

EDITORIAL

CLOSURE AND NEW START: PAST AND FUTURE PUBLICATIONS ON DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY

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Taking into account recent developments in the publication activity on Dialogical Self Theory (DST) and the publication needs of our authors, my co-editors, Jaan Valsiner, Eugenie Georgaca, Vincent Hevern and I, have decided to close the *International Journal for Dialogical Science* (IJDS) and to cooperate with another, more established journal. To our delight, the editors of the *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* (JCP), Robert Neimeyer, Jon Raskin, and David Winter and we as IJDS editors, decided on a merger of the JCP and the IJDS. As a start of this merger, the JCP has created a special section of the journal for the submission and publication of DST-related articles. I will explain the reasons behind the decision to merge and take the opportunity to look back at what the IJDS has achieved and what its function has been. At the same time, I use this decision as a welcome opportunity to reflect on some recent developments in the DST network and some needs for future perspectives.

What has the IJDS achieved?

Since the IJDS was launched in 2004 the journal has published 128 articles. The majority of them were parts of special issues and a minority were published as independent articles. Some space was reserved for the publication of book reviews. Our usual procedure as editors has been to invite recognized authors in the field to function as guest editors and to provide them with the opportunity of bringing together a group of authors around a topic relevant to DST. Part of our strategy was to complement main papers with commentaries in order to stimulate fertile discussions. In this way, the IJDS has served as a productive platform for the publication and evaluation of a diversity of theoretical and research papers that have significantly contributed to the discussion and elaboration of DST and to linking this theory with adjacent fields of inquiry (see under Archives). However, despite the scientific relevance of the papers and their stimulating variety, the total number of publications were not high enough to permit inclusion in

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scholarly indexes, an apparent obstacle for many interested researchers to publish their papers in the IJDS. This brings me to clarify the advantages of the merger of the two journals.

The advantages of merging IJDS and JCP

The editors of both journals believe that such collaboration carries significant advantages for both parties. For the IJDS it secures the academic credibility of a longstanding peer reviewed journal (JCP is now in its 28th year), which publishes in an online-first format, followed by print archiving of contents on a quarterly basis. Thus, JCP offers the advantages of searchable online content open to essentially all relevant scholarly indexes in a rapid publication format and combines this with the traditional respectability of print publication. Perhaps most relevantly, *JCP* is ‘bundled’ with dozens or hundreds of other social science journals in its marketing and subscription to countless university libraries throughout the world, giving it limitless reach internationally. Such activities are guided by Taylor & Francis, the parent company for JCP, and one of the world's leading academic publishers.

Publications in the JCP are given the credibility of an indexed, peer-reviewed journal that ‘counts’ toward tenure and promotion--increasingly a necessity in virtually all developed nations, and very prominently so in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and many Asian nations. Moreover, the merger offers the convenience of manuscript review management through ScholarOne, which is among the most popular and flexible editorial platforms in the world.

The merger has the additional advantage that it broadens the readership of DST scholarship beyond the already broad bounds of the field, by bringing it to the attention of a wide range of social constructionist, constructivist, postmodern and narrative scholars from a variety of disciplines. It also opens the possibility of joint conferences, which can promote more vigorous interchange between the two fields. The first example of such a conference is the *10th International Conference on the Dialogical Self* (13-16 June, 2018, in Braga, Portugal) as a joint enterprise of the International Society for Dialogical Science (ISDS) and the Constructivist Psychology Network.

In order to give a workable form to the merger, the editors of both journals agreed to create a specific co-editorship for DST and to include a special DST section mentioned in the masthead of the journal. With pleasure I have accepted the offer to serve as first DST co-editor. In this position I’m dedicated to prepare the publication of articles and special issues devoted to DST themes.

The editors of the journals have also considered to change the name of the journal. Although this was not impossible, it might be a harder sell to stakeholders. Actually, one of the greatest hesitation about a name change might arise with the publisher, for two reasons: JCP has carried its present name for almost 25 years, and

CLOSURE AND NEW START

has built up some level of ‘brand’ recognition. So, for the time being, we decided to include a DST section in the journal but not or not yet to change its name.

For the JCP too this collaboration has some advantages. It enriches the already considerable contributions of DST to the journal's content, both in standard issues and occasional special issues. It will increase the ‘paper flow’ of diverse high quality manuscripts and will augment the editorial presence of DST scholars on the board of the journal. It will broaden the readership of constructivist work and the subscription base for the journal and it opens the prospect of joint conferences, as noted above. It also permits consideration of increasing substantially the page allocation to the journal, to which the publisher is fully receptive.

The need of coherence in the DST field

For clarifying purposes, I place the past activities of the IJDS in the broader context of recent developments, materialized in publications that were released parallel to those appearing in the IJDS. I mention a few of them.

A landmark publication was the first *Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory*, edited by Hermans and Gieser (2012), that brought together researchers and practitioners from 15 countries, who together wrote 29 chapters in three sections: theory, method, and practical applications. Due to its openness and diversity of fields of application, DST is subjected to strong decentralizing forces with the result that different researchers, working in different (sub)disciplines, countries or cultures are working in isolation from each other. Therefore, handbooks and other comprehensive works serve as centralizing forces that help to create the necessary theoretical coherence.

The same coherence argument motivated Konopka, Hermans, and Goncalves (2019) to prepare the *Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory in Psychotherapy: Bridging between Schools and Cultures*. This book demonstrates how DST as a ‘bridging theory’ is capable of demonstrating that very different therapeutic schools (e.g., cognitive therapy, Gestalt therapy, psychoanalysis, emotion-focused therapy, mindfulness therapy, and even native American therapy) share basic features that can be elucidated by DST, opening the possibility of moving from one to another therapy along DST channels. This book is written as a ‘successor’ of the earlier work *The Dialogical Self in Psychotherapy*, edited by Hermans and Dimaggio (2004).

A collection of DST studies in education was published in the book *The Dialogical Self in Education: A Multicultural Perspective*, edited by Meijers and Hermans (2017). In this work a group of scholars demonstrate how theoretical and practical innovations emerge at the highly fertile interface of internal and external dialogues. At the same time this book presents a dialogical alternative to the traditionally dominant monological education. For the relationship between self and

learning see also the book *Interplays between Dialogical Learning and Dialogical Self*, edited by Ligorio and Cesar (2012).

Apparently, there is not one method that is uniformly used by different DST researchers and practitioners. Rather than working with one commonly accepted procedure, investigators employ a multiplicity of DST-informed methods which strongly vary, contingent on their different research questions, populations, cultures, or practical settings. Therefore, I made an attempt to bring together a variety of methods in the book *Assessing and Stimulating a Dialogical Self in Groups, Teams, Cultures, and Organizations* (Hermans, 2016).

Over the years, I heard reviewers and authors emphasizing the need for a developmental basis of the dialogical self. A very welcome contribution to this topic was provided by the book *Dialogic Formations: Investigations into the Origins and Development of the Dialogical Self*, edited by Bertau, Goncalves, and Raggatt (2012).

DST is not only a dialogical but also a narrative theory, referring to people's capacity of telling different stories from different *I*-positions, a capacity that even enables them to tell a more or less coherent narrative about themselves from a meta-position. In her book *Narrative Psychology: Identity, Transformation, and Ethics*, Julia Vassilieva (2016) sketches the 'narrative turn' in psychology and portrays three main theoretical approaches, those from Dan McAdams in the USA, Michael White and David Epston in Australia, and Hubert Hermans in Europe.

The affinity of DST with psychoanalysis has received welcome attention in the book *Jungian and Dialogical Self Perspectives*, edited by Jones and Morioka (2011). It has not only presented commonalities and differences between the two approaches but also showed what and how they can learn from each other.

An application of DST to the field of religion was provided by the book *Religious Voices in Self-Narratives*, edited by Marjo Buitelaar and Hetty Zock. In this work religious *I*-positions were investigated from both narrative and dialogical points of view.

These books are just a few examples that contribute to bringing some degree of coherence in DST-informed activities. In my view, this coherence is necessary as a counter-force to the distributive tendencies inherent in the theory as a general and encompassing conceptual framework, open to applications in a large variety groups, cultures, organizations, each with their specific questions, traditions, and values.

Special issues

A series of special issues were not only published in the IJDS but, in parallel, also in other international scientific journals:

CLOSURE AND NEW START

1. *Culture and Psychology*, 2001, 7 (3).
2. *Theory and Psychology*, 2002, 12 (2).
3. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 2003, 16 (2).
4. *Identity. An international Journal of Theory and Research*, 2004, 4 (4).
5. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 2006, 19 (1).
6. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 2008, 21 (3).
7. *Theory & Psychology*, 2010, 20 (3).
8. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2012 (137).
9. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 2013, 26 (2).
10. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 2018, 31 (1).

As this overview shows, the highest number of special issues were published in JCP, which was an extra reason to seek for a merger with this journal.

International Conferences on the Dialogical Self

A few years before the International Society for Dialogical Science (ISDS) launched the IJDS, my colleagues and me started to organize a series of biennial *International Conferences on the Dialogical Self*. The intention was to provide an opportunity for scientists and practitioners to present new ideas and share their research and experiences with each other, across countries and disciplines. Typically, the conferences brought together participants from more than 30 countries. Here is an overview of conferences, countries, and organizers:

- First Conference (2000), Nijmegen, The Netherlands, organized by Michael Katzko.
- Second Conference (2002), Ghent, Belgium, organized by Leni Verhofstadt-Deneve.
- Third Conference (2004), Warsaw, Poland, organized by Katarzyna Stemplewska and Piotr Oles.
- Fourth Conference (2006), Braga, Portugal, organized by Miguel Goncalves.
- Fifth Conference (2008), Cambridge, UK, organized by Alex Gillespie and Tania Zittoun.
- Sixth Conference (2010), Athens, Greece, organized by Stavros Charalampides.
- Seventh Conference (2012), Athens, Georgia, USA, organized by Bob Fecho.

HERMANS

- Eighth Conference (2014), The Hague, Netherlands, organized by Frans Meijers.
- Ninth Conference (2016), Lublin, Poland, organized by Piotr Oles.
- Tenth Conference (2018), Braga, Portugal, organized by Miguel Goncalves.

The conferences serve as a fertile playground for the creation of new ideas, many of which have led to innovative publications in the IJDS and other journals.

Central concepts of Dialogical Self Theory

In a most succinct way the dialogical self can be conceived of as a dynamic multiplicity of *I*-positions which together function as a society of mind, intimately interconnected with the minds of other people. As such, the *I* emerges from its intrinsic contact with the (social) environment and is bound to particular positions in time and space. As such the embodied *I* has the possibility to move from one position to the other in accordance with changes in situation and time. The central concept, *I*-position, is a spatio-temporal and relational act. It can only exist in the context of other positions (e.g., *I* position myself as defensive towards an attacking other and as cooperative towards a loving other). In the act of *I*-positioning, one is placing oneself vis-à-vis somebody else and, at the same time, toward oneself in the metaphorical space of the self. As a spatial-relational process the self is taking a stance toward somebody else, either physically or virtually, and addresses the other and oneself via verbal or non-verbal orientations and communications (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

The central concept of *I*-position does not only refer to the *I* as ‘I myself’ but also to the significant other (and even a significant thing, see later) as ‘another I’. Around this center, a number of dynamic and flexible concepts are structured. From a spatial point of view, positioning forms a pair with counter-positioning. From a temporal point of view, positioning is followed by repositioning. The dialogical self receives its organization by the workings of meta-positions and promoter positions, that help to prevent the self from becoming disorganized or fragmented. Liberation from the continuous stream of positioning, counter-positioning, and repositioning becomes possible via forms of depositioning (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka) (for a more complete overview of DST concepts and their definitions, see the Glossary in Hermans (2018)).

Three basic features of Dialogical Self Theory

Taking into account the many and variegated contributions to the DST field during the past 25 years, I consider three features of DST as particularly characteristic: its generativity, flexibility, and bridging potential. It is a *generative* theory in the sense that it functions as a fertile ground for the creation of new ideas, stimulation of innovative research, construction of new methods, and the development of theory-

guided practices. The striking variety of phenomena studied by DST scholars, as expressed by several hundreds of scientific articles and books in the past 25 years witnesses this generativity (Stam, 2010).

DST is also a *flexible* theory: the central concepts can be combined in a variety of different ways so that widely different phenomena fall within its horizon of study and in its field of application. This flexibility is demonstrated by the countless studies that focus on combinations of DST with any other theory or practical approach. Sometimes, I compare the theory with the Chinese tangram puzzle that consists of a limited number of basic shapes that can be combined to form a variety of new shapes. In this comparison, the basic shapes represent the concepts of the theory whereas the new shapes refer to the variety of phenomena that fall within its range of application.

The *bridging* potential of the theory is reflected by its potential to link different fields of study and by its capacity to be applied in a diversity of (sub)disciplines and to a variety of topics of interest, not limited by any limited research tradition or demarcated practice (for overview of fields of application, see Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 19-20). As a bridging theory DST aims to connect and link theories that are often investigated in splendid isolation from each other, or even considered to be contradictive. On the level of practice DST has proven its viability and fertility in three domains of application: education, culture, and psychotherapy (see the books on these topics mentioned above).

Three future directions

For future research, I consider three fields of study not only as highly significant but even strongly needed: nonverbal dialogue, the neuroscientific basis of the dialogical self, and the emergence of hybrid combinations of persons and things.

In his preface of a special issue on self and dialogue, Stam (2010) already proposed that future studies on self and dialogue devote attention not only to what is said but also to what is not said. Indeed, as well-known, in face-to-face communication *non-verbal cues*, including body-language, are even more influential than verbal aspects. However, up till now the latter ones are largely neglected in DST research and methods (for notable exceptions, see the Composition method, Konopka & Beers, 2014, and Gieser's, 2006, research on 'shape shifting').

Another often raised question which I heard over the years was: What is the *neurological* basis of the dialogical self? A preliminary answer to this question was given by Lewis (2002) and by Schore (1994). In my book *Society in the Self: A Theory of Identity in Democracy* (Hermans, 2018), one full chapter is dedicated to the neurological basis of the dialogical self as a positional theory. This is in agreement with Raggatt (2012) who emphasized that any dialogical self theory should take the concepts

of position and positioning as its conceptual basis. Future studies may profit from studying positioning, dialogue and brain in their interdependency.

Finally, there is one development that, to my knowledge, has not received any systematic attention from DST scholars, whereas it is giving form to our daily lives and will do so even more in the future: the emergence of *hybrids* of people and things, a societal and technological change with far reaching implications for the functioning of the dialogical self. Increasingly, the organization of our everyday world is unthinkable without the workings of sophisticated software and the advanced technology of machines, computers, and smartphones that are co-constructing, and sometimes even replacing, our memory, thinking, imagination, language, knowledge, and even our creativity. This technology has the consequence that the traditional dichotomy between people and things are put into question with the result that, in a rapid pace, our selves become populated by a diversity of ‘hybrid *I*-positions’. In future studies, dialogical relationships with *I*-positions of a hybrid nature need attention from DST researchers in a world in which the boundaries between humans and things are becoming increasingly blurred. Present and future *I*-positions are, in the form of hybrids, invited to participate in a ‘parliament of things’ (Mallavarapu & Prasad, 2006).

Finally

As editor-in-chief of the IJDS I experienced a great pleasure of cooperating with some eminent scholars who were willing to function as co-editors of this journal and who gave their best efforts to creating an open platform for the creation of many stimulating ideas: Eugenie Georgaca, Giancarlo Dimaggio, Jaan Valsiner, and Vincent Hevern. For his creation of a publication channel and for his invaluable contribution as managing editor of the journal, I want to thank Vincent Hevern in particular as he has done an enormous job over the years to make this journal work. I wish to express also my gratitude also to the editors of JCP, Robert Neimeyer, David Winter, and Jon Raskin who opened the doors of their journal for future DST-related publications and discussions.¹

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¹ For the foreseeable future, an archive of the complete IJDS will continue to be available online at the current website: <<http://ijds.lemoyne.edu/index.html>>. We are committed to arranging for a permanent archive for the journal to ensure its availability for future scholars and are actively exploring options to achieve that aim.

CLOSURE AND NEW START

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