

## BOOK REVIEW

**Hubert J. M. Hermans & Thorsten Gieser (Eds.)**  
***Handbook Of Dialogical Self Theory.***  
**New York, NY: Cambridge University Press**  
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The *Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory*, published in 2012 and edited by Hubert J. M. Hermans and Thorsten Gieser, is worthy of note because of the psychological portrait of the human being which it proposes. Psychology incessantly seeks an adequate model of the human psyche, and the dialogical self-theory concept aspires to the status of a bridging theory. As such, it successfully links quite separate fields and introduces a conceptual apparatus that promises to meet the substantial demands of the interdisciplinary study of the human psyche during a crisis of ever-increasing specialization and the fragmentation of science.

The editors of this work are among the leading representatives of narrative psychology and creators of dialogical self theory (DST). In this work from the subdiscipline of narrative psychology, Hermans and Gieser do refer to social group relations and dynamics, but only in order to show that dialogicality is a characteristic of the self system constituted by the multiplicity of *I-positions*. The authors set three goals: to systemize DST, describe its multifaceted nature, and present the many contexts for its application. First, dialogical psychology as a new subfield requires systemization and specification of terminology; the authors undertake this task in the first chapters of the book. Second, the book edited by Hermans and Gieser is a rich and comprehensive collection of dialogical self theory concepts, described in over 500 pages. Third, the collection of studies presented by Hermans and coauthors present varied contexts of application as well as differing approaches of researchers from numerous academic centers. Some of the studies described are completely innovative propositions for the application of DST, studies which explain the phenomena of acculturation or refer to traditional healing methods, as cases in point. Such studies testify to the fact that DST has been a source of inspiration for contemporary researchers. While reading this book,

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we become familiar with the works of 46 authors of a variety of cultures and academic traditions, all of whom are exploring the dialogical *self*.

This study has been published by Cambridge University Press in a series of textbooks and represents the fruit of two decades of development of DST. Of particular value is the fact that the authors represented are from Africa, India, Japan and China, in addition to traditional, Western centers of science. They also include the Polish school of researchers of the dialogical self, who have had a significant share in the development of DST-based methods. This multitude of approaches and perspectives speaks to the openness of the editors and also to the fact that contemporary science is edging its way toward the golden age of globalization. The works of Hermans and his coauthors demonstrate that psychology must be open and creative, and that it is inherently culture bound. The reviewed work additionally convinces us that the dialogical self concept is alive and developing.

Who are the target readers of this book? It merits use as an academic textbook on DST. It should be of interest to the academic community, as it depicts the methodological status of the conception of the *self*, moving beyond mere speculation. Due to the numerous perspectives and applications of DST, the work will interest “humanists,” including anthropologists, linguists, sociologists, psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, doctors and even business psychologists – those who accept the assertion that the human psyche is socially constructed while also marked by dialogicality and polyphony. Authors of individual chapters use a clear and lively style, so the concepts described will interest even those readers unfamiliar with the topic.

The editors aspire to verify the theoretical concept of the dialogical self, and simultaneously defend it, by convincing the reader that it is not just one more interesting, philosophy-based metaphor for “internal voices” but an empirically-based theory. The work promises to familiarize us with the origins of the assumptions, applications and empirical verification of dialogical self theory. The authors lead the reader through chapters describing the polyphony of the self, as grounded in philosophy and literature. Hermans derives inspiration from the philosophy of dialogue as well as *belles-lettres* to describe the core traits of the *self*.

This collection of works edited by Hermans and Gieser is organized into three sections: theory, research and methods, and applications. In the 12 chapters of the first section, theoretical assumptions (although some chapters do not entirely share this quality), main concepts, and issues related to developmental, socio-cultural and clinical aspects of dialogical self theory are discussed. Hermans clearly and concisely presents the root of the concept, tracing the historical and philosophical origins of the idea to James and Bakhtin, Mead and Buber. His first chapter is a key to the ones that follow, as it presents many important distinctions and nuances in the web of cornerstone ideas for the dialogical self conception, including the personal and social self, homogeneity

and heterogeneity of the self, spatial and temporal *I-positions*, dialogicality and monologue, freedom and limitations of the I function. Hermans' conception relates to the symbolism of social relations and positions which can appear in the self-consciousness of the individual. These are analogous to the set of live positions that might exist, for example, in a film or novel, where each of the internal voices has its own story to tell. Hermans' descriptive language makes the theory accessible, even to non-psychologists. In the chapter authored by Barresi and Bertau issues related to the development of the dialogical self in the period of infancy and first years of life are presented. The authors focus on the developmentally important distinction between *I* and *not-I* (*self* and *not-self*) as well as *meta-position* and *I-position*, conditioned by the development of language and the awareness of one's body. Valsiner and Cabell attempt to describe the abstract process of *self-making* as a type of synthesis for which dialogical *self* is the catalyzing space, as it emerges in the process of continual negotiation and renegotiation. Successive chapters of the first section present DST in the context of the multicultural challenges of the contemporary world, including problems of acculturation, among others. These phenomena also have deep implications at the psychological level of the individual and their cultural identity. Van Meijl's article leads the reader through a process of negotiating cultural identity by the residents of Polynesia; then other authors use the language of DST to describe the phenomenon of acculturation of immigrant residents in the US. The question of the identity of "who am I as a representative of a culture or cultures" is related to the repertoire of voices and cultural positions that can exist in the universe of the *self*. The chapter authored by Verhofstadt-Denève discusses the roles and limitations of DST in the analysis of intra- and interpersonal processes stimulating reflection on one's own self in the process of dialogue during psychodrama. Surgan and Abbey analyze the process of hybridization during the creation of the *self* system and the *third position*. Hevern depicts the degree to which anonymity and isolation marked by communication on the Internet instill dialogical activity in the sphere of the *self*. Paul and John Lysaker analyze and review the polyphonic nature of the *self* in DST in the area of psychiatry and mental disorders, in particular the issue of identity in schizophrenia. In the last chapter the reader learns of the relational and dialogical character of traditional methods of therapy used in Africa, in confrontation with the Western tradition.

The second section of the book relates to methodological aspects of DST, as illustrated by qualitative as well as quantitative studies on the dialogical and polyphonic self. It is worth noting that one half of the authors of this section are Polish researchers. Oleś and Puchalska-Wasyl present aspects of the dialogical self in the context of character traits, based on the results of research using their own test scale for the activity of internal dialogues. Żurawska-Żyła and her team use DST in an analysis of literary texts and propose a typology of authors based on differences in their relationships to the protagonists of their novels. Stemplewska-Żakowicz and coauthors

describe a series of experiments aimed at verifying DST and analyzing cognitive aspects of individual *I-positions*, with their particular ways of viewing the world. The chapter authored by Nir takes a closer look at the process of internal negotiations in the framework of *I-positions* up close, analyzing stages and methods of constructive solution of an internal conflict. Gonçalves and Ribeiro describe the opportunities to apply DST and the technique of internal narration as well as the stages of paving new, adequate ways of viewing and understanding oneself and the world in the process of psychotherapy. The last chapter, under the authorship of Jasper and coworkers, contains a critical discussion of methodological issues and a classification of techniques used in research based on DST.

The third section of the book discusses applied issues in psychotherapy, education, emotion work and consumer behavior. Rowan depicts the advantages of the cognitive apparatus of DST in a description of the dynamics of phenomena which emerge during psychotherapy. In the following chapter, Dimaggio describes the particularities of disorders in the area of intra- and interpersonal dialogue, giving examples of ways to reorganize these dialogues in the psychotherapy process. Neimeyer shows to what degree DST may be helpful when offering support for those facing dying and death. In the next chapter, Morioka discusses the concept of *ma* in the Japanese culture and points to operating in the dialogical space of DST as an important factor in therapy. Ho in his chapter focuses on the connection of dialogue and action and the weight of these relations in the problem-solving process. The chapter authored by Hermans-Konopka discusses the dynamic nature of the *self*, the defining characteristic of which is continuous change. The chapter shows how DST is used in work on emotions in coaching, as one example. In her work on the impact of DST in education, Ligorio pays attention to the limitations of the classical cognitive approach, highlighting the input of DST in the development of the identity of students and teachers and the student-teacher relationship. Winters and her coworkers bring DST to the sphere of student career planning, the development of an awareness of career paths, by stimulating internal career dialogue. Bahl closes with an applied section, pointing to the role of the dialogical concept in understanding the behavior of consumers, whose preferences condition the specific repertoire of the *self* narrative.

Is there anything to be said against this work? Editors Hermans and Gieser claim that the nature of the *self* is inseparably connected with the embodied experience of dialogicality as rooted in the social environment. Some chapters are characterized by a large degree of speculation, metaphoricity and difficulty in verification of some assumptions. A careful read of the chapters devoted to theoretical issues may give the impression that while DST seems clear and intuitive, submerging oneself in the concept leaves one with the sense of navigating at a level of overwhelming abstraction. In comparison with other similar concepts, DST comes up short because of its complex language of new ideas used to describe and explain the human *self*. It is difficult not to

notice certain analogies to the concept of Transactional Analysis of Eric Berne, i.e., the three main ego states, the conception of position, scripts, roles and internal self-speech, or transaction. The Karpman Drama Triangle applied by Berne is a simpler but clearer concept. While DST has its own specific features and methodological status, it is a conception that requires further development in the direction of greater consolidation and generalization in the area of the numerous new and excessively provisional neologisms used. Particularly valuable are the attempts to systematize and define basic concepts presented in several chapters, such as the glossary of key terms presented by Raggatt, descriptive definitions and distinctions, e.g. positioning phenomenon (*I-position, counter-position, meta-position, and third position*), which also depict the development of theories connected to the dynamic processes of mediation, centralization and decentralization of the *self positions*. The concepts described by Hermans and Gieser require readers to master the complex and refined conceptual apparatus as a passport for travel in the world of the dialogical self. DST theory transports us into a unique world with its own language, thanks to which we come to see familiar objects in a new way. It is a language that is obligatory, in keeping with the maxim – to which DST has certain privilege – *When in Rome, do as the Romans do*.

To conclude, the conception presented in this edited work, based on the metaphor of conversation and minisocieties, has inspired researchers working on social, cultural and clinical psychology issues. The collection of publications compiled in this book indicates how DST allows various phenomena to be articulated in a new way, including schizophrenia, psychodrama, therapy and intercultural contact. The many authors of this work stress the fact that dialogical self theory crosses the boundaries of the “here and now,” and gains new explanatory power beyond many other theories.