



## A polylogue? Where and how to move with and in dialogue?



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**Aydan Gülerce:** Having provided in the previous articles our views on placing the concept of *dialogicality* in psychology, let us here further elaborate some of our ideas in relation to each other's work through the following four basic questions that are of common interest:

*Q1. Dialogicality requires a certain understanding of dialogue. What do we/you understand by the term dialogue?*

**Peter Raggatt:** 'Dialogicality' is a fundamental property of human consciousness. Its foundation is the utterance – 'I speak, therefore I am'. Speaking is typically 'addressed' to an 'other' in some form (specific, generalized, present, absent), but it can also be addressed to the self, in what we call 'inner speech'. If the foundations for speech are dialogical, then it follows that social discourse, thinking, and indeed culture itself, must have dialogical properties. In this approach the meaning of 'dialogue' is extended well beyond notions of conversation with syntax. Indeed, Larrain & Hays (2012) have recently defined our inner discourse as "a dialogue that consists of a constant negotiation and redefinition of ideological territories" (p. 9). One

way to explore these territories or 'spaces' is to use positioning theory. At the most abstract level, thinking requires that we address the object of thought from a distanced position in relation to the object. Likewise, language requires that we represent things with signs that are in distanced relation to their referent. And when we examine the self we are doing so from a distanced 'position' in relation to the speaking subject (the 'I'). All these processes can be linked conceptually by the idea of movement between positions.

The concept of 'positioning' is very important for dialogicality. In this special issue Cor Baerveldt takes issue with this approach. He argues that notions of 'position' and 'position exchange' ignore the lived, embodied experience of the person and 'individualize' dialogue in a way never intended by Bakhtin. The consequence, he argues, is a lack of 'depth' in theorizing about dialogicality. Cor Baerveldt's wish is for a "primordial dialogicality" that is shared and embodied but "neither conceptual, nor propositional". He makes a number of insightful contributions in his critique. It is true, for example, that the concept of 'position' can be construed, I think misleadingly, as static and lacking dynamism, rather like the concepts of 'role' and 'trait'. It fixes the positioned in time and space, a little

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like using a single frame to interpret a movie. But movies are not watchable without their frames, and positions have their own time-space coordinates. Moreover, positions demand counter-positions and there-in lies a source of dynamism.

Let me illustrate this briefly here with reference again to the case of Charles (see this issue). When Charles encounters a childhood moment of radical ambiguity at a football match – his father rejects him on the grounds of masculinity/he loves his father and wants to affirm his masculinity – two opposing, if you like, ‘meta-positions’ crystallize in Charles. These two positions ‘unfold’ in lived time, but they are also traceable in the historical record, and in chronological time, as the data I report demonstrates. In thinking about the notion of ‘deep dialogicality’, I see it as embodied in this painful moment of ambiguity for Charles, and in all the subsequent moments that recapitulate Charles’ dilemmas about his homosexuality and his understandings of gender.

Finally, I offer some brief observations on Cor Baerveldt’s notion of dialogical ‘style’:

- 1 There was little mention of linguistic and discursive processes in this formulation of style. What is dialogical about the notion of style?
- 2 Related to this, if a propositional approach to dialogicality is de-emphasised then where is language in our inquiries?
- 3 The notion of ‘style’ is ambiguous and hard to grasp. It suggests individual differences. Can style be instantiated with concrete examples? Cor Baerveldt argues that style can “never be confronted or interrogated directly, so that we might render a descriptive account of it...”. If this is the case, then how can we know that style exists, other than by purely ‘feeling’ it, as it were, in the moment?

**Cor Baerveldt:** Peter Raggatt claims that dialogicality is a property of consciousness and that the foundation of dialogue is the utterance. For Bakhtin (1986), an utterance is an embodied speech act embedded within a speech genre, expressing not so much a point of view, but an entire mode of being or axiological stance. Therefore, an utterance is always polysemic, ambiguous and incomplete, such that it requires the demarcating categories of the ‘other’ in order to momentarily acquire the contours that allow it to be identified as a position. What is juxtaposed in dialogical activity are not just spatial positions, but entire lives and bodies that vibrate and resonate and generate new significance in a way that will always remain somewhat equivocal. ‘Positioning’ is not what constitutes dialogue. Rather, positioning is what remains when dialogue is forced artificially into a (pro)positional format.

Hermans and Kempen (1993) have argued that dialogism escapes the logical requirement of non-contradiction (which states that something cannot be *A* and *not-A* at the same time), because *A* and *not-A* can each be stated from a different position, such that their contradiction would merely constitute a dialogical disagreement. Bakhtin, however, follows Bergson in contesting the very logic of

identity and non-contradiction as it pertains to expression and recognizes that in genuine expression *A* and *not-A* can be expressed not just from two different positions, but simultaneously in the same expressive act. Herein lies the deeper meaning of dialogicality as a theory of expression and generativity. I applaud Peter Raggatt’s attempt to make DST more dynamic by introducing Bakhtin’s notion of chronotope. Of course, Bakhtin’s chronotope is a notion no less enigmatic than Merleau-Ponty’s notion of style. The chronotope deals precisely with the dynamic relation between the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’, between human consciousness and concrete historical meaning, which is at the heart of Bakhtin’s understanding of dialogicality. For Bakhtin the chronotope is not merely a sequence of spatial events, but the very condition for the representability of events (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 250).

I would argue that ‘style’ and ‘chronotope’ are notions that serve a somewhat similar function in the work of the Merleau-Ponty and Bakhtin, respectively, in that both are concerned with a kind of non-conceptual generality that allows for the singularity, ‘denseness’ and ‘fleshiness’ or concretely lived experience. This concern is not primarily phenomenological, but is shared by a broad variety of expressivist, ‘vitalist’ and post-structuralist thinkers from Goethe to Dilthey and Bergson and more recently Deleuze. Far from having to appeal to ‘vague feelings’, as Peter Raggatt suggests, such thinkers challenge us to abandon the quasi-exactness of abstract thought for a careful yet critical engagement with live-as-expressed. We don’t encounter the other as just a position, but as a fully embodied life. We don’t just exchange positional statements with each other, but we participate with others in a world that is both ‘shared’ and intimately our own. For Bakhtin dialogicality belongs to the domain of lived experience and if dialogicality is therefore a phenomenological notion, it is so only if experience is recognized as lying in the realm *between* ‘positions’, that is, in the realm of expression and affirmative differences.

**Aydan Gülerce:** Let me bring in various third voices from my framework to reflect on just a few points to illustrate my definition: As I discussed in my paper, I, of course, concur with Peter Raggatt’s claim “I speak, therefore I am” on the significance of the language use (as one of the major ingredients, so to speak) for a dialogical psychology. But the critical question for me is whether “speaking” alone (both, by itself, and to oneself) necessarily suggests genuine dialogicality just as *self-talk* (Vygotsky), *ego-centric monologue* (Piaget), and even “inner speech” (Wittgenstein). It suggests that it might rather imply monologicality, just as “self-reflection” of the sovereign *cogito* (Descartes). Here is how: “I speak (your/the Other’s words), therefore *you/the Other* are”. My existence is a real/sensible/lived experience which does not need words if they were not for *you/the Other* to hear/recognize/acknowledge *my being* (existence/need/desire). My “self” (as infinite subject/ive-object/ive meaning potentials) remains “free-floating” in silence and in “private” always as a project (to be “realized/actualized”) in *pain* of the unsayable/“unuttered truth” and in *pleasure* of mastering (a/your/the Other’s) language, the *jouissance* that “I” made “it/the Thing” (Lacan) “ours”. It is not *mine*, since I have excess

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