Polyphony and Polyphasia in Self and Knowledge

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The purpose in this paper is to contribute towards an understanding of the link beween plurality of self and knowledge. The paper relates the concept of cognitive polyphasia with Bakhtin's views on positioning and the polyphony of the person, and Hermans and Kempen's concept of the dialogical self. It links dialogical epistemology and ontology to argue that, (i) polyphony and polyphasia of self and knowledge are two sides of the same process, and (ii) our ability to position ourselves in relation to the knowledge of others explains how the meanings, practices and identities that co-exist within individuals and groups are put to use, enabling us to function in multiple relationships and contexts. The paper concludes by suggesting that identity and knowledge are inseparable from both the multiple relationships in which they develop and from processes of self-other positioning. Research on expert knowledge of homelessness amongst professionals working in the UK voluntary sector is briefly examined to illustrate the proposed theoretical argument.

POSITIONING, REPRESENTATIONS AND IDENTITY

Guided by a key question at the heart of Duveen's work; the link between social representations and identity, the aim of the paper is to articulate the relationship between plural representational fields (polyphasia of knowledge) and the inner plurality of the self. The relationship between representations and the constitution of the self was also pointed out by Moscovici (2000), yet was not explicitly addressed when discussing the issue of cognitive polyphasia. He noted; 'Through belief, the individual or group is not related as a

subject to an object, an observer to a landscape; he is connected with his world as an actor to the character he embodies, man to his home, a person to his or her identity' (Moscovici, 2000, p. 253). The paper, reflects on this issue and articulates the co-existence of plurality of self and knowledge within individuals and groups. Polyphony and polyphasia of self and knowledge will be conceptualized as co-constructed upon the basis of representational processes along which people take up and negotiate particular I-positions addressed to dialogical others (inner and 'real'), from which they put to use contents and modes of thinking, and in doing so criticize, challenge, negotiate or reproduce others' knowledges. In order to illustrate the proposed theortical argument, I shall draw upon examples from qualitative research on expert knowledge of homelessness amongst the community of professionals working in the UK voluntary sector (see Renedo & Jovchelovitch, 2007 for a discussion on methodology and analysis).

Both identity and social representations are socio-psychological processes through which meanings are constructed and organised thus affording us ways to relate to the outside world and to the world of others. They have a relational genesis and are co-constructed side by side through dialogue with others in the multiple locations in which we live. As many who have worked on issues bearing on social representations have shown (e.g. Gervais & Jovchelovitch, 1998; Howarth, 2006), the logic that guides how social knowledge is used is that of identity construction and maintenance. The centrality of identity work, relative to the way social representations are used is evident in Duveen's work on gender (Duveen, 1993; Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). His research shows that social identities are elaborated and/or stated through the process of drawing upon and re-constructing the many symbolic resources available in a representational field (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). As symbolic communicative practices, social representations are representations by a person and/or a group and thus they constitute an act of asserting an identity and affirming who one is (Gervais & Jovchelovitch, 1998) in differentiation with the dialogical other (Jovchelovitch, 1996). Knowledge, understood as a system of representations, is 'both dependent upon and expressive of the identity issues experienced by the groups which produce them.' (Gervais & Jovchelovitch, 1998, p. 711). This was clearly the case in Gervais and Jovchelovitch's research on health beliefs amongst the

Chinese community in England. They found that the cultural clashes experienced by this displaced community were contained in their polyphasic representational fields and also guided their processes of identity construction and maintenance (Gervais & Jovchelovitch, 1998). Different levels of acculturation amongst members of the Chinese community were linked to the different ways in which people put to use their hybrid representations of health and illness to defend their plural identity- i.e. sometimes eastern and sometimes western (Gervais & Jovchelovitch, 1998).

The relationship between social representations and identity has been articulated through the concept of social positioning (e.g. Breakwell, 2001; Duveen, 2001; Elejabarrieta, 1994). This is a concept which has been used with varying meanings within social psychology. In the social representations literature, adopting a social positioning refers to taking and acting on a specific point of view of shared (but not consensual) points of reference (e.g. Clémence, 2001; Doise, 1984; Elejabarrieta, 1994). In this sense, through the adoption of specific social positionings, the representations shared by a group of people can be expressed in diverse ways rather than used in a standardized manner (Elejabarrieta, 1994) thereby giving way to different social identities (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). The process of positioning not only enables people to negotiate a particular standpoint in relation to shared representations, but also to express their identity (Duveen, 1993; Elejabarrieta, 1994). As Duveen (2001) argued, identities 'are not simply internal elaborations of meanings, but the reconstruction of externally constructed patterns of meanings' (p. 263) that develop through processes of positioning of the self in relation to representations circulating in the social world.

Social positioning is rooted in the anchoring process (Doise, 1993 in Clémence, 2001) and it is due to socialization in different groups that people are able to take different positions (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). As Duveen (1993) shows in relation to the construction of gender identities, the acquisition of the identity of the child is a process of adopting a particular social positioning within the collective systems of meaning available to them. Social representations of gender around the child contain different possibilities of gender identities and it is in adopting a position for herself within this landscape that the child negotiates her identity (Duveen, 1993). Hence, identity is understood as positioning and

different identities can develop due to the possibility to take different positions; those that are viable within the same representational field due to their 'fit' with the norms of the system (Duveen, 1993). This enables the development of an identity, which although open to change is relatively fixed and thereby constitutes an important influence on meaning-making during the course of social interactions (Duveen, 1993). This is an important point of disjuncture between the social representational approach to positioning and that of discourse analysts (Duveen, 1993). For Harré and associates (e.g. Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Lagenhove, 1991) identity is fluid and constantly changing as we step in and out of different discursive interactions. This approach to positioning emphasizes an anti-essentialist view of the self as it argues that a person's subjectivity; 'is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others' lives.' (Davies & Harré 1998, p. 35). For them, identity as social positioning, is reduced to inter-personal practices at the conversational level through which meanings are negotiated amongst speakers in the course of interaction (Elejabarrieta, 1994). Duveen (1993) rejected such discursive conceptualization of positioning and although he argued that a representational field can make viable different social identities, he emphasized a more fixed identity. Only those positions that are consistent with the norms of the system are made available, which in turn, makes untenable certain identities (Duveen, 1993).

Positioning in Duveen's work is examined to address the process through which different social identities emerge out of the same representation (Duveen, 1993; Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). The proposal in this paper has a slightly different focus. The concern is with the process through which a plural social identity is formed hand in hand with a polyphasic representational system shared by a group or community. How is the plurality of self and knowledge co-constructed? And how can different identities and forms of thinking co-exist within the individual? In order to address this issue, the paper adopts a different, yet not mutually exclusive approach to positioning than that used within the social representations literature; one that captures the dialogical nature of the phenomenon. Using Bakhtin's dialogical notion of positioning as a source of inspiration allows us to recognise the

addressivity and relational nature of social representations and identity (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986). The notion provides an understanding of the dialogicality of human beings as both containing the alterity of the other but at the same time separating from it through positioning towards the representations that she brings to dialogue. As we will see later, in Bakhtinian sense positioning is a triadic relation between a positioned *I* addressing an *Other* (i.e. an individual, a group or an institution) in relation to an object of knowledge and in response to his/her worldviews on that object. This notion helps overcome the divide between self and society (and culture), that is assummed in the problematic distinction between personal and social positioning (e.g. Harré & Lagenhove, 1999; Hermans, 2001). Positioning arises both in the micro-encounters with others throughout the personal history of an individual and in our wider participation in the socio-cultural and political contexts where we live (see Raggatt, 2007 for a taxonomy of forms of positioning by source of origin and mode of expression). The proposed approach to positioning is in line with Raggatt's comprehensive approach in the sense that it recognizes that positioning processes are rooted in the dialogue between self and society and expressed in discursive, symbolic, performed and embodied social acts (Raggatt, 2007). Such a comprehensive view is important in order to capture both; (a) how representations are materialized in our lived experience and translated into practices and relationships (Jodelet, 1991), and (b) the discursive, performative and embodied dimensions of identity.

As Bakhtin (1986) puts it, the dialogicality of human beings involves a *responsive* nature and an ability to *position* oneself in relation to the other within a context of juxtaposition of ideas and clash of meanings. And it is through dialogical processes of addressing, responding to, and appropriating the representations of manifold others that selfhood and thought come into being (Bakhtin, 1984). Hence, as the paper shall discuss, the internal diversity of self and knowledge is an expression of the responsive nature of human beings towards the polyphony of discourses of others (in the person and the outside world), those who we encountered in the past and those with which we relate to in the present time. The proposed view does not claim that everything is fluidity of knowledge and identity. An argument that assumes that identity and knowledge are constantly changing, along with movements across different contexts and dialogical relations, would

fail to recognise the basic human need for stability. How, if not, could we experience ourselves as single persons, or how could we explain invariance in knowledge? How, if not, could we establish criteria for considering what is right and wrong, good or bad. Certainly, there is a place for both multiplicity and sense of unity, change and permanence in the person across time and space. This postulation is achieved by looking at Bakhtinian positioning within the context of Hermans and Kempen's (1993) dialogical self, which enables us to move away discourse analysts' anti-essentialist notion of positioning.

Bakhtinian positioning enables us to link the inter and intra-psychological, as well as the polyphasia of knowledge and the inner plurality of the self. Its feature of addressivity and rhetorical nature make the concept potentially useful to explain the use and defence of certain types of knowledge, and the contestation of those knowledges that put one's identity and potentialities at risk. His conceptualization of the constitution of the person as a process of 'ideological becoming' (Bakhtin, 1981) whereby a plural 'consciousness' is co-constructed in dialogue with and evaluative positioning towards others' worldviews, resonates with the making of representations that occurs alongside 'a kind of ideological battle, a battle of ideas' (Moscovici, 2000, p. 275). The process of ideological becoming is dependent on a complex tension between privileging one's knowledge under centripetal forces and centrifugal forces of meaning that tend towards the other's views and the position that they impose upon us. These are the internal battles between 'voices' of dialogical others struggling for hegemony to institute their competing discourses and impose positions on the self, framing the subjectivity of the person and the representational act. The person has possibilities for either being subordinated to the dominant 'voices' of authoritative others, or taking contesting I-positions subverting the other's knowledge and the position it imposes on the self. Such contradiction and tension within the internal dialogues of the person are a reflection of the conflicts with which self-other relationships are loaded in the social world (Jovchelovitch, 2007) and shed light on the contested nature of representations.

COGNITIVE POLYPHASIA AND 'TRACES' OF OTHERS IN THE SELF

Moscovici's hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia refers to the 'diverse and even opposite ways of thinking' (Moscovici, 2000, p. 245) that exist simultaneously within the individual and the group, and that are eclectically put to use within the dialogical relationship with others. The concept helps us understand knowledge as a plurality of co-existing and at times conflicting forms of thinking, meanings and practices living side-by-side in the same individual, institution, group or community. It conveys the dynamic dialogue that exists between different spheres of knowledge and expresses the inter-relations between the multiplicity of meanings circulating in the social world. The concept captures the plurality and dialogicality of all knowledge systems and the matrix of relationships that form the experience of everyday life. It provides the means to theorize how a multiplicity of voices of others speak through individual speakers and within social fields (Jovchelovitch, 2008). The polyphasia of knowledge can only be understood within the context of multiple ego-alter relationships, where different ideas and modes of thinking clash and compete over meaning giving way to the emergence of social representations. The internal dilemmas and plurality that polyphasic systems contain between different themes, representations and practices do not cancel each other out. Instead, they co-exist within the person (and the community), who relates to them as a resourceful asset that is differently put to use to deal with the needs and challenges of the diverse contexts where she lives (Renedo & Jovchelovitch, 2007). Its plurality and at times contradiction have a situated functionality and make sense in the context of our belonging to diverse life-worlds where different types of thought, practice and communication are required (Wagner, Duveen, Verma, & Themel, 2000). Cognitive polyphasia in representational fields serves as an asset of practices and meanings that individuals and groups can draw upon thus enabling them to move across their multiple relationships and locations in the social field (Jovchelovitch, 2002, 2007; Renedo & Jovchelovitch, 2007; Wagner, et al., 2000). This elaboration brings to the fore the question of what determines that, within the plurality of knowledge, some meanings and symbolic practices are asserted in rejection to others? This issue will be futher discussed later.

The notion of polyphony, which was used by Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1984) to describe

the complexity of the characters of Dostoyevsky's novel, is perhaps, his most original contribution to our understanding of the polyphasic nature of knowledge and the plurality of the dialogical self. It helps us to understand how the polyphasia of knowledge is bound to the inner plurality of selves and anchored in different dialogical relationships. As derived from Bakhtin, the dialogical self is inhabited by an orchestrated polyphony of the voices of others with their respective values and worldviews. We simultaneously exist in internal dialogue with the diverse worlds of multiple others (Bakhtin, 1986); those that we encountered in the past and those with which we relate to in the present time. And our existence is 'an orientation in this world, a reaction to others' words' (p.143). Hence, in the polyphonic self there are 'traces' of the discourses and narratives left by others along the past or present dialogical relationships, which are evaluated and rhetorically responded to through acts of positioning (Bakhtin, 1984). In this way the notion is central to our understanding of how the individual subject contains a plurality of polyphasic discourses about the self, others and the world, each of which has its place in our interaction with others in different contexts.

As Bakhtin (1984) points out about the polyphonic novel, the polyphonic self is 'multi-styled', 'multi-accented and contradictory in its values' (p.15), and thus a heterogeneous 'hybrid' (p.11). For him, the plurality of human consciousness is constituted through dialogical relations in a landscape of I-positions addressed towards others. It is within the polyphonic encounter between voices in disagreement, harmony or negotiation, whereby meaning about the self and the world comes to be constituted. The conceptualization of the dialogical self that stems from Bakhtin's accounts of polyphony has an important implication; it maintains a perspective of the plurality of knowledge as rooted in the polyphony of voices of dialogical others, each of which embodies a discourse of its own. Knowledge is 'played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses'- ideas embodied in the voice of different others to which the person rhetorically responds (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 88). As Hermans & Kempen (1993) note regarding the conceptualization of the dialogical self, that stems from Bakhtin's polyphonic novel; 'it permits the one and the same individual to live in a multiplicity of worlds with each world having its own author telling a story relatively independent of the authors of the

other worlds. Moreover, at times the several authors, may enter into dialogue with each other.' (pp. 46-47). It is along the positions adopted towards the views of dialogical others that each of the multiple selves of the inner plurality of the person is constituted in co-emergence with a corresponding discourse.

For example, in the study of expert knowledge of homelessness, the interviews with professionals produced a shared representational field sharply characterized by cognitive polyphasia, with content and forms of knowledge about homelessness and themselves drawn from the dialogues with the polyphony of others (e.g. the statutory professional, the homeless themselves and the public). Professionals from the homeless voluntary sector working in the context of service provision in London are at the intersection between different spheres of knowledge. They move locations from the front-line of homelessness (streets and hostels) to the spheres of policy making and the public, having to be accountable to private funding bodies and partner statutory agencies who hold different definitions of homelessness (diverging understandings of its causes and disagreements in relation to the intentionality behind homelessness). Within these locations they confront obstacles to the realization of their interventions and they struggle to engage others, particularly statutory professionals, with their definitions and approaches to homelessness. It was from these multiple locations in which they simultaneously live and relate to others (e.g. through public awareness campaigns, responses to policy and statutory joined-up service delivery), from where they borrowed the dialogues through which they constructed their knowledge and community identity. The identity of the professional emerged as one side of the same dialogical process of knowledge production and it was through argument and debate with others, that particular meanings of homelessness and practices towards the homeless person merged with particular identities of the community of voluntary sector professionals (Renedo, 2008). For instance, practices of healing and understanding were linked to representations of the homeless as a whole person and an ontology, co-emerged with representations of the identity of the professional as an ally of the homeless. Practices of curing and judging the homeless were linked to representations of the homeless as fragmented and objectified, co-emerged with representations of professionals as warriors and victims of institutional domination. The results captured how

polyphasic knowledge does not live within the bounds of a single unified self or 'consciousness' as Bakhtin (1984) would say. Instead, their knowledge was similar to the genre of the Dostoevskian polyphonic novel, which is 'multi-accented and contradictory in its values' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 15), reflecting the dilemmatic nature of the context of their work. Since their everyday work is fraught with a multitude of different interactions with others and demands, the co-existence of contradictory practices, thinking and communication about homelessness came as no surprise. But how can we explain this process without falling into assumptions of internalization and of a direct relationship between discourses and social practices in the outer world and individual functioning? In the following section I adopt a Bakhtinian approach to positioning to explore how the dialogical and plural way we experience and come to know ourselves and the world is mediated by acts of positioning towards the polyphony of others.

CONSTITUTING THE SELF: POSITIONING TOWARDS THE OTHER

The ontology of human beings and the epistemology of knowledge are symbolic activities bound to each other and deeply rooted in the plurality of ego-alter dialogical relations. Within the dialogical encounter between the multiplicity of voices of others 'discourse about the world merges with confessional discourse about oneself' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 78). Bakhtin (1984) considered that we experience the world and make sense of ourselves in terms of the world of others; clashing with it, judging it and positioning ourselves towards it. As he puts it: 'I live in a world of others' words. And my entire life is an orientation in this world, a reaction to others' words (an infinitely *diverse reaction*)' (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 143, emphasis my own). He suggests that self and knowledge are co-developed through a clash of plural multi-voiced meanings in co-authorship with manifold others. By 'multi-voicedness' Bakhtin does not imply an act of copying or literally uttering others' discourses with their 'intonations' and 'emphasizes'. Instead, an utterance is positioned in relation to the dialogical other and it is due to its responsive nature ('addressivity') that it 'refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account' (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91). It is from a positioning towards

the other that 'a story is told' and 'a portrayal built' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 7). He emphasizes that the person reflects back upon the self as an object in relation to the other's views actively appropriating and responding to them and in this process making them her own. The person can only make sense of herself and emerge as an ontological human being through identifying herself through the other and in co-operation and conflict with the other (Bakhtin, 1984), and this requires the person setting her own position towards and responding to the other.

Despite the fact that Bakhtin assumes 'the other in me', it is through the notion of 'appropriation' that he highlights the agency of the person to re-construct and bring novelty to the 'voices' (values, perspectives and ideas) of others, infusing them with own values and intentions (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984). This notion explains how positioning constitutes an active *evaluative* act towards the representations of others. In Bakhtin's sense, positioning implies the *appropriation* of the other's knowledge, its re-accentuation with one's intentions, which in turn, opens the possibility for re-construction and contestation of her worldviews. As Marková (2003b) argues, 'co-authorship demands evaluation of the other, struggle with the other and judgment of the message of the other' (p.256). The 'use' of knowledge within a plural representational field is embodied in a voice and a position and constitutes *an answer towards the voice of the other*, from a subject who 'wants to be heard, understood, and 'answered' by other voices from other positions.' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 88). In positioning oneself with respect to others' knowledge over time, 'appropriating' it to claim and defend a particular vision of the world, 'one that strives for social significance' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.333), the person engages in what Bakhtin calls a process of **'ideological becoming'.** This process consists of gaining and asserting authority for one's own voice throughout the constant dialogue with the polyphony of others' voices (Tappan, 2005). Such conceptualization has therefore an important bearing on the issue of the contested and argumentative dimensions of social representations.

For example, research with professionals showed that their knowledge of homelessness and co-construction of identity as a community of practitioners were built upon dialogical battles with a polyphony of others and in response to their representations. The battle with the statutory other appeared as dominant to the organization and dynamics

of their representational field. Statutory institutional demands and the hegemony of their definitions of homelessness pose a dilemma and a threat to the voluntary ethos and practices. Hence homelessness was constructed through clashes between discourses of humanization and institutional discourses. The first refers to the dialogical responsibility towards the relationship with the homeless, where the professional fights between, on the one hand, humanization and companionship, and on the other, victimization and otherization. The second relates to the pragmatics of institutional regulation, where the professional finds herself in a dilemmatic conflict between, on the one hand, bureaucracies and institutional control that limit their supportive interventions and on the other hand, a strong sense of advocacy and responsibility as a political representative of the homeless, which results in objectification and politicization of the homeless ontology. The clash between both discourses was played out in a plural and contradictory representation of the identity of the homeless person.

It was along the shifting of positions adopted as responses towards symbolic interlocutors that elements from the polyphasic representational field were put to use as rhetorical devices for justifying, explaining and claiming thoughts and practices towards the homeless. From their different positions they addressed diverse others (e.g. the bureaucratized and careless statutory professional, the socially irresponsible public, the scrutinizing government) and engaged in continuous fights for social justice for the homeless and the recognition of their moral ethos and expertise as a community of practitioners. The process of putting to use their contradictory discourses revealed a strong tendency to defend their threatened knowledge, practices and community identity as a group of professionals. Their knowledge dynamics were characterized by a shifting of positions as *'knowledgeable professionals'*, *'defiant non-conformists'* and *'victims of institutional power'*. But in their paternalistic fight the voice of the homeless was not invited to engage as dialogical co-partner in the struggle with the outside audience (statutory others and the public). When professionals shifted their positions to *'contractors of the government client'* and *'traders of the homeless product'*, their fight for justice became politicized and monological. The unintended consequence was the reification and exclusion of those who are the ultimate cause of their struggles and their existence as a

professional sector. Their process of representing 'homelessness' implied understanding themselves as members of the voluntary sector and constructing a shared identity. The plurality and contradiction of their knowledge was evident in their identity, which emerged as contested, at times contradictory and populated by multiple voices. Hence, the professional emerged simultaneously as someone struggling between being: (1) *a member of the ethical voluntary sector* vs. *victim of institutional domination*, (2) *an essential helper/expert* vs. non-*legitimate practitioner, (3) an ally (of the homeless) vs. warrior*. The results from this study illustrated how for every response to an other's discourse the new meaning that emerged 'talked' about both the referential object and the self of the person. What the data suggested was the emergence of a co-constitutive process of proposing an identity and using a form of knowledge, which developed through the positioning and re-positioning towards the knowledge claims of the manifold dialogical others.

At the beginning of the paper I have pointed to the importance of Bakhtinian positioning to understanding the link between the polyphasia of knowledge and the inner plurality of the self. Positioning also reflects the rhetorical nature of knowledge and self-construction, within which the person is engaged in debate with others. This is critical if we are to make sense not only of the inner plurality of the person, but also to appreciate how this is fraught with dilemmas and contradictions. In as much as the individual subject is inhabited by a polyphony of voices of others, she lives in a sphere of conflict between different statements of what is the truth, confronting values about justice, and so on. Furthermore, Bakhtin's emphasis on the agency of the person to rhetorically position within the dialogical relationship with others (Bakhtin, 1984) helps us understand the eclectic use of knowledge within plural representational fields. The evaluative act of positioning, mediates the plural way individual subjects represent the world and come to know and experience one-self. This conceptualization of positioning can also illuminate how the internal plurality of the person, functions as an asset that can be drawn upon to cope with the juxtaposition of voices and discourses characteristic of the vicissitudes and the distensions of modern life. However, it is important to note that the process of positioning is not fully volitional and a result of the agency of the individual, it is in part organized by the social environment and framed by the dialogical other.

SPATIALIZED SELF: USE OF POLYPHASIC KNOWLEDGE AS MOVEMENT OF I-POSITIONS

The issue of the diversity of knowledge and multiplicity of selves brings to the fore the question of how different forms of knowledge, meanings and identities live, simultaneously within the individual. How can the plural polyphonic person experience herself as being single, integrated and the same across time and spatialization of dialogical relationships? How is a functional sense of self achieved, which enables both intelligibility as well as coherence across the multiple relations with others? Hermans and Kempen (1993) draw upon Bakhtin's notions of polyphony and spatialization (Bakhtin, 1984) and the Jamesian distinction between *I* (self as knower) and *Me* (self as known object) (James, 1890) to conceptualize the dialogical self as a multiplicity of I-positions dialogically related to each other and orientated to actual or imaginal others. In this way, they achieve a balance since it is in drawing on Bakhtin's perspective that the assumption of essential unity and continuity of the self implied in James' work is overcome whilst a certain unity within the self is assumed. Both Jamesian unity (continuity) and Bakhtinian co-existence (discontinuity) are integrated in the dialogical self (Hermans, 2001). This conceptualization helps us to explain how a sense of having a united self-identity is possible within the multiplicity of selves (Salgado & Hermans, 2005). Although the dialogical self is spatialized along a multiplicity of co-existing 'characters' (positioned *I's* addressing others), there is also space for experiencing a certain sense of permanence and of being one person (oneness of mind), which responds to the essential human need for some reference and stable framework.

Co-existence of plural and contradictory modes of thinking and identities is possible due to the spatialization of the self alongside simultaneous dialogues where she takes different I-positions addressing others' representations and from which meaning emerges and different Me's are built. This spatial extension of the self across a multiplicity of positions provides opportunities for the plural realisation of the person and for the eclectic use of different forms and contents of knowledge. Each I-position tells different and even opposing 'stories' about the world and the self and particular identities are

intimately bound up with particular forms of knowledge, discourses and social practices. Now, one could ask: If there are possibilities for movement across multiple positions, what is it that drives the eclectic selection of the mind within the inner plurality of the person? Knowledge is eclectically used from a particular I-position from which, the person engages in a rhetorical act of judgment of the discourse of the dialogical other and in doing so defends her own positioned knowledge and concomitant identity. As such, Bakhtinian positioning is an act of orientation and defense of one's view, which expresses *commitment* (responsibility) to one's knowledge and to the particular self that co-emerges with it. As he argues, within polyphony, where the voiced discourse of every co-author is attempting to dominate the other (Bakhtin, 1984), commitment to one's 'words' is essential. The failure to commit could lead to loosing self identity and authenticity (Marková, 2003b). The positioned use of knowledge conveys *commitment* to projects, social practices and memberships to communities, groups or cultures. Intertwined with this commitment and our experience of identity is the search for or denial of *social recognition* (Marková, 2003a). Social recognition 'involves realization of two fundamental dialogical potentials. One potential refers to the *Ego*, who desires that the *Alter* treat him with dignity. The other potential refers to the *Alter,* who desires that the *Ego* treat him with dignity.' (Marková, 2003a, p. 255). In this sense, the need of social recognition explains how despite multiplicity of selves there is a search for a certain degree of continuity and coherence in our identity and polyphasic knowledge, which in turn drives the contestation and challenge of those representations that constitute a threat to our identification and *commitment* to values, projects and communities. The adoption of a particular position in the fight for social recognition or in the endeavor to refute others' social recognition is intimately related to our commitment to forms of knowledge and identities. However it is also due to the dialogicality of human nature, that the person does not hold absolute agency and authority sovereign from the position of dialogical others. The person is not fully able to freely move from one I-position to another, independently from the dialogical co-partner, and her knowledge and identities have the risk of being constrained by the way the other positions her. The power of the other to frame one's position co-exists with the power and agency of the person to challenge and contest it. A discussion of the possibilities for

criticizing and contesting more powerful knowledges of others and the positions they impose on us is beyond the scope of this paper.

As research on expert knowledge of homelessness illustrated, the identity and knowledge of the professional emerged as inherent to the reactive nature of the person and her capacity to critically engage with the alienating and otherizing representations of homelessness held by statutory professionals and the public. However, these dynamics also expressed the simultaneously unavoidable structural need of having to conform to the statutory (and private funding body) frame and the positions that it imposes on the professional from the voluntary sector. These were regarded as a threat to their identification with and commitment to the community of the voluntary sector as well as to the wellbeing of the homeless. Participants fought over the statutory other's limitation and setting of boundaries to their ethos, knowledge and supportive approaches to the homeless. This is an other who illegitimates and scrutinizes their knowledge and practices. At the core of their plural and contradictory identity and knowledge was the continuous struggle with the statutory other to defend the voluntary sector's project, the yearning for social recognition of their expertise, and the simultaneous need to conform to institutionalism. There was a reasonable coherence within the plurality of the self of the professional, which limited how far they moved from one identity to another. There was a tendency to co-construct a positive identity *(e.g. an ally)* that sought to protect their approach and knowledge, bolstering their self-esteem and pride as a community of practitioners. However, at points, contestation to statutory others' representations and agenda was intertwined with justification of having to conform to their knowledge. Additionally, their possibilities for material contestation appeared as being constrained by structural needs such as depending on external funding and thus having to adapt to the agenda of others. This finding points to the need of understanding critical engagement and contestation as relational and inherently linked to material and structural dimensions.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have suggested that the phenomenon of cognitive polyphasia and the polyphony of the self are two sides of the same process. Bakhtinian positioning enables the person to move along many locations and relationships in the social fabric simultaneously existing in multiple inner and outer dialogues through which a sense of self and knowledge about the world are mutually co-constructed. The polyphony of the person leads to a multiplicity of co-authorships in the co-construction of self and knowledge, and explains the plurality of the ontological, as well as the epistemological. It is through and against others' 'words' and representations, in a tensional struggle to institute one's versions of reality that the plurality of self and knowledge is constituted. In this way, the inner plurality of the person and the content and dynamics of her knowledge are bound to the conflicts and diversity of the dialogical context; the person's repertoire of internal and external relationships with others, where their different worldviews meet and compete with one another. Polyphony and polyphasia of self and knowledge contain in their very content and dynamics the resources for plural thinking and identity. The empirical case discussed clearly exemplifies this. Professionals' multiple locations in the social fabric and interactions with social actors holding diverse knowledges, provide them with the resources to construct the plurality of contents and dialogues through which they co-construct their polyphasic knowledge and identity.

I have also suggested that the spatialization of the self is central to the ability of the person to live in simultaneous locations in the social fabric appropriating and re-accentuating the voices of different others, which come to constitute her inner plurality. The movements alongside I-other positionings are at the heart of the dynamics of polyphasic knowledge, whereby particular meanings are eclectically put to use (merging with a particular identity), with different aims- to contest, to negotiate and/or to support others' representations. I finish by suggesting that Bakhtinian positioning does not only mediate the way people are able to think in multiple ways and experience plural concomitant identities. It also sheds light on the critical potential of social representations theory. A critical version of the theory 'highlights the intersubjectively negotiated and contested character of human relations' (Howarth, 2004, p. 363). Positioning accounts for the creative agency of the person to respond and re-construct the knowledge of others. It

accounts for the possibility of a new production; a re-presentation, that emerges through dialogical/ ideological reworking of the voiced claims of others with the aim of serving one's own intentions. Hence, the relational is a space where the voice of an other (institution, authoritative other) can impose particular positions on the self, limiting the negotiability of knowledge and subjectivities, and constraining the persons'/groups' epistemological and ontological potentials. However, the relational is also a space of possibilities since the rhetorical nature of positioning towards the others' discourse enables one to enter into the arena of her knowledge, applauding, contesting or detesting it. Positioning is at the heart of the tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces in the self and explains how certain forms of thinking and being are given way, becoming viable and intelligible in a particular dialogue with others.

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