

## SELF AND DIALOGICAL MULTIPLICATION

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### Abstract

Departing from a Lockean illustration in the context of the history of the notion of Self, this article presents a discussion on dialogism as an effort to overcome ethnocentric views of human psychological phenomena. Dialogical approaches in psychology focus tensions between different viewpoints in face of an object of social representation (Marková, 2006). It is assumed that the socio-cultural polyphony is internalized during one's life trajectory (Hermans, Kempen and van Loon, 1991; Valsiner, 2007b). From a typical dialogical approach, the notion of dialogical multiplication is proposed addressing the creative cultural process in which multiple positions in face of an object is taken into account, but also multiple objects of reference are created under a semiotic construction. Finally, the article focus upon a clinical case formerly reported and analyzed by Ernst Boesch (1991), showing how dialogical multiplication is processed in the setting of psychotherapeutic I-other relationships and within the Self.

**Keywords:** Meaning construction; Perception; Imagination; Otherness; Identity.

### Resumo

A partir de uma ilustração Lockeano no contexto da história da noção de *Self*, este artigo apresenta uma discussão sobre o dialogismo, como um esforço para ultrapassar visões etnocêntricas a respeito de fenômenos psicológicos humanos. Abordagens dialógicas em psicologia focalizam as tensões entre diferentes pontos de vista em face de um objeto de representação social (cf. Marková, 2006). É pressuposto que a polifonia sociocultural é internalizada durante a trajetória de vida de uma pessoa (cf. Hermans, Kempen and van Loon, 1991; Valsiner, 2007b). Partindo de uma abordagem tipicamente dialógica, a noção de multiplicação dialógica é proposta, endereçando o processo cultural criativo, no qual muitas posições em face de um



objeto emergem, mas também muitos objetos de referência são criados sob uma construção semiótica. Finalmente, um caso clínico relatado e analisado por Ernst Boesch (1991) entra em foco, mostrando como a multiplicação dialógica se processa no enquadre das relações eu-outro em psicoterapia e dentro do Self.

**Palavras-chave:** Construção de significado; Percepção; Imaginação; Alteridade; Identidade.

## Introduction

The history of modern psychology shows the effort of researchers to validate our area of knowledge as scientific. Practices and concepts of both scientific and non-scientific psychologies are culturally oriented. As researches constructed the subject of our discipline, they organized themselves in social communities around laboratories, professional projects, methodologies and *methodolatrics* (Danziger, 1994), according to certain historical circumstances. The notion of Self is one instance of the cultural process as it involves the constitution of psychology as a distinctive discipline, that is, concerning notions and concepts from a particular framework.

Few centuries before the foundation of the first laboratory for psychological research by Wundt, in Leipzig, 1879, European peoples had to deal with the psychosocial impacts derived from their encounter with the diversity around the world (Figueiredo, 1992). The dissolution of internal borders and the meeting of external borders allowed the emergence of new ethnic mixtures, linguistic hybridism, religious changes etc. Renaissance was not only a period of openness to the ancient European history, but also allowed the meeting of otherness and their way of life—languages, religiosities, uses and customs, rituals and so on—beyond the borders of each feudal territories within Europe, including lands overseas. The relatively stable life around small territory with small villages became ruptured by unknown variations and novelties; the well-known local population and language was invaded by foreigners dialects and accents; the social hierarchy started to be questioned; the clear distinction between center-periphery was confused; as well as the well-defined notions of regularity and order. Instead of a world plentiful of meaning and integrity, with durable personal and collective identities, the new emergent socio-cultural field brought the

diversity and the complexity of unusual ways of being human.

Different strategies emerged, along centuries, as efforts to re-organize the chaos at such a complex socio-cultural field. Until the 18th century, a series of transformations took place in the pool of intellectual life: the religious reformation; the construction of consistent philosophical systems, in which rigorous rational deductions were in the core of the immanent phenomena concatenation; the strengthening of empirical studies, from Galileo to Newton, the Empiricism of Bacon and so on. Cosmological formulas emerged along this historical moment as a solution to the gaps and uncertainties of unbalanced natural and social world (Cassirer, 1994). Nevertheless, during the process of emergence of new ideas and solutions, ethnocentric assumptions take place as preconceptions out of the tradition of their proponents (Gadamer, 1960/2008). In this sense, the notion of Self articulated with the notion of property can be a good illustration.

### **Self and Property: An Ethnocentric Preconception?**

The aim of this topic is to illustrate how the notion of Self can be pervaded by a conception of personal identity, showing how it goes beyond and holds to previous culturally situated notions. I'll ground my argument mainly in an analysis from Fausto (2008), concerning the Lockean notion of Self as a classical case of socio-cultural elaboration on property.

Fausto (2008) argues that the Lockean theory of property addresses a theory of personal identity. The English philosopher intended to justify “the individual liberty, establishing limits to the government and the private property as a natural right, at the same time that postulating an original state of things in which the world was commonly given to all” (p. 336). Then, Locke faced a great issue: “If man is a living body, an animal of a certain shape, then what is a person? A person is an intelligent thinking being that can know itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places” (Uzgalis, 2012). Therefore, personal identity is intrinsic to a continuous reflexive relation of the consciousness with itself and is achieved through this very process. Through the process of conscious self-ownership, intelligent human beings regulate their variations over time and space, allowing juridical identity and moral responsibility over his/her body and other material things in the world to take place (Fausto, 2008). Personal freedom is, therefore, reassured through the conception of self-ownership:



In sum, the theory of property in Locke puts in action a set of cosmological and anthropological presuppositions. There is a deity that produced a world populated with subjects (human beings) and utile things (animals, plants, land...) given in common to the humanity. These subjects have two main attributes: first, an identity with itself that is kept despite the temporal duration, and that is the condition to someone to be judged (by God and by humans) in reference to his acts; second, they are owners (the cause) of their acts, because they are also the owners of their bodies, the mean through which is possible to act effectively over the world. The action over the world—assembled in the category “work” (*labour*)—guides the subjects progressively to the appropriation of the utile things, in such a way that what was given in common starts to be individualized and dominated by some people, excluding others. In social life, this process leads to a distinction between owners and non-owners, and the former, thanks to their control over the things aggregated to their bodies, start to have an exceeding agentive potential. Therefore, the owner becomes the model for the agent and the appropriated goods become index of its agentive capacity (Fausto, 2008, p. 337).

Around two centuries after John Locke (1632-1704) had developed his philosophical ideas, another master, from the other border of the Atlantic ocean, developed further a notion of Self with strong implications to contemporary psychological approaches. William James (1842-1910) proposed a peculiar notion that is somehow compatible with Lockean ideas previously presented, articulating identity and ownership:

*In its widest possible sense, however, a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account. (James, 1890, p. 291)*

For James (1890), three aspects have to be taken into consideration in the effort for understanding the empirical experience of the Self: the constituents of the self, self-feelings, self-seeking and preservation. James proposed the existence of constituents of the Self, hierarchically organized into categories: four types divided in two classes. On one hand, the material and the social Self are both connected to external things in the world, from the personal body and objects to other individuals we relate with (either friends or adversaries). On the other hand, he asserts two constituents associated with the internal organization of the Self: the so-called spiritual Self and the principle of personal unity.

Whereas the Spiritual is defined by James (1890) as a reflective and affective process that covers psychic faculties and dispositions, that is, “the result of our abandoning the outward-looking point of view, and of our having become able to think of subjectivity as such, *to think ourselves as thinkers*” (p. 296), the principle of personal Unity addresses personal identity, perception of sameness in time, as an integrative property of disperse experiences of the I with the others in the world:

*The consciousness of Self involves a stream of thought, each part of which as 'I' can 1) remember those which went before, and know the things they knew; and 2) emphasize and care paramountly for certain ones among them as 'me,' and appropriate to these the rest. The nucleus of the 'me' is always the bodily existence felt to be present at the time. Whatever remembered-past-feelings resemble this present feeling are deemed to belong to the same me with it. Whatever other things are perceived to be associated with this feeling are deemed to form part of that me's experience; and of them certain ones (which fluctuate more or less) are reckoned to be themselves constituents of the me in a larger sense, - such are the clothes, the material possessions, the friends, the honors and esteem which the person receives or may receive. This me is an empirical aggregate of things objectively known. The I which knows them cannot itself be an aggregate, neither for psychological purposes need it be considered to be an unchanging metaphysical entity like the Soul, or a principle like the pure Ego, viewed as 'out of time.' It is a Thought, at each moment different from that of the last moment, but appropriative of the latter, together with all that the latter called its own. All the experiential facts find their place in this description, unencumbered with any hypothesis save that of the existence of passing thoughts or states of mind. The same brain may subserve many conscious selves, either alternate or coexisting; but by what modifications in its action, or whether ultra-cerebral conditions may intervene, are questions which cannot now be answered. (James, 1980, pp. 400-401)*

Although Locke and James have much in common in their reflections on Self and ownership, the latter allow us to focus on a plurality of nuances concerning our subjective references to the others and to things in our environment, affective-cognitive intrapersonal self-positions, the process of appropriating past experiences, memory and orientation to the future. Dialogical narrative approaches to human psychology interpret the Jamesian constituents of the Self as characters of a personal narrative, in



order to understand the intra-psychic world as a result of the internalization of socially lived relationships (cf. Cresswell, 2011; Hermans et al., 1991; Salgado, 2007). Among the characters of dialogical self-narratives are self-seeking and self-preservation, that is, orientation to the future and to the past, respectively, and feelings as the expressive character of the narrative speech.

#### *Dialogism in the Self and different selves out there*

Many contemporary psychological researchers were influenced by William James theory on the consciousness of the Self (i.e. Boesch, 1991; Bruner, 1990; Cresswell, 2011; Hermans, Kempen and van Loon, 1992; Linell, 2009; Salgado and Simão, 2011; Valsiner 1998; Valsiner and van der Veer, 2000; Wertsch, 1992; Wagoner, Gillespie, Valsiner, Zittoun, 2011 and others). Although an exhaustive review on Jamesian influential ideas is not the aim of this paper, a brief look on what he proposed as constituents of the Self allow us to observe a connection of his propositions and the Lockean way of understanding property and identity.

On the other hand, data collected and analyzed by anthropologists focusing the varieties of human cultural-personal experiences challenge scientific-psychological hopes for universal understandings from the beginning of the disciplinary divorce between psychology and anthropology (Jahoda, 1992). Polemics around the notion of Self is included in the field of cultural differences and their epistemological elaborations.

Diverse contemporary works developed by non-Western cultural psychologists stress the pertinence of a dialogical understanding of Self. Nevertheless, sometimes these works put aspects of the notion of self into question, guiding adjustments and modifications to its dialogical appropriation. Recent cultural investigations that took place, for instance, in India (Bhatia, 2006; Chaudhary, 2003; Malhi, Boon and Rogers, 2009 and others), China, Singapore and Korea (cf. Choi and Han, 2009; Goh and Kuczynski, 2009; Shi-xu, 2009; Wang and Dai, 2011 and others), Japan (cf. Köpping, 2005; Murakami, 2007; Omi, 2012 and others) and Arab countries (cf. Hammack, 2010; Skandrani, Taïeb and Moro, 2012; and others) are representatives of this polemics.

Whereas some recent discussions on cultural psychology address African humanities (cf. Keller, Demuth and Yovsi, 2008; Rasmussen, 2011), insightful theorizations from ethnographic studies could be further developed in order to achieve

broadly shared conceptions of Self. An insightful work was elaborated by Jean Rouch (1971), exploring the vicissitudes of the Self from his ethnographic experience as a filmmaker among the Shongay-Zarma (Niger, Africa). Sharing the construction of an ethnographic film with their participants, Rouch reports a 'strange dialogue' in which "the film's 'truth' rejoins its mythic representation" (p. 2), blurring the boundaries between the real and the imaginary. The Self of the filmmaker in face of otherness sight was able to achieve novel elaborations through the methodology of 'ethno-dialogue'.

Researches in different cultural settings have explored distinct nuances of the self in the framework of cultural psychology. Nevertheless, possible contributions made up from and by people of segmented societies, that is, stateless societies, remain little explored. The notion of dialogical multiplication, focused on this paper, unfolds preliminary attempts to aggregate to the psychological notion of Self, elaborations from previous studies concerning recent anthropological findings on the notion of perspective, based on conceptions developed by people from segmented indigenous societies of South America (Lima, 1996; Viveiros de Castro, 1996; and other works). As details on the interdisciplinary dialogue can be found in previous publications (Guimarães, 2011; 2012), a reasonable selection of theoretical and methodological achievements apart from that will be presented here before proceeding to some practical implications.

### **Self Through Dialogical Multiplication Lenses**

The main issue that guided the reflections on dialogical multiplication was the substantial finding that objective correlatives of similar concepts usually do not coincide in intercultural dialogues. Anthropological literature is plenty of cases reporting misunderstandings derived from quick translations of terms or even from dialogues that happen in a supposedly common language (cf. Albert, 2002; Lagrou, 2007; Lima, 1996, 2005; Sztutman, 2005; Vilaça, 2006; Viveiros de Castro, 1996, 2002, 2004, 2006; Wagner, 1981 and many others). Misunderstandings appear to be inherent to dialogue, demanding a constantly celebrated effort of one's adjustment of its attunement to the attunement of the other (Rommetveit, 1992). For dialogical approaches it is a basic assumption, since each person has a proper perspective, or meanings, in face of any object in debate.

Cornejo (2008) discussed the minimal communicative situation as a triangular



condition in which someone negotiates the meaning of something with someone else. Triadic pictures or metaphors are often used to account any dialogical process (Marková, 2006; Moscovici, 2003; Simão, 2012; Simão and Valsiner, 2007), allowing the comprehension of differences and tensions around a specific topic or social representation (object). Withal, something else happens when we have dissimilarities under a same notion. The following instance from Ernst Boesch can be useful to clarify what happens when a same word is used by different persons:

*It will take some time before Sally discovers that the pronoun 'I' also applies to herself and not only to others. Why, after all, should it? 'Sally' is not only sufficient for distinguishing her from others, but, even better, calling herself 'I' like everybody else would make her less of a person. Why, then, use such an ubiquitous pronoun? Might it be because of its undiscerning quality that Sally does not use it for calling Bobby? There are in fact cultures—e.g. Thailand—that do not know an all-pervading 'I'; there a person will refer to him- or herself either by the personal name or by a pronoun varying according to partner and situation. It has been thought that people in such cultures did not develop individual selves—the contrary might be said as well: 'I' is so pervasive, used similarly by everybody, that it scarcely hints at a distinguishing identity (Boesch, 2003, pp. 287-288).*

When Boesch discusses why doesn't Sally call Bobby 'I', he indicates that the use of a same pronoun addresses different objects of reference in the world. On the other hand, in Guarani's language, for instance, most of the words are used associated to any pronominal reference. The word house is not used addressing an independent object, but usually related someone: *xero* (my house), *ndero* (your house), *nhandero* (our house) etc. The same to other deixi-things: *xevoxa* (my bag), *ndevoxa* (your bag), *nhandevoxa* (our bag), and so on. The elements of the world are, then, always attached to someone, there is not a reality independent of a point of view, as Lima (1996) also perceived in her ethnographic work with Yudja people from Central-Brazil.

Intercultural dialogues are permeated by gaps between Self and other. It can be amplified to the extent that interobjective realities cannot find intersection points. Recent anthropological works are evincing the existence of different ontological routes in history and societies (Lima, 1996; Descola, 2005; Viveiros de Castro, 1996;). It leads to the recognition of non-translatable dimensions between cultures and, consequently, to the incommunicability of self-experiences between incompatible semiotic grounds.



These works are facing the limits for accessing otherness continuous dynamics of semiotic construction.

The phenomenological methodological constraint labeled *Epoché* considers “[...] that any phenomenological description proper is to be performed from a *first person* point of view” (Beyer, 2011, n. p.), therefore, “[...] ‘bracketing’ the question of the existence of the natural world around us” (Smith, 2011, n. p.). This conception is convergent with some constructivist approaches, according to which the reality is considered a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/2003). The experience of otherness is supposed to happen in a background of mutual affections without a transcendental meaning. It implies that the relational process allows the emergence of more than one objects of semiotic reference, sometimes these interobjective constructions are incompatible and/or incommunicable.

Thence, the dialogical triadic unity needs to be multiplied:

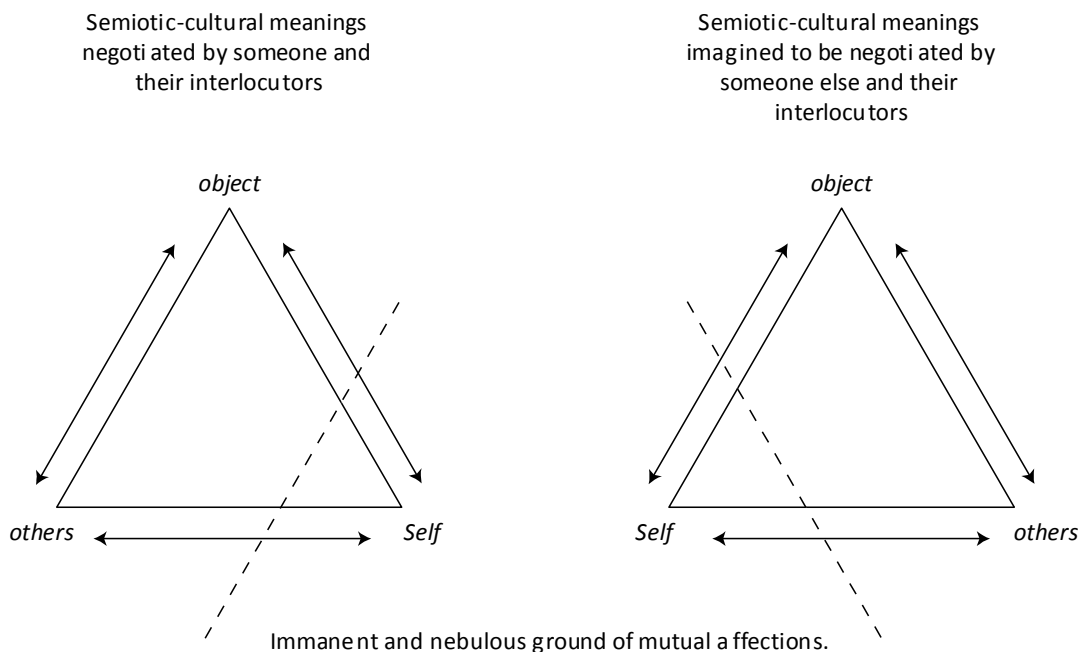


Figure 1 - The multiplication of dialogical triadic unities.

Figure 1 shows a general assumption of the dialogical multiplication: there are different objects of reference in the discourse of a Self engaged in an interethnic dialogue. Nevertheless, similar cultural processes—creative semiotic elaborations in



face of the experience of nebulous others and world—can be imagined and observed in each Self that mutually affect themselves in a nebulous immanent ground.

By nebulosity I mean the affective pre-semiotic flow of experience in the boundary of the Self, other and world (cf. Valsiner, 2007a; 2007b). On the other hand, semiotic constrains are built and socially shared. In order to overcome the disquieting (Simão, 2003) experience emerged from the nebulous field. These semiotic constructions are diversely constructed by different cultural manufacturing. Consequently, the multiplication of cultures entails a field of divergences concerning interobjective constructions of meanings among members that share specific cultural fields. Global society, for instance, evinces the existence of differently shared religiosity, languages, rituals, habits and maybe... psychologies!

A similar principle of dialogical multiplication can be derived to our reflection on the Self: the multiplication of symbolic objects at the core of cultural interchanges, rather than achieving an equivalent semiotic reference, addresses some limits for the integration between intrasubjective and intersubjective plans of Self experiences. Dissimilarities under same notions can be now focused under a dialogical approach: in Self–otherness relation, imaginative activities based on previous culturally constructed meanings take place in order to fill disquieting experiences.

#### *Articulating intrasubjective and intersubjective experiences of the Self*

The Conferences on Psychology uttered by Vygotski between March and April of 1932 at the Pedagogic Institute of Leningrad, were published in a posthumous book "The development of psychical superior functions" in 1960 (Moscow). They brought up some of his research results organized as an academic course. His fifth conference focused on "Imagination and its development during the childhood". At the end of the conference, when Vygotski expressed his own perspective on the discussed topic, he asserted:

*Along with the images created during the process of immediate cognition of reality, the individual creates images, which are recognized as a production of the sphere of imagination. At a high level of thought development, images that cannot be found fully formed in the reality surrounding us are created. This makes it possible for us to understand the complex relation between the activities of the realistic thinking and the imagination in their superior configurations and in*

*all of its stages of development. It is comprehensible therefore that each step towards the achievement of a deeper penetration into reality is simultaneous to the fact that the child is breaking free, to some extent, from his previously more primitive recognition of reality.*

*Any deeper penetration in reality demands a freer attitude of the consciousness towards the elements of this reality, a detachment from the external apparent aspect of the reality immediately given in primary perception, and the possibility of more complex processes. Due to those conditions the cognition of reality is enriched and becomes more elaborated. (Vygotsky, 2001, pp. 437-438)*

The good knowledge, therefore, is an elaboration that depends on the way children internalize their perception and elaborate it through the sphere of imagination. Perception and imagination can be understood as a double face of the consciousness related to its objects: when perceiving, the consciousness apprehends the object as exterior to itself; when imagining, the consciousness apprehends the object as independent of its external presence. During the ontogenesis, perception and imagination relate dialectically so that much of our perceptive approach to the exteriority is developed by our imaginative internal elaborations and vice versa. Besides, there is a fundamental relation between action and meditational means, the developing person articulates personal symbolic resources and actions, embraced by Self perceptive-imaginary apprehensions.

The notion of symbolic resource here adopted is based on Zittoun's elaborations according to which:

*[...] the use of symbolic elements by an agent in order to achieve something in a particular social, cultural and temporal context constitutes that symbolic device as a resource that enables the agent to make a transition from one socio-cultural formation to another [...] (Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Invision & Psaltis, 2003, p. 416).*

On the other hand, the notion of symbolic action was taken from Boesch's theory, according to which:

*[...] an action will always be performed by an 'encultured' individual who profits from cultural opportunities or facilities and is limited by their constraints; at the same time, the actor will select and adapt cultural contents and thereby create*



*the idiosyncratic meaning of the action [...] (Boesch, 2001, pp. 480-481).*

Symbolic resources and symbolic actions, as mediations of Self relationships with the others and things, are expressions of psychological dialogicality. They act over the tension between personal aspirations and concrete experience, revealing negotiable meanings between diverse viewpoints.

Both symbolic action orientation and symbolic resources are features of the cultural field (Boesch, 1991) in which trajectories of life (Valsiner, 2007b) take place. Thence, intersubjectivity is not only a process that happens among two or more persons in the world, but also in different levels of the intrasubjective dimension of the Self, i.e. in its internal dialogue. Hermans (1996) stressed that the others in private imaginary dialogues are derived from our relation with external others. The Self is, therefore, an intrasubjective space in which diverse positions are personally integrated, through semiotic elaboration of affective and nebulous experiences.

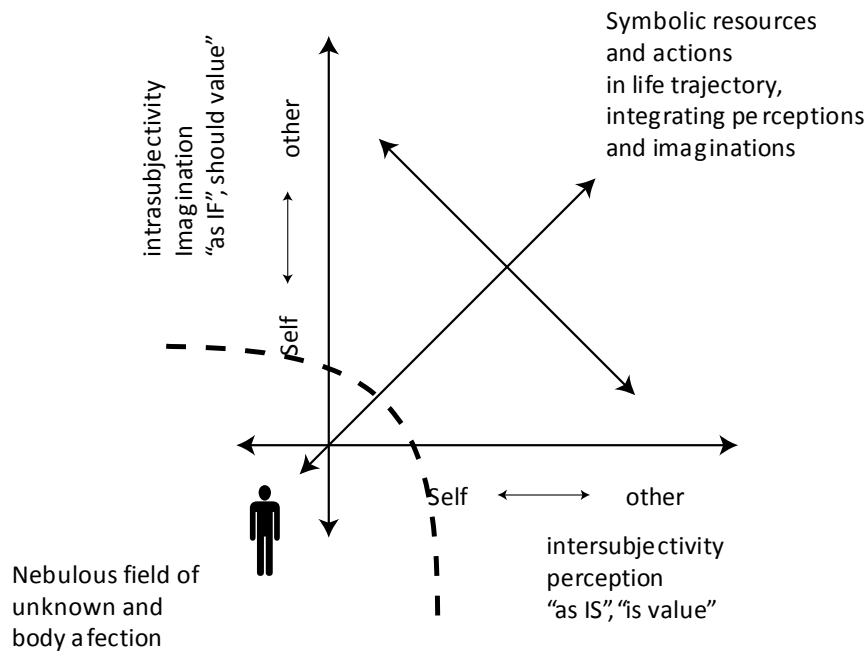


Figure 2 - Self as a construction integrating embodied intersubjective (perceptive) and intrasubjective (imaginary) experiences.

As represented in Figure 2, symbolic actions and resources articulate perceptive experiences of the exteriority as it is, including intersubjectivity, with imaginary experiences of the intrasubjective psychological dimension, converting life trajectories

into self-narratives whereas elaborating nebulous, affective-cognitive experiences<sup>1</sup>.

### **Dialogical Multiplication in Movement: Approaching a Psychotherapeutic Setting**

The present topic is an effort to outline the process of emergence and development of different trajectories of symbolic action and semiotic elaborations. I'll present a full exposition of a clinical case formerly reported and analyzed by Boesch (1991, pp. 274-278) in his book "Symbolic Action Theory and Cultural Psychology". The presentation of the case will be followed up by commentaries, in order to make explicit the position of the therapist as a knowledge constructor out of the experience with his patient. Special aspects of this process can be described as dynamics of dialogical multiplication.

The cultural psychologist, Ernst Boesch, practiced psychoanalysis for many years, "although only a smaller part of his life, and has learned much from it, concerning action theory" (Boesch, 1991, p. 274). His presentation of a clinical case from his practice aimed to demonstrate the individual development of "fantasm-myth interplay", a theoretical elaboration from his symbolic action theory. This exposition does not aim to provide a deep discussion on Boesch's psychological theory, but, precisely, focus on the embracement of his meaning construction out of the challenging experience with otherness: his report is especially attractive because it presents, in a very sophisticated way, the semiotic-cultural process of symbolic emergences, concerning theoretical conceptions in psychology, from the convivial interchange between psychologist and patient.

Selected parts from his presentation will be emphasized in *italic*, **bold** and underline. The italic part indicates his description of how the therapist perceives the patient as she is; the underlined part indicates his theoretical elaborations, a demonstration of his personal way of imagining (hypothesize) the experience; finally, the bold part is an articulation between his perceptions and theorizations, integrating both:

*I have chosen here the example of a young woman who had developed a striking sensitivity to "action constrictions": she perceives limitations, barriers as*

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed discussion on the notions of 'as IS' and 'as IF', 'IS value' and 'should value' can be found in Valsiner (2007b) and Boesch (1991) respectively.



*difficulties as being imposed more often on her than on others. As a result, she lives in constant expectation of failure; successes tend to surprise her, and she also tends to disparage them as being coincidental. **This would be an example of a “threat-fantasm”, a leitmotiv manifesting itself in the specific qualities of individual experiences, in situational anxieties and corresponding fantasies.** For the cultural psychologist, the example gains additional interest by illustrating the individual assimilation of religious and moral rules of a group (pp. 264-275).*

This excerpt contains the therapist elaboration on the experience of the patient in different levels. Articulating perceptive experiences with his self-reflective notions, Boesch organizes the narrative using semiotic constructions to provide an accurate description of patient's feelings and expectancies (italic); the association of her experiences with his analytic preconceptions, emerged out of similar experiences lived and/or developed from his studies (bold); and the generalization of the concrete case to other possible experiences (underline). Following the narrative, the same way of articulating the experience of the other and self- understandings appears:

*The origins of these attitudes appears readily understandable: The woman grew up as the only girl among her brothers, in a family strongly marked by an austere religious, morally exacting and confining mother, with whom she identified completely in early childhood, but against whom she rebelled later. **As is often the case, the mother felt most attached to her eldest son, while the father cared most for his only daughter, but the mother managed to curb her husband's displays of affection for the young girl. Of course, such a constellation caught the daughter in a strongly ambivalent action field: as the sole girl among three boys she had to accept rules of action different from the ones for her brothers. The sexual complications which naturally ensue from such a situation were less eased and exacerbated by the religious rigidity in the petit bourgeois surroundings.** On the one hand, for example, the young girl was reprimanded vehemently for parading in front of her father in a new undershirt; yet, on the other, the mother found nothing amiss with having an older brother sleep in the same bed with his sister long after the age in which parents usually (and erroneously) trust in the innocence and sexual indifference of the children.*

*Obviously, the experience of barriers is a pervasive part of the whole constellation. **The moralizing of the mother constitutes barriers as much as does her preference for the sons; the social constraints imposed on girls limited our subject's action field in comparison to those of her brothers; the emotional and sexual attraction toward father and brothers fell under the moral taboos of the mother; the identification with her mother ran counter to the rejection she later developed toward her. In these and other ways the young girl was continuously faced with external or inner barriers, experiences which she structured into the fantasm both of an opposed external world as well as her own personal deficiency.***

*Fantasms, as we have seen, are subjective models of interrelationships between self and environment. **Our example first shows us the impact of the experienced environment fantasm-building. Yet, already at this early stage we detect the contribution of mythical elements. The mother's piety, reinforced by the closely associated religiousness of school and church, provided relevant mythemes in the form of diverse, yet daily instructions, dictates, rebukes, admonitions, tales as well as concrete actemes – linked with each other and with everyday events in a sometimes consistent, sometimes divergent way (as the example of sexuality demonstrated). The child was thus faced with extremely complex structuring tasks: not only in unifying the manifold mythemes and actemes into a consistent whole, but also harmonizing them with her fantasmic aspirations.*** (p. 275).

We can grasp from this excerpt that Boesch continued to articulate selected aspects of the patient description, presents a coherent narrative of her childhood (italic), and interprets it with his symbolic resources (articulated notions from his theoretical approach, in bold). Sometimes, some general principles supposedly valid for everyone are explained as a depiction of his theory. Boesch used his personal understanding of the psychological functioning as a semiotic resource to understand the subjectivity of the other (his patient), grounding it in an empathic movement towards the other. He conceived empathy as an effort that allows the contact with meaningful connotations--verbal and non-verbal—from the other. Emphatic feelings, therefore, have some specificities: “[...] Empathy, in this sense, starts from the inner polyvalence of one’s own experience, and uses it for elaborating distinctions within I-other relationships” (p. 358). As the expressions of the other hide and show intentions,



feelings, thoughts, attitudes etc., it encompasses mistakes. The other is always considered an autonomous Self, apprehended from an exteriority.

As symbolic constructions happen in irreversible time integrating intersubjective experiences and intrasubjective elaborations, each person has his/her own trajectory of symbolic construction:

*The diverse myths of a society may be contradictory. At the outset of her studies, our young woman was to encounter the myth of the New Left, that is, of a non-authoritarian, permissive society – obviously antagonistic to the values of her family. Confronted with such opposing myths, we make choices, form compromises, attempt syntheses. So did the woman: she married, albeit in a civil ceremony, thereby rejecting the religious myth while at same time embracing the bourgeois one. She apparently felt this to be too much submissiveness to her upbringing; so she agreed with her husband to the freedom engaging in other love affairs. Attempting thus to reconcile two mutually exclusive myths, she unavoidably conjured up conflicts and difficulties: whatever the woman did was in turn challenged by the “counter-myth”- she had erected inner barriers to both alternatives of action.*

*The woman finally sought a solution to her difficulties through psychotherapy. **As could be expected**, she met with what Freud termed the “Feminine Oedipus complex”. We can assume that she was already familiar with the myth of Oedipus from her school days, although never having related it to herself. Now she was offered to the myth as a kind of aid to understanding – which in fact, quite in the sense of Lévi-Strauss, is one of the essential functions fulfilled by a myth. At first, the woman snatched it up with relief. She had finally found a formula which promised to straighten out her inner confusion and account for her ambivalent actions. Let us not overlook here that this was neither the Sophoclean nor the Freudian Oedipus “myth”; rather, the young woman perceived it as a scientific explanation: this is the course human development takes, as psychoanalysis has proved time and time again. This distinction is probably not unimportant, for in the (western) culture of our time a “myth”, once it is perceived as such, has the quality of being “non-committal”: it is a kind of fairy tale which one can take or leave. The vast number of myth-stories with which a host of publications have familiarized us, from Asia to Greece to North and Central America, has reinforced this arbitrariness. The fact that psychoanalysis*



*has transformed the Oedipus myth into the Oedipus theory restores its original function of representing a binding system of reality.*

*Order must prove its qualities in two ways: first by allowing to coordinate areas of reality experienced by the individual; second, by validating and confirming the thus acquired I-world-view within one's group. **For these reasons the Oedipus interpretation was not able to hold long in our case. It could not account for either the problems relating to her brothers or the constraining impact of her mother. In addition, it would also lack social validation: she would soon be led to ask why girl friends – also subject to Oedipal processes in their development – escaped similar personal difficulties.** Indeed, the salient feature of this woman's problems is precisely that she experienced limitations of actions more than other people. **Given the moralizing religion pervading her parents' home, it would be, furthermore, almost inevitable that the Oedipus interpretation would reinforce instead of diminish her guilt complex: "Others can cope with their incestuous temptations – I can't."** The structuring and validating powers of the myth were inadequate here, and therefore, the myth would be called into question: the analytical interpretation was "wrong". In other words, the myth was rejected because it was felt to be too divergent from both a subjective constellation of experiences and from fantasmic aspirations. The search for a "consistent" view of herself has to go on. (pp. 275-277).*

This excerpt addresses some of the symbolic organization of the patient, describing it using the mediation of notions from the approach of the psychologists (i.e. myths, fantasms etc). Figure 03 depicts the dialogical multiplication process that takes place from the psychotherapeutic meeting: on one hand, the relation of the psychologist with his patient and, on the other hand, the relation of the patient with her psychologist. These relations are originally affective and nebulous, but the recurrent meetings guide the symbolic construction of the personal experience:

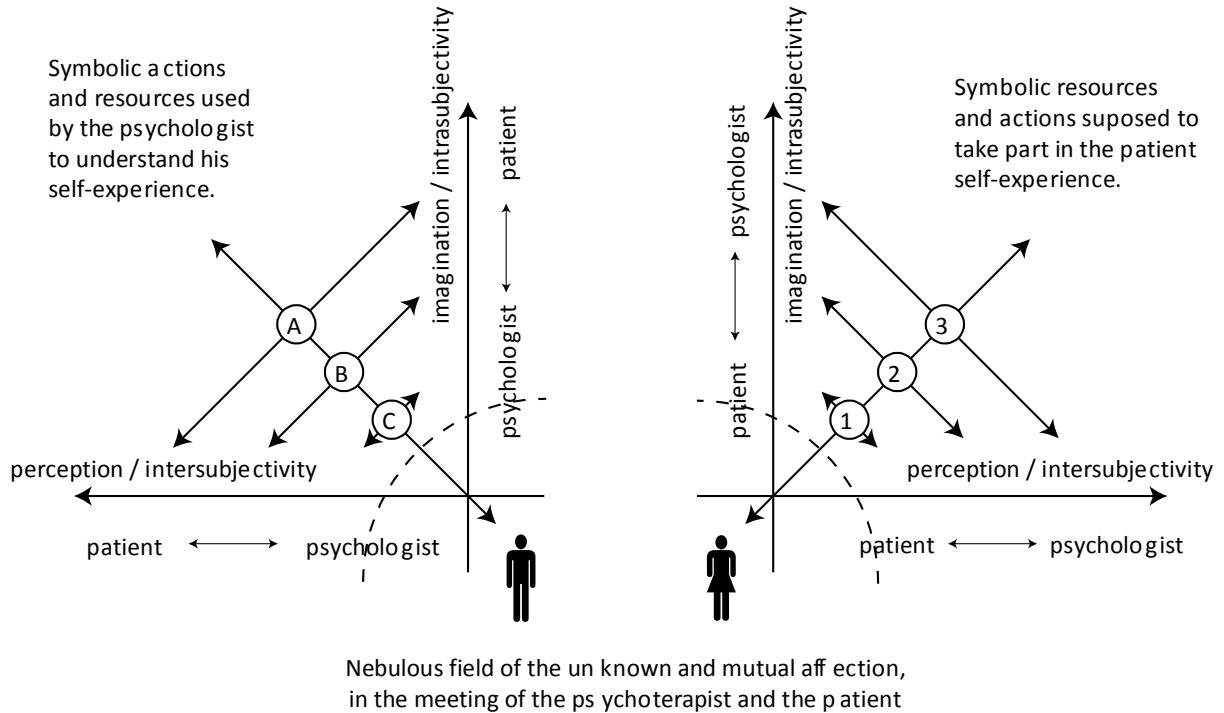


Figure 3 - Different trajectories of semiotic elaboration of experiences between therapist and patient.

Figure 3 was constructed in order to account the way Boesch describes the patient with selected information, focusing her affective way of being, her sensitivity to constrictions, her expectation of failure, her surprise when she succeeds (A). This selection is connected to the framework of the psychologist integrating his perception of the individual with his previous reflections about how subjectivity works (B). His personal understanding of the psychological functioning is used as reference to understand the subjectivity of the other. Besides, the relation with the other is an opportunity to make new generalization, namely, to change himself and his theory in order to include the experience of the other (C).

Boesch's experiences with his patient allow his personal path of symbolic elaborations to develop, but the experiences of the patient with the psychologist guide her to another way. Living under a personal conflict, she decided to find a psychotherapeutic orientation in order to solve it. She initially reports it, narrating personal life experiences (1). The therapeutic meeting was considered as a possibility for solving her conflict, at the beginning, because psychoanalysis was a cultural device in which she believed (2). She articulated her psychoanalytic readings with her beliefs,

developing intrasubjective expectancies that guided her symbolic actions to face the psychotherapeutic meeting.

Divergences between the patient and the psychologist, in Self appropriation of semiotic notions, appeared concerning the psychoanalytic reference. It was not a difference of position concerning a psychological theory. Boesch remarks that the Oedipus myth she was in contact with was “neither the Sophoclean nor the Freudian (...); rather, the young woman perceived it as a scientific explanation: this is the course human development takes, as psychoanalysis has proved time and time again” (p. 276). For him, the supposed scientific explanation was something to be critically approached. While his experiences with his patient allowed a personal path of symbolic elaborations, the experiences of the patient with him guided her to another way. The role of the psychologist was to confront some of the woman's beliefs, working as a catalyst of the transformation and supporting subjective reorientation.

*Myth, thus, as an extraneous order suggested to personal experience, is not just accepted and interiorized. Rather, encountering different manifestations of a myth starts a complex process of controversy, contention, selection, compromise, transformation, both internal and external. In the case of our young woman, these processes were obvious all through her childhood up to the present. It is likely that not until she is well into her mature years this woman will succeed in achieving a self-and world view which manages to select, integrate and harmonize both the mythemes of her experience and her personal fantasms.*

*Arranging experiences into consistent order and reaping approval from the group are in essence only the inner and outer aspects of a more global consistency formation. Yet a third, and possibly more difficult, aspect must be added: The myth should offer a consistent system of order for new actions. This implies that already the reception of mythemes would pass through the filters of present action tendencies and action structures, which may mean both that they transform the perception of the mytheme, and also that the myth transforms in its turn existing action propensities. This obviously requires that the new action structures proposed by the myth are perceived to be more profitable than previous ones, and “profitable” implies that they appear so in the light of existing fantasms. They would be more likely to become acceptable if supported by*



models with whom the individual can identify and who demonstrate the usefulness of new ways of acting, or of new ways of conceiving life.

***In the case of our young woman the old action structures, i.e. her “limitation fantasm”, would be expected to be resistant, since it also assumed a protective function: fantasizing limitations, obstacles to one’s goals, not only frustrates action tendencies, but it also reduces responsibility, alleviates guilt feelings or even transfers them to others, and legitimizes aggression. In a sense, her neurotic action structure could give her the impression of “reaping the best of both worlds”: being married, and thereby a respectable person, but also enjoying the freedom of a bachelor and thereby participating in the anti-bourgeois rebellion. In this way she was able to identify with her parents, all the while revolting against them, to keep up her incestuous brother fixation, and to reject it. This “nibbling from both tables”, apparently, was crumbling under the impact of motherhood; the experience of a first miscarriage probably became the releasing impulse triggering internal restructurings. Maybe that psychotherapy supported the reorientation as a catalyst, but it obviously needed the powerful assistance of the upsetting experiences of stillbirth and motherhood. These confronted the woman again with success and failure, but now the cultural “mother-child-myth” acquired personal significance and thus became likely to stimulate and support new fantasmic expectations (p. 277).***

The excerpt above addresses dynamic processes of ruptures and identifications with different social others in the life trajectory of the woman, entailing contradictions to her personal experiences and personal aspirations. These contradictions were disquieting her, demanding symbolic actions in order to build a Self consistent view. Nevertheless, some of her options were irreconcilable, that is, non-dialogically negotiable paths, upbringing the conflict within her psychological system. Two main myths were in conflict in the experience of the woman. Using our schematic representation we can build the conflictive *bricolage* constructed in the Self of Boesch’s patient as follows:

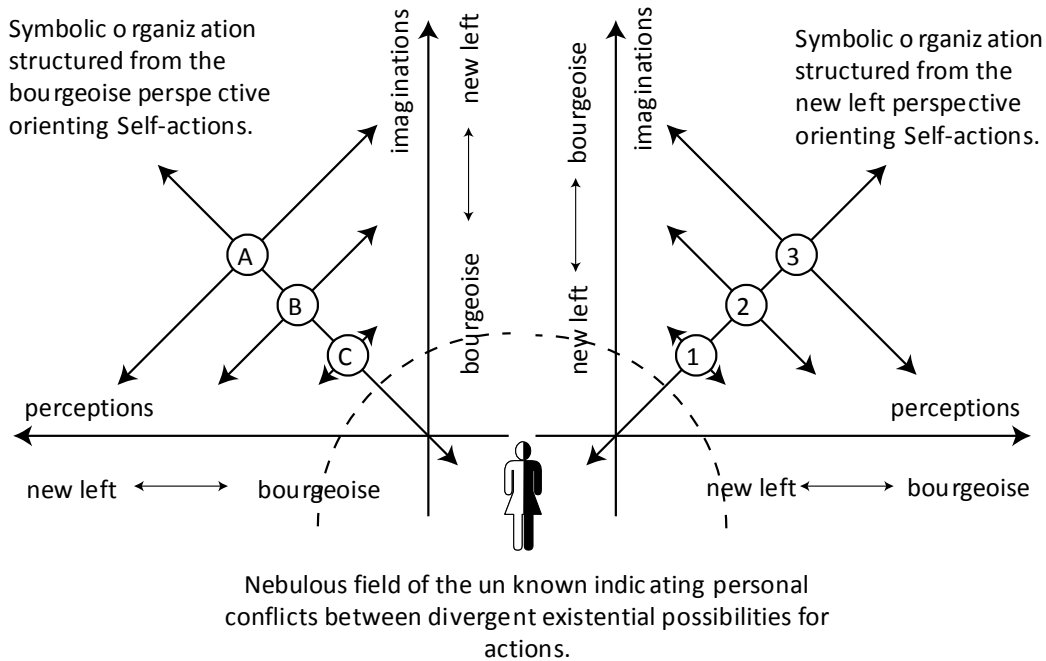


Figure 4 - Articulation of divergent perspectives, without synthesis, within the Self.

The woman was a divided person, trying to “reap the best of both worlds”. Boesch says “(...) being married and therefore a respectable person, but also enjoying the freedom of a bachelor, and thereby participating in the anti-bourgeois rebellion” (p. 277). For that reason, her symbolic body was represented as divided in Figure 4.

On one hand, there is a perception of living and orienting herself from bourgeoisie aspirations, in opposition to a way of life according to the New Left conceptions: she should marry in a religious ceremony (C), nevertheless, she opted for a civil one (B) managing to mediate possible injuries to her good social reputation (A). On the other hand, there is an intersubjective experimentation of the New Left way of life in opposition to the bourgeoisie one; associated to the personal expectancies projected to it: she engaged in an anti-bourgeoisie rebellion (1) and, although marrying, opted for an open relationship (2), in order to assure her aspiration for freedom (3).

As her network of intrapersonal conflicts was perceived as too disquieting, after strong experiences, it was possible for her to achieve symbolic transformations, reorganizing her availability to act differently: a synthesis through novel symbolic actions and symbolic resources was in course with the support of the psychotherapist.

Boesch (1991) asserts that a myriad of personal tendencies or propensities to act



can coexist in the intrasubjective psychological experience of his patient, some of them antagonist, others convergent. The internalized polyphony of the patient is similar to what is observable in any cultural field. Variability is, therefore, interindividual and intraindividual, the imaginary intrapersonal functioning bring up to the person his/her selection from ontogenetic experiences. He concludes the exposition of the clinical case emphasizing the hard enterprise of Self elaboration of conflicts intrasubjectively inherited from the socio-cultural intersubjective meetings:

***The case of this woman gives a striking illustration of the multiplicity of myth impacts in a person's development and its interaction with fantasm-building. It shows, too, that myth impacts somehow interact. The moral system of the family, in our case, was not identical with that of the church, the school and the village community, but they were strongly intertwined and communicating. The child met them successively – first the mother, then the church and the school – but their interrelations made them appear consistent and, for a long period of the child's development, convincing. The break occurred when she was confronted with the ideology of the New Left which, although antagonistic to the previous myth impacts, was much closer to some very personal and hitherto mostly unconscious fantasmic aspirations. Thus, the multiplicity of myths induced identification conflicts, as well as ambivalent identity construction. The "limitation fantasm" became combined with an inflated "ego fantasm": our woman did not react as "Cinderella", but as a "Sleeping Beauty" who, although enclosed by a wall of thorns, yet expected to be rescued by magic prince, without having to provide a contribution of her own – which, quite obviously, was the rationale of the "bachelor-reservation" in her marriage; it is likely that it contributed also to her motivation to undergo psychoanalysis (p. 278).***

The trajectory of symbolic actions and semiotic elaborations in this clinical case is remarked by progressive ruptures and transitions aiming at stabilization. Analytical resources of the psychotherapist were unfolded whereas, during the process, life trajectory of the patient, including the clinical sessions as a part of it, harmonized her conflicts. The systematization of the process presented here encompasses the Self trajectories of dialogical oppositions as intersubjective perception and intrasubjective imagination, asserting that the same process is multiplied in the experience of the otherness.

Self is conceived here as encompassing multiple possibilities for symbolic actions and elaborations, although constrained by the background of the cultural field: sometimes following the values of bourgeoisie tradition and sometimes following the values of the New Left ideology, the woman presented by Boesch started to live an intense embodied conflict. As far as we do not have immediate access to the experience of the other, there is always a nebulous field of unknown in the I-other relationship that increases the potential for the emergence of novelties in the personal trajectories. The description of the woman's life trajectory evinces her multiple perspectives concerning intrapsychological disquieting experiences. Family, church, school, university and others contributed to construct her personal identity. In adult life, the way she read psychoanalysis performed a role in the temporary stabilization of conflicts, and the effective experience of psychotherapeutic meeting were understood as a catalyst for processing options and rearrangements between incompatible cultural discourses.

### **Final considerations**

The appropriation of dialogical approaches on the Self in recent cultural studies in psychology is related to the possibility of reflecting on the borders between the intrasubjective and the intersubjective, allowing the understanding of the exchanges between the social-cultural and the personal-cultural psychological dimensions. In fact, dialogism is often claimed as a less ethnocentric perspective in psychology than others, once it addresses a rupture with both individualism and rationalism (i.e. Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1991), dominant tendencies in our cultural trends for centuries. Whereas dialogical theories on the self are efforts to overcome the entrenched dualism culture and self (Bhatia & Stam, 2005), Bakhtin (cf. 2009) questioned the excessive socio-centrism of the Freudian approach to psychology. The dialogical effort, therefore, addresses a more general concept of Self (cf. Valsiner, 2004) that transcends differences among a variety of culturally situated psychological trajectories.

One of the main sources of transformation in human development happens through the search for intersubjective sharing. Socio-cultural relations embrace intrasubjective and intersubjective dimensions addressing Self-Self and Self-Other relationships. Therefore, to investigate a topic like Self-Self and Self- other (world) relationships address us to the frontiers of psychological studies and to the advances



of other disciplines concerning culture. The work with interdisciplinary tensional fields allows us to amplify our comprehensions about the Self and possibly reach novel models for understanding it. If one has availability to be displaced from a well-known semiotic-cultural territory and participate for instance, in the quest for integrative concepts between psychological, historical and anthropological approaches, the understanding of the socio-cultural origins of our concepts could increase our chances to reach theoretical innovations.

Lockean and Jamesian notions of Self aimed to find a universal conception of identity, but achieved a notion of Self strongly bounded to their socio-cultural field of symbolic actions. There is no doubt that it is impossible to someone to transcend his or her historical situation. The notion of dialogical multiplication when constructing a general psychological knowledge, selects the experience of differential trajectory in the sharing process of semiotic construction. In such an extent, it conceives symbolic actions and symbolic resources as elaborations out of the immanent field of unknown. Nebulous experiences of otherness increases the potential for further elaborations articulating Self perceptions and imaginations. The notion of dialogical multiplication, therefore, can be a useful device for comprehending the process of sharing and non-sharing trajectories between different Self and cultural perspectives, contributing to psychologists in the observation of the genesis and unfolding of a multiplicity of symbolic actions and resources.

Focusing a clinical case, this article possibly leads to the clarification of a set of dialogic antinomies that are present in the course of personal symbolic transformations in the field of the therapist-patient relationships. The notion of dialogical multiplication incorporates to the analytical setting not only semiotic elaborations of the patient, but addresses the emergence of meaning from nebulous affective embodied experiences. Meaningful experiences unfold from a diffuse, pre-semiotic background, in which different active embodied agents are mutually affected. Diverse meanings can be constructed out of the nebulous and disquieting field. Each construction about oneself and the other is grounded in ontogenetic previous experiences from the trajectory of a Self: they are stable sediments out of the intersubjective stream of feelings (cf. Guimarães, 2010).

Finally, the notion of dialogical multiplication, as proposed in this article, also allows us to see the dialogical boundary between the Self and the other as integrating the intrasubjective, imaginary, dimension and the intersubjective, concretely



experienced dimension. Therefore, it guides the researcher to have a detailed approach on the processes involved in psychological sharing and psychological differentiation.

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