

Part VII

Experiences Make the Person

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27 The Human Experience: A Dialogical Account of Self and Feelings

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The basic claim of a dialogical perspective is that, in order to better understand human activities, we need to assume that the basic foundation of human life is social relatedness. Every human agent, every *ego*, is always in relation and responding to an *alter* (a virtual and/or material audience) about a certain object (Marková, 2003) by using semiotic means.

There is no consensual definition of what constitutes a dialogical perspective, but six basic common principles have been outlined (Salgado, Cunha, & Bento, 2013; Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007; Salgado & Valsiner, 2010). It starts by assuming the primacy of relations over entities (*relationality*). Therefore, life in general, and human life in particular, calls for a look that focus on human-life-in-relations; these relations are dynamic (*dynamism*), mediated by signs (*semiotic mediation*), implying an Other (*alterity*), with whom each and every one establish dialogical relationships (*dialogicality*) within a socio-cultural context (*contextuality*). It is assumed that psychological actions entail all these features simultaneously.

The dialogical perspective has been successfully applied in several fields of psychology and in varied ways. For example, it originated the dialogical self-theory, developed by Hubert Hermans (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), which still stands as the most popular branch of the dialogical-Bakhtinian approach to psychology. There are also some other important developments, such

as dialogical perspectives on psychotherapy (see Leiman, 2011, 2012; Martinez, Tomicic, & Medina, 2014; Seikkula, Laitila, & Rober, 2012), the use of dialogical influences on the socio-cultural approach to psychology (see Salvatore, 2016; Valsiner, 2007, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; Zittoun et al., 2013), the articulation between the theory of social representations and the dialogical perspective by Marková (2003), and so many other examples.

In this chapter, we will take those important developments as the general background to explore a specific question: How can we describe the human experiential mind within a dialogical perspective? In our view, a dialogical perspective may help psychology in better explaining one of its core elements: the constitution of human experience and the consequent human subjective sense of having a mind. Dialogically informed perspectives replace the overarching ego of its foundational position. However, this does not eliminate consciousness and self-awareness of this inquiry. As Jacques (1982/1991) claimed, “consciousness is no longer the architect of the communication relation, but its inhabitant. It realizes and accomplishes itself during the semic building blocks available for communication within an organized community” (p. 216). Thus, the human and self-aware mind needs to be framed within a dialogical perspective.

In previous works, in collaboration with several colleagues, we have developed different aspects of a dialogical model of our subjective

processes (Salgado & Ferreira, 2005; Salgado, Ferreira, & Fraccascia, 2005; Bento, Cunha, & Salgado, 2012). This chapter is another step in that direction by exploring the role of feelings in the constitution of a dialogical perspective of the mind.

27.1 Taking Some Lessons from James

This endeavor revolves around the very basic ground of psychology. To look for a dialogical description of the human mind touches some of the foundational questions of this science. What is the object of psychology? What are the phenomena involved? In what phenomenological grounds we come to agree that there is such a thing we call “psychology”? We are not oblivious to the sociohistorical background of our apparent intuitions, but none of us doubts that what we coin as “psychological” refers to *specific* aspects of our life, and these are highly dependent on our constant subjective experiencing. Thus, we will start by stating that psyche or the human mind has in its phenomenological awareness of human experience one of its key distinctive features. As Brentano (1874/1995) argued long ago, mental phenomena need to be distinguished from physical phenomena. Following Brentano’s seminal work, in which he reintroduces notions from scholastic medieval philosophy, this distinction is based on the “intentionality” of the mind: mental acts are always “about” something, they always have an object beyond itself, something that does not apply to physical phenomena, at least without the intervention of beings capable of original intentionality. Thus, the intentional mind is capable of “experience” and the definition of this feature lies at the very core of the birth of psychology as a scientific discipline (see Valsiner, 2012a, for a more detailed historical account).

But how to describe this mind?

Our point of departure here will be William James. We believe he gives a very accurate

description of what can count as the “human experiencing mind.” Actually, it may be argued that he was far from original, since his description was previously set by the German look of the nineteenth century at “experience.” Nevertheless, it has become a very popular point of departure for Western psychology and it is coherent with our following arguments.

His point of departure is the following: the main subject of psychology is our “consciousness of thought.” In his words: “*The first fact for us, then, as psychologists, is that thinking of some sort goes on. I use the word thinking . . . for every form of consciousness indiscriminately*” (James, 1890, p. 225).

His option is to take the whole field of consciousness as the main point of interest, instead of those supposedly more basic elements, such as sensations. Thus, he is clearly escaping the atomistic perspective, adopting a holistic position:

Most books start with sensations, as the simplest mental facts, and proceed synthetically, constructing each higher stage from those below it. But this is abandoning the empirical method of investigation. No one ever had a simple sensation by itself. Consciousness, from our natal day, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations, and what we call simple sensations are results of discriminative attention, pushed often to a very high degree. (James, 1890, p. 225)

In this last excerpt, it is important to clarify that in the context of James’s nineteenth century German background, “empirical” is synonym of “experiential,” and therefore he is clearly denying the atomistic orientation of the positivistic philosophy. To him, to be empirical meant to be close to the phenomena as these are actually experienced by the person. We do not have perceptions in an isolated way: our experience comes in the form of integrated totalities or *gestalts*.

Up to this point, he is clarifying what should be the matter of primary concern to us, psychologists. Psychology studies human conscious minds

that we all are aware of having and our mind is experienced as a totality.

Then, he goes on to ascertain some other features:

How does it go on? We notice immediately five important characters in the process . . .

- 1 Every thought tends to be part of a personal consciousness.
- 2 Within each personal consciousness thought is always changing.
- 3 Within each personal consciousness thought is sensibly continuous.
- 4 It always appears to deal with objects independent of itself.
- 5 It is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects – *chooses* from among them, in a word – all the while. (James, 1890, p. 226)

James continues his chapter explaining these five features. From his explanations, we will retain the following:

- Human normal consciousness is a *personal* consciousness, meaning that it implies a first-person state, and some kind of property. In other words, psyche always involves a feeling of subjectivity and selfhood.
- Our consciousness is always changing and its main feature is its operation as an irreducible stream.
- It has a sensible basis that establishes the feeling of continuity.
- Consciousness always involve some intentionality or aboutness, i.e. toward an object of consciousness.
- It is selective, and therefore, active about its momentary focus.

In this way, James takes the terms “stream of thought, consciousness, or subjective life” as synonymous (p. 240). At the same time, James is paving the way to admit that consciousness has

a sensuous base, as it becomes even clearer in the following passage:

When we read such phrases as “naught but,” “either one or the other,” “a is b, but,” “although it is, nevertheless,” “it is an excluded middle, there is no tertium quid,” and a host of other verbal skeletons of logical relation, is it true that there is nothing more in our minds than the words themselves as they pass? What then is the meaning of the words which we think we understand as we read? What makes that meaning different in one phrase from what it is in the other? “Who?” “When?” “Where?” Is the difference of felt meaning in these interrogatives nothing more than their difference of sound? And is it not (just like the difference of sound itself) known and understood in an affection of consciousness correlative to it, though so impalpable to direct examination? Is not the same true of such negatives as “no,” “never,” “not yet”? The truth is that large tracts of human speech are nothing but signs of direction in thought, of which direction we nevertheless have an acutely discriminate sense, though no definite sensorial image plays any part in it whatsoever. Sensorial images are stable psychic facts; we can hold them still and look at them as long as we like. These bare images of logical movement, on the contrary, are psychic transitions, always on the wing, so to speak, and not to be glimpsed except in flight. Their function is to lead from one set of images to another. As they pass, we feel both the waxing and the waning images in a way altogether peculiar and a way quite different from the way of their full presence. If we try to hold fast the feeling of direction, the full presence comes and the feeling of direction is lost. The blank verbal scheme of the logical movement gives us the fleeting sense of the movement as we read it, quite as well as does a rational sentence awakening definite imaginations by its words. (pp. 253–254)

Thus, James introduces a distinction between perceptions (sensorial images) and these “signs of direction” embedded in our stream of consciousness. We are unable to hold on to these feelings, since their transformation in sensorial images

would kill their movement. They are distinctive states of mind, felt elements, but not fully articulated thoughts. James goes on in other directions throughout that essay, but he was opening the door to the notion that there is a strong connection between our psychic life and our embodied felt sense. More than clear elements in our mind, we feel them as vague; they seem to be almost pure dynamism, movement in itself, or the feeling of the movement:

Some will interpret these facts by calling them all cases in which certain images, by laws of association, awaken others so very rapidly that we think afterwards we felt the very *tendencies* of the nascent images to arise, before they were actually there. For this school the only possible materials of consciousness are images of a perfectly definite nature. Tendencies exist, but they are facts for the outside psychologist rather than for the subject of the observation. The tendency is thus a *psychical* zero; only its *results* are felt.

Now what I contend for, and accumulate examples to show, is that “tendencies” are not only descriptions from without, but that they are among the *objects* of the stream, which is thus aware of them from within, and must be described as in very large measure constituted of *feelings of tendency*, often so vague that we are unable to name them at all. It is in short, the re-instatement of the vague to its proper place in our mental life which I am so anxious to press on the attention. (p. 255)

This rich description tells us something quite different from the modernist conception of the mind: each person feels one’s mind. Thus, in our opinion, James is not only pointing to the ambiguous features of our lives (that can be at the very core of our being; see Abbey, 2012; Ferreira, Salgado, & Cunha, 2006; Valsiner, 2007), but to the felt sense as a fundamental piece of our consciousness. He did not claim that as clearly as we are doing now, since he places these feelings in the middle of some other mental constituents and not necessarily as a fundamental one. How-

ever, it makes all the sense to claim that these feelings of tendency, the feeling of our movement from the present state to the anticipated future may be understood as a vital element of the self-organization of our phenomenal field (see also Smallwood & Schooler, 2015). We are conscious because we are constantly feeling what is happening to us and centering it in ourselves (Damásio, 1994, 2010; Salgado & Hermans, 2005). As Valsiner (2007, 2014) has stated: our psyche is a felt mind. Thus, to have a conscious mind and to feel are intertwined in the creation of our subjective life: the phenomenological field created moment-by-moment always comes with a self-referential bodily felt sense.

27.2 A Dialogical and Sociocultural Look at the Human Experiencing Mind

Taking James’s view as the source of inspiration, as well as the Bakhtin heritage (see Salgado & Clegg, 2011), and some suggestions from neurosciences (Damásio, 2010), our proposal is that human mind refers to the ability of having experiences about something else simultaneously in a self-referential mode and in an other-referential mode.

By “experience” we are referring to the mindful or subjective constitution of an image of something else. Beforehand, it implies a relationship between an agent and an object. This latter may be an ache in a stomach, or one’s arm, or a something in the past, and so on. Within this relationship, the agent is sensing and representing (in a broad notion of representation) something (in the environment, in oneself) – therefore, an experience is always something I am feeling “about” something else. If I am having an experience of listening to music, it means that I am, as an agent, in a relationship with this particular piece of music, which I am sensing. The scenario is even more complex, since

human beings not only sense those “objects,” but they also sense them in a self-referential way (what also may be termed as self-awareness): if someone “experiences,” let’s say, the sound of music, it implies that this person is feeling music as “something happening to me.” Finally, and adding even more complexity to the puzzle of the human mind, all this interaction we have with the world is socially regulated. Every particular object is socially rooted. Taking music again as an example: in a song, the specific “materiality of the sounds” gets organized, performed, and shared in socially meaningful ways. Thus, even if privately felt, any particular human experience is rooted in social practices, and its subjectivity is always dependable on social codes.

In synthesis, we will claim that the phenomenological or experiential the human mind can be described in the following way:

- The mind operates by the creation of gestalt or experiential fields.
- These states of mind are always in a process of dynamic change, but in its regular normal processing, they are felt as continuous.
- This embodied sense of continuity, regardless the sense of discontinuity on the contents of consciousness, implies self-referential processes.
- We claim that the most basic level of explanation to such a process is the constant bodily felt sense, by which, under normal circumstances, the experiential fields are felt in an embodied way.
- These felt self-referential processes will also be key elements to the emergent sense of subjectivity, centeredness, and agency.
- Feelings, in themselves, involve some form of embodied response to some actual or potential situation.

The remainder of this chapter will explore in more detail this general picture.

27.3 First, Second, and Third-Person Perspectives Within the Human Mind

Before us, we have a world that is felt as an “object,” a kind of external entity that impinges itself in our lives. However, every one of us feels these interactions with the segments of the world as private experiences. Finally, between these two poles, the interaction between the human agent and the object is rendered intelligible only within a socially organized world. Thus, and according to these distinctions, the person is not only interacting with an object: by using social means in that interaction, the person is also in a social relationship with others – what we may call a dialogical relationship. Moreover, since social and cultural life is embedded in the object itself, the materiality of those objects is impregnated with socially charged meanings, making the object always a social and symbolic entity. Therefore, within a single human experience, we will always have an I interacting with an object (an “it,” which may be a “him,” “her,” but also a “you,” a “me,” “us,” “we,” or “them”), and this takes place within a socially embedded situation. In other words, there are three conflating perspectives within each single mindful experience: a first-person (an I), a second-person (the social audience), and a third-person (the object) perspective.

27.3.1 The First-Person Perspective

This is the inward felt experience of the focal object and its surroundings, the perspective from within. This may be understood as the “phenomenal self-awareness.” It is the “feeling of what happens” (Damásio, 1999) and what gives a full subjective sense to any experience – it is the felt origin of the “self.” It may be useful to distinguish within this first-person perspective two layers: on the one hand, we have the

phenomenological awareness with a referential function, by which the person is representing an “external” segment of the world – for example, I may be hearing a piece of music, while looking through a window to this forest; on the other hand, all this process is also self-referential, and the person becomes self-aware. The referential function comes with the ability of sensing and representing something “outside” – the intentionality of the mind. The mind needs a content and the content is always about something. However, this representation comes also with one of the most extraordinary capacities of the human mind: the self-referential feeling. The person knows that “this” event is happening to me and that it is affecting me. Without this kind of implicit and embodied knowledge, there would be no subjective feeling of the experience: the mind would be only a matter of representation and automatic action. With this feeling, mental contents become subjected to self-awareness and to a feeling quality that will be vital to human affairs. As we will argue later, these feelings will be the most basic grounds of human motives for action.

It may be argued that there are moments in which the person is deprived of this self-awareness – like in sleep or during crisis of epilepsy. However, these are exceptions to the basic functioning that only show the dramatic dependence we have on self-awareness for our usual daily functioning.

27.3.2 The Second-Person Perspective

This is the social dimension of the human mind and the one that dialogical perspectives have been highlighting. There is, simultaneously, an external and an internal dimension to this social quality of the mind. Our world is materially and symbolically socially organized, and therefore, our mental contents are also socially organized and addressed. Thus, we develop our mind within that

external social world that is given to us. At the same time, by this necessary social articulation, the mind appropriates this external world, making it part of the mind itself. Thus, everything that happens in the mind has a social nature. For example, if you are talking with someone else, you are coordinating with that someone; if you are alone, writing a letter, the addressee of your message is invoked; if you are just thinking about something, you are still using socially acquired means (semiotic tools) in order to develop your thoughts and, more importantly, you are addressing at least one or more virtual others that somehow shape the course of your thoughts. Meaning, in terms of human affairs, has always these social roots, since it always involves the coordination between at least two agents.

Social organization starts from the very beginning of life, in the relationship between caretakers and the baby: their mutual coordination is crucial for the global safety, well-being, and development of the infant. We live in a social world that organizes itself in different ways: conventions, routines, habits, activities, each one involving coordination between social actors and between different settings. Sleeping and feeding are socially marked, but also the pattern of proto-dialogues by which the infant is brought to the world of human communication. Thus, newborns are right there introduced to a social world that constrains the possible pathways of development. Moreover, from a certain point on, human beings are socialized into symbolic forms of communication, by which they become able to coordinate with others (and, consequently, in a self-referential way, with themselves) in more complex forms. In other words, the mind becomes semiotic, since it starts using semiotic means to represent “objects” and also to coordinate with the social world in subtler and more complex ways.

From a dialogical point of view, as part of the family of sociocultural psychological

theories represented in this volume (see also Salvatore, 2016; Valsiner & Rosa, 2007; Valsiner, 2012b, 2014; Zittoun et al., 2013), this sociogenesis of the mind will always be a core dimension. The human mind is always a matter of meaningful social coordination with others. Such social coordination involves communication with others and, therefore, creates meaning. At the same time, social coordination is dependent on the use of semiotic tools: two coordinated agents need to use signs and a semiotic shared system. Verbal language is the clearest case of the use of signs, but there are also some possible others: for example, you may see tears in someone's else eyes as a sign of sadness, or a smile as a sign of happiness.

Thus, the relational nature of the mind, previously highlighted in the description of the first-person perspective, has a socio-relational layer. Most of the theories in this volume share this view, but it is still frequently forgotten in psychological theories.

27.3.3 The Third-Person Perspective

The third-person perspective refers to the more “externalized” properties of the mind. What happens in the mind, happens to me (first-person), and convokes a social background in which it is embedded (second-person); yet, it is also “about something else” (third-person). The “aboutness” or “intentionality” of the mind (in the philosophical sense of intentionality, meaning that the mind is referring to something beyond itself), previously described, is the core element for this third-person perspective.

This is rendered possible through, first, by the perceptual abilities of the mind, but in the case of human beings, it is much further developed by the symbolic semiotic ability of the mind. In our stream of experiences, we not only have perceptions or images that map the world – we also have complex forms of thought that involve manipu-

lation of symbolic signs. “Sign” can be defined as some sort of “sensorial object” (visual, auditory, olfactory, taste, and tactile) that stands for something else. The smell of a rose announces its existence, the perfume of a loved one reveals her presence, footsteps in the snow denounces the solitary walk of a human being. Likewise, the vision of these printed words before your eyes also create sentences in your mind that enables you to read and follow this reasoning. Human beings have developed highly complex semiotic systems based on verbal signs in which the meaning of a sign is dependent on the relation it establishes with other signs within socially created semiotic systems. These interconnected networks are vital to the most complex activities of the human beings.

Signs are socially articulated and addressed, but they also allow to refer to something else (see Rosa, 2007 or Salvatore, 2016 for more elaborated accounts on semiosis). By representing and substituting the referred objects, signs and sign-mediated activities, in some sense, become impersonal or supra-personal – thus, they may be shared with third parties socialized in the specific semiotic code in use. Of course, when brought to life in the mind of someone else, signs also become lived experiences and, therefore, become personal and social. But semiotic productions may gain some material independence, such as happens in books, DVDs, or chess boards. At the same time, they are vital elements for the human world of meaning, since meaning is always rooted in these semiotic elements and activities.

The contents of our mind refer to “it,” and this semiotically mediated “it” becomes part of the mind. These objects are always represented objects, and representation that initially is only sensorial and motoric becomes later symbolic. Thus, the “semiotic objects” of our mind become analyzed, fragmented, compared, put in logical and dialectical relations with other signs. Thus, the inner feeling of, let's say, a melody may

become an explicit (and not only implicit) object of our awareness. We are not only aware of our experience, we also create verbal descriptions of our life. We build narratives, for instance, in which we describe personal experiences within a time frame. We formulate plans for the future. And we engage in self-reflection. This involves not only a felt experience and a succession of events; it also implies the possibility of codifying those moments into a symbolic system that treats all these experiences as “objects” or “things.” Moreover, it also implies the development of abstract notions (e.g., causality, laws, etc.) and the possibility of situating personal episodes within a specific time frame (e.g., “This happened yesterday”; “The game is about to end”; “Tomorrow I will go to the zoo”).

We must highlight that these three perspectives co-occur simultaneously and feed each other. Starting with the third-person perspective, its connection with the second-person perspective is clear in the social rootedness of our language: we are only able to develop a language through the social guidance of others and the semiotic systems are introduced by a given sociocultural background. The other way around is also true: it is only by referencing to the world through signs that we dialogically coordinate and communicate with others – that is, signs enable our communication with others. The same applies to the relation between feelings (first-person) and the semiotic accounts (third-person). We can only refer to something that somehow is experienced – even if we are talking about fictional objects, such as dragons or Lilliput, we have some sort of “experience” of that fiction (imaginary, in that case). At the same time, every feeling is a potential event for semiotic description. Finally, as we will be elaborating later, every felt experience is actually also socially rooted and addressed, something that demonstrates the connection between the first- and second-person perspectives.

It is important to notice that in this view, what has been frequently treated as pure cog-

nitive operations or cognitive contents become connected with an embodied feeling. The connection between the cognitive and the felt experience gives a phenomenological background to abstract ideas. Notions, concepts, ideas, they have meaning through this connection (rather unstable, sometimes) between those three poles (personal, social, and abstract). Take, for instance, the notion of “past”: this notion is not only a matter of taking the logical or “purely” cognitive properties of the past; it carries a “way of feeling things” – largely developed in a social medium. In this case, we are discussing time, but the same may be applicable to any kind of concept. That is why, we propose, that concepts are far beyond the “words” – paradoxically, concepts involve the preconceptual embodied feeling in themselves!

Within this framework, the human mind may be described as composed by these three distinct but highly interdependent layers or perspectives. We have a layer of subjective self-centered experiences (first-person), which are socially organized, developed, and addressed (second-person), referencing something else through signs embedded in specific semiotic systems (third-person perspective). Figure 27.1 aims to describe these three interconnected perspectives of the mind. A person looks to the clock (a socially organized event) and realizes that it is later than expected, creating a feeling of alarm and the verbal account “Gee, I’m late!” All these three layers make this a meaningful experience to the person, but also to potential audiences: if we were witnessing this in an airport and watched the person immediately starting to run right after hearing her say “Gee, I’m late!,” we will guess that the person is late for a flight.

In a certain way, psyche is this social and embodied world of “ideas” or “concepts.” We also believe that this picture may bridge some of the long quarrels between idealists and empiricists traditions of thought. But this also may explain why pure sign-operating machines, such as computers, do not have a mind – and therefore,

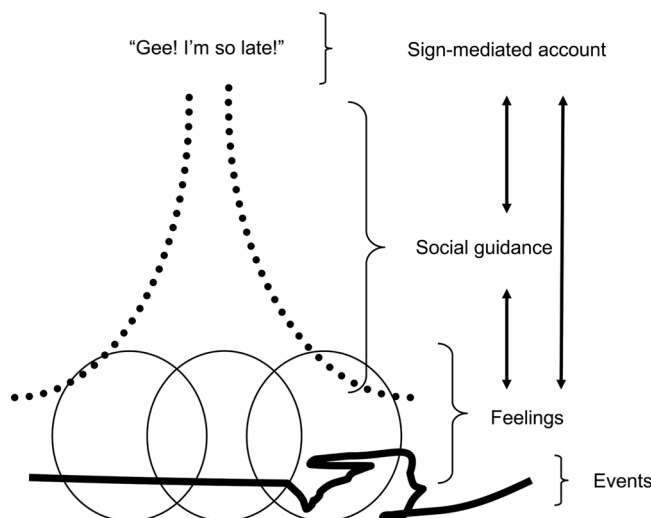


Figure 27.1 The three layers of the human mind: first-, second-, and third-person perspectives.

why pure cognitive sciences are only touching a part of the elephant, even if a very significant one.

27.4 Putting the Mind in Motion: The Notion of Position

Taking this perspective as the general background, our inner subjectivity may be described as an experiential field in which our feeling of being in the world (a first-person experience, composed by our general felt and perceptual organization of the lived moment) is semiotically articulated within a dialogical and communication relation with others (present or absent). For example, I see a tree at this moment while feeling a sense of beauty in the movements of its branches and leaves. The tree, then, becomes my focal object, that fills my awareness as the main matter of my present moment. This sense of the tree and the accompanying thought constitutes a general field of experience; the position assumed toward this focal object also socially situates the person. Nobody is here to listen to my thoughts, nobody but a virtual other. Beyond this virtual other, I also have other internal audiences that

are implicitly invoked by this position – the previous relations that now enable this experience and position at this moment. Thus, I have a felt experience, but this experience is already socialized, it is guided by previous dialogical articulations. The virtual other is the addressee of my thought (thinking is generally conceived here as an inner-directed chain of utterances). Those inner audiences are not “objects” in themselves, but “patterns of relating with” that are relevant to the situations (e.g., all my social experiences around observing nature). Thus, we have the responsive and purposeful action of the person (the position assumed) toward the object (a relation that is mediated by signs); through this position toward the object, that has an experiential side (the felt quality of the experience), the person assumes a position toward others (present or absent). Then, we may distinguish between the addressed others (virtual or real); and internal audiences, somehow involved in the meaning-making of the situation.

Then, one person comes in, and I can share this moment and feeling. A new addressee, a real person comes to the scene and the utterance is externally expressed. She understands the

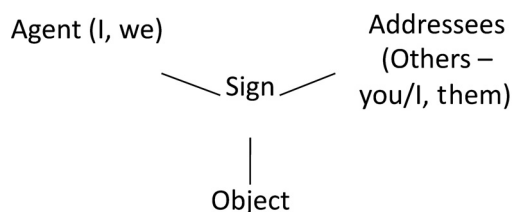


Figure 27.2 The triadic structure of a dialogical position.

situation and validates it – “yes, it is really a beautiful movement.” A dialogical dance between I and Other starts, in which her agreement means more than a mere identification. In this case, her agreement may mean that a feeling of mutual and reciprocal understanding arises; a sense of excitement may be brought to the situation by this sudden mutual contact; and so on. Her response calls for a response from me. In sum, we may say that at each moment, a person is always assuming a position toward the world and toward others.

In order to depict this notion of position we may use the following diagram (Figure 27.2), largely borrowed from Karl Bühler (1934/1990; see also Salgado & Valsiner, 2010), which shows its triadic nature. At the same time, this diagram implies the three layers of perspectives previously presented.

In other works, we have developed this notion of self-position, since we believe that this notion can represent an excellent unit of analysis for our dialogical studies (see Salgado, Cunha, & Bento, 2013). Here, we will only briefly describe this notion. It is argued that the agent is always assuming a personal position (which may be also representative of a group, community, etc.) toward specific addressees about an object. Thus, a position involved what may be called, in a Bakhtinian perspective (Bakhtin, 1929/1984), “double-directedness”: the position is simultaneously directed to the object and to an audience. Every position has also a responsive and evaluative nature based on affective processes. We pro-

pose that the energetic quality of human life is embedded in and fed by our affective life.

27.5 A Dialogical Account of Feelings

To establish this sort of perspective places feelings as vital elements of a subjective life. For some, this may seem a retreat to egological models, and contradictory to the dialogical foundations of our proposal. That would be true if we would be unable of rendering a dialogical account of feelings and affectivity. However, we believe that feelings are not only vital elements to unite body and mind, but a promising door to the dialogical conceptions of subjectivity. Thus, if we want to better develop our notion of a subjective mind we need to have a better hold on good theories about feelings and emotions.

Feelings have several dimensions that should be carefully decomposed, even if they take place simultaneously. As several researchers in this area have been claiming for a long time (Greenberg & Safran, 1987) each feeling has:

- an inner and bodily sensuous quality;
- an aboutness – it is always about something, that is, it has a referent;
- a responsive directionality – it assigns value to different courses of action and consequences; in other words, it involves some evaluation of the past, present and future referent, and therefore, it presents itself as a tendency of action or response to it (e.g., avoidance/approach);
- An expressive and communicational value, since we do not only feel in our body, but we also express it to others.

In our view, the conjugation of these features allows us to establish a dialogical account of feelings as shown in Figure 27.3.

Thus, feelings (and emotions, as their counterpart) have three simultaneous dimensions, which correspond largely to the three

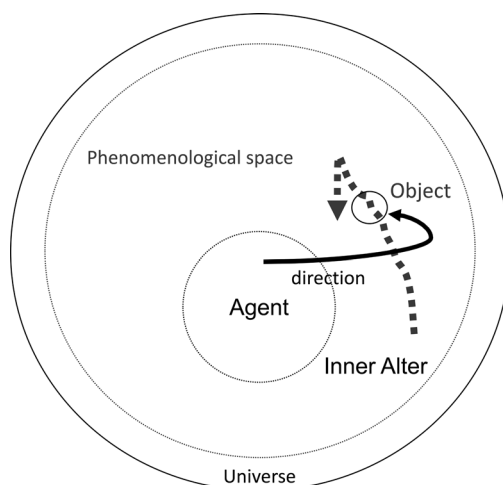


Figure 27.3 A dialogical conception of feelings.

aforementioned dimensions of the experiential mind (first-, second-, and third-person).

- An inner dimension: This includes the sensuous flux of changes taking place here-and-now in the body-in-action. The obtained feeling creates a sense of subjectivity, a first-person or personal consciousness.
- A responsive dimension: The feeling is integral part of the response to the lived situation. As James argued, we feel the movement of our consciousness and these feelings are *signs of direction*. They carry a tendency of action, they move the person in certain ways toward that *something* – the current task. Through feelings, the person is moving to a specific positioning toward her or his experience. Usually, this feeds an *instrumental action* toward the world (e.g. feeling something like “I want more of this” while holding an apple and biting it). Meanwhile, since this positioning is also felt as a first-person experience, this positioning is a personal positioning.
- An expressive and communicational dimension: Feelings and emotions are expressive and embodied responses. Thus, they link a communicational agent to a real or potential addressee. Through emotions, we express or

“say” something, even if not with words. It is not contrary to our purposes to claim that some of these emotions seem to be clearly biological prewired, since this does not exclude communicational and dialogical properties. It only means that our own biological features, such as our emotional abilities, are also dialogically based: they were selected, at least, partially, because of their communicational value. Evolutionary perspectives seem to endorse the vital importance of the expressive and communicative value of emotions in the process of natural selection (see Damásio, 2010). Thus, emotions involve also a *communicational action toward a social world*.

The final picture portrays feelings and emotions as involved in several simultaneous processes: in the instrumental actions toward the world, in the communicational actions toward social others, and in the personal feeling of being a subjective agent.

Our claim is that the expressive communicational dimension associated with feelings is essential to make the bridge between I and others, but also between I and oneself. Let’s say that one person feels sad. On the one hand, this person is feeling sadness, and this is inwardly communicated, allowing the person to become aware of her or his present state; on the other hand, this sadness may be expressed through the body, which may call for a response from others – compassion, for instance. Indeed, the constant background feelings that go with every moment of our consciousness are communicated from oneself to oneself. In fact, emotional expression is not only something to call attention from others, but also contains some crude or general reciprocal expectation (crying expects help, expression of rage expects fear, and so on). Throughout our infancy, the kind of social regulation that these situations ignite is vital to what will happen next. For example, what is the child supposed to control autonomously and what are the situations in

which the child will be appeased by others? The kind of dialogical articulation started by each felt moment socializes that very feeling, instituting new expected answers; and from the moment that a feeling originates those expectations, it allows a new form of answer to the felt situation.

Overall, we are arguing that feelings come to acquire meaning in this dialogical engagement with others. They operate as signs, directed inwardly and outwardly. However, it is in the articulation between expression of the agent and answer of the addressee that they will acquire their full life. Feelings expect something from others. And therefore, even in their inward orientation, they also are marked by this distinction between agent (the one who expresses) and addressee (the one who interprets and reacts to the expression).

The following passage from the novel *The Shadow of the Wind* may illustrate this complex dialogical dance of feelings. The narrator, Daniel, tells us that he lost his mother when he was four years old and how that affected his daily life throughout his childhood:

Six years later my mother's absence remained in the air around us, a deafening silence that I had not learned to stifle with words. . . . As a child I learned to fall asleep talking to my mother in the darkness of my bedroom, telling her about the day's events, my adventures at school, and the things I had been taught. I couldn't hear her voice or feel her touch, but her radiance and her warmth haunted every corner of our home, and I believed, with the innocence of those who can still count their age on their ten fingers, that if I closed my eyes and speak to her, she would be able to hear wherever she was. Sometimes my father would listen to me from the dining room, crying in silence.

On that June morning, I woke up screaming at first light. My heart was pounding in my chest as if my very soul was trying to escape. My father hurried into my room and held me in his arms, trying to calm me.

"I can't remember her face. I can't remember Mummy's face," I muttered, breathless.

My father held me tight.

"Don't worry, Daniel. I'll remember for both of us." (Ruiz Zafon, 2001/2004, pp. 1–2)

First, we have the absence of his mother, revealed by the feeling quality of the silence – not yet stifle with words. He longs for her, she is not there for him, and this contact between the agent and the physically absent addressee creates a need to be fulfilled. Thus, Daniel, driven by this need, seeks for contact (the action tendency) and, as a child, freely uses his imagination to talk with her, letting him feel "her radiance and warmth." Thus, his feeling of sad "absence" leads him toward an imaginative world where he recreates her presence and contact, letting him feel her response that comes in the form of maternal love. Thus, the need for real contact and the response of absence feeds an imaginative form of connection, which is reciprocated. Daniel's complex subjective felt mind takes the form of a complex play between him and her mother. In parallel, his father witnesses all this interplay and Daniel's feelings, which are also externally directed, make him feel deeply sad, crying alone. This in turn makes Daniel aware of the real absence of his mother. However, in that day of June, when Daniel becomes unable to recall her face, his cry for help is immediately responded to by his father, who holds him and appeases him with those beautiful words – "I'll remember for both of us." They are united in their dramatic loss. Thus, there is simultaneously an internal and external drama driven by strong feelings and needs, which leads the agent toward specific positions and forms of living through the current situation.

As such, feelings share the Janus qualities of signs, since they are deeply involved in the relation between *ego* and *alter* (Marková, 2003), they differentiate an agent and an addressee. Initially, these feelings act as basic tools of social communication (Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001): in fact, in the early phases of life, the very possibility of starting joint action is dependent on these emotional expressions. These relational

patterns, with emotions as their basic currency, seem deeply important to establish a kind of sensuous knowing-how of being in the world – borrowing from Ruiz Zafon, not yet stifled with words. From then on, progressively, complexity will be increasingly higher: the child will learn to name feelings, to coordinate feelings with specific contextual demands, and later to articulate the felt quality of abstract thought with fuzzy systems of values and ideals. At that point, we will have a full dialogically engaged agent in a socio-cultural world. But the heart, even when solitary, will remain in-between.

27.6 Conclusion: Where Is the Self Then?

In this chapter, our aim was to contribute to the clarification of what we mean by “human sense of experience” when following a dialogical perspective. That started a travel throughout some basic questions in search for a description of our phenomenological sense of being in the world. We ended up with a proposal that distinguishes three basic interconnected layers for the human mind: a basic felt sense, a social and dialogical field in which the person assumes positions toward the world, and a semiotic component that allows symbolic actions and reflections. We then explored a little further the affective side of the mind, since the subjective basis of our minds calls for more attention to this basic layer.

We also believe that this may help us to better configure an answer to the following somewhat intriguing question: “Where” is the self within a dialogical perspective? Based on our proposal, we may argue that “self” refers to a multilayered process, in which the first-, second- and third-person perspectives conflate. First, the basic sense of self involves an embodied felt sense, from which self-awareness and self-centeredness are derived. This is the subjective feeling, the level where the agent feels that “this is happening to me.” At this first-person level, embod-

ied feelings play a core role (first-person). The phenomenological perception of what happens is always mapped against that simultaneous embodied felt sense. Thus, the perception of the world and the perception of oneself are two faces of the ongoing conscious interchange with the world. This creates a basic self-feeling, which is the basic ground for what we usually name as the “self.” These feelings, and the corresponding basic sense of self, also assign explicit value to the current lived situation, which is highly important to determine future courses of actions or to future eventual introspective reflections. We also believe that this corresponds globally to the notion of I-as-subject from James.

In what sense, then, is the self “dialogical”? All this takes place within a social background, which regulates the events taking place and their meaning. In other words, that basic self is largely regulated by this social and dialogical dimension (second-person). As we have argued, the person is always assuming a position toward social audiences, which are constitutive of the position in itself. Thus, the position of the self is always social and dialogical. Finally, the self has also a third-person dimension, related with the semiotic abilities of the mind. All that happens is not only felt, but also has content and becomes explicit, and by being explicit it becomes possible to create narratives about oneself. We believe that this last layer corresponds to the “Me” from James. Taking together these three layers, the self becomes then a matter of creating meaningful narratives and other forms of semiotic accounts that may guide the person through life’s endeavors, rooted in specific patterns of dialogical self-positions and pursuing basic values and needs related with one’s well-being.

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