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The Self Surrounding Itself: Double dialogicality

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Abstract. This is a brief exercise of how dialogicality of an introspective account could be analyzed. It builds on the notion of hyper-dynamic nature of the dialogical self in action, where three parallel and mutually coordinated feed-forward loops operate. Voices emerge as agent-linked semiotic devices that momentarily set up the I-positions that serve for creating the pattern of tension potentials of the self system, which guide the maintenance and development of the self. Old dichotomies—personal versus social- are not useful for looking at the realities of love of Felicidad Mosquera, or of the dialogical self in general.

The Dialogical Self is dynamic—yet structured. The introspective short story may allow us a glimpse into the ways in which the dialogical process moves. It entails rapid movement through loops between I-positions—constructed as the flow of experience moves ahead.

The “bare story” of the flow of an ordinary encounter of Her and Him is very simple:

He looks at her
He asks her for salt
She puts salt in his hand
His hand barely touches hers

This is just the mundane everyday act of passing the salt. Yet the short story writer narrates it differently—with extensions (from *The Guerrillero*, p.119):

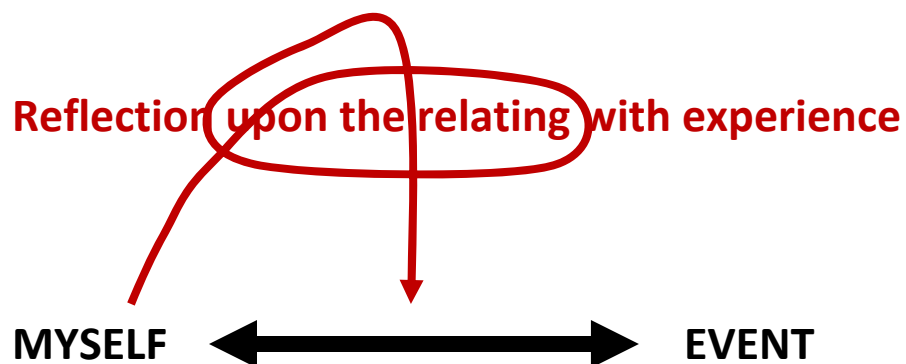
I can't understand. Felicidad Mosquera,
I don't recognize you any longer.
I never thought you'd change this fast,
Go from black to white, as you did,
from one day to the other.
Because the trembling you felt
when he looked at you with his dark eyes
or the stammering, like a little girl
when he asked for the salt
and barely touched you with his fingers
as you put it in his hand,
everything in you turned upside-down
the current changed, your cables crossed
so how in God's name didn't you notice it?

So the internal domain of the story is constructed here:

He looks at her	She trembles
He asks her for salt	She stammers
She puts salt in his hand	She feels everything turned upside down
His hand barely touches hers	

This is merely the subjective meaning-making counterpart—not yet indicative of any aspect of the Dialogical Self. To get to the Dialogical Self, we need to see how the external (events) and the internal (feelings) become related-through reflexivity. Reflexivity raises above the event<>experience relationship, constituting a meta-level (Figure 1). That reflexivity requires semiotic mediation—signs of various kinds.

Figure 1. Reflexivity in event<>experience relation



Note that the reflexivity is constructed by the Self—not by the Other(s). Of course through the myriad of social suggestions by the Other(s) the particular forms of reflexivity are made available. Types of attributions (e.g. “*he made me tremble*” versus “*I started to tremble* because of him” etc) are directed by such suggestions (social representations of the self-in-society).

The reflexivity entails a scenario where the **internal becomes external** so as to make it possible to examine the internal—by taking MYSELF-OUTSIDE-MYSELF (ME→ YOU-as-ME→ ME) as position, or emphasizing what the OTHER did to MYSELF. This is done by constructing voices (“I say...”, “you say”...”X says”) that create temporarily fixed I-positions.

Again from *The Guerillero*, p.119:

I-position move

Voiced dialogicality

ME→ OUT→ ME
 ME→ OUT→ ME
 ME→OUT→ ME
 ME→ ME

I can't understand. Felicidad Mosquera,
 I don't recognize you any longer.
 I never thought you'd change this fast,
 Go from black to white, as you did,
 from one day to the other.

ME→ME
 ME→OTHER→ ME

Because the trembling you felt
 when he looked at you with his dark eyes
 or the stammering, like a little girl

ME-> OTHER→ME

when he asked for the salt
 and barely touched you with his fingers

ME→ OTHER
 ME→ ME

as you put it in his hand,
 everything in you turned upside-down
 the current changed, your cables crossed
 so how in God's name didn't you notice it?

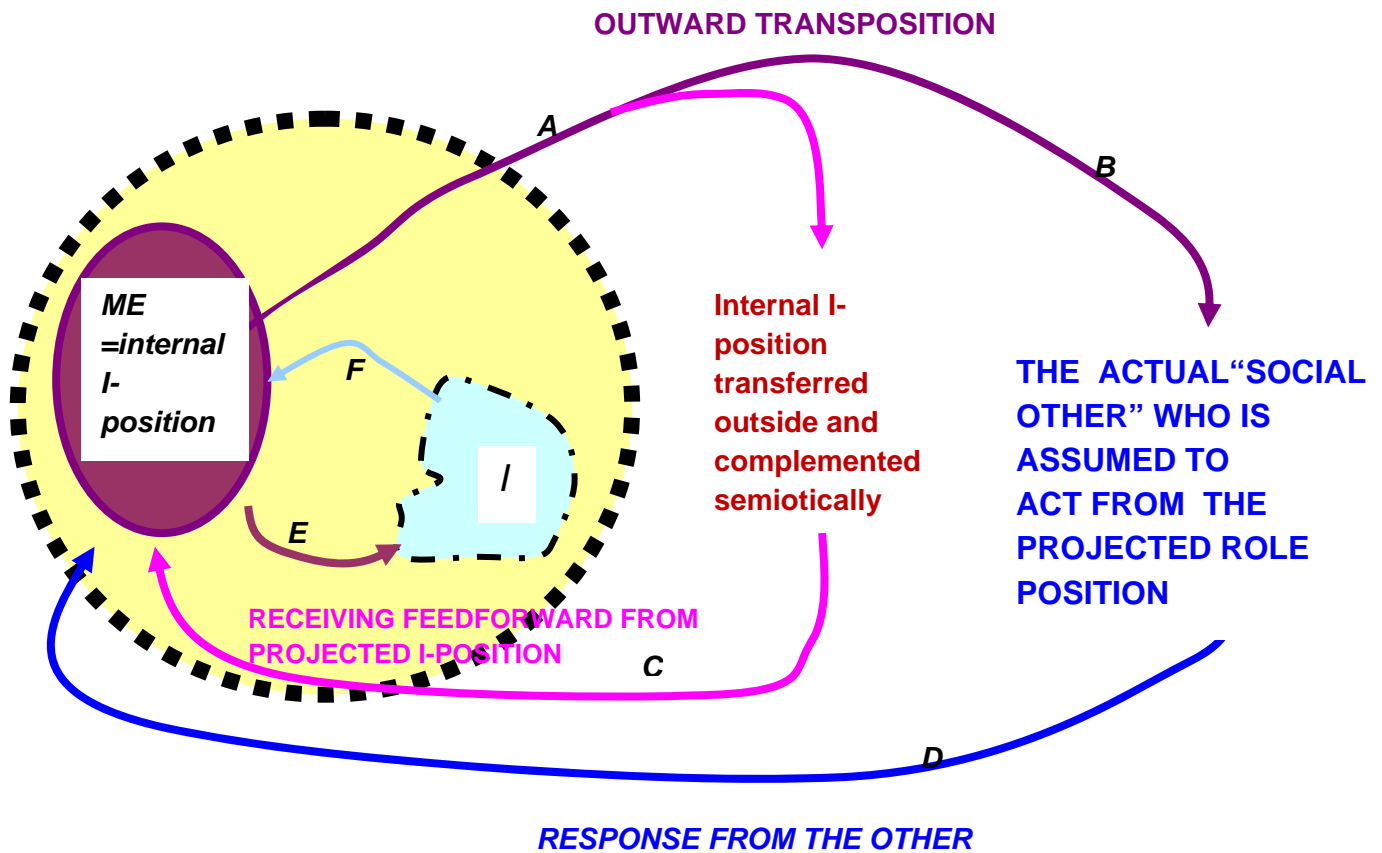
ME→OUT→ME

The important focus is that of projecting the ME into the same role outside of the “inside self” as the Other. Thus-- in ***I don't recognize you any longer*** the I and you are the same—yet they become distinguished as Subject (I) and Object (you). The voice of “I” emerges to relate to “you.”

Transitory nature of I-positions. So we have a redundant system of Dialogical Self where an I-position can be momentarily transferred from inside to outside to make it possible for the self to reflect upon inside (“self mirror”). The reflection entails use of **hypergeneralized affective sign fields** [Valsiner, J. (2007). ***Culture in minds and societies***. New Delhi: Sage]. Through such signs that fluidity of the ongoing relation of the self to the event is both clarified and maintained.

Specifically—what is the function of *don't recognize* and *any longer*. Marker of irreversible change in the relation-- ANY LONGER.. "I used to, but no more". In the RECOGNIZE<>non-recognize duality of meaning the priority relation is reverses (recognize<>NON-RECOGNIZE), as it is mapped on the distinction within irreversible time. These distinctions are made dynamically within coordination of three dialogical loops (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The Trialogical Self (after G. H. Mead)



General Point to Conclude: Double redundancy. The flexibility of the Dialogical Self system is guaranteed by double redundancy.

First of those is the **rapid movement** of I-positions between locations (inner/outer self domains—in Hermans' terms). That rapid movement -- possibly a fitting analogue here is the movement of human gaze in observing visual images—guarantees that there is necessarily **dialogicity in time**. No previous I-position location is ever revisited (even if it is similar, it is not the same). Integration of I-positions—Present and Future—is immediately unfolding (**A→moving into →B**, rather than discretely

oppositional—**A in contrast to B**) in the process of experiencing. This is a contrast between methods of looking at I-positions that pre-construct these as discrete positions (“you now” vs “you 5 years from now”). The functioning of the Dialogical Self is in a flow (perhaps best captured by Marková—three-step process), not in contradictions between static given positions.

The second redundancy is in at least two “**social others**”—the externally transposed inner position, and actual other person—Figure 2. The internal I-position (itself a double—of ME<>I loop) faces in parallel two “mirrors”—which may enter into dialogical relation between themselves, as well as with the internal position. In that “triangle” compensation for lack of one component out of 3 does not eliminate dialogicality (the other person may be absent if the externalized inner I-position creates contrast with the ME<>I system. The ME<>I system is never absent. It feeds the constant movement of the externalized I-position. The “inner self” becomes surrounded by two kinds of “social others”—externalized and generalized internal I-positions, and actual other people who reflect upon the person.

So--the I-positions move— and move rapidly if need be, thanks to self-reflexivity which becomes possible through such move, as well as enables further move. Voices create the flow of I-positions the relationship between which in time generates more voices. The “core self”—a maintained status quo of the system-- is ***in that movement*** (rather than in any static entity “in” the person), and can be seen in Felicidad falling in love against all odds for no externally specifiable “causal reasons”. So we become fascinated with fugitives or with the riches of boring millionaires, or with symbolic expressions of power, property, and propriety—all in the same way—to feed into our dynamic self-system. **The very social and very dialogical self is thus deeply egocentric**—and that egocentricity (as an open system) depends fully on the social world.