Dialog als kollaboratives Handeln

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Zusammenfassung

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Theorien sozialer Prozesse haben sich traditionell auf individualisierte Untersuchungseinheiten konzentriert, etwa auf die Person, die Gemeinschaft, die Organisation. Die Beziehungen zwischen den Einheiten werden dadurch marginalisiert und oft auf kausale Relationen reduziert. Nicht zuletzt aus diesem Grund erscheinen dialogische Prozesse bis heute nicht ausreichend theoretisch beleuchtet. Der vorliegende Beitrag analysiert zunächst einige vorliegende Theorien des Dialogs, um dann für die Konzeptualisierung des Dialogs als kollaborativem Handeln zu plädieren. Die Konstitution von Bedeutung wird dabei nicht dem Individuum und seinen Fähigkeiten, sondern dem kollaborativen Prozess selbst zugeschrieben. Die bedeutungsvollen (Sprech-)Handlungen der Dialogteilnehmenden sind mithin ko-konstitutiv und die Unterscheidung von Ursache und Wirkung wird obsolet. Der Beitrag diskutiert die Implikationen dieser Sichtweise unter Berücksichtigung kultureller und historischer Kontexte dialogischen Handelns.

Schüsselwörter: *Dialog, kollaboratives Handeln, Diskurs, Bedeutung*

Summary

Social theory has traditionally centered on individuated units, the person, the community, the organization, and so on. Relations among units are thus marginalized, and when theorized, typically presume causal relations between the units. Partly for these reasons, dialogue remains under-theorized. The present attempt begins by considering the ideological saturation of many existing conceptualiza-

tions of dialogue. Moving beyond these, a case is made for dialogue as collaborative action. On this account, meaning is not a possession of the individual, but of a collaborative process. An individual's meaning comes into being through the other, and vice versa. Thus, linguistic acts of the participants are co-constituting. Cause and effect become irrelevant. Implications of this view are discussed, including the culturally and historical context of dialogic efficacy.

Keywords: *dialogue, collaborative action, discourse, meaning*

Zusammenfassung
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    The need for illuminating theory of dialogue has never been greater, while simultaneously, the available resources few. There are good reasons for this condition. Regarding the need, the world condition is one in which there are unparalleled possibilities for human interchange. The internet, cell-phone, jet transportation, and the like, virtually eliminate the barriers of space and time separating one person from another. As a result, virtually any group of people – small or large – can locate like-minded associates from around the world. Together they may generate, sustain, defend, and expand a body of ideas, associated values, and ways of life. Each group forms a potential island of meaning and direction poten-

tially cut away from other groups. Thus, whether political, religious, ethnic, ideological, communal, or national, there is an exponential increase in the potential for conflict with other groups, and the conditions of conflict expand exponentially. In a world where all individuals now possess destructive potential, we face a Hobbesian dystopia of all groups against all. Dialogue is one of the few means available for transcending boundaries of difference.

With respect to the lack of resources, social theory in Western culture has largely been restricted to one of two domains: the individual person or the social group. In both cases there is a strong penchant for *entification*, that is, for viewing the world as made of up of fundamentally independent entities. Scholarship variously focuses, then, on the psychological makeup of the individual, group functioning, organizations, and cultures. In the case of dialogue, the minimal unit of concern is the interaction between two or more persons. However, because of the traditional focus on the psychological basis of individual functioning, the process of interchange has been a poor stepchild. If individual persons constitute the atoms of understanding, then relationships are secondary and artificial. It should be no surprise that the fields of social linguistics and communication were late-comers to the divisions of knowledge.

It is against this backdrop that I wish to lay the groundwork for a theory of dialogue that does not begin with the assumption of independent entities, and specifically, with a view of isolated minds seeking to communicate.[1] This account will be composed of three parts. As a précis, I will first propose to move beyond prescriptively based conceptions of dialogue. I will then outline the rudiments of a theory of dialogue in which collaborative action takes center stage. Finally, I will treat several broad implications of this perspective.

Beyond Prescriptive Definitions of Dialogue

There are scholars and practitioners who have been drawn to the potentials for dialogue to transform social worlds. However, their investments are not accompanied by agreement in how dialogue is to be conceptualized. Hosannas to dialogue are loudly sung, but with little realization that such praise may be directed toward entirely different practices. On a simple level, *The American Heritage Dictionary* offers the common definition of dialogue as »conversation between two or more people«. However, virtually no scholarly work on dialogue shares

this definition; scholars of dialogue are seldom interested in mere conversation. Nor do such scholars typically share definitions with each other. In my view, the primary definitional criterion of most contemporary analyses of dialogue is derived from a vision of an ideal form of relationship; dialogue is defined in terms of the favored ideal. For most contemporary analysts, merely having a conversation does not constitute authentic dialogue.

It is primarily the particular vision of the ideal that sets various dialogic scholars apart. David Bohm's (1996) popular work, *On Dialogue*, defines dialogue as a form of communication from which something new emerges; participants must evidence a »relaxed, non-judgmental curiosity, with the aim of seeing things as freshly and clearly as possible« (p. ix). Yet, Robert Grudin's *On Dialogue* is not so much interested in relationships that create novelty as he is in a »reciprocal exchange of meaning…across a physical or mental space« (p. 11). In contrast, Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) are not centrally concerned with either generating novelty or exchanging meaning, but rather with the creation of convergence in views; they define dialogue as »a mode of communication that builds mutuality through the awareness of others« (p. 116), and it does so through the »use of genuine or authentic discourse, and reliance on the unfolding interaction« (p. 116). At the same time, for L. C. Hawes (1999), the central ingredient of dialogue is conflict reduction; for him dialogue is a »praxis for mediating competing and contradictory discourses« (p. 229). In further contrast, while many of the above scholars assume that dialogue is among equals, Eisenberg and Goodall (1993) are chiefly concerned with enhancing the voices of minorities. They see dialogue as providing parties with a chance to speak and be heard and to challenge the traditional positioning of authority. Quite distinct from all these orientations, Isaacs (1993) defines dialogue as »a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience« (p. 25). Finally, for Tullio Maranhao (1990), it is not everyday life that dialogue should throw into question but all certainty of knowledge. For him dialogue is a logic of stating and questioning, with the aim of generating the kind of skepticism that invites continuous inquiry. For Maranhao, dialogue is a form of »anti-epistemology«.

With such differing views of dialogue, each saturated as it is with values and visions, any general characterization of dialogue becomes perilous. In order to establish a more comprehensive analytic frame, while not sacrificing valuable

distinctions embedded in these various accounts, it is useful to separate the normative from the descriptive. Rather than equating the term »dialogue« with any particular vision of ideal interchange, a non-partisan definition might be useful. Variations in the specific patterning of interchange may thus reflect the various ideal forms sought by differing scholars. In this way we might return to an elemental formulation, but nevertheless open a space for considering variations in specific forms and functions. I do not propose a return to the view of »dialogue as conversation,« as such return does not serve our analytic ends here. The term »conversation« is both ambiguous and conceptually thin. Nor, as indicated earlier, do I wish to return to the assumption of dialogue as a form of inter-subjective interchange. I turn, then, to the potential of viewing dialogue as *collaborative action*.

The Co-Active Origins of Meaning

In foregrounding the concept of collaboration we mean to call attention to the relational foundation of dialogue. That is, meaning within dialogue is an outcome not of individual action and reaction, but of what Shotter (1984) calls joint-action, or the coordinated actions of the participants. In this sense, the meaning of an individual's expression within a dialogue depends importantly on the response of his or her interlocutor – what has elsewhere been called »a supplement« (Gergen, 1994). No individual expression harbors meaning in itself. For example, what we might conventionally index as a »hostile remark« can be turned into »a joke« through a response of laughter; the »vision statement« of a superior can be refigured as »mere window dressing« through the shared smirk of the employees.

It is useful to begin by considering Wittgenstein's (1963) metaphor of the language game as the origin of word meaning. The metaphor calls attention specifically to the coordinated or rule-governed activities of the participants in generating meaning. The words »half-volley« and »overhead smash« acquire their meaning by virtue of the participation of the interlocutors in the rule constrained talk of tennis. Words invented by a single individual (a »private language« in Wittgenstein's terms) would not in themselves constitute meaningful entries into meaning.[2] Or, as we might say, the meaning of any utterance depends on its functioning within a relational matrix. It follows that we cannot comprehend dialogue as the exchange of independent utterances by two or more interlocutors.

Rather, the utterances gain their particular meaning from within the »game« played by the interlocutors.

This view of dialogue as a collective achievement emerges from a broad array of scholarship, including developments in ethnomethodology, the history of science, the sociology of knowledge, discursive psychology, literary theory and communication theory.[3] In each of these cases there is a strong tendency to place the locus of meaning within the process of interaction itself. That is, the individual agent is de-emphasized as the source of meaning; attention moves from the *within* to the *between*. Yet, while recognition of the jointly constructed character of meaning has become increasingly widespread, there is as yet no comprehensive account of how such a process occurs. If we accept such an orientation, what are the action implications; what new conceptual resources can be mobilized, what new questions are raised? For purposes of furthering such inquiry, I offer several rudiments of a collaborative account of the achievement of meaning in dialogue: An individual's utterances in themselves possess no meaning.

We pass each other on the street. I smile and say, »Hello Anna«. You walk past without hearing. Under such conditions, what have I said? To be sure, I have uttered two words. However for all the difference it makes I might have chosen two nonsense syllables. You pass and I say »Umlot nigen«. You hear nothing. When you fail to acknowledge me in any way, all words become equivalent. In an important sense, nothing has been said at all. I cannot possess meaning alone.[4] The potential for meaning is realized through supplementary action.

Lone utterances begin to acquire meaning when another (or others) coordinate themselves to the utterance, that is, when they add some form of supplementary action (whether linguistic or otherwise). Effectively, I have greeted Anna only by virtue of her response. »Oh, hi, good morning…« brings me to life as one who has greeted. Supplements may be very simple, as simple as a nod of affirmation that indeed you have said something meaningful. It may take the form of an action, e.g. shifting the line of gaze upon hearing the word, »look!«. Or it may extend the utterance in some way, as in »Yes, but I also think that…«. We thus find that to communicate at all is to be granted by others a privilege of meaning. If others do not treat one's utterances as communication, if they fail to coordinate themselves around the offering, one is reduced to nonsense.

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To combine these first two proposals, we see that meaning resides within neither individual, but only in relationship. Both act and supplement must be coordinated in order for meaning to occur. Like a handshake, a kiss, or a tango, the individual's actions alone are empty. Communication is inherently collaborative. In this way we see that none of the words that comprise our vocabulary have meaning in themselves. They are granted the capacity to mean by virtue of the way they are coordinated with other words and actions. Indeed, our entire vocabulary of the individual – who thinks, feels, wants, hopes, and so on – is granted meaning only by virtue of coordinated activities among people. The birth of »myself« lies within relationship. Supplementary action is itself a candidate for meaning.

Any supplement functions twice, first in granting significance to what has preceded, and second as an action that also requires supplementation. In effect, the meaning it grants remains suspended until it too is supplemented. Consider a client who speaks of her deep depression; she finds herself unable to cope with an aggressive husband and an intolerable job situation. The therapist can grant this report meaning as an expression of depression, by responding, »Yes, I can see why you might feel this way; tell me a little more about your relationship with your husband«. However, this supplement too stands idle of meaning until the client provides the supplement. If the client ignored the statement, for example going on to talk about her success as a mother, the therapist's words would be denied significance. More broadly, we may say that in daily life there are no *acts in themselves*, that is, actions that are not simultaneously supplements to what has preceded. Whatever we do or say takes place within a temporal context that gives meaning to what has preceded, while simultaneously forming an invitation to further supplementation. Acts create the possibility for meaning but simultaneously constrain its potential.

If I give a lecture on psychoanalytic theory, this lecture is meaningless without an audience that listens, deliberates, affirms, or questions what I have said. In this sense, every speaker owes to his or her audience a debt of gratitude; without their engagement the speaker ceases to exist. At the same time, my lecture creates the very possibility for the audience to grant meaning. While the audience creates me as a meaningful agent, I simultaneously grant to them the capacity to create.

Yet, it is also important to realize that in practice, actions also set constraints upon supplementation. If I speak on Freud, as an audience member you are not able to supplement in any way you wish. You may ask me a question about object relations theory, but not astrophysics; comment on the concept of repression, but not on taste of radishes. Such constraints exist because my lecture is already embedded within a *tradition of act and supplement*. It has been granted meaning as a »lecture on Freud,« by virtue of previous generations of meaning givers. In this sense, actions embedded within relationships have *prefigurative* potential. The history of usage enables them to invite or suggest certain supplements as opposed to others – because only these supplements are considered sensible or meaningful within a tradition. Thus, as we speak with each other, we also begin to set limits on each other's being; to remain in the conversation is not only to respect a tradition, but to accede to being one kind of person as opposed to another. If you tell me that I have not been a good friend, I will scarcely be recognizable unless I ask you to tell me why you feel this way, and what have I done. Your very comment constrains my potentials. Supplements function both to create and constrain meaning.

As we have seen, supplements »act backward« in a way that creates the meaning of what has preceded. In this sense, the speaker's meaning – his or her identity, character, intention, and the like – are not free to »be what they are,« but constrained by the act of supplementation. Supplementation thus operates *postfiguratively*, to create the speaker as meaning this as opposed to that. From the enormous array of possibilities, the supplement gives direction and temporarily narrows the possibilities of being. Thus, for example, for a therapist, to inquire into a client's depression is to establish a form of constraint. If the client is to remain sensible, he or she may readily accede to being depressed. Therapeutic questions are never innocent. While act/supplements are constraining, they do not determine.

As proposed, our words and actions function so as to constrain the words and actions of others, and vice versa. If we are to remain intelligible within our culture, we must necessarily act within these constraints. Such constraints have their origins in a history of preceding coordinations. As people coordinate actions and supplements, and come to rely on them in everyday life, they are essentially generating a tradition. If enough people join in these coordinated activities over

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a long period, we may speak of a cultural tradition. Yet, it is important to underscore that our words and actions function only as *constraints*, and *not as determinants*. This is so for two important reasons: First, the conditions under which we attempt to coordinate our actions are seldom constant. We are continuously faced with the challenge of importing old words and actions into new situations. As we do so, such words and actions acquire new possibilities for meaning. For example, you are visiting a farm and you point out to your child, »look…that is a chicken«. The word »chicken« thus gains its meaning from the way it is embedded in this configuration of events. Later that day, the farmer's wife comes to the dinner table bearing a large platter, and announces, »We are having chicken for dinner tonight«. Now the word used in referring to the live and clucking animal refers to the individual pieces of cooked meat. As new situations develop, so will the same word acquire other potentials for meaning. More formally, all words are polysemic; they may be used in many different ways.

A second important reason for our relative freedom of action lies in the fact that meaning making is always local. That is, coordination is always located in the here and now, in momentary and fleeting conditions – in the kitchen, the boardroom, the mine, the prison, and so on. These local efforts to coordinate give rise to local patterns of speaking and action – street slang, academic jargon, baby talk, jive talk, signing, and so on. And, because those who enter into such coordinations may issue from different cultural traditions – new combinations are always under production. In effect, we inherit an enormous potpourri of potentially intelligible actions – each arising from a different form of life – and the repository is under continuous motion. Our actions may be invited by history, but they are not required. In this sense, we can indeed »step over our shadows«. In order to function adequately in continuously changing circumstances, creative combinations will always be necessary. As we speak together now we have the capacity to create new futures. Traditions of coordination furnish the major potentials for meaning, but do not circumscribe.

To amplify a preceding line of reasoning, it is important to recognize that the words and actions upon which we rely to generate meaning together are largely byproducts of the past. If I approached you and began to utter a string of vowels, »ahhh, ehhhh, ooooo, uuuu…,« you would surely be puzzled; perhaps you would make for an exit, as I might well be dangerous. This is so because such

utterances are nonsense, or to put it another way, not recognizable as a candidate for meaning within Western traditions of coordination. Similarly, if we began to dance and you suddenly crouched and gazed at the floor, I would scarcely continue dancing. Your actions are not part of any coordinated sequences with which I am familiar. Our capacity to make meaning together today thus relies on a history, often a history of centuries' duration. We owe to traditions of coordination our capacities for being in love, demonstrating for a just cause, or taking pleasure in our children's development.

This is not to say, however, that there is no room for novel words and actions. Indeed, in the past century we have witnessed an explosion in new vocabulary terms, sporting activities, dance steps, and so on. Because we are not determined by the past, we are free to play, to violate expectations, to explore the outrageous. And, when we confront the novel word or act, we can with effort bring it into meaning. To return to our dance, I might well stop dancing when you crouched on the floor. However, if I understood you to be playing, inviting, challenging, I would do my best to find a means of coordinating with you. Perhaps I would also crouch, and begin to sway forward in your direction. Thus, an adolescent who wears something »weird« to school may give rise to a fad. And therapists who believe the schizophrenic's »word salad' is meaningful will find ways to render such utterances meaningful. Meanings are subject to continuous reconstitution via the expanding sea of supplementation.

In light of the above, we find that what an utterance means is inherently undecidable. No amount of discussion, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, or other attempt to determine what has been said, can be determinative. The meaning of any utterance is a temporary achievement, born of the collaborative moment. Further, as relations continue over time, what is meant stands subject to continuous alteration through an expanding arena of action/supplements.

Sarah and Robert may find themselves frequently laughing together – affirming each other as humorous persons – until Robert announces that Sarah's laughter is »her forced attempt to present herself as an easy going person« (in which case the definition of the previous actions would be altered). Or Sarah could announce, »this is all very pleasant, Robert, but really you superficial guy; we really don't communicate at all« (thus reducing Robert's humor to banality).

At the same time, these latter moves within the ongoing sequence are subject to further reconstitution. In reply to Robert's accusation of playing the role of being casual, Sarah could reply, »Robert, are you worried about your job again? What's bothering you?« Or, Robert replies to Sarah's ascription superficiality with, »Now I see…You are only saying that, Sarah, because you find Bill so attractive«. Such transformations in meaning may also be far removed from the interchange itself (e.g. consider a divorcing pair who retrospectively redefine their entire marital trajectory), and are subject to continuous change through interaction with and among others (e.g. friends, relatives, therapists, the media etc.).

In conclusion, we find the exclusive focus on the face-to-face relationship is far too narrow. For whether »I make sense« is not under my control; nor is it determined by you, or the dyadic process in which meaning struggles toward realization. At the outset, we largely derive our potential for coordination from our previous immersion in a range of other relationships. We arrive in the relationship as extensions of the past. And, as the current relationship unfolds, it serves to reform the meaning of the past. These interchanges may be supplemented and transformed by still others in the future. In effect, meaningful dialogue ultimately depends on an extended array of relationships, not only »right here, right now,« but how it is that you and I are related to a variety of other persons, and they to still others – and ultimately, one may say, to the relational conditions of society as a whole. We are all in this way interdependently interlinked – without the capacity to mean anything, to possess an »I« – except for the existence of an extended world of relationship.

Expanding Potentials

Thus far I have outlined a way of understanding dialogue as a relational achievement. It remains now to explore a number of significant implications of this view. At the same time, this exploration should serve to flesh out the theory in way that it can ultimately speak to issues in practice. Mind as Relational Performance

In their accounts of dialogue most theorists draw from the individualist tradition in which language is a reflection or expression of the individual mind. On this account, dialogue is a form of inter-subjective connection or synchrony. The public actions are derivative of private meanings. In the present account I have bracketed the realm of subjectivity, and focused on the public coordination

of discourse. This enables us to avoid a number of intractable philosophical problems (e.g. the relation of mind to body, the problem of »other minds,« and the hermeneutic problem of accurate interpretation), and to focus on the relational function of various utterances within ongoing conversation.[5] Utterances are essentially actions performed with social consequences. This is to say that significant analyses of dialogue can ensue without recourse to psychological explanation. However, the critic may properly ask at this point, if it is wise to disregard the contribution of private thought and feeling to the process of dialogue, is it not short-sighted to abandon concern with processes taking place within the individual while dialogue proceeds?

In reply, the effective analysis of dialogue need not refer to states of individual understanding, thought, subjective biases, inattention, personality traits, and so on. This possibility was initially demonstrated in Garfinkel's (1963) groundbreaking work on ethnomethodology, and now more copiously in various forms of discourse and conversation analysis (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001a, 2001b). At the same time, this is not to exclude concern with what theorists have traditionally viewed as psychological process. If an intimate friend expresses anger toward us, we may lapse into silence, unable to respond. However, this does not mean that we are comatose. A dozen replies may »buzz through our head;« we ride an emotional roller-coaster. Let us not deny the significance of such events. However, the existence of unspoken replies does not simultaneously mean a reinstatement of the subjectivity assumption, the view that meaning originates in private minds and is expressed outwardly in words. Let us rather reconstruct the meaning of subjectivity – the »inner world«. How is this so?

Consider: you have agreed to take part in a play, and you must master your lines before tonight's rehearsal. With the script before you, you speak the lines; when they are familiar, you put the book down and perform them more fully – perhaps with a laugh or a shout. You decide to take a shower, and while you are showering you try to recall the lines silently. During the silent rehearsal you move through a clever line and a smile crosses your face. You »feel« the mirth. Here we see that the distinction between the internal and external world breaks down. What takes place internally is essentially an action in the external world, only conducted without full expression. The internal activity is effectively a reduced form of making sense in our common relationships. Thinking, on this ac-

count, is a form of privately enacted speech – a public act simply carried out in private.

In much the same way, we may usefully reconfigure the concept of intention. We commonly speak about our intentions as causing our actions. For example, we might say to ourselves, »I must apologize«, and then we proceed to do so. To be sure, the apology may not be defined that way by others; in this sense I need them to ratify that it is an apology. However, I did know what I was doing at the time, from my perspective, and this knowing *preceded* the supplementation. Such common events are often used to support the assumption of conscious agency: I chose my actions, I intend certain meanings and not others. This concept of a free, internal agent that directs the traffic of one's words and deeds has a long tradition, and much contemporary support from humanistic scholars. Yet, in spite of its attraction (»I am the god of my action…«), the concept has faired poorly both philosophically and ideologically. The notorious problem of free will on the one hand, and the politics of narcissism on the other, are only two of the knotty issues. How can we sustain the conception of conscious intention without falling into these traditional traps?

We find a promising answer by extending the view of thought and feeling as the private re-enactment of public life. If I am an actor who does what we call, »playing the part of Hamlet«, I can readily tell someone that, »I am playing Hamlet tonight«. Public life provides me, then, with a pattern of action and an acceptable construction of that action. It allows me to tell others that I intend to play the role of Hamlet tonight. The word »intention« does not direct the action so much as comment upon its occurrence. In this way I can also say, »I intended that remark as an apology…« with full assurance, because my immersion in public life gives me grounds for knowing that the words I have uttered can commonly be defined as an apology. By the same token, we can say, »he intended to commit the murder«, not because we have insight into his conscious state, but because his experience in cultural life furnished him with just this construction of the act in question. Dialogue as Bodily Enactment in Context

While the present orientation to dialogue emphasizes discourse, this is not to embrace linguistic reductionism. Spoken (or written) language may be focal in the present analyses, but other than for analytic purposes I do not wish to separate out spoken or written language from the full panoply of actions that con-

tribute to the production of meaning. Clearly the action implications of spoken words within dialogue are fastened to the simultaneous movements of the speakers' bodies, tone of voice, and physical proximity. The way in which an utterance such as »I disagree« is supplemented, may depend importantly on the accompanying posture, gestures, and volume of the voice.

At the same time, dialogic efficacy cannot ultimately be separated from the world of objects and spaces – the material context. The efficacy of one's words may importantly depend, for example, on whether one is clutching a gavel, a dagger, or a bouquet of flowers. In the same way, the meaning of words within the dialogue may depend on whether they are expressed in an executive suite, in a bar room, or over the internet. Again to draw from Wittgenstein (1963), the language games in which we engage are embedded within broader forms of life. Thus, the meaning of »half-volley« and »overhead smash« not only depend on the rules of tennis talk, but on their function within a form of life that includes balls, racquets, nets, lines, players, strawberries and so on. Dialogic Efficacy as Historically and Culturally Situated.

The contribution of any particular act of speech to dialogic coordination is contingent on its placement within a cultural context. In part this emphasis acknowledges Saussure's (1974) distinction between the synchronic and diachronic study of language. While we may effectively focus on contemporary forms of dialogue and their accomplishments (synchronic study), we must also be prepared for temporal transformations in what and how various ends are accomplished. For example, for the past several decades, practitioners in the area of conflict reduction have made concerted attempts to generate new and more effective forms of dialogue. Argumentation initially gave way to practices of bargaining, and in many areas bargaining practices have been replaced by mediation. At the same time, new forms of mediation are continuously emerging (for a more detailed account, see Gergen, 2009).

Bakhtin (1981) also draws our attention to the heterogeneous cultural traditions that typically contribute to the shared language of a nation. At the same time, the focus on cultural heterogeneity prepares us for the difficulties that may be encountered when participants do not share discursive traditions. As the mounting literature on cross-cultural (mis)understanding makes clear (see for example, Rahim, 1994; Pearce, 1989; Ting-Toomey and Oetzel; 2001; Jandt,

2001) such dialogues may be frustrating and ineffectual. The dialogic moves effective for achieving goals within one tradition may be counterproductive in conversations with those outside the tradition. Similarly, even within the same culture the dialogic forms effective in one condition may not carry over to another.[6] Whatever is said about dialogic efficacy must thus be tempered by consciousness of contingency. Dialogic Forms and Their Outcomes

We may now return to the problem of value-saturated visions of dialogue. Finally, in viewing dialogue as discursive coordination, I have attempted to avoid conflating normative and descriptive commitments. Coordination in itself is neither good nor evil. From the present standpoint, a heated argument is as much a dialogue, as an attempt to gain an appreciative understanding of another's »point of view«. This is scarcely to abandon concern with the kinds of ideals central to most contemporary analysts. Rather, it is to invite differentiation among forms of dialogue in terms of the ends they serve. Thus, while certain forms of dialogue may indeed succeed in reducing conflict, other forms of collaboration may enable authority to be challenged, multiple opinions to be expressed, or taken-for-granted realities to be deliberated. Drawing again from Wittgenstein (1963, 6e): »Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails, and screws. – The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects«. From this perspective, inquiry is invited into the specific forms of dialogue required to achieve particular goals of value.

My own concern in this case has been with forms of what may be called *transformative dialogue*, that is practices that succeed in blurring the boundaries between otherwise isolated and alien groups of people (see, for example, Gergen, 2008).

There are many such practices in existence and indeed, on a grass-roots level new developments are flourishing (see for example, Bojer et al., 2008; Yankelovich, 1999). However, the present account of dialogue as collaborative action invites a particular form of analyzing these practices. Specifically, the analyst may address the particular moves within the dialogic sequences that invite productive supplementation. To illustrate, arguments as a dialogic practice seldom succeed in bringing participants closer together in their orientations. In large measure this is because arguments are often based on antagonism (»war by other means«), and any discursive action taken on the part of one interlocutor will invite a supplement

that discounts the value of the action. Participants may move through a space of argument in such a way that neither can generate a line of reasoning that is ratified as reasonable by the other. However, other practices are far more successful in crossing boundaries of meaning, and the challenge is to locate what appear to be successful moves in the collaborative sequences. For example, curious questions, affirmations, narratives of anguish and admissions of doubt are all promising moves (in contemporary Western culture) for bringing participants into common space of understanding. Ultimately it may be possible to generate what amounts to a vocabulary of dialogic moves, allowing new amalgams to be created as circumstances require.

It is finally important to note here that the value placed on dialogic outcomes may vary significantly from one standpoint to another. For example, a vigorous argument, from an outsider's perspective, may seem aggressive and hostile. For the participants, however, such skirmishes can be enlivening fun, much like a game of chess. By the same token, the outcomes of any particular dialogue may be simultaneously both positive and negative (see Thatchenkery & Upadhyaya, 1996). One may be pleased that a given dialogue succeeds in establishing intimate bonds with another, but simultaneously realize that certain critical capacities are suspended. And too, what is accomplished in a dialogue may be judged differently in terms of what ensues at a later point in time. In effect, dialogue itself is subject to the vicissitudes of dialogue.

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Endnotes

1   See Gergen (1994) for a more complete account of the impossibility of communication in the dualist or mind/world tradition.

2   In this sense, the traditional binary separating monologue and dialogue is misleading. The term monologue cannot refer to the language of one person along, for such a language would fail to communicate. Thus monologue is

better understood as an extended (or dominating) entry of a single voice into a dialogue; in this sense monologue is an unevenly distributed dialogue.

3   See, for example, Garfinkel, 1967; Kuhn, 1970; Latour, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Fish, 1980; and Shotter, 1993.

4   You may object: "Well, even if not acknowledged, what I say might mean something to me personally," and that may be. But the question then becomes, how did your utterances come to have personal meaning? I take up this issue shortly.

5   See also J.L. Austin's *How to do things with words* (1962), in which the performatory character of speech is illuminated.

6   See, for example, Well's (1999) discussion of optimal forms of classroom dialogue.

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