

Ponencia presentada en el Seminario
Diálogo como paradigma de las ciencias humanas,
Santiago, abril 24 y 25, 2007.

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Dialogicality as a theory of social knowledge

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Epistemological frames

- Focus on dialogue as an epistemological frame for the human sciences at this conference
- What could we mean by an epistemological frame?
- = the point of departure how to answer the question:
What is (social) knowledge?
- Two main epistemological frames in human sciences:
 - an individual knower as a point of departure
 - A dyad mutually constructing knowledge in thinking and dialoguing as a point of departure
- Knowledge is always of something – objects, the self, another person

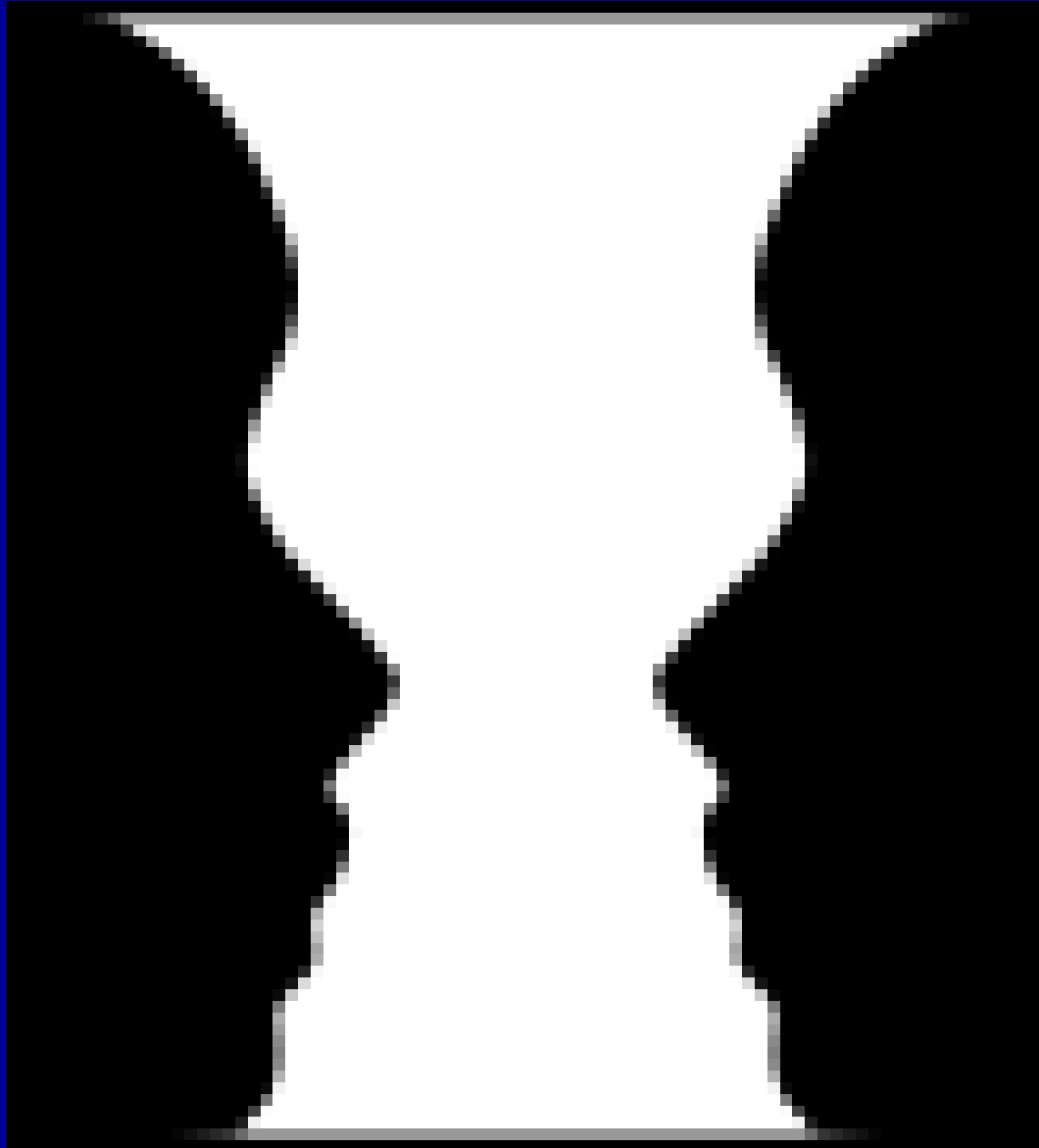
Dialogicality as an epistemological frame

- The focus of my talk will be on the latter epistemological frame – that is, on a dyad co-constructing knowledge
- But we need to make a distinction between a dialogue, dialogicality and dialogism
- I shall make these distinctions as I go along. In this talk, I shall start with dialogicality.

What is dialogicality?

- Dialogicality is an idea that the individual or better the self (the Ego) has a fundamental capacity to conceive, create and communicate about social realities in terms of other(s) (the Alter)
- There could be no Ego without the Alter. They are interdependent from their *origin* (in the development of a single individual, in society, history and culture)
- Interdependence is a basic condition of the human mind (= *ontology* of the human mind)
- The Ego and the Alter co-constitute one another in a dynamic figure-ground set-up

Figure/ground image

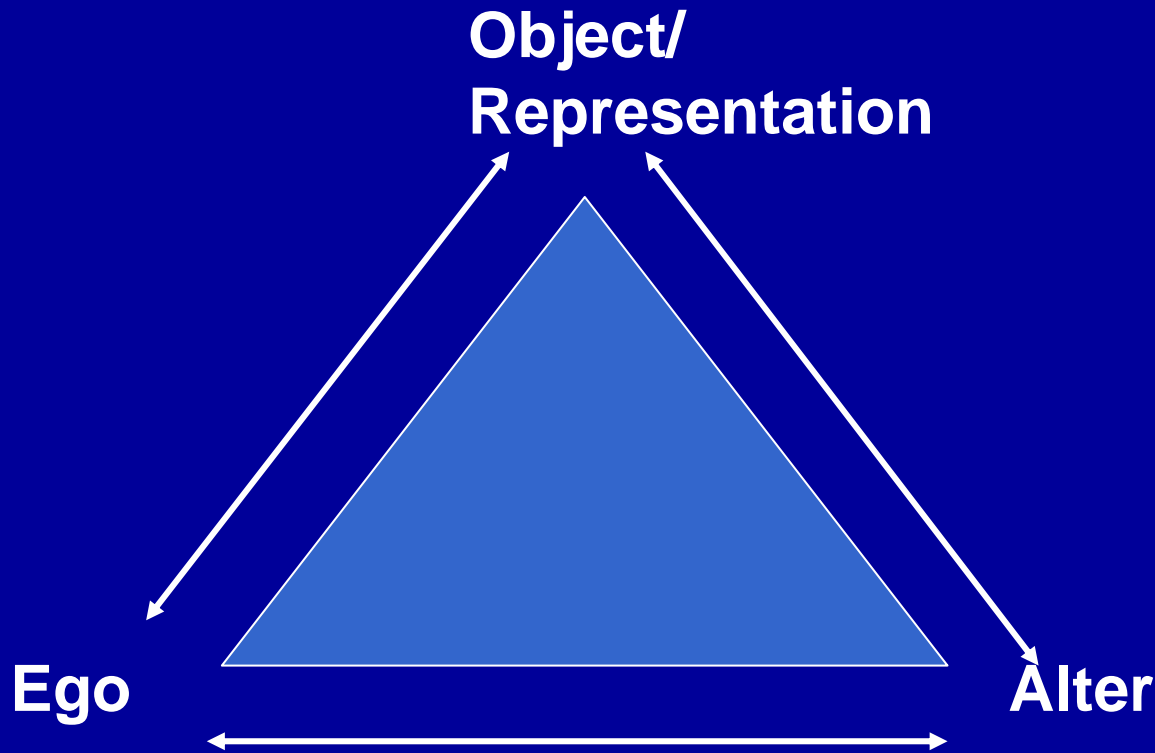


The 'Ego-Alter'

- The Ego-Alter is an abstract concept. In concrete dialogues we find different kinds of the Ego-Alter, for example
- 'I -you'
- 'minority - majority'
- 'I- group'
- 'group -another group'
- 'I - culture'
- **Dynamic: one constituent affecting the other, in thinking, dialogue and formation of knowledge, leading to changes (development) in both constituents.**

The Ego-Alter-Object

- From ontology Ego-Alter to epistemology Ego-Alter-Object



Dialogicality

- Different forms of the Ego-Alter interdependence (as indicated in the previous slide) constitute the basis of an epistemological frame (dialogicality) in the construction of social knowledge in its manifold forms.
- Today, there are different approaches that call themselves 'dialogism', 'dialogical turn', dialogical self' 'mutualism'.
- I shall not be concerned with their diversities but I shall speak about two different approaches that, for me, are theoretically interesting. They have developed independently of one another, one focusing primarily on the Ego-Alter dialogical interdependence **in language (speech)** and the other focusing primarily on the Ego-Alter in **social thinking**. Both are essential to the co-construction of socially shared knowledge

Dialogicality in these two approaches

- **In dialogism** (M. Bakhtin)- focus on speech
- **In the original theory of social representations** - (S.Moscovici)- focus on thought
- These two approaches are essential to the construction of socially shared knowledge
- They are based on the same epistemological presuppositions and on similar concepts
- Conceptual convergences between these two approaches have implications for theory and empirical research both in the study of language and in dialogue, and in social representations

Dialogicality in dialogism

- The neo-Kantian philosophy;
- = the dialogical perspective on language, thought and knowledge as a dialogue; dialogical principle (Buber, Rosenstock, Rosenzweig, Cohen, etc.)
- Dialogism in Russia: Institute of the living word, The State institute for discursive culture, Institute for comparative literature and new languages
- Michail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and his Circle (Volosinov, Medvedev)
- Cultural battles with individualistic ideology or with monological theory of knowledge
- Focus on culture, literature, philosophy

Dialogicality in the theory of social representations

- Theory of social representations is a theory of social knowledge based on dialogicality
- It studies people's understanding and making meaning of *complex social phenomena*, that are important to individuals, groups and societies in and through dialogues. For example, it studies what people understand by democracy, how they speak about it, how they argue, disagree and come to consensus. Other examples could be the study of national identity, justice, mental illness, trust and distrust, how they speak among many others.
- Ideological struggles in France in the 1950s and 1960s- the Communist Party and the Catholic Church
- Serge Moscovici - La Psychanalyse (1961/76) – how a scientific concept finds its way into common sense and thinking and dialogues of ordinary people

Dialogicality in the theory of social representations

- A representation is directed at others; through pointing out something to someone, it speaks; and through expressing something to someone, it communicates.
- This means that we should aim to study social representations in change and not as static phenomena
- different meanings of communication
- Conversation as a primordial form of communication
- different forms of thinking and transformation of thinking
- Multifaceted relations between thinking and communication
- Transformations of the contents of knowledge
 - Interest in technology and science
 - relations between science and common sense

Common features in dialogism and in the theory of social representations

1. Two tendencies in the Ego-Alter interaction
2. Asymmetries and dialogical tension
3. Consciousness/unconsciousness and implicitness in knowledge and communication;
4. Heterogeneity in thinking and communication; heteroglossia

1. Two tendencies in the Ego-Alter interaction

- A tendency towards intersubjectivity and mutuality; conformity; sharing ideas and perspectives (e.g. Erikson, primary or ontological trust, prior to any feeling of autonomy and initiative)
- Tendency to establish oneself in and through interaction as an agent : desire to be recognized as an agent
- Struggle for social recognition –history as a history of desired desires (Kojève) – symbols of recognition
- The two tendencies in language and communication

2. Asymmetries and dialogical tension

- Galam and Moscovici
 - Asymmetry and tension as source of movement
 - Breaking the symmetry
 - Two tendencies in groups: towards stability and change
- Bakhtin
 - Dialogical relations in tension
 - Oppositions and ambivalence
 - Double face of Janus

Asymmetry and tension as a source of movement in social representations

- The dialogical the meaning of the phrase 'to be in dialogue':
- - effort to establish intersubjective understanding, to diminish conflict, to increase symmetry in exchanges and in reciprocal relations
- - asymmetries, the power of ambivalence and the tension between the Ego-Alter
- A dialogue includes not only personal interaction but also dialogues in group phenomena, 'dialogues of ideas' and even 'dialogues between cultures and historical epochs'.
- It is well established that changes in physical and biological systems take place through moves from symmetrical to asymmetric states. Equally, in social systems, asymmetries and tension between dialogical components (or participants) keep dialogue moving

Breaking the symmetry (in social representations)

- Galam and Moscovici (1994, p.485) explain:
- a dynamic is operative within a group preventing interactions from becoming uniform at all times and for all individuals simultaneously. The breakdown of symmetry means on the contrary that at any level of group diversity, each individual has some capacity to switch from dissensus to consensus, from conformity to innovation and *vice versa*, but in such a way that things balance out overall to keep the symmetry breakdown at a constant value associated with the given diversity. On the whole the exclusion process – hence the breakdown of symmetry – initiates a dynamic order, an order that is evolving. It actually keeps things in flux and yet does not put at risk the interactive relations and their directions.

Two tendencies in social representations

- **group activities - two 2 opposite tendencies:**
- **an effort for consensus – conformity, compromises and shift towards convergence in order to reduce conflicts**
- **The opposite tendency favours change-works through tension, divergence and differentiation between people and even through conflict**
- **Group dynamics is a product of these two oppositional tendencies operating simultaneously**

Dialogical relations in tension in dialogism

- **dialogical relations are not engaged solely in search for intersubjectivity and in a peaceful contemplation**
- **cognitions and affects are in tension; they clash, judge and evaluate one another**
- **Bakhtin (1981, p.314) foregrounds dialogue as a strife of divergent perspectives: ‘one point of view is opposed to another, one evaluation opposed to another...this dialogic tension...permits authorial intentions to be realised’ in heterogeneity of languages and of ideas**
- **Understanding, precisely because it is active, is always evaluative**

Oppositions and ambivalence in dialogism

- The topic of Rabelais carnival in the Renaissance – Bakhtin's extravagance in the treatment of the power of ambivalence and oppositions as dialogical concepts.
- The display of the idea of double-voicedness. Ambivalence saturates language, daily life, culture, and the human body - everything that has some human relevance. All ambivalent images are dual-bodied, dual-faced and pregnant with their oppositions. They integrate affirmation and negation, the top and the bottom, convergence and divergence not only as sequences of expressions but above all, as expressions in their simultaneity. The simultaneity of life and death figures as most prominent. Bakhtin dramatizes his analysis to the extreme, presenting even dying as droll. He depicts an individual body in throes of death and at the same time gives an image of another human body just being born. For him, where death is, there is also change and renewal (Bakhtin, 1984, p.409).

Double face of Janus

- The image of birth is also ambivalent showing that where there is birth, there is also departure, these pictures culminating with the image of the birth-giving death (ibid. p.352). Bakhtin presents variations of death in renewing the earth's fertility, the birth of Pantagruel which caused his mother's suffocation (ibid. p. 408), and even death from laughter. There is also a sequence of the past giving birth to the future.
- ambivalence never changes into monovalence but the two oppositions coincide in the world of becoming, in which there are no hard boundaries between objects, words or cultures. Boundaries always change because, as Bakhtin assumed, 'a tense dialogic struggle takes place on the boundaries' (Bakhtin, 1979/1986, p.143).

3. Consciousness/unconsciousness and implicitness

- In psychology, including social psychology - pre-eminence of conscious thought
- Unconscious disturbing – Freud, MacDougall, Le Bon – fear of association with the crowd mind and madness
- Bakhtin avoided references to the unconscious (Bakhtin, 1984).
- The unconscious implied Freud's unconscious - individualistic and mechanistic - preoccupation with a single consciousness.
- His analysis of Dostoyevsky's novels, draws attention to the fact that Dostoyevsky had no sympathy for psychology for its 'physiological line, which reduced psychology to physiology' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 61).

Consciousness/unconsciousness and implicitness in social representations

- Through language past gets access to the present; memory is not just about conscious but unconscious and implicit
- Today's ideas invested with inherited meanings
- Social representations – memory, common sense, past meanings and their transformation
- Let us take the concept of themata as example

Themata

- relational categories pertain to the Ego-Alter - a very long duration
- relevant personally and/or collectively (e.g. male/female, good/bad, equal/unequal), or can have an epistemic significance (e.g. stability/change, old/new)
- could be of biological, cultural, historical or even more contemporary origins
- Moscovici (1992; Moscovici and Vignaux, 1994/2000) - *themata*, i.e. pre-categorizations and taxonomies of oppositional nature -at the basis of the common sense and therefore at the basis of social representations
- They are communicative. They may not be directly and fully brought into language, although the potential of bringing them into language is always present

Themata

- **Edible/inedible**
- **dichotomy embedded in history and culture**
- **content differs according to culture (the theory of social representations studies content and not abstract structures or processes)**
- **eating different kinds of meat; forbidden food; oysters;**
- **Chernobyl; foot-mouth disease; contamination and poison**
- **dirt; religious reasons; bread as symbol**

Themata

- they will start generating concrete contents in specific conditions and activate the formation of more complex forms of socially shared knowledge
- political, ideological, scientific or other reasons that start creating tension or conflict and bring a thema into the centre of collective attention and communication. With its content no longer taken for granted, a thema creates communicative tension, and starts generating new contents and new relations in networks of other concepts: it becomes thematised.

Consciousness/unconsciousness and implicitness in dialogism

- Consciousness cannot be explained psychologically, but dialogically. This is what Dostoyevsky was doing through 'dialogic intuition' which penetrates his literary characters, moving his aesthetic vision into the depth of consciousness 'but not into the depth of unconscious... Consciousness is much more terrifying than any unconscious complexes' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 288).
- Instead, Bakhtin referred to inner speech, habits, memories, and hidden and implicit aspects of communication. Dialogues, whether external or internal, are always open towards the past and the future, there is nothing finalized; to take part in dialogue requires accepting this openness in order to penetrate the deepest levels of consciousness.

The depth of consciousness or the unconscious?

- Consciousness is only collective – it always stands in relation to another one. Even looking in the mirror is not a sole activity: ‘I look at myself simultaneously with the eyes of myself and of the others, so we have here an intersection of different world views, an intersection of two consciousnesses. Human life is an open-ended dialogue’ (ibid. p. 293), in which a reified model of the world is being replaced by a dialogical one. For Bakhtin, like for Dostoyevsky, consciousness can become deeper but it does not fall into the unconsciousness.
- Using different terminology than Bakhtin, and a different view of Freud’s unconscious, Moscovici (1993, p. 72) states:
- ‘All that is unconscious is collective and all that is collective is unconscious. It is memory in which the unfamiliar is made familiar and which associates unconsciously what was consciously distinct...Language is powerful when it gives an unconscious past access to the present, when it invests today’s ideas with the flesh of inherited meanings... memory endows representations and words with an affective tonality which is familiar to culture and religion alike...memory is not only a faculty of our conscious state, but also and much more of our unconscious states (ibid. pp. 74-75).

The depth of consciousness or the unconscious?

- Bakhtin argued against the notion of the single consciousness and against the notion of the unconscious. We can even hypothesize that Bakhtin chose to analyze Dostoyevsky's novels in order to expose his own views of dialogicality.
- He rejects the idea of empathy - merging of one consciousness with the other, (Philosophy of Act, 1986/93). Analysing Dostoyevsky, he exposes this idea even more strongly. Consciousness must be in interaction with another consciousness in order to achieve its proper existence: 'justification cannot be *self*-justification, recognition cannot be *self*-recognition. I receive my name from others, and it exists for others (self-nomination is imposture)' (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 287-288). Dostoyevsky was hostile to world-views, which see the final goal in merging, in dissolution of consciousnesses into one consciousness and in the removal of individuation: 'No Nirvana is possible for a single consciousness. A single consciousness in *contradiction in adjecto*' (ibid. p. 288).

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The depth of consciousness or the unconscious?

- The unconscious is also part of common sense knowledge and of historically and culturally established oppositional dichotomies, e.g. 'we' and 'them', 'moral' and 'immoral'. Culturally established oppositions or communicative 'themata' (Moscovici and Vignaux, 1994) are brought from the unconscious thought only when conflicts in society bring them to the surface. Then they become consciously thematised and start generating new social representations. In this sense, the unconscious is something that, in and through tension and conflict, can be brought to awareness from the depth of consciousness.
- Question: does Bakhtin's dialogism and Moscovici's theory differ only in terminology?

4. Heterogeneity in thinking and communication

- Social representations: diverse forms of thinking – cognitive polyphasia
- Dialogism: heteroglossia in the Rabelais carnival; official and folk cultures separated linguistically; thinking and speaking as indeterminate
- Inner dialogue and the ‘third party’

Cognitive polyphasia

- different cognitive goals employ heterogeneous modes of thinking and communicating. To think means to take diversions and to attempt different mental routes - these range from scientific to religious, from literal to metaphorical, from jokes to formal expressions, etc.
- Common sense thinking and knowledge displays cognitive polyphasia, i.e. diverse and even opposite ways of thinking', suited to and articulated in different contexts. These diverse and multifaceted ways of thinking and communicating are often in conflict
- dialogue among ideas - 'The Rules of Sociological Method' (Durkheim, 1938) to investigate the ways in which social representations 'adhere to and repel one another, how they fuse or separate from one another' – i.e. how they circulate in society. Dialogue among cultural traditions or ways of thinking (Bakhtin, Lotman).

Example: trust

- Trust - in different languages, cultures and socio-political systems – refers multiplicity of phenomena. Individuals develop the meanings of ‘trust’ through the process of socialisation and communication, acquiring locally relevant systems of social knowledge. Trusting God, parents, friends, institutions, professionals or the future involve a variety of forms, different kinds of interaction, relationships and communication.
- In daily practices trust may hide specificities of interactions and communication.
- ‘trust’ and other notions, e.g. confidence, reliance, expectation, solidarity and so on.
- trust as immediate apprehension of the Ego-Alter relations; broader perspectives include trust as reflected obligations, morals and contracts.
- ontogenetic, historical, cultural and socio-political characteristics of trust changing throughout history.

Trust

- As a thema
- Erikson took a developmental perspective of trust
- Georg Simmel held trust as a primary ontological relation binding society together -any kind of socialisation takes place within different forms of knowledge and determines the degree of trust that people develop with respect to one another
- we can hardly obtain full knowledge of one another, trust is situated both within the realm of knowledge that individuals form of one another and beyond its boundaries
- Historically, social groups, communities and institutions have established themselves within and throughout social differentiation - relationships have diversified, trust has become thematised. In a heterogeneous society trust is person- and content- specific one may trust the other with respect to a specific activity, e.g. professional competence but not with regard to personal integrity. One may not reveal to others personal aspects, belongingness to particular social groups, one's interpersonal relations and so on.

Macro-social trust

A priori generalised trust (G. Simmel)

Context-dependent (context-specific) trust

Psychosocial feeling

Pre-conceptual trust

Social cohesion

In-group solidarity

Local communities

Conceptual trust

audits

Machiavelian strategies

Co-operation

Primary (taken-for-granted) trust

Reflective trust

Pre-conceptual trust

Emotional interdependence
Psychosocial feeling

Third parties

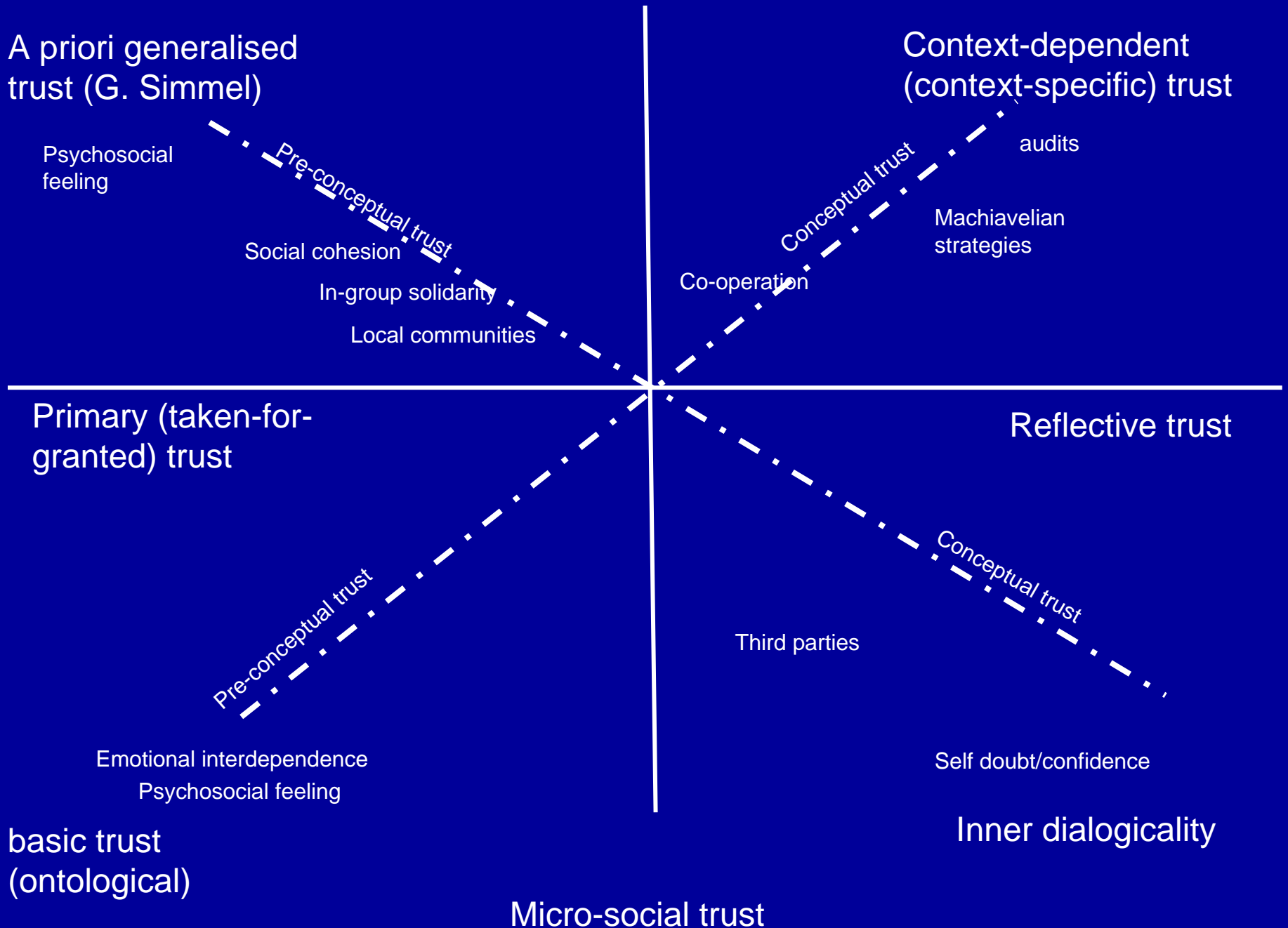
Conceptual trust

Self doubt/confidence

basic trust (ontological)

Inner dialogicality

Micro-social trust



Dialogism: heteroglossia

- Bakhtin: rejection of language as a unitary and orderly system. 'Language' means speaking of languages and heteroglossia (or multivoicedness). For example, a specific aspect of heteroglossia in the Renaissance carnival; official and unofficial cultures separated linguistically. Official culture - Latin and formalistic expressions; folk or unofficial culture uses popular and festive languages, representing a dual-bodied world: language includes praise while abusing; it abuses while praising. Folk culture uses dialects with all their comic aspects: 'The dialects become complete images and types of speech and thought; they are linguistic masks. Each mask features a dialect of the Italian language'.
- different ways of speaking; dialects, professions use styles of talking and so do social classes and ethnic groups; specific ways of marking differences and accents in speaking.

Dialogism: heteroglossia

- Thinking and speaking is open and undetermined; always new interpretations of meanings depending on who is the other: 'Nothing conclusive has yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future, and will always be in the future'. New interpretations involve tension and negotiation of conflict. Dialogue is saturated with hidden and open polemics, parody, irony, hidden dialogicality, open and hidden rejoinders, collisions and quarrelling, all of these ridden with tension, leaving a loophole, exposing dialogue to openness of different interpretations – and therefore to novelty. A loophole is a residual meaning leaving 'the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words'.

Inner dialogue and the third party

- Symbolically and socially represented kinds of the Alter that are in internal dialogue with the Ego
- Internal and external dialogue – aspects of heteroglossia
- Inner dialogue with the self (generalised other, parents, friends, political leader, reference group, other others, virtual others, third person, consciousness)
- The inner alter manifested linguistically and through diverse speech activities (e.g. quoting, addressing others,
- Others not immediately present in dialogue
- Worldviews, opinions of others, cultural communication