

**LOOKING AT “MEANING AS MOVEMENT” IN DEVELOPMENT:  
INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL ORIGINS  
OF THE DIALOGICAL SELF**

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**ABSTRACT.** Introducing the articles of the second issue of the *IJDS*, this article first sketches the notion of the Dialogical Self (DS) and then turns to the challenging question of conceiving and investigating DS regarding its developmental origins, be it ontogenetically in observing caregiver-infant exchanges or microgenetically in studies tracing actual changes in the dynamic “landscape of the self”. A second, more implicit challenge is identified at the level of the basic concepts: dialogicality and dialogues, insofar as these have to be thought of in regard to development. Dialogicality turns out to be central, and as working definition the authors propose to see dialogicality as a potency, meaning an expectation of the other's addressivity to oneself. The relationships between dialogicality and language are briefly explored: given dialogicality as potency, language is a complex, semiotized form of realized dialogicality.

**Keywords:** dialogue, dialogicality, dialogical self, language

As invited editors we are very pleased to present this second issue devoted to the developmental origins of the dialogical self (DS). In the spirit of dialogicality and of the interdisciplinarity of the journal it was our explicit intention to invite contributors from “within” as well as from “without” the DS Theory - as it articulates itself in its conferences taking place every other year. The exchange of perspectives and the discussion of different readings of similar phenomena is not only enriching for DS Theory in itself but also as an opening of this theory to other views. Thus, possibly confronted with other readings and interpretations, DS Theory gains the possibility to develop itself in an open and truly dialogical way. As editors with the privilege of reading and commenting on the contributions and thus *dialoguizing* with all persons writing for this issue, we have to admit that we were the first ones to reap the dialogical fruits: each contribution is the result of extensive dialogues. For that, we have to thank all contributors for their willingness and patience to engage in these dialogues. It is our hope that the outcome, not least due to the commentaries given to each article, will read

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as a reflection of these dialogical movements – clearly positioned and nonetheless open to further discussions.

### **The Dialogical Self**

The notion of the DS was first proposed by Hermans and colleagues (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, 1996, 2001). It builds from two contributions: the self psychology of William James (1902) and George Herbert Mead (1934), and the dialogical view of language proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1986). The DS notion starts with a conception of the self as multifaceted, but more important multivoiced and dialogical. The polyphonic novel from Bakhtin (1984) was the metaphor for this view of the self: a novel where there is “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices ... What unfolds in his novels [Dostoevsky’s novels] is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with his own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the events he depicts” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.6). The dialogicality of the self is defined in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions which can be endowed with a voice in the landscape of the mind. Positions are thought to be internal as well as external (belonging to the extended domain of the self such as my wife, my colleagues, my enemy); dialogues may take place among internal positions, between internal and external and between external positions (see Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007, for new applications of the theory in the globalized reality). In this, the linguistic basis of self-understanding is recognized, and in relating the concept of the DS to Bakhtin's concept of language, Hermans and Kempen, 1993 highlight the dialogical quality of the *forms* that self-understanding is taking. The dialogical form is then thought to characterize the dynamics of selfhood.

This dynamic perspective on selfhood has proven itself to be one of the most promising ways to surpass the old static conceptions of self which viewed the self as a monadic structure capable of relating with other monadic structures (Sampson, 1993), but still each independent from the other. The reality of the individual self was, in this sense, different from the reality of relationships. DS Theory brings relations and interaction patterns to the core of the self. Self and others are two faces of the same coin: the self only exists as it relates to other selves, whom exist as they relate to other selves, and so on. The “self-concept” is thus also defined by the matrix of relationships in which the person is involved: the reality of the self *is* the reality of relationships. This brings to the core of the self a reality dominated by relational and dynamic processes. Between different I-positions (internal and external) relationships marked by tension, agreement, disagreement and conflict are happening incessantly and the meaning-making activities result precisely from these dynamic relations, both at level of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. Thus, understanding how these dynamic

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relations occur and what rules are governing their development is an important theoretical problem that needs to be addressed.

### **The Development of the Dialogical Self**

By its dynamic nature, this perspective on the self, poses a considerable challenge: we do not only have a new vocabulary to describe self processes (e.g., I-positions; dialogical relations) but, more importantly, we need to develop tools to study its dynamicity (see Valsiner, 2006). This brings us necessarily to the field of development, be it in terms of ontogenesis or of microgenesis. Undoubtedly, one of the most challenging questions for DS Theory at present is how to conceive and investigate the origins of the DS: how to retrace the ontogenetical becoming of the complex dynamical landscape of self (i.e. ontogenetic research). This reconstruction is fruitfully supplemented by studies that track the dynamical transformations in an already formed self (i.e. micro-genetic research). Both perspectives need a moment-by-moment observation of formation and transformation processes in order to account for identity formation and psychological change. Taking both of these perspectives into consideration corresponds to a view of development as a process going beyond the formative years and happening throughout the life-span; moreover, development reaches into the next generation: “development encompasses the entire manifold of the life course, from conception to death, and into the next generation. Children become parents in their own time, and novelties introduced in one generation can become traditions of the next.” (The Carolina Consortium on Human Development, 1996, p. 5). This statement points to the socio-cultural situatedness of any development, to its historicity as well as its cultural and individual (family) dimensions.

It is in this perspective that the present special issue addresses the question of origins. Thus, the investigations by *Maria Lyra* and by *Andrea Garvey and Alan Fogel* focus on the ontogenesis of self, observing dialogical patterns between infants and caregivers. One important challenge addressed by these studies is how to research the developmental processes of the DS prior to the development of language and how this pre-verbal self is already founded in dialogicality, structuring the way for patterns of dialogical movements in future development. This is one of the issues taken up in the commentaries on these contributions. Thus, *Dankert Vedeler* discusses in his comment on Garvey and Fogel the acquisition of the concept of dialogue in the relational-historical approach to the development of emotion and self (according to Fogel, 2001). *Chris Sinha*, acknowledging in his comment Lyra's methodological innovation and her careful analysis, insists nevertheless on the important distinction between the precursors of the semiotic function and its earliest manifestations.

Seeking origins is asking for development and its conditions, its significant moments. It is of course also asking for causality, although in a very prudent way – especially in the case of disturbances in the development of the DS as addressed by

*Filippo Muratori and Sandra Maestro* in their article devoted to autism, interpreted by the authors in the context of deficits in primary intersubjectivity. The commentaries on this article by both *John Barresi* and *Livia Colle and Elisa Grandi* refute the (sole) psychosocial explanation related to founding intersubjectivity and refer to neurologically based processing deficits, resulting in the failure to engage in intersubjective activities.

These ontogenetically oriented investigations are followed by three theoretical contributions. Thus, *Marie-Cécile Bertau* is concerned with the notion of voice as a central one to DS Theory. Taking an ontogenetical perspective on this concept, Bertau offers a model of how the experienced voice of a significant other becomes the foundation of inner positions, whereby the process of interiorization is central. *Per Linell* focuses in his comment on Bertau, three dimensions of voice – material embodiment of utterances, personal signature, and perspectives on topics – and ends up asking several questions concerning the relationship between internal and external voice usages. The discourse related to the very concept of internalization is critically discussed by *Noah Susswein, Maximilian Bibok and Jeremy Carpendale* who refute the way internalization as a concept has been used in our theoretical constructions, suggesting instead the concept of “mastery” to account for the relation between social and psychological phenomena in development: children have to succeed in mastering the selection pressures in their social environment. Such mastery involves “following routines, obeying rules, observing social etiquette, coming to agreement and disagreeing, etc.” (Susswein et al., this issue, p. 194). Cognitive development in ontogenesis is seen in parallel to evolutionary environments which select a valid mutation; thus, the authors finally argue that the mind is not dialogical in itself, rather, its makeup is defined and constructed in a context defined by selection pressures of social interaction. *Jaan Valsiner*, in his comment on Susswein and colleagues, offers an alternative reading with a model of interiorization called “laminal model of internalization/externalization”. Both contributions and their respective views on internalization are finally picked up by *Michael Bamberg and Barbara Zielke* in addressing the question of where to look in developmental inquiries. In her comment on this contribution, *Gabriele Lucius-Hoene* points to the concept of dialogicality and questions its empirical status, highlighting an important issue: is the dialogical self a generative metaphor or *the* reality of the self? Arguing for the study of “everyday [dialogical] practices where a sense of self is continuously under construction” (p. 239), Bamberg and Zielke offer a bridge to the closing contributions concerned with dialogues between adults.

The microgenetically oriented investigations by *Filipa Duarte and Miguel Gonçalves* as well as by *Carla Cunha* are concerned with the dynamics of change observable not in everyday discourse but in *provoked* dialogues between researchers and participants. To take this procedure and its consequences into consideration is in

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our opinion one of the most important question DS theory should reflect on, a window opened by *Livia Simão* in her comment on Duarte and Gonçalves. In short, the question is asked what kinds of effects on the dialogicality of the self, on its dialogical configuration, will result from the explicit invitation to engage a dialogue with a listener about self positions this listener assumes to be in a dialogue. Eventually, it is to ask about the formative role of language for the self. These microgenetic investigations show in an impressive way the processes by which new positions and voices are balanced or unbalanced with the familiar ones, sometimes creating stability and at other times allowing changes, be it temporary or more permanent.

### **Conceptual Clarifications: Dialogicality and Dialogism**

A second and perhaps more implicit challenge present in this issue concerns the basic notions different scholars and researchers are using: dialogues and dialogicality has to be conceived in a developmental perspective. Overviewing the contributions, it becomes obvious that the notion of dialogicality is implicitly at the center of discussion. Dialogues - as well as dialogical patterns - gain their theoretical and methodological status from there. In what follows we propose first a definition of dialogicality from which dialogues and dialogism will derive, and then proceed to the developmental perspective on dialogicality as the core notion.

Before developing the specific understanding of dialogicality here proposed, it should be underlined that there exists within the field of dialogical science different directions of theorizing, and thus different conceptions of dialogicality. This is not only because this field is highly interdisciplinary, bringing together quite different perspectives on human beings, but also because of its relative newness. The reformulation of basic psychological notions and theories in terms of a dialogic and semiotic framework is in no way achieved<sup>1</sup>, and the reformulations are themselves evolving – not the least through vivid discussions.

As an illustration, two approaches may be pointed at briefly, the second one reflecting a quite different position to the one we are embracing here. First, Lewis (2002) suggests a “neurally realistic model of the dialogical self” and postulates different mental states, ranging from “vague, gist-like sensations to articulated words or phrases” and thus different in degrees of articulation at which “motor (speaking) and perceptual (hearing) events are taking place” (2002, p.179). Lewis assumes a kind of basic dialogical attitude which may be unfolded, but may also remain global and unspecified, un-articulated in terms of positions and thus not manifest as dialogues.<sup>2</sup> This dialogical attitude develops itself into genuine dialogues when problems are encountered – Lewis' example is a woman miscooking her rice. A similar situation,

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1 See Sinha (this issue) in regard to “a recasting of classical genetic epistemology”.

2 A more detailed discussion of Lewis' approach is to be found in Bertau (2004).

requiring problem-solving skills, can be seen in participants solving the Raven's test (Bertau, 1999). But going further, to another kind of problem, namely facing situations of danger, one may ask if the basic dialogical attitude is still functioning. Dimaggio and Hermans (submitted), in dealing precisely with these kinds of situations, and, more generally, with short-term emotional reactions, reject any dialogicality in these reactions. Emotions can be for these authors a form of appraisal, involving peculiar action readiness modes, for example flight in the case of fear; thus, emotions do not necessarily imply another position to whom the self may talk.

Two questions derive from these – far too brief – sketches. First, to what degree of explicitness do dialogues have to be manifested before we may assume dialogicality? Related to this: Is a manifestation in dialogues required at all? Second, does dialogicality of the self (the starting model) apply equally to all and every psychological process? The conceptual clarification we propose can not answer these questions but may open the way to discuss dialogicality as a core concept. It is in this sense that the following suggestions are made.

In terms of a proposed definition, dialogicality means that human expressions are in interrelationships with other's expressions: any single expression, such as a spoken utterance, a written text, a thought (even if not yet exteriorized) is a reply to other's utterances, texts or ideas. In this sense, dialogicality refers to a property that is essential in all human meaning-making processes. Thus, it underlies and determines all psychological and communicative structures and processes. Linell (in preparation) goes beyond the level of expression and addresses the human condition: “The term dialogicality (...) refers to some essence of the human condition, notably that our being in the world is thoughtfully interdependent with the existence of others.”

Extending this view on dialogicality as belonging to human expression, one may also assume certain *artifacts* to be dialogical. Insofar as some objects are ascribed dialogical properties (Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007) they become “dialogical objects” (Bertau, 2007); to the extent that some objects in our culture invite self-dialogue, one may include “objects that foster self-world differentiation” (Morin, 2005, p.116), such as mirrors, photographs of the self, and written material. Dialogicality in these artifacts will be a result of the above mentioned dialogicality of communication-cognition processes, objectified in external entities as well as in the activities involving them (e.g., writing). The most prominent dialogical artifact is language. But this artifact is different from the other ones in that we are *living in it*; it is only thanks to a specific kind of abstraction (literalization) that we can think of it as distant from us, as an object. The dialogicality of language is not due to an attribution process, as is the case for the other

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dialogical artifacts. Rather, it is the human condition itself, as proposed by Linell (in preparation), that constrains the dialogicality of language.<sup>3</sup>

This description makes it clear that dialogicality is itself founded on a certain *ethos* – a totality of attitudes, of patterns of actions and judgments belonging to a historically concrete life form, and this ethos is comprised in what is called “dialogism”.<sup>4</sup> With Linell, dialogism is a comprehensive term for a bundle of “theoretical and epistemological assumptions about human action, communication and cognition” (Linell, in preparation, p. 2). This analytical perspective, takes actions and interactions in their contexts as basic analytical units (Linell, 1998, p.7). Every form of human life and every human process of knowing are thought to be basically relational (Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007). Thus, dialogism is committed to a relational perspective on the individual in contrast to viewing the individual as autonomous, *sometimes* entering social relations, *sometimes* undertaking dialogues, *sometimes* positioning itself towards an Alter. For dialogism, dialogicality is inescapable, thus, dialogues (and dialogical patterns) will be the form of the individual's symbolic expression, and dialogues (internal and external) will be the place where meaning is made.<sup>5</sup> This understanding of dialogism emphasizes especially the linguistic, communicative and cognitive construction involved in the “dialogical appropriation and recognition” of the world (Linell, in preparation, p. 8).

It should be emphasized that dialogism refers to a meta-level. It is a theoretical position leading to certain consequences; it is not an ontological category like dialogue, dialogical patterns, and even dialogicality which is assumed to exist somehow in human beings. Of course, dialogues and dialogical patterns are most obviously ontological; dialogicality is a construct, but assumed to be real, to have ontological status. Dialogism is a paradigm, a set of assumptions determining any concept and investigation in a given domain (psychology, linguistics, philosophy).

Through dialogism, we (scientists) interpret human expressions as determined by dialogicality, and as thus dialogical – no matter what their actual form looks like: this can even be monological. Illustrating this, we may point to the therapist's work confronted with a rather monological expression but simultaneously perceiving the dialogicality of the processes leading to this expression. In this vein, several family therapists propose interview strategies to keep the conversation dialogical (see Andersen, 1991; Anderson, 1997; Seikkula & Trimble, 2005), equating in a sense

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3 Thus, written material as well as the writing process itself should be theoretically and empirically treated in a different way.

4 See Elm (2002) for the term “ethos”, and Schürmann (in press) for a discussion of this ethical foundation.

5 Especially with this formulation one can state a deep contrast to Dimaggio and Hermans' (submitted) position, as sketched above.

monological relations between persons with dysfunction. For instance, if we have a family where the same views (and accusations) are repeated over and over again, the therapist will make an effort to allow novelty and diversity to emerge, allowing different voices to be heard. Notice that the monological outcome of the family relationship pattern involves dialogicality if we look at the level of the process of communication and even at the level of (individual) cognition of the members of a family. By repeating over and over the same view (monological outcome), other voices are neglected and avoided (dialogical process). The therapist needs to pay attention to the dynamic of the system to allow these marginalized voices to be heard, creating in this way a new tolerance for difference and ambiguity, given the multiplicity that arises with the transformation. The emergence of a monological output is tracked dialogically by microgenetic analysis. This is what Valsiner (2004) termed hidden dialogism, which means that dialogicality is present even in the more monological presentation. Cunha's article (this issue) illustrates well this complexity, in which dialogical processes could lead to monological expression. Confirming and deepening this aspect, *William Stiles'* comment shows how the methodological tools Cunha developed to study these processes can be enriched by the assimilation model and also, in turn, fruitfully enrich this model.

### **How Does Dialogicality Arise in Ontogenetic Development?**

Taking the developmental perspective, the question is: does dialogicality *exist from the start*, allowing for the emergence of the self, for emotional development and for the dialogical patterns one can infer when studying relationships and the self? Or is dialogicality *developed through social others and their dialogues*? The answer to these questions can be given in distinguishing two pole positions.<sup>6</sup> In the first position, dialogicality is seen as innate, given, and thus located in the individual. Bråten's (1988) concept of the “inborn virtual other” seems to go in this direction as well as Trevarthen's “inborn primary intersubjectivity”, often referred to by this author and also to be found in the comment by *Maya Gratier and Colwyn Trevarthen* on Bertau (this issue); *Dankert Vedeler's* comment on Garvey and Fogel (this issue), too, takes explicitly the “no blank state-position” and aligns itself to inborn primary intersubjectivity. Dialogues seem here to have a triggering function for the unfolding of dialogicality.

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6 Innateness or acquisition? How can the relationship of learning and development be conceived? These questions correspond to an extensive and complex discussion in psychology, also related to the issue of how nature and culture are brought together in humans. We cannot address these issues here; important ideas are found in Baldwin and Vygotsky (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) and in subsequent cultural psychology as formulated e.g. by Cole (1996). Bruner's (1983) approach viewing humans as, so to speak, biologically determined to live in culture is an effort to overcome the nature-culture dualism.



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The second position would precisely start with a completely blank newborn by whom dialogicality is to be fully acquired through socialization processes. Thus, dialogicality would be located solely in social practices and interactions; and, of course, dialogues are necessary practices, a necessary condition for the development of dialogicality.

Acknowledging the tricky formulation “existing from the start”, one may ask: from which start? Birth or conception? The biological or the imaginative-psychological conception, i.e. conceptualization? This leads to a smoother position situated in the middle of the above poles – a position we privilege. Following this, dialogicality exists from the beginning of life, and even before, since people make meaning about the baby's life; dialogicality would not exist nor develop without concrete social others oriented towards the becoming person. Thus, dialogicality is seen as a *potency*, meaning an expectation of the other's addressivity to oneself; an orientation towards the other *and* towards his/her orientation to oneself – even if this “self” is not yet developed.

This potency is developed by the newborn in the course of her interactions with significant others, not least through the acquisition of dialogical practices – dialogues are thus central to potency's realization. In this position, dialogicality is located in the individual as well as in interactions with others. As the interactants live in a historical and cultural world, these interactions construct a dialogical world – a world existing in and through exchanges with an address-reply structure. Thus, the interactions are dialogical practices with different forms: preverbal, verbal and nonverbal, and can exist in actual social spaces as well as in imaginative personal ones. Finally, the practices will always transport a sedimented, over-individualized dialogicality (see Bakhtin's, 1984 and 1986 reflection on the fact that utterances are used and re-used in the act of speech). This sedimented dialogicality and actual dialogical practices are shaping each other in a dialectical process, allowing for the cultural development of dialogicality.

Describing the development of dialogicality in this way leads inevitably to see language and dialogicality as deeply related. With Humboldt, language is to be understood with regard to address and reply (*Anrede – Erwiderung*, Humboldt 1827/1994). Assuming dialogicality as potency, language is a complex, semioticized form of *realized* dialogicality. In giving dialogicality a form, language shows itself as a formative and generative power: it does more than propose a vestige of an independently developed dialogical entity (e.g., a position of self). As itself dialogical, it develops dialogicality into specific forms. Different cultures with different languages and with different ways of relating subjects to each other account for this specificity. An illustration may be found in the ways cultures allow or suppress self-imaginings as found in the imaginative role play of children, with its specific usage of language (Carlson, Taylor & Levin, 1998); this play form is related to a certain kind of language use, of dialogues, and of plays with positions and voices. As a practice, “being other

people” pretence (Lillard, 2001) may be seen as a precursor activity to the self-practices and processes assumed to take place within the DS.

Thus, culturally shaped dialogicality corresponding to language forms will give rise to differently lived and experienced processes in the DS (types of dialogues, of positions, of voices). Acquiring language can then be seen as accomplishing a qualitative jump in regard to dialogicality: with verbal language, dialogicality is realized in a different way, giving rise to such complex processes as self-awareness and consciousness. Concluding, we would state that language – as spoken and written language or discourse – is a central locus of dialogical development: concerning self and identity, emotions, mind, consciousness.

Less abstract and less complex forms of realized dialogicality are what we like to call dialogical patterns, developing in to real dialogues. Thus, we define dialogues with Linell (1998) as “any dyadic or polyadic interaction between individuals who are mutually co-present to each other and who interact through language (or other symbolic means)” (p.9). That is: referring to actual and mainly verbal dialogues.<sup>7</sup> The prototype is verbal exchanges between adults in face-to-face situations. In dialogical patterns individuals are also co-present, but they are interacting with language only to some extent; they also interact with paraverbal means, vocalizations, gaze, bodily postures and gestures. The presence of these paraverbal means are prototypical for exchanges between caregiver and infant. From these dialogical patterns the infant will come closer and closer to verbal dialogues (e.g., Bruner, 1983). The notion of *form* is especially important to dialogical patterns, sometimes captured with the notion of frame (Bruner, 1983). The contributions by Lyra, Garvey and Fogel (this issue) address these preverbal dialogical patterns, showing problems and possibilities of the empirical identification, location and description of those fluctuating, extremely time-bound patterns.

We hope that the contributions grouped in this issue will inspire more discussion, theoretical reflection and empirical studies into this fascinating topic, which implies studying a reality that is changing, sometimes dramatically, while we are making efforts to study it and in a sense fixating it with our rather limited (dynamic) concepts and tools. We believe this is the major challenge to the development of this field.

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7 “Mainly verbal” given the characteristic of dialogues to have the possibility of being abbreviated. In these abbreviations, the linguistic factor will be shortened, fragmented, and allusions will suffice (see Jakubinskij 1923/2004).

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