

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[6] Accepting or rejecting, and the way in which this is done, can be seen as a communicative interactional phenomenon. Sullivan's self-dynamisms or self-systems play an important role in this, as do culturally internalized behaviors such as not being allowed to say no or keeping one's eyes downcast, which were mentioned in the first section.

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understanding of what this means, the next two sections describe each of the six stakes and each of the six modes of interaction.

2.2 Transaction - 'Relationships are bartering', or how a relationship can be characterized as a variable game of transactions with different stakes

As was stated earlier, interactional behavior always has a concrete purpose. In other words, each interaction is engaged in for a specific *stake*. What are the stakes in the interpersonal interplay of forces?

There is whole range of different stakes. Biological or physiological needs may lead to requests for a concrete 'commodity' such as food or clothing. Or a particular piece of *information* may be needed, for example when asking for directions. In the city of Axen, these varying stakes are divided into six categories (10):

1   Goods

People cannot do without material goods. Food, clothing, shelter, etc. are material needs. Like most social animals, we are not completely self-supporting. We take care of our offspring, of those in need, and of each other. One of the advantages of family ties is that it makes it possible to ensure that each member receives his or her fair share. Less complex societies engage in bartering of goods.

In order to make the best possible use of our potential, modern society has developed an elaborate division of labor, and invented money. Because of this, our affluent society offers us a wide variety of goods. We are both producers and consumers, and we need each other as such. Government, through taxes and other contributions, assumes a large part of the responsibility which in the past belonged to the nuclear or extended family. And this in turn allows for greater individualization.

We don't just use these goods to satisfy our own needs. Possessions enable us to offer something to others. Even small children express friendship through gift-giving. According to a Dutch saying, small presents sustain a friendship.

2   Proximity

This refers either to physical proximity or to its derivative: symbolic proximity, which may take the form of a ring, a photograph, a piece of clothing, a letter or phone call, or even a mutual or generally recognized bond. Man is a social being and as such dependent on others. This makes human proximity a stake of the highest order.

Important interpersonal relationships are strengthened or weakened by greater or lesser proximity. For many people (women?), their happiness is even largely determined by the degree to which the need for proximity of significant others is met.

American Red Cross

3 Care
This includes serving, grooming, nursing, etc. This stake is of literally vital importance in our infancy. After all, as babies we were completely dependent on the care provided by others. And the need for care is not limited to when we are young, sick, or old. Being taken care of, being taken by the hand, being supported, all give us a feeling of well-being. As human beings, we cannot do everything by ourselves.

We also pay for care. Hotels and restaurants, public transportation, hairdressers, hospitals and nursing homes are just a few examples. Fortunately, many of us also take pleasure in providing care. Our society employs a large number of people in our vibrant service industries. This only goes to show that care is a stake which prompts us to interaction.

4 Information
The ability to do things independently requires a thorough familiarity with one's environment. Because of this, man has on occasion been referred to as an information-processing system. Information, in this context, should be broadly understood to include anything that we perceive through the senses. We also receive a lot of information through language. 'If you don't know, just ask!' is a common expression. What types of information can we seek or provide? We have a lot of different words for information: news, announcements, directions, tips, reports, messages, trivia. Our audio-visual aids largely serve our need for information. In addition to the written word in books, newspapers and magazines, an important part is also played by the telephone, radio, television, and the Internet. Just consider how much information TV brings us on world events , for example. Information overload is by now a common phenomenon. In short, man by his very nature likes to gather information, and even trivia pique his curiosity provided they're new.[7]

5 Person
This includes any way of revealing something of ourselves. Even at a very early age, we feel the need to be seen or to reveal something of ourselves to those we trust. If we don't trust a situation, however, our tendency is to want to hide, or to go red with shyness or shame. Later on, we also learn to show ourselves to impress or compete with others.

An important purpose of many relationships is to reveal oneself and be seen. We express ourselves, and hope for acceptance and perhaps also admiration. Taking pleasure in being seen strengthens our self-confidence, and conversely, we find feeling undervalued and overlooked very hard to bear. If this happens, it's common to shut out the rest of the world or even to lose our sense of self completely. Being ignored by others can be a real 'killer'.

6 Guidelines
People have a need for instruction and guidance, and not just when they're young. We sometimes feel insecure, and those who know how something is done are frequently consulted or are given positions of leadership. A direction or instruction can be passed on as a hint, suggestion, advice, task, or command. People who are well-informed tend to feel the need to get a grip on a situation, and therefore often take charge unprompted. Steering and guiding the power of others provides an enormous increase in one's potential to achieve things. And yet,

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[7] People also fulfill an important role by bringing others news. Whoever has new information, can easily become the center of attention in a variety of situations. This attention may also tempt people to start gossiping. The bearer of bad news, on the other hand, runs the risk of being identified with his message and having to bear the brunt of the aggression aroused by it.

many of us also enjoy being guided from time to time, and to adopt a dependent attitude. People can suffer from an oppressive sense of responsibility and fear of failure. In such cases, it can be a relief when another person takes charge.

2.3   Interaction mode, or How the Stakes are Used

Now that we have summarized the *stakes* of the relationship in the six categories above, it is time to consider the ways in which we can enter into the relationship, or the *interaction modes*. Although each interactional event is unique, some specific, general behaviors can be distinguished, such as *giving* and *receiving*. In general, it can be said that an interaction is clearer as its distinct actions are more easily recognized, and that the interaction is more obscure as there is more room for interpretation whether a particular action means one thing or another. For example, if someone requests something of me but at the same time makes it clear that I can't refuse, this causes confusion and I may start to wonder: 'Should I answer the question or meet the underlying requirement?' [8]

Ferdinand Cuvelier designed a coherent model for the various modes of relation: the 'relationship indicator'. He describes this model in detail in his book on the city of Axen. He states that each interaction has two possible points of departure:
- One can act from a sense of possessing one of the six transactional stakes (goods, proximity, care, information, person, guideline)
- One can react, i.e. experience oneself as the person towards whom the action is directed (the non-possessor), and respond to it by means of a reaction

A Possessor
The possessor, i.e. the person acting from a position of affluence or abundance, can take one of three courses of action, each of which has its own specific nature:
1. He can give from his possession
2. He can hold on to it
3. He can attack the other person with it

B Non-Possessor
The non-possessor, i.e. the person responding from a position of need or shortage, can also take one of three courses of action:
1. He can receive what is offered
2. He can passively submit to it
3. He can resist it

The six possibilities described above encompass the six different relation modes. We can illustrate these relation modes in a diagram, and use this diagram to map a person's position in any interaction.

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[8] It has been said that those who are exposed to mixed messages from an early age may learn to respond with schizophrenic behavior. (II)

De bezitter

De niet-bezitter
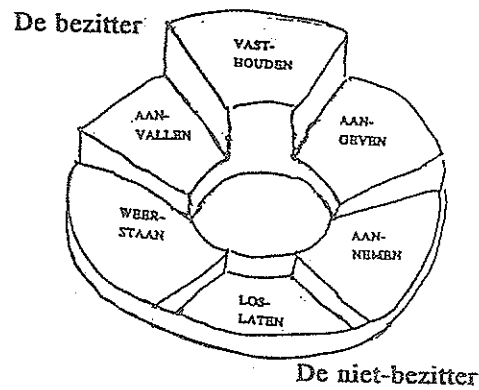
Cuvelier considers each of the six relation or interaction modes a specific cluster of energy: a force. To refer to these forces, he coined the Dutch term **axen**, derived from a combination of the Latin words alter (other) and actus (action).

The six animal symbols

To illustrate his model and make it easier to use and explain, Cuvelier assigned a particular animal symbol to each of the 'axen'. His model of interaction is definitely not just understandable for those with a lot of previous training, but can be made accessible to anyone who is interested.

Schildpad
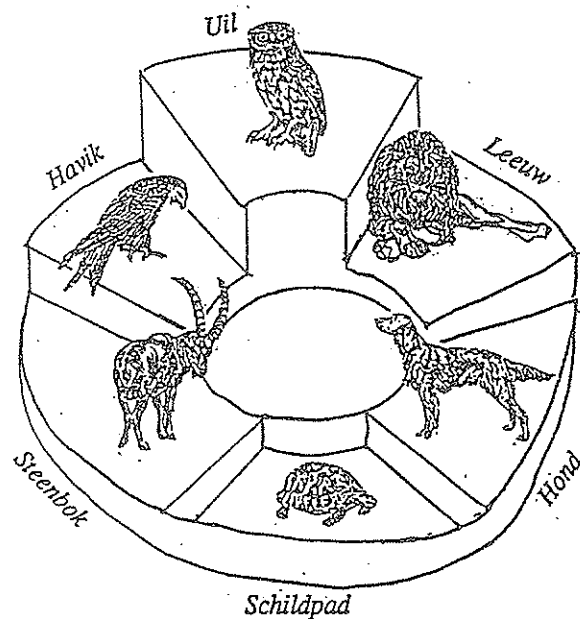
Below is a description of the six animals and the behaviors they symbolize. The three relation modes associated with possession (action modes) are discussed first, followed by the three relation modes associated with non-possession (reaction modes).[9]

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[9] Of course, communication is a circular process, a constant interplay between modes of action and reaction during which stakes are exchanged.
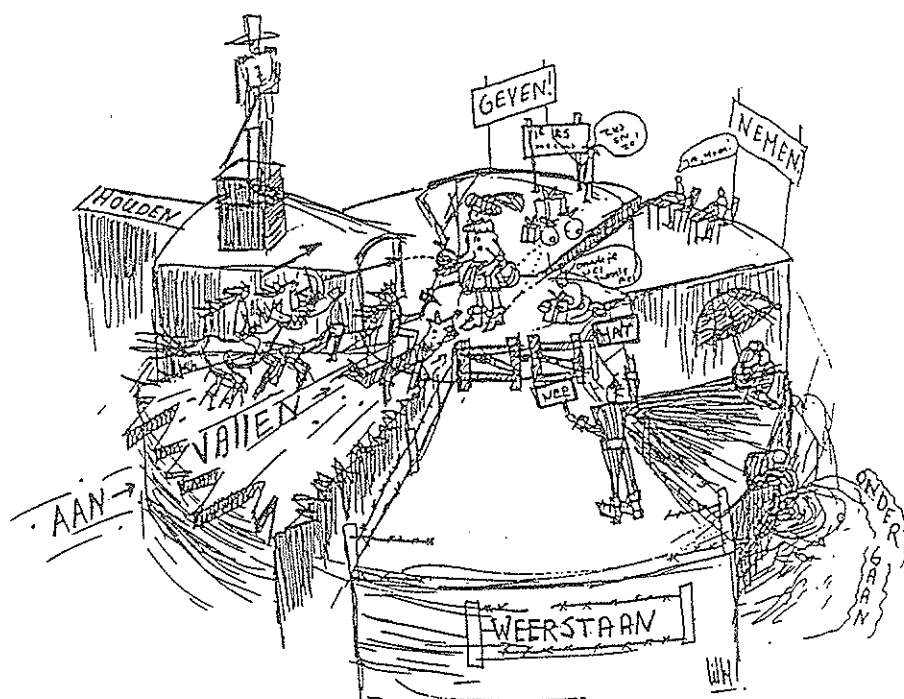
A The Possessor
1   Giving – the Lion

As the king of beasts, the lion symbolizes giving. This includes offering, providing, issuing, presenting, expressing, granting, etc. As is the case for the other animals, the specific verbs may vary depending on the stakes involved: information is provided, but care is given.

2 Holding on – the Owl

As a symbol of silence and wisdom, the owl stands for holding on. This includes keeping, keeping to oneself, withholding, not giving, collecting, keeping secrets, saving, keeping under consideration, hoarding, storing, removing oneself, etc.

3 Attacking – the Eagle

As a raptor, the eagle symbolizes attacking. This includes confronting, criticizing, expressing aggression, testing, challenging, destroying, fighting, forcing entry, grabbing, stealing, etc.

B The Non-Possessor
4 Receiving – the Dog

As man's best friend, the dog symbolizes receiving. This includes accepting, taking, agreeing, allowing, following, saying yes, imitating, idolizing, putting up with something, but also requesting and trying to obtain something, etc.

5   Submitting – the Turtle

Safe inside his shell, the turtle symbolizes submitting. This includes letting go, enduring, dropping the reins, letting things slide, withdrawing, avoiding, doubting, turning inwards upon oneself, letting things pass, lying low, hiding, avoiding decisions, etc.

6   Resisting – the Ram

The ram and his horns symbolize resisting. This includes fending off, protesting, not agreeing, securing one's turf, pushing away, saying no, refusing, etc.

2.4   Accommodating and Frustrating Pairs

Cutting across the distinction between 'possessors' and 'non-possessors', this model clearly contains three complementary pairs:

1   Cooperation

The lion-and-dog pair can be seen as a form of cooperation: their focus is on 'you and me together'.

2   Competition

The eagle-and-ram pair can be seen as a form of contest or competition: their focus is on 'either you or me', either my desires, plans, ideas, etc., or yours.

3   Control

The owl and the turtle have in common that they both focus on control: either in an inclusive fashion, i.e. I encompass you (for example, I'm taking you into consideration even though you're not aware of it), or in an exclusive fashion, i.e. I'm withdrawing from you.

The communication between these pairs is generally very clear: the relational pattern is obvious, and the participants know what to expect from one another.

There are of course numerous other options. You give, but I resist. You ask and I withdraw. You attack and so do I. Interactions like this are quite frustrating to us. The participants will often wonder what's gotten into the other person, and the mood will usually become negative until the air is cleared by means of meta-communication and a more harmonious mood can be found.

3.   LOGIC AND MYTH

3.1   A Topographical Analysis

No matter how complex human interactions may be, it is still possible to discover their underlying structure and to break this structure down into a number of basic elements. Cuvelier's model of interaction offers a tool that makes it possible to provide a 'topographical' description of patterns of communication and relation modes.

Needless to say, no analysis, however true-to-life it may be presented, can ever be a match for the infinite refinement of reality. The city of Axen is a model, and relates to reality like a street map is to a real city. As a map and a model of thinking, however, Cuvelier's book surpasses the level of a strictly rationalistic and logical analysis. Instead, it is a heartwarming invitation to the reader to start exploring by himself.

The work of Edmund Leach, a cultural anthropologist, focuses on analyzing cultural customs (12). He points out that the city is a unity of social space and time. In his opinion, this means that logic and myth are intimately connected in the city. This phenomenon has also been worked into Cuvelier's city.

The book describes the city's 'prehistory'. In addition, the city has a guide for its residents and visitors. This guide is ascribed to 'old Mandracite'. It contains thirty-six 'pieces of wisdom', one for each transactional/interactional combination. As an example of old Mandracite's texts, the following is a translation of what he says on the stake 'news', combined with the relation mode 'receiving', in condensed form:

'Receive the News'
When old Mandracite was told a story, he said:

I open my ear like a shell,
That I may hear the message of the sea.

I close my eyes,
To focus on the sound of the voice.

The melody, the meaning of the words,
The heartbeat underneath, the living rhythm...
I can feel something new being created in me.

In the silence of my listening,
New life finds fertile ground,
And takes root like seed in the womb.

Listening frees up space within me.
I can hear the murmur of the sea.
It flushes old sediments from my riverbed:
A new story remakes me as new.

I open my eyes and see the new color.
A new lifeblood flows deep within me,
New in scent and taste.

All this derives from him
Who speaks to me.
I should not by my own noise
Disturb this new life.[10]

(Respectfully adapted by Renée Oudijk)

3.2   The Power of the City
In his 'City of Axen', Ferdinand Cuvelier has developed a model of human interaction which encompasses both the economic, reciprocal transaction and the communicative interaction. He

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[10] Of course, myth does not conflict with logic only insofar as the reader tacitly subscribes to its principles and values.

uses the form of a novel, in which he appeals to the reader's reason through the logic of his model, while at the same time communicating with the reader's subconscious through mythic elements.

In all, he has succeeded in presenting his model of interaction in a very evocative manner. [11] Cuvelier offers his readers an excellent foundation for observing and mapping social behavior in a simple and orderly manner. His model makes it easy to identify a person's well-developed and less well-developed modes of interaction. The playful animal symbols and the objectifying nature of the street map also ensure that this model has a low threshold for self-analysis. The primary value which Cuvelier propagates in addition to all of the above is that the city has a central meeting place, where we can meet each other as well as ourselves.

The low threshold is also facilitated by the fact that Ferdinand Cuvelier never takes a judgmental stance. He does not follow the more common distinction between positive and negative, good and bad characteristics. Like Leary and Coffey, he approaches good and bad as an open or a contorted way of responding to the power of the 'axen' (was it not Wittgenstein who stated that evil stems from being blinded?). Getting caught up in the power of one of the axen and frantically trying to stand one's ground can be called a form of psychological dysfunction.

In the 1920s, the founding father of modern psychiatry, Harry Stack Sullivan, already pointed out that a healthy development of one's personality is inversely proportional to the number of drives that have come to lead a dissociated existence (13). In my opinion, this is the same as what Cuvelier states succinctly when he says that psychological illness means no longer being able to come together in the central meeting place.

3.3 To Conclude
In the central meeting place, valuing your own pronounced behaviors as strong points is not frowned upon. This has a liberating effect, particularly in comparison with the more common approach that overly frequent behaviors are something to be cured of.

For example, in the city of Axen, it is not considered problematical if somebody is particularly good at submitting. It may of course become problematical and even create an image of depression if someone uses this mode of interaction whether it is appropriate or not, and hardly uses the other modes to shape his or her relationships.

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[11] The book also contains an illustrative drawing of the city plan and a game designed to practice its principles.

Thus, the six stakes multiplied by the six modes of interaction can be seen as thirty-six communicative possibilities, thirty-six tools in one's interplay with others. Just as applies to a traditional tool kit, you can't create a masterpiece if you only have one or two tools to work with, and you'll have to expand your possibilities if the available options are inadequate to meet enough of your needs and desires.

It's a sign of social prudence as well as healthy self-interest to want to expand one's 'social tool kit'. In the interest of a more creative communication, it is moreover very valuable to be able to respond flexibly to the abilities and limitations of others.

The model of the city of Axen helps us, in our development as an individual, to gain independent insight into the impact of our abilities and limitations where social skills are concerned. This consciousness-raising process motivates us to continue participating with renewed enthusiasm in the game of human interaction. After all, this is the only way in which the quality of the interplay can improve: a positive orientation towards one's self that helps to fully embrace one's own responsibility.

Much remains to be said, but the interested reader will no doubt want to read the book first-hand. Each person in his or her own way, as each person is unique. On the other hand, we are fortunately also similar enough to be able to identify with others in many ways. This creates a bond between us as inhabitants of the Global Village, and ensures that the social sciences with their often one-sided appeal to reason do not have to alienate us from the deeper reality of our human existence.

Renée Oudijk, Brunssum 1991
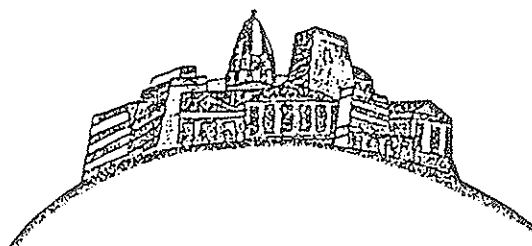
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