

[Alex Gillespie](#)

Supplementarity & Surplus: Moving Between The Dimensions Of Otherness

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1

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Running head: MOVING BETWEEN THE DIMENSIONS OF OTHERNESS

Supplementarity & Surplus: Moving Between The Dimensions Of Otherness

Alex T Gillespie

University of Cambridge, UK

ag272@cam.ac.uk

Abstract

This commentary starts by attempting to clarify the ways in which Coelho Junior and Figueiredo (2003) use the logic of supplementarity to conceptualise the discourses on intersubjectivity in terms of four dimensions of otherness. A new domain of application is proposed and the limits of the approach are pointed to. In the second section I critically examine the extent to which these four dimensions, and the movements of supplementarity between them, adequately capture the theories of intersubjectivity. The use of these dimensions seems, on the one hand, to obfuscate several interesting contradictions between the theoretical approaches within the dimensions, and on the other hand, to artificially dualise the theoretical traditions between the four dimensions. In the final section, Mead's account of intersubjectivity, and the constitution of subjectivity, is presented, and developed, as operating in the spaces between the proposed dimensions of otherness.

Keywords: supplementarity, intersubjectivity, subjectivity, G H Mead, E Levinas

Supplementarity & Surplus: Moving Between the Dimensions Of Otherness

Coelho Junior and Figueiredo (2003), in their thoroughly broad ranging paper, advance the provocative, metatheoretical, position that there are four dimensions of intersubjectivity, each of which plays a part in the constitution of subjectivity, and that they are incommensurable with each other. These dimensions are four theoretically driven perspectives each bringing a different dimension of intersubjectivity, and otherness, to the fore. They take us beyond the idea that one theory of intersubjectivity and the constitution of subjectivity is more adequate than another, or indeed that the question of intersubjectivity can be resolved. Instead, they point to how the weaknesses of one dimension are supplemented by the strengths of another. This non-foundational, or perspectivist approach, is, needless to say, qualitatively different from recent attempts to synthesise the same literature according to different, types of intersubjectivity (e.g. Crossley 1996), and as such makes a distinctive contribution.

The logic of supplementarity

There is, however, an ambiguity in Coelho Junior and Figueiredo's paper. What is the nature of these dimensions? There is a perpetual slippage between their uses of the words "dimension," "matrix" and even "pole." This is significant because sometimes the dimensions seem to indicate whole theoretical traditions, and at other times to indicate the poles of a binary opposition, each of which makes for quite a different interpretation of the paper.

If we treat the matrices as indicating whole theories, then the proposition is that each of the theories reviewed has a certain validity in relation to the question of how subjectivity is constituted, and that to address this question we can profit by learning to commute between

them, rather than searching for a synthesis. If this is the argument, then one might wonder why introduce a new nomenclature for theories that already have names?

The logic working between these matrices, Coelho Junior and Figueiredo write, is one of supplementarity. Derrida (1967/1974) develops the idea of supplementarity through his reading of Rousseau. Throughout Rousseau's texts, Derrida finds a hierarchical nature-culture binary opposition, in which nature is the privileged term and culture an unnatural supplement. This privilege carries into other areas so that speech is privileged over writing, and presentation over representation. Derrida pursues the notion of 'supplement,' and writes that, unlike the complement, "the supplement is *exterior* (...), alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it" (p.145). This allows Derrida to show that Rousseau's privileged term, nature, is in fact incomplete (because it is supplemented by culture), and thus depends upon the subordinated term, culture, for its completeness. For example, Rousseau privileges "natural" childrearing practices, and bemoans the use of nannies, but the very need for childrearing practices, which come from outside of nature, reveal nature's incompleteness. In the logic of supplementarity, the subordinated term in a binary opposition, that is exterior (not complementary) to the privileged term, returns and by reversing the hierarchy, replaces the privileged term.

Reading Coelho Junior and Figueiredo's paper through this lens, their project appears to be deconstruction with a happy ending. In their "final thoughts" they illustrate some of the movements of supplementation that they see at work among the four dimensions of otherness. Firstly they write that the interpersonal "forces" us to think of the intrapsychic. This suggests an interpersonal-intrapsychic opposition, where a privileging of either pole necessarily implies a return of the suppressed pole. They suggest that Mead privileges the interpersonal, and the psychoanalysts privilege the intrapsychic. Another opposition the authors point to is that between otherness and inclusion. Here, Levinas is placed on the otherness pole and the

other phenomenologists are placed on the inclusion pole. Again, the suggestion is that each is the counterpoint of the other. The logic of supplementarity is such that in both cases whichever way we state intersubjectivity, whichever poles of these binary opposites we privilege in our account, we find the account lacking and the subordinated term returns to unravel our construction. But Coelho Junior and Figueiredo's analysis is not nihilistic. They offer a happy ending, because, at each point of supplementation, where one theory collapses, there is conveniently a supplementary theory that we can commute to.

The deconstruction of our discourse into the movements of supplementarity between its constitutive binary pairs is powerful. It challenges the desire for foundations and synthesis. By introducing this logic, Coelho Junior and Figueiredo provides insights into why the literature on intersubjectivity has such little consensus. Our discourse has been trapped in a four-dimensional cage, and debates between these dimensions have been between false opposites. In what follows, I take up this provocative idea and try to articulate a further movement of supplementarity.

Many of the phenomenologists, in the trans-subjective dimension, privilege the pre-reflective; indeed there is nostalgia for it. The phenomenological method, which began with Descartes' doubt, and his retreat to the ego, perhaps inevitably would start to look behind the ego, seeking out its own preconditions. Coelho Junior and Figueiredo refer to these preconditions as the "primordial trans-subjective soil" and the "original field," out of which reflective consciousness arises as an alienated aberration. Take, for example, Merleau-Ponty (1962, p.242), who writes that "reflection does not itself grasp its full significance unless it refers to the unreflective fund of experience which it presupposes, upon which it draws, and which constitutes for it a kind of original past". Here, conscious reflection is left dependent upon an "original" pre-reflective past.

The suppressed pole, reflective consciousness, can be recovered by returning to William James's (1884) paper on introspection (which Alfred Schuetz (1941) suggests influenced Husserl). In this paper, James introduces the 'psychologist's fallacy,' which refers to the tendency for psychologists to get confused between what is in their mind and what is in the mind of their subjects. To apply this fallacy to the idea of pre-reflective experience, we only need to ask, in whose mind is this 'pre-reflexive' experience? The answer is that it is in the mind, or reflective consciousness, of the phenomenologist. Indeed, it is the act of reflexive consciousness, the *epoché*, that 'discovers' this pre-reflective domain. Thus the pre-reflective depends upon the reflective conscious experience.

Bringing this back to the literature on intersubjectivity, there is a tradition of theory and research that has emphasised reflective consciousness, especially mutual awareness of each other's consciousness. Rommetveit (1974), developing from the work of Mead, Vygotsky, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein, puts forward the idea of an architecture of intersubjectivity. He writes, "intersubjectivity has (...) to be taken for granted in order to be achieved" (p.56). What Rommetveit means by this is that there is a partially shared architecture of perspectives that constitutes a shared taken-for-granted world, and that this must be assumed, in order for anything to be said, or understood. The intersubjectivity achieved, through the shared architecture, is a partially shared mutual awareness based on a partial interchange of perspectives. Such an interchange of perspectives is reflective consciousness. For example, in Hegel's master-slave thesis (only the slave can get full recognition because recognition must come from someone equal or superior) self-consciousness is seen to arise from consciousness of mutual recognition (Marková, 1984). Such interchange of perspectives, and thus reflective consciousness, is also evident in the work of Ichheiser (1949) who looked at misunderstandings, and Goffman's (1956) study of

embarrassment. It takes two mutually aware consciousnesses to have the dynamics of recognition, misunderstanding and embarrassment.

Thus the phenomenologists' subordination of reflective consciousness can be supplemented by the approach of these authors, to open up questions about the intersubjectivity involved, for example, in the social emotions and identity. From the standpoint of the four dimensions proposed by Coelho Junior and Figueiredo, this conception of intersubjectivity would appear to be on the interpersonal dimension and to be supplementing the trans-subjective dimension. However, it would be wrong to say that the trans-subjective dimension can supplement Rommetveit's architecture of intersubjectivity in any obvious way because that dimension is that which has to be assumed, so that reflective intersubjectivity can be (partially) achieved. Instead, it appears that Rommetveit's approach occupies both poles. In the next section I will critically examine the extent to which the theories of intersubjectivity can be located on the four proposed dimensions.

The boundaries between and within the dimensions

Coelho Junior and Figueiredo do not explicitly recover the binary hinges upon which the debates on intersubjectivity swing, and the oppositions at work remain somewhat implicit. Instead, the logic of supplementarity appears to be transposed up, to function at the level of whole theoretical traditions. The potential problem with this is that it can end up polarising, and even dualising, the theoretical traditions by obfuscating the aspects of these traditions that theorised more than one dimension, or the dynamic between the dimensions.

The question is, can the logic of supplementarity work on whole theories? The logic of supplementarity can only work where one side of an opposition has been privileged. This makes it particularly suited to traditions like phenomenology, which perhaps due to its roots in epistemology, has been led repeatedly to the idea of "first philosophy." This is what

Descartes finds in “I think, therefore I am” and what Husserl finds in the transcendental ego. Despite differences, they are both located firmly on one side of an opposition which arguably presupposes the opposed term (mind-world, ego-other). Like Archimedes, who, on discovering the law of the lever, said ‘give me a place to stand and I will move the world,’ these theorists thought they had found a place from which to theorise the world (though perhaps unlike Archimedes they did not quite see how fundamentally the two sides of the lever, or a binary opposition, are related to each other). In such cases the logic of complementarity works well, as Levinas showed when he recovered the other. But not all theories of intersubjectivity can be so easily characterised.

Coelho Junior and Figueiredo recognise that the traditions they refer to do not sit easily on their prescribed poles. In their characterisation of the four matrices, a degree of overflow is evident: Psychoanalytic insights contribute to the traumatic matrix and the interpersonal matrix; Mead contributes to the trans-subjective matrix; and the trans-subjective is evident in the interpersonal. Yet in so far as they recognise this overflow, they also imply that the matrices are independent of the theories, which then returns us to the question as to what status these matrices have. The point I want to make is that if the dimensions are independent of the theories, and the logic of complementarity works between the dimensions, then we would expect there to be a logic of complementarity within the dimensions. But as I now show, this is not always the case.

Take, as an example, the question of ethics, and the traumatic dimension. For Levinas (1991/1998), ethics arises in the unbounded responsibility that is demanded from self by the face of the other. This ethical determination of self’s being is primary and incomprehensible. Then, when there is a third (another other), self is forced to compromise his/her responsibility for the other due to the demands of the third. Caught in these two demands, self must compare two infinities, and this, Levinas speculates, is the origin of theoretical knowledge. In

this account, the ethical demand of the other precedes all knowledge. However, Mead also has a theory of ethics (e.g. 1913, p.378), which is closely tied to his social psychology. For Mead, although the other is initially everything, it is only later that the ethical demand arises. Mead locates the ethical in the dissolution of self that arises when self acknowledges the perspective of the other. Furthermore, because taking the perspective of the other is implicit in all knowledge, so the ability to be ethical expands with knowledge, rather than preceding knowledge. In regard to this question of ethics, both Levinas and Mead could be positioned on the traumatic dimension, yet their approaches are not complementary, and have fundamental differences.

To examine further the distinction between the theoretical traditions and the dimensions, let us consider the following movement of supplementarity, which is identified in the final section of Coelho Junior and Figueiredo's paper:

Nonetheless, it is easy to see how the interpersonal leads us, in fact forces us, to think of intrapsychic intersubjectivity, as a self is constituted by introjecting complementary roles, being the result of processes of internalization (in primary and secondary socialization) which place significant others in the condition of what can be thought of in terms of instances and 'internal objects.'

Here at the boundary between the interpersonal and the intrapsychic dimensions, there is a mixing of Meadian and psychoanalytic concepts. The things which are outside - complementary roles and significant others - are identified with Meadian concepts, while that which is intrapsychic - internal objects - is identified with psychoanalytic concepts. The psychoanalytic concepts that articulate the family, the reality beyond the patient and the psychoanalytic setting (e.g. the dynamics of transference and counter-transference, Green, 2000) have been suppressed. And to sustain the counterpoint, the Meadian theorisation of the intrapsychic, the 'I,' the 'me,' internal dialogue and reflection, have been overlooked. The 'I'

(which is not the same as the phenomenologists' transcendental ego) and the 'me' are not complementary to Freud's second typology, of the id, ego and superego. Thus, again, we have two quite different theories occupying the same dimension.

Turning next to the question of how Coelho Junior and Figueiredo get from the interpersonal to the intrapsychic we find the psychoanalytic concept of introjection, and Berger and Luckmann's (1966) concept of primary and secondary socialisation. In Winnicott's object relations theory, the external object, (e.g. the mother) becomes associated with the child's relation to a transitional object that does not leave when the mother does (e.g. a blanket) and that transitional object paves the way for the development of the internal object that stands for the mother in her absence. The important quality of the transitional object is that it cannot be reduced to either the intrapsychic or the external. This is, for Winnicott, "an essential paradox, one that we must accept and that is not for resolution" (1971 p.151). Mead also theorises this space between the dimensions, but his conception is quite different. In the social act, the metaphor of shifting perspectives between that of the actor and the observer replaces the metaphor of moving between inner and outer. Thus the question of introjection would be rephrased in terms of how an object for the observer becomes an object for the actor – how they come to share an object. This sharing of the world arises social interaction. The point I want to make is that although Coelho Junior and Figueiredo identify a movement of supplementarity between interpersonal and intrapsychic theories, in fact, both psychoanalytic and Meadian traditions theorise, in different ways, both poles of this opposition, and furthermore, they theorise the movement between the poles.

It is wrong to overemphasise the differences between Mead and psychoanalysis, as there are interesting points of complementarity. For example, Mead (1926) made use of Freud to analyse the way films compensate for inferiority complexes, and on a couple of other occasions makes approving reference to the idea of the superego. Also, both Mead and

Freud, partly under the influence of Darwin, made use of social instincts (where the sex drive is a social instinct, Green 2000). Nonetheless, the characterisation of the literature in terms of the four proposed dimensions seems to run the risk of obscuring the aspects of theories that flow beyond their prescribed dimensions, thus silencing the potentially fruitful contradictions between approaches both within each of the dimensions, and between the dimensions.

Surplus & subjectivity

Besides applying the logic of supplementarity to the discourses on intersubjectivity, the professed aim of Coelho Junior and Figueiredo's paper is to further our conceptualisation of the constitution and development of subjectivity. This theme is to the fore in the penultimate paragraph where it is suggested that otherness is necessary for subjectivity to emerge, but that this otherness needs to be supplemented with a sense of inclusion, otherwise the otherness is always beyond being and cannot enter into the constitution of subjectivity. In what follows I want to take up these suggestive remarks and try to further theorise this dynamic of supplementarity as it occurs within Mead's theoretical approach.

Mead (e.g. 1925) is a perspectivist and as such does not subscribe to any one place from which everything can be considered (which is quite in line with the thrust of Coelho Junior and Figueiredo's paper). And although Mead chose to consider social psychology from the standpoint of the act, which is his basic unit of analysis, the act itself cannot be reduced to one side of the binary opposition between intrapsychic-interpersonal. Take for example Mead's (1934, p.8) definition of the act: "The act (...) has both an inner and an outer phase, an internal and an external aspect." The act moves across the perspective of the actor and the observer, such that mind and behaviour arise only as 'phases' within that movement. One of the few Meadian scholars to have highlighted this is Farr (1996, p.79), who writes of the act: "Both perspectives, however, are partial and, being the perspective of two quite

different individuals, they are incompatible with each other.” There can be no commensurability between the inner phase and the outer phase because they are in the perspectives of different individuals. The matrix that is the origin of Mead’s explanatory power, is not singular, nor static, but internally incommensurable with itself.

Due to this incommensurability, the other always exceeds self. And for this reason, I think Mead can arguably occupy a place on the traumatic dimension of otherness. The difference between Levinas and Mead, in this regard, is that Mead stands outside of the perspective of self and other, while Levinas, in the phenomenological tradition, occupies the position of the self (i.e. the other exceeds *me*). The advantage of Mead’s approach is that he can move across the perspectives (which for Levinas is an act of violence). So while Levinas remains concerned with radical otherness, Mead moves between the perspectives, such that the otherness becomes relative (i.e. not only does other exceed self, but self exceeds other).

However, one could also read Mead as belonging to the trans-subjective dimension because of his emphasis on our shared biological being, shared embodied actions and shared language. Through the organisation of society we come to enact various roles, and through newspaper, fiction, and imagination we vicariously participate in a diversity of roles. From childhood games, and the mass media, we all have the attitude of the policeman and the robber, the mother and the father, the rich person and the poor person within us. This is the attitude of the generalized other, which Coelho Junior and Figueiredo recognise as part of the trans-subjective dimension. From the perspective of the constitution of subjectivity, the most important aspect of the attitude of the generalized other is the shared attitudes that we have toward each other, because these are the attitudes which, when turned upon the self, constitute self-awareness.

The double emphasis on sameness – the trans-subjective dimension – and difference – the traumatic dimension – is not unique to Mead. Hannah Arendt (1958, p.155), for example,

wrote that, if people were not different they would have nothing to say to each other, and if they were not the same they could not understand each other. The question is, what is the precise dynamic between these poles?

The other does, as Levinas so eloquently argues, exceed self. But we can make a more specific statement than this. Taking up the perspective of the other, looking back toward self, there is a part of this excess that concerns self – in regard to certain things, the other knows more about self than does self. This is what Goffman (1959, p.14) refers to as the expression an actor “gives off” (e.g. visual appearance), as opposed to “gives” (e.g. speech), what Bakhtin (1923/1990, p.22) refers to as “excess” (e.g. the other sees the back of my head), and what Farr (1996, p.79), writing from the reverse perspective, refers to as a “blind spot.” The point is that, because the act crosses two perspectives, the actor has privileged access to the inner phase, while the observer has privileged access to the outer phase. I am interested in the outer phase, and will call the specific excess that the other has over self, *surplus*. Behaviours of self like blushing, slips of the tongue and appearance comprise some of the everyday surplus that the other has over self. In academia, commentaries are attempts to cultivate and return a surplus.

According to Mead, for non-symbolic animals the other is everything – in the environment of such animals the other looms large, but there is no self to be found. Amongst such animals, each animal has an unshared surplus over the other animals. The defining feature of humans is that this surplus has become shared (i.e. we know who we are to each other). Humans are able to share their surplus in so far as each human has, within their social attitudes, the attitudes of others – the attitude of the generalised other. In regard to the constitution of subjectivity, the question is how these social responses, which are already shared (but orient to others), come to turn inwards so that the surplus that self has held over others in certain roles, can, when self is in the complementary role, be held over self. For

Mead, this occurs via the coordination offered by language (see, Dodds, Lawrence, & Valsiner, 1997).

Through language, as manifest in shared activity, fiction and imagination, the surplus of the other is paired with the responses of self over which the surplus arises, such that self can experience a double attitude, the attitude of the actor, and the attitude that is the observer's surplus, simultaneously. The simultaneous experience of these two incommensurable perspectives on the same act, so that it is experienced from both the inside and the outside, is reflective consciousness. Such reflective consciousness forms a new matrix for action, and possibly a new dimension of otherness, namely, being other to oneself. If this ability for self-mediation is what is meant by subjectivity, then, from the perspective developed here, it is the return of the surplus of the other to self that has grown into subjectivity.

I have emphasised the idea of surplus because it moves across the space between the dimensions that Coelho Junior and Figueiredo propose. It is unclear whether the surplus belongs to radical otherness, to interpersonal interaction, to trans-subjective or even to the intrapsychic. As we saw with Rommetveit and object relations theory, the danger is that conceptualising the literature on intersubjectivity according to the four dimensions may in fact dualise theoretical traditions, and obscure their respective attempts to theorise the dynamics between the dimensions. Rather than transposing the logic of supplementarity from binary pairs up, so that it operates *between* whole theoretical traditions, I have tried to point out some places where the movement between these binaries is theorised *within* the theoretical traditions. Surplus arises from the excess of the other, from beyond self, and constitutes subjectivity by supplementing action towards the world with action towards oneself acting towards the world.

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