WHERE IS CULTURE WITHIN THE DIALOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF?

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ABSTRACT. This Special Issue covers recent international efforts to domesticate the general theoretical framework of the Dialogical Self (DS) within cultural contexts where the Self/Other distinctions have historically been less clearly differentiated than in the occidental societies. This collective effort demonstrates that the theoretical perspective is applicable universally—yet with modifications in the ways in which its basic concepts— voice, I-position, polyphony of voices—have been originally set. The dynamic affective complexes such as *shimcheong* (in Korea—Choi & Han, 2008; Han & Choi, 2008) or *utushi* (Morioka, 2008a, 2008b) require a new notion of opposition where the contrasts between the opposing poles feed into each other without a rupture—yet constituting a dynamic barrier in itself. The Dialogical Self is contextualized in an equally multiple context of social relationship hierarchies (Chaudhary, 2008; van Meijl, 2008) which both calls for functional fluidity of the DS processes (to adapt to changes in the relationships) and limits the differentiation in the Self in relation to the Other. The form of operation of the voices and their derived I-positions is likely to be imaginal first (Ruck & Slunecko, 2008) and verbal only as a translation from the affective-visual code. This brings the cultural nature of DS close to the efforts of contemporary semiotics to understand the operation of non-verbal signs in human minds and environments. The 19 papers (5 target papers and 13 commentaries with two responses) in this special issue are valuable contributions to the DS framework by expanding and challenging the DS theory in diverse dimensions.

Keywords: dynamics, culture, functional fluidity, relationship hierarchies, self, other

The Dialogical Self grows. The number of theoretical voices that make use of the concept is on the advance in our contemporary social sciences. Dialogical approaches—currently increasingly popular within the framework of dialogical self theories (Ferreira, Salgado and Cunha, 2006; Hermans, 1996; 2001, 2002; Hermans and Kempen, 1993; Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007; Josephs, 1998; Linell, 2008; Marková, 2003; Salgado and Gonçalves, 2007; Salgado and Hermans, 2005)—stem from the psychological phenomena of everyday life practices where seeing the unity of opposites in tension-filled action is unavoidable. Such are processes of psychotherapy, education, decision-making—in short all domains of activity where people strive towards some future state of affairs under the conditions of prevailing uncertainty. Here the dialogical perspective emerges from practical needs—and re-thinking of dialogicality within minds, interaction, and societies is an appealing new direction in psychology.

Globality and culture

Like most of our contemporary constructions, the Dialogical Self becomes global. Having started from personality psychology (Hermans & Kempen, 1993) it grew in cultural psychology (Hermans, 2002) and psychotherapy (Salgado & Hermans, 2005), and has become well-spread over the World. The focus of this Special Issue—on culture in dialogical self—indicates its further inter-disciplinary extension to anthropology (Rasmussen, 2008; Van Meijl, 2008) as well as involving participants from 14 countries from 5 continents (Asia: Japan, Korea, the Philippines, India; the Americas: Chile and U.S.; Africa: South Africa; Europe: the Netherlands, UK, France, Estonia, Spain, Portugal, Austria). The regular conferences on dialogical self are increasingly international since their beginning in Nijmegen in year 2000. It could be said that the Dialogical Self perspective is truly a paradigm for understanding the human beings in the new millennium. Yet there is much real conceptual work to be done to make the DS perspectives work in the heterogeneous realities of cultural conditions all over the World.

These realities are undergoing historical change. Our contemporary world has become liquid rather than solid—to use the dialogical opposition that Zygmunt Baumann (2007) has emphasized:

> …in the liquid modern world, the solidity of things and human bonds is resented as a threat. This is the big difference between the solid stage of modernity and the liquid state of modernity. Not many years ago, the major concern of still solid or nostalgically solid modernity was: the centre does not hold. I would suggest that liquid modernity has changed so that it resents the centre as such. In the cacophony of sounds and the hubbub of sights—a kaleidoscope of constant change—there is no centre around which things could condense, solidify and settle. (Bauman, 2007, p. 122)

In some respect, the movement from theories of "solid" self and personality—those emphasizing "traits" or myriads of dimensions of personality (such as the "big five" etc)—to the "liquidity" of all the voices of the DS seems to follow the lead of our social time. Yet it is not fully so—the DS theories continue to worry about "the center"—yet it is a dynamic "center" that is being sought after. A constantly changing configuration of "voices" that transforms the structure of I-positions—"highest liquidity"—is in itself a very "solid" position. Hence the opposites are the same—or turn into each other.

Where can we locate culture within the Dialogical Self?

The DS perspective unifies social sciences—bringing together the fields of researchers from developmental, personality, clinical and social areas of psychology as well as from anthropology and sociology. Thus, the ill-defined notion of *culture* stands

as a conceptual organizer of such interdisciplinary synthesis—albeit remaining a fuzzy concept on its own. The crucial confusion of *the cultural* with the myriad of empirical comparisons of differences between societies in cross-cultural psychology is one of the poles of the confusion. On the other are the philosophical analyses of the focus on the *ideal of selflessness* in many non-Western societies—proven by their histories and even by some anthropological accounts. How can one look at the dialogical self in contexts where different societies are assumed to be different (e.g., the widely accepted—yet inadequate—contrast of "individualist" and "collectivist" societies), yet where the ideal state of human existence is the achievement of the <u>absence</u> of anything independently describable as the self?

Here the link with contemporary cultural psychology helps—*culture* is not an essence within the minds of people from the given society, but an *organizing principle of each and every human mind*, in any society. It is thus everywhere—always in action, but usually rarely noticed. We do not notice the most basic and ordinary facets of living. Seeing the universality of culture is most visible in contrast with the non-human world:

> The persons, relations, and materials of human existence are enacted according to their meaningful values—meanings that cannot be determined from their biological or physical properties….*no ape could appreciate the difference between holy water and distilled water…* This ordering (and disordering) of the world in symbolic terms, this culture is the singular capacity of the human species (Sahlins, 2000, p. 158, added emphasis)

Thus—as long as the DS is organized by signs (semiotically mediated)—culture is in each and every act of creating I-positions, contrasting them, defining what kind of tension is there in the contrasts, and overcoming the tension. Without doubt the set of meanings—and values—is profoundly variable between people as we look across the World and encounter different social traditions in different countries. But behind this inter-personal difference in specifics is the universality of the process—of creating meanings, and using these meanings in the process of self-regulation.

Contextualizing the DS: Relationship hierarchies

Chaudhary (2008) explains in our Special Issue conceptions about the self in India as being relational, familial, essentially incomplete placed within a constellation of relationships. Talk about self separately from social relationships is considered egotism in India. Such discursive demands explicate basic features of the Indian society – as it is hierarchical, secular and profoundly multicultural. Democracy in India is generated by group identity built on the multiplicity of social distinctions all operating at the same time—rather than to any single "key attachment" to a value. As a result, in interpersonal relationships, people are sensitive to nuances and small acts of commission and omission in both conduct and the field of feelings. This sensitivity is further captured in Korea (Choi and Han, 2008) and Japan (Morioka, 2008a, 2008b)

Chaudhary (2008) challenges the current DS theories by posing that monologicality is not a negation of the DS, but one of its forms. There is nothing "inherently bad" in the absence of dialogicality in some situations—rather, these situations may resolve their problems more efficiently than they ever could under the conditions of dialogicality. The strive towards monologicality is enhanced by social structures—it is not merely accepted in rigid hierarchies of social kind, but actively promoted (one of us has termed that "dialogical monologization"—Valsiner, 2000).

Dialogical monologization is also visible at individual levels. Morioka (2008a) took the cases of two Japanese clients who visited for counseling in his clinic. As a therapist, he used the DS model in analyzing inner dialogue where a I-position is to converse with another I-position. According to him, the presumed dialogue does not take place, instead monologue prevails inside for the societal evaluation by anonymous others they face which become internalized other having dominant voice. This state of lacking dialogicality works to alienate the self. Therapists work to break such state of a monologue, often hidden in self-deception into dialogical state.

The affective flavor of the DS

It is only symptomatic that the majority of contributions to this Special Issue look for culture—and find affective processes wherever they look. Once we admit judgment is central in the experience of emotion, we have to accept emotion is cultural phenomenon. Emotion is cultural because its experience requires social judgment which necessarily incorporates cultural value system and cultural schema of meaning making.

Different internal structure of emotion prevalent in different societies is a consequence of such judgment rather than its reason. Morioka's (2008a, 2008b) *utushi*--therapeutic mimetic action in context-- instigates the client to re-experience her or his own word repetitively so she/he experiences a sense of continuity of self from showing such response. Morioka points out that meaning should not be imposed by the therapist but needs to be constructed in the space (temporal and spatial) of *ma* for successful release of tension. The experience of the therapeutic conversation need to become unfinished in a new state—therefore open for new dialogical encounters. According to Morioka, therapy is a setting of conversation between several others and the self of the client where the therapist manages to create in-between (*ma*) spaces both for temporally and spatially by providing *utushi* between one and the other. The genuine goal of therapy is to create and maintain *ma* between different people, time, views where the interacting parties engage in *utushi* mode of communication. Human beings relate—and cure themselves—through affective dynamics. The DS is a feeling self! Choi and Han (2008) provide further elaboration for the affective basis of the DS. They introduce *shimcheong* as the key to understand relationships in Korean contexts. While analyzing the process of *shimcheong* they explain the Korean conception of self and collective mentality. It is crucial to bear in mind that *shimcheong*—like many "in-between"

terms—works both for the collectivity but also for the individuality. *Shimcheong* is a phenomenological experience going on in the intra-psychic dialogue, as well as in inter-psychic dialogues.

Van Meijl (2008) provides a look at the DS theory from the angle of contemporary anthropology. He takes an issue with the globalization effect on uncertainty on self—self is a unity but it is not unitary. Uncertainty is one of myriad reaction in the cultural contact zone. The self is disunited and dialogue is essential to maintain a balance between multicultural selves. Anthropology provides local evidence of people's self as not united and yet living a life without much trouble, which should be accounted by the DS theory. What happens in the relationships of I-positions is the negotiation of functional unity of the self—different parts of the self are loosely and temporarily connected with one another, which leads to tension in some of these relations (but not others) and is the basis for adaptation to all the new encounters that social reality—globalization—might bring (Tsuda, 2000). The dialogical interaction among I-positions is to establish unity-- but this process is never-ending as instead of unity of structures ("the core self") we arrive at steady states of unity of loosely structured but focally functioning cores of human beings. Uncertainty of living guarantees the functional nature of such solution.

The DS field needs innovation in methodology. From its origin the DS theory derives from specific methods—verbal in their nature-- which has made the movement of its theoretical basis towards greater generality a slow and painstaking process. In contrast, most of human affective meaning-making is nonverbal—iconic and indexical in C.S. Peirce's terms—and hence verbally based methodology of analysis of the DS may only access a limited realm of pertinent phenomena (Valsiner, 2005). Included in our Special Issue is the pioneering effort of Nora Ruck and Thomas Slunecko (Ruck & Slunecko, 2008) to apply planimetric analysis to visual scenes that reflect DS. This direction deserves further attention.

Culture in the DS: making sense of diversity

In sum, our Special Issue expands the traditional horizons of the DS theories—yet that expansion is caught in the web of traditional notions. First, the notion of culture is still often viewed as a kind of "geography of the selves"—efforts are made to distinguish the cultural characteristics of "the Indian self", "the Japanese self", the "Korean self" and so on. By turning these traditional typologies dialogical does not change the initial impasse of presuming that such "cross-cultural differences" in the manifest self-reflection or conduct of people from different social traditions is useful for a new theory. Psychology has been classifying (and cross-classifying) its phenomena over its century-and-a-half history—without much insight resulting from that meticulous yet limited activity. However, the examination of specific cultural

properties of self shed lights into the area of universal self hitherto neglected or unexamined in the Euro-American context.

The contributions to this Special Issue attempt to move in a different direction—viewing cultural tools as operating within the minds. Here what are obviously big differences between societies (it is hardly the case that a Canadian ice-cream seller relates to his clients through *shimcheong* or *ubuntu*) speak of trans-societal generality of cultural processes within the dialogical self. The general direction for their study is developmental process analysis (Abbey & Diriwächter, 2008). From that perspective, the DS theories are at the right place—of theory construction—at the right time—when most of the rest of psychology continues to be involved in futile analyses of quantitative "measures" that have been alienated from the original phenomena. The Dialogical Self approach restores psychological reality to the field—for further dialogues aiming at basic understanding.

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