



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [SciVerse ScienceDirect](http://SciVerse.ScienceDirect.com)

Language & Communication

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/langcom

Counterparts: Co-presence and ritual intersubjectivity



William F. Hanks

University of California, Berkeley, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 7 August 2013

Keywords:

Phenomenology
Ritual practice
Participation frames
Shamanism
Maya

ABSTRACT

Taking Schutz's analysis of interaction relations as a point of departure, this paper examines intersubjectivity through the lens of shamanic divination and exorcism in Yucatec Maya. Shamanic practice alters and in some ways contradicts the principles of reciprocity, mutuality and congruence that lie at the heart of intersubjectivity as Schutz defined it. The co-engagement of shaman with patient is mediated by ritual objects on the altar, the intercorporeal space of performance and legions of spirits who though invisible are nonetheless made present. Intersubjectivity is effectively dismantled and reorganized, not as the universal foundation of co-engagement, but its occasional by-product.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

To a certain common sense, intersubjectivity is a direct relation between two or more subjects, usually based on what they share. While there are many debates regarding the subject, we will assume for the moment that a subject is a human capable of sensory experience, emotion and engagement, and capable of acting as an I. Holding aside anesthesia, sleep and altered states, and leaving open questions of fragmentation or unity, singularity or composition, to be a subject is to engage a world through body, cognition or emotion. Sometimes this engagement is focused on another subject, as when I greet my friend, speak to a stranger or adjust my path to avoid bumping into an oncoming pedestrian. Subjects can co-engage in many ways, of course, but all forms of co-engagement create intersubjective relations. As I will use the term, intersubjectivity is what happens when subjects co-engage.¹

This paper examines intersubjectivity through the lens of shamanic divination and curing in Yucatec Maya, and will challenge the received view of intersubjectivity in several ways. It pays special attention to the four-way relations between the shaman, the patient, the relevant spirits, and the altar. The shaman–patient relation is deeply asymmetric, and based neither on reciprocal empathy nor mutual understanding. In divination, the shaman can peer into the patient's inner life and body, while in exorcism, his body may become the counterpart of the patient's, such that what occurs in the patient's body also occurs at exactly the same time in his own. The key factor is that these are all unilateral relations: the patient cannot peer into the shaman's life or body nor can he mirror in his body the bodily states of the shaman. The shaman–spirit relation is also asymmetric in several ways. For instance, the spirits can see the shaman but he cannot see them. The shaman can lower the spirits to the altar in ritual prayer, but they never raise him to the heavens. At the same time, there is a regular reciprocity between shaman and spirits in divination, wherein he poses questions in words, and they respond with signs in divining crystals. Shamans also develop histories of encounters with spirits, in which they speak human language and teach their own names to the individual shaman. It would be fair to say that the relation between shaman and his familiar spirits is closer to intersubjective dialogue than is the shaman–patient relation. The altar is critical in this process because the shaman's *Santos* 'holy images' and divining crystals, called *sáas.túun* (lit. light.stone) mediate between the spirits and the

E-mail address: wfhanks@berkeley.edu

¹ This paper was originally presented at the 2010 Annual meeting of the AAA in the panel *Intersubjectivity across cultures: Is there a common core?*, organized by Eve Danziger and Alan Rumsey. I am grateful for the comments from fellow panelists and for comments on the written version, thanks to Alan Rumsey, Eve Danziger, two anonymous readers, Carlo Severi and Terra Edwards.

performance space. Indeed, as I will try to show, the altar objects are so important and active in mediating relations between the participants as to be themselves semi-participants. For want of a better term, I will call them ‘power-objects,’ which never lose their character as material objects, yet which are activated through prayer.²

Under the combined effect of the special participation framework of ritual performance and the objects through which it operates, intersubjectivity is transformed into a varied array of relations. In ritual interactions like the ones discussed here, we see the fragmentation, partial inversion and ultimate reanalysis of ordinary intersubjectivity, especially as described by phenomenologists. These empirical data may be taken to contradict established treatments of intersubjectivity, by showing the idea itself to be culture-bound, or they may be taken to show that the universal category is variably realized and analyzed by different cultures. The case is analogous to debates among ethnographers of the Pacific over the status of theory of mind and intention-attribution as the basis of communication. The ‘doctrine of opacity of mind’ among Bosavi and Urapmin people challenges the universality of theory of mind and any theory of communication that assumes it, or at least shows that cultural and linguistic ideologies may suspend or alter its realization (Robbins and Rumsey, 2008: 414–417).³ In parallel fashion, the practices of Maya shamans show that intersubjectivity takes forms whose varieties are systematically altered by cultural values and the circumstances under which subjects co-engage. More pointedly, intersubjectivity is the variable product of co-participation, not its universal pre-condition. In divination and exorcism, we find human patients who are not subjects, material objects that act and express intentions, and shamans whose own body and subjectivity undergo several transformations.

The conceptual background of my discussion is based primarily on a combination of Alfred Schutz’s phenomenology, Peircean semiotics and the linguistic anthropological literature on participation frameworks. As is well known, Schutz’s work is based on a creative synthesis of Husserl’s phenomenology, Weber’s theory of social action and *Verstehen* ‘understanding’, and on aspects of American pragmatism (particularly William James). Schutz was a friend and close reader of Merleau-Ponty as well, as evident in his attention to the body, and a reader of Bergson, as evident in his discussion of time. Although there is little mention of Peirce in Schutz’s writing, the tie to pragmatism is evident in the relative ease with which one may combine Schutz’s discussion of signs, intersubjectivity and understanding with Peirce’s approach to semiotics (Peirce 1940). Given that linguistic anthropological studies of interaction derive in part from these same sources, the theoretical framework assumed here is purposely narrow.⁴ As a first step towards a broader study of ritual co-engagement, this paper focuses mostly on the specialized practices and understandings of the shaman, leaving a fuller account of the patient’s perspective for another occasion.

2. Intersubjectivity

Schutz made several important observations about intersubjectivity. Subjects who are ‘face-to-face’ whether or not they are actually looking at one another, enter into what Schutz called a reciprocity of perspectives. The most obvious symptom of this is reciprocal gaze, but Schutz had more than vision in mind.⁵ Depending upon degrees of familiarity or anonymity, subjects may know more or less about one another as individuals or as types of person. Each has a ‘perspective’ irreducible to the visual field, and grounded in the interests at hand, past experience and common sense. The subjects may have different personal histories, occupy different positions in the society, and speak different languages or varieties. But whatever their differences, the Schutzian view proceeds from the premise that their respective perspectives are interchangeable. Subjects bring to intersubjectivity the idealization that ‘if I put myself in your position, the world would look to me as it looks to you.’ This is of course an idealization and rarely a sheer truth, since it assumes a common world and a forbiddingly high degree of congruence between perspectives. But just as the Gricean cooperative principle and its associated maxims exist not as empirical facts of how people talk, but as assumptions with which they (and we) calculate implicatures, so too Schutz’s concept of reciprocity of perspectives entails not that perspectives actually *are* fully congruent, but only that subjects engage one another as if they were at least partially congruent. In assuming that your perspective is congruent (Grice 1975, Hanks 2002) with mine, I can anticipate aspects of your reception of my gesture, and I can interpret your gesture by asking what it would signal were I to have performed it.⁶ This little bit of self-directed introspection, however fleeting, is the trace of reflexivity, without which reciprocity as Schutz construes it would not function.

² I do not see either the human-like qualities of some spirits or the actor-like qualities of power-objects as being reducible to the projection of human, intentional communication onto inanimate objects. Some spirits enter into semiotically mediated communication with humans under certain circumstances, but most Maya spirits appear under various aspects anyway. A proper explanation of this relation would lead us into the organization of Maya cosmology and its deep relation to Christianity in the practice of contemporary shamanism. This would have to include the relations of exchange, partial reciprocity and mutual attention that are the substrate on which human-spirit communication emerges. For more background on Maya altars see Hanks (1990:368–369, 371–377, 379, 382–383; 1993a; 1993b).

³ It would be productive to consider the debates on opacity of mind from the perspective of semantic and referential indeterminacy in radical translation, as developed out by Grice, Quine (1960, 1970, 1987) and nicely deployed by Hallen and Olubi Sodipo (1997). Unfortunately, this line of discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴ I have in mind here the work of Goffman, Garfinkel, Schegloff and Goodwin, all of whom show more or less influence from Schutz, Weber and the *Verstehen* tradition of scholarship, albeit blended with other lines of thinking. In this paper, most of this work is in the background, with the detailed ethnographic case taking center stage.

⁵ Schutz’s approach to intersubjectivity is based on Husserl’s phenomenology. For both thinkers, the term designated not mutual understanding but reciprocity of empathy, what Duranti (2010) calls ‘trading places.’ The cognitive question of understanding arises only on the basis of reciprocity, which is rooted in the body and co-presence.

⁶ There is an intimate relation between Schutz’s idealization of intersubjective dimensions on the one hand, and Weber’s classic treatment of ‘orientation’, *Verstehen* ‘understanding’ and *Sinnzusammenhang* ‘meaning context’ in action. Both describe actual actions in terms of ideal-typical relations (see Weber 1947).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10460910>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10460910>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)