Introduction to the special issue on generalisation from dialogical single case studies

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Dialogism and dialogicality

Throughout historical and cultural development, language and symbolic communication have been vital for humans' evolving capacities to conceive themselves and others as beings who can think, who have knowledge and beliefs, who experience, use symbols, tell stories, and otherwise. Individuals, groups and societies create intersubjective bonds, struggle for their social recognition, evaluate and judge their intentions and actions. These capacities not only privilege speech and symbolic communication as vital, but they have ethical qualities. Although these capacities have been concerns of humankind throughout history, with the emergence of the social sciences in the eighteenth century, they became the subject of explicit research. Among scholars, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) emphasized the inventive power of language and the ethical nature of common sense thinking. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1801) viewed language through the power of self-consciousness and self-realisation. Wilhelm Humboldt (1767-1835) conceived of language as an organic whole, which is never a finished product but an ever-changing and dynamic process. We could view such scholars as predecessors of the concepts of 'dialogical existence' and 'dialogical thinking', which were later developed in the post-Hegelian Marburg School, Bakhtin's dialogism, Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach, and American pragmatism. These theoretical influences led, during the second half of the last century, to the development of a number of approaches in which dialogue has become the central concept and thus, such approaches often call themselves 'dialogical'. At the same time, the emphasis on dialogue, in which professionals and clients/patients mutually co-construct meanings of their concerns, has become influential in professional practices such as psychotherapy, family therapy, and the care of people with communication difficulties. Moreover, the focus on mutualities in dialogue has penetrated other domains of social interactions, for example in education, services and politics.

The main presupposition of dialogical perspectives is that the mind of the Self and the minds of Others are interdependent in and through the sense-making and sense-creating of social realities, in interpretations of the past, experiencing the present and imagining the future. Some dialogical approaches focus on the development of peaceful relations among humans, their intersubjective understanding and aspirations for harmonious relations in daily life, politics and professions; others explore clashes among participants and groups, and

strategies in which they negotiate their positions. Still others are inspired by the new media and by various internet genres. All these forms of communication express heterogeneous dialogues in constantly changing cultures.

In view of so many diverse co-existing dialogical approaches, we need to specify the kind of dialogicality that concerns us in this special issue. We develop our conceptual framework of dialogicality as primarily derived from two sources: from the dialogical philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth century (e.g. Buber, Bakhtin, Lévinas) and from socio-cultural psychologies (e.g. Vygotsky, Valsiner). Both approaches presuppose that the interdependence between the Self and Others forms an ontological unit. This unit takes on different forms, e.g. collective-individual, the self-social environment, the dissident-political regime, or the individual-institution. In all such cases, each pair forms an unbreakable unit: one component in each pair defines the other component; if one component changes, the other also changes. In this process the Self and Others not only co-construct knowledge and beliefs, but they also evaluate one another, make judgements of their actions, they trust and distrust one another, and take and avoid responsibilities. They are bound by ethical concerns. Their dynamic uniqueness is realised in and through language and communication, and through multifaceted forms of interaction in the construction of meanings in concrete local situations. These capacities have a strong influence in professional practices such as education, health-related issues and disability, as well as in politics.

If, as researchers, we presuppose the uniqueness of the Self and Other in communication and in the co-construction of social realities, the question of whether or not particular empirical methods are suitable for exploring the qualities and properties of such units then arises. Although this question has been partially addressed by scholars who call for methodological and analytical approaches that focus on the Self-in-relation-to-Others, including focus group methods (Marková et al., 2007), the study of diaries (Gillespie et al., 2008; Zittoun, 2014), the use of sensitising questions in interviews (Gillespie & Cornish, 2014), and the analysis of multivoicedness (Aveling et al., 2015), there is no consistent approach to taking dialogicality seriously in psychological research. As such, tensions between the holistic nature of the uniqueness and dynamics of ontologically interdependent Self-Other units, and the methodological tools with which such units are studied, remain (Grossen, 2010; Marková, 2016). Acknowledging the properties of Self-Other units clearly excludes the use of methods that require the study of many 'similar' or 'same' cases, as well as studies that consider that people can be studied outside of the relationships in which they are embedded, such as studies that deploy only questionnaire methods (Bartory, 2010;

Puchalska-Wasyl, 2010). The uniqueness of the Self-Other unit calls for studying each unit as a whole, in its singularity, that is, as a "single case", as paradoxical as it may sound.

Single case studies and dialogical single case studies

Beyond a naïve understanding, the study of a "single case" does not only mean the study of a single person in isolation – although some of these are foundational in psychology (Rolls, 2014). In the existing literature, the terms 'case' and 'case study' are used very broadly, and numerous definitions attempt to capture their meanings, or at least some of their pertinent characteristics (e.g. Forrester, 1996; Flyvbjerg; 2006; Gerring 2011; Morgan, 2012; Ragin and Becker, 1992). Among these, Morgan (2012) applies her perspective of single case studies across all disciplines, in which the researcher or the practitioner examines a complex singular event, whether an institution, a town, an industry, or a physical, medical, biological or social phenomenon. This very broadly based definition comprises her insistence on treating the object of study – usually a complex problem or situation – as a whole, rather than on fragmenting it into elements; it emphasises that the whole is an open-ended event existing in the real-life environment; it explores relations among elements of that whole using diverse methods; and it attempts to tie together different kinds of evidence concerning that case. The fundamental features of this definition are not only the perspective of wholeness, but equally important, multidimensional relations among elements of the studied whole, leading to a coherent pattern of findings. While this definition of single case studies seems to be applicable across many domains, it is likely that each discipline will adapt it to its specific purposes. In this special issue, we are concerned with dialogical single case studies and therefore the above general definition of single case studies, although useful, is not sufficient for our purpose. The Self and Others respond to one another as humans, that is, they evaluate their mutual actions, they interpret their communication and their intentions. A dialogical single case study therefore involves ethical and dynamic interdependencies between the Self–Other(s).

In order to explain the specific nature of dialogical single case studies, let us consider what makes a difference between a single case study and a dialogical single case study using an example of a classic single case study of an 'affluent worker' in the study of Goldthorpe et al. (1968-1969). These researchers hypothesised that when working classes become affluent, they lose their class identity, and therefore deliberately searched for a case that would prove their hypothesis. However, their research showed that the hypothesis was wrong. They found

1   instead that the 'working class', having reached the 'middle class' status, did not dissolve into

2   society without class identity. Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 226) describes the case:

3   Luton, a prosperous industrial centre with companies known for high wages and

4   social stability—fertile ground for middle-class identity—was selected as a case, and

5   through intensive fieldwork, the researchers discovered that even here an autonomous

6   working-class culture prevailed, lending general credence to the thesis of the

7   persistence of class identity.

8

9   This single case study had all the features defined by Morgan (2012). It preserved the idea of

10 wholeness, it was an open-ended event, it explored relations among elements through

11 intensive fieldwork in a real-life environment, and it provided a coherent narrative

12 concerning class identity. In this well-designed single case study, the researchers' concern

13 was to explore a specific question about the transformation of the working class into the

14 middle class.

15   If one wished to re-define this case as dialogical single case study, one would pose

16 different research questions. For example, in exploring the concept of 'affluent worker', one

17 would foreground questions about Self-Other relations, the strength of historical and cultural

18 forces, ethical and dynamic relations between 'affluent workers' and their bosses with respect

19 to class identity, or to wages. Such redefinition of a single case study would still fulfil the

20 criteria set out by Morgan (2012), but it would, moreover, depict it as a dialogical single case

21 study. In other words, the researcher has options about how to construct the problem under

22 study and how to choose appropriate theoretical and empirical concepts. Both kinds of single

23 case studies, i.e. dialogical and non-dialogical, might use the same research methods, such as

24 intensive and in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, observations, interviews, and so on, and adapt

25 them for their respective purposes.

26   Dialogical single case studies, as we define them in this special issue, involve ethical

27 and dynamic interdependencies between the Self–Other(s). So far, we have emphasised the

28 ontological nature of the Self-Other interdependence. Let us now draw attention to the ethical

29 and dynamic features of these interdependences.

30

31 *Ethics of dialogical single case studies*

32   Humans act in order to promote what they consider good, just and worthwhile, even if

33 their judgements differ enormously; what is good for some humans could be experienced as a

34 misery, injustice, worthlessness and even terror, for others. Such normative judgements are

based on moral evaluations of actions, intentions and responsibilities, and not on a neutral processing of information (e.g., Brinkmann, 2010). Moral judgements stem out of ethical principles. In particular, a dialogical ethics implies the uniqueness of the Self-Other interdependence, which the participants in a single case study express in actions, communication and thinking.

Three authors are classically invoked when dialogicality is considered as an ethics: Martin Buber (1878-1965), Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995). The three authors have a non-monist, relational understanding of the world and especially, humans, developed together with a reflection on the status of language. Although we cannot enter into a scholarly discussion on the context of production of the work of these authors, which is deeply related to dramatic historical and political events that transformed Europe, as well as important philosophical debates, we would like to briefly recount the nuances of their approach to dialogue as forms of ethics.

Martin Buber develops his reflection in a double anchorage, first in the Jewish tradition of commenting the Torah and the Talmud, and second, from his parallel interest in literature and the arts. His little known book translated as *I and Thou* (Ich und Du), published in 1923 (Buber, 1953, 1969), presents the core of his argument: language gives us fundamental terms (*Gründworte*) that presuppose a relation, or are inherently relational as existential experience. Hence, *I* is fundamentally an *I-Thou*, and goes along with a relation with *you* apprehended in its uniqueness and totality. The other is in principle a human being, but some forms of relation to non-humans can have comparable intensity – a relation to a tree, or a horse (Buber, 1985, p. 55). Buber, drawing both on mythical and psychological depictions, reminds us that the child or infant is initially purely in-relation (in the womb, tactilely), from which he or she emerges before meeting the other – you – while being an *I*.

> If I face a human being as my *Thou*, and say the primary word *I-Thou* to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things. This human being is not *He* or *She*, bounded from every other *He* and *She*, a specific point in space and time within the net of the world; nor is he a nature able to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. But with no neighbour, and whole in himself, he is *Thou* and fills the heavens. This does not mean that nothing exists except himself. But all else lives in *his* light. (Buber, 1953, p. 8)

Hence, the *I-Thou* relation is an encounter that, temporarily, makes the background or the situation disappear; at this point, one's attention is entirely turned to that unicity or integrity of the other. Such intense face-to-face relation can also fade out, the moment at which the *you* becomes an *it*: if the self decomposes the other in its properties, or for his position in networks with others, in time and space. Hence, states Buber, one cannot be purely and all the time relating to others as *you,* he or she has to have an alternate mode of engaging them as it and as you; but, he adds: "And in all the seriousness of truth, hear this: without *It* man cannot live. But he who lives with *It* alone is not a man." (Buber, 1953, p. 34). In effect, the world of *It* is the world of simple, mechanical causalities; in contrast, it is in the *I-Thou* relation that the person can be in itself, in subjectivity, in relation to the face of the other, and there only, live his or her freedom. The possibility of deciding, and not obeying simple causalities, is hence dependent on *I-Thou* (Buber, 1953, p. 51). Hence, for Buber, a dialogical relation is a condition of being human, with free will and agency; in that sense, the other is a condition for the realisation of self as human.

Mikhail Bakhtin's work also grows, in a different context, from a double religious (Christian) and literary commitment. His later work on dialogism in literature is widely known in psychology – the ideas that language circulates in such ways, that utterances respond to and anticipate others, and, understood in their context, carry the echoes and harmonics of other utterances, in other contexts. Dialogism is in that sense an idea implying answerability, with the idea that every utterance, every word, answers a previous one and expects a next one; addressed toward that next word or utterance, it is thus shaped by the answer it anticipates (Bakhtin, 1982, p. 280). From this follows the principle of polyphony of discourses and consciousness: "each person's inner world and thought has its stabilized audience that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values, and so on are fashioned" (Bakhtin/Voloshinov, 1929, in Morris 1994, p.58).

These ideas are connected to a deeper sense of answerability, present in Bakhtin's earlier work; to escape a world of pure mechanical and contingent determinations, the person must unite the domains of science, art or life – "the three domains of human culture" – and in each of them, the person must fully engage herself. Hence, in the arts:

I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art, so that everything I have experienced and understood would not remain ineffectual in my life (M. M. Bakhtin, 1919/1980, p. 1).

This form of engagement, or accepting to answer with one's life, appears more generally in the human act, seen as unique occurrence, and a condition for being. In his philosophy of the act, Bakhtin enunciates the idea of answerability as dependent of *my* uniqueness in the relationship to others or in my action:

> And although answerability is always already embedded in one's relations with other persons, it remains primarily an "answerability for my own uniqueness, for my own being" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 42). For Bakhtin, the answerably performed act is the foundational feature of the self within the self-Other architectonic. (Murray, 2000, p. 138)

Hence, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981a; 1984) emphasised ethics in terms of responsibility for communication. The most common understanding of responsibility in Bakhtin's work refers to 'non-alibi in being'. Bakhtin (1993) repeatedly insisted that the Self, despite attempting to excuse him-/herself for actions or for inauthentic communication, cannot live an alibistic existence, depriving him-/herself of dialogical relations with Others. In addition, Morson (2010) refers to a second kind of alibistic existence in Bakhtin's work: to non-acting. This kind of alibi refers to situations in which something drastic happens in the Self's presence where he/she could help but instead, the Self pretends that he/she is not aware of that happening. As Morson (2010, p. 100) states, in both kinds of alibi the Self commits a moral error 'in denying presentness'. The second case of alibistic existence reminds us of Emmanuel Lévinas' (1974/1998) concept of responsibility of the Self for the one who suffers.

Emmanuel Lévinas, a philosopher and author of comments of the Talmud, develops an argument closer to Buber, yet makes his primary concern the other (Poirié, 1996). The other is so unique and absolute, that, when I enter into a relation with him or her, I have the essential responsibility to acknowledge and preserve that otherness, or the "alterity" of the other. Lévinas uses the notion of "face" to designate this exteriority of the other, who preexists and cannot be reduced to my apprehension of him or her (Lévinas, 1979, p. 50). This uniqueness and fragility is what, in turn, "summons me" (Lévinas, 1998, p. 146), and calls my responsibility (Prairat, 2012):

1   I call face that which thus in another concerns the *I*—concerns me—reminding me,

2   from behind the countenance he puts on in his portrait, of his abandonment, his

3   defenselessness and his mortality, and his appeal to my ancient responsibility, as if he

4   were unique in the world—beloved. (Lévinas, 1998, p. 227)

5

6   For Lévinas, the Self is responsible for the sufferer in the sense that she or he must act

7   against evil in the name of Justice. It is the order of Justice, Lévinas argues, that sets limits to

8   the Self's responsibility. Ethics directs the Self to the defence of the Other, which surpasses

9   the threat that concerns the Self.

10

11   In summary, these three understandings of a dialogical ethics emphasise different

12   features of Self-Other interdependences that are relevant to the dialogical single case study as

13   well as to the researcher involved in this task. Bakhtin's dialogicality is focused on

14   responsibility of the self for communication. It is perhaps the easiest to apply as care for the

15   infinite dialogicality and polyphony of the social world and discourses within, and also, to

16   pinpoint the researcher's own part played in this flow of responses and demands, echoes and

17   harmonics, before, during and after the research act. It also puts to the fore the fact that he or

18   she is engaged with his or her unique answer to that complex fabric. Buber invites us to

19   apprehend the persons as well as the nature we meet on a field in their intense uniqueness – in

20   full encounters, and not to reduce them to "its" in analytical terms. Lévinas, eventually,

21   although also concerned with responsibility, conceives it in a different sense than Bakhtin. He

22   calls us to go one step further in our apprehension of Others; meeting and acknowledging

23   their uniqueness, we actually become responsible for them, even more than for ourselves. In

24   the articles of this special issue, we shall see that all these kinds of ethics play their roles in

25   the complex events that the authors attempt to understand.

26

27   *Chronotope*

28   Just like ethical issues have attained a considerable discussion in social sciences,

29   though not always in terms of dialogical ethics, so 'dynamics' has been extensively

30   discussed, though not as a dialogical concept. 'Dynamics' refers to change, development,

31   movement, transformation, and so on, in and through passing time, and so it opposes the

32   assumption of stable states of human affairs, fixed positions, and a lack of change. The

33   relation of 'dynamics' to time and temporality can be pursued in a number of directions (e.g.

34   linear time vs non-linear; linear as mechanical time vs more dynamic/fluid; linear as

1 unidirectional/irreversible vs. reversible time; multidirectional, chronometric time vs

2 experiential time). These directions could be explored historically, culturally or

3 psychologically (Simao, Guimaraes, & Valsiner, 2015).

4 Psychological temporality has usually been explored as a journey of passing through

5 stages in time, and 'dynamics' in this sense is a fundamental concept in developmental

6 psychology (Smith & Thelen, 2003; Van Geert, 2003: Witherington, 2007). This perspective

7 of temporality is often conceived as a progressive succession of events, and many studies

8 addressing psychological development represent time by movements of hands on clocks or by

9 the sequential ticking of biological, or even of social, time. For example, classical models of

10 the "ages of life" have often been represented as a succession of immutable steps on an

11 upwards stair from birth into adulthood, and then downwards into old age and death (for a

12 discussion, see for instance Zittoun, Valsiner, et al. 2013). This conceptualisation has also

13 infused many theories of development. Jean Piaget, for instance, proposed a dynamic view of

14 development as relating to core processes of accommodation and assimilation; eventually, the

15 system would find states of dynamic equilibrium – which he at times designated as stages

16 (Piaget, 1968). Unfortunately, many of Piaget's followers defined the growth of moral

17 development, of cognitive development, perception of responsibility, as well as of physical

18 development in terms of a static and linear succession of stages, at times represented as steps

19 as in staircases, thus losing the original understanding of a dynamic equilibrium.

20 An alternative to linear scale-models can be found in emphases on circles or spirals. It

21 is the German philosopher George Hegel who, in the early 19th century, formulated the idea

22 of the development of mind as 'circles returning within themselves' or as 'spirals' (Hegel,

23 1807/1977; 1821/2001). He presented an image of development as a process of interaction

24 between the mind and its social environment, during which both partners in interaction

25 gradually transform in and through the process of active understanding. Drawing on this,

26 Valsiner (2018) argues that 'spiral forms are the material encodings of the psychological

27 processes of tension between open and closed infinities'. He observes that images of spirals

28 dominate the processes of the developmental sciences and of genetics, as well as the

29 imagination of individuals, or professionals. However, if they avoid some problems of the

30 scales, these spiral models do not explicitly account for the spatiality of development in

31 society.

32 Interestingly, Bakhtin offers an alternative route for thinking of dynamic development

33 through time and space, and one that is instructive for dialogical single case studies. For him,

psychological experience takes place in an uncertain and unpredictable world; temporality is a fundamental feature of his theory of dialogue – and of dialogism. Dialogue does not follow any predetermined route, but there are always infinite possibilities of 'becoming', that is, of transforming one state of discourse into another, even if the change is very small. We can repeat here Bakhtin's famous phrase that "nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 166).

Bakhtin stated that he was inspired by Einstein's and Kant's ideas about time-space. He maintained that all lived experience takes place in a specific time and space, that is, in a *chronotope*, in which time-space forms an interdependent and indivisible unit (Bakhtin, 1981b; Bemong et al. 2010; Steinby, 2013). The meaning of what people say and do is specific to the chronotope in question. Time cannot be described as linear but it has a specific psychological function in a particular condition (or space), and it can diversify in multiple ways. However, Bakhtin made it clear that while he accepted Kant's evaluations of the importance of time and space, he did not accept his *abstract* concepts. Kant considered time and space as transcendental forms of knowledge (ordinary knowledge is concerned with knowledge or objects; transcendental knowledge is concerned with knowledge of how it is possible to experience those objects *as* objects). Instead, Bakhtin considered chronotopes as processes of *concrete* artistic relationships as expressed in novels. He analysed chronotopes historically, from Greek romance through to the Rabelaisian novel, and to modern literature, focusing specifically on novels by Dostoyevsky. Bakhtin's historical analysis is not just an analysis of literature but it is an account of human experience in history that takes place in and through different life-styles.

In what follows, we can recall some of the chronotopes identified by Bakhtin. In Greek romantic novels, space is abstract and is not linked to time. Space is interchangeable in sense that the story that takes place in Babylon, could just as well happen in Egypt or Byzantium. In ancient literary products, time and space are separate from one another and therefore in essence they are reversible, in the sense that spaces are interchangeable, and events can be undone under certain circomstances: 'The adventure chronotope is thus characterized by *a technical, abstract connection between space and time,* by the *reversibility* of moments in a temporal sequence, and by their *interchangeability* in space' (Bakhtin, 1981b, p. 100; original emphasis). In commenting on Bakhtin's analysis of chronotopes, Morson (2010) observes that heroes in Greek romance do not behave as agents. Instead,

things happen to them by outside powers or by accident, and the test of Greek heroes' resilience is to endure fate and chance.

According to Bakhtin's analysis, ancient literature did not succeed in generating literary forms that would be adequate to depict an individual's private life. Personal life is adequate only in minor genres, proceeding through schemata and routines of love, hate, power struggles, wars and peace, but without any specificities of *historical time.*

In contrast, the second type of chronotope takes place in a real historical and irreversible time. In contrast to Greek romance in which time and space were abstract and linked only mechanically, Bakhtin arrived at a 'Bildungsroman', in which humans emerge as *historical agents*; here, irreversibility refers to the cosnsquent open-ended nature of human experience in time:

> Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 166).

Modern awareness of historical time in social philosophy, as well as in the evolution (or transformation) of species in the 18th and 19th centuries, was accompanied by political and economic changes. These changes also gave rise to the modern concept of the Self and the Self's relations with Others, and so they prepared the conditions for the concept of dialogicality. These new relations became embedded in the Self's search for social recognition, which included the struggle for human rights, dignity and equality. They brought about new ideas of myth of nations and nationalism; they encouraged interest in history and in other cultures, and promoted languages as the markers of national identity. They led to imaginations of the past and the future. In this atmosphere, the new literary genre of *Bildungsroman* emerged, in which the Self (the hero) underwent moral and intellectual growth in historical time during his/her life experience. Bakhtin specifically focused on Goethe's novels, portraying the hero's ethical development: 'One sees the *essential* and *necessary* character of man's historical activity' (Bakhtin, 1979/1986a, p. 38; original emphasis). 'Bildungsroman' presents humans as creative, fully equipped to deal with life-experience and its problems. No longer are humans presented as accepting what happens to them: Bakhtin's chronotopic seeing refers to human actions in creative historical time.

While in Goethe's novels historical time was a fundamental feature of chronotope, it was in Dostoyevsky's novels that several chronotopes would take place simultaneously through the heteroglossia of language. Although human activities take place in historical

time, chronotope is experienced in here-and-now situations and in heterogeneous encounters through transformations of personal loyalties and responsibilities. As Bakhtin observed about Dostoyevsky's novels:

> In his characters' language there is a profound and unresolved conflict with another's word on the level of lived experience ("another's word about me"), on the level of ethical life (another's judgment, recognition or non-recognition by another) and finally on the level of ideology (the world views of characters understood as unresolved and unresolvable dialogue). What Dostoevsky's characters say constitutes an arena of never-ending struggle with others' words, in all realms of life and creative ideological activity. (Bakhtin, 1981c, p.349).

Each hero undergoes different chronotopes as he encounters new situations, e.g. real-life meetings with others, with organizations, and representatives of governments.

Bakhtin (1981b, p. 251) concludes his extensive essay about chronotopes by posing the question about the significance of all these chronotopes. He responds to his own question by insisting that chronotopes are narratives that generate representations of different types of plot. While *major* chronotopes provide a framework which generate a particular genre, *minor* or subsidiary chronotopes may occur in an unlimited number and they have their own motives. Different chronotopes co-exist, are mutually interwoven, they oppose and contradict one another: 'The general characteristic of these interactions is that they are dialogical (in the broadest use of the word)' (Bakhtin, 1981b, p. 252).

We do not need to interpret Bakhtin's analysis of literary chronotopes as being exhaustive in terms of their types and of historical periods, according to which chronotopes are abstract in ancient literature, while in modern literature they are dominated by heteroglossia and by profound self-reflexion. Rather, Bakhtin's analyses may serve as examples of possible chronotopic types, posing the question as to whether complex networks of social, political and cultural, as well as personal relations in concrete circumstances, might reveal other chronotopic types, and so disregard a specific historical stage. In fact, Bakhtin was deeply aware of the close relations between historical, social and political events that influence both individual and societal lives and their reflections in space-time relations, as in provincial towns in the nineteenth century (Bakhtin, 1981b, p. 247).

Finally, what is the status of chronotopes in terms of epistemology and ethics? Concerning the epistemological status of chronotopes, Bakhtin accepts Kant's concept of

time and space in stating that chronotopes are 'indispensable forms of any cognition' (Bakhtin, 1981b, p. 85). However, he explains that in contrast to Kant's transcendental forms of cognition, chronotopes are 'forms of the most immediate reality', which, for Bakhtin is fundamental for artistic creation: 'the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic'. Bakhtin's 'image of man' necessarily raises the idea of human beings as ethically responsible. This image figures in Bakhtin's work throughout all his writings, from his early book *Towards a Philosophy of the Act* (Bakhtin, 1993) until his last pieces. When we consider chronotopes, the subject of ethical responsibility becomes particularly important. Chronotopes are not simply time-space units that can be found in plots or in events, but they are ethical units that provide an essential ground for social action. In other words, chronotopes are active forms of experience and of communication, rather than neutral forms of information processing. Because chronotopes are communicated, they create meanings, have values, and so carry ethical responsibility, which is revealed in and through concrete and local events in which humans are involved as co-actors. We can conclude that since for Bakhtin language is a concrete dialogical co-action, it is fundamentally chronotopic.

Building on Bakhtin's ideas, let us characterise chronotope as a dialogical epistemic genre, that is, a style of co-acting in a concrete time-space situation which results in the transformation of the intersubjective knowledge and experience of participants. The term 'genre' comes from the study of speech and literature, and Bakhtin (1979/1986b; 1981a) defines genres as epistemological styles of speaking and communicating. Humans are born into genres that are conventionalised and institutionalised styles of communicating and acting. They have a double orientation: towards stability and towards change. While they are relatively stable social products embedded in social practices and culture, they change through communicative practices of individuals and groups. They are recognizable through community precisely because they are institutionalized (Marková, 2001). In a concrete time-space situation, a chronotope embodies the irreducible Self-Other unit that is bound by ethical and dynamic relations. Since a chronotope is a style of co-acting in a concrete time-space situation, it requires that the researcher explore the network of elements constituting the whole of the case in question, its major and subsidiary themes, and their co-existence. Within these, humans have their freedom and constraints with respect to making choices. They experience uncertainties, fears and hopes; they imagine their past, they live in their present, and expect their possible futures (Bergson, 1889/2001).

Chronotope as analytical tool: Ontogenesis, microgenesis and sociogenesis

How can we use Bakhtin's conception of chronotope in literature within the social sciences, that is, beyond the realm of his project? As dialogical or sociocultural psychologists, we aim to account for ethical and complex realities – that is, to build dialogical case studies. The notion of chronotope can therefore serve us both as analytical tool, and as communicative tool.

First, when we enter in dialogue with a particular complex reality – a given "case study", the notion of chronotope can enable us to identify diverse streams or arrangements of time-space dynamics, of different scales. One possible way of identifying these scales is to call upon the notions of sociogenesis, ontogenesis and microgenesis, used in developmental sociocultural psychology (Duveen, 2001; Gillespie & Cornish, 2010). Sociogenesis designates the genesis of the social, that is, social, ideological, political or historical transformations; ontogenesis is about the development of a single person along her/his course of life; and microgenesis intends to capture ongoing dialogues and interactions in specific locations, and are thus the moments through which both socio- and onto-genesis are regenerated.

These three notions usefully capture different scales of change and their mutual relations – usually, sociogenesis is slower than interactions, unless of course there is a revolution or a war. However, these notions fail to account for the necessarily situated nature of these dynamics, which the notion of chronotope allows us to introduce. Hence, the notion of chronotope could become an analytical tool to identify, in the complex dynamic whole of a case, "channels" of transformation, in time and space, of different scales. We could thus for instance consider that the case as a whole – say, an institution – evolves according to a first chronotope, a certain time-space arrangement (which would correspond to a spatialisation of sociogenesis), that some of its subparts evolve according to other time-space dynamics (for instance by following the trajectory in time and space of one specific person coming through that institution), and also, that some relations within the whole have their own chronotope at a microgenetic scale (for instance, by following a specific teacher-student dynamic moving across time and space). In that sense, the notion of chronotope would be an analytical tool to follow time-space trajectories at different scales.

At the same time, through the notions of sociogenesis, microgenesis and ontogenesis, we can identify different implications for time and specifically, for its ir/reversibility, as it relates to different chronotopes. First, sociogenesis can include two types of chronotopes. On the one hand, mythical time evolves sociogenetically, although it implies suspended,

interchangeable, that is, in Bakthin's words, reversible time and spaces. Certain belief systems and ideologies can equally be detached from specific time-spaces, or act as if they were (think for instance, of new evidence-based interventions, which are supposedly by their nature transferable, or the promise of "the end of history" of socialism). On the other hand, sociogenesis also includes the unfolding of history, and in this sense, time is irreversible and attached to specific spaces: once a war has happened it cannot be undone (as in Anisov's (2001) "broom of time", quoted in Zittoun et al., 2013, p. 103), and neither can the consequent chains of events and destruction be revoked.

Second, at a microgenetic level, chronotopes occur through specific encounters and interactions. Here, of course, time is objectively irreversible; actions cannot be undone, hands unshaken, and nails unhammered. However, some microgenetic events can be recurrent, as in routine-based chronotopes. Because of their repetitive nature, these can be experienced by specific persons as "the same" or as anchored in an endless, reversible time; hence, the dullness of repetitive jobs or actions is epitomised in Promotheus. Similarly, microgenetic events can be recurrent in the sense that spoken words may carry weight that carries into new interactions.

Thirdly, ontogenesis presents an interesting combination of possible chronotopes and relations to time and space. Again, the idea of the *Bildingsroman* here rejoins a developmental understanding of people's course of life; through experience, indeed, people try situations, fail, learn new modes of action, transform their identities, develop new understanding – time is here irreversible: experiences cannot be un-lived. However, psychology has also taught us that experienced time can be much more flexible and bendable. Dreams reveal the reversibility of psychic life: there, we can experience new combinations of events or feelings long gone, linked to the present, or attached to our fear of the future. Similarly, our emotional life also often brings into the present fears from childhood or aspects of our identities in principle no longer existent. Psychoanalysis thus made us aware of the lability and reversibility of psychic time (especially of the unconscious) (Green, 2000a, 2000b). Hence, at all levels of socio, micro and ontogenesis, tensions between the irreversibility and the reversibility of time can coexist, at times with tragic consequences.

Based on such an analytical distinction, and also following Bakhtin's reflection on literature, we could elaborate on specific forms of accounting for these chronotopes. Hence, the concept of social representation may usefully be used to describe sociohistorical chronotopes, but not the life-course of a person. In dialogical single case studies that are concerned with ethical and dynamic interdependencies between the Self–Other(s), that

therefore capture the 'wholeness' of cases, and that by their nature are open-ended, the notion of chronotope has purchase is an analytical tool to understand multiple time-space trajectories of different scales, in and through which ethical co-actors relate to one another. Chronotopes also serve as a communicative tool, insofar as the means through which we account for them could become guides for writing up and communicating about case studies. Indeed, as social, cultural or dialogical psychologists, we may have to account for the transformations of countries, institutions, interactions or people; but the style of writing about these needs to be adjusted to the specific "scale" of time-space dynamics, and so the specific concepts (e.g. for Bakhtin, *Bildingsroman*) used to account for these chronotopes. This then opens the question of the "genre" of knowledge (in the literary sense of the term) we produce through the identification of chronotopes in dialogical case studies, and so too the question of how that knowledge could become general, and indeed, what that means, as we will see below.

Chronotopes and generalisation in dialogical case studies: towards new knowledge genres

It is clear that dialogical single case studies so defined have unique criteria that pertain to an ethics of engagement, of answerability, and of responsibility on the one hand, and streams of time-space dynamics with specific scales on the other. These criteria have implications not only for how one defines single cases, but also for how one researches, evaluates, and thinks and contributes with, them. The social, cultural or dialogical psychologist does not stand outside of the dialogical dynamics we have described in this paper. Entering in dialogue with a case that is characterised by specific time-space dynamics of ethical co-actors, the researcher is also bound by ethical concerns, she/he engages with Others, and is responsible to them. Hence, the ethics of Self-Other interdependences that impel the researcher to frame her or his questions in terms of chronotopes are also central to what the researcher her-/himself does, and to what she/he *can do* with the case so built, which has implications for the mode of generalisation, if any, she/he pursues. This is true in two senses. Firstly, the researcher-researched relation comes to constitute a subpart of the case; this is obvious, although variations will be found between different case studies (whether the researcher-participant relation moves over time, or the trajectory of the researcher her-/himself is important, and so on) (Hviid & Beckstead, 2011; Zadeh, 2017; Zittoun, 2017). Secondly, the researcher who studies the complex dynamic whole of a case through chronotopes reveals their commitment to a specific epistemic genre. From this commitment the question of what can be known from a dialogical single case study then arises: a question

that has most often been framed within the literature as the question of generalisation. As we will see, this question is perhaps not appropriate for dialogical single case studies.

As with cases so defined by Morgan (2012), Valsiner (2019), and others (see e.g. Flyvbjerg, 2006), it is first evident that generalisation from samples to populations, or statistical generalisation, when applied to dialogical single cases, makes little sense. The researcher motivated to study dynamic and ethical interdependent units does not approach the construction of their case using a method of sampling that treats the Self as something other than an ethical being from whose unique communication with Others something important can be known (see also Marková, 2016). Moreover, dialogical case studies are not underpinned by the commitment to prediction that is requisite to statistical forms of generalisation, and which clearly does not involve an understanding of Self-Other dynamics in specific time-space. Further, questions about how to statistically generalise from case study research, which derive from a focus on an independent Self, rather than the actual subject matter of whole cases, not only fail to align with the ontological presuppositions of dialogical approaches, but also do not account for the fact that such research generates insights not only from human participants but also from the sociocultural environment (see also Valsiner, 2019).

A number of researchers have conversely suggested that we should generalise from single case studies to theories rather than to populations. Two of the most outspoken authors to argue this, Flyvbjerg (2006) and Yin (2012, 2013), describe the distinction between generalisation to populations and to theories as the distinction between formal or statistical generalisation on the one hand, and analytical generalisation, on the other. Analytical generalisation is of course not novel. It is in fact quite common for qualitative researchers to claim that they are engaging in this task through 'grounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); the generation of theory through the sampling strategy of 'theoretical saturation'. In basic terms, theoretical saturation refers to the point at which no new information is gained from conducting further interviews, observations, and so on, and from which the researcher can identify the specific 'properties' of the category of interest (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.61).

Although in its original formulation, theoretical saturation was conceived as relating to the 'never-ending process of generating theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.40), in much of the literature to date this aspect has been obfuscated by an overemphasis on saturation through empirical sampling, marking the elevation of a tool to a theory (Valsiner, 2006). Even scholars who seek to use more nuanced approaches, such as that of corpus construction (see Bauer & Aarts, 2000), uphold some idea of there being a point at which sampling

produces nothing new. In other words, despite the fact that this approach determines theory-building as 'open-ended', it fails to conceptualise the subject matter of research as equally dynamic. Rather, it treats the case at some point as 'closed'.

So conceived, generalising to theories cannot be the basis upon which generalisation from dialogical single case studies can be defended. This is not only because the researcher using grounded theory does not generally identify their case as dynamic, but also because it is not clear that claims to general theories made on this basis align with the ethical nature of dialogical single cases. In overemphasising sampling, claims to theoretical saturation have most often relied upon researchers' claims to further data collection providing 'informational redundancy' (Sandelowski, 2008), which in itself relies upon researchers listening to participants to ascertain whether or not their stories generate 'redundant' information. This amounts to researchers seeking to be bored by participants. In other examples using grounded theory, researchers 'go beyond' saturation on 'ethical grounds', e.g. in studies in which people want to participate (they want to be listened to, recognised, and so on), and so researchers facilitate this, even though they assume that doing so will not generate new insights (see e.g. Saunders et al., 2018). In these, less typical, examples, research practices ostensibly contravene the principles of theoretical saturation in order to uphold Self-Other researcher-participant relations, yet do not genuinely engage with the Other.

A different proposal for generalising to theory was presented by Dennis Bromley (1986), who argues that "[w]e do not infer things 'from' a case study; we impose a construction, a pattern on meaning, 'onto' the case …" (p. 290). The construction of a pattern on the basis of a single case study is also suggested by Tania Zittoun (2017), and it can also be traced to Kurt Lewin's defence of single case studies (Lewin, 1948; Lewin and Lippitt, 1938). For Zittoun (2017), analytical generalisation takes the form of Peircean abduction. In such approaches, the open-ended nature of the case, and the case study, are maintained. However, generalising to theory through identifying patterns seems to contradict our emphasis on chronotope as a communicative tool. This is because asserting a transition from cases to theory reflects one of the "agreed upon parts of a scientific package" (Becker, 2009, p.232), the uniformity of which does not necessarily align to the specific "scale" of time-space dynamics identified within a particular case. At the very least, generalising to theory would need to involve generalising to *theories* (plural), but here something still appears to be lost in terms of thinking about the *genre* of knowledge that is produced through the study of single cases.

The discussion in this paper seems to re-orient our thinking: away from *generalisation from* case studies, towards generating *knowledge through* cases, insofar as we have described dialogical single case studies as concerned with dynamic and ethical interdependencies that can be accounted for in the identification of chronotopes, and suggested that chronotope may be characterised as a dialogical epistemic genre. Knowledge genres or epistemic genres have been discussed in relation to social epistemology in general (Berkenkotter & Tuckin, 1993), to narratives in medicine (Pomata, 2014) and to single case studies (Morgan, 2012). Although Morgan does not refer to Bakhtin, by 'epistemic genre' she means a thinking style or a way of thinking. In terms of case studies, this for Morgan (2014) means the re-situation of knowledge, or the transfer of locally generated knowledge to other areas. She suggests three strategies in particular, which she calls bridges and stepping stones (from one local knowledge to another local case), ladders (from one local knowledge to many other cases), and exemplars (which establish local as typical and transfer it to many other similar cases).

In contrast to non-dialogical single case studies, the researcher of dialogical single cases must not only identify strategies of resituating knowledge, but they must raise questions about resituating knowledge and experience through chronotopes, and they must pose questions about the strength of ethical engagement of (and to) participants.

In this special issue, we shall see that different answers to the question of how to resituate knowledge in and from dialogical single case studies emerge. In all of the papers, we see how the construction of a dialogical single case study takes shape. In many, we see the researcher's primary concern with, and commitment to, her participants; this is for instance a priority for Hviid's (2020) intervention in a region that wanted to change kindergarten practices in Denmark, and the approach developed by Cornish (2020a) in working with the communities affected by the Grenfell Tower fire in London. Some of the papers in this issue foreground dialogical practices in the field, as for instance Coultas (2020), whose contribution explores whether an educational intervention in Tanzania can acknowledge the dialogicality of participants at all, and Markova and Novaes (2020), who consider a variety of professional practices. Others foremost focus on the analytical tools with which dialogical single case studies can be articulated, such as Zadeh and Cabra (2020) who reflect on dialogical exemplars, and Zittoun (2020), who builds a regional case study and mainly uses a dialogical analytical principle. In fact, doing so, all of the papers reflect upon the implications of dialogism as a theoretical frame, and the epistemological approach and ethical concerns of dialogical single case studies (see Cornish 2020b for a general discussion). Collectively, the papers of this issue serve as several examples of the process of

resituating knowledge within a dialogical epistemic genre, and are therefore intended, as reflections, to be as open-ended as the cases they describe.

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