

Operant Subjectivity

The International Journal of Q Methodology

Dialogism: A Philosophical Contribution to Understanding Concourse and Consciring¹

Gustavo Said
Michael Stricklin
Federal University of Piauí, Brazil

Abstract: This article begins with questions of an ontological and epistemological nature. Does a person think independently? Are we the authors of our thoughts. How can we know? To address these questions, we try to bring ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin to bear on Q Methodology. Comparing the thinking of the Russian philosopher with that of the English physicist and psychologist William Stephenson led to questions that guide our thoughts more specifically: subjectivity is expressed in dialogue and in comparison between different voices, according to Bakhtin, which therefore can be expressed methodologically in a concourse and tested by way of a Q study. We offer a thought experiment, in the form of a Q study, to exemplify Bakhtin.

Introduction

The formation of individual subjectivity has always been a controversial topic in the humanities and social sciences. Roughly speaking, the discussions have been divided between two epistemological views: *idealistic subjectivism*, which advocates the full and complete formation of the subject as a free actor and the role of consciousness in the social environment, and *abstract objectivism*, which sees the subject bound by culture and language, tied to the structures of various orders. In both views it is not possible to consider the individual outside the frames of an individualistic psyche governed by conscience or by a metaphysical logic that removed any freedom of action.

From the first decades of the twentieth century until now much has changed in the study of subjectivity. From the idea of the subconscious in Freudian psychoanalysis to the concept of self of the early symbolic interactionists, from the humanistic phenomenology of Heidegger to Sartrean existentialism, through Gestalt psychology and cognitive-behavioral psychology, the different contributions in the various subfields of knowledge reflected almost always the same fundamental ontological and epistemological questions: Who is the subject? How is it generated? What is the role of the other in the formation of subjectivity? Consequently, doubt remains at the methodological level: Is it possible to describe and analyze subjectivity? How is it possible to perceive it?

¹ This article was first written in Portuguese and then translated into English by the authors, with the assistance of Woods Stricklin. It was presented at the 29th Annual Q Conference, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, September 5-7, 2013 and was the winner of the 2013 Donald J. Brenner Outstanding Paper Award.

In 1935, British physicist and psychologist William Stephenson announced the profound conjecture that a person's feelings could be identified and recorded in an interactive process, and in turn these feelings could be compared with the feelings of others. Exploiting this insight, he created a methodology for the scientific study of subjectivity, known as Q. This methodology enables objective analysis of subjective phenomena by comparing the opinions of respondents with respect to a representative sample of texts.

Lago, Machado and Fagan (2006)² explain that Q Methodology was developed especially for studying human subjectivity, which is understood in this case as the affective field composed of feelings, motivations, attitudes, beliefs and opinions of each individual. Articulated, these elements make up a system by which people analyze the world and thus make decisions based on the relationships they establish through other people. According to Roman and Apple (1990), subjectivity cannot be identified only by what occurs "in people's heads," in that subjectivity embraces human consciousness, and so it is necessary to recognize subjectivity as asymmetric, determined by multiple power relations and interests of class, race, gender, age and sexual orientation. Additionally, as a process that is established in interpersonal relations, subjectivity can only be mediated through communication phenomena. That said, the concept of subjectivity should be discussed and problematized in relation to consciousness and symbolic interaction.

Consciousness, subjectivity and communication are concepts that are articulated in Stephenson's view. They come together in the key concept created by Stephenson to designate the forms of self-expression that result – and can only be part of – social interaction: communicability. With the nature of communicability in mind, it is no stretch to acknowledge that there are in Q Methodology epistemological traces of a philosophy of mind and a philosophy of language.

By considering the construction of individual subjectivity within a network of interpersonal relationships, emphasizing intersubjectivity, Q Methodology approaches the thought of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who, according to Clark and Holquist (1998), unlike other philosophers, built a philosophy of language that puts "the social dynamics of the observable practice of language as the specifying force that structures interpersonal relationships in the *Zwischenwelt* or the 'intermediate world'" (Clark and Holquist, p. 36). It should be noted that Bakhtin and Voloshinov in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (2004)³ have proposed overcoming the stalemate represented by the dichotomy between idealist subjectivism and abstract objectivism, it being that, in the first case, language is seen as a purely individual act, neglecting its social character, and, in the second, linguistic awareness of interlocutors in concrete

² While there are not as yet many examples of Brazilian Q-studies, throughout this article we highlight Brazilian scholarship where applicable. Of particular note to the Q community is work by students of Prof. Linda Gentry in applied linguistics at the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP). Papers presented at a *Festschrift* honoring Prof. Al Talbott, the second president of ISSSS, was held at the Federal University of Piauí in 2008. A book containing papers presented was published in 2013. Also, the journal *Bakhtiniana*, published at the Pontifical University of São Paulo, focuses on Bakhtin and accepts manuscripts in Portuguese and English.

³ This manuscript was completed in 1929 but published only decades later. A debate continues regarding the authorship of this and other works. Holquist (2003) accepts that Bakhtin wrote *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* but that Bakhtin either sought to disguise his authorship for political reasons or co-authored it with Voloshinov. The date cited is for the edition in Portuguese.

situations, and thusly historical and actual language use, is suppressed. In the work cited, the focus of the analysis is shifted from the formal aspects of the language, i.e., the grammar and syntax, to the operationalization of it, understood as the historical and social aspects of language as put into action between subjects.

Now this is notable for the purposes of the present article on another level. It marks the moment (1929) when Bakhtin shifted away from Saussurian transcendentalism to a Peircian pragmatic theory of signs (Holquist, 2003), and we want to call attention here to Bakhtin's shift as being parallel to Stephenson's letter to *Nature* (Stephenson, 1935).⁴

In the Bakhtinian perspective, analysis of language must consider the context (place, time), characteristics and intentions of the interlocutors, the verbal and nonverbal semiologies, the forms of interaction, everything that enters into the construction of the meaning of a discourse.

As noted in the previous reflection, the formation of individual subjectivity in Bakhtin is related to Peirce's semiotic system. In effect, language is to be thought of as being in a state of instability, as an uninterrupted flow of speech acts able to assign value to objects. There are, then, three possible outcomes of this first assertion: 1) there is no sense of self without language, meaning that consciousness can only arise and affirm itself if embodied in signs; 2) there is no sense of self without the other, meaning that human thought only becomes authentic thought under the conditions of living contact with the thoughts of others, embodied in the voices of others, in the consciousness of others, which can only be expressed in the word (Bakhtin, 1997b); 3) hence, there is no self that does not express itself in terms of language. On his critical reading of the Hegelian dialectical idealism, Bakhtin perceives the linguistic sign in its social and ideological aspect, which relates the individual consciousness with social interaction. Bakhtin, however, did not articulate his theoretical configuration of thinking to methodological operations that enable the study of subjectivity within the network of interactions of signs that constitute the social context that shapes the subject interdiscursively.

In an attempt to relate the thought of the Russian philosopher with the methodology developed by William Stephenson, this article raises a question: Does subjectivity conform to dialogue, and is it expressed in dialogue with and confrontation between different voices, as Bakhtin thinks? A possible answer to this leads to a new question: If the answer is affirmative, do the factors of a Q study represent, in methodological terms, this dialogue between voices, being the common point where subjective thought can be intuited from contact with the thoughts of others, embodied in the expressive relationship with other thoughts?

Since we want to examine relationships between the concepts of Bakhtin and Q Methodology, we can only proceed if they exist within the same epistemological framework. We must accept as plausible that the ideas developed by Stephenson also belong to the domain of philosophy of language and philosophy of mind within which Bakhtin's work is inscribed. Of course, assuming that the methodology created by Stephenson is only part of a broader theoretical framework, the notion of subjectivity should have common elements in both propositions: Will the subject be aware of his/her thoughts, according to Bakhtin and to Q Methodology? For these two propositions, is the subject the exclusive and sole author of his/her thoughts? Finally, is subjectivity the product of intercommunication?

⁴ On this comparison, Saussure's line of thinking would parallel R methodology.

The central point made in this article is that thoughts, and therefore consciousness, are the result of intersubjective relationships. But those do not make the individual hostage to the "other". Instead, for Bakhtin, according to Oliveira (2008, p.108):

Our subjectivity is formed from the other, but we do not merge with it. We always produce something new. The subject creates it in response to the images that are given to him/her by others. The picture of me that I make never coincides with the image of the other, but always I learn from the image I have of the other; I always transcend that image and create a field of open potential. A merging would only lead to an impoverishment because it would destroy the externality and otherness, replacing interactive processes with finished products.

For Bakhtin, it is understood that the relationship with otherness always has a transformative and possibly enriching aspect regarding the formation of subjectivities. In the analysis of literary works he perceives a set of voices expressed in the text. These voices manifest themselves interactively, which suggests that in every text there is a *dialogic heteroglossia*. Holquist (2003, p69) writes,

Heteroglossia is a situation, the situation of a subject surrounded by the myriad responses he or she might make at any particular point, but any one of which must be framed in a specific discourse selected from the teeming thousands available. Heteroglossia is a way of conceiving the word as made up of a roiling mass of languages, each of which has its own distinct formal markers. These features are never *purely* formal, for each has associated with it a set of distinctive values and presuppositions.

Is it possible to think analogously in terms of the construction of subjectivity? Can the presence of variant voices in dialogue within the same text, or in the consciousness of an individual, be demonstrated?

In this article we cast light on the nature of subjectivity, which is of theoretical interest. Further, we believe that an appreciation of the intersection of Bakhtin's dialogism and Stephenson's communicability can refine a Q researcher's practice. By understanding that individual subjectivity arises and exists in a dense multi-voice dialogue both within and without a person, researchers can better identify factors and better understand and describe what they mean.⁵

Subjectivity in Bakhtin⁶

For Bakhtin (1997b), *to be* means to be "through" and "to" the other. This thinking has very clear social implications for studies of subjectivity in that it postulates that there is no subject who is not constituted in relation to otherness, within certain historical contexts. To this end, Bakhtin was supported in texts by the philosopher Martin Buber (1958), who described the "leading-words" principle "I-Thou" and "I-It", expressing, respectively, the relationship between one subject and another, which is the foundation of human interpersonal identity, and the association between subject and object, which establishes human experience. Thus, in Buber, life is a dialogue, because the leading-word principle is fundamentally the relationship of a subject to the other. In ontological

⁵ For Bakhtin all of life is an action, an event, and hence subjectivity is *performed*.

⁶ For a compatible account of subjectivity in Bakhtin's philosophy, see Holquist (2003), an American linguist and important translator of Bakhtin.

terms, this implies that reality is relational and therefore subjects are constituted intersubjectively.

At the core of his proposition Bakhtin (1997a) understands the process of formation of subjectivity as based on three categories that are consistent: the image I have of myself (*I-to-me*), the image I have of the other (*other-to-me*) and the image that others have of me (*I-to-the-other*). It is in the discussion of the categories "other-to-me" and "I-to-the-other" that Bakhtin introduces a modification to Hegel's concept of interaction between two or more minds, better known as the thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectic. In Bakhtin, unlike in Hegel, the "other" is not the negation (or antithesis) of being. To accept Hegel on this point would require accepting his determinism, which in turn would extinguish any establishment or implementation of a change in consciousness. This is to say that awareness cannot be synthesis (a Hegelian "third") because being means *being through others* and *to one's self*, and thus relational. Because of the relational aspect that subjectivity entails, Bakhtin thinks that subjects are constantly changing, even though their subjectivity cannot be completely erased. Bakhtin holds that interaction always yields a "surplus", and it is this surplus that gives rise to something totally new in an interaction. According to Oliveira (2008, p.118), the concept surplus

is central to the understanding of the Bakhtinian subject in his initial discussions, because it defines what each person has in particular. It is from the notion of surplus . . . that we can have a complete picture of the other, while the entirety of each person is always open and it changes all the time.

From an epistemological point of view, just as language does not secure a person's identity, a person is not understood as a finished whole ontologically given and subscribed, but rather as having an interior and exterior nature. In this view, the subject develops and forms in continuing relationships, in experiences and in life as made common and shared with others through language. In this sense, Bakhtin imagines the subject as always being able to change, as an open system predisposed to change, which can consent to listen to others and incorporate parts of their messages. Dialogue always takes place in an indeterminate way, and changes in the subject are not always consensual, confirming the ideological aspect of speech, the unequal distribution of power between individuals and the distinct place they occupy in the social context. Whether intentional or not, the relation that is embodied in the individual inevitably affects communication.

The inevitability of change and attendant unpredictability that signical interactions (read, roughly, "communication processes") promoted in the subjects are not the central point of Bakhtinian reflection, but by correlation form an important topic of research and discussion. In one contribution to what can be conceived as a phenomenology of intersubjective relationship, Ciro Marcondes Filho (2008), for example, points out that communication phenomena, as well as quantum phenomena, cannot be captured and can lead to consequences in participants by changing their previous status. In other words, communication is what transforms the subjects who are intertwined in a relation. The analysis of communication phenomena relies heavily, according to the author, on the awareness of what is occurring. This is achieved through sensible intuition that takes into account, in turn, intellectual intuition before and after the phenomenon analyzed, recovering the idea of process and, in philosophical terms, Bergson's concept of duration. It is therefore important to question: if change is always

taking place, can it be non-consensual and/or even unconscious? Considering the weight of the intellectual production of the author quoted, it seems that, yes, the subject may be unaware of this transformation caused by communication.

At odds with Freud, Bakhtin imagines a set of opinions articulated in ongoing dialogue to form new sets of opinions that will feed into the construction of subjectivity. Thus, Bakhtin posits, the position occupied by each subject involved in a given socio-historical context, enables him/her to perceive the world from specific and different viewing angles. This is what can be understood as surplus vision: "what I see of the other is just what only the other sees when it comes to me" (Bakhtin, 1997a, p.43). For Bakhtin, the words of the other have a power of completion, of fulfillment. The subject, in this sense, is part of something missing (not in the sense of psychoanalysis, especially Lacanian) and uses dialogue with the otherness to fill it, to complete it. The measure of each subject and the world in which it belongs is assured by the words that the "other" directs and, therefore, this tension between the word itself and the word of the other is that the subject is constituted and perceived as such (Barbosa, 2001). In other words, the individual takes on an awareness of the subject in relation to the other. Out of the realization of this tense relationship are born two concepts fundamental to the thinking of the Russian philosopher: exotopy and dialogism.

In the Bakhtinian perspective of forming a relational subjectivity, the concept of exotopy is associated with the concept of dialogism, because in the act of dialogue the word of another completes the subject.

When Bakhtin submits the dialogical act to the law of positioning, he asserts the existence of a principle of extra-position guiding senses. What is inaccessible to the gaze of a person is what meets the eyes of another. Thus, in the sphere of human relations and communication surplus of vision is as important as what is offered explicitly to look at (Machado, 2001, p.227).

About this discussion, Tezza ponders: "assumed in the Bakhtinian worldview, the exotopy is the fact that only the other can give us completion, as well as only we can give completion to the other" (Tezza, 1996, p. 22). Our subjectivity, in this sense, is a process always open and changeable, in so far as we imagine under the gaze of the other, and with him, all the time, we will inevitably interact. Thus, Bakhtin replaces the psychological subject with the dialogic subject.

Dialogism and exotopy are therefore the basic elements for the formation of the subject from the perspective of Bakhtin. With these concepts, Bakhtin believes that every speech act is addressed to an interlocutor, hence constituting the formative processes of the subject. Otherness installs itself in the relationship through the dialogue that engages the individuals who are involved in communication exchanges. Furthermore, speech acts can originate in previous dialogues, which were formed in different historical and geographical contexts. Therefore, the utterance is shaped by the relationship with each interlocutor, being a product of social interaction, which takes place in turn, according to the characteristics of the historical context. "What makes a word what it is are the many ways it may take on various meanings in different contexts and ownership that make its different speakers in specific communicative situations (Bakhtin 1997b)". As every act of utterance requires the presence of the "other", albeit in varying forms, it appears that awareness models itself intersubjectively in a given social context.

Certainly the social aspect of discourse has remarkable weight in the theory of Bakhtin (1997b) on the formation of subjectivity. In this theoretical path, the awareness occurs in interactive contacts with the "other" that are present in a particular context. According to Oliveira (2008), it is at the point of such contact between voices – consciousness – that the idea is born and lives. Therefore, in assessing Oliveira, individual consciousness will always be decentralized, for signs exist only on inter-individual ground. Consciousness, for him, is linguistics, which makes it both an objective fact and a social force that is not restricted to the Cartesian cogito. "The individual is permeated by the social: we develop our individuality through social events and contact with different discourses" (Oliveira, p.4). Consciousness and subjectivity are not confused but are closely related. They are not *a priori* givens that rely solely on innate or inherited characteristics. Rather, the ontological aspect is replaced by a historical heartbeat, the ability of consciousness and subjectivity to come into being.

On the concept of dialogism, it can be concluded that all discourse has aspects of co-authorship, because no speech belongs solely to its author. It is clear that every author of a discourse uses a particular form to orchestrate certain voices, as well as inner speech, which, according to Bakhtin, is the semiotics of consciousness, the way we reproduce exterior discourses in our minds. According to Oliveira (2008), inner speech, once uttered, begins to act upon the world, influencing other discourses and therefore the systems governing a particular society. "Lodging language in central position to the extent that it forms the subject in inner speech, Bakhtin imagines the formation of subjectivity as a conversation, a battle of voices speaking from different positions and invested in different degrees and kinds of authority" (Oliveira, p.5). Once again, we find here the notion of continuous transformation of the individual and the social interaction signic, or indeed, communicativeness. Moreover, using the term interactive communicativeness seems redundant to the extent that communication is already etymologically a phenomenon of communion and interaction.

Interaction between different discourses is one of the conditions for the formation of conscience. "The semantic structure of the internally persuasive word is not completed, it remains open, it is always capable of revealing all the new semantic possibilities in each of its new dialogized contexts" (Bakhtin, 1988, p.146). And the Russian philosopher concludes, emphasizing the redemptive character of otherness for the formation of the subject: "In life, after seeing ourselves through the eyes of another, always we return to ourselves" (Bakhtin, 1997a, p.37).

Both otherness and subject are located in a co-domain, a common domain: language. Bakhtin's dialogism breaks through the Cartesian stalemate, which divides studies on subjectivity into either subjectivist or objectivist. Bakhtinian subjectivity is constituted by a subject actively engaged with a social and historical "other."

Subjectivity in Q Methodology

What is the concept of subjectivity at work in Q Methodology? How does this methodology analyze the elements that constitute subjectivity?

After reading the preceding paragraphs one can recognize a certain consonance, a certain familiarity. The terminology may be different; the citations may well be unknown; but answers to these questions are to be found in the epistemological parallels. Kantor's conception of a psychological event illustrates this:

$$PE = C (k, sf, rf, hi, st, md),$$

where *sf* is the stimulus function, *rf* the response function, *hi* the history of *sf-rf* interactions, *st* the immediate situation, *md* the medium of contact, *k* the specificity principle, and *C* indicates interactive field conditions (Kantor, 1959). One can simply substitute concepts from either Bakhtin or Stephenson to meet Kantor's interbehavioral requirements.

Kantor: $PE = C (k, \mathbf{sf}, rf, hi, st, md)$

Bakhtin: $PE = C (k, \mathbf{utterance}, rf, hi, st, md)$

Stephenson: $PE = C (k, \mathbf{Q\ item}, rf, hi, st, md)$

Kantor's student Noel Smith (cited in Bigras and Dessen, 2002) states that Q methodology focuses on "a group of self-referent statements (or pictures or other items) on a topic and subjects (in the fullest sense of the word) are instructed to sort the items into subjective categories ranging, e.g. of 'more like' (+5) to 'least like' (-5)". The resulting rankings are then called a Q-Sort and correlations are established among the persons (subjects) and not between tests or measurements. That is, those who have classified items in a similar manner are correlated with each other and exhibit similar or corresponding behavior. Based on the individual correlations, groupings are extracted called factors which, in turn, show the views shared by people. Therefore, Smith says, through Q one can identify persons who are similar and dissimilar to the other in a given factor" (Smith, 2000, p. 320-321).⁷

More recently, Tim Deignan introduced the Q community to some of Bakhtin's terminologies and theories (Deignan, 2012) and pointed out that Bakhtin "resonates strongly" with Q. He cites Irv Goldman's account of Stephenson's scrutiny and rejection of hypothetico-deductivism, determinism and any associated reliance upon categorical concepts, such as the so-called faculties of the mind. Goldman rehearses the consequences of these conceptualizations by recounting the history of the Cartesian philosophy of the mind:

Descartes conceived of the mind and body as separate but interacting entities. His theory located the body in space and time making it identical to all other bodies that are governed by mechanical laws. Minds, in contrast, were immaterial, private, immune from mechanical laws and governed by innate ideas, such as "unity," "infinity," and "perfection."

Goldman refers to this duality as a myth almost universally accepted and takes up Stephenson's definition of subjectivity as essentially "the condition of viewing things exclusively through the medium of one's own mind (Stephenson, 1975, p.100). Now, on the face of it, this definition would appear to negate dialogism, but we want to argue that this is not so. Stephenson is merely pointing out that "only I can be the source of what I mean."

Unlike other methodological approaches that seek to predict the behavior of persons from a particular feature, Q methodology seeks to understand the point of view of the

⁷ But it should be noted that Bigras and Dessen in their study failed to follow best practice by using a sample based upon scale values, which of course is not Q.

person in general, emphasizing how this coincides with that of others. Thus, Q methodology is a systematic analysis that considers the person as a whole, pointing up relations between people of different opinions in a given context.

For Q Methodology, despite the vagueness of the concept and its non-consensual aspect, subjectivity is the benchmark that enables humans to define and express their own world (inner world) in relation to the objective world (outside world). It can be understood as a complex system consisting of attitudes, beliefs, motivations and values. Great complexities are at issue.

Complexity means that there are elements of the system, which may not be known, and that there are relationships between them that stay unknown, hence ignored. Additionally, none of these elements may be understood if considered in isolation from the others. Q allows one to make visible these elements and the relationships between them by the classifying (Q sorting) that each person makes. These [items] are not isolated features that emerge, but an organized whole, with a meaning that is specific to that person, and that can be interpreted because there is not one characteristic that is being treated, but the whole. (Lago et al, 2006, p.6)

Therefore, the complex and systemic nature of subjectivity can be perceived, as revealed by Q Methodology. What can be known epistemologically about subjectivity arises from a complex, dynamic and historical tangle of relationships between people who can express themselves by means of a Q Sort. If subjectivity is constituted in this manner, therefore consciousness is also formed since the subjects themselves define this network of relationships. Stephenson (1993) states that in subjective intentionality complexity is the natural order of things.

Q Methodology then can help answer the following question: Is there agreement or disagreement of opinions among respondents, and how do differences in opinion arise? (Bigras and Dessen, 2002) A comparison of opinions, convergent or complementary, sometimes even contradictory, can be extremely valuable for research but must be understood within an epistemological frame, to which we now turn.

On many occasions Stephenson defended an epistemological approach to the quantum nature of subjective sciences (among them, especially in psychology, communication and political science), highlighting, accordingly, concepts important to quantum physics that could also mark out studies of this modality of science: complexity, unpredictability and complementarity. Stephenson clarifies these ideas in several articles. He claims a new status for subjective science, refuting the notion of subjectivity as a substantive consciousness (a state of being) and replacing it with the concept of communicability, realizing that knowledge is also generated in dialogical situations, a process he calls conscurring, and not as an *a priori* reason. Subjectivity is not reducible to consciousness, it follows, because for the English physicist and psychologist, humans are communicating creatures and subjectivity must be understood as relational self-reference. This implies that consciousness, in Stephenson's way of thinking, is always changing and achieved only on the basis of relations between different subjectivities, who can express themselves in relational contexts. Communicability and its consequent importance to the formation of conscience follow from this. Communicability is how one expresses something about him/her self and

about the world, i.e., expresses his subjectivity in a context of high interaction with others.

As in quantum physics, according to Stephenson's epistemological proposal, Q models self-reference in a complementary way, since the factors of a Q study provide evidence in understanding the process of formation of subjectivity, both in an individual and social sense, making a clear connection with the postulates of the philosopher Martin Buber and a clear reading of the symbolic interactionism of George Herbert Mead, especially the idea that the self is a transit zone between the individual and the social group. Incidentally, here we notice more than a coincidence of dates; there is a coincidence of titles. In 1938 Mead published his book *The Philosophy of the Act*, containing postulates on the importance of play and the game, with their marked differences in an internalization process of the 'other' in a child's life. In the early 1920s, Bakhtin had written a book with the same title, *The Philosophy of the Act*, containing the first version of the thinking that led to the concept of dialogism. Also in the decade of the 1920s, developments in quantum mechanics led it to become the standard formulation for atomic physics. Its acceptance came after the publication of the work of Schrodinger and Heisenberg in 1925, and especially after the completion of the Solvay Conference in 1927. Stephenson created Q Methodology in 1935 and some years later, in 1967, published *The Play Theory of Mass communication*, specifically pointing out that self-actualization is a result of playful games, which involve multiple agents in contact with media content.

Deepening the relationship between quantum mechanics and Q Methodology, Stephenson (1987, p.43) makes a comparison between a theory about the unpredictability of an event and the idea of concurrence, which he created in Q Methodology as the universe of all phrases that people may say or think about a topic: "...the thousand meanings entail the 'conflicting possibilities' which quantum theory applies to...constituting Q methodology's concurrence, the self-referential statements from which Q samples are drawn, Q technique applied, and quantumized factors found in a given context." Viewed this way, the analysis of subjectivity depends on correlations of numerous subjects. The results can be understood as a possibility, among the many possible contexts in which interpersonal communication occurs in unpredictable ways.

It can be concluded, following the thoughts of Stephenson, that the social context in which the numerous intermingled statements that make up a concurrence assumes a great importance in Q Methodology, appearing in the form of shared ideas and opinions, and can be confrontational or conciliatory, as Amanda Wolf (2011, p, 52) realized in commenting on the work of Eefje Cuppen:

If people are to "meet new ideas", they must know their own ideas and be able to exchange them with others. In addition, they must be able to move beyond the mere shared content of their ideas to consider content which is individually unique. The danger, however, of moving beyond shared ideas is that the dialogue can become "confrontational", centering on different values, rather than unfolding "constructively" by "articulating assumptions" and "looking creatively for ways forward"... Investigating assumptions can show "where divergent perspectives converge" ... Q assisted in selecting participants with a diversity of perspectives for dialogues. Diversity is, of course, a characteristic of a collective, not an individual.

Wolf calls attention to the possibility of different discourses becoming confrontational and also highlights the fact that diversity is a feature of the collective, not solely the individual, assuming that, as in Bakhtin, the subject constructs his/her consciousness, his/her inner speech, which is unique and unusual, always doing so in a complementary manner with respect to a variety of other discourse, i.e. external speech. In Stephenson (1987, p.46), the idea of a complementary discourse is clear. For him, this theoretical context makes social interaction directly cogent, and everything in it is self-referential: "the Q sorts are correlated with one another, bringing past into present and future in the process." Communicability would re-emphasize the possibility of self-expression that forms a specific context for interaction and sharing of ideas.

Conclusion

Although Bakhtin and Stephenson did not share the same geo-historical context, and, in a way, they did not have the same intellectual affiliations, thinking about both appears to reveal common elements which fall within an epistemological tradition with a subjective-interpretative stamp and a socio-constructionist ontology rooted in Kant and Peirce. On one side, the two authors overcome the same theoretical abstractions of individualistic subjectivism with its idea of a transcendent consciousness centered on the subject; on the other, they reject the general positivist proposal that privileges objective investigations and suppresses data collected in any other situations as being singular, unique and unreliable. Each in his own way criticizes that epistemological foundation, and consequently the conceptual-operational system of modern social sciences. They reject reductionists of whatever stripe -- whether in the name of an individualistic subjectivism, who naively believe in the complete freedom of action of each individual, or whether on account of excessive control of behavior, action and thinking, who are said to be bound by some kind of framework. These are replaced by a recognition of the complex constitutive properties of human relationships and individual subjectivity, understood not as the genesis of the psyche, but as products of the same, which emerge from the confluence of internal and external phenomena .

If the previous paragraph suggests that in the work of these authors there are revisions to elements of the philosophies of Hegel and Buber and even to symbolic interactionism, it is to be expected that, since the first decades of the twentieth century, the lines of development of social thought -- mainly in the fields of sociology, philosophy, semiotics and psychology -- demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt their dissatisfaction with the prevailing theoretical models. Considered in the form of theoretical syntheses that contain some postulates of philosophical pragmatism, the key elements that unite the thought of Bakhtin and Stephenson are the concepts of consequentialism, contextualism and anti-representationalism. As a backdrop, their ideas form a clear -- and in the case of Bakhtin an unintended -- rapprochement with the notions of unpredictability, complexity and complementarity of quantum physics. Stephenson (1987, p.54) points out that the factors of a Q-Study are quantum leaps:

[W]hat Q methodology offers is pure quantum science, probabilistic, its concern being with the masses of the everyday common communicability people have about common things . . . and none of it involving the [state of] "consciousness" of philosophy and psychology, the "unconsciousness" of Freud, the behaviorism of Skinner, or any other of the many, in psychology, philosophy and social sciences, who have fashioned themselves on the logic of Popperian methodology . . .

In turn, in "The problem of the text" Bakhtin converges with Stephenson in a critique of the subjective sciences, claiming that the foundation of the humanities is centered on a dialogical matrix: "The humanities take as their subject the human spirit. The spirit (of self and others) cannot be taken itself as an object (an object directly observable to the natural sciences), but only its expression through signs, in its creation of texts – about the self and the other." (Bakhtin 1997b, p,332) Moreover, he states in "Remarks on the epistemology of the Human Sciences":

The sciences are a monological form of knowledge: the intellect contemplates something and pronounces on it. There is only the one subject: the scientist who performs the act of cognition (of contemplation) and speech (uttered). Then, before his eyes, the thing stands mute⁸. Any object of knowledge (including man) can be perceived as a thing. But the subject as such cannot be perceived and studied simply as a thing because, as a subject, it cannot be dumb and remain a subject, consequently, the knowledge one has of it can only be dialogic (Bakhtin 1997b, p.403).

Obviously Bakhtin exaggerates by reasserting a reified aspect of knowledge and by decoupling subject and object of the knowledge in the exact sciences. He does not mention the theory of quantum physics, where the presence of an observer interferes with an experiment tracking the movement of subatomic particles. The act of observation changes the "behavior" of the particles, preventing the design from achieving full objectiveness and neutrality. In any case, however, consciousness, for him is consciousness of a relational and dialogical world.

For Stephenson subjectivity should not be construed as individual consciousness. It must be rooted in conscurring, meaning knowledge sharable within a culture ("I know together with someone . . ."). Drawing on old texts (pre-Descartes), Stephenson (1980) argues that the word conscious – and its sister terms conscience and consciousness – are derived from *conscire* (from the Latin *scio* meaning "to know" and *con*, meaning "with") and meaning "to be aware with." That is to say, *conscire* is a relational way of knowing and communicating. So conscurring means something known by participatory sharing. In a word: communicability.

In this order of understanding, for Stephenson there is no room for the metaphysical subject, self-centered and self-sufficient, whose awareness is only self-awareness and wherein it is enough to be solely one's self. Subjectivity is interrelational. The unpredictability that shapes the study of subjectivity is similar to that revealed by quantum physics when analyzing the "behavior" of subatomic particles, as mentioned before. Stephenson suggests a connection between physics and psychology: "It was only late in the 1970s that I could satisfy myself about the pragmatics of quantum theory in Subjective Science. It required the putting together of communication theory, concourse theory, the operantcy of factors and Newton's Fifth Rule, to make tangible what had previously been mainly an exciting analogy between physics and psychology, for matter and mind" (Stephenson, 1981, p.132).

⁸ It is a metaphor to say that the thing does not signify until someone looks at it and interprets it. The thing is mute; it cannot speak by itself.

The links between the thought of Stephenson and of Bakhtin are probably coincidental, since the two never met, and possibly did not have access to one another's work. Without knowing it, they became joint agents in the same intellectual undertaking. Now, if situation shapes the speaker, and context is an integral part of each individual's self-expression, the analogies between Bakhtin and Stephenson become an intellectual synthesis that generates ideas about the processes that form an individual within the social environment through language and communication.

And so, in Bakhtin, the dialogical subject is the highest expression of the relational role of language. This is not specifically a result of simple interaction but of an interactive context in which the individual fits itself, models itself, transforms itself, in short, *thinks itself* into becoming a subject. In a context of high complexity, wherein many agents interact through utterances, if the group precedes the individual, as the first symbolic interactionists thought, the subject is already formed inside the group. Yet, the subject is recognizable in the midst of the relationships that identify the group, and acting there, the subject is able to transform others, whose voices blend together. In this intersubjective web the subject becomes polyphonic, and otherness assumes a role of complementing the vision one has of one's self. In Bakhtin's theory of verbal interaction, communication is an act of social and cultural sharing in which agents exchange interpretive models that guide further conduct; they coordinate relationships and in so doing they build subjectivity within each other.

For Bakhtin as for Stephenson, language should be conceived not as an expression of individual thought or as an asocial system, but as a process of extremely complex interaction between socio-historically situated subjects. According to Stephenson, a Q study enables subjectivity to be rigorously analyzed through the correlations between Q-sorts, from which in turn factors are identifiable in which the interactions with each other have been expressed. In other words, a Q-study makes it possible to quantify the intersubjective relationships between the self (existence, which *is*) and the other or not-self (which also *is*), through the semiotics proposed by Bakhtin. Stephenson gives the name *communicability* to the relational process stemming from encounters between different subjectivities, which results in knowledge sharing (consciring), while Bakhtin, in his own way, comes to call it inner discourse, which can be conceived of in terms of the semiotic, just as in communication with others, but here the "others" are represented within the individual. Thus, authorship becomes, in its relational expression, a co-authorship. Or, in the context of a Q-study, a factor expresses the specifics of co-authorship of the relationships produced in the Q-sorts, which are representatives of the consciring embedded in a concourse. The subjectivity that emerges from these processes is complex, complementary and unpredictable.

To end this article, we offer an answer to a common question in the Q community: What is a factor? To provide a base for an answer, we start with Peirce's "Logic As Semiotic: The Theory Of Signs" (Peirce, 1955). Bakhtin's and Stephenson's' versions would look like the images in Figure 1:

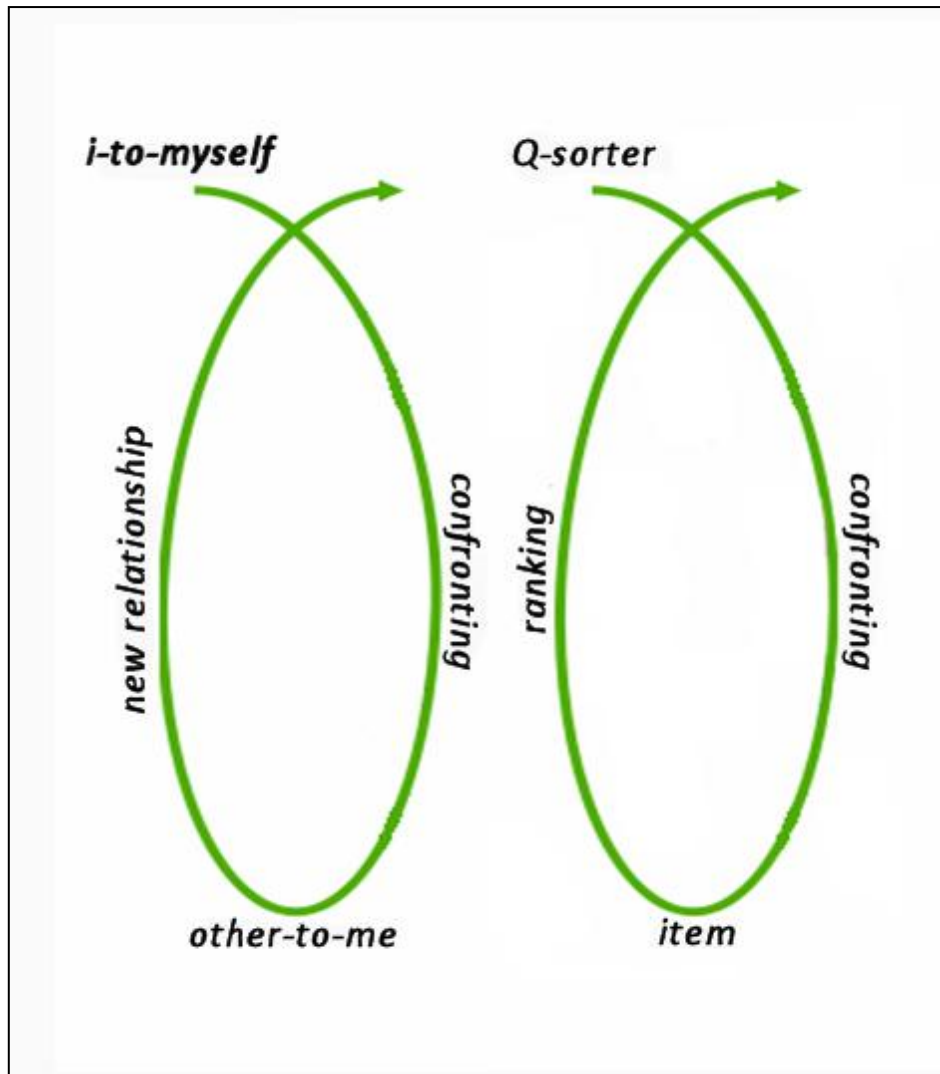


Figure 1. Expression of Peirce's triadic semiotic in dialogism and in communicability.

On Bakhtin's version of Peirce's semiotic, a dialogue creates a *new relationship* through the confronting of the *other-to-me* by the *I-to-myself*. The confrontations can continue, each repetition yielding another *new relationship*, for as briefly or as long as one likes. The result of the dialogue, then, is a new text, co-authored by the *I-to-myself* and the *other-to-me*.

Now a Q-sorter performs a special dialogue with the items in a Q-sample, and congruent with Bakhtin, the new relationship resulting from each confrontation between sorter and item yields a ranking. In this manner we can say that a Q-sorter is the co-author of a completed Q-sort.

The next stage of a Q-study is correlation of the collected Q-sorts, which in turn are submitted to factor analysis. Factors are duly extracted, and at the end, perhaps, factor rotation. In mathematical terms, a factor is defined by those sorts with significant loadings. Figure 2 shows the loadings for two factors, 1 and 2:

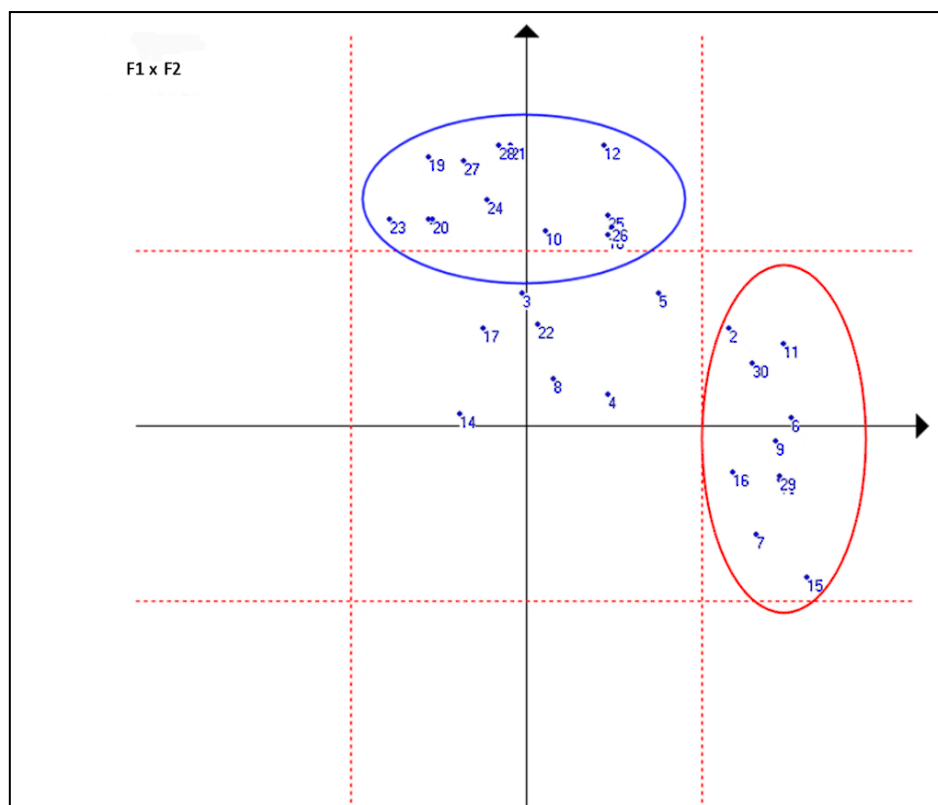


Figure 2. Localization of co-authorship of two factors

Thus, if we accept Peirce's triadic semiotic and Bakhtin's version of it, namely, that the *I-to-myself* in confronting the *object-to-me* yields a *new relationship* which can be rigorously elaborated by Stephenson's Q Methodology, and, if all this is true, then we authored by those Q-sorts which load significantly on a factor.

References

- Alves-Mazzotti, A. J. (1998). *O método nas ciências naturais e sociais: pesquisa quantitativa e qualitativa* [Method in the natural and social sciences: Quantitative and qualitative research]. São Paulo: Pioneira.
- Bakhtin, M. (1988). *Questões de literatura e de estética* [Questions of literature and aesthetics]. São Paulo: Hucitec.
- Bakhtin, M. (1977a). O autor e o herói [Author and hero]. In M. Bakhtin, *Estética da criação verbal* [The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation] (2nd ed., pp. 23-215). São Paulo: Hucitec.
- Bakhtin, M. (1977b). *Problemas da poética de Dostoievski* [Problems of Dostoyevsky's poetics]. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária.
- Bakhtin, M. M.; Voloshinov, V. N. (2004). *Marxismo e filosofia da linguagem: problemas fundamentais do método sociológico nas ciências da linguagem* [Marxism and the philosophy of language: fundamental problems of sociological method in language sciences] (11th ed.). São Paulo: Hucitec.
- Barbosa, M. N. (2001). *O Discurso Pedagógico na Educação Tecnológica* [Pedagogic discourse in technical education]. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Universidade Federal Tecnológica do Paraná, Curitiba.
- Bigras, M., & Dessen, M. A. (2002). O Método Q na avaliação psicológica: utilizando a família como ilustração [Q method in psychological assessment: using the family as

- an illustration]. *Avaliação Psicológica*, 1 (2). Retrieved from <http://pepsic.bvsalud.org>
- Brown, S. R. (1999). Political Psychology and Naturalistic Subjectivity. In G. A. Mota Botello (Ed.), *Psicología política del nuevo siglo: Una ventana a la ciudadanía* (pp. 41-58). México: Sociedad Mexicana de Psicología Social y Secretaría de Educación Pública.
- Buber, M. (1958). *I and Thou* (R. G. Smith, Trans.). (2nd ed.). New York: Scribners. (Original work published 1937).
- Clark, K., & Holquist, M. (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin*. São Paulo: Perspectiva. (English edition, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- Deignan, T. (2012). A novel way to develop policy and practice. *Operant Subjectivity*, 35(2), 102-128
- Goldman, I. (1999). Q methodology as process and context in interpretivism, communication, and psychoanalytic psychotherapy research. *Psychological Record*, 49(4), 589-605.
- Holquist, M. (2003). *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kantor, J.R. (1959). *Interbehavioral psychology* (2nd ed.). Granville, OH: Principia.
- Lago, A.; J. Machado; S. Fagan (2006). *Principais causas do não associativismo entre agricultores familiares do Município de Nova Palma (RS, Brasil) e Estratégias de Extensão* [Main causes of associations between family farmers in the municipality of Palma Nova (RS, Brazil) and Extension Strategies]. In Anais do Congresso da Sociedade Brasileira de Economia e Sociologia Rural, pp.1- 13. [Proceedings of the Congress of the Brazilian Society of Rural Economics and Sociology]. Fortaleza: SOBER/UFCE.
- Machado, I. A. (2001). *O Romance e a voz - A prosaica dialógica de Bakhtin* [The Romance and the voice - the prosaic dialogue of Bakhtin]. São Paulo: Imago/FAPESP.
- Marcondes Filho, C. (2008). Comunicação, uma ciência inexata e contudo rigorosa [Communication, an inexact science and yet rigorous]. In G. Said, *Comunicação: Novo objeto, novas teorias*, pp. 51-65 [Communication: new object, new theories]. Teresina: Edufpi.
- Oliveira, M. G. de (2008). Bakhtin, linguagem e os processos de formação do sujeito: implicações para uma sala de aula de leitura de textos shakespearianos [Bakhtin, language and the processes of subject formation: implications for a classroom reading of Shakespearean texts]. *Vertentes* (São João Del-Rei), 31, 102-139. Retrieved from http://intranet.ufsj.edu.br/rep_sysweb/File/vertentes/Vertentes_31/miria_gomes.pdf.
- Peirce, C. S. (1955). *Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs. Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (Kindle Locations 1934-1935). Dover Publications. Kindle Edition.
- Roman, L. G., & Apple, M. W. (1990). Is naturalism a move away from positivism? Materialist and feminist approaches to subjectivity in ethnographic research. In E. W. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education* (pp. 38-74). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Stephenson, W. (1935). Technique of Factor Analysis. *Nature*, 136, 297.
- Stephenson, W. (1972). Applications of Communication Theory: II. Interpretations of Keats' 'Ode On A Grecian Urn'. *Psychological Record*, 22(2), 177-192.
- Stephenson, W. (1987). How to make a good cup of tea. *Operant Subjectivity*, 10, 37-57.
- Stephenson, W. (1993). Intentionality: Or how to buy a loaf of bread. *Operant Subjectivity*, 16(3/4), 69-90.

- Stephenson, W. (1980). Consciring: a general theory for subjective communicability. In: D. Nimmo (Ed.), *Communication yearbook 4* (pp 7-36). News Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Tezza, C. (1996). A construção das vozes no romance [The construction of voices in the romance]. In B. Brait (org.). *Bakhtin, dialogismo e construção do sentido*, pp. 219-226 [Bakhtin, dialogismo and the construction of meaning]. Campinas: Ed. da Unicamp,
- Thorsen, A.A. (2008). *Teachers' Priorities and Beliefs A Venture into Beliefs, Methodologies, and Insights* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Stavanger.
- Wolf, A., Good, J. M. M., Brown, S. R., Cuppen, E. H. W. J., Ockwell, D., & Watts, S. (2011) Q Methodology and its applications: Reflections on Theory. *Operant Subjectivity*, 35(1), 48-71.