

CHAPTER 6

A RESEARCHER AT THE CROSSROADS

A Commentary Upon Processing Process

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Valerie Bellas and James McHale (this volume) approach their chapter as a dialogical narrative of a developmental research process, written in the present to retrospectively achieve an analytic view of the past while developing several sequential microgenetic studies. In this commentary, I will maintain dialogism as a semiotic and theoretical tool to guide my reflections upon their questions and their work. In this sense, it seems useful to start by outlining some of the general principles that guide the dialogical framework as a specific approach to epistemology, psychological science, and professional ethics. Following this, I will focus and elaborate on some of the questions raised by Bellas and McHale about the scientific developmental process of an investigator, the values for psychological theory and practice within this approach and the guidelines for microgenetic methodologies. Having highlighted some of the challenges and theoretical difficulties that need to be overcome in order to create meaningful and innovative research and theory, I will take the chance to

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present some of my personal decisions regarding these issues in my own developing process of a microgenetic psychological study.

DIALOGUE AS THE PROCESS AND THE CONTENT

With its strong emphasis on the rejection of a representational epistemology which characterized modern science, postmodernist thinking, in particular the social constructivist movement lead the way to a profound and relevant critique concerning the social sciences. In turn, this aspect draws attention to the social, relational, and dialogical features of meaning making, in particular the creation of scientific knowledge (Salgado & Hermans, 2005). However, the extreme versions of this critique (e.g., Gergen, 1994) which argued in favor of the refusal of any kind of private and internal psychological experience lead to a social solipsism that created a few problems to psychology (Marková, 2003b). Namely, what could be the role of a science that aimed to study subjectivity, if there are no such things as subjective experiences? Are psychologists left to accept that this science has an impossible object of study? Are we to resign to only what exists between people? As Salgado (2003) has questioned before:

If someone uses introspection and tries to know himself, he is turning into an interior world that was socially constructed; when he symbolizes a certain body state with an emotional label, the same happens. Does this mean that you are relating to someone? Yes and no. In a certain sense, you are alone; in another you are accompanied by all of those who share the same sphere of intelligibility. But, independently of it, you are having a private and personal experience. (p. 189)

Dialogism seems to create a solution to this dilemma. Subjectivity is still a viable object of study for psychology with the “admittance that, once familiarized with some particular language, the individual has authentic private (in opposition to public, explicitly shared) experiences” (Salgado & Hermans, 2005, p. 7). It is my belief that, in a dialogical epistemological stance, we can admit having private and subjective experiences, without needing an essentialist foundation to that subjectivity or to psychology. According to Marková (2003b), the necessary developments for psychology to achieve its goals are: to stop being mute to ontology and to commit to an ontological stance on the nature of human beings and human change, thus allowing the impasse between the individual solipsism of foundational epistemologies and the social solipsism of social constructionists to break. If we characterize the mind “as the capacity of human beings to communicate, to make sense of signs, symbols and meanings” (p. 23), “a

situated and historically constituted phenomenon in communication, tension and change” (p. 24), we have an ontological commitment of the human being as a dialogical, communicational and relational being, in an unavoidable and temporally irreversible change process that is at every time rooted in history and culture. In sum, dialogism implies a necessary ontological commitment of the human existence as a communicational existence, since “*to be* means to *symbolically communicate*.” (p. xiii).

Following this argument and in an approach clearly inherited from Mikhail Bakhtin, Salgado and Gonçalves (in press) assume four main axiomatic principles for dialogism: (1) the principle of relational primacy; (2) the principle of dialogicality; (3) the principle of alterity; and (4) the principle of contextuality.

← Au: Is the source year for Salgado and Gonçalves in press or 2007 as in the refs.

The relational primacy draws attention to the human life as a relational life with an *Other* (being this other person, other dimensions of self, the social realm, etc.). The other is always considered to be intrinsically connected to an *I* since “Being is simultaneity; it is always *co-being*” (Holquist, 1990, p. 24). Subjectivity is only possible because relationships with other human beings allow it: “Nobody exists alone—in fact, every human being is, from the very beginning, involved in a relational and communicational process” (Salgado & Hermans, 2005, p. 8). For some decades now, the field of developmental psychology has been presenting increasing evidence that argues in favor of an innate intersubjectivity as the most powerful developmental tool—a specific social awareness and orientation towards the other that allows babies to establish relationships (Trevarthen & Aitkin, 2001).

The principle of dialogicality sends us to the necessary simultaneity of at least two responsive dialogical participants in the dialogical encounter creating a communicational interchange (Salgado & Gonçalves, in press). At this point we are faced with the concept of dialogue both as metaphor and metonymy for dialogism. In this sense, if human existence is dialogue and happens through dialogue, psychology has to necessarily deal with it as a process and a product. The concept of dialogue has an abstract sense and it refers to several different conditions (Linell, in preparation): (a) to the meaning that is produced during the dialogical encounter; (b) to the communication that is produced through a semiotic device—like language; (c) to the social *praxis* that provide the specific context to the communication; and (d) to the difference of the participants in interaction. However, if in our discussion we talk about dialogical relations, we necessarily and simultaneously invite the (dia)logical opposite—monologue. Hence, we might ask: can we have a monological relation with an *Other*? By axiomatic assumption, an encounter between two individuals is necessarily dialogical (while an encounter between a person and an object is usually monological), since it is an encounter with two responsive

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interlocutors and the relation is the absolutely inseparable unit. However, Salgado and Gonçalves (in press) state that the monologicality versus dialogicality dilemma is more dependent on the sort of interchange that occurs and least on the kind of entities relating. If one interlocutor tries to exclude and annihilate the other, treating him like a nonresponsive object (an *it*), we can categorize this act as monologization of the *Other* (Holquist, 1990). In this sense, I will later argue on how traditional psychology has sometimes created a monological account of human beings, treating their research participants as monological entities, instead of persons. Nevertheless, according to dialogism, the simultaneity of the dialogical *Other* is so fundamental that it moves us to the third principle.

In a Bakhtinian reasoning, the principle of alterity emphasizes that, a subjective existence is a consequence of the irreducible and necessary relation of tension and difference between an *I* and an *Other*, an *Ego* and an *Alter* (Marková, 2003b; Salgado & Gonçalves, in press). As we have seen, a dialogue implies simultaneity and responsiveness between participants in an irreversible time and space; however, communication and addressivity can only occur in the inevitable difference that exists between both dialogical elements (Holquist, 1990). Alterity implies, above all, difference and tension. “Through tension, the self is not attempting to fuse with the other but, instead, to set his own position and to assimilate strangeness” (Marková, 2003a, p. 257). This principle draws attention to a striking difference between this point of view and the social constructionist focus: while the latter focuses on what is common and emphasizes what is shared, dialogism emphasizes this radical difference and the never-ending tension between interlocutors. It goes further than sharedness, by putting emphasis on the assumption that subjectivity emerges from a position of outsideness: “to communicate means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself” (Marková, 2003a, p. 257). The self can only author itself by the subjective appropriation of the *Other’s* view—and the view of the *Other* is marked by the radical difference that exists in-between. For dialogue to occur there has to be a difference that keeps meanings in motion: any meaning can only emerge from its difference towards an(other).

The last axiomatic principle in this discussion is the principle of contextuality, which relates us to the specific social-historical-cultural context that surrounds a particular dialogical encounter and gives it its intelligibility. The context situates the discourse: there are no independent messages from its context and so, contexts would not be what they are in the absence of a given construction of meaning which thus, situates them (Linell, in preparation). In this sense, dialogism and social constructionism share the view of local “truths” and situated historical, social and cultural “realities”—the social construction of phenomena. Nevertheless, it admits,

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above all, that this kind of dialogically created reality is subjectively appropriated by individuals—and this should not be ignored by the psychological science.

A Dialogical View of the Scientific Process

Bellas and McHale's chapter, in my view, illustrates how the scientific process of a specific investigator is a dialogical process, built out of tension and dissatisfaction that makes the researcher move further from one study to the next. This sincere narrative shows us not a logical and cumulative sequence that usually appears in the dominant narratives characterizing the scientific process and acquisition of knowledge, but instead a tensional sequence, a series of attempts to surpass difficulties and improve on limitations, that at some point in time were recognized or valued by the investigators. Though this narrative presents a personal reflection of an individual process, I personally recognize and identify myself with some of the feelings and doubts presented here, and it will probably lead to the same outcome in the minds of other young researchers reading this in the future.

In this sense, Bellas and McHale's chapter is a narrative of the scientific process that humanizes it because science is above all a human process which, like any other, is dialogical in my point of view. Perhaps this chapter, more than describing the scientific process itself, is a narrative that characterizes the process of a human being involved in a scientific investigation of a certain area. Most of the time, this development is not a rational, linear, and logical one, but tensional and affective as well—and this clearly contrasts with the popular versions of how to “make” science. In their chapter, we can see how imagined interlocutors or specific scientific audiences were involved with them in a communicational interchange that invoked the conflict, tension, and disagreement of other points of view, alternative explanatory positions and profitable criticisms, and how these internal and external dialogues kept creating the transformation and further inquiry that led to the different studies.

Science is an unfinished process—always in mutation and transformation that generates the kind of dissatisfaction in the investigator that Bellas and McHale communicate to their readers. This may be related to an effort in achieving some other place, some other point in knowledge—an orientation to the future, to the next question and the next challenge in the anticipatory integration of the future in the present that characterizes human existence (Abbey & Valsiner, 2004). Like any effort of meaning-making science is always incomplete, unfinished, in motion—this never-ending human/social/historical/cultural context that is the scientific

endeavor is always demanding further creation and innovation. Any researcher who was well-acclimated within this sphere of intelligibility suffers from the same ambition, which is at the same time his/her motive and his/her anguish.

Thus, the researcher lives in a dynamic between what is already created and what is not-yet understood, in which any point of departure has already been a point of arrival. However, in his effort to subjectively incorporate the knowledge already created and build novel knowledge in an innovative and creative act (with all the contingencies this holds, historical and accidental), the researcher has to comply with the rules and values of this communicational encounter between scientific participants like peers, supervisors, faculty, and scientific community in general. Obviously, the creative process is not totally free—the scientific community has its constrictions, values, language, and action codes like any other dialogical and communicational arena. So, this pressure for creativity and innovation is a rather constricting one—new findings have to be situated in the careful yet challenging balance between previously accepted intelligibility discourses and novel ones to be assimilated and approved.

Some of these novel scientific products (for example, new theories) may not be accepted immediately by the scientific community, or not accepted at all. Psychology has several examples of creative minds not readily acknowledged by their scientific peers and whose ideas waited a long time for delayed or eventual recognition (e.g., Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Mikhail Bakhtin). Nevertheless, once these scientific products and constructs are accepted by the scientific community and become usual in their discourse they are exported *a posteriori* to the general community in the shape of practical speeches about everyday common phenomena (we could think about the enormous amount of self-help books about motivation, emotional intelligence, and personal relationships that are found in bookstores).

If we take the methodology cycle (Valsiner, 2006) as a structuring lens and make a brief reading of this process, we can see how our general common sense assumptions enter the scientific field as an intuitive experience of researchers that in turn elaborate methods that capture certain aspects of the phenomena, collecting some data that becomes comprehensible in scientific theories that, then return to the general public transforming (or not) their general assumptions and/or creating new ones. So, if we assume an epistemological stance that true scientific knowledge is the one that is accepted by a specific scientific community in a given social, cultural, and historical time, in this sense, is always situated in that linguistic community that considers it valid, I pose this question: From an ethical point of view, should our knowledge and methodologies also be exposed to the scrutiny of its lay participants—the first and the last targets

of this cycle of knowledge? Generally this sensitive question is usually put aside by the argument of, lack of expertise of these participants with the scientific terminology and technical discourse that we use, but in this line of reasoning, we have to admit that scientific knowledge is a form of power that separates the educated and the ignorant—and the latter will not be heard in this knowledge production cycle. This possibility certainly leads me to reflect on alternatives.

I can speculate that a possible solution for this problem could be to also make this knowledge production cycle dialogical: the researcher should be involved in an emphatic active effort to understand the subjective position of the *Other* (being this other the coparticipant in the investigation). After all, if we as psychologists want to make of subjectivity our object of study and we, as humans, are always constricted by the radical difference that exists between us, it is necessary to hear the voice of our participants—because our theories will be about them. Psychological science has already produced an enormous amount of knowledge that was deaf to the subject's point of view. In this traditional way of doing research, the researcher monologically dominates the subjectivity of the *Other*: it reduces the participant to the passivity and nonresponsive status of an object (instead of a person). In my perspective as a psychologist and researcher, a dialogical, epistemological, theoretical and ethical point of view, are valuable, and so it is important: to engage in dialogue with the *Other*, and let my initial assumptions, categories of analysis and latter theories be influenced and enriched by the participant's subjective position.

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Accepting the Challenge of *Microgenesis*

Bellas and McHale mention several challenges a microgenetic researcher has to face and places the demand for innovation in every step of the scientific process: in the definition of the phenomena to be studied, in the link between theories and methods of investigation, in the tracking of a constantly changing object of study, in the analysis of data and in the writing of the results.

The Ambiguity of the Starting Point

One of the first challenges they faced as microgenetic researchers was the dilemma of how to find a starting point (which is arbitrary since it is the product of a human decision) and how to grasp the phenomena (while discarding what is not important for our purposes). These questions lead us to the first challenge of the microgenetic process, common to any other scientific process, which is the definition of the phenomena. The definitions, or better, the descriptions of the phenomena are multiple,

polysemic—or, in a Bakhtinian terminology—endowed of *heteroglossia* (Bakhtin, 1981). Trying to describe a certain phenomena, or deciding how, places the investigator in the center of the ambiguity created by the multiplicity of ways to describe something (the specific phenomena), by different (theoretical) points of view, different (theoretical or empirical) intentions, different interlocutors or contexts. Ambiguity is “an emergent and continuously present property of selfhood and meaning-making processes” (Ferreira, Salgado, & Cunha, 2006). However, this ambiguity has to be (at least partially) overcome if we want to communicate something. The scientific descriptions of phenomena occur, thus, in a complex communicational space that forces its participants to a reduction of ambiguity while changing to a symbolic level of linguistic exchange. As such, this is an inevitable and irreversible transition to a different level from the one where the target phenomena occur—the level of experience. Placing something in this communicational space implies a dialogical interaction with an *Other* (supervisor, peers, etc.) and even if it may potentially create other sources of *heteroglossia*, it is restricted by the rules that mediate this scientific interchange and the need to be understood by the interlocutor. In this reasoning, a starting point in a microgenetic investigation is never orphan of others, especially, the voices of other theories.

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Thus, from my point of view, microgenetic research should start by the articulation of a theory that allows a description of phenomena in its process of transformation (Valsiner, 2006), which is the intent behind this kind of research. In this sense, it should be framed within a theory that provides adequate linguistic devices to the characterization of becoming. This is actually a challenge in itself since language tends to be static and lack the adequate terminology to describe a constantly changing object of study (Valsiner, 2006). Referring to this issue, Valsiner emphasizes the vertical consistency between axiomatic assumptions, theories, concepts, methodologies, collected data, and descriptions of phenomena as the adequate way to accomplish scientific knowledge—especially in the field of developmental science. Microgenetic intentionality will probably lead the investigator to situate in this field—a general orientation that focuses particularly in “the dynamic interplay of processes across time, levels of analysis, and contexts.” (Carolina Consortium on Human Development, 1996, cited in Valsiner, 2006) in contrast with a large tradition of developmental psychology that has been unfortunately focused mostly on outcomes and in tracking the differences between individuals. Aiming to look for microgenesis within the focus of developmental science will probably lead the investigator to engage in the creation of innovative methods “tailored” to the study of phenomena within that vertical methodological consistency and that specific research(er) point of view,

instead of using prescribed or “ready-made” methods supposedly “correct” to access any given developmental process. In sum, finding an adequate semiotic-organizing-system is imperative in this field of microgenesis, since it is not the microgenetic method by itself that allows us to achieve the previously mentioned research ambitions.

Constructions Versus Constraints of the Objects of Study

In this moment of the discussion, Bellas and McHale’s concern about the possibility of constriction and “creation” of phenomena and data (since every study implies that some decisions will be made about which descriptions and analytic categories will be privileged over others), needs to be reflected upon. This question has different implications when it is asked within a representational epistemology, where it enquires if our knowledge represents the world, and consequently, the essence of things or objects of study it intends to explain. In this epistemological framework, even if it were necessarily implicit, the “construction” and constrictions upon the descriptions would be denied. This rising concern would inevitably lead to an exclusion of this theoretical knowledge, since this framework allows no ambiguity or doubt (Ferreira, Salgado, & Cunha, 2006).

On the contrary, the epistemological line of reasoning that I have been using derives from an epistemological framework which is aware that the linguistic games we choose to play will necessarily constrain our vision of the phenomena. In this sense and however pertinent it may be to argue upon the implications of these “constructions” and constrictions, they do not necessarily lead to the elimination of knowledge. Another important remark to note is that, when we are describing something, we are at the level of meaning-making, which is like I said before, a different level from the one where experience occurs. This is an inevitable gap that will always be present in our psychological science, and this distance can never be overcome because these two levels (experiential vs. semiotic/linguistic/meaning-making) will never coincide. In this line of reasoning, the issue turns out to be whether or not our descriptions are open to the subjective experience of the *Other*. This openness to the *Other* will necessarily present some obstacles to psychology because we will never reduce the radical difference that separates and differentiates two unique human beings (Jacques, 1991). However, in my view, this effort of openness and attunement with the *Other* needs to be intentional and pursued in psychological research, instead of mistakenly taken for granted.

Hence, our ambitions as psychologists and researchers may shift to the construction of such adequate descriptions that respect the subjective experience of other human beings—dialogical descriptions. What I mean with this, is that, we may want to construct scientific knowledge as the

product of a dialogical interchange between the investigator and the interlocutors (the research participants), played with an effort of achieving some kind of empathic understanding in this process. In this dialogical encounter the rejoinders will both be enriched and modified by each other's positioning (with their own background and preferential linguistic games). The scientific endeavor is to seek a "surplus of seeing" (Holquist, 1990) emergent of this dialogical encounter that enhances the possible description of the *Other*: the researcher's vision needs to be added to the vision of the *Other*, so that a complemented perspective of the whole is created combining both points of view. Consequently, psychology would come closer to subjectivity.

When referring to the data analysis stage, Bellas and McHale state that for a process of meaning-making to occur from the collected data, a new look at the theories has to be done—as we can see, this shows how the process of meaning-making is never a orphan of theories. This is so, because, "the world does not speak; only we do" (Rorty, 1989, p. 26) and, like the world, data requires efforts of meaning making that emerge generally from the semiotic field of theories, even if these are opposite ones (in an A vs. Non-A relationship; see Abbey & Valsiner, 2004).

Finally, the writing of results is played again in the linguistic and communicational arena. This step of the investigative process is another one where innovation comes into action. However, like I have mentioned before, the products of the investigative process are the somewhat challenging equation of the empathic movement of the investigator towards the subjectivity of the other and his/hers return to his/hers own yet already different subjectivity and the norms and rules of the linguistic community (interlocutors and audiences) where they are to be communicated. Acceptance of these products, either immediate or delayed, imply a new semiotic device that opens the horizon to further possibilities of (linguistic) action, creation of theoretical alternatives, referential concepts and novel psychological "realities" or constructs. Innovation always involves a re-description of the phenomena and it is always played in the semiotic, linguistic field—so this should be our ultimate goal and achievement as microgenetic researchers. Thus, the innovation required in this step of the process is a linguistic one—played at the meaning-making level.

The Riddle of Psychological Time

Another important challenge for microgenetic research highlighted by Bellas and McHale is the tracking of a constantly changing object of study. If "The central descriptive unit of dynamic focus is the notion of trajectory—movement through time" (Valsiner, 2002b) we are left with a problem concerning the adequacy of a given arbitrary decision on how to

deal with time or how to construct the adequate temporal units to capture an evolving psychological phenomenon, especially subjective experience. If “A person creates signification by way of a sign in a here-and-now-to-future context” (Josephs, Valsiner, & Surgan, 1999, p. 258), how can we capture the meaning-making process that is happening “now?” The question about what is the nature of “now” has intrigued some authors (e.g., Stern, 2004). I have been particularly interested by the possibility of human beings experiencing a discontinuous flow of experience in time. Stern uses an ancient distinction of time to address this issue: the Greek view of *chronos* (the objective view of continuous time, as measured by our clocks) and *kairos* (which is the subjective time experienced as a whole in discontinuous lived moments, different and independent “present moments of lived experience”). This distinction allows us to address the recognized differentiation relating to the incompatibility of the perception of our subjective experience with an objective passing of time (when we are anxiously awaiting for something, we have all been surprised by the experience of the prolonging of time rather than the experience of its objective measure). It seems to me that, if we want to adequately describe the subjective experience, we need to focus on *kairos* or the “present moment”. This author presents some necessary characteristics of the “present moment” (Stern, 2004) and I have selected a few for this illustration: (a) “Awareness or consciousness is a necessary condition for a present moment” (p. 32), (b) “The felt experience of the present moment is whatever is in awareness now, during the moment being lived” (p. 32), (c) “Present moments are of short duration” (p. 33), (d) “Present moments are holistic happenings” (p. 35), (e) “Present moments are temporally dynamic” (p. 36), and (f) “The experiencing self takes a stance relative to the present moment” (p. 39).

The “present moment” of subjective experience is the feeling of what happens and implies the recognition of myself as the centre of that experience (characteristic *a*) and what is now in my awareness (*b*). For example, I may now be thinking about how to finish writing this idea, but if I am suddenly interrupted and someone asks me what I was thinking, I shift to a different present moment, which is trying to objectively explain my past experience to someone. The subjective experience of “now” is an independent experience, a gestalt (*d*) and is usually compared to the duration of a musical sequence, since they are both units of meaning-making as a whole (*c*). However, their short duration accompanies the dynamics of our affective field (*e*)—always shifting according to changes in the level 1 of processes of generalization and hyper-generalization in affective regulation of the flow of experience (general immediate presemiotic feeling) (see Valsiner, 2005). The experiencing self may also

be more or less involved in the present moment, since it can distance itself or become closer, or even evaluate what is happening (*f*) (Stern, 2004).

In this line of reasoning, the notion of our temporal units will be shaped out of the developmental process that we are studying (always with the background of our assumptions and theories that conceptualize the subjective psychological process as a whole). In this framework, we can select phenomenological events instead of mere parts of an experience to focus on our studies—and this is, in my view, substantially different from a methodological device that leads us to divide the process into a chronological sequence. In this last case, we are placed in the heart of the parts-and-whole dilemma, without ever constructing a solid view of the gestalt phenomena we want to grasp.

I am becoming increasingly fascinated by the possibility of studying the present moment of lived experience, because it is my understanding that it may be nicely combined with the Bakhtinian notions of positioning and event (Holquist, 1990): everything is experienced from a certain position in existence and the meaning of experience is necessarily influenced by the position from where it is being apprehended by the person; this position is always experienced as an event, an event of being a self (a self in that specific position) in space and time.

My Ongoing Personal Dialogues With *Microgenesis*

My interest in microgenesis started, like any other microgenetic researcher, by the possibility of keeping a persistent involvement with psychological processes constantly evolving and changing. Emerging in the background of an interest in the dialogical self theory (DST, e.g., Hermans, 1999; Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992) and dialogism (with its implications to psychology—see Marková, 2003b; Salgado & Hermans, 2005), I wanted to grasp the imaginary dialogues and movements between *I-positions* in an interview with a participant (Gonçalves & Cunha, 2004). This interview is assumed as a semiotic tool (or a complex set of successive semiotic devices) to create the possibility of meaning-making by fostering internal dialogues (between *I-positions* in the participant) and external dialogues (in the interaction of interviewer and interviewee).

Dialogism (e.g., Holquist, 1990; Salgado & Hermans, 2005) allowed me to arrive at a conceptualization of human beings as intersubjective and relational beings, always in interaction with an *Other*, and the DST gave me the possibility to depict the self as a relational, social, cultural, and dialogical process and product (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992; Salgado & Hermans, 2005). I was, however, unsatisfied with some

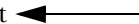
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empirical versions of the DST (see Ferreira, Salgado, Cunha, Meira, & Konopka, 2005, for an analysis of different levels of multivoicedness in DST research) and increasingly more interested in the concept of *I-position* as a given center of experience in the self (Salgado & Ferreira, 2005)—a Bakhtinian event of the self (Holquist, 1990). In this sense, subjectivity is constituted by a dynamic flow and succession of *I-positions*, each one engaged in dialogue and creating novel meaning-making throughout the passing of each lived moment. Daniel Stern's (2004) view on the "present moment" gave me the unit of analysis to track the shifting of one *I-position* to another. I assumed that this novel conceptualization allowed me to bring the dialogical approach nearer to the phenomenology of experience.

Emerging from these theoretical decisions, the intentions of this microgenetic study became: (1) to depict and characterize the dynamic flow of *I-positions* in the dialogue and, (2) to keep track of the subjective meaning-making processes that accompany the flow of the lived experience during a research interview (Cunha & Gonçalves, 2005). This study also has other specific goals, it aims to achieve in the articulation between the microgenetic and the mesogenetic levels of analysis (Valsiner, 2002a), like: (a) the description and modeling of specific autoregulation processes in the dialogical self that maintain a dynamic stability in the meaning-making processes through time; (b) the description of how specific semiotic devices may introduce innovation and change; and, (c) the characterization of the dialogical change processes that may appear (Cunha & Gonçalves, 2005). However, the last three research objectives will not be discussed here, since their elaboration would "distract" us from our illustrative purposes in this commentary.

So, with the first and second objectives in mind, my transcripts of the interviews became a pathway of changing *I-positions*, involved in specific meaning-making processes at each given "present moments." I decided to cut the entire transcript into different utterances—which I conceived as different *I-positions* in time and analyze each utterance with different parameters (this was also inspired in the work of Leiman, 2004). With dialogism and DST in the background the following parameters of analysis seemed important to me in light of the purposes of this study: The agent (*who* is speaking); The interlocutor (or specific audiences *to whom* he is speaking); The content (*what* is being said, the contents of speech); The intentionality (*why* is it being said); and the "storytelling-event" (in a terminology borrowed from Stanton Wortham, 2001) that refers to *how* is it being said, as the intersubjective positioning towards the interlocutor. I believe these to be the important criteria for a truly dialogical account of the phenomenology of subjective experience: the dialogical interchange between an *I* and an *Other*.

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The transcripts, being the result of a dialogical encounter between the participant and the interviewer, already identify the interlocutors in dialogue. However, Bakhtin (1981) argues for a *double addressivity* in communication: “each utterance is always addressed toward an object (or, more precisely, addressed toward the specific available discourses about a given object), but it is also addressed to an interlocutor” (Salgado & Hermans, 2005, p. 8). In this sense, the participant is not only addressing the present interlocutor, but also addressing the possible alternative ways of meaning-making, possible contents of speech, or his past *I-positions*, at each “present moment.” The intentionality implicit in the meaning-making process allows me to grasp different intersubjective positionings or orientations of the participant at each point of the interview, simultaneously creating unique “storytelling events” by the succession of the participant’s different attitudes towards his audience in the dialogue.

An Illustration of the Microgenetic Analysis of the Transcripts

To allow a better clarification of the microgenetic methodology of analyzing the transcripts, I will now illustrate with a specific excerpt of a transcript.

This transcript refers to an interview with a research participant that chose to discuss his professional situation as a significant personal problem which causes him a certain amount of distress and worrying in his daily life. Throughout the interview, the participant talked about his dissatisfaction with his present professional situation and the possibility of changing jobs. However, this option elicits concern with the unknown future and the risk of making a mistake. As the interview continues, the participant brings forth different ways of positioning himself in face of these personal concerns and worries, expressing a dynamic stability in a conflict between being “too worried” or “too indifferent” about his professional situation and considering the implications between being “passive” or “active” towards a decision that would bring uncertainty to his future. Throughout the interview, we can also depict the proliferation and escalating of these positions (Valsiner, 2002a), while he proceeds in further elaborating and describing his problem (e.g., “me as worried” vs. “me as excessively worried,” “me as apparently unworried”).

In the specific excerpt that is being presented here, the participant is reflecting on what he would think about this present problem if he was to project himself in a positive future, 10 years from now. Looking back from this point in the future into his present concerns and fears, he says:

Participant: Perhaps, I would ask... (clause 123) Why so much worrying? (clause 124) Because, after all, everything was solved! (clause 125)

According to the microgenetic methodology that I have been describing, this question presents three *I-positions*, connected to three “present-moments” (identified by these different utterances). Each one of these utterances is analyzed according to the referred parameters of analysis, as the Table 6.1 presents.

In this small excerpt, we can see how the participant shifts from one *I-position* to the next, semiotically (re)organizing himself in face of the specific task and his meaning-making elaborations. While doing this, he speaks from different phenomenological points, to specific interlocutors and audiences. What he says accompanies and reflects his flow of experience and places him with different intersubjective orientations towards the interlocutor, himself and the specific contents of his speech and thinking, while creating the first glimpse of a novel way to view the present situation—“I as an Optimist,” that becomes further elaborated in the rest of the interview.

A Researcher at the Crossroads: Concluding Remarks

Being a psychologist or a psychological researcher is dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty as a way of life. Microgenesis is a particular

Table 6.1. An Example of the Microgenetic Analysis

<i>Parameters</i>	<i>Utterance 123</i>	<i>Utterance 124</i>	<i>Utterance 125</i>
Who?	I as in the present	I as if I was the positive future	I as if I was the positive future
For whom?	The interviewer + the positive future	The interviewer + I as in the present	The interviewer + I as in the present
What?	He states that he would ask	He asks why so much worrying	He states that after all everything was solved
Why?	Complying with the request of the interviewer: imagining and explaining the dialogue between present and a point in the future where he looks upon this moment	Performing the same task: imagining and explaining the dialogue between present and a point in the future where he looks upon this moment	Performing and developing the same task, this time realizing that this future is associated with the resolution of this specific problem and its absence
How?	Repeats the task he has to do to organize himself to imagine	Becomes involved in an imagined position of the future, using the direct speech	Starts presenting himself as an optimist about the problem

ambiguous field that presents unique challenges to the investigator at every step of the way, sometimes confronting him/her with multiple directions and crossroads. In these decisive stages of the scientific process, the need for innovation and creativity is almost an imperative. Process, change, development and transformation are the ambitions and seldom attainable goals. However, the chance to observe a psychological phenomenon in its irreversible unfolding and transformation in time is a fascinating area of investigation. Many are the challenges and the anguishes experienced at every step of the way. Nevertheless, since I have been involved in this field, I have caught myself paying attention to the little things in life, the little unrepeatable moments of everyday experience that fade away if unnoticed.

Throughout this commentary, I have tried to highlight some of the scientific challenges in general and those associated with microgenesis in particular. I have argued that psychology has to make an ontological commitment to the nature of human beings and human process so that subjectivity reenters the psychological arena of investigation with a renewed impetus. At this stage of my work, I have been satisfied with the possibilities that the dialogical epistemological, theoretical and ethical framework have given me and with the conceptualization of human beings as essentially relational beings. Hence, the dialogical perspective was always present as the guiding structure of my comments and my reflections, just like it is present in my work. Some decisive periods of the research process were highlighted and discussed: challenges in the definitions/descriptions of the phenomena, the vertical methodological consistency between assumptions, theories, and methodologies, some of the questions that appear while making sense of the data and, again, the redefinition of phenomena while describing the results.

The reflection presented here, although quite challenging to me, also helped me to organize my thoughts and theoretical stances around my work. Since all this was written for the always present audience of my (possible) future readers, I hope this work can be useful and potentially inspiring to other young researchers.

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