



Abstract The polysemic nature of intersubjectivity stems not only from diverse pursuits and goals but also from different ontologies of intersubjectivity. More specifically, the four matrices described by Coelho and Figueiredo (2003) imply two ontologies: 'I-Other(s)' and 'I' versus 'Other(s)'. These ontologies lead to different concepts of communication. In the former case, communication is based on the idea of attunement and fusion of the minds. In the latter case, communication seems to be either determined a priori as a moral principle or managed monologically. Despite essential differences between the two ontologies, they both aim at the reduction of diverse positions of the self and other(s). It is argued that intersubjectivity that aims at fusion with the other is too narrow to account for the constitution of subjectivity. Instead, dialogicality, that is, the capacity of the human mind to conceive, create and communicate about social realities in terms of the 'Alter', must complement intersubjectivity in conceptualizations of subjectivity. Living in the world of others presupposes that co-authors not only attempt to reduce their differences in communication but also that they acknowledge one another as co-authors of their ideas; they dispute and fight about ideas; and they also confirm their participation in social realities.

Key Words co-authorship, dialogicality, *Ego-Alter*, intersubjectivity, social recognition

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Constitution of the Self: Intersubjectivity and Dialogicality

In their thought-provoking paper, Coelho and Figueiredo (2003) imply that the polysemic nature of the notion 'intersubjectivity' stems from the fact that researchers in the human and social sciences pursue different goals and try to answer different questions about intersubjectivity. I would like to extend their claim by suggesting that these goals and questions are underlined by diverse ontologies of intersubjectivity. Since any theory of intersubjectivity must involve language and communication, ontological diversities serve as a point of departure for different concepts of communication between selves and others. I shall make two remarks about these issues in the first part of my commentary. In the second part I shall suggest that the study of

subjectivity requires going beyond the notions of intersubjectivity as delineated in the four matrices.

Diverse Ontologies of Intersubjectivity and Communication

In my first remark I would like to examine the four matrices of intersubjectivity presented by Coelho and Figueiredo in terms of their ontologies. The existential point of departure in some approaches to intersubjectivity is the 'I-Other(s)' as an irreducible dyad. For example, Coelho and Figueiredo maintain that trans-subjective intersubjectivity (matrix 1) 'refers to the field of primordial, maternal reality . . . in which otherness emerges as a constituent of subjective experiences . . . through its character of primordial inclusion' (p. 199). The authors refer primarily to philosophical analyses of Scheler, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Philosophical theories view the concept of otherness in a generalized, ethical, religious and metaphysical sense and they treat intersubjectivity as either a phenomenological, analytical or ethical concept. For example, the 'I-Other' in Scheler's (1923/1954) ethics of value and sympathy is reflected in the idea that each individual is responsible for every fellow-feeling.

A similar concept of the 'I-Other(s)' as an irreducible dyad seems to be expressed in psychological theories of the self by James Mark Baldwin, George Herbert Mead and Lev Vygotsky (which would all presumably fall under matrix 3). Psychological theories of the self and self-consciousness are built on the idea that *Ego* and *Alter* are in a relationship with one another—and that through this mutuality they co-develop. Baldwin's, Mead's and Vygotsky's concepts of the 'dialectic of social growth', 'conversation of gestures' and 'inter- and intrapsychological processes', respectively, all express the idea that the mechanism of knowing oneself and the mechanism for knowing others are one and the same. For example, Baldwin's (1895) concept of the 'dialectic of personal growth' expresses the mutual interdependence between *Ego* and *Alter* as a give-and-take relationship in which 'the self meets self, so to speak' (p. 342). Similarly, Mead (1934) argued that 'an individual becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals towards himself' (p. 138).

In contrast, ontologies of intersubjectivity described in matrices 2 and 4 are based on 'I' and 'Other(s)' as existentially separated from one another. This means that their point of departure is either 'I' or 'Other' and that they pose the question as to how the gap between I and others can be reduced. For example, the ontologies in matrix 2 stem from the

criticism of Cartesian transcendental solipsism, which presupposes the rationality of the individual's mind. In his critique of the transcendental ego in *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl (1960, p. 91) argues that rationality is not individualistic. Rationality is intersubjective: there is always 'myself and others' (p. 93). We experience the world not through private formations in the mind of the individual but as intersubjectively constituted experiences. Yet Husserl retains the existential distance between 'I' and 'Other' and therefore, as Coelho and Figueiredo maintain, he has to deal with the question of how to overcome 'the abyss between I and Other' (p. 196).

Levinas's earlier work is close to Husserl's position, giving it a highly ethical meaning. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas (1961/1969) challenges the point of view that the totality of being can be captured by the transcendental ego. Like Husserl, he argues that subjectivity is not the isolated ego attempting to understand the being-in-the-world (Levinas, 1991/1998, p. 7). Levinas maintains that modern philosophy overemphasizes the being as activity, as an engagement in the world rather than as an engagement with others. Engagement with others is moral, obligatory and asymmetrical. Levinas emphasizes the separation between the self and others, and human beings in their separation make moral demands. The self has no right to question what the other requires from him: his obligations to others are unlimited. This fundamental and a priori relation to the other, however, Levinas argues, is not ontology but religion.

In his later work *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas (1974/1981) expresses even more strongly what Coelho and Figueiredo call 'traumatic intersubjectivity'. In his theory of proximity and separation he doubts the very notion of subjectivity. As he puts it elsewhere, the other 'takes precedence over me from the start; I am under allegiance to him' (Levinas, 1991/1998, p. 202). He argues that the self's responsibility for the Other, which starts with face-to-face interaction, is total: being responsible for death and suffering of others, the self is reaching all the time for something that he or she cannot reach.

Finally, in intrapsychic psychoanalytic intersubjectivity (matrix 4), the 'I' and 'Other(s)', again, are separated. The I undergoes changes throughout socialization. The Other, that is, a civilized society, restrains sexual and aggressive impulses of the subjectivity, bringing them under control and restraint of morality. The superego functions as the individual's conscience, and self-control is achieved through defence mechanisms, fear of punishment, guilt and anxiety.

My second remark directs attention towards language and communication. Although the theories of intersubjectivity differ with

respect to how they treat these two subjects, no theory can afford to avoid some kind of treatment of them. In our case, the two ontologies, that is, 'I-Other(s)' and 'I' versus 'Other(s)', imply different concepts of communication. In the former, according to which the 'I-Other(s)' dyad is irreducible, communication presupposes that the two participants contribute reciprocally, though asymmetrically, to the construction of the message. They are co-authors and their responsibility for communication is mutual. For example, Mead's conversation of gestures (matrix 3) is based on the idea that one participant starts the gesture but it is the other who completes it by giving meaning to it. The fulfilment of contract, mutual responsibilities for the construction of the message, and attunement to the attunement of the other are amongst the most important principles of communication. Or if we take an example from Merleau-Ponty (matrix 1), dialogue involves the creation of commonality between interlocutors. The words of the self and of his or her interlocutor 'are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 354).

Such ideas about communication, however, can hardly apply to ontologies, which are based on 'I' and 'Other(s)' as existentially different and separate. In these ontologies communication seems to be either superimposed on 'I' and 'Other' on ethical principles, as in Levinas's approach, or it is treated in a monological fashion, as in the case of psychoanalysis. In Levinas's (1991/1998) highly ethical approach, communication seems to have the controlling power over the self. As he expresses this idea, it is the other who 'calls upon me from a strange authority—imperative, disarmed . . . the human face . . . already language before words, an original language of the human face' (pp. 198–199). Intersubjective communication can take place without words or gestures: facing the other is already speaking (Levinas, 1991/1998, p. 26). Since, in Levinas's (1974/1981) theory of separation in the economy of proximity, he claims that to be for the Other is to be without identity, communication itself is a passivity of being.

Communication in a psychoanalytic encounter is monological. The self and Other(s) are separated partners in the dialogue. The patient speaks in front of the Other rather than to the Other. By expressing his thoughts as freely as possible, the patient, as a self-observer, reads off the surface of his consciousness. The Other in communication is present but is communicatively passive. It is the patient's talk to himself that is supposed to cure him.

We could add here that the phenomenological intersubjectivity of

Alfred Schütz, derived from Husserl, also presents a rather passive view of communication. Intersubjective 'permanent habitual possession of knowledge' is sedimented in our minds. The reciprocity of perspectives becomes actualized in topically or situationally relevant events, that is, when we encounter the 'same' situation again or when we recognize a typical situation (Schütz, 1970). We share the cultural schemata of others and their actions, or the sedimented stocks of intersubjective knowledge that are re-cycled through similar experiences. Similar and typical experiences are so pervasive that any new experience is communicated and interpreted in terms of these established types or the habitual stocks of knowledge that we have already acquired (Schütz, 1970, p. 59). Culturally shared knowledge and the ways in which we habitually communicate make us oblivious to differences and to inconsistencies in perception and experience.

While communication is essential in both kinds of ontology of intersubjectivity, it should be apparent that, due to different kinds of communication between self and others, the constitution of subjectivity would proceed in very different manners. Coelho and Figueiredo recognize the conceptual diversities in their four matrices of intersubjectivity, but they nevertheless point out that these matrices should be seen as 'simultaneous elements in the different processes of the constitution and elaboration of subjectivity' (Abstract, p. 193). Yet we need to pose the following questions. Bearing in mind the differences—and, possibly, the incommensurability—between these paths, what meaning could we attribute to their simultaneity in the constitution of subjectivity? How can these ontologies—that is, 'I-Other(s)' and 'I' versus 'Other(s)'—allow for a continual commuting between them, as the authors suggest?

Intersubjectivity as a Search for Common Ground

Despite the diversities discussed above, there is, nevertheless, at least one kind of a parallel (rather than a similarity) between the meanings of intersubjectivity in all four matrices, whether psychological, religious, ethical or otherwise. In all those cases intersubjectivity aims to reduce the distance between I and Other(s).

In trans-subjective and interpersonal intersubjectivity (matrix 1 and 3) the participants build on their already existing mutuality. This idea of common ground between 'I-Other(s)' has been nurtured in European social sciences and humanities for two hundred years. It was probably clearly expressed for the first time by Hegel (1807/1977) in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* when he maintained that self-consciousness

achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. Hegel's younger contemporary, the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1843/1966), argued that the individual does not possess in him- or herself the essence of the human being, neither as a moral being nor as a thinking being. The essence of the human being exists only in the community and in the unity of one person with another (p. 71). He argued that ideas arise only through communication and conversation, and the community of one human with another is the first principle and criterion of truth (pp. 58–59).

These theoretical ideas, which have been extensively developed in scholars ranging from the Neo-Kantians to Bakhtin, were empirically explored during the 20th century in the psychological studies of the development of the self and personal identity. They go hand in hand with the ontogenetic studies of the concept of otherness. Developmental psychologists like Newson (1979) and Trevarthen (e.g. 1979, 1992, 1998) have argued and provided empirical evidence that the child is born with a predisposition for intersubjectivity. In getting actively engaged with the environment, the child selects his or her own milieu. Parents, for their part, by providing a stimulating environment and, indeed, by presupposing that young children already comprehend quite complex messages, further contribute to the intricate interplay between biological and cultural influences. Thus, by presupposing intersubjectivity, they actually shorten the path to its achievement (Rommetveit, 1974). Trevarthen (1992) maintains that understanding intersubjectivity can provide an explanation 'of how human social and cultural knowledge is created, how language serves a culture and how its transmission from generation to generation is secured' (p. 102).

Current research refers to 'innate intersubjectivity' (Trevarthen, 1998), the 'virtual other' (Bråten, 1998), the 'innate basis of the theory of mind' (e.g. Gopnik & Meltzoff, 1993) and the 'nature–nurture–culture equation' (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993). Thus it seems that there are good grounds for formulating a hypothesis that, throughout its evolution and socio-cultural history, the human mind developed not only biological and cognitive universals, but also the capacity to communicate and to be open to other minds. Trans-subjective and interpersonal intersubjectivities use abundantly phrases like 'the fusion of minds', 'attunement to the attunement of the other' and 'fusion with the other'. In traumatic intersubjectivity, in which the self attempts to fulfil his or her responsibilities and strives for proximity with the Other, communication, whatever form it takes, must be aiming at the reduction of distances between the participants. In intrapsychic intersubjectivity (matrix 4) the divergence between the

self and Other is reduced by the self's internalization of societal demands. Internalization of these demands socializes the uncontrolled self.

If intersubjectivity is supposed to express the idea of closing the gap between I and Other(s)—so as to theoretically create the sphere of 'in-between' to think of the I and the Other—we could hardly object to such a characteristic of intersubjectivity. It is crucial to conceptualize the taking of the role of the other, or fusing with the other, as phenomena of this 'in-between' kind. However, if it is claimed that these kinds of intersubjectivity constitute subjectivity, then we must pose some questions. How could subjectivity so conceived account for innovation, creativity and for change in individuals? If intersubjectivity is bound to communication, it presents a very one-sided kind of communication, one that always aims at a happy unification with the Other. Yet subjectivity is more than that (Marková, 2003).

Dialogicality in the Constitution of the Self

When Hegel (1807/1977) maintained that self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness, his idea was that this was achieved not by the fusion with other minds but through the struggle for social recognition. In his formulation, the individual has the capacity to acknowledge the other as a human, and he or she has the desire to be acknowledged in the same fashion. In other words, social recognition involves two ideas. One idea refers to the *Ego*, who desires that the *Alter* treat him or her with dignity. The other idea refers to the *Alter*, who desires that the *Ego* treat him or her with dignity. Social recognition, therefore, is a basic social drive—or desire—directed towards other human beings. Through social recognition, social and historical realities can be conceived as the human history of desired desires (Kojève, 1969, p. 9).

The Neo-Kantian philosophers—for example, Buber, Marcel, Rosenstock and Rosenzweig—presented these ideas in terms of 'the dialogical principle', which involved the relationship between 'I' and 'Thou', that is, the relation of co-authors in communication. In addition to Hegelian philosophy, their dialogical principle came also from Judaism and from Christianity. It was part of the Old Testament as the cultural and communal spirit. The dialogical principle, the Neo-Kantians argued, is established and maintained through speech and communication. Communication expresses the life experience of people, their emotions, concerns and their making of their social realities.

Although all Neo-Kantians were anti-individualist in their approaches

to the study of social thinking and language, they presented diverse views of dialogical mutuality. Martin Buber (1923/1962) expressed it in terms of I-Thou. He has become, today, the best known of all the Neo-Kantians. However, his I-Thou remained basically at the level of dialogue between human individuals, that is, at an interpersonal level. In contrast, Rosenzweig's treatment of dialogue was much broader. For him (Rosenzweig, 2001), the key to intersubjectivity was not only mutuality and reciprocity, but, above all, the dialogical asymmetry and tension. Moreover, I-Thou did not centre on two voices in a dialogue and their mutual relations; it centred on multiple voices in a broad community, in politics, ideology and in social institutions. Rosenzweig argued that one could not reduce the dialogical principle to intersubjectivity, reciprocity and mutuality. Being critical of Buber's narrow conception of I-Thou, he wrote to him: 'What would become of the I-Thou if they will have to swallow up the entire world and Creator as well? . . . For my and your sake, there has to be something else in this world besides me and you!' (cited in Batnitzky, 2000, p. 253, note 44, letters of Martin Buber).

Rosenzweig (1921) treated dialogue not simply as mutuality between the I and the Thou but, above all, as the communal world with the prevalence of judgement, difference and conflict. It is the impossibility of a total consensus that is the basis of all dialogues; indeed, the lack of consensus keeps the dialogue going.

Rosenzweig's treatment of dialogue has far-reaching implications. It redirects the focus on thinking and communication as a fusion of the minds or as something that always diminishes distances between people to dialogue as a communication in which the co-authors dispute, fight about ideas and negotiate their antinomies in thinking. In dialogue, the participants confirm one another as co-authors of their ideas and they also confirm their participation in social realities.

Every individual lives 'in a world of others' words' (Bakhtin, 1979/1986, p. 143). Humans make the world in terms of others, and the entire existence of the self is orientated towards others' language and others' world. We begin life by learning others' words, the multifaceted world of others becomes part of our own consciousness and all aspects of culture fill our own life and orientate our existence towards others. But living in the world of others is expressed by Bakhtin as co-authorship rather than as intersubjectivity. Co-authorship demands evaluation of the other, struggle with the other and judgement of the message of the other.

Already in his early work, but published only recently and entitled *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin (1986/1993) makes a distinction

between pure empathizing and active empathizing with the other. Pure empathizing leads to a submerging of the self in the other and viewing the world from the other's perspective. For Bakhtin, pure empathy erases the other, leads to annihilation, to the loss of individuality and to non-being. In contrast, active empathizing involves the struggle with *Alter*, with the strange; what arises from this struggle is something productive and new. For Bakhtin, there is no communication unless the self lives through active understanding of the strange, of *Alter*. The speech of others and their thoughts contain *strangeness*, which the self tries to overpower by imposing its own meaning on the other or to appropriate by making it part of its own thoughts and speech. The constant strife between strangeness of others' thoughts makes communication meaningful and essential to the human condition. There could be no dialogue if participants were not opposed one to another through mutually experienced strangeness, which creates tension between them. Tension is not bound to either of them, but actually exists between them.

Ideas are in tension; they clash, judge and evaluate one another. To be means to communicate, and to communicate means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. Bakhtin insists that a person has no internal sovereign territory and that he is wholly and always on the boundary with others. In other words, the limit of the self is not I, but I in interrelationship with other, '*I and thou*' (Bakhtin, 1979/1986, p. 167). All symbolic activity of humans is founded on 'dialogue' between different minds expressing multitudes of multivoiced meanings.

Bakhtin insisted that the I can be aware of himself and become himself only through recognition of himself for the other, through the other and with the help of other. *Ego-Alter* exist only within the realm of communication. They can stand for the self, groups, sub-groups, communities, societies and cultures. It is more than interpersonal communication. Through tension, the self is not attempting to fuse with the other but, instead, to set his own position and to assimilate strangeness. Reflecting on others' perspectives and accepting them is only one aspect of the development of the self-concept. These processes determine the self only partly but they never lead to the fully developed self-concept. As Bakhtin expresses his position: 'What would I have to gain if another were to fuse with me? . . . let him rather remain outside me' (Bakhtin, 1979/1986, p. 78). The self acts because of some motives, goals and reasons. Acts are intentional, and for them to be effective, they require personal commitment and responsibility. Words can be actions only to the extent that the co-authors give them power to act

through personal commitment and taking a stance. The loss of commitment to one's words could result in the author's loss of self-identity and authenticity. Dialogicality implies contract: responsiveness and responsibility. There can be no word without a speaker—words have their history. There can be no word without the self.

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Biography

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