**The Eighth International Conference on the Dialogical Self**

**19-22 August 2014, The Hague University, The Hague, The Netherlands**

*Public Dialogical Selves: Excentric Beings in Language[1]*

**Keynote**

**August 19, 2014**

**Marie-Cécile Bertau**

**(Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Germany)**

---

[1] The kind reader should be informed that the following text includes extensive endnotes which were of course not given at the talk. These notes represent what I cut out in order to respect time, they are important commentaries or elaborations. Nevertheless, the reader can simply follow the main text without diving into details.

# 1 Introduction

My entrance to the issue of the dialogical self is language. Not discourse, not language-in-use: language.

I am intrigued by the way language works, I ask *how* language does what it does: constructing realities and forming a world view (*Weltansicht)*, and, first of all: how does it enable a self to perform her or his self. Asking these kind of questions, I view language as a *formative phenomenon*, with a genuine part, a *life,* in our psychological beingness – this is coupled with a clear rejection of the notion of language as a tool.

I am attached to Humboldt's philosophy of language, where language is conceived as *energeia*: a „being-at-work" or „doing-ness", usually translated by the term "activity". We are *subjected to* that activity, and *we do it* at the same time – so, toolness coupled with simple agentivity is not possible, rather a *receptive doing that forms and transforms the doer in each performance*. So, a very specific kind of activity: it is situated *between* activity and passivity: this is what indeed characterizes human activity.[i]

Through Humboldt, I am also attached to early Soviet investigations of language (Jakubinskij, Vološinov, Bachtin, Vygotskij), all champion the view of human beings' mediatedness by dialogic, sociocultural language, a multivoiced phenomenon (*not* a tool: Vygotskij).[ii] Taking both traditions together[iii] permits, first, to go beyond simple toolness and into dialogical dynamics, second, it allows to incorporate *form*.

With this view, performance gains a specific taste: language activity *is form*, not a formless flow of meanings, but meaningful form, individuated and made certain. Forms are then *forms to go through*, to experience as a *meaningful passage* one is in and traverses.[iv]

What I would like to offer you today is an exploration of that „being-at-work" or „doing-ness" of language. In a way, this exploration leads to something simultaneously obvious *and* veiled:

"There are two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, »Morning, boys. How's the water?« And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, »What the hell is water?«"[v]

I take water to be language-as-activity, and I follow partly that metaphor: I appreciate the notion of language as element, taken for granted, just because we are immersed in it: we take our "swimming" as an activity we do by ourselves – not realizing that it is precisely swimming and *not* flying or running. But: language is *not* water. It is *not* a natural, pre-given element to our beingness:

it is a socio-cultural, historical artifact, a construct we did and constantly *do by our very "swimming"*: It is as if the fish "do their water" by their swimming, *nevertheless needing the water to swim* and to *be* fish.

Swimming-languaging: for Humboldt language *is* activity, it exists as address and reply. Humboldt turns the picture around and put the ever-becoming as starting point to conceive language: the spoken word is what is given[vi], and language is a dynamic and dense reality which is concretely occurring. Hence, it becomes a *presence* in the here and now of any language activity, a particular "third party", located at a kind of mid-level, which is neither completely individual nor fully abstract. It is closely bound to form, or to "per-forms".

Several scholars are formulating a kind of thirdness that reaches beyond the inter-subjects and introduces a third or mid-level located *before* the macro, abstract social level. The main preoccupation seems to be how to articulate the individual with the social, giving stability the way to dynamics and vice versa. Interestingly, form plays a role.

I propose to question that meso-level through some of its descriptions in the literature, *and* through its phenomenal traces. Having addressed the notion of the Third itself, I will close my talk with a glimpse into "Excentricity".


## 2 The Mid-Level or Third

### 2.1 Descriptions and Labels

In the context of the preoccupation I just mentioned, one can find descriptions that explicitly aim at *a middle* located between the social and the individual selves.

An urgent plea for a involving a mid-level within the frame of dialogical research is found in Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011). They address the issue of alterity as "made through social dimensions that go beyond interpersonal relationships" – these social dimensions include "an institutional dimension" (p. 497). With the term "institution", the authors aim to account for the stability of the self, because by their rules, norms, procedures, routines etc., institutions are able to confer stability and continuity to interpersonal relationships. Stressing that institutions are constructed and transformed by concrete social actors, the authors introduce a "third dimension". The *personal dimension* refers to the individual's uniqueness, the *interpersonal dimension* refers to "the collective construction achieved by interactional dynamics", the *transpersonal dimension* enables the apprehension of a social dimension that "refers *neither* to interpersonal relationships, *nor* to abstract and de-contextualized social values and rules" (p. 498, italics mcb). Hence, a subject can simultaneously be conceived as unique, concretely involved in interpersonal relationships, and

symbolically related to broader communities. Interestingly, the term introduced is borrowed from Clot (2008) who applied it to analysis of professional work practices: here, the transpersonal dimension refers to a *professional genre*. Let me give you the definition:

"A professional genre is a set of activities that has a *history* in *a certain work community* […] and forms a repertoire of expected actions. It frames each individual's professional practices and is transpersonal because the workers *recognize it* as a collective property with socially shared values. [It] has a *psychological function* in a worker's activity: by regulating his or her activity within a wider professional field, a professional genre links him or her to a community of workers and acts as psychological resource" (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011, p. 498, italics mcb).

Moore, Jasper and Gillespie (2011) comment Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011) and also address the issue of stability through institutions. In order to elaborate the transpersonal dimension, they propose Goffman's frame concept: frames *link* the social world to the structure of the dialogical self. Actions within one frame tend to stabilize the dialogical self, whereas being "caught between frames tends to destabilize the self" (p. 510). Hence, frames as relative stable institutional *forms* are necessary to the dialogical self, the passage between forms seems to be formless, therefore dangerous.

Another description is owed to narrative studies: De Fina (2013) recently stressed that positioning analysis "offers a *middle ground* between approaches to identity that keep a very narrow focus on the here and now of interactions […] and orientations that focus much more on wide social processes such as the circulation of ideologies" (2013, p. 43, italics mcb). De Fina goes on to say that this "middle way" is theorized by Bamberg's (1997) level 3 positioning. Level 1 refers to the way characters in a story are positioned to each other, level 2 refers to the positioning processes in the story-telling world (real interlocutors), and level 3 explores "how the speaker/narrator positions a sense of self/identity with regards to dominant discourses and master narratives", and how s/he "makes this relevant to the interaction in the here and now" (Bamberg, 1997, p. 385, 391): hence, in level 3, the interlocutors relate themselves to the social in terms of dominant discourses, they make it relevant now. De Fina underscores that a third level is necessary to deal with how interlocutors negotiate less locally produced identities.[vii]

The labels so far are: the transpersonal, third dimension; the middle ground and the level 3 of positioning. The concepts are enrolled in order to provide for the connection between the social and the individual. The function of the third or mid-level is to confer the self stability through stable forms (frames, dominant discourses), simultaneously leaving enough space to be unique.[viii] Further, the third dimension mediates the social and the individual to each other, so that the social is

*concretely present within* the individual, without incorporating it. The "grain size" of that transpersonal or mid-level is invoked through terms like institution, community, and practices: more proximal and more graspable social forms than "the social" as such.[ix]

## 2.2 Traces

Having briefly located and described the mid-level as a kind of thirdness, I will now turn to the traces of the meso-level. From the standpoint of language-as-activity, my leading question is:

How does the meso-level, or the transpersonal, *talk*, how does it *sound*?

Note that I am not asking for a third party as an "additional other"[x] coming to Me and You, and located at several levels of abstractions, including remote or potential audiences, possible future gossipers, professions and institutions, constructed collectives, super addressees, and generalized others (Linell, 2009[xi]): Me + You + ThirdParty.

Rather, I ask precisely for the meso-level articulating the Individuals with the Social (not: the Self to the other Self) so: Self-Other-Related Selves – MesoSocial. As that kind of level, it is associated to an institutional level, what Linell calls "Socioculture", linked with "we" or "one", French "on", German/Swedish "man", and generic "you": the **voice** of this specific instance is my interest, that is, the *forms one can observe as connected to that mid-level*, sometimes coming as third. My collection of traces is very selective.[xii]

My first illustration is Georgaca's (2012) precise look at the dialogue between client and therapist, where the therapist is thematized as *real addressee* of the client's talk, as a *counter-position* to the client's position, and – just appropriate to my subject – as an *institutional role*.[xiii] Commenting analysis of therapeutic sessions by Martinez, Tomicic and Medina (2012), Georgaca addresses the therapist's activities: the therapist operates as *medium* by conveying the client's statements back to him, he is positioned as a *conveyor* of the client's words, "attributing thus the *authorial position* of his statements to the client" (p. 164, italics mcb), and by constructing himself as a *witness* of the client's problems and change, he validates the client's new position.[xiv] So: *medium, **conveyor of words**, **witness of change***, and *authorial position*: Because of this shift to an institutional function, the voice of the therapist has a specific weight, this voice can *ennoble* the client's words by taking them up and given them back.[xv] Georgaca further stresses that the form internal and external dialogues take are "dependent upon the constellation of dominant and culturally legitimate perspectives on the world and the self" (p. 166); Georgaca urges to analyze how "formative and

normative aspects" of psychotherapy are "actively played out and pursued in the minutiae of the therapeutic exchange" (p. 167): this echoes Bamberg's (1997) level 3, and addresses concrete forms.

Martinez et al. use the same method as Georgaca (Dialogical Discourse Analysis), and so are attentive to the therapist's performances, in that particular case how he manages episodes of rupture in the therapeutic alliance.[xvi] Here is the beginning of a fragment which is part of an episode of rupture. The client wants to quit the therapy. The therapist says:


1    T1: "...I would have to be honest to tell you that, **in this jo::b(.) we**

2        **sometimes see** with a certain frequency that, when somebody

3        feels better, just like **in medicine when one** feels better one says it's

4        ENOUGH, so to speak, right?..." bu::t but to me this not me::e:: I believe

5        tha::t you are reproducing a mechanism of yours ok?(.) to be actually

6        working and suddenly ok? You say (finger snap) I quit!!

(Martinez et al, 2012, p.111, without category indicators; **bold** by the authors, underlined mcb, line numbering mcb)

Following Martinez et al, in line 1 the therapist first uses a deontic modality: " I would have to be" and a modalizer "to be honest": the therapist positions thereby himself as "a trustful person that speak from a 'must be'" (p. 112).[xvii] That the must-be is for me already the indication of an instance enacted by "the job" and "we": I think we see and hear the *professional genre* speaking, the transpersonal instance of Clot (2008) and Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011). This seems to be confirmed by the authors' analysis: in line 1 and 3 (**bold**) the therapist brings in "a third party" that comes from outside the actual relationship: "this job", "in medicine", and that has a generic form: "we", to which the indefinite words "somebody" and "sometimes" also belong: so he speaks here of very general occurrences, to which the client is an instantiation: as a result, the relation between Th and Cl *broadens*, they become more distant to each other: the therapist shifts his position from the here-and-now particular Th to a representative of the third "the job", which is psychotherapy.[xviii] The Th positions his client by saying: "**we sometimes see with a certain frequency that, when somebody feels better**". After that performance of the institutional position, the Th goes on to enact the "general client's" voice: "it's ENOUGH"[xix], returning then to his own voice, so the distance between Th and Cl is reduced to their usual one. Now the Th utters the core of his statement: the reason to not quit. His final argument is again the performance of a voice: that of his client,

accompanied by the finger snapping which is iconic of the "suddenly": "(finger snap) I quit!!". So, we have here an impressive shift between voicings in one person[xx] which is also *a shift between kinds of performances, invoking different communities of language practice* with their common history and language forms (Clot's work communities) .[xxi]

I take my second illustration from De Fina's transcripts, an extract of an interview with a Salvadoran women (Francisca), focused on her experience with learning English when she first arrived from El Salvador. F's narration is about the different ethnic groups at the school she was attending, and the problems she experienced. The core of the interview is a story:

De Fina (2013), S. 49-51 (mcb: line numbering, interlinear arrangement, and alignment of English to Spanish lines, and **bold**):


1  A: tu te acuerdas de algo que en ese periodo alguna cosa específica que te haya pasado?

   A: *do you remember something that in this period anything specific that happened to you?*

2  F: oh si, si me me (h) me: uh-

   F: *oh yes, yes I (h) I uh-*

3     la primera palabra que que yo aprendí acá era **stink**,

      *the first word that I learned here was **stink**,*

4  A: stink.

   A: *stink.*

5  F: porque una **una niña** de- una afro nina afro americana estábamos en el

   F: *because a girl **a girl** from- an African American girl we were in the*

6     baño y yo estaba lavándome las manos y estaba s fleche ola,

      *bathroom, and I was washing my hands and I was alone,*

7     y **sí me agredieron y me dijeron "You stink"**,

      *and **they did attack me and they told me "You stink"**,*

8     y entonces yo me quedé con eso en la en la en la m<u>e</u>nte,

      *and so I stayed with this in the in the in my mInd,*

9     y cuando yo le fui a preguntar a una amiga que hablaba un poquito más de

      *and when I went to ask a friend of mine who spoke a little bit of*

10    inglés,

      *English*

11    y me dijo **"oh eso quiere decir que tienes mal olor que tu que tu hiedes o**

      *and she told me **"oh that means that you have a bad smell that you**

| 12 | **algo así" hhh** |
| --- | --- |
| | *smell bad or something like that", [hhh]* |
| 13 | entonces y eso fu(h)e la primera palabra que yo aprendí, |
| | *so and that wa(h)s the first word that I learned,* |
| 14 | y entonces ya pus uno se empieza como a intimidar más también quizás, |
| | *and so then one starts to become more intimidates as well may be,* |
| 15 | porque **prácticamente yo no les estaba haciendo nada**, [...] |
| | *because **practically I was doing nothing to [them]² [...]*** |

De Fina's analysis at level 3 uses only some introductory utterances by Francisca, that reproduce the dominant views about hierarchies among ethnic groups by the order of their naming: Whites-Asians-Blacks-Latinos. De Fina also points to the shift from singular to plural: "a girl" and "they", (l. 5 + 7), but without further explanation. I would like to look at this shift, which is indeed remarkable, together with the voices enacted at lines 3, 7, 11-12.

In my reading, the shift to the plural is due to a shift from a particular person to an instance, namely to the third or dominant Discourse, that considers that ethnic groups on a lower level then the speaker stink, and that "one" (!) can, or even should, say the words "You stink!" when addressing a member of that group: this is the accepted, *specifically embodied wording.* So, I would say that F is shifting because she perceives that something more than the particular girl facing her is attacking her: a racist discourse – again invoked at the end by the pronoun "them" (l. 15).[xxii] Further, there is this "more advanced" friend speaking, voiced by F in line 11-12.[xxiii]

So, "you stink" has a history *within* the narration: it was said to F in the story, explained to her by a friend, and re-invoked as paradigm of her English learning for the interviewer: This language form travels from speaker to speaker, changing its status: as *tag of the dominant Discourse*, as the *subject of a metalinguistic dialogue*[xxiv], and as *abbreviation of F.'s start in the US*. From the "tag of the dominant Discourse" interpretation we could infer that it has a longer history: it came "from the top", and traveled "down" through all verbal aggressions persons suffer from and do to another person (+ body aggressions).[xxv] Hence, the attack F. endured was an attack perpetrated by the girl as representative of the third – which is not an excuse, but may contribute to clarify how structural violence also works.

---

2   In the original: „her", but Spanish „les" is plural, so I corrected to „them". The laugh particle in line 12 are not reproduced in the translation by De Fina (2013).

I will conclude my illustrations with an example from my research group.[xxvi] We work with video-confrontation, where the researcher and her subject watch together an activity that subject did before and which was videotaped. The dialogues that take place during the video-confrontation are investigated.

Tures' (2014) investigation is located in the field of education, she works with students of early pedagogy. The students videotaped their language activities with children at a day care center, these videos are then used in a video-confrontation session with the teacher. Here is an example of such a video-stimulated reflection. D = trainer + lecturer of Do = Doris, student (*italics* at l. 11-14: perceivable change in voicing; **bold:** mcb)

1    D    (nickend) mhm mhm
*(nodding) uh uh*

2        (blickt auf Bildschirm) und sie hatten ja auch in der ersten
*(looks at the screen) and you actually said in the first*

3        videoreflektion auch gesagt
*video reflection*

4        (blickt zu Do) dass das kind ja so im alltag auch anders wahrgenommen wird
*(looks at Do) that the child is perceived differently in daily routine*

5    Do   hmm (blickt zu D, nickt)
*uh-uh (looks at D, nods)*

6    D    als eben sprachlich nicht dass es sich nicht so äußert
*precisely not for her language, that she is not expressing herself very much*

7    D    (nickt)
*(nods)*

8    D    habe ich das noch richtig in erinnerung (langt sich ans Kinn)
*do I remember that correctly (touches her chin)*

9    Do   genau (nickt)
*exactly (nods)*

10       (blickt zu D) also sie wird als
*(looks at D) so she is [perceived] as*

11       ***ja sie kommuniziert gar nicht im kindergarten (.)***
***well, she doesn't communicate at all at the kindergarden***

12       ***weder mit anderen kindern***
***neither with other children***

| 13 | | *sie beobachtet nur* |
| | | *she only observes* |
| 14 | | *und spricht eigentlich nicht* |
| | | *and doesn't really talk* |
| 15 | D | hmm (greift sich an den Hals) |
| | | *uhu (touches her throat)* |
| 16 | Do | (blickt nach unten) **und die erzieherinnen sind der meinung** |
| | | *(looks downwards) **and the teachers have the opinion*** |
| 17 | D | (wendet sich von Do ab und schreibt) |
| | | *(turns away from Do and writes)* |
| 18 | Do | (blickt wieder zu D) **dass sie <u>keine ganzen sätze sprechen kann</u>** |
| | | *(looks to D again) that she **<u>is not able to speak in complete sentences</u>*** |
| 19 | D | mhm //(beginnt leicht zu lächeln//, blickt auf zu Do) |
| | | *uhu //(starts to smile//, looks to Do)* |
| 20 | Do | (blickt wieder zu D) **dass sie <u>keine ganzen sätze sprechen kann</u>** |
| | | *(looks to D again) that she **<u>is not able to speak in complete sentences</u>*** |
| 21 | **D** | **mhm //(beginnt leicht zu lächeln)//,** |
| | | uhu *(starts to smile)//,* |
| 22 | **Do** | **//(beginnt zu lächeln)// und** |
| | | *//(starts to smile)// and* |
| 23 | **D** | **(//blickt auf zu Do//.)** |
| | | *(looks up to Do//.)* |
| 24 | **Do** | **//dann// denke ich immer** |
| | | // then I always think |
| 25 | | **/(lacht)// sie kommt rein wow** |
| | | //(laughs)// she comes in wow |
| 26 | **D** | **//(lacht)//** |
| | | //(laughs)// |
| 27 | **Do** | **und sie fängt an mit einem kompletten satz gleich mal (schwungvolle, wegwischende Geste mit Arm) und ja (Schulter zucken)** |
| | | *and she starts right away with a complete sentence (swinging, wiping away gesture with the arm) and yes (shrug of the shoulders)* |

Here, we have the clash of two different thirds, each with a certain opinion about children's correct speech. The first one pertains to the culture of practice at day care centers, the second one belongs to the university culture of research and teaching – the student travels between theses cultural and language spaces (and has to act rightly for each). Both thirds have their preferred language forms. Their clash is manifested in how a specific child is categorized and perceived, both stances are enacted by the student.[xxvii] The culture of practice is voiced by Do in line 11-14: she shifts in voice quality. She enacts the team of teachers, who themselves are *representatives of the third* of their community. Its core dogma is uttered twice, in an almost identical repetition at lines 18 and 20: it is just said, not voiced by a marked shift; it is a well-known formula in Germany, said to children by teachers "Sprich in ganzen Sätzen!" ("Speak in complete sentences!") with a specific intonation, and transmitted through generations of teachers and also parents.[xxviii]

The dogma is finally transposed into an embodied, freeing gesture at the end (l. 27), the child is put on the scene (beginning with l. 25), the evaluative "wow" announces a positive surprise, or the entry of a star, and then Do enacts what the child does bodily: wiping away the critical third – hence giving way to the alternative one.

## 2. 3 Third: Sharpening the Notion

What I put together with these illustrations are some slight traces of an instance which is *not* a person, but has a central part in the positional and polyphonic dynamics of the dialogical selves' language activities. With the language-as-medium perspective, I will try to sharpen the notion as I understand it.

Marková (2006) addresses very similarly a specific kind of third party as an "inside feature of dialogue", one of the core topics of dialogical and dialogue studies, having a long past already, Bakhtin (1986) is of course one of the main figures here. Marková describes that third as "traditions, institutions, friends and colleagues, political parties and so on, who speak through dialogical participants. Speakers may explicitly or implicitly refer to those who are not physically present in dialogue […] conversation is conceived as being penetrated by a number of visible or less visible *Alter* who communicate through the mouth of speakers" (p. 133). I feel very near to that description, but I think that the aspect of "speaking through" has to be differentiated, it is a crucial point: what kind of relation do speakers-listeners have to the third? And thus also: what kind of status does the third have?

Firstly, I would like to highlight the specific character of the third as I understand it:

it is *languaged* (*sprachlich*), so it is not a list of particular persons and social institutions: not an *Alter* (it is upstream to these). Secondly, the third I mean is not simply "referred to" or "expressed". What is at stake is a *presence here-and-now*, not an invocation of a pre-given, but an in-vocation giving the third a voice, and that is: giving oneself a voice, *that* "kind of voice". It is a *living-through*: think of the water the fish do by their very swimming (medium-ness).

So, this is the kind of presence I am at, *a presence the subjects are within*, at the same time doing it. That presence transforms the Me-You-dyad and the Me-You-Third Parties-triad into Me-You-Others-within-the-Third. Being "within", the subjects' "doing" shows that particular quality: it is active-passive.[xxix] Further, the third which is present as performed in language activity is *not sheer dynamics*, rather it is forms[xxx] – hence, the third exists as plurality: this is why we can speak of different third<u>S</u>.

I am interested in *the specific languaging of thirds* as it is enacted either in verbal forms, or in voicings, or both – saying: "this is how one/we *say* that and *listen* to it", and this has a particular *sound.* As Georgaca (2012), I would like to observe how a third is "actively played out and pursued in the minutiae of the [...] exchange" (p. 167) – played out in *language activity*. The thirds I am looking for are *communities of professional speakers-listeners[xxxi]:* The *connoisseurs* in such communities are those who are allowed *to particularly represent the third[xxxii]*, to speak or listen and evaluate as its representative. Speakers-listeners are *at the same time* these biographically unique selves and representatives of their common Third. And this is precisely how language as medium comes to be present.[xxxiii]

I follow the same idea as Grossen and Salazar Orvig looking for a level "before" the abstract. So, the third that I conceive *is bound to a community*, it is present, and at the same time transgressing the very Now and the very Individual. I think this is possible because of the objectifying power of symbolic language.

## 3 Excentric Selves: A Glimpse into Plessner's Anthropology
### 3.1 A Different Anthropology
This is a glimpse into Plessner's philosophical anthropology, a framework I myself just started to study, because I think it offers a fruitful base for the conception of the modern subject – or person, in Plessner's term. This base could permit to refine the core concepts needed for a non-Cartesian subject.

Helmuth Plessner (1892-1985) was a German philosopher and sociologist – under the Nazi's regime he was forced to flee and stayed from 1934 until 1943 in Groningen, then went into hiding in Utrecht and Amsterdam until the end of the war.

Plessner's philosophical anthropology is *different* from usual anthropology to several respects.

One of these is that Plessner's study of the human being is *not* a study of the members of a biological species, but the study of "corporeal personhood."[xxxiv] *All* human beings count as persons, a human being *is* a person: this hints to a specific break of modern politics vis-à-vis feudalism: In pre-modern times, not all human beings counted as persons (e.g. slaves, women) the person status was granted by some pre-ordered instance (God, the King, Nature). For this reason, Schürmann (2014) calls Plessner's philosophy "a philosophy of modernity, because it is a philosophy of the public", where "the public [is a ] space of shelter".[xxxv]

For Plessner, persons *are* beings of nature, meaning: 1) that they are more then cultural beings, 2) that they are grounded, not celestial beings – they are grounded in their modernism, which does not involve a pre-ordered instance that grants their personhood.[xxxvi]

### 3.2 Excentric Positionality

The basic phenomenal situation of human beings is formulated by Plessner in the following way.[xxxvii] On the one hand, we perceive ourselves from without, as if standing beside ourselves, moving through a scenery. On the other hand, we are able to relate and focus everything that we encounter to the position of our body-ness (*Leiblichkeit*), from where we express and act and wherein we experience (*erleben*): we can completely merge into that focus, so it is as if the possibility of realizing that we *are* also able to see ourselves from another point of view has disappeared. This is where *excentricity* dissolves into *recentricity*: the relationship between the two forms of centricity is for Plessner formulated as the problem of the limit (*Grenzproblem*).

The term "limit" is a core one: it distinguishes anorganic from organic, living beings:

Whereas anorganic bodies only have a boundary (*Rand*), more or less their ending, living beings have a limit (*Grenze*) which they "manage", or "cultivate", by themselves[xxxviii]: this very specific relationship of living beings to their limit is for Plessner "positionality". Living systems thus take a position, *at the same time* they are set (*gesetzt*), that is, they do not owe their existence to themselves: hence positionality is not an active setting, but being-set: positionality has a passive dimension, which lays the ground for any I-construction or We-construction: it can precisely not be set by an I or a We.[xxxix]

So, persons not only *live and experience* (*leben + erleben*), they *experience their own experience* (*Erleben erleben*): there happens a turning point, a transition (*Umschlag*) from being in one's body-ness to being outside one's body-ness: this is the irreducible dual aspect of human beings' existence, it is a true break with their nature – and, as said, human beings live on this as well as the other side of the break (Plessner, 1982, p.10).[xl]

In Plessner's understanding, it is a third that permits and enables the distinction: this third is the *co-world* (*Mitwelt*).[xli] The Third is *not* an own, powerful sphere where unity is effected, it is not the "reconciliatory third" – rather: it is the break, the rupture itself, the "empty crossing" mediating the dual aspect.[xlii] Human beings, persons, *realize* their own limit, they are able to *perform the passage, simultaneously keeping the sides,* hence realizing a paradox: being themselves and not being themselves, and a tautology: being themselves and staying with that beingness. [xliii]


From these relationships, Plessner derives a threefold positionality, saying that the person is 1) the body, 2) within the body (internal life of the soul), and 3) outside the body as a point of gaze (*ein Blickpunkt*), from where *it is* 1) and 2). Hence, there is the outside world (*Außenwelt*), the inside world (*Innenwelt*), and the co-world (*Mitwelt*).

The co-world does not surround the person (as nature does), nor does it fill the person (as the inner world does), rather, it *supports* the person by *being simultaneously supported and formed* by her.[xliv]

The notion of the co-world does *not* start with the "I", on the contrary: the self-reflecting self is an experience that is *bound to the existence of other selves*, the self experiences herself as self *and equally as* member of the co-world. The relationship to oneself and to the outside world is mediated and constituted by the co-world.[xlv]


### 3.3 A Reading

I think you have heard some of the central motifs I advocated for: the passive-active dimension, the necessity of other selves to be a self, the importance of the body, and also the idea of a movement, here as passage as turning point and break. I would like to propose the following reading.

The break that is given with to the dual movement excentric-centric, could be: language as *energeia,* an activity, a movement, which gives the passage between excentric and centric positionality a dynamic form. This is due to the specific character of the language sign to be reversible. That means: We can direct language to ourself: so reflection is a movement that leads to oneself *via Alter and language*, it is therefore a socially lived languaged contact to others.[xlvi]

Further, I take the "point of gaze", where from the person is the body and within the body, also as a point of listening – I depart from the *visual* metaphor and take the point as a point of *listening*-gazing: this could be the co-world as witness, who enables by its gazing-listening to turn away and to return (ex- and recentering movement). It enables the *stability within the paradox and the tautology of being self*: not being self – staying self.

But what struck me deeply is Plessner's description of the co-world: "it *supports* the person by *being simultaneously supported and formed* by her" – this rejects the pre-given power, and a controlling, wonderful I as constructor. There is a relationship at stake, which is for me very much an echo of the medium as I described it at the beginning of my talk: language is a deeply socio-cultural, historical artifact, a construct *we did and constantly do by our very "swimming", i.e. languageing*. In my reading then: the co-world needs a formation for its supporting and being supported: this could happen in language-*energeia*.

## 4 Conclusion[3]

### 1: Public Self

To be a public self is to be in excentric-centric movements, bound to the body, experiencing a self mediated by the co-world. Language *as language of others*, and *as language beyond instrumentality – energeia –* is necessary to that movement.

### 2: Polis

I could well use Clot's *professional genre* as given by Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011) for what I call (with the Greek word for the city-state) "polis" – that community of speaker-listeners performing specific language practices.

Original:

"A professional genre is a set of activities that has a *history* in *a certain work community* […] and forms a repertoire of expected actions. It frames each individual's professional practices and is transpersonal because the workers *recognize it* as a collective property with socially shared values.

---

3   In the given talk the conclusion included the core statement #1 and two pictures symbolizing the meso social, which are not rendered here. Instead of the pictures I offer – complementing #1 – the conversion of Clot's (2008) definition of a professional genre (as given in 2.1 following Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011) into the definition of a polis as community of speaker-listeners – which I could *not* give in the talk for reasons of time constraint.

[It] has a *psychological function* in a worker's activity: by regulating his or her activity within a wider professional field, a professional genre links him or her to a community of workers and acts as psychological resource" (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011, p. 498, italics mcb).


Conversion:

 (my replacements and additions underscored):

The polis frames each self's language practices and is transpersonal because the speakers-listeners recognize it as a collective property with socially and pragmatically shared values. They recognize it through their specific doing-living, thereby making it present as this polis. They are not just acknowledging and expressing it, they are per-forming it now as *in situ* formation. A polis has a psychological function in the activity of the speakers-listeners: by witnessing this activity, it regulates his or her individual and social language activity within a wider professional field of "language connoisseurs", a polis that links him or her to a community of speakers-listeners and acts as psycho-social resource.[xlvii]

**5 References**

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genre and other late essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bertau, M.-C. (2014, in press-a). Sprache: öffentliche Praxis im Medium des Dritten. In J. Volbers, Th. Alkemeyer & V. Schürmann (Eds.), *Praxis. Konzepte und Kritik*. München: Wilhelm Fink.

Bertau, M.-C. (2014, in press-b). The need for a dialogical science. In A. Yasnitsky, R. Van der Veer & M. Ferrari (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural-historical theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bertau, M.-C. (2013). Voices of others unto the self, voices of others in the self. Polyphony as means and resource for constructing and reconstructing social reality. In A. Liégeois, J. Corveleyn, M. Riemslagh & R. Burggraeve (Eds.), '*After You !' Dialogical ethics and the pastoral counselling process* (pp. 37-65). Leuven – Dudley (MA): Academic Publisher Peeters.

Bertau, M-C. (2011). Language for the other: Constructing cultural-historical psycholinguistics. *Tätigkeitstheorie: E-Journal for Activity Theoretical Research in Germany, 5,* 13-44.

Clot, Y. (2008). *Travail et pouvoir d'agir*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

De Fina, A. (2013). Positioning level 3. Connecting local identity displays to macro social processes. *Narrative Inquiry, 23*(1), 40–61. DOI 10.1075/ni.23.1.03de

Friedrich, J. (1993). *Der Gehalt der Sprachform. Paradigmen von Bachtin bis Vygotskij*. Berlin: Akademie.

Gadamer, H.-G. (1986). *Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen, Register*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr. [Hermeneutics II, Truth and method]

Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. London, New York: Routledge

Gerhardt, V. (2003). Die rationale Wendung im Leben. Helmuth Plessner: »Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch«. In H. Joas (Ed.), *Kunst, Macht und Institution. Studien zur Philosophischen Anthropologie, soziologischen Theorie und Kultursoziologie der Moderne. Festschrift für Karl-Siegbert Rehberg* (pp. 35-40). Frankfurt/Main, New York: Campus.

Georgaca , E. (2012) The essential elements of dialogically-based research on psychotherapy: a proposal (commentary). *International Journal for Dialogical Science , 6*(1), 161-171.

Grossen, M. & Salazar Orvig, A. (2011). Dialogism and dialogicality in the study of the self . *Culture Psychology17*(4), 491 -509.

Humboldt, W. von (1827/1994). Ueber den Dualis. In W. Von Humboldt, *Über die Sprache. Reden vor der Akademie*. Ed. by J. Trabant. Tübingen and Basel: Francke.

Humboldt, W. von (1999). *On Language: On the diversity of human language construction and its influence on the mental development of the human species.* Ed. by M. Lonsonsky, transl. by P. Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Partly online: http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/vhumboldt-wilhelm.htm]

Karsten, A. (2014). *Schreiben im Blick. Schriftliche Formen der sprachlichen Tätigkeit aus dialogischer Perspektive*. Berlin: Lehmanns Media.

Krüger, H.-P. (2006). Die Antwortlichkeit in der exzentrischen Positionalität. Die Drittheit, das Dritte und die dritte Person als philosophische Minima. In H.-P. Krüger & G. Lindemann (Eds.), *Philosophische Anthropologie im 21. Jahrhundert* (pp. 164-183). Berlin: Akademie.

Lindemann, G. (2011). Der menschliche Leib von der Mitwelt her gedacht. *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie, 59*(4), 591-603.

Marková, I. (2006). On the "inner alter" in dialogue. *International Journal for Dialogical Science, 1*(1), 125-147.

Martinez, C., Tomicic, A. & Medina, L. (2012). Dialogic discourse analysis of psychotherapeutic dialogue: microanalysis of relevant psychotherapeutic episodes. *International Journal for Dialogical Science , 6*(1), 99-121.

Moore, H., Jasper, C. & Gillespie , A. (2011). Moving between frames: The basis of the stable and dialogical self. *Culture & Psychology, 17*(4), 510 -519.

Plessner, H. (1982). Der Mensch als Lebewesen. In H. Plessner, *Mit anderen Augen. Aspekte einer philosophischen Anthropologie* (pp. 9-62). Stuttgart: Reclam.

Salgado, J. & Hermans, H. J. M. (2005). The return of subjectivity: from a multiplicity of selves to the dialogical self. *E-Journal of Applied Psychology: Clinical section. 1*(1), 3-13.

Schürmann, V. (2014). *Souveränität als Lebensform. Plessners urbane Philosophie der Moderne*. München: Wilhelm Fink.

Schürmann, . (2011). *Die Unergründlichkeit des Lebens. Lebens-Politik zwischen Biomacht und Kulturkritik*. Bielefeld: transcript.

Schürmann, V. (2008). Prozess und Tätigkeit. Zur Spezifik der Tätigkeitstheorie. *Behindertenpädagogik 47(*1), 21-30.

Schürmann, V. (2006). Positionierte Exzentrizität. In H.-P. Krüger & G. Lindemann (Eds.), *Philosophische Anthropologie im 21. Jahrhundert* (pp. 83-102). Berlin: Akademie.

Tannen, D. (1989). *Talking voices. Repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversatioal discourse.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tures, A. S. (2014). *Im Dialog mit jungen Kindern. Einblicke in die Professionalisierungsprozesse von Frühpädagogikstudierenden – eine interdisziplinäre und multimethodische Studie.* PhD thesis, LMU, München, June 2014.

Vygotskij, L.S. (1931/1992). *Geschichte der höheren psychischen Funktionen* [History of higher psychological functions]. Edited by A. Métraux, transl. by R. Kämper. Hamburg: Lit.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1930/1997). The instrumental method in psychology. In R. W. Rieber, J. Wollock (Eds.), *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky, Volume 3, Problems of the theory and history of psychology* (pp. 85-89). New York and London: Plenum.

Wallace, D. F. (2012). *Das hier ist Wasser / This Is Water*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.

i   Feuerbach, Leont'ev, see Schürmann (2008).

ii  See Bertau (2011): "Vygotsky developed the idea of the psychological tool in the years 1927-1929, leading […] to the account of the development of higher psychological functions from lower ones through the mediation of psychological tools (Vygotsky 1930/ 1997; Vygotskij 1931/ 1992). The mediational process itself was thus Vygotsky's first interest, not yet the means of this process. […] Self-regulation is thus in the first instance conceived as self-control, and control is mastering others and oneself, and language is the master's tool. […] Vygotsky formulates self-control differently from the 1930s on. This crystallizes in giving up the tool metaphor for language, and it coincides with Vygotsky's increasing interest for the means of mediation, for the 'meaning volume' of the word. Vygotsky realized that the psychological tool, i.e. the word, has an inner side, leading him to the basic assumption of the developing relationship between a sign and its meaning. " (pp. 23-24).
I think that the most crucial point in this turn to the dynamics of language itself is the *non-coincidence* between the psychological and the grammatical plane: "Lack of correspondence means that what is said (i.e. expressed in grammatical categories) does not necessarily correspond to what is meant [on a psychological plane/psychologically]. " (Bertau, 2014 in press-b)
Furthermore, the form dimension is urgently needed to complete that dynamics: Vološinov is here the one to invoke: the form relates to the social, non-verbal. It has an important part in the intricate dynamics between word and thought: not vesting the meaning, having its *own value* (Friedrich, 1993).

iii Especially by articulating Vygotsky and Vološinov with each other.

iv  Forms a beginning, an end, and a specificity in terms of sounds, rhythms, positionings, tempi, tensions.

v   These are the first, famous words of David Foster Wallace, given at a commencement speech in 2005, at Kennyon College, Ohio. Cited following D. F. Wallace, 2012, p. 39.

vi  Not only given, but kept, not lost, not given up. By the couple *ergon-energeia* Humboldt links himself to the notion Aristotle formed in order to grasp a very specific kind of activity in his discussion of the problem of becoming and change: it is an intense, present and dynamic form of reality (see Bertau, 2014 in press-a).

vii  The mid-level is necessary also in order to "find *a balance* between a recognition of the relative freedom of positioning that individuals have in interaction and the appreciation of processes of 'enregisterment'" (p. 43, italics mcb). So, there is also freedom and constraint to relate.

viii Grossen & Salazar Orvig (2011) name also "material aspects": even more stable and concrete forms for the self.

ix  Bamberg's (1997) dominant discourse seems to be of a larger grain size, nevertheless it points to specific discursive realities within a society.

x   Third parties as additional others: Linell, 2009, p. 103, also p. 95.

xi  See Linell, 2009, pp. 95-105.
"Potential audiences": these are the "invisible third party" of Salgado and Hermans (2005), forming a triangle: I – Other – ThirdParty: where the personal meanings of I and Other are negotiated. In this description, I miss *form*, only the level of meaning is addressed; furthermore, it is not the third party as such that mediates, but language-as-activity: in plural forms pertaining to different poleis. So, it is not the audience as such which is important, but the fact that the audience *is languaging*. In the authors' notion of subjectivity, the voice is seen as a *tool* "by which the I establishes a specific relationship with another", at the same time, the person is subjectively instituted, so that subjectivity becomes "a relational or dialogical production": yes, but "voice" is a languaging body, and language as the objectifying Third instance is missing. (see Salgado & Hermans, 2005, p. 11)

xii See Linell, 2009, p. 95. It is interesting to observe how different languages articulate the Sociocultural not only through personal pronouns, but also reflexive pronouns: French: "ça ne **se** fait pas!", Italian: "non **si** fare!", but German "das sagt **man** nicht!"

xiii Here, Georgaca (2012) points to the necessity for any analysis of psychotherapy to "be attentive to the ways in which the institutionally prescribed role of the therapist is enacted in the therapeutic exchange" (p. 166). I completely agree.

xiv I would add: he validates the new position *as new, as right* in line with the agenda they both have, namely a specific development of the client.

xv  The prerequisite to this is that both accept the agenda (the client's/child's/pupil's/apprentice's development in a certain sense).

xvi In two such episodes Martinez et al observe that "the therapist tend to involve a *third party* [...] to give *objectivity* to the relationship" (p. 111, italics mcb)

xvii I add here: that "must be" serves to linder the face-threatening-act that the therapist is going to enact: "you are reproducing a mechanism of yours". Note how many hedges this utterance gets: e.g. the lengthening in "not me::e:: " l.4, the tag questions and pauses in l.5: "ok?(.) and l.6: "ok?".

xviii The meaning of this professional instance is even consolidated by the comparison "just like in medicine": medicine is still much more valuated than psychotherapy. (We can assume that through the this invocation, the distance between Th and Cl. is even more broadened.)

xix Again with two hedges: so to speak and tag question: gain acceptance and understanding. I see that voice as the particular client's voice, Th enacts a reported speech as summary of what is essentially said by the client (see Tannen, 1989, p. 113: "summarizing dialogue").

xx  These are: the institutional third = enacted linguistically – to the general client = v1; the Th = v2 to his actual client = v3; the actual client to his therapist = v4.

xxi The community of psychotherapists and doctors (accompanying healing processes, with their agenda); the community of the therapist's colleagues, the community of those speaking with that kind of finger snapping. The community of those often speaking with reported voices. And the very small community of Th-Cl: their history. But it is always MORE: they have language forms.

The Th could have said: "look, the other day when you felt better, it was the beginning of a new vision on your work, remember? You said Oh my Go::d, it feels so easy to go there now, I have a light feeling inside my belly!" With these forms, the Th would have done something else, he would have performed a different self in relation to his client's self, who is differently positioned and experienced. But what the Th does here, is to speak as the third, with the third. My point is not the rhetorical effect of the form, it is its formative effect for selves, its dynamics for the selves who are always subjected to the language per-forms.

xxii One could say that F. shifts for rhetoric purpose, e.g. to amplify her story, make it more dramatic, but I think she would have marked this in a more hearable way, the pronouns and verb forms are quite a discrete means, and do not seem to be.

xxiii The friend is more advanced in English and also with respect to hierarchical level: I infer this from the laugh particles, which could display a non-empathic position with F in the story. For this, I assume that the laugh particles belong possibly to that voice and not to F-the narrator.

xxiv This metalinguistic discourse is focused on its situational meaning ("**you** have a bad smell").

xxv I think that it originates in the white Discourse saying that all Non-Whites are uncivilized, i.e. not washed savages, and therefore stink.

xxvi See the detailed studies by Karsten (2014) and Tures (2014).

xxvii Whose evaluative positioning of herself vis-à-vis these thirds is encouraged, or co-positioned by D (e.g. the smile episode). I see D and Do acting as accomplices, constructing their positioning as a counter-position to the "wrong third", hence themselves belonging to the right one: they recognize each other. See Gee's (1999) term the "real Indian" as paradigm for the members of communities who recognize each other as "real member"; certain procedures are necessary to test if someone belongs to someone's own third or not; and to which degree that person is nevertheless acceptable.

xxviii That stance is no more taken by professionals in research and teaching at universities.

xxix Or: receptive-active (*empfangend-aktiv*)

xxx It is form as formations, meaning a dynamics made *certain*. This is exactly the relationship between *dynamis* and *energeia*. See Bertau (2014 in press-a).

xxxi The professionals admit novices, educate them how to speak-and-listen-and-voice correctly (writing-reading).

xxxii Specific status of connoisseurs.

xxxiii Thus, the third as I understand it is not an *Alter,* because no self could take its position, it can only be re-presented.

xxxiv "*leibhaftige Personalität*", Schürmann, 2014, p. 16

xxxv Schürmann, 2014, p. 11: "Schutzraum": the *citoyens* (citizens) let each live, but are not indifferent to each other. Their relationships are indirect: against the "cult of community": urban society – a *style* (Sainte-Beuve).

xxxvi See Schürmann, 2014, p.16-17: "Dass Personen, anthropologisch gesehen, Naturwesen sind, ist also das Credo, und dabei muss man zweierlei mithören: Sie sind i) mehr als bloß Kulturwesen, und sie sind ii) irdische, und nicht himmlische, geerdete, und nicht ätherische Wesen."

"More than cultural beings" means: human beings are embedded in a more extensive nature than they themselves are. The specificity of activity-passivity is related hereto: "der Lebens*vollzug* erweist sich […] als eigentümliche Mitte von Aktivität und Passivität" [the *carrying out* of life proves itself as peculiar middle between activity and passivity] (Schürmann, 2011, p. 192). For this reason, personhood is a crucial point of discussion: coma patients, clones etc.: the fragility of personhood is exactly due to the fact that there is no "given rule", no instance to free us from discussing and deciding – the outcomes could be wrong. This is what became clear with the civic revolution (*bürgerliche Revolution*).

A further point is worth mentioning: Plessner's philosophy is "sovereign", because it knows its own conditionality, it does not hold the own philosophy as the proper and real one – so it is thinking with a standpoint, see Schürmann, 2014, p. 25. It is to be aware of one's own "coordinate system". This means not the least a rejection of analytical philosophy, that does not acknowledge that a scale of validity is never given, but a "free layout" (*freier Entwurf*) (Schürmann, 2006, p. 86).

xxxvii I follow Krüger (2006).

xxxviii These are Gerhardt's words: "Während anorganische Körper lediglich einen Rand haben, an dem sie mehr oder weniger zu Ende sind, haben Lebewesen eine von ihnen selbst bewirtschaftete Grenze" (2003, p. 39), found in Schürmann, 2011, p. 192.

xxxix See Schürmann, 2011, pp. 192-193.

xl To experience the own experience is to become aware of one's self, to experience oneself (*sich erleben*). Following Plessner, the animal lives (also) from a center and into a center, but it does not live *as* center, so its own being-a-self remains hidden to the animal. Although the animal forms a self, it does not experience its self ("aber es erlebt nicht – sich"), see Plessner, 1982, p. 9.

xli The point is here, that this co-world would be of no help if only on this or that side of the limit, it could not permit *the passage – the movement*. See Krüger, 2006, pp. 166-167.

xlii Plessner, 1982 p. 11: "das leere Hindurch der Vermittlung". Human beings live as body (1), as soul (2), and (3) as the psychophysic neutral unity of these spheres.

xliii Krüger, 2006, p. 170.

xliv Plessner, 1982, p. 14: "Die Mitwelt *trägt* die Person, indem sie zugleich von ihr getragen und gebildet wird."

xlv See Lindemann, 2011, p. 596-597.

xlvi Generally: Self has a contact to herself, Self *is* a self to herself via *Alter* in the medium of language as *energeia*. See Bertau (2014 in press-a).

xlvii The resource lies particularly in polyphony, see Bertau (2013).