

DIALOGAL MODES OF UNDERSTANDING

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The presuppositions, for this presentation, of dialogal modes of understanding are:

- 1) Relationships are reciprocal and not necessarily symmetrical.¹
- 2) Speech is *identity and variation*.²
- 3) In authentic dialogue both of us can go where neither of us alone could go.
- 4) *Inbetweenness* is the spiritual cosmic connection of it all.

If we consider a reciprocal relationship is not necessarily symmetrical it provides a way to understand the dynamic nature of interpersonal relations. This will allow us to make distinctions in the social context for what I call dialogal modes of understanding. The dialogal situation is a dynamic interplay that gives expression to an inherent interpersonal tension. This is a natural aspect of speaking. Despite the different history that people bring to the dialogal situation, each becomes available for the other. Being available establishes the possibility for a common ground.

The tension that exists in dialogue shifts as participants become attuned to and understand one another. This tension is the enlivening aspect of authentic dialogue. It opens up the worlds of those involved and initiates action. Without this tension, dialogue would soon come to a standstill. Nothing new would ensue. Authentic dialogue moves participants. Without this movement, stagnation sets in and the quality of interpersonal presence deteriorates.

Even though two people share a common time and space, what arises will influence each of them differently. Two persons may be mutually influenced in a relationship that holds particular importance for both. At the same time, this does not mean that one tries to become the other. In authentic dialogue, the participants do not simply conform to one another. The tension that exists in social and personal conditions remains unique to each and provides an enriching common ground. Each may be influenced without mirroring the other.

Tension is inherent in the person and within the interpersonal situation. It opens up reciprocity, a way to see another's perspective. Through this creative tension, differences in practical and theoretical approaches, limitations, oppositions and even conflicts can stimulate authentic dialogue. They keep social horizons open for the creation of a future together.

This mutual recognition uncovers existential meaning involved in vital dialogal situations, compressing the meaning of history, social, cultural and personal existence into a unique and named way of life together. These speech forms are authentic dialogal modes of presence that are future-founding and establish new horizons that are culturally-transforming.

The eventual outcome of this shared time and space remains to be taken up by each person. These are connecting moments of *Inbetweenness* in that each person participates in the authentic dialogue as opposed to something that happens between two persons that displays more of a physical characteristic. In a dialogal situation it is possible to be different, to become different and change. The participants in a dialogal situation carry each other into future activities. Each participates. Now if consider *identity and variation*. As soon as something is spoken and it is given back to the other in dialogue, it is transformed, becoming a variation upon the ground of *Inbetweenness*. This allows understanding. Change ensues.

Dialogue allows one the possibility to become different. It is enhanced and renewed with this investment of self by the other. With each personal variation a new facet of meaning is unveiled and reveals new perspectives. In authentic dialogue, both of us can go where neither of us alone could go.

Inbetweenness gives rise to the double possibility of self-transcendence (vertical-horizontal). The human being has the potentiality to go beyond. We are referential beings who clarify meaning in relation to others upon the ground of *Inbetweenness*. This possibility transcends all structural and ideological limitations and barriers.

The dialogal modes of presence in authentic dialogue must also be distinguished from others, such as idle chatter, talk or simple information-giving modes that neither include temporal fronts of action nor achieve the simultaneous height and depth which takes place in a dialogal communion. Authentic speech awakens in us thoughts that form new thought which recasts them all. It stirs the sedimentation of language.

A reciprocal mode of caring for the other extends without conscious thought of one's own boundaries. This is an existential risk that fosters and strengthens the interpersonal bond. The existential risk is always present as one comes toward another since the modal presence in relationships is reciprocal but not necessarily symmetrical. If relationships were symmetrical we would have nothing to say because without the possibility of variation in speaking everything would be $A=A$.

Dialogal modes of understanding are not independent of one another. They are related to one another. In **Figure 1** the personal, local and global situation fit in with one another.

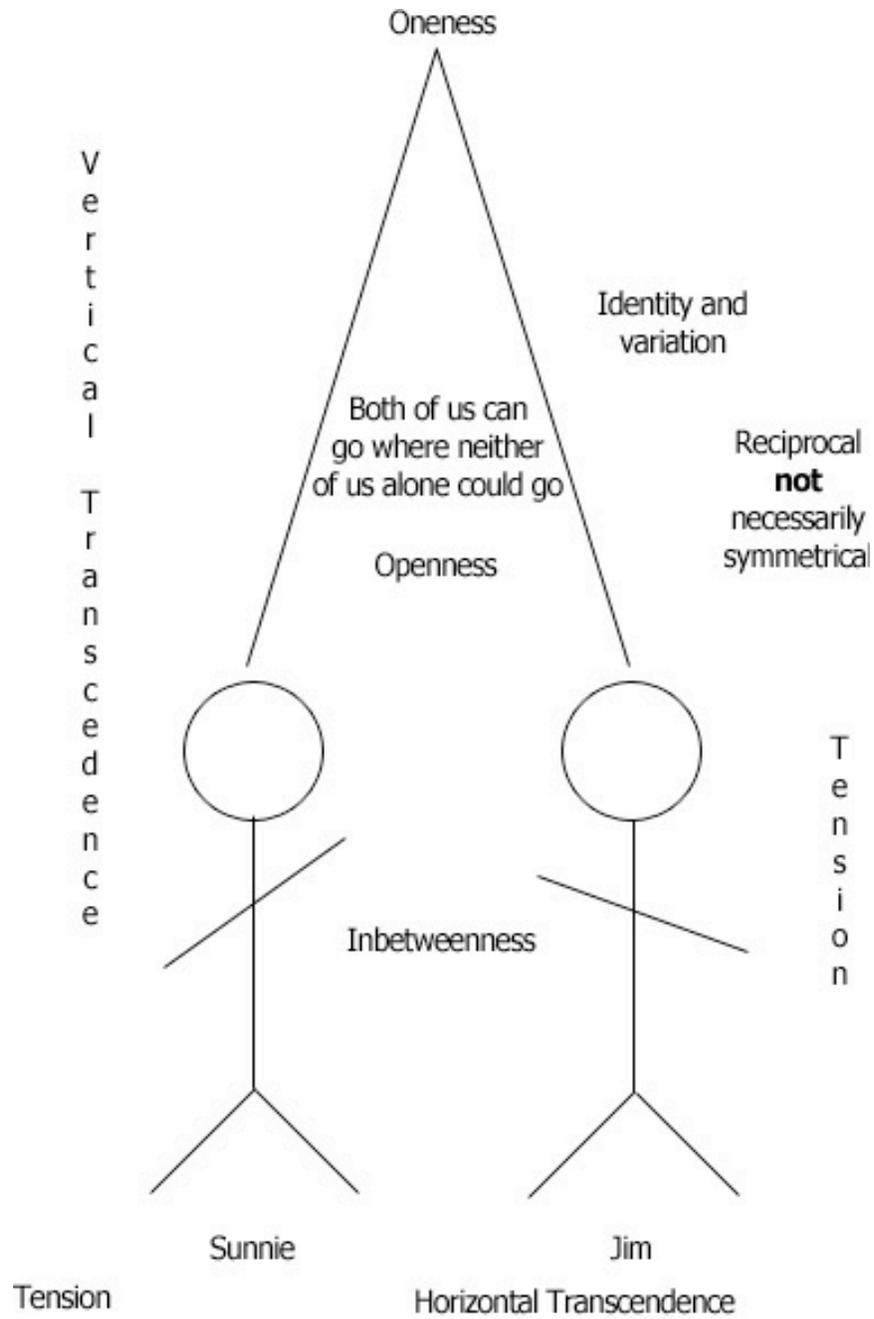


Figure 1

Dialogal Modes of Understanding
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Notes

- 1) Stephan Strasser, *The Idea of Dialogal Phenomenology* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 56.
- 2) Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, *Speech and Reality* (Norwich: Argo Books, 1970), p. 49.