NARRATIVE AND IMAGE: METAPHORS OF THE DIALOGICAL SELF AND THE PROBLEM OF SPATIALITY
(COMMENTARY ON RUCK & SLUNECKO)

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ABSTRACT. Ruck and Slunecko (2008) present a proposal for a method of investigation of the dialogical self which is based on the potential of the image as a form of self-expression and a privileged means of accessing its structure and relational dynamics. The main objective of the pictorial method is the study of the role of the self's spatial and temporal dimensions and it seeks to become an alternative tool to methods of a *narrative nature*, which put stress on the temporal dimension, and which have dominated dialogical self theory at a meta-theoretical and theoretical levels and also at a methodological level. This commentary takes the form of a reflection on the dichotomy inherent to the general argument of the authors: image versus narrative in the dialogical conception of the self. The viability of both narrative and pictorial metaphors, in the description of the dialogicality intrinsic to the processes pertaining to identity is discussed through the difference between narrative/textual/linguistic spatiality and imagery/pictorial/geographic spatiality.

Keywords: Dialogical self, narrative, image, metaphor.

Within the scope of the dialogical self theory, proposals for new conceptual and methodological approaches to the investigation of the component aspects of the dialogicality inherent to the self are always enthusiastically and eagerly received. The challenge is particularly demanding due not only to the nature of the phenomenon itself, the self, but also due to the complexity with which dialogical self theory formulates that phenomenon. As it happens, Ruck and Slunecko's article (2008) is very representative of this complexity, bringing forward many fundamental questions raised by dialogical self theory such as, for example, the role of the relationship between temporality and spatiality in the constitution of the processes pertaining to identity or the contribution of each of the different modes (narrative and imagery) to the production of meaning. This seems to be as much more important as, in fact, some of these appear to be taken as acquired and usually remain outside the efforts for conceptualization and reflection.

Ruck & Slunecko's general argument and method

Ruck and Slunecko (2008) begin by questioning a core issue in the theory of the dialogical self: the relationship between spatiality and temporality in determining the dialogicality intrinsic to the identity processes. Thus they argue that the temporal dimension has been privileged and they focus on the need for the self's spatial dimension to assume a more predominant and intentional role in the conceptualization and study of the dialogical self. More than exclusively considering the spatial dimension, the authors seek to understand how both dimensions – spatial and temporal – relate to each other in the emergence of the self.

The authors make use of the conceptual and methodological assumptions of image science, which focuses on the study of meaning's spatial dimension, i.e., on the meaning of visual representation itself, which is thought to emerge from the identification of the relationship between the represented elements. Therefore, they concretize their argument by presenting a daring proposal for a method of investigation of the dialogical self that focuses on the potential of the image as a form of self-expression and thus as a privileged means of accessing the structure and relational dynamics within the dialogical self. Thus, based on arguments in favor of a pictorial approach to the dialogical self, the authors highlight the spatial dimension, giving intentionality to the study of the relationships between the components of the image as a means of accessing the dialogicality intrinsic to identity processes. With this pictorial analysis tool, the authors seek to develop the study of the role of the self's spatial dimension, and its goal is to become an alternative and/or additional tool to methods of a *narrative nature* which have dominated investigation in dialogical self theory.

Theories and concepts as metaphors

As is known, the theory of the dialogical self appears in an intellectual context emerging from the critique of modern epistemology. In this context, there is incentive to elaboration and consolidation of new configurations relating to the problem of knowledge and the statute of the real which abandon the demands of an unambiguous link between reality and representations. These new metatheoretical frameworks support the integration of fictional processes in the epistemological matrix, in the sense that current theories and concepts do not aspire to be identical to the world but are recognized as possible versions of the highlighted phenomena. That is to say, it is "as if" the psychological domain is like a computer, or a story. Thus, it is nowadays largely accepted that psychology makes use of organizing metaphors which articulate theories and methods in the approach to psychological phenomena (e.g., Leary, 1990). However, we must recognize that when using conceptual theories and tools, the organizing metaphors are, to a certain extent, literalized, since the phenomena being studied, are identified with the concepts used. Concepts and reality are taken as identical and, in this

sense, the tools and methods used promote this literalization of organizing metaphors. Therefore, up to a point, this is a natural process, but it is also potentially restricting.

This commentary does not seek to question the metaphorical nature of knowledge however it helps us to reveal the movement made by Ruck and Slunecko to establish a pictorial metaphor in the approach to the dialogical self which, as we shall see, only co-exists tensionally with the traditional metaphor in the dialogical self theory.

Narrative metaphor

Traditionally, narrative has been the organizing metaphor of the self in dialogical self theory (e.g., Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992). The assumption of the narrative mode of meaning is that human beings assign meaning to their lives by organizing their experiences in the form of stories. Just like in a story, episodes are located and organized in space and time and integrated in a *continuum* whose whole - *the life history* – gives the person the ability for projection into the future and the sense of acting that we call self (McAdams, 2001). Time assumes a main role in the narrative not only as an episode structuring and organizing element, but also as a dynamic mechanism for constructing meaning through the integration into the narrative of the past, of the present and of the anticipation of the future. Therefore, the narrative thinking mode (Bruner, 1986) is more than a process for organizing meaning from experiences processed by narrative; the narrative and the act of narration in itself become organizing principles for the self, integrating the semiotic dynamics from which meaning emerges. In this sense, the narrative generates meaning itself (Sarbin, 1986; Hermans, 2002). The narrative metaphor also integrates the assumption that the construction of meaning in the context of the discursive relationship between the author and potential "addressees", real or imaginary, establishing itself by its nature, as a dialogical process. As Hermans and Kempen (1993) mention, when introducing the notion of dialogical self, the act of narration always implies an audience, that is to say, a dialog with another person, and it is from this dialogical relationship that new meaning may emerge.

Hermans and Kempen (1993), based on Bakhtin's polyphonic romance metaphor (1984), add multivocality to the narrative and dialogical concept of the self, i.e., the self ceases to be understood as emerging from the stories told by a single narrator; instead, each story of each experience has its own author. These different authors, or "I-positions", may establish dialogue relationships with other relatively independent "I-positions". It is thus that Hermans (2006) introduces the concept of the dialogical self as a "theatre of voices", where the "voice" is sustained, once again, by the two main dimensions of the self: space (i.e., the positioning assumed by each author in the relationship with another I-position) and time (i.e., the narrative content emerging from the dialogue between I-positions). Thus, the dialogical self is a multifaceted phenomenon, multivocal and dynamic, emerging from the dialogue relationships

between different I-positions (e.g., Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, 2003). By analogy with James's distinction (1890) between "I" and "Me", where the "I" corresponds to the self's reflexive property (i.e., the self as knower, author) and the "Me" corresponds to the different characteristics that the "I" assigns to itself as his/hers (i.e., the self as known, actor), the "I" can assume different I-positions of the self and move in the *imaginary landscape of the self*, expressing itself through the voice issued from the position assumed at that moment, the "Me" (in Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Each I-position integrates semiotic content which might generate different relational dynamics between I-positions from the moment they are vocalized and addressed to other I-positions and this sharing of meaning favors the emergence of new repositioning and meaning processes (e.g., Valsiner, 2004a).

With the decentralization of the "I" as single narrator, the narrative matrix is maintained as a means of meaning emerging from the dialogue relationships that are capable of being established between different and multiple I-positions in the dialogical self. This spatialization of the characters in the narrative of the self – I-positions – also allows us to conceive internal dialogues in the likeness of interpersonal dialogues. In this sense, like in social speeches, the meaning of reality emerges from the narratives shared between multiple I-positions in dialogue. The outcome of these relationships is always relative depending on their addressee. Therefore, the self is not a predetermined phenomenon but, rather, it emerges from the casual dialogical relationships which become established between different I-positions (Holquist, 1990). With these developments in dialogical self theory, *time spatialization* also takes place (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Space assumes, with this cumulative transition of the narrative-self to the dialogical-self, a main role as defining property of each I-position and of the dialogical field itself. This property makes it possible to re-conceptualize the temporal dimension itself through the phenomenon of juxtaposition, as mentioned by Ruck and Slunecko (this issue). The juxtaposition refers to the ability the self has to contemplate at one moment in time two or more positions, voices which narrate two or more parts, sometimes even contrasting, of the same story, by assigning it a "pictorial property". This simultaneity of events phenomenon imposes discontinuity in the linearity and continuity inherent to the temporal dimension of traditional narration, making it possible for dialogical relationships between juxtaposed voices to be analyzed independently of the progression of the global narrative. Therefore, this juxtaposition phenomenon allows the spatialization of time itself, assigning it reversibility, a simultaneous access to the past, the present and the projected future as main elements in the construction of meaning (e.g., Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

Pictorial metaphor

In spite of this movement for time spatialization, Ruck and Slunecko (2008) remark that the narrative metaphor tends to emphasize temporality to the detriment of

spatiality while dimensions of the dialogicality of the self. It is important to recognize that this has also been remarked upon within the scope of literary theory (e.g., Zoran, 1984).

Thus, authors use the image and appeal to the assumptions of image science as an alternative tool to the narrative methods of studying the dialogical self as a way of demonstrating their argument in favor of the need to highlight the spatial dimension of the identity processes. They end by electing the image as an expression of these processes. With this, authors tell us that "*it is as if*" the self was an image, bringing to the dialogical self theory an imagery / pictorial metaphor. They literalize this metaphor when they make use of the analysis of the spatial relationship between the components of the image as a means of discovery (revelation) of the identity processes. Thus, the elements that compose the self become components of the image and the relationships between those elements, spatial relationships.

With this, Ruck and Slunecko promote an interesting dialogue between the two metaphors or ways of thinking about the dialogical self, as well as an important re-questioning of the intellectual tradition of dialogical self theory. However, could these two metaphors be reconcilable? Are both metaphors viable in the approach to the identity processes from a psychological perspective? This question arises because both metaphors carry with them traces of epistemologies (and ontologies) which sustain them and which are inherent to the methods used in both metaphors. In this respect, note how, for example, Ruck and Slunecko focus on the relative position of the various elements / components of the image and how Hermans (e.g. Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995) focuses on discursive units of meaning, the valuations. The main goal of Ruck and Slunecko's text appears not to be the establishment of a new rational for approaching the dialogical self in a complete and substantial sense. Therefore, they do not go beyond the description of some of the central assumptions of the analysis and composition of images within the scope of image science. That is, they do not mention in what way these assumptions and the properties inherent to the image might reflect properties capable of being used as conceptual matrix of the self.

It should be noted that, in this sense, the discussion cannot be maintained exclusively at the level of the image and the narrative as means and modes of communication and representation. The stance of emphasizing the image or the narrative carries with it a commitment to a certain view of the nature of human experience and of the meaning production processes. Focusing on this or that representation mode demands compromises, both at ontological and at epistemological level. As we referred in what concerns the narrative metaphor, the statement is that human experience is narratively organized and structured. So, what would be our position regarding these questions from a pictorial metaphor?

The problem of the image: from perception to fiction

We represent the world and by doing that, we impregnate it with verbal and pictorial images. Therefore, representation encompasses a metaphorization process; it approaches the world "as if" the world corresponded to what we say or to the pictorial images that we produce about it. In this sense, human experience belongs inexorably to the "as if" domain. "The structure of our relationship with things is always figurative; it is always a product from work which creates meaning and from imagination" (Marcos, 2001, p. 21). It is through an "instituting imagination" (Castoriadis cit in Mendes, 2001) that the world becomes present. However, the world becomes present and presents itself in different ways according to the way we are involved with it. The way we are involved with the world also restricts our nearness and appropriation of the world. Now, it seems to be precisely at this point that Ruck and Slunecko (2008) fail to recognize in a substantial way the differences between image as perception and image as fiction. Both refer us to the different world reference and representation modes (see Ricoeur, 1979).

Image as perception makes us closer to the world, to the real and, with that, the image appears as a portrait or copy, as a representation, which is mediated by our perception of the world and of the properties of the objects to which it refers. A fictional image may or not refer to the real, but its reference is linguistically mediated and the language is not in the world. In this sense, language begins by holding us off the world so as to institute it afterwards, when it acts on it in the reference process. Just as Ricoeur (1979) writes:

> The ultimate role of the image is not only to diffuse meaning across diverse sensorial fields, to *hallucinate* thought in some way, but on the contrary to effect a sort of *epoche* of the real, to suspend our attention to the real, to place us in a state of non-engagement with regard to perception or action, in short, to suspend meaning in the neutralized atmosphere to which one could give the name of the dimension of fiction. In this state of non-engagement we try new ideas, new values, new ways of being-in-the-world. Imagination is this free play of possibilities. In this state, fiction can, as we said above, create a *redescription* of reality. (p. 134)

Thus, from the psychological perspective, involvement with the fictional has this function of abstracting models of the world, stimulating actions, thoughts and feelings, through which we involve ourselves in social interaction and construct meaning (refer to Mar & Oatley, 2008, for a review).

The problem of space: pictorial space and narrative space

Taking the image from the perspective of perception, Ruck and Slunecko (2008) approach the spatiality of the dialogical self from a pictorial point of view and, with

this, they raise another problem. From a pictorial perspective, spatial order is composed by lines, vectors and objects represented which consigns it to a planimetric analysis. However, Ruck and Slunecko (this issue) appear to have an implicit euclidean vision of space since they have based their interpretation of Frida Khalo's image on the identification of points in space and in the expression of its relationships in terms of distance, angles, vectors and relative positions. In the same way, the authors consign the spatial dimension to a graphic existence that is incompatible with a text's spatial dimension (Zoran, 1984). As we noted, language implies a degree of arbitrariness in the relationship between meaning and meaningful, which limits the correspondence between the spatiality of meaning and the spatiality of meaningful. Therefore, from a narrative perspective, the spatial dimension refers us to the meaning structure of a text (Zoran, 1984). Here the limits of the pictorial metaphor can be observed. From a psychological perspective, it is precisely the structuring and restructuring of the meaning matrix along time which seems to be crucial since it is in that process, involved in the dialogical matrix of interpersonal relationships, that meanings are negotiated, constructed and reconstructed.

Conclusion

Ruck and Slunecko (2008) raise a crucial issue for a dialogical description of human subjectivity: the role spaciality and temporality in the determining identitarian processes. However their method of approaching this question close from the perspective of science image, seems to limit their initial intuition for psychological purposes. Nevertheless, a perspective on image integrated with narrative metaphor seems promising. In fact, pictorial metaphor brings a renewed questioning of metatheoretical and theoretical tradition of dialogical self theory. Simultaneously, pictorial method has the potential to access alternative modes of elocution of I-positions trough pictorial mode of expression and this motivates further development both as a method of analysis and in its implications for dialogical self theory. Recurring to an expression typically used in painting: "the painting isn't solved yet".

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