

Language, Self and Society. Hermeneutic Reflections on the Internal Conversations That We Are.

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“*The conversation that we are is a never ending conversation*” (Gadamer, X, 140)²

1. In Medias Res

Where shall I start? With the beginning or the end? With practices or with discourses? With myself or with the others? To ask a question is to answer it. As the answer is always an answer to some question, the conversation is essentially dialogical, even when it appears as an internal monologue.³ And even when we are writing texts, we’re always talking to others. Whether these others are our predecessors, contemporaries or successors, to use Schütz’s typifications, whether they are past writers, future readers, or a bit of both, as is the case with the author who reads what he writes while he thinks, they are always somehow there as members of a virtual, potentially universal audience we are addressing in thought when we are writing.⁴ Consequently, our texts are not

¹ Like in old fashioned letters, I extend the memorable conversations I had with the honourable members of the Reflexivity Forum in Warwick and in the shadow of Kenilworth Castle into print. Once you’re into the conversation, it is indeed hard to get out of it... Like in all virtuous circles, the point is, however, to enter it properly and to transform the circle into a spiral that points beyond itself to what sustains it: gratitude. I especially would like to thank Margaret Archer, Andrew Sayer, Norbert Wiley, Vincent Colapietro and Pierpaolo Donati for inspiration. I also would like to acknowledge various types of support – material (texts), intellectual (ideas), moral (advice) and emotional (care)- from various persons, notably Fernando Suárez Müller, Harry Kunneman, Hubert Hermans, Marc de Leeuw, Hans Herbert Kögler, Nikos Mouzelis, Gabriel Peters, Thiago Pontes, Rachel Herdy, Jennifer Greenleaves, Marguerite Labrunie and, last but not least, Tatiana Rotondaro.

² All references to Gadamer come from the *Gesammelte Werke*. The first number refers to the volume, the second to the page.

³ That thinking is dialogical and takes the form of a conversation is perhaps the central idea of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. It is not only at the heart of his habilitation on Plato’s dialectical ethics (V: 5-163, esp. 15-48), but also of his communicative elaboration of Heidegger’s lonely metaphysics - from *Sein zum Tode* (being unto death) to *Sein zum Texte* (being unto text) – into a theory of being that foregrounds language. “From dialectics back to dialogue and back to conversation” (II: 368) - that is indeed Gadamer’s way into the question concerning being. By thinking through the Socratic dialectics of question and answer, he has expanded Plato’s definition of thought as internal conversation of the soul with itself into a full blown philosophy of language as the medium for understanding ourselves, the world and what is beyond language. On conversation (*Gespräch*), see Gadamer, I: 383ff, II: 6 ff., 58 ff., 151 ff., 207 ff., 500 ff., X, 104 ff., 267 ff.

⁴ Chaim Perelman (1992: § 7) reminds us that the philosopher always addresses himself to a ‘universal audience’ and argues in the hope of getting its approval of his arguments. This approval is not a factual one, however, but a counterfactual one that is assumed as soon as one starts writing. Even the consent that there’s no consensus to be had on the only issues that really matter – What can I hope? How shall I live? What should I do? – counts as a consensus of sorts.

really texts, but contributions to an ongoing conversation that we inherit from our predecessors, address to our contemporaries and transmit to our successors.

We are always already in the midst of a conversation. We are as much in the conversation as the conversation is in us. I'll therefore start in the middle. *In medias res*. Etymologically, the thing (*res*) is, in fact, not a thing, but a cause (*causa*), something which is at stake in the conversation.⁵ What is at stake in the conversation is the truth, but the truth is still open. When one is convinced that one possesses the truth, one does not really engage in conversation. One talks to the other, not with the other, and one talks to the other to convince him or her of one's own truth.⁶ Unlike speech, which is an oral presentation by one person directed to other persons, dialogue seeks a common ground and allows people with different views on a topic to learn from each other.

Needless to say I'm not in possession of the truth and I have no lessons to give. I'm engaged in a quest and I'm on my way. My research is, literally, a *search*. I raised a question -Where shall I start?- and I'm looking for an answer. The dialectics of question and answer is the undertow of conversation and the way that leads to a common ground. Persons who talk to each other seek a common ground. By doing so, they do not only enter into communication, but also into community. Conversation implies, by definition, the presence of another. Even when I talk to myself and think in silence, I speak to myself as another. As thinking is dialogical through and through, Peirce's 'tuism' -which he defined for the *Century Dictionary* as "The doctrine that all thought is addressed to a second person, or to one's future self as to a second person" (*apud* Wiley, 2006: 40) – is, in fact, a truism.⁷

1.1. *Conversamus ergo sumus*

⁵ *In medias res* is a literary and artistic technique where the narrative starts in the middle of the story instead of from its beginning. Here I take *res* in its original sense. In Roman law it does not refer to the thing, but to the cause, to that which is in litigation: "The primitive meaning of *res* oscillates between the ideas of litigation, the litigious situation, and the object that gives rise to contention. [...] Fundamentally, the 'thing' is the 'cause' [...] If *res* is the object, it is first and foremost a debated object, subject to a difference of opinion, a common object that brings together two opposing protagonists into a single relation" (Thomas, 1980: 416–417).

⁶ As always, the identity politics of the personal pronouns raise intractable problems: Should I refer to the subject as he or she, use the neutral or try to express my own (unstable) identity into my text? Even if I often use the generic masculine to refer to subjects, persons, individuals, actors, I trust no one will infer that I think that women have no subjectivity, personality, individuality or agency!

⁷ In this article I explore convergences between hermeneutics and pragmatism to bring the conversation back into language. To make the point that every conversation is part of a larger conversation, that conversation is always dialogical and that access to reality is always mediated by symbols and signs, I draw on Gadamer and Peirce, but similar arguments can be found in Bakhtin's sociological philosophy of language (which I only recently discovered). Cf. Bakhtin, 1977, esp. chapter 6.

Middling through, searching for an answer to the question that has been raised, I discover that I cannot really start the conversation. I can only continue it in thought or in writing. In the beginning was the word. Whatever I say, the word does not belong to me, but to language. Language is always already there. It is the beginning that has never started. It is a fundamental insight of hermeneutics that language is the medium of thinking and that thinking is a conversation one has with another. We are always already in the midst of words and thoughts as well as of others. Conversations take place in language. As Gadamer (I: 450) says: “Language is essentially the language of conversation”. Or, again (X: 25) with due emphasis on intersubjectivity: “Language is really where conversation is, in being together with others”. And with even more force (II: 144, 206, 364): “Language is only ever in conversation” (*Sprache ist immer nur im Gespräch*).

Language is not only the medium of conversation, it is also its product (‘duality of language’). That language is both the ever present precondition of conversation and the continually reproduced consequence of intentional practices is not a paradox; rather it is inherent to the hermeneutic circle.⁸ The circle that interrelates conversation and language as part and whole, process and product, *ergon* and *energeia* is an ontological structural feature of the human condition. By virtue of language, thanks to it, we become human. Conversation always already presupposes language and draws on it, while the conversation inevitably fashions and transforms not only language, but also the subject who speaks to others (including him- or herself) about something in the world (in which s/he is included). We always inherit traditions and incessantly participate in the past, which we can reproduce or transform, but which we cannot create *ex nihilo*. As a matter of fact, we belong as much to history as history belongs to us. There is nothing reactionary in saying that even revolutionaries stand in traditions and are bound to continue them - rebellion against tradition being one possible way of

⁸ Whereas Anthony Giddens formulated the theorem of the ‘duality of structure’ that became the hallmark of structuration theory through a skillful neo-Wittgensteinian interpretation of the relation of co-implication of *langue* and *parole* in Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale*, I’m trying to arrive at a similar position through a reading of Gadamer’s dialogical interpretation of the hermeneutic circle in Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* (Gadamer, 1999, I: 270 ff., II: 57-66). In the original formulation of structuration theory, the echoes of his encounter with Gadamer’s hermeneutic dialectics can still be heard: “Considered as a structure – and this is crucial – natural language is a condition of the generation of speech acts and the achievement of dialogue, but also the unintended consequence of the production of speech and the accomplishment of dialogue” (Giddens, 1976: 127).

expressing it.⁹ To avoid the mustiness of conservatism, it should also be noted at this point that while conversations take place in language and presuppose tradition, the latter is dialogical and plural, with central, semi-peripheral and peripheral subtraditions that have porous boundaries and are in constant interaction with each other.

The “uniduality” of language points to a generalized semiosis not just of the self, but of the world as such (Colapietro, 1989). The world is always already pre-interpreted by language and comes to itself, presents itself to us in language as an open and infinite totality. Language is constitutive of everything that exists for Man. That does not mean that everything is language or that there’s nothing outside of language, but rather the reverse. Everything that is thought can, in principle, though not in fact, be expressed in language. Language is everything and everything is always already enclosed in language. Whatever is said is always bound, backwards and forwards, by what is not said. The experience of being speechless only confirms that one is seeking the right word to express what one wants to say even if, for the time being, it remains unspeakable. As Wittgenstein says in a letter to Engelmann: ““If only you do not try to say what is unspeakable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unspeakable will be -- unspeakably -- contained in what has been spoken!” (Engelmann, 1967: 6, transl. modified).¹⁰

Between inchoate feelings and well formed sentences, there’s no solution of continuity. If it cannot be expressed in prose, it can perhaps be expressed in the language of poetry or painting. Even silence speaks, and as the saying goes, it speaks for itself. Language is the medium in which being is wrapped, thought expressed and reality revealed to us as a human reality that makes sense (at least most of the time).

⁹ The debate between Habermas and Gadamer obscures what the former inherited (*traditur*) from the latter and what he did to refashion it – to insert speech act theory with its validity claims as an operator of Reason. This debate was as much about the relation between tradition and critique – about the place of the tradition of critique within humanism – as it was about the relation between philosophy and the social sciences. While Habermas is definitely a hermeneutician, Gadamer is not a sociologist. As he said in a letter to Richard Bernstein: “Admittedly, to make me into sociologist is something no one will succeed in doing, not even myself” (Bernstein, 1983: 265).

¹⁰ *Avant la lettre*: I do not ignore nor do I aim to belittle the pre-, the non- and the post-linguistic. But before I concede the point, I want to defend the argument and think it through. Gestures (Mead), sensations and emotions (James), laughing and crying (Plessner), ethnomethods (Garfinkel), habits (Merleau-Ponty), operations and calculations (Piaget), etc. – all these embodied and expressive phenomena are pre-linguistic (or “pre-predicative”, to use more phenomenological language), but that does not mean that they cannot enter the internal conversation or that they cannot be expressed in language. As a matter of fact, by thinking, and a fortiori by speaking about them, their tacit dimension is brought into the open.

Language is a window that opens onto the world and the bridge that brings us in communication and community. By privileging language, solipsism is overcome from the start. If, *per impossibile*, I were the only individual in the universe, I would not have a language. Not insulation, but conversation is the basic law of human existence.¹¹ The openness towards the other is what distinguishes Gadamer's hermeneutic dialectics from Heidegger's existential analytics of *Dasein*. Every time I talk to someone, I get out of myself to find the other and using his or her language as a medium of communication, I enter into a dialogue with the other. Whether we come to an agreement or not, we are always looking for a common ground that we share. In any case, I'm not alone in the world, the world is not constituted by me, the other is not a figment of my imagination. "Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts" (Peirce, 1931-58: 5. 265). *Conversamus, ergo sumus*.¹²

1.2. Knowing of the Third Kind

My contribution to the conversation will be a minor one. I only want to change a word. In fact, a verb, as we shall see later. But by changing a word, one changes the subject. My subject is sociology and the subject of sociology is human beings who, *together*, form a society and by doing so are formed by it and become not only what, but also who they are. Sociology belongs, by nature, to the human sciences. Standing in between the natural sciences (which are descriptive and explanatory) and the humanities (which are interpretative and normative), they partake a bit of both. As such, they develop a third kind of knowledge.¹³ It is not theoretical knowledge ('know that', in Ryle's

¹¹ Compare and contrast with William James (1950, I: 226): "Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law".

¹² Cartesian conversations on intersubjective monadology: Following K.O. Apel and V. Höslé (rather than Habermas and Mead), Suárez Müller (2004: 48-57) radicalizes the linguistic turn within the tradition of absolute idealism and conceives of internal dialogue as the ultimate foundation (*Letztbegründung*) of thought. Unlike Descartes, he does not smuggle the ego into the cogito, but starts from thinking as a precondition of doubting, affirms that thinking is dialogical and concludes that universal sympathy is the telos of dialogue. But even if we accept that the absolute is thinking, that thinking is dialogical and that dialogue presupposes and projects an infinite community of conversation, if the charge of solipsism is to be avoided, it still has to be shown that this never ending dialogue is not only intrasubjective, but truly intersubjective. The other is within me without me.

¹³ In an attempt to put the interdisciplinary of 'humanistics' (applied humanist studies) on new foundations, Harry Kunneman (2005) has introduced existential and existential reflection on processes of learning as a third mode of knowledge, somewhere in between pure academic blue-sky research (mode 1) and applied interest-driven research (mode 2). To the extent that the social sciences are committed to the advancement of norms, values and beliefs that further the process of humanization, they are part of the third mode of knowledge production.

terminology), nor is it merely a craft, a habit, a skill ('know how'). As a reflexive form of common knowledge, yes, as a methodical extension and systematization of common sense (*sensus communis*) that is shared by all who speak the same language (Habermas, 1973: 178-233), the new sciences represent knowledge of the third type. Perhaps we could call it 'know with' or, in more Peircean vein, knowledge of "withness".

The ambit of the human sciences encompasses nature, culture and the practices that interconnect both.¹⁴ Between nature and culture, analyzing both the processes of human alienation that transform culture into pseudo-nature, which is devoid of meaning and to which one has no access from within, and the processes of humanization through which the social world is constituted as a common world of shared meanings that one has to appropriate to become oneself, that is where sociology stands. In the middle, because it investigates the morphogenetic processes of exteriorization, alienation and internalization of meaning (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) that constitute the social world as a man-made world that is always on the verge of spinning out of control and of becoming alienated from its origin and its end. But also somehow above it, because it turns into an object of investigation that of which it is itself a part.

In the tradition of Hegel, and closer to us of Dilthey, Gadamer and Habermas, we could say that sociology deals with exteriorizations and internalizations of the Objective Spirit. Indeed, the Spirit is not only at work in the subject that thinks and feels, talks and acts, but also in institutions, organizations and systems of actions, such as the economy, the state, law or society, which are exteriorizations of the Spirit and, hence, subject to understanding. Retranslating the term *Geisteswissenschaften* into English (which the translator Schiel introduced in 1854 to render John Stuart Mill's moral sciences), we can now say that sociology is a spiritual, moral and political science in the humanist tradition and define it as the science that describes, interprets and explains social life in terms of the objective Spirit with the aim and the intent to preserve or restore the living dialectics between the individual and society that ideally allows for the flourishing of both. Following Ricoeur (1986: 263-288), I take the freedom to transpose practical

¹⁴ The social sciences deal with nature in two respects: to the extent that nature is human (is nature 'for us' and therefore culture) or, inversely, to the extent that culture has crystallized into 'second nature' (alienated culture as pseudo-nature). With nature and culture at opposite ends, the social sciences deal both with the humanization of nature and the degradation of culture into pseudo-inert facticity. They do not merely analyze these processes, but as normative and practical sciences that consciously continue the humanist tradition, they are animated by the desire to reactivate the practices that keep the dialectics between nature and culture going. As I have analyzed the dehumanization of the social world at length elsewhere (Vandenbergh, 2009), I will focus in this chapter on the relation between culture and practices.

reason to the collective level and relate it to the struggle against the alienated and alienating objectivation of the Spirit into reified social systems that stifle action by ridding it of all meaning. At the risk of losing the normative dimension of sociology and its connection with practical reason, which reanimates the dialectics between agency and society, but in order not to overburden the discipline with the metaphysical baggage of absolute idealism, we could also, following post-Hegelian neo-Kantians (sic) (like Lask, Simmel and Cassirer) and post-Hegelian pragmatists (like Peirce, Dewey and Mead), define sociology as a cultural science that deals with the web of meanings that constitute the world as a human world and summon the subject to realize its inner potential. Believing that “Man is an animal suspended in webs of meaning” (Cassirer), I conceive therefore of sociology not only as a science in search of causal powers (Bhaskar), but also as an interpretative one in search of meaning (Geertz).¹⁵

1.3. Alethic truth¹⁶

By focusing on structure to the detriment of culture, critical realists (with the exception perhaps of William Outhwaite) have not paid sufficient attention to language.¹⁷ Language is real and has to be conceived of as a “causal power” that constitutes the world as a meaningful one in which we find ourselves at home and that we can never fully surpass. The Marxian legacy and the concomitant fear of committing the “linguistic fallacy”, which reduces the world to language, action to performance and the subject to an ever shifting patchwork of discursive identifications, has led to an underestimation of the causal power of language. Although the distrust of structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, archeology, genealogy and other

¹⁵ I have amended Geertz’s (1973: 5) quotation – “Man is an animal suspended in webs which he has himself spun” (which he actually borrowed from Cassirer, but without saying so), by leaving out the Weberian emphasis on action and the subjectivism it implies. Although culture is indeed man-made, one might as well reverse the formula and say that culture transforms the animal into a human being and that, therefore, it makes man.

¹⁶ Giving a dialectical twist to his own thought, Bhaskar (1993: 394) has introduced alethic truth into critical realism. Referring to the real reasons, grounds or reasons of things, alethic truth can be understood as the ontologically deep truth of things (as different and perhaps even opposed to the truth of propositions). At the deepest level, this truth exists independently of its verification by science, though all science necessarily and inevitably presupposes it. In more mystical vein, Heidegger’s *aletheia* will reappear in Bhaskar’s (2002) ultimate philosophy of metareality as the ‘cosmic envelope’ one can access and identify with in and through meditation on the unity of being.

¹⁷ Following Gadamer, I speak of language as both background and horizon of communication and experience, but language is only a proxy for the ‘objective spirit’ of the Hegelians, the ‘symbolic forms’ of the neo-Kantians, the ‘forms of life’ of the neo-Wittgensteinians or the life-world of the phenomenologists.

de/constructivist approaches, like Rorty's neo-pragmatism, that do not recognize anything outside of the text, is in part justified, it tends to throw out the baby of hermeneutics with the water of post-structuralism.¹⁸

Unlike post-structuralism, hermeneutics does not, however, reduce the sign to a play of signifiers without reference. It does not collapse the intransitive into the transitive dimension. Language after all does not speak about itself, but about being and beings – whether this being is a fellow, a stone on the road or a flickering flame in the darkness of night. What comes to language, what is expressed and “presents itself” in language is “the world itself” (Gadamer, I: 453). Thanks to language, we can get glimpses of the world itself beyond language, even if this world always and inevitably appears to us and to others who do not share our life-world or our language, as an adumbration of the world in itself. If anything, language points beyond itself to alethic truth and, by doing so, it makes us aware of our own finitude. Significantly, Hermes, the messenger of the Gods, is associated in Greek mythology with the function of translating the message from the Olympus into a form that human intelligence can understand.

The world itself can be shown and known. It can be experienced as an open totality, but it cannot be scientifically objectified as such without loss. One gets access to it through participation, not through objectification. Unlike structuralism, hermeneutics does not analyze language from the external perspective of the observer, but it conceives it first and foremost as a symbol that has to be disclosed from within through participation. Instead of searching for codes within language from without, it searches horizons within life from within the life-world.¹⁹ As a way of getting access to meaning from within, hermeneutics is kind of phenomenology in the plural in which the ‘We’ always has precedence over the ‘I’ (not to mention Husserl's transcendental ego). Like

¹⁸ Provided one does not abandon the ‘emic’ perspective that discloses the realm of meaning from within – as opposed to the ‘etic’ perspective that objectifies meaning structures in a ‘packet of relations’ (Lévi-Strauss), hermeneutics and structuralism are not always and not necessarily exclusive. In his important contribution to the theory of interpretation of *Weltanschauung*, the young Mannheim (1964: 91-154) tried to integrate the three strata of meaning (objective-structural, subjective-expressive and documentary-hermeneutic) into a phenomenologically inspired and hermeneutically sensitive historicist sociology of culture. Closer to us, Ricoeur's (1969) impressive detour through structuralism, semiotics, Marxism and psychoanalysis, has convincingly shown that one can use the ‘etic’ perspective to better understand meaning. As he put it forcefully and elegantly: “To explain more is to understand better” (1986: 25).

¹⁹ The fact that the philosopher-sociologist brings in her own horizons when she investigates the textures of meaning raises interesting questions about the hermeneutics of hermeneutics. Human investigators reveal the sense and reference of the word not simply by lifting the obscuring veil, but by making it transparent through language. Heidegger's infamous *Destruktion* (a.k.a. deconstruction) does not destroy; it clears the sedimentations of language and removes the ‘tissue of ideas’ (Husserl) in order to return ‘to the things themselves’ (*zu den sachen selbst*).

phenomenology, it is concerned with the constitution of meaning, but unlike phenomenology, which analyzes meaning from the micro-perspective of the subject who intentionally gives meaning to his action, hermeneutics is a macro-perspective that interprets, understands and explicitates the meanings that the subjects intend as a form of participation in the webs of meanings in which they are suspended and which reveal the world as a familiar one that always already makes sense.

Extending a Weberian metaphor, we could say that phenomenology is more interested in the spider that weaves the web, whereas hermeneutics is more concerned with the web that is woven. If phenomenology adopts the perspective of the participant of the first person singular, hermeneutics deepens and enlarges this perspective by replacing it into the encompassing framework of symbolic meanings that is common to all the subjects who share a common language (by extension, to everyone who speaks a language). With its insistence on ontology, understood as the invisible, but real totality of symbols, signs and meanings that constitute the world for us, humans, as a meaningful one, hermeneutics is compatible with critical realism. Metaphysically speaking, language, symbols, concepts are the primal stuff of the world and not simply a fixture that human beings impose on it. As a matter of fact, with its insistence on culture, hermeneutics represents the idealist version of realism. As such, it complements and completes the more materialist version that foregrounds structure.

In accord with the main tenets of critical realism, I would like to defend the thesis that we do not merely have conversations with ourselves, but that we *are* these conversations. By changing the verb, I intend to bring back the conversation into language and conceive of the self as a hermeneutic and semiotic self – as a self-interpreting animal that is suspended in the conversational webs of language, that communicates with others within oneself. By foregrounding language and intersubjectivity, I do not only aim to continue the great Socratic tradition of dialogue, but I also want to bring critical realism, pragmatism, hermeneutics and phenomenology into an ongoing conversation.

2. The Mediation of Meditation

2.1. Grafting Pragmatism onto Hermeneutics

Freely paraphrasing Hans Georg Gadamer, in conversation with him as it were, we were on our way, looking for an answer to a question that had been raised before by others. We arrived at the hermeneutic insight that, through language, the conversation is in us as much as we are in the conversation. Or, to quote the old master himself: “The conversation that we are is a never ending conversation” (X, 140).²⁰ In his analysis of C.S. Peirce’s semiotics of the self, Vincent Colapietro arrived at a similar conclusion. “From the perspective of semiotic”, he says, “we are always already in the midst of others as well as of meanings; indeed, otherness and meaning are given together in our experiences of ourselves as beings embedded in a network of relations – more specifically, enmeshed in the ‘semiotic web’” (Colapietro, 1989: 27-28). This convergence and continuity between hermeneutics and pragmatism is, no doubt, an indication that we are on the right path. But with its firm insistence on human subjectivity, reflexivity and consciousness as a phase within action, pragmatism offers a welcome correction to the anti-humanism Gadamer inherited from Heidegger.²¹ The existential analytics of *Dasein* is indeed conceived of as a *Fundamentalontologie*, and definitely not as a philosophical anthropology. Although the ontological primacy of the whole over the parts is well taken, one has often the impression that in philosophical hermeneutics it is language that is speaking in conversation rather than the subjects themselves. To foreclose the vanishing of the subject, I will therefore follow pragmatism’s lead and think through not only how subjects use language to make sense of their world, their action and their life, but how they are also themselves “processes and products of semiosis” who become who they are thanks to the internal conversations they have with others as well as with themselves.

Following the maxim of pragmaticism – “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we can conceive the object of our conception to have” (Peirce, 1931-58: 5.2) – we will wade down the stream of consciousness from the antecedent conditions of thought (*terminus a quo*) to their consequences for action in the real world (*terminus ad quem*). To move from hermeneutics to pragmatics implies two

²⁰ Heidegger was the first to call attention to Hölderlin’s famous passage on “the dialogue that we are” (Grondin, 1997). But unlike Gadamer, Heidegger followed Hölderlin in understanding this dialogue as a conversation that goes on not between mortals, but between mortals and the Gods.

²¹ What matters to Heidegger is not Man, but Being and what comes into being by Man. What Heidegger (1964) says about thinking in his *Letter on Humanism* also holds for language: “Thinking is, in sum, the thinking of Being. The genitive has a double sense. The thinking is of Being in so far as thinking that partakes of Being belongs to Being. Thinking is at the same time the thinking of Beings in so far as it belongs and listens to Being (34). [...] Not Man but Being is essential (84) [...]. What matters is to put *humanitas* at the service of the truth of Being, but without the humanism in a metaphysical sense (138)”.

movements: first, from the external conversations we have with others to the inner conversation we have with our selves and, then, back from the inner conversations we have *in foro interno* to the external conversations (communications) that take place in everyday life and in the public sphere. To explore the ‘concomitant complementarities’ between hermeneutics and pragmatism I will have to execute a delicate operation and ‘graft’ a pragmatic sociology of internal speech onto a phenomenological hermeneutics of language as the medium of conversation. With its focus on interiority, pragmatism extends the spirit of hermeneutics deep into subjectivity, into the self, into the soul. The natural confluence of the spirit of hermeneutics into the soul of pragmatism avoids from the start the traps of solipsism and the quagmires of psychologism.²² Indeed, if the self is constituted by language in conversation with one’s self and others, individual thinking cannot be the starting point for doubting the existence of the other. As Dewey had correctly understood: “Failure to recognize that this world of inner experience is dependent upon an extension of language which is a social product and operation led to the subjectivistic, solipsistic, and egotistic strain in modern thought” (*apud* Rochberg-Halton, 1986: 34).

While hermeneutics proposes language as *arché* and conversation as its medium, pragmatism conceives of the self as its product and the good society as its *telos*. The synthesis of hermeneutics and pragmatism I’m proposing has various advantages: it avoids the Cartesianism of transcendental phenomenology; it solidly grounds pragmatism in holism and overcomes the individualism of W. James and H. Blumer; it corrects the political conservatism of German hermeneutics (Heidegger) with the progressivism of the American social reform movement (Dewey); and last but not least, it opens the way to a ‘psychological sociology’ (Durkheim) of intrasubjective social communication that would at the same time be an ‘interspiritual psychology’ (Tarde).

Following the lead of Peirce, Dewey, Mead and Cooley, prominent social theorists (Wiley, 1994, Archer, 2003, Collins, 2004) have finally opened the ‘black box’ of the mind and started to empirically investigate the internal dialogue people have with themselves – they have discovered it is a ‘chatterbox, full of voices!’²³ In an ongoing

²² Anti-Cartesian as ever, Peirce excludes solipsism as a mere metaphysical afterthought to communication: “But when a person finds himself in the society of other, he is just as sure of their existence as of his own, though he may entertain a metaphysical theory that they are all hypostatically the same ego” (CP 6.436, *apud* Colapietro, 1989: 79).

²³ In terms of intellectual filiations the sequence goes as follows: Colapietro *genuit* Wiley *genuit* Archer *et* Collins. Colapietro worked out Peirce’s semiotics of the self, Wiley proposed a synthesis of Peirce and

dialogue with them, passing the theme through many and varied voices like in a polyphony, I will now move from philosophy to sociology and investigate what the internal conversations can do for us.

2.2. Back to Sociological Theory

As sociologists, we're always concerned with the mic/mac issue. Whether this question has been imposed on us by chroniclers of the discipline (above all Giddens and Alexander) or not, fact is that, one way or another, we're all thinking about how we could satisfactorily link agency to structure (Giddens), the life-world to the system (Habermas) and the field to the habitus (Bourdieu). Well after the debate had degenerated into the tedium of high scholasticism, Margaret Archer (2003), the *doyenne* of critical realism, introduced the theme of internal conversations into her challenge of the 'neo-orthodox consensus' (structuralism + language games).²⁴ Through a systematic integration of a few central concepts ('analytic dualism', the 'morphogenetic sequence', the 'stratification of society') and theorists (Lockwood, Buckley, Bhaskar), she has convincingly shown (at least in my opinion) that structuration theory collapses structure (culture, structure and social systems) into agency – instead of linking agency to structure, it is 'sinking' the distinction (Archer, 1988: xii), as she puts it pithily. Owing to a double compression of agency and structure into practices, Giddens committed the 'fallacy of central conflation' and was, therefore, unable to conceive of either the emergence of a relatively autonomous cultural system from interactions (Archer, 1988) or the supervenience of social structure on the latter (Archer, 1995).

The consequent defense of analytical dualism – a device that freezes the frame and allows for a sequential analysis of the interchange between 'people' (interaction) and 'parts' (systems) – is the other side of systematic refutation of the theorem of the duality of structure. Instead of collapsing systems into interactions, it upholds the distinction

Mead, Archer picked it up from Wiley in her struggle against Giddens and so did Collins in his attempt to integrate Mead and Goffman in a Durkheimian micro-sociology. Personally, I discovered the fascinating theme of internal conversations via Archer, but coming from critical theory, I had already been prepared for it by Craig Calhoun's (1995: 50) offhand observation that Habermas had neglected intrapersonal dialogue. As Norb Wiley has been exploring the continent of internal speech for twenty years on his own and has gone deeper into the recesses of the mind than any of us, he deserves at least an honorable mention (cf. *Theory. The Newsletter of the Research Committee on sociological Theory of the ISA*, Spring/Summer, 2008).

²⁴ For a more extended presentation of Archer's morphogenetic social theory, I refer the reader to my review of the first four volumes of 'The Archers' (Vandenberghe, 2005). For a more personal overview of the two decades it took her to develop the morphogenetic approach, see Archer, 2007b.

between levels in order to analyze their interplay. The emphasis on emergence and dualism does not deny that social and cultural systems are ultimately man-made (no action: no structure nor system), but the restructuring of structuration theory offers better mileage to think through the inertia of the social world, diagnose its attendant social and psycho-social pathologies (from alienation and anomie to depression and panic disorder), and explore possible remedies (Honneth, 2000: 11-69). What we are concerned about is whole forms of life that have gone awry. As a result of ‘heavy’, almost unchangeable structures that have sedimented over time and that no one has foreseen and that no one really wants (global capitalism, technological drift, climate change, etc.), the social world is not a dream that one can change overnight; it is rather like history according to James Joyce: “a nightmare from which we are trying to awake”.

By upholding the distinction between system and life-world, ‘parts’ and ‘people’, Archer can do what Giddens cannot – namely to properly theorize alienation (rather than smuggle it back in via the backdoor). Indeed, with Mouzelis (1991: 25-47) and Archer, I am convinced that the emergence of autonomous and alienating ‘figurational structures’ can only be properly conceptualized if agents are not seen as continuously reproducing or transforming the society they are making. To think through the phenomenon of alienation critically, the emergence of objective structures that follow their own laws and that cannot be reduced to the practices that constitute them, has to be acknowledged openly. Without ‘syntagmatic dualism’ (Mouzelis), alienation or *Entfremdung*, to speak like the Marxist philosophers, cannot be conceptualized, let alone remedied. Moreover, it should also be noticed that agents can only reflect on the structural and cultural conditions of their action, if they can distance themselves cognitively from them, be it to analyze them in a more theoretical manner or with the practical intent to change them. To question the rules and claim the resources presupposes reflexivity, not the immediacy that marks routine activity. Without ‘paradigmatic dualism’ (Mouzelis), *Verfremdung* (Brecht) or the reflexive estrangement of one’s culture and society to analyze it or to change it ‘with will and consciousness’, cannot be properly theorized.²⁵ Dualism and reflexivity are connected, because it is

²⁵ The category of reflexivity is so rich and so confusing that I simply prefer to abstain from it (see, however, Vandenberghe, 2006b). I have the impression that Archer has transformed the French verb *réfléchir* (to think) into a concept. In her critique of reflexive modernization theory (Lash, Giddens, but above all Beck and his German colleagues (Bonß, Lau, Holzer) who creatively use the systemic concept of reflexivity to thematize “the dialectical suicide of whole systems” (Beck and Holzer, 2004: 165), she

only if the distinction between structure and agency is maintained that one can acknowledge that agents have the capability to reflexively examine their projects and their feasibility, given the objective circumstances in which they find themselves and which they have not freely chosen.

Now that reflexivity has been brought into the analysis, we can return to the theme of internal conversations. To expose what conversation analysis can do for us, sociologists, I will leave Giddens's jargon behind and move on to an analysis of the greatest sociologist of the second twentieth century: Pierre Bourdieu (with whom Archer studied in Paris in the 1970's). As his brand of critical sociology is only too well known by now, no introduction is needed. Whoever has seriously meditated on the intra-related concepts of field, habitus and capital, knows that the Achilles heel of the system is lodged in the short shrift it gives to reflexivity (Kögler, 1997, Lahire, 1998, Mouzelis, 2008). In Bourdieu, everything happens as if the subjects were somehow hypnotized into action. Actors are embodied agents rather than conscious 'subjects' (a word the French sociologist studiously avoids). In spite of the fact that habits are part and parcel of the pragmatist conceptual toolbox - James, but also and above all Dewey who conceived of it as a 'dynamic force' (2002: 43)²⁶ - the habitus functions as the *malin génie* of frictionless reproduction of the social world. Indeed, in Bourdieu, the latter occurs in spite of the subject, thanks to his or her non-reflexivity. To break the circle of reproduction - in fact, it is a circus in which all display the tricks they have learned to play -, it is enough to introduce the internal conversations people have with themselves in between the field and the habitus.²⁷ Through reflection and deliberation, the agents ponder what they want to do not only in their life, but *with* their life, and the differential answers they give to these existential questions has implications for the reproduction and transformation of society. Archer's central thesis - let's call it the "thesis of the

dismisses the Luhmannian notion of systemic reflexivity - "no real meaning can be attached to systemic reflexivity" (2007: 30)-, but I think she does it to her own peril. I confess that I find the effects of systemic reflexivity (the 'observation of observations') so powerful, corrosive and threatening to critical realism that I don't know how to deal with it. For a brilliant and readable sociological analysis of realism that is inspired by Luhmann, see Fuchs, 2001.

²⁶ "Habit means a special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than bare recurrence of specific acts. It means will" (Dewey, 2002: 42). In William James, the habits are rather more sturdy. His philosophy of habits is, in the first instance, "a chapter in physics" (James, 1950, I: 105). Approvingly, he quotes the Duke of Wellington: "Habit a second nature! Habit is ten times nature" (id., 120).

²⁷ In my own take on Bourdieu (1999: 50), I had collocated Blumer's "self-interaction" and Habermas's "rational communication" in between the field and the habitus, but I concur that internal conversations is more elegant and powerful. To unhinge Bourdieu's system, one could also bring in a little existential crisis and see what that does to reproduction. I thank Gabriel Peters for this astute observation.

mediation of meditation” – can now be formulated: Reflexivity is exercised through people holding conversations with themselves in which they clarify, organize and systematize their ‘ultimate concerns’ (Tillich) in an existential and personal project to which they commit themselves. To find out who they are and what their ‘mission’ is in this life, people have to decide “what they care about” (Frankfurt, 1988: 80-94), and they do so through an inner dialogue with themselves and significant others.²⁸ It is this meditation of the actors on what really matters to them and what they are willing to forego, or to invest in in order to realize what they care about and have ‘devoted’ themselves to, that constitutes the mediatory mechanism which links the causal powers of structure to agency.

Social structures and cultural systems exercise their causal powers by structuring the situation of action through constraints and enablements, but to the extent that the activation of those causal powers depends on the existential projects that the actors forge *in foro interno* (no projects: no constraints or enablements), actors can be said to actively mediate their own social and cultural conditioning. Provided we transform Karl Popper’s ‘three-world theory’ (Popper, 1979) into a ‘four-world theory’ that takes into account the emergence of social systems without reducing them to practices, it may be used to clarify the topology of the mediation of meditation. World 1 (*physicalia*, i.e. the physical realm of natural objects), world 3 (*intelligibilia*, i.e. the cultural realm of relations between ideas and theories) and world 4 (*sociabilia*, i.e. the social realm of relations between positions and roles) are objectively given.²⁹ They exist independently of ‘world 2’ (the psychological world of states of consciousness and objects of thought), but Nature, Culture and Society are only linked to each other via internal speech, which belongs to ‘world 2’.

In accordance with the ‘four-world theory’, we can conceive of situations of action as concrete contexts in which actors try to realize their personal projects within the

²⁸ Although faith is, undoubtedly, the ultimate concern, it should be noticed that the internal conversations and the sequence that interlink concerns, projects and practices into a personal *modus vivendi* do not necessarily lead to heaven. “There’s nothing idealistic here, because ‘concerns’ can be ignoble, ‘projects’ illegal’ and ‘practices’ illegitimate” (Archer, 2007b: 42). It would be interesting, though definitely not uplifting, to empirically track the internal conversations of youngsters from the *favelas* in Brazil who have been enrolled by the *narcotrafico* and transformed into ‘soldiers’ who attack to defend their turf and kill in order not to die.

²⁹ Popper wavers between Plato and Mannheim. His ‘world 3’ contains both eternal entities that the mind ‘discovers’ (e.g. like perfect numbers (6, 28, 496, 8128, etc.) and socio-historical items that it ‘invents’ (like his own critical rationalism and his unfalsifiable theory of falsification). It should be noted that to the extent that the self is genuinely a hermeneutic and dialectical one that emerges in and through internal conversations, it belongs itself to world 3 (I thank Fernando Suárez Müller for this observation).

framework of natural, cultural and social circumstances that constitute both the means of achieving their aims and constraints on that achievement. It is important to note that there's always an interrelation between the personal projects of the subjects and the culture of which they are part (world 3/world 2), as well as between the projects and the facts of both the physical (world 2/world 1) and the social (world 2/world 4) context. It follows from this that neither the natural nor the cultural nor the social elements of the situation can directly determine the course of action; they can only do so mediately by constraining or enabling the projects. As courses of action are produced through the actor's reflexive deliberations about how they could possibly integrate their 'ultimate concerns' into sustainable life-projects that are feasible in the given circumstances, the constraints and enablements of the situation need to be activated by the actors themselves if they are to exercise their causal powers. Although Archer is conscious of the connection between Culture – which she refers to as the 'Universal Library of Mankind'- Society and internal conversations, I'm afraid that in her valiant struggle against de/constructivism, she has significantly underemphasized the importance of language. Gently, I would therefore like to invite her to take the 'linguistic turn', which is, in fact, as we shall see, a return to alterity and intersubjectivity.

3. Experience and Nature

3.1. Parts and Wholes

Now that the meditations and ruminations of the actors have been introduced into the mic/mac debate as a mechanism of mediation that activates the causal powers of the people – 'the power to dream/to rule, to wrestle the world from fools' (Patti Smith) - the next step consists in opening the 'black box' of the mind in order to investigate the connection between language, self and society. At the intersection of the Spirit and the Soul, Margaret Archer encounters the tradition of pragmatism and engages with it. The works of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and George Herbert Mead lead her to a progressive break with the paradigm of perception and observation of the external world (to which not only positivists, but also Edmund Husserl remained captive).

Instead of moving outwards, she now moves inwards into introspection, into the self.³⁰ As always, she factors in time. Drawing on Wiley's (2004, 2006) 'triological' synthesis of Peirce and Mead, she schematizes the conversations into a cycle of morphogenetic sequences wherein the conversational 'I' speaks to itself in the specious present by projecting itself backwards and forwards into time: The conversational self (the 'I' at T2) interprets the past self (the 'me' at T1) to the future self (the 'you' at T3).³¹ The upshot of this imaginary meeting of selves is a working consensus in which the conversational self tries to align context, concern and projects into a possible train of action. Eventually, when the self has rehearsed several possible ways of action in fantasy, it 'makes up its mind', and 'action gears into the outer world' (Schütz, 1962: 20, 67, *passim*).³²

Sociologists and social psychologists will, no doubt, recognize the input of symbolic interactionism. At this point, it should be noticed, however, that Margaret Archer is highly critical of Mead (Blumer is only mentioned in a footnote).³³ In a rather severe assessment of the man and his work, she charges Mead for his 'oversocialized' conception of the inner wo/man: "Mead is an almost uncompromising externalist. [...] It is not a dialogue with oneself; it is a conversation with society. [...] A domain of

³⁰ By turning inwards, Archer consciously avoids the linguistic turn. Unlike Apel (1973, II: 178-219) and Habermas (1991: 9-33), she does not consider Peirce's semiotic transformation of Kant's transcendental philosophy as a first step of the critique of the philosophy of consciousness – a first step that seeks to reintegrate consciousness within language and to understand the internal conversation as an intrasubjective extension of intersubjective communication.

³¹ In 'Choosing among projects of action', Alfred Schütz (1962: 67-96), who was heavily influenced by pragmatism (James and Dewey), also described the temporalities involved in the act of 'fancying and projecting' of open possibilities of action in the future perfect tense (*modo futuro exacti*). The actor projects himself in fantasy into the future when the anticipated project will already have been accomplished. "Projecting, as we have seen, is retrospection anticipated in fantasy" (Schütz, *id.*, 87).

³² When the self gives its *fiat*, the projected action is executed and thought 'gears into the outer world and alters it'. Twenty years later, I still vividly remember when I first read the Austrian's distinction between 'overt' action or work and 'covert' action or a 'mere performance' of mental operations that can be revoked and annulled at any time. The distinction between action 'by commission' and 'by omission' ('purposive refraining from action') is also pertinent, but, of course, unlike Archer, Schütz was not thinking about life-projects and life-courses, but about stretches of action and doxic modifications of the pragmatic attitude.

³³ Archer is highly critical not just of the linguistic turn in philosophy, but also of the micro-revolution in sociology. Like Colin Campbell, whose trenchant critique of 'international situationalism' she fully endorses, she seems convinced that, notwithstanding all the waffle about the meaning of action, the preoccupation with the situation of action explains why "there is no action theory in contemporary sociology" (Campbell, 1996: 36). In order to correct some of the excesses of the inheritors of Schütz, Goffman and Garfinkel, she has, however, bent the stick the other way: intra-action and subjectivity are overemphasized, while interaction and intersubjectivity are underemphasized (even within the self). Although I understand why Archer and Campbell want a concept of the self that allows for unmediated experiences of reality, as in "teaching oneself to swim" (interaction with nature), "a solo mountaineer learning hand and footholds" (developing practical skills) or "solitary contemplative prayer" (communion with God) (Archer, 2006: 322), I think that a crash course in science studies should be sufficient to effortlessly deconstruct all of the examples.

mental privacy has been lost through its social colonization” (Archer, 2003: 78, 79, 82). Thinking with George Herbert against Margaret, one could, however, easily reverse the charge and say, with due apologies: “Archer is an almost uncompromising internalist. The internal conversation is not a conversation with others, let alone communication in and about society. A domain of public communication has been lost through introspection of the soul”. Even the more sympathetic critics have noticed “a solipsistic tendency” in her work (Sannino, 2008: 276) that systematically underemphasizes “interactions” (Mouzelis, 2008: 199-213) and “transactions between interdependent actors” (Dépelteau, 2008) and pointed to “the problem of intersubjectivity” (Gronow, 2008).

Fortunately, to bring back intersubjectivity and language into the conversation, one does not need to pass through Husserl, Gadamer, Apel or Habermas – though it helps.³⁴ All the elements one needs to make the case that internal communication is hermeneutic (mediated by language) and semiotic (mediated by signs), dialogical (conversation between I and Me) and intersubjective (conversation with significant others within oneself) are already available in pragmatism itself. Unlike hermeneutics, which foregrounds the eternity of Being, pragmatism is first and foremost a practical and praxeological philosophy of Becoming (and, thus, of time). As a post-Darwinian and post-Hegelian philosophy of evolution, it conceives of the universe not as an ‘iron block-universe’ (Dewey) that can be captured in a “kodak fixation” (Dewey, 1973, I: 211), but as a world that is still in the making, “brimming with indeterminacy, waiting to be completed and rationalized” (Shalin, 1986: 10).³⁵

According to pragmatism, the world is definitely not a thing – all *energeia*, it is work in process/progress. It is always in flux, while all things in the universe are in relation, interaction or transaction with each other. It may be somewhat exaggerated to say that pragmatism offers a secularized version of process theology and a socialist version of Einstein’s relativism. The fact is that the genuine pragmatist is a humanist like the

³⁴ Theunissen’s *Der Andere* is still, by far, the best book on intersubjectivity and dialogue within the phenomenological tradition (from Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre to Buber, Löwith and Jaspers).

³⁵ Unlike neo-Darwinism, pragmatism is not a dog-eat-dog philosophy; in spite of the American business-ethics that sometimes resonates in some of its most famous maxims (the meaning as the ‘cash value’ of action, the stress on ‘expediency’, the necessity to ‘adapt’ and ‘innovate’, etc.), it is not utilitarian either. No doubt their Darwinism is better approached via *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* than in *The Evolution of Species*. Towards the end of his life, Peirce did not hesitate to write about evolutionary love (‘agapasm’), Mead is all about cooperation, Dewey about solidarity and participatory democracy, while Cooley, that kindred spirit, waxes lyrical about sympathy and community.

ultimate Comte, a solidarist like Mauss and Durkheim, and a relativist like Simmel.³⁶ Where Descartes only saw an opposition between the mind (*res cogitans*) and the body (*res extensa*), pragmatism roots the spirit and the mind in the organism itself. While it places the organism in its immediate environment, it conceives at the same time of the mind as part of a larger evolving cosmic whole that has become fully conscious in the human being. From the ultra-small to the extra-large, pragmatism considers the universe as a complex spiral of concentric circles that open onto the universe and into the self. As everything enfolds everything, one can either enter the spiral from the bottom or slide down in circular movements from the top to the bottom. The direction does not really matter. What matters is the circular causality that interconnects parts and wholes into a living totality.³⁷ Like in a hologram, the part is in the whole, the whole is in the part; or more emphatically: the part *is* the whole.³⁸ As both are relative to each other, one might as well say, without contradiction, that the part is an ‘aspect’ of the whole as the reverse. As far as pragmatism is concerned, they are the same, only considered from a different angle. With its emphasis on becoming and wholeness, it is only consequent when pragmatism describes the implicate order as a dynamic one in which each ‘aspect’ is seen as a ‘phase’ within an evolving totality.

3.2. The Semiotic Circle

Inspired by Darwin’s narration of the organic connections he perceived between different life-forms, pragmatism consciously replaces the subject-object relativity with a dynamic integration of the organism into the environment. Instead of opposing the former to the latter, it integrates both in a single movement. “The organism is”, as John

³⁶ ‘In the beginning was the relation’ (Buber)... According to Donati (1991: 66, 80), this is “the most general presupposition in the metaphysical environment of sociological theory”. I have explored Simmel’s interactionist and structuralist theories of the relation elsewhere (Vandenberghe, 2002). It would be worthwhile to compare directly Dewey, Simmel and Mauss (without having to pass through the first Chicago School or via Durkheim).

³⁷ In the social sciences, the ‘merological’ connections between parts and wholes have recently been theorized to great effect by Marilyn Strathern (1991, 1996) to analyze the contextualizing interpretation of complex phenomena. In her anthropology of Melanesia, she shows that elements can be part of different systems that are internally related to each other via part-whole relations that can be described differently from different angles and thereby redescribed as something else.

³⁸ Pragmatism’s post-Darwinian philosophy is a form of vitalist monadology. Like Leibniz, the pragmatist believes that there are no gaps in nature (Peirce’s ‘synechism’), that everything is alive (vitalism) and that the universe is full of organisms and relations. Or, to quote Leibniz himself: “Each portion of matter may be conceived as like a garden full of plants and like a pond full of fishes. But each branch of every plant, each member of every animal, each drop of its liquid parts is also some such garden or pond” (*Monadology*, § 67).

Dewey (1973, I: 65) says, “in and of the world”. It is both an agent and a patient. Whatever influences the changes of other things is itself changed in the process. What is mind and what is matter is relative. Matter and mind are “two sides or ‘aspects’ of the same thing” (id., 299), like the convex and the concave or the inside and the outside. They are integrated into a whole in and through experience. Thanks to experience, the world and the mind are inscribed into each through a recursive loop that co-produces both: “The world is in the mind, which is in the world” (Morin, 1994:201).

For pragmatism, experience is the font and origin of everything. “Experience is *of* as well as *in* nature. It is not experience which is experienced but nature” (id., 252) – stones, plants, animals, energies, fluxes, diseases, etc. Things that interact in certain ways and resist are real and are experienced as such. They are encountered in real life as constraints on action or as enablements, as things that the organism has to adapt to, struggle with, circumvent or otherwise take into account in its ongoing engagement with the world.

Initially, the organism encounters the world as a problem that raises a question. The situation in which it finds itself is confused and confusing, indeterminate and chaotic. To find its bearings in this “big, blooming, buzzing confusion” (James), the organism has to transform “an indeterminate situation into a determinately unified one” (id., 238). At its most general level, this ordering of the world occurs in and through inquiry: “Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (id., 226).³⁹ Consequently, when the situation is defined as orderly and coherent, the question is answered, the problem is solved and action spontaneously ensues. “Suppose it is a question of knowledge of water [...]. It occurs as a stimulus to action and as the source of certain undergoings. It is something to react to – to drink, to wash with, to put fire out with, and also something that reacts unexpectedly to our reactions [...] In this two-fold way, water or anything else enters into experience” (id., 84-85). Interestingly, the experience of the organism is itself an organic experience that integrates the various phases of the act into a functional whole.

³⁹ For a more fine-grained phenomenological exploration of the mental activities that go into ordinary inquiries of everyday life, see Schütz’s analysis of ‘relevances’ and ‘typicalities’ (Schütz and Luckmann, 1973, I: 182-241).

Experience in its vital form is an effort to adapt to the environment by changing it. It is characterized by “pro-jection”, by reaching forward into the unknown to make it known. As connection with the future is a salient trait, experience opens up new possibilities by seeking new directions. Within experience, sensation, emotion, cognition, volition and conation form a living unity. “This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it” (Dewey, 1973, II: 556). The root of all knowledge is to be found not in knowledge itself, but in action, not for the sake of knowledge, but for the sake of action itself. All thinking is grounded in practice and returns to practice. Knowledge and consciousness have to be conceived of as phases within a single teleological act that intervenes in the world to change it, to adapt the world to the organism and the organism to the world.

In his revolutionary article on ‘The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology’ - an essential piece if one wants to understand Mead-, Dewey (1973, I: 136-147) criticizes the mechanistic conception of action that underlies all forms of behaviorism – from Thorndike to Watson and Skinner to contemporary rational choice theory. The problem with behaviorism is that it breaks the ‘flow’ of action into an arc made up of broken segments. Instead of conceiving action as a continuous ‘circuit’- let’s say, to maintain the continuity with hermeneutics, as a ‘semiotic circle’ in which the parts are organically coordinated into a living whole -, it decomposes action into a mechanical sequence of causes and effects. It is the well-known and much decried Stimulus/Response model of Pavlov’s dogs and Homans’s pigeons. What behaviorism does not understand is that the response does not follow the stimulus; it is rather the reverse: the response determines the stimulus. “The so-called response is not merely *to* the stimulus, it is *into* it” (138). This is the case because the stimulus has to be understood as a functional moment or phase within a process of ongoing adaptation and coordination. What is at one moment a guiding response (dependent variable) may at the next moment become a guiding stimulus (independent variable). When, due to problems of coordination, the act cannot be properly completed and consummated, reflection intervenes in between the stimulus and the response. Inhibited by the conflict in the coordination of the different phases of the act – impulse, perception, manipulation and consummation (Mead)- the organism bends back on itself to think the situation through and contemplate alternative paths of action.

In between the stimulus and response, consciousness (or ‘mind’, as Mead will say) intervenes as a phase within an ongoing teleological sequence. The dog hears the noise,

because it listens with wide open ears when the master arrives; the bird sees the worm in the apple, because it looks for it; the monkey grasps the banana, because it touches and feels that it is within reach of its left upper arm. “There is simply a continuously ordered sequence of acts, all adapted in themselves and in the order of their sequence, to reach a certain objective end, the reproduction of the species, the preservation of life, locomotion to a certain place. The end has got thoroughly organized into the means” (Dewey, 1973: 143).⁴⁰

3.3 Interactive Monadology

Up till now, we have spoken about organisms and the sequential organization of experience into a whole whose members ‘conspire’ and ‘coöperate’ towards a common end. Following Dewey’s post-Darwinian philosophy of the act, we have mentioned animals and, implicitly, we have included humans into the animal realm, but what characterizes pragmatism is that it socializes nature and conceives of nature itself as a form of cosmic cooperation that is animated by universal sympathy in which everything vibrates and resonates, communicates and converses with everything. Metaphysically speaking, nature itself is, ultimately, as a commentator put it, “a biocosmic emergent dialogue” (Rochberg-Halton, 1993: xii).

Although this dialogical perspective on nature is not completely absent in the thought of John Dewey, who generally privileges the instrumental engagement of organisms with the objects in their environment, it only fully comes into the open in George Herbert Mead’s work.⁴¹ Indeed, unlike his friend, Mead puts practical intersubjectivity at the front and center of all his reflections and folds instrumental action into communicative action (Joas, 1980). Indeed, picking up the thread of romantic theories of sympathy (*Einfühlung*) that conceive of nature as an animated field of resonance, he not only affirms that natural objects themselves are constituted by the social process of

⁴⁰ For a remarkable pragmatic analysis of the inversion of ends and means within the context of action, where the ends appear as the result (at the end) of a continuous process of adaptation and reorientation of action, see Joas, 1992: 218-244.

⁴¹ All references to Mead’s books will be abbreviated as follows: PP (*The Philosophy of the Present*, 1932); MSS (*Mind, Self and Society*, 1934); MT (*Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 1936) and PA (*The Philosophy of the Act*, 1938).

interaction, but he goes further and, seemingly, conceives of nature itself as a kind of society.⁴²

In what are perhaps the most speculative pages of his oeuvre (PP: 119-139; 1934: 178-186; 1938: 426-432), he boldly extends his theory of role-taking to nature and proposes a perspectival switch, suggesting that we, humans, take the role of inanimate objects when we interact with them and manipulate them to our own ends.⁴³ To understand how Mead got to this theory, one has to know the basics of his philosophical anthropology. What distinguishes the human being from lower animals is the capacity to manipulate objects by hand and language. “Speech and the hand go together in the development of the social human being” (MSS: 237. The upright posture of *homo sapiens/demens* has liberated the hands from employment in locomotion for manipulation. The dynamic interdependence between manipulation (hand) and perception (eye) into a functional *Gestaltkreis* is not unconnected from communication (mouth). Together, the capability of manipulation of what is at hand (*zuhanden*), the perception of what is distant (*vorhanden*) and the capability of changing perspectives, which is grounded in language, offer the physiological-functional basis of the evolutionary process of hominization.⁴⁴ In his *Philosophy of the Act*, Mead (1938: 3-25, *passim*) argues at length that the coordination of hand and speech, which allow respectively for the manipulation of objects at hand and in thought, has considerably increased the

⁴² Or, as Gabriel Tarde (1999, I: 58) would say: “Everything is a society, every fact is a social fact”. Of late, Latour has rediscovered Tarde and I’ve been told that he’s currently writing a big book on ‘process sociology’ that is partly inspired by Whitehead. One of the great merits of Actor Network Theory is that it has brought the materiality/sociality of things back into sociology (cf. Pels, Hetherington, Vandenberghe, 2002). But whereas Latour does not hesitate to ascribe agency to objects, he does not sufficiently take into account the materiality and affectivity of the human subject. What is lacking in his ‘interobjectivity’ is precisely ‘intersubjectivity’. Like ethnomethodology ANT remains stuck in the phenomenism of the philosophy of observation and does not make the transition to a proper phenomenology of things (Vandenberghe, 2006a). For a sociological account of liminal sociality that takes into account the affective nature of our effective engagement with things, see Knorr-Cetina, 1997.

⁴³ Sociologists tend to stick to their guns and limit their understanding of Mead to his theory of the mind, self and society, to use the famous title in which his lectures on social psychology were collected. If they would read on, they would discover that this ‘process sociology’ is the epitome of his cosmology, metaphysics, ethics, his philosophy of the act, his theory of time and space, etc. For a good account of the larger picture of his mind by one of his former students, see Miller, 1973.

⁴⁴ The capability to exchange perspectives and take the attitude of the other is a universal one that is built into every language. It is grounded in the pragmatics of personal pronouns that differentiates the I, the You and the It, as well as the milieu of activity they are directed at – the It being related to technical manipulation and scientific objectification, the You to intersubjective relations with the other and the I to the expression of the self and the symbolization of thoughts. As Jean-Marc Ferry (1991, I: 82) states in his speculative reconstruction of universal grammar: “To communicate among themselves, the subjects differentiate their objects into addressees that belong to the category of the third person and those that belong to the second person. As speakers, they themselves belong to the first person. It is only by knowing it that they are subjects”.

possibilities of action. With the intercalation of a manipulatory phase in between the perception of distant objects and the gratification of consummation, the act becomes an intelligent one. In the absence of the manipulatory phase, as is, allegedly, the case with lower animals, the reaction to the stimulus is direct. Without the intervention of plans, thoughts and ideas, human beings would be at the mercy of the environment like animals.

Mead's characterization of animal behaviour is, no doubt, unfair, but I think his description of human interactions between subject and object in terms of role taking is less objectionable than might appear at first.⁴⁵ In imagination, we anticipate what we will do when we come into contact with the thing – let's suppose it's a stone. We anticipate that it will resist as we 'finger' it and project an 'inside' into it. Our effort to manipulate it by hand finds a response in its resistance ('pushiness' or 'objectivity', as Whitehead and Latour would respectively say), and, presumably, as well in the resistance our hand offers to it. The object may be inanimate, but it is not unresponsive. We experience this resistance as a response coming from within the stone itself. Mead affirms: "The physical object has an interior in the same sense that the social object, or the other, has an interior" (PA: 430). Taking the role of the object, we feel ourselves pressing back against the stone as objects with which we identify. In this quasi-dialogue with the object, we are transformed in turn. Like in Husserl's Fifth Cartesian Meditation (§51), through 'pairing' of the object's inside with our own outside, we become an object among objects, a body among bodies. "We can become objects to ourselves at the same time that they can become objects to us" (Mead, 1932: 136). Through the exchange of perspective, we identify with the material object and projecting our own interiority into it, we do not only anthropomorphize and socialize nature, but we also discover at the same time our own materiality. Of course, Mead does not claim that objects are subjects, actants or entelechies endowed with intentionality and consciousness, but rather the reverse: Subjects are objects to themselves. His argument is a genetic one: Before we become objects to ourselves, we have to be objects for others. Similarly, to become subjects to ourselves, we need others. In imagination, we

⁴⁵ In the wake of Jane Goodall, Thelma Lowell, Frank de Waal and others have applied techniques of participant observation to animals. The new ethology has shown that animals (monkeys, elephants, dolphins, crows) are more like us: conscious, intelligent, creative, reflexive, communicative, sensible, playful, funny, compassionate and fair. With Mead, but against him, we could say that animals have a self, a mind and a society.

need to see ourselves as they see us, anticipating in thought, how they will respond to us in interaction.

Objectivity presupposes subjectivity; materiality sociality; and sociality intersubjectivity. Neither the object nor the subject is first. Both emerge in the relation and presuppose sociality as their condition of possibility. At the limit, nature is the integral of perspectives one can possibly adopt on things. The perspective on things emerges out of contact with the things one manipulates, while science is only the methodological extension, formalization and systematization of the organism's commerce with nature (Habermas, 1973: 116-178). To the extent that the integration of the multiplicity of perspectives occurs in and through effective communication in "the open community of scientists", which corresponds to Peirce's "unlimited community of communication" (Apel), pragmatism can indeed be considered as a semiotic reformulation of Leibniz's monadology.

As in Leibniz, all perspectives are ultimately integrated, interrelated and unified in reality itself. The multiverse is a universe. When one thinks the totality of all things on the one hand and the totality of all possible perspectives on the other hand, then one thinks at both ends the same world. The interrelation of all perspectives in which the whole appears coincides with the world itself. The convergence and coordination of perspectives is, however, no longer conceived of as the work of God, but of Man. By virtue of the fact that the human being is a speaking animal (*zoon logon echon*) it is endowed with the capacity of language. Allowing each and every one to adopt a universal perspective on singular things, it is the medium that enables the rational integration and coordination of perspectives that corresponds, presumably, to the Truth itself – for the time being, because the truth itself is always in flux. "Different minds may set out with the most antagonistic views, but the progress of investigation carries them by a force outside of themselves to one and the same conclusion.[...] The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality" (Peirce, 1938-58: 5.407).

Unlike Leibniz's, Mead's monadology is not only an intersubjective one; it is also an interactive one. Monads have windows and doors. The other is not merely existent, as in phenomenology, but articulatory and communicative – "it talks and expresses its intentions, values, judgments and consolations" (Perinbanayagam, 1975: 503). The subjects are in contact, conversation and communication with each other and with

themselves, either directly in face-to-face contact or indirectly, via media of communication (language, but also money, power or influence). They are connected to each other and to society through language.⁴⁶ What distinguishes human beings from animals and unanimated things is not that they are interrelated – after all, everything in the universe is - but that they are conscious not only of being so but also of doing so.

The interconnection of minds and consciousness into a common whole is an active and ongoing process that is mediated by language. Using all kind of signs, from insignificant gestures to genuine symbols, subjects can evoke in themselves implicitly the same response which these signs evoke in others. Although the process of mediation presupposes the imagination of a community, it does not take place in imagination, but in action, imagination being only a ‘phase’ within collective action. As a mechanism of symbolic representation of the dynamic relations between parts and wholes, language plays a crucial role in the mediation between individual and society. It allows the members of society who share a common discourse not only to ‘pro-ject’ a common world, but also and perhaps more importantly to act in common and co-ordinate their actions. As H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (1954: 82) write in their important, but forgotten book on the psychology of institutions: “A community of discourse thus normally coincides with a community of coordinated activities. For the prime function of language is to co-ordinate social conduct”. As a common fund of symbolic representations that each of the interactants has in mind when they enter into communication with each other, language is indeed what makes society possible.

4. Society, Self and Mind

4.1 Collective Subjectivities

Like Peirce and Dewey, George Herbert Mead is a holist, a collectivist and a socialist of sorts. Influenced in his early youth by Hegel, he develops a dialectical social theory in which individual minds are interconnected with each other and brought into society thanks to and through a continuous conversation between the individual Mind and the collective Spirit. Like Dilthey, with whom he took a course from when he studied in

⁴⁶ As the relations between the elements that make up the whole are internal ones, one can dialectically reverse the formulations: Subjects are connected to each other through society; society is connected to language through the subjects; language is connected to the subjects through society, etc.

Berlin, he leaves no doubt about the ontological priority of language and society over the individual: “The whole (society) is prior to the part (the individual), not the part to the whole; and the part is explained in terms of the whole” (MSS: 7).

Mead’s reflections on sociology and social psychology are dialectical exercises in merology (the science of parts and wholes). Societies are cooperative wholes, made up of interactions between elements which are not only parts, but which are wholes themselves. Like groups, individuals are associations of parts that are in interaction, conversation and communication with each other to coordinate their actions into a whole, but as parts of a whole they are themselves wholes, made up of various parts that are in interaction and communication with each other. The conclusion of these merological considerations on communication and conversation between and within parts of all kinds is that, as humans, we are only the end point of an evolution where the conversation becomes conscious of itself (the mind) and of its evolution (science). Speculative as ever, Mead affirms that the appearance of consciousness (of the first and second order) at the individual and collective levels is “only the culmination of that sociality which is found throughout the universe” (PP: 86).

The movement from cosmology to sociology and social psychology is inwards – from the whole to the parts, from the external to the internal, from communication to imagination. Given the temporal and logical pre-existence of the social process to the self-conscious individual that arises in it, the analysis of the constitution of society has to precede the analysis of the constitution of the self. The constitution of the self is, after all, only a phase within the constitution of society. Consequently, the book that made Mead famous should really have been entitled *Society, Self and Mind* rather than the reverse.

All considered, symbolic interactionism is first and foremost a theory of linguistically mediated collective action. Its subject is society, understood as a “collective subjectivity” that makes society.⁴⁷ Like all idealists, Mead neglects the systemic environments in which symbolically mediated interactions take place and tends to reduce society at large to an ongoing sequence of interactions of interactions, associations of associations or organizations of organizations, we might as well say that

⁴⁷ From a realist perspective, it is obvious that symbolic interactionism has difficulties in grasping the more structural and systemic aspects of society. Instead of granting to materialists and structuralists that collective subjectivities intervene in society, it identifies society with collective subjectivity, i.e. with a ‘subjectivity of higher order’, to speak like Husserl and Peirce. For an attempt to conceptualize societies and collective subjectivities in more realist terms, see Vandenberghe, 2007 a, b.

collective subjectivities do not only make society; they *are* society. Society is, ultimately, a subjective collectivity in the making that is becoming conscious of itself and coincides, at the limit, with humanity as such.

Against this humanist background, one can better understand why Mead continuously insists on the necessity to adopt the perspective of the ‘generalized other’, which he identifies, in a first moment, with the ‘whole community’ and, in a second moment, with the ‘universe of discourse’. By taking the perspective of the ‘generalized other’, the individual interprets his own action in relation with the action of the other members of society and understands it as a contribution to collective action – a contribution that may well determine the direction of society.⁴⁸ The logic behind this social capability of the individuals to engage in concerted action and to interweave their action into a collective act is definitely organicist and functionalist – almost Durkheimian in its understanding of the division of labour as a form of social cooperation.⁴⁹ In the same way as the individual player of an organized game is able to collaborate with the other members of the team by understanding his own position in the total field of collective action, any member of a given community is, in principle, able not only to understand his function, but also to organize his own behavior in function of a larger whole of which he is part. As knowledge of the whole is “distributed” over the agents in such a way that each member knows not only what the others know, but has also almost complete knowledge of what each member of the community knows, the agents use that collective knowledge to help solving a common problem of action or to realize a common plan.⁵⁰ The result of cooperation is a collective product that all have in mind and to which each has consciously contributed his part. “It may be as different from the

⁴⁸ By conceiving of the mechanism of role taking as a moment in the coordination of action, Mead has given a cognitivist and pragmatic interpretation of sympathy and kindred moral sentiments, but without openly saying so. In the Scottish tradition of moral philosophy, role taking is linked to judgment: We see ourselves through the eyes of the other, observe ourselves in imagination as the other sees us and judge accordingly. As the moralist Adam Smith says: “We either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, according as we feel that, when we place ourselves in the situation of another man, and view it, as it were, with his eyes and from his station. We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it” (Smith, 1976: 109-110). As can be gathered from this quotation, Mead’s “generalized other” is only an alias of Smith’s “impartial spectator”.

⁴⁹ Mead’s universal communitarianism chimes all too well with Durkheim’s republican individualism. Both converge in a functionalist reinterpretation of Kant: “The categorical imperative of moral conscience is taking the following form: prepare yourself to ultimately accomplish a determinate function” (Durkheim, 1986: 7).

⁵⁰ For an outstanding presentation of “distributed knowledge” (Norman, Hutchins, Kirsch, Conein) by one of the leading figures of the new French pragmatist sociology, cf. Quéré, 1997.

sum of what the individuals could have thought out in separation as a ship built by a hundred men is from a hundred boats each built by one man” (Cooley, 1983: 21).⁵¹

For Mead society is not a substance, but a verb that is conjugated in the first person plural. Each of the individuals is engaged in a complex series of organized acts that are moving toward a common end and that are continuously monitored in the process. The integration of all the individual acts into a common process is controlled in the movement, through continuous exchange of mutual perspectives, by the anticipation of the realization of the final cause.

Let’s take a micro-example – a team of surgeons performing an operation *together*. A number of professionals are directly involved in the performance on and around the operation table. All attention is focused on a small part of the patient’s body and each member of the working team is closely monitoring the acts of the surgeon and her assistants, while keeping an eye on the medical machinery. As a social object, the body means different things to all the persons involved, including the patient (and his family). An assistant hands the scalpel to the surgeon. She takes it without looking and nods, while another assistant gets ready to remove the blood that will start to ooze in a less than half a minute. Each anticipates the acts of the others and organizing their own response to the call of the other, their action in common is a single collective act that is moving towards a common end (which, for reasons of decency, I prefer not to call the ‘final cause’). Let’s now take another bloody example, but a macro one – war. However destructive the aim, it can only be brought off through the cooperation of all. As Kenneth Burke wrote: “Million of cooperative acts go into the preparation of one single act. Modern war characteristically requires a myriad of constructive acts for each destructive one; before each culminating blast there must be a vast network of interlocking operations, directed communally” (quoted by Perinbanayagam, 2003: 76).

What holds for one community also holds for the next community. In pragmatism, society is conceived of as a multiplicity of interacting communities, each made up in turn of multiple primary and secondary groups (cities, neighborhoods, gangs, families, etc.). Through identification and disidentification with the societies, communities and subcommunities one is a member of, collective subjectivities wax and wane. At any

⁵¹ More than Mead, John Dewey (1954) is fully aware of the “heterogony of ends” and the quagmire of unintended consequences of cooperative actions on a collective scale. His spirited invocation of the public and defense of representative democracy is nothing else but a call for conscious social control of the indirect, extensive and obnoxious consequences of joint action at the institutional level.

given moment, any denizen can join one of the multiple communities s/he belongs to in order to contribute to its functionings, making it stronger in the process, or defect from it, weakening it. By literally taking another role, I cannot only change my social identity, but I can also join a group and cooperate in the actualization of its potential. As I'm writing this text in my office, some of my social identities (e.g. member of staff of my university, member of the 'reflexivity forum', sociologist with philosophical interests, hermeneutician and would-be pragmatist) are activated, while others (e.g. sunbather on the beach, Belgian citizen, amateur of fine chocolates) are deactivated. I would have liked to go to the World Social Forum in Belém do Pará in Brazil to join its activities, but time constraints and the fact that I had to finish this chapter made it impossible, at least this time. In any case, the possibility of simultaneous identifications that make and break collective subjectivities opens up a third way between nominalism and realism. Collectives are real to the extent that their potential is actualized; to the extent that it remains virtual they are nominal. But nothing precludes that a potential group, like the glorious Proletariat of yore, regains force as a world historical actor or that a powerful actor, like the bankers of Wall Street, become demoralized and weakened.

4.2 The Standpoint of Social Behaviorism

I have often wondered about the reference to the "standpoint of social behaviorism" that appears in the subtitle of *Mind, Self and Society*. As a friend of John B. Watson, Mead may have spent many a Sunday with him in his laboratory in Chicago watching him performing his experimentations on rats and monkeys. But that did not stop him from criticizing his friend's conclusions for being, literally, 'mindless'.⁵² Nevertheless, the reference to a behaviorist standpoint theory remains a puzzling one. I can only make sense of it in terms of the distinction between covert/internal/potential and overt/external/actual behavior, which 'gears into the external world and alters it', as Schütz would say. Whereas overt behavior is observable, covert behavior is not. Mead

⁵² Reintroducing thought between the stimulus and the response, Mead (1934: 106) pointed to the question of reflexivity to hoist Watson on his own petard: "You can explain the child's fear of the white rat by conditioning its reflexes, but you cannot explain the conduct of Mr. Watson in conditioning that stated reflex by means of a set of conditioned reflexes, unless you set up a super-Watson to condition his reflexes". Instead of setting up a super-Watson, one could also entertain the hypothesis that the rats were playing dumb, while actually conditioning the behavior of the experimenter!

did not deny the existence of the mind, far from it, but he had serious doubts about the scientific use of the method of sympathetic introspection. To understand the meaning of human action, one does not need to enter into the mind of others to find out what they think. Instead of working from an elusive inside to an expressive outside, one should rather work from the visible (or audible) outside to the invisible (or inaudible) inside and consider the minding as a phase within the organization of a publicly observable act. “The act, then, and not the tract, is the fundamental datum in both social and individual psychology” (MSS: 8). It is not some psychic state that is the object of pragmatic inquiry, but the act in its totality and its sociality, as it is expressed in language. “There’s no private language”, as Wittgensteinians are wont to repeat. Language is common and it is public. The meanings which are processed privately *in foro interno* are public meanings. Thinking is a moment of the organization of the collective act and should be understood as such. “We want to approach language not from the standpoint of inner meanings to be expressed, but in its larger context of cooperation in the group taking place by means of signals and gestures. Meaning appears within that process” (MSS: 6), and in good pragmatic fashion, it appears as its consequence.

The meaning is in the open, it is articulated within language as discourse. Instead of trying to get at deep meanings and inner states of the individual, one should understand inner conversations not only as internalizations of public communication, but also as public modes of description of inner thought that configure action as collective action (Cefaï, 1998: 246-261). In other words, the reasons and motives of actors that give meaning to their actions should be understood as “vocabularies of motives” (Mills, 1940, Gerth and Mills, 1954: 112-129) or, as your local ethnomethodologist would have it, as “accounts” of action that are out there, not in the head of the actors. As Garfinkel (1990: 6) once said: “There’s nothing in the head of interest to us, but brains”.⁵³

Interestingly, semiotics and hermeneutics convergence once again. When we understand a text, or action as a “quasi-text” (Ricoeur, 1986: 205-236), it is not a matter of penetrating into the spiritual activities of the author; it is simply a question of grasping

⁵³ Inspired by Wittgenstein, Bakhtin, Volosinov or Vygotsky, the most interesting constructivist psychologists (like Rom Harré, Kenneth Gergen, John Shotter, Hubert Hermans), who focus on discourse and dialogue have arrived at similar conclusions. Namely that one has to study cognition where it lives, in discourse. Wielding Ockham’s razor, Rom Harré (1992: 6) goes too far and simply decapitates the head and eliminates the mind: “Not only is there no one thing that is thinking, in many cases there is clearly only the overt discursive activity. The myth of the mind has come perhaps from the observation that one soon learns to do privately (behind one’s face, so to speak) what one first learned to do publicly”.

the meaning or sense (*Sinn*) of the text. As Gadamer says with the force of conviction: “The meaning of hermeneutical inquiry is to disclose the miracle of understanding texts or utterances and not the mysterious communication of souls. Understanding is participation in the common aim” (Gadamer, I: 297). The question is, undoubtedly, an important one. In external as well as in internal communication, something comes into language. What we want to understand is not so much what is behind the text (the mind), but rather what is in front of it – the reference, what language talks about, the world

To understand what someone says does not mean to transpose oneself in the mind of the other to re-live her experiences, but to understand what she meant. Although the meaning is intersubjective – it is what the conversation is about- it is objective, and in this sense independent of the speakers. When the conversation is a successful one, the speakers come to a common understanding and a consensus on the issue. What matters is the thing (*die Sache*) one is thinking about in conversation – the thought not the thinker.⁵⁴ And in any case, to understand the thinker, whether it is oneself or another who’s doing the thinking, one has to make a detour through signs (Peirce) and symbols (Gadamer). As Ricoeur (1986: 33) says - but one can find similar ideas in Peirce and Mead: “There’s no understanding of self that is not mediated by signs, symbols and texts”. In hermeneutics and semiotics, the way to the self is a long, winding and arduous one. Self-reflection is not direct, but mediated and broken by a triple detour through language, false consciousness and unconscious desires and, last but not least, the other (Ricoeur, 1969: 7-28).

This methodological position explains Mead’s (1964a) reticence with regards to Cooley’s introspective sociology of the larger mind, which he otherwise admired. When Cooley proposed to write an “autobiography of society”, Mead thought the object was too hazy, not to say mystical, to be submitted to scientific investigation. Indeed, for Cooley, society is in the last instance an “imagined community” of fellows that exists in our own mind: “The human mind is social, society is mental [...] Society, then, in its immediate aspect, is a relation among personal ideas. In order to have society it is evidently necessary that persons should get together somewhere; and they get together

⁵⁴ Personal experience confirms this conclusion. As I was intensively thinking and writing about internal conversations to write this chapter, I was out of myself – ‘into the text’, as I said to my friends to apologize for my being unavailable for external conversations. When I went to see my psychoanalyst to get my narratives straight, I had nothing personal to say, so we talked about the self in social psychology.

only as personal ideas in the mind. Where else? Society exists in my mind. It exists in your mind as a similar group, and so in every mind. [...] Persons and society must, then, be studied primarily in the imagination [...] I conclude, therefore, that the imaginations people have of one another are the *solid facts* of society, and that to observe and interpret these must be a chief aim of sociology” (Cooley, 1964: 81, 119-121).

Although Mead was quite taken by Cooley’s sentimental vision of a society of selves that are in continuous communication and conversation with each other, he objected that this conception was mental, not scientific: “The locus of society is not in the mind, in the sense in which Cooley uses the term, and the approach to it is not by introspection, though what goes on in the inner forum of our experience is essential to meaningful communication” (Mead, 1964a: xxxvi). Indeed, although we need to imagine society in thought if we are to coordinate our actions in the real world, society is extra-mental. It exists *extra nos et praeter nos*.

4.3 Fellowship in Thought

The other does not belong to the same field as my self. The other is not constituted by me, as Sartre says somewhere, but encountered. She exists in the real world and is not a figment of my imagination. I have internal dialogues with her, I imagine her in the theater of my mind, but that is only to rehearse our respective roles in the collective action we are going to engage in together.

Mead insisted that the complex co-operative processes and activities of organized human society are possible only in so far as every individual involved in them can take the general attitudes of all others such individuals, understand his own activities as a contribution to the organized social whole that emerges out of these interactions and, last but not least, can direct his own behavior accordingly. The use of significant symbols that carry the same functional meaning for all the individuals involved is a presupposition of the integration of actions of individuals, who may not even know each other, but who speak the same language, into common action.

Thanks to language, an individual can think through his own activities with respect to those of others. In imagination, anyone can enter into the perspective of others who are not actually present and transcend the immediacy of the environment. Talking to oneself in solitary thought, taking the role of the others towards oneself, one can expand one’s world in one’s mind. The individual does not only take on the roles and attitudes of the

others, however, but thanks to the mediation and schematization of language, also their world. “You cannot convey a language as a pure abstraction; you inevitably in some degree convey also the life that lies behind it” (MSS: 283). Indeed, “to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life” (Wittgenstein, 1954, § 19). Through communication, an entire world can thus be ‘appresented’ to any member of the community.

Like Gadamer, Mead assumes that one is not bound by the horizon of one’s own language. The limits of one’s language are indeed the limits of one’s world, but, *pace* Wittgenstein, limits can be transcended through intercultural communication. In the same way as the individual can transcend his own local social group, the latter accordingly can transcend itself through language. “There are, of course, different universes of discourse, but back of all, to the extent that they are potentially comprehensible to each other, lies the logicians’ universe of discourse with a set of constants and propositional functions, and anyone using them will belong to that same universe of discourse. It is this which gives a potential universality to the process of communication” (MSS: 269).

Mead emphasizes the intellectual side and conceives of communication first and foremost as a cognitive meeting of minds, and not as an emotional one. Although he mentions sympathy at times, there is, as Axel Honneth (1992: 128) has noticed, no place for love in his system of thought. To find the bonds of love and the ties of sympathy that transform the cold meeting of minds into a general outflowing of hearts, we have to turn to Charles Cooley, that gentle man who brings common humanity into the internal conversation. Continuing the venerable tradition of theories of moral sentiments, from the Cambridge Platonists and the Scottish moralists to the contemporary ethics of care, he focuses explicitly on the affective preconditions of communication that motivate one to exchange perspectives and enter into the world of the other. Like Adam Smith, Cooley conceives of sympathy or fellow feeling as the capacity, yes even the propensity, of the imagination to transport one into the situation of the other and to experience vicariously what the other feels. But unlike Adam Smith, he extracts the individual from the situation of interaction. As a result, he underplays the mutuality of the exchange of perspectives, reducing thereby sympathy to empathy. In Adam Smith, like in Mead (who overstates his case: “If there’s no response on the part of the other, there cannot be any sympathy” (MSS, 299)), the mutuality of role taking comes better to the fore. The following quotation about the impartial, but benevolent spectators who

sympathize with a person who suffers, fully honours the *syn* of sympathy and the *cum* of conversation: “As they are continuously placing themselves in his situation, and thence conceiving of emotions similar to what he feels; so he is as constantly placing himself in theirs. As they are constantly considering what they themselves would feel, if they actually were the sufferers, so he is constantly led to imagine in what manner he would be affected if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation. As their sympathy makes them look at it, in some measure, with his eyes, so his sympathy makes him look at it, in some measure with theirs, especially when in their presence and acting under their observation” (Smith, 1973: 22).

But let’s return to Cooley’s one-sided analysis of sympathy. By projecting or, to use the language of contemporary folk psychology, by ‘simulating’ ourselves into the position of the other, we enter into a “fellowship in thought” (Cooley, 1983). We look for what we have in common - a common mood, *Stimmung* or feeling that we share – and this commonality unites us in thought. “The outgoing of the mind into the thought of the other is always, it would seem, an excursion in search of the congenial” (Cooley, 1964: 156).

When we have found what we have in common, we enter not so much in the mind of the other as the other enters into our heart. By opening our heart, we can listen with care to what she says and understand what moves her. It is through sympathetic introspection into the other that we enter into the sentiments of the other. Taking the role of the other, we feel the other’s joys and sorrows. Through fellow feeling, our moral sentiments are stimulated and our moral imagination is enhanced at the same time as it is enlarged. Spontaneously, through simulation of ourselves into the position of the other and imaginary identification with him or her, we recognize the other as a fellow human being and welcome him or her in “the hospitality of the mind” (Cooley, 1964: 146).

While Mead spoke of communication that makes cooperation possible, Cooley talks of communion that fuses minds into a harmonious whole. “By communion minds are fused into a sympathetic whole, each part of which tends to share the life of all the rest, so that kindness is a common joy, and harshness common pain [...] Everything that tends to bring mankind together in larger wholes of sympathy and understanding tends to enlarge the reach of kindly feeling.” (1983: 40, 191). Of course, initially, the individual is only a member of a given group, community or society. He’s in direct contact with his family and neighbors, friends and colleagues, but only indirectly with the friends of his friends, his fellow citizens and other human beings in any part of the world.

Nevertheless, through an act of “sympathetic identification” with concrete others who are not present in person, to speak like the phenomenologists, he can vicariously feel what they feel and how they feel by visualizing the situation that afflicts them in the eye of his mind. If he can open his mind through language, he can open his heart through sympathy. Extending the boundaries of the world to include those he only knows indirectly, via the media, for instance, he can create in his mind an ‘imagined community’ and enter into its perspective to adopt the universal stand of an impartial but benevolent spectator, who judges and condemns injustice as unnecessary suffering.⁵⁵

The criterion of judgment is pathocentric, not logocentric, though it must be conceded that the universalist ethics that are founded in reason presuppose that sense of common humanity that makes us not merely human, but humane. Although Cooley’s texts are suffused by human warmth and he speaks like a sentimental humanist about the “dawning of sympathetic renewal” (Cooley, 1964: 158), his sociology of the larger mind exudes the atmosphere of a small American town like Ann Arbor. The man who coined the concept of the “primary group” limits the reach of affective solidarity to the community. Like love, and out of necessity, sympathy must be selective. “It is well for a man to open out and take in as much of life as he can organize into a consistent whole”, says Cooley (1964: 147), “but to go beyond that is not desirable”. Unlike Mead, Cooley is not a true cosmopolitan, but a communitarian.⁵⁶ From this point of view, Mead’s universalism, which is grounded in language, is more generous, even if it lacks the spontaneity, affect and imagination of Cooley. Provided that the common glow of moral sentiments is infused into the community of discourse, we might follow Philip Rieff (1964: xx) and reinterpret “the categorical imperative not as sublime ethical doctrine but as routine psychological dynamics”.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Due to lack of space, I cannot go into considerations on the relation between sympathy, distant suffering and the ‘politics of pity’. See Boltanski (1993) on the latter. For a well-known account of the role of the printed media in the constitution of ‘imagined communities’ (like classes and nations), see also Anderson, 1983. Anderson does not refer to Cooley, Mead or any other of the pragmatists. I’d like to think that if he had done so he would have been able to envision collective subjects beyond the nation-state.

⁵⁶ In *The Cosmopolitan Self*, which is perhaps the best book on Mead, Mitchell Aboulafia (2001) shows that Mead’s account of social development of the self combines universalism, pluralism and individualism and culminates in the enlarged *sensus communis* that marks the cosmopolitan mind.

⁵⁷ While Cooley’s argument about sympathy allows one to significantly soften the coldness of Kant’s universalism, which treats everyone equally with equanimity and without distinction, it does not, however, personalize ethics. Unlike the ethics of care, Cooley is not concerned with the ‘concrete other’, but with the common humanity we all share. The movement is inwardly going out from the concrete other towards humanity, not the other way round, to the one we encounter not in our mind, but in real life. On

5. Intrasubjective Intersubjectivity

5.1 The Self and its Other

Reading Mead backwards – from society to the self rather than the other way round- we have analyzed the constitution of society as a ‘collective subjectivity’. The time has now come to investigate the constitution of the self and the mind, which are at the very heart of his social psychology, *from within*. Mead’s main thesis is well known: the mind and the self are social through and through. As personal properties, they emerge out of social life and are linguistically mediated. When it comes to the reflexive capacities of man, Mead is indeed a social constructivist – and so am I- but he also allows for the existence of non- and pre-reflexive spheres. As a pragmatist he does not deny that prior to an awareness of self and prior to the mind, there is “the world that is there” (Miller, 1973: 88-102). Neither does he affirm that the world out there arises out of consciousness. It is rather the reverse: consciousness emerges out of, as well as in our engagement with the world that is there and it is constituted by social interaction and communication with others.

Although we are concerned with the self, we have to start with the mind, however, for the self presupposes thinking. To explain how the mind emerges, Mead has recourse to the gesture and starts his investigation of thinking with Wundt’s “conversation of gestures”. He opens his analysis with the legendary fight between two dogs, but quickly moves on to linguistically mediated communication between humans. The obvious aim of this move is to connect the mind to symbolism and self-consciousness to language. When “significant symbols” are brought in, the conversation of gestures becomes a meaningful one. Taking each other’s role, each of the actors projects himself into the position of the other. Adopting his attitude, he does not only see himself as the other sees him, but he also hears himself as the other hears him. The crucial point is that thanks to the symbolization of gestures, each actor can arouse in himself the response he’s calling out in the other. “The importance, then, of the vocal stimulus lies in this fact that the individual can hear what he says and in hearing what he says is tending to

the opposition between the general and the concrete other, see Benhabib’s (1992) pointed intervention in the Kohlberg-Gilligan controversy.

respond as the other persons responds” (MSS: 69-70). As the meaning is a shared one, the interlocutors can understand each other.

To understand each other, the actors have, however, to make the detour via the “general other” and adopt the perspective of any ordinary language user. Through mutual adjustment of the expectations to one another, they can then, eventually, coordinate their actions. But before they act jointly, there’s thinking, and according to Mead, who follows Cooley on this point, thinking is essentially an internalized, implicit and covert conversation the individual has with himself by means of symbols: “Since higher thought involves language, it always a kind of imaginary conversation” (Cooley, 1964: 92). “The internalization of the external conversations of gestures which we carry on with other individuals in the social process is the essence of thinking” (MSS: 47). Thinking may be internal and take place in the individual’s mind; it is nevertheless essentially a social phenomenon that finds its origin in communication. The individual is the locus of thought, but the contents of his thought are public. The meanings are not his, but they are common to all subjects who speak the language. Similarly, the symbols he uses are part of the process of communication and belong to a relational field, and it out of this field that mind arises. “Out of language emerges the field of mind” (MSS: 47).

In the same way as the thought presupposes language, the self presupposes the other: “We must be others if we are to be ourselves” (PP: 194).⁵⁸ There’s no subjectivity without intersubjectivity and, we may add, no intersubjectivity without language. In vaguely Hegelian fashion, Mead defines the self (*ipse*) reflexively as a subject who experiences himself as an object.⁵⁹ The subject who minds the other becomes an object

⁵⁸ Unlike persons, who can exist by themselves (by the mere grace of God), selves are dialectical. The self presupposes, by definition, a non-self or other, either within or without oneself. Analytically speaking, the self cannot be a loner. As the relation between self and the other is an internal one, the self presupposes the other as the other presupposes the self. Both are mutually constituted in and through the relation. The self, the other and the relation itself that constitutes them are one – three in one, one in three, like in the trinity.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hegel (1986: 145): “When a self-consciousness is the object, the object is as much I as object”. The self or *ipse* in Latin (*das Selbst* in German, *le soi* in French, *o si mesmo* in Portuguese) is a reflexive pronoun in the third person that has particularity of being able to refer to all personal pronouns. Following Ricoeur (1990: 11-14, 137-166), I conceive of self-identity not in terms of formal or substantial sameness (*idem*), but as a reflexive, dialogical and narrative process of selfhood (*ipse*) that interweaves continuity and change through continuous, lifelong conversation between the self and the other, within or without oneself. Although I cannot develop the point here, I’d like to defend a narrative conception self identity. “Narration is what ‘emplots’ and directs the internal conversation. To properly understand how personal identity is formed, one has to understand that the internal conversation takes the form of a narration, while the narration itself has to be understood as a conversation that is intrasubjectively intersubjective. One has not only conversations with ‘oneself as another’ (Ricoeur), but also with ‘the other as oneself’ (Mead). It

to himself. He's both subject and object - or as Adam Smith (1976: 113) has it, both a spectator and an agent-, and he knows that he is.⁶⁰ He becomes reflexive and conscious of himself as another, thanks to the other (and not owing to the other, as is the case in Sartre's existentialism where the gaze of the other transforms the subject into an object that is under surveillance). By placing himself into the perspective of the other, he becomes an object to himself, but without, however, objectifying or reifying himself in such a way that his subjectivity gets lost (Kögler, 2009). The subject experiences himself as a self only through the mediation of others. Rimbaud's famous dictum (in his letter to Izambard, known as 'letter of the visionary')- "Je est un autre/I is another"- thus also holds for the self. To become a self, the subject has to see himself from the external standpoint of another self or, more generally, from any other self who has been fully socialized and can adopt the perspective of the "participant observer" in the field of social action.

It is important to underscore that the subject does not have an immediate consciousness or unmediated awareness of himself. It is only by imagining what the other thinks of him, by anticipating the response he is going to evoke in the other, that he calls out in himself the response of the other. Through socialization, the subject is able to get outside of himself not just into the perspective of the concrete other (dad and mum, Peter and Paula), but of a "general other", any other who knows not only the rules of the game (like an observer), but who also knows how to play it (like a participant). Language is crucial here, because it is largely through the mediation of language that the subject is socialized in such a way that he can enter into the perspective of the generalized other and understand himself as any other understands him. When the response of the general other is thus into the subject – as the stimulus is into the response, according to Dewey-, the subject becomes an object to himself and sees his self reflected in the mirror society holds up to him. "Each to each a looking

is through an internal conversation with oneself that one communicates with the other. Even if one narrates one's self, the other remains present as an 'inner witness' of the personal identity to which I commit myself and for which I am morally accountable and ultimately responsible" (Vandenberghe, 2005: 233).

⁶⁰ What Mead analyses in a cognitive way is described by A. Smith (1976: 113) in an affective and moral key: "When I endeavour to examine my own conduct, I divide myself, as it were, in two persons. The first is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavour to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavouring to form some opinion. The first is the judge; the second the 'person judged of'".

glass/reflects the other that doth pass” (Cooley, 1964: 184).⁶¹ Contrary to what edifying pragmatists may think, our essence is indeed a “glassy one” (Rorty, 1979: 42-45). Our self reflects in the other like in a mirror (but beware of analogies: as the images continually change, so does the mirror itself). We become who we are, through reflection (like in a mirror) and conversation (like in speech). The point of *Bildung* (or edification) is not only to keep the conversation going, as Rorty has it, but also to find our own subjective truth. It is (partly) out of an image that society holds up to us that each develops a more or less coherent sense of self. To the extent that self is not a given, but as a task, we can amend Freud’s famous dictum: Where the Other was, I shall become.

The self, however, is not a unitary thing. Neither thing, nor unitary, it refers, in fact, to a duality within the subject. “Two souls, alas, do dwell within his breast”. Insisting once more on the dynamic nature of everything, Mead conceives of the self as a process of alternation between two phases or poles, which he calls respectively the “I” and the “Me”.⁶² The I is linked to spontaneity and creativity, whereas the Me is the organized set of attitudes of the community within the self. Like the impartial spectator, the Me is the “great inmate of the breast” (Smith, 1976: 130, 134, 262). If the Me represents society as it appears in the mind’s eye or, to switch from vision to voice, in the conversation one has with oneself, the I stands for the spontaneous, impulsive reaction toward the collective. The I is aware of the Me and responds to it with varying degrees of creativity. When the I is fully awake and potent, it brings novelty into the conversation. When it is completely knackered, it basically repeats the lines it knows. In reacting creatively to the community, the I changes it, for the better or for the worse. “The I appears in our experience in memory. It is only when we have spoken that we know what we have said” (MSS: 196). We all know from experience that however much we may rehearse an anticipated conversation in thought, the conversation we will actually have will be different from the one we imagined. It may even derail and go off

⁶¹ Although Cooley must have known *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he never cites it. Not even the passage where Adam Smith (1976: 110) explicitly speaks about the reflected or looking glass self: “Bring him into society, and he is immediately provided with a mirror which he wanted before. It is placed in the countenance and behavior of those he lives with. [...] This the only looking glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct” (Smith, 1976: 110 and 112). For a comparative analysis of the role of mirrors in Cooley’s, Mead’s and Lacan’s developmental psychology, see Wiley, 2003.

⁶² Some commentators of Mead have interpreted the I and the Me as avatars of Freud’s Id and Superego. More sophisticated readers have recognized the transcendental Ego of Kant in the I and the Alter Ego of Freud in the Me. Later on, I will clarify my own reading with reference to Adam Smith and William James.

track, leaving us astonished and the other flabbergasted by what we have just said. “Did I say that? Where did that come from?” is a common expression of surprise when one realizes that the I ‘acted out’. “If the ‘I’ speaks, the ‘Me’ hears” (Mead, 1964b: 143) (but who listens?). And then retrospectively, when I can look back on myself, I can see that by activating a train of memory in my mind, I have made a new connection between ideas and brought some novelty into the world, which can then be stored and integrated in the Me (my own personal one, but also, through communication, the collective one) as a fund on which I can draw next time when I resume the conversation and try out a new line (“What about morphing this TRAIN of memory into a trail? rail? station?).

Dear reader, rather than talking about reflexivity, should we not perhaps practice it?

Norb, what do you think?

Okay.

Okay then.

*Let’s do it!*⁶³

5. 2. Conversations on the Great Society

With the dialogical alternation between the I and the Me, Mead has introduced a transformative dialectics of the self into his semiotic theory of self-reflexivity. In the conversation of the self, everything happens as if the American pragmatist had somehow transposed the dynamics between ‘langue’ and ‘parole’ of French semiology into the subject’s self. If the I has the capability to reflect on the stand of society and to critically respond to it, the demon of stable social reproduction within the self is silenced from the start. But to become truly critical, innovative and creative, the dialogue has to become properly dialectical. This happens when the dialogue becomes conscious of itself – as in dialogue on dialogue, reflection on reflection, thinking about thinking, *noêsis noesêos* – and the self transcends its own society to project itself in the direction of an ideal society of free, autonomous and self-determining subjects. When dialogue shifts out into dialectics, the dialogue becomes transgressive and integrates the *telos* of universal communication into its own functionings. I like to think that this is what Mead had in mind when, in the final pages of the book, he drew moral and

⁶³ For explorations of the ‘second voice device’ and other literary techniques that aim to force the repressed reflexivity of the scientific genre into the open, see Woolgar, 1988 (Hi, Steve!).

political conclusions and invoked the “the attainment of a universal human society” as “the ultimate goal of human social progress” (MSS: 310).

From this utopian perspective of a fully reflexive self, formed by a continuous dialogue between a creative I and a future Me, we can overcome the conventional conception of an “oversocialized self” that has all the trappings not of a person, but of a personage who spends his or her life playing the role society has allocated to him or her.⁶⁴ The fully reflexive self incorporates not so much the histrionic figure of the actor (the *prosopeion* of the Greeks and *persona* of the Romans, meaning the mask) who acts out society’s script with a modicum of originality as the one of the director who integrates the different phases of the self into a more or less coherent, harmonious personal project that is at once individual and social, singular and universal. The subject is not ‘subjected’ to society (the *hypokeimenon* as *subjectum*); s/he’s a subject or a person in the emphatic sense of the term – someone who is at the same time fully human, fully social and fully her- or himself.⁶⁵ In Mead as in Dewey, the personal quest for the ‘good life’ is intrinsically connected to, and inseparable from, “the search for the great community” (Dewey, 1954: 143-184). In a just and democratic society, the self-determination of the people and the self-realization of the person are two sides (external/internal) of the same coin. Like in a virtuous circle, there’s a continuous morphogenesis between the external and the internal dialectics. In a vibrant democracy, society becomes conscious of itself as a collective subject that determines itself, while its subjects are equally self-conscious as autonomous, yet interdependent subjects: “There then arises a community in which everyone can be both subject and sovereign, sovereign in so far as he asserts his own rights and recognizes them in others, and subject in that he obeys the laws which he himself makes” (MSS: 287, note 17).

⁶⁴ In *Structure, Agency and The Internal Conversations*, Archer proposes such a ‘Durksonian’ reading of Mead (Mead as a mixture of Durkheim and Parsons). Neither fully autonomous nor fully reflexive, the self appears as a rather conservative force without much individuality– more of a communicative than an autonomous or a metareflexive self, to use her categories. In opposition to this view, I’d like to argue that Mead’s dialectical self is fully reflexive. (I intend to develop the category of full reflexivity – meta/meta, including meta/communicative and meta/autonomous in a subsequent text) To make my case, I’ll rely on Habermas’s (1992: 187-241) remarkable essay on Mead’s theory of subjectivity (which is, actually, much better than his chapter on Durkheim and Mead in *The Theory of Communicative Action*).

⁶⁵ One can generalize Carl Schmitt’s (1990: 49-66) observation, according to which all main concepts of modern political sciences are secularized theological concepts, to the social sciences in general. The notions of person, subject and individual all have a theological prehistory. With its suggestion that the person is essentially pre-social, the notion of the person is often used polemically by conservative forces (see Ratzinger on abortion and euthanasia). With de Beauvoir, I’d say that one is not born, but becomes a person (or ceases to be one).

The self-identity of the fully reflexive person of the “great community” is not conventional, but ‘post-conventional’ (in the sense that Kohlberg and Habermas have given to this concept). Rather than adopting the perspective of the existing society that judges acts through ‘formal-rational’ application of the law, s/he imagines an ideal and ‘unlimited community of communication’ of which s/he is a member and appeals to this higher court to contest the judgment of first instance. “All intelligent political criticism is comparative” (Dewey, 1954: 110) – the critic sets up a larger community that transcends the specific order of which s/he is part and, taking the attitude of this ideal community, s/he anticipates its realization in thought and judges the existing society in the name of Reason (or, if one prefers, of one’s own conscience).

Through the invocation of a higher and larger self, “practical reason is both socialized and temporalized” (Habermas, 1988: 224) – socialized, because the projection of a hypothetical kingdom of ends has to be validated and recognized by one’s contemporaries (potentially, by all; counterfactually, it even includes predecessors and successors) and temporalized, because the idealized form of communication is not only projected into a future, but presupposed as an existing moment of transcendence that grounds critique. Now, to the extent that this future society within one’s breast has to be recognized by one’s fellows as a legitimate one, individualism and universalism go hand in hand. Entering into the perspective of a larger community that coincides at the limit with the fulfillment of humanity as such, the individual projects and presents a future Me that has to be recognized and validated by the others.⁶⁶ Given that this virtual identity is inevitably part of the individual’s current identity; given, moreover, that the individual has to get out of himself to take on the perspective of a supposed ‘impartial spectator’ – “this demigod within the breast” (Smith, 1976: 131); given, finally, that the individual has to adopt this perspective in the first person - “never as a mere representative, but always in *propria persona* (Habermas, 1988: 231) - the Me is encouraged to remain him- or herself, even when s/he adopts the perspective of society. As the spectator, thus, necessarily coincides with the actor, socialization is in no way opposed to individualization, but most emphatically includes it. To the extent that the

⁶⁶ Drawing on the *Critique of Judgment*, Alessandro Ferrara (1998) has introduced the Kantian concept of ‘reflexive judgment’ into moral philosophy and developed an ambitious theory of reflexive authenticity that integrates the singularity of the self with the universal acclaim of its exemplarity. He not only advocates authenticity as a normative ideal, but also holds that authenticity, understood as ‘exemplary congruency of an individual, collective or symbolic identity with itself’, provides us with a new ideal of universal validity that shifts the emphasis away from the generalizable toward the exemplary and the authentic. Just like well-formed works of art, authentic identities inspire in us a sense of admiration.

individual is socialized into freedom, we can thus conclude that the self is truly dialectical: “‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’” (Hegel, 1986: 145).

In the same way as socialization and individualization are complementary phases within a dynamic process, external communication and internal conversation have to be considered not in opposition to, but in continuity with each other. To show that the internal conversation continues external communication and is destined to return to it to strengthen it, let me refer to the debate between Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls. To maintain the drift of the argument I’ll give a pragmatic spin to it and connect it to the theory of moral sentiments. *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls (1972) is, without doubt, one of the most important books of the second twentieth century. In spite of the fact that every page and footnote of the book has been submitted over and over again to analysis and commentary, the book is mostly read as a liberal version of rational choice. Consequently, its connections with Adam Smith’s theory of sympathy have been overseen.⁶⁷ The guiding idea of the theory of justice is simple: A society would be just if it redistributed the rights and the duties in such a way that every one of its members would subscribe to the principle of fairness without reserve, because it would guarantee the rights and liberties of all, while accepting the social inequalities only to the extent that it compensates the least advantaged.

The theory of justice is a strong theory of the social contract. The main device of this contract theory is the so-called “original position” (Rawls, 1972: 1-53, esp. 17 ff.) in which each would be invited to adopt the perspective of a reasonable, yet sympathetic spectator before signing the contract that seals the alliance between the members. Thus, each would imagine him or herself in the position of the other and when each had adopted the perspective of all the others *seriatim*, each in turn, s/he would hypothetically arrive at the principles of justice for the basic structure of a well ordered society. Of course, this mechanism of serial identification of all with each and every one can only function on the condition that everyone makes abstraction of their own personal and social situation to retain only what is common to all human beings without distinction. In other words, in imagining oneself in the situation of the other in order to ascend to the superior and encompassing position of the impartial spectator, each is

⁶⁷ As far as I can see, only feminist philosophers like Susan Moller Okin (1989) and Seyla Benhabib (1992: 148-177) have seen the connection between Rawls and Adam Smith, reason and feeling, justice and benevolence, fairness and care. Coincidentally, in sociology, Rawls’s daughter, who is a collaborator of Garfinkel, has introduced the notion of sympathy into Goffman’s interaction order and Sacks’s conversation analysis (Rawls, 1988).

placed under a “veil of ignorance”. As one would not know if the other were rich or poor, black or white, male or female, we can assume that the principles the members would hypothetically adopt to order their society would be just, not in spite of the anonymous character of the other, but rather because of it.

In Rawls, the justification and validation of the principles of the social contract are the result of the simulated internal conversations the impartial spectator has with his fellow citizens. The spectator sets up an “inner forum” (Mead, MT: 375 and 401) in which he confers with himself. “He asks and answers questions. He develops his ideas and arranges and organizes those ideas as he might do in a conversation with somebody else. [...] It has not yet become public. But it is part of an act which does become public. We will say that he is thinking out what he is going to say in an important situation, an argument which he is going to present in court, a speech in the legislature. That process which goes on inside of him is only the beginning of the process which is finally carried on in an assembly” (Mead, MT: 402).⁶⁸

In setting up this internal forum within himself everything happens as if the sympathetic spectator, comfortably seated on his couch after a long day of work, had called before his mind any person of his acquaintance and invited him or her into his internal conversation in the evening.⁶⁹ In his mind, he entreated his friends and acquaintances to sit next to him, discoursing with them on the principles that would be the object of the original agreement. Having left his dear friends, while enclosing them in the depths of his heart, he continued the imaginary conversation by inviting the friends of his friends to the dialogue. Eventually, through an eidetic variation of the friends of his friends, he arrived at a generic and faceless, but well informed, concerned and caring citizen who would “look at the system from the standpoint of the least advantaged representative man” (Rawls, 1972:151).⁷⁰

⁶⁸ In his collective psychology of reasoning, Halbwachs uses a similar metaphor as Mead and arrives at similar conclusions – but whereas the movement in Mead is outwards, the movement in Halbwachs is inwards: “Our thought is often as a deliberation room where arguments, ideas or abstractions that we largely owe to others meet: so that it is the others who debate in us, defend theses, formulate propositions which are only the echo of the outside in our mind”.

⁶⁹ In a delightful passage, Cooley quotes Goethe’s thought experiment, who speaks of himself in the third person: “Accustomed to pass his time most pleasantly in society, he changed even solitary thought into social converse, and this in the following manner: He had the habit, when he was alone, of calling before his mind any person of his acquaintance. This person he entreated to sit down, walked up and down by him, remained standing before him and discoursed with him on the subject he had in mind” (Cooley, 1964: 91; see also Wiley, 1994: 54-55).

⁷⁰ There are some faint echoes in Rawls of the gospel (esp. Matthew (25:5) who summons the faithful to help “the least of these”) and liberation theology with its “preferential option for the poor” (Second

Through the clever device of representation of the original position, Rawls has thus created a public space in his innermost heart (*in foro interno*, as Kant would say). Habermas objected to the privacy of the internal conversations of his friend. Inviting his American colleague to a public debate, the German philosopher had gently convinced his colleague *in actu* of the necessity of continuing the internal conversation with an external communication among equals that takes place in the public sphere.⁷¹ It is by public communication, not just by internal conversation, that speakers progressively arrive at the common and impartial view of the “Great Judge” (Smith, 1976: 262) or, more affectionately, the “Great Companion” (James, 1950, I: 316). By inviting not only their friends who share their views, but also the neighbours who don’t share them to *voice* their opinions in public, the citizens persuade one another, by means of the force of the better argument, of what is just or wrong.

According to Habermas, moral and political principles become objective and universal through the public use of speech and reason. Indeed, thanks to communication, the citizens can have mutual knowledge of the positions of the others and, thereby, arrive, through overlap of the common content that is publicly communicated and commonly shared, at a consensus on the very principles that order a just society. By transforming the internal conversations that the sympathetic observer has with himself and all the others into a real communication among participants of an external conversation, we move at the same time from the private (Rawls) to the public (Habermas) use of speech. There’s thus an ongoing dialectic – or a ‘double morphogenesis’, as Archer would say – between internal and external conversations. When the communication is over, the participants can continue the debate internally, and after mature reflection, they can then join again the external conversation. As the internal conversations are constitutive of who we are, individually and collectively, the reconstruction of society cannot be separated from the reconstruction of the human mind. To change society we have to change ourselves, and as the only thing we can change right now is ourselves, why not start social reconstruction with an internal revolution? After all, that is how mankind evolves to higher stages of development. “Or in short, social reconstruction and self or

conference of the episcopate of Latin America, Medellin, 1968). For a more extended elaboration of the ascent from the “concrete other” to the anonymous and faceless *socius*, see Vandenberghe, 2008.

⁷¹ See the debate between two of the greatest political philosophers of the twentieth century in *Journal of Philosophy*, 1995, 93, 3.

personality reconstruction are the two sides of a single process – the process of human evolution” (MSS: 309).

5.3 Multiple Selves

In passing, I have already alluded to the fact that I am constructivist when it comes to reflexivity and the self. I don't think that realism in sociology is incompatible with constructivism in psychology.⁷² I do indeed believe that we construct ourselves in and through internal conversations. We do not merely have such conversations with ourselves and others; to the extent that we constitute ourselves through discourse, we are these conversations. Of course, we do not exactly construct ourselves like houses, but we are building sites nevertheless. By describing the self as a “fabrication” I do not aim to dismiss it, nor do I join the ranks of once fashionable post-modernists. On the contrary, it is as a humanist and archeo-modernist that I welcome the constructivist emphasis on self-empowerment and the capability for self transformation and self-realization.

If hard line realists find constructivism objectionable, I suspect that they will even be less inclined to accept my next proposal. We have already seen that the self is multiple. It includes an I and a Me. Being a declinative, the self not only incorporates an I and a Me which I address as a You (“Tuism”); but it also includes the whole gamut of persons and things it reflexively refers to as a pronoun. The I would not be a self if it could not distance itself from itself and refer to itself as you, s/he or it and position itself with reference to a we, a you and a they. As all these persons are, one way or another, enclosed in ourselves, I propose to take the reference to “ourselves” literally and think of it in the plural. Although very few people suffer from ‘Dissociative Identity Disorder’ (formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder) and most of us succeed most of the time in keeping our alter egos in a functioning whole, I would nevertheless

⁷² In a debate with Rom Harré, Margaret Archer (2006) criticizes his position theory for ‘oversocializing’ the self. I for my part have criticized him for ‘overpsychologizing’ society (Vandenberghe, 2007a). At the time I hadn't really engaged with the new social psychology – that social psychology that does not so much investigate how the individual behaves in groups, but rather how groups behave in the individual. Having glanced at some of the more interesting and more philosophical representatives of discursive psychology (Shotter, 1993, Gergen, 1999) and cross-cultural psychology (Paranjpe, 1998, Hermans, 2001) who study dialogue and conversation, I tend to concur that the self is by and large a conversational reality.

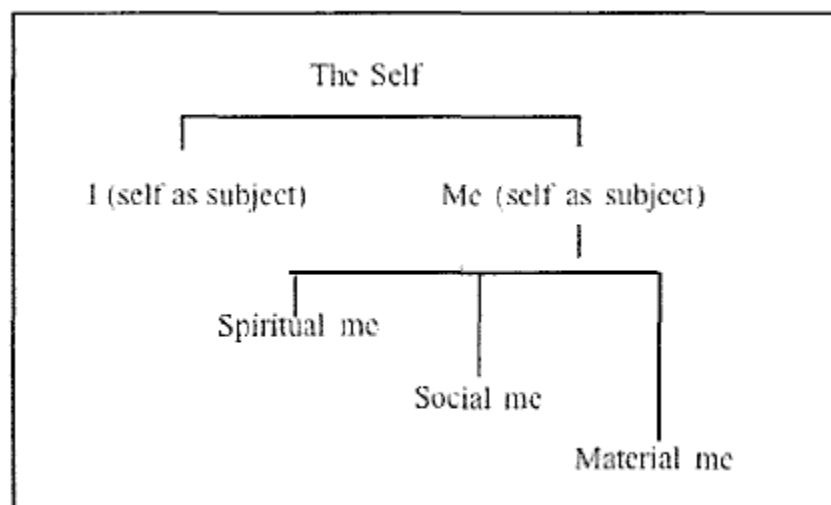
like to defend the thesis that we are all multiples.⁷³ For sure, I wouldn't go as far as Pirandello and suggest that, like Moscarda, we are "one, nobody and a hundred thousand".⁷⁴ I am not that mad, but I would nevertheless like to explore the thesis of the multiple self as a reasonable one.

Mead affirms: "A multiple personality is in a certain sense normal" (MSS, 142). To make sense of this statement, as well as of what I take to be his real vision of the person, I'll have recourse, in a first moment, to William James and, in a second one, to Bakhtin. In *The Principles of Psychology* (especially the phenomenal chapter 10 on the consciousness of the self), James brilliantly develops a pragmatist theory of the Self. The self is not a thing, but a complex process (or 'function') of unification that integrates the objects that appear in the "stream of thought" into a whole. It does so by making a basic distinction between the inside and the outside. What does not belong to the self and is in this sense alien to it is left outside – it is 'not me'; what belongs to it is inside – it is 'me'. Like Luhmann, James conceives of the self as a complex autopoietic system that splits the whole universe into two halves. Each of us makes a selection that is particular to him or her. "My experience is what I agree to attend to. Without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos" (James, 1950, I: 402). When the others hold up a mirror to us in which "we see oursel's as ithers see us", to quote the Scottish poet Robert Burns, we also make a careful selection of the representations. Those we identify with go up into the self; the others are left out. Based on the selective process of attribution that each of us makes on an ongoing basis, the Self emerges at the totality of contents of the universe that we are tempted to call by the name of me: "*In its widest possible sense, 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*

⁷³ For a humane and compassionate account of multiple personality disorder, see Hacking, 1995, especially chapter 2 where he analyzes how it feels to be a multiple ("But how does it feel? Miserable, scary, that's how it feels" (p. 35)). Within a single person, multiple personalities (so called alters) with their own complex and unique behavior pattern and social relationships may come out at various times and determine the behavior of the person. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are popular representations of such alternation of personalities. The alters of a single individual may differ not only in age, but also in race, sexual inclination and even sex. A person who is visibly masculine may, when an alter is in control, claim to be feminine. A woman who wants to have nothing to do with sex has an alter who does it with her husband. For an analysis of the internal conversations of schizophrenics, who are different from multiples, see Lysaker and Lysaker, 2002.

⁷⁴ In *One, Nobody and a Hundred Thousand*, Pirandello narrates the story of a man who follows through the project of systematically 'deconstructing' each and every one of the social selves that others expect him to play. The novel ends tragically with the internment of the protagonist. For a fine sociological analysis of this Garfinkelian novel that explains action as result of the interaction between a multiplicity of internal dispositions and a plurality of internal contexts (practices = dispositions + contexts), see Lahire, 2005: 230-248.

ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account” (James, 1950, I: 291). As this powerful and frequently cited quotation suggests, people and things in the environment belong to the self, as far as they are felt as ‘mine’. In trying to systematize the contents of the self, James first distinguishes between the I and the Me, by which he means, respectively, the self as subject (or agent) and the self as object (or spectator).⁷⁵ The latter is further subdivided into three hierarchically ordered ‘constituents’, with the spiritual Me at the top, the social Me in the middle and the material Me at the bottom.⁷⁶ With Paranjpe (1998: 78), we can schematically represent this conceptual framework as follows:



⁷⁵ Like Mead, James is talking about the empirical or phenomenal self and not about the noumenal one. What he analyzes at this stage (pp. 291-328) are the objects of thought as they appear in the stream of consciousness. He’s concerned with the *cogitatum* or the *noema*, to speak like Husserl, but as the Ego is not submitted to a transcendental reduction, it is neither a priori, nor pure, but empirical. It is only at a later stage (pp. 329- 371), which will not concern us, that he will introduce the pure ego as a kind of changeless non phenomenal ‘Arch-Ego’ that accompanies all the thoughts and unifies them synthetically.

⁷⁶ With some good will one can recognize the three types of sign of Peircian semiotics: the spiritual Me as symbol, the social Me as index and the material Me as icon of the Self. For a provocative analysis of the triangulation of the symbolic-discursive, the somatic-affective and the behavioral-performative dimensions of the self with a special emphasis on misalignments between these dimensions, see Shalin, 2007.

The material Me (or material self) includes the body, clothes, homes and other possessions I am attached to (e.g. my nose, my glasses, my car, my office, my books). My body is the archetype of things I possess. All that is part of the material self is, in fact, felt as an extension of my body. Things have a meaning and a use. The objects I encounter in my surroundings are rather variegated. They can be gifts, works of art, consumer goods, commodities, tools, utilities, instruments, technologies, whatever. Whatever they are, they are invariably and inevitably signs and, therefore, social.⁷⁷ The social Me or social self involves the many social roles we play. James does not only argue that we have as many social selves as we have roles, but, most interestingly, he ties roles to recognition, affirming that we have as many selves as there are groups we care about. “Properly speaking, a man has a many social selves as there individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind” (James, 1950, I: 294). The desire to be recognized by others is strong, so strong that it is a vital need. Non recognition (owing to indifference and invisibility, or even worse, outright hostility and rejection) may be so painful that it mortifies the self. Although the person is not identical to his social persona, any attack on the latter will be felt by the former: “To wound any one of these his images is to wound him” (ibid.). Sometimes a person’s social selves may be at variance with one another, even painfully so, as any academic with a deadline and a lover (not to mention kids!) will be able to confirm. “So many books, so little time”. One’s role-set is not necessarily consistent. We all have our internal contradictions. To maintain the appearances - “our face” or the “face of the other”, as Goffman would say-, we routinely ‘backstage’ parts of our social self. Between verbally articulated positions and extra-discursive postures incongruities do occur: “When the sworn-to-chastity and committed-to-moral-uplift clergy abuse their charges, the misalignment between their preaching and action is painfully obvious. The same goes for police using their night sticks for purposes unspecified in their manuals, judges whose court behavior makes a mockery of the notion of judicious temperament, teachers whose emotional littering vitiates the emotional intelligence they seek to impart to their students” (Shalin, 2007: 212).

One cannot please everyone, and certainly not at the same time. One cannot even please oneself and be all the things one would love to be. “Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year,

⁷⁷ For a good pragmatic analysis of the meanings of things, see Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) on domestic symbols and the self.

be a wit, a bon-vivant, and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher; a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a ‘tone-poet’ and saint. But the thing is simply impossible” (James, 1950, I: 309). Choosing is losing. As one cannot actualize all possible selves, one has to set up a list of possible characters one could live with, review the list carefully, arrange its items “in an hierarchical scale according to their worth” (id., 314) and, finally, pick out the one on which to stake one’s salvation. The self that is compossible with the highest value of the person and that would be “worthy of approving recognition” by an ideal judge, such as God, if he exists, or any other imaginary “Great Companion” who incorporates humanity in exemplary fashion, corresponds to the real self.⁷⁸

With the introduction of a higher, ideal spectator who ranks and evaluates the representations the actor has of himself impartially, yet sympathetically, we arrive at the spiritual Me, which constitutes the apex of the Self. Unlike the material and the social selves, which refer to evanescent objects that appear in the stream of thought as it were from outside, the spiritual self looks at the process of reflection from within and identifies within thinking the thinker it wants to be. Representing the higher aspirations of the ego that the subject admires and identifies with, the spiritual self refers to the inner core of the person. If we conceive of the self as a spiral of concentric circles that form as it were a citadel, the spiritual self is the “a sanctuary within the citadel” of inner life (id., p. 297 and 303) from which all volitive acts seem to emanate.⁷⁹ Although it appears within thought as the inner sanctum, it is not thought, but felt. “When it is found, it is felt” (id., p. 299). And when it is attacked, it hurts badly, so badly, one would be willing to give, or even take, one’s life for it.

Armed with this trinity (one person, three selves), we can now return to Mead’s sociogenesis of the self to counter the argument that he “oversocializes” the self. As a matter of fact, he doesn’t, but by failing to distinguish explicitly between the spiritual and the social self, he has not sufficiently made clear the connection between his social

⁷⁸ Scheler’s essay on ‘exemplars and leaders’ remains unsurpassed. Unlike Weber, who is obsessed with strong leaders, Scheler enlarges and deepens the perspective on leadership by considering spiritual leaders (like Jesus or the Buddha), cultural geniuses (like Socrates and Goethe), political and military leaders (like Cesar and Napoleon) and successful entrepreneurs (like Henry Ford or Richard Branson).

⁷⁹ Sentimental as ever, Cooley extends James’s metaphor of the citadel, fusing it with Peirce’s image of bounty and treasures. Allowing for two-way traffic between the self and the universe, he affirms that the gates can be opened to the other through love: “The self, from this point of view, might be regarded as a sort of citadel of the mind, fortified without and containing selected treasures within, while love is an undivided share in the rest of the universe. In a healthy mind each contributes to the growth of the other. What we love intensely for a long time we are likely to bring within the citadel, and to assert as part of ourself” (Cooley, 1964: 187-188).

psychology and his moral psychology. Whereas the former suggests that that we have as many selves as the situation of interaction requires and that we can change our roles like we change our shirts and socks, the latter indicates that the self can only become a coherent one if the individual integrates all of his or her roles into an exemplary and authentic life project that is at once universal and singular, moral and personal.⁸⁰

With James, we have distinguished three main selves which may each, in turn, contain many subselves that do not necessarily cohere. These three selves are not substances, however, but aspects within a single process of “selving” within the person. My possessions, my roles, my aspirations are all part of a complex process that can be analyzed from different angles. When I speak about my body, my profession and my vocation, I’m not speaking of different existences, but of different perspectives on the same thing - my existence, my life. Persons evolve. They age, mature and, eventually, they die. My bodily Me is not what it used to be. I’m getting a bit of a stomach these days and my hair starts graying. My social Me is expanding as I’m learning new roles. By moving continents, I have made new friendships, while other ones are deteriorating. My spiritual Me has undergone significant changes too. I have become a mystical atheist. Over the years, a lot of changes have taken place. Like a boat that is changed plank by plank, I have refurbished myself. What, if anything, has remained the same through all these major changes in every aspect of my self?

The question of unity within diversity or sameness through change is a thorny one. James called the philosophical question of identity – is there “a Self of all the other selves” (id., p. 297) that remains invariant through changes? – “the most puzzling puzzle” (id., 330) with which psychology has to deal.⁸¹ Needless to say that I do not pretend to solve that puzzle that has occupied the best minds for millennia (Taylor,

⁸⁰ Lahire quotes a statement on the infinite fragmentation of the self in everyday life by Jean-Claude Kaufmann, who has produced beautiful ethnographies on the management of laundry by nascent couples, but ended up writing pop and pulp sociology for the masses: “The individual who leaves his dirty clothes in a heap in the room is not the same one who in the morning puts the same heap in the washing machine. He does not touch things in the same way, with the same ideas in his head. He is really another person, in another system of thought and action, changed by the different perception of the same objects” (Lahire, 1998: 25, note 7).

⁸¹ In the history of philosophy two positions are recurrent: either one follows Hume and Nietzsche or Descartes and Kant. Either one denies the existence of a self: nothing remains the same (Hume); the self has to be overcome (Nietzsche). Or one affirms its existence: “I think, therefore I am” (Descartes); the transcendental Ego accompanies all of my perceptions (Kant). The opposition between Hume and Descartes is paralleled in Indian philosophy by the Buddhist denial and the Upanisadic affirmation of the Self. As a midway between these two extreme positions - the exalted subject of Descartes and the wounded ego of Nietzsche- , Ricoeur (1990) has proposed to think narrative identity in terms of a dialectics between *idem* and *ipse*.

1989, Paranjpe, 1998). Instead of a solution, I propose to rephrase it as a problem of collective subjectivities, but now the problem of coordination appears, as Elster (1985: 16) says, as “an intra-personal, inter-temporal problem of collective action”. Within the person, the problem of coordination can best be thought of as a problem of orchestration between various voices within the internal conversation. Like in a polyphonic orchestra the point is not to silence the independent melodic voices, but to integrate them into an evolving texture so that each new voice fits into a harmonious whole. In accord with the merological considerations of pragmatism, one might even think of music with double or multiple choirs that may be separated from each other, as can be observed in performances of 16th-century music or, closer to us, in Britten’s *War Requiem*.

The metaphor of the polyphonic novel was proposed by the Russian philosopher and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*.⁸² In this work he rebuts critics who characterized Dostoevsky’s method as a Hegelian narrative in which two positions strive for ascendancy only to be merged in a synthesis at the end. Inspired by Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms, Bakhtin transforms the plurality of cultural forms into a plurality of voices that are in continuous dialogue with each other. He develops the idea that in Dostoevsky’s works there’s no single, authoritative author at work who plans everything rigidly and in detail (like in the Soviet Union), but that the author gives significant leeway to the characters of his novels. Raskolnikov, Stavrogrin, Ivan Karamazov and the Great Inquisitor are independent, relatively autonomous figures, each with their own character and their own view on the world that unfolds as the heroes present their own unique perspective on the world. Each has a personal life and a personal view of the world. Instead of a multitude of characters and fates within a unified objective world, as is the case in Tolstoy, Dostoevsky gives voice to a plurality of consciousnesses and worlds. In this polyphony of voices, the voice of the narrator resides beside the voices of the characters and has no greater authority than any other of the voices. Voices intersect and interact dialogically, and as in hermeneutics, they mutually illuminate biases and limitations of the positions they represent.

If we use this polyphonic model to make sense of the internal conversations we have with ourselves, we can understand the self as a choir in which a multiplicity of voices resonate and intermingle. Within the conversation, different voices pop up. They may well be fragments we have picked up from newspapers, books or conversations with

⁸² As I haven’t properly studied Bakhtin as yet, I freely draw in the following paragraph on Hermans, 2001.

others. Coming from different sources, places, times, traditions and generations, the voices are necessarily heterogeneous. Voices can speak through other voices (“ventriloquation”) or in different idioms. I swear in French, count in Dutch and when I prepare my classes which I teach in Portuguese, I take notes in English, even if the author is German.

The voices I confer with in dialogue represent alternative perspectives on the world and myself that are adopted by other people (friends, family, colleagues, opinion makers, etc.). The intrasubjective conversation is an intersubjective and dialogical one. The I listens to the interlocutors, which may be aliases of himself or represent different selves of others, asks them questions or gives them answers. Playing through the same theme, like love, competition or suicide, to name but a few, in a multiplicity of voices that represent different positions on the same issue and illuminate it from various angles, the I engages in a dialogue with itself. This dialogue is an ongoing one. While nothing guarantees that the voices come to a consensus – they may very well be incompatible or contradictory- the questions they raise and the various answers they give explain why the intrasubjective intersubjective conversations only come to an end when we die. When we die, they die with us, though others may continue their conversation with us. It is only when we are forgotten by all that our conversation goes out like a candle.

Coda

Instead of a conclusion, let me end with a confession: I have not written the text I intended to write. I wanted to offer some disguised autobiographic meditations on the teleosis of the self – from fracture to full reflexivity and beyond – but ended up grafting pragmatism onto hermeneutics. Instead of developing a transformative hermeneutics of the self, I have only worked out a methodological preamble to it. As this chapter is already far too long, I will keep my internal conversations internal and not make them public for now. One day, in a sequel to this text, I will offer an onto-teleo-theological reading of internal conversations and articulate it in a dialectical sequence of three successive moments. The first moment is ontological. Following Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s turn to language, I will argue that, like interpretation, conversation is not simply a method to get access to the self, but a way of being that is constitutive of the self. With Ricoeur and Macintyre, I will sketch out the narrative conception of the self as a mid-way that allows one to steer a course between the exalted self-sufficiency of

the Cartesian cogito and its deliberate fracturing that follows the Nietzschean assault on the self. The second moment is teleological. Inspired by Karl Jaspers's *Existenzphilosophie*, I will try to develop an ethics of existence in the form of a developmental moral psychology. To do so, I will not hesitate to reorganize Archer's four distinctive modes of internal speech into a teleological sequence that starts with the fracturing of the self in times of existential crisis and ends with the fully metareflexive self who is in control of its own destiny. The third moment is theological. I will make some of the theological concepts that were smuggled into the internal conversation explicit and suggest that the internal conversation is really an inner conversion of the self. Translating the doctrine of the salvation of the soul into secular language, I will sketch out the contours of a humanist ethics of authenticity in which we become who we are by pursuing "the good life with and for others in just institutions and a sustainable environment".

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