A

propriately for an Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapist, Marcel Duclos’ book is made up of many different parts. It references people and topics as diverse as William James, Antonio Damasio, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, the Chiron body psychotherapy school, and the Kabbalah of Jewish mysticism. It looks at advanced old age, affect regulation, and alchemy.

This diversity has a central idea at its core: the self. The self is one of the key concepts in IFS, alongside the need to welcome all “parts” (equivalent to subpersonalities, aspects, etc.) of the client. To better understand and connect with our many parts, IFS encourages access to our “Self” – a coordinating center that brings healing and “can and should lead the individual’s internal system (IFS Institute, n.d.).”

Duclos wants to go a step further with this concept. His search for the elusive Self divides it into three interrelated aspects with differing quantities of capitalization: the self, the Self, and the SELF.

If you read this book, you’ll see a lot of these varying capitalizations, and quite a few definitions of them, too. They serve as ways into something that is necessarily difficult to define in any concrete way. But, for Duclos, this trinity is worth looking for, or drawing out, as it adds a new level of insight beyond the use of the singular self.

So, what do the three terms mean? One of his more straightforward explanations is:

■ **self** = “the me, the ego, the I”
■ **Self** = “the self that functions through the wisdom-qualities of the SELF”
■ **SELF** = “the archetypal Imago Dei, the Other, the Source, that transcends the multiplicity manifest in the trinity of mind, brain, and body” (p. 201).

Or, following a discussion of Jung and mystical Judaism, there’s:

“Through awareness, the self consciously transforms into a Self, existing through and by the SELF’s energies. It is the person’s life’s task to effect a separation from the self’s original unconscious identification to an eventual conscious relationship with the SELF that creates a third entity, the Self. A trinity within” (p. 65).

Or the more esoteric:

“As the SELF gives birth to the self, the self enters the crucible of transformation and becomes the Self who incarnates the SELF into the post-paradisiacal world, thus giving the ALL, the IT, God, an opportunity to heal the broken and burdened by experiencing the cost of healing the IT’s OWN CREATION.” (p. 126).

Like the IFS practitioner, you can perhaps get a flavor of some of Duclos’ other parts from these explanations. They include the young New England theology graduate student enthused by the work of Jung, the professor of psychology and philosophy, and the Core Energetics–trained prac-
titioner working with soma as well as psyche. Looking back at over fifty years of study and prac-
tice, Duclos’ aim in this book is to examine how his three-self model, and IFS itself, can be seen
to connect with, be informed by, or further inform, the work and concepts of practitioners and
theorists, past and present. He also reflects on own work and life, with autobiographical asides on
some of the at times painful learning experiences that have informed who he is today.

Both these shared experiences and the range of thought and subject matter covered help give this
book a wider audience than just IFS practitioners. Those without an IFS background might do well
to brush up on some of the basic terminology of the practice, as we’re quite quickly dropped into a
fairly deep end. But, while Duclos obviously sees IFS as something of a pinnacle in terms of current
therapeutic modalities, he also notes it as one of many, and his insights have relevance to other
practitioners working in a similarly aligned way.

While some of the territory and nature of this inquiry felt new to me, my reading soon settled into
its own rhythm. I found myself interestingly following down the many paths presented, encoun-
tering some fascinating books and new angles on established thinkers. These are quoted frequent-
ly alongside Duclos’ comments in a form of exegesis or critical interpretation, and many times
I found myself highlighting authors, and wanting to take my own extended journeys into some
of the works he mentions. The way individual sections fit together occasionally felt confusing or
fragmented, but the bigger picture, the felt sense of the work, seemed cohesive, led by the warm
spirit of Duclos’ generous, inclusive inquiry.

The sheer number of different topics covered and quoted makes this a difficult work to summa-
rize, but readers of this journal may be particularly interested in what Duclos has to say about
body psychotherapy. In Chapter 12, “Somatic Psychotherapy and the Self,” he selects a few of his
many influences to discuss in this context.

He sees an “amicable, creative relationship” between IFS and body psychotherapy, something
that is being made more explicit by the Somatic IFS of Susan McConnell, which is concerned with
the embodiment of self as part of the healing process.

He discusses John Pierrakos and his concept of the Core: “the source of our being... our divine
connection to universal forces,” which gives access to our “higher self” (p. 156). There is a com-
mentary (p.164) on some of the more “enigmatic” statements from Stanley Keleman’s book Your
Body Speaks Its Mind: Expanding Our Selves (1975), praising his “anti-dualistic” understanding of
human nature, musing on pulsation, and considering connections with religious experience as
explored by William James.

A brief look at Linda Hartley’s writing in Contemporary Body Psychotherapy: The Chiron Approach
(2009) connects Reich’s trust of the organism’s inherent capacity for self-regulation and wellbe-
ing with the IFS trust in the regulatory nature of the Self, and the inherent positive intent of our
various parts.

Particularly resonant was an analysis of John Conger’s book, The Body in Recovery: Somatic Psycho-
therapy and the Self (1994). Conger is a Jungian analyst and body psychotherapist, and this book
helped Duclos “bridge the psychosomatic world” in his personal and professional life while in
Core Energetics training (p. 178).

For Conger, embodiment means “not perfect health but rather a consciousness of wholeness and
relatedness, a standing in the center of many polarities as an inventive curious presence in a state
of spontaneous play.” In response to the “psychic injury” of interpersonal trauma (essentially a
“crushed rebellion, a voice of protest reduced to silence”), therapists need to foster the client’s
“embodiment, [that] capacity to bring diverse internal and external elements into an organiza-
tion called the Self” (Conger, 1994, p. 199). This sense of Self becomes something that can be
trusted to endure, no matter the difficulties of the present, which knows that it is related to oth-
ers, and knows that it is part of nature and life itself.

In Conger’s writing, Duclos says that he can hear “the strains of Jamesian music, Jung’s sym-
phonic elegance, the Jazz of body-psychotherapy modalities, the IFS sonatas.” It’s an apt de-
scription of Duclos’ book as a whole, too. It contains many different styles of music perhaps, but
music all the same.
Adam Bambury is a relational body psychotherapist who lives and works in London, UK.
Email: adambtherapy@gmail.com
Web: www.innerflametherapy.co.uk

REFERENCES