



BOOK SYMPOSIUM

In and out of intersubjective attunement

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Response to comments on Duranti, Alessandro. 2015. *The anthropology of intentions: Language in a world of others*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The comments on my book by Shaun Gallagher, Eve Danziger, and Jack Sidnell and Nick Enfield offer a broad spectrum of insightful observations, theoretical reflections, and critical amendments to some of my arguments. I will use my response as an opportunity, rarely given to an author, to clarify my choice of concepts and arguments, clear possible misunderstandings, and briefly expand on some of the themes introduced by my colleagues.

There seems to be some agreement among everyone that the notion of “intention” still deserves attention (by anthropologists and philosophers) even though there is disagreement among them about whether Searle’s original conceptualization needs to be abandoned altogether (Danziger), revised and refined (Gallagher), or turned into a different criterion (Sidnell and Enfield). Some of the strongest validation of my contributions seems to be for the empirical validity of contextualized recordings of spontaneous interactions (in Samoa and in the United States), my cross-linguistic semantic and pragmatic analysis of what English expresses by words like “intention” and “intending,” and the historical reconstruction of how the notion of “promise” was introduced into Samoan discourse in the nineteenth century. Danziger expands the cross-cultural comparison by creatively drawing from my earlier proposal for six layers of Husserlian intersubjectivity (Duranti 2010) and proposing a “minimum architecture of levels” (three instead of six) to account for “what we know about mental-state sensitivity across cultures.” Her concise



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and elegant analysis based on her own thick description of Mopan Mayan ways of speaking (e.g., Danziger 2006, 2013) and Alan Rumsey's (2013) contrasting case of the Ku Waru provides an excellent invitation to future research.

My use of Husserl's work raised two questions, which I rephrase here as "Why only Husserl?" (Gallagher) and "Why is Husserl discussed at all given that he is not better than Searle?" (Danziger).

Toward the end of his comments, Gallagher briefly notes that in my discussion of the "dark side" of engaging with others (e.g., the danger of becoming victims of social conformity or hegemony), I limit myself to "discussions of these issues in classic phenomenology" instead of "point[ing] to ongoing debates" (which include Gallagher's own contributions alone and his collaborations with others).

Danziger first agrees with my critique of Searle's conceptualization of speech acts and intentions, but then asks why I was not as critical of Husserl's theory, which she does not see as an improvement over Searle's mentalistic model. Furthermore, by invoking my own Samoan data and the observations made by ethnographers in support of the so-called "opacity of mind," Danziger questions Husserl's characterization of intersubjectivity as the possibility of "trading places." In her view, any situation (in Samoa or elsewhere) in which social actors do not take their interlocutors' perspective into account is a potential counterexample to the universality of intersubjectivity understood as an a priori of human sociality and human cognition—the latter thesis being one that I identify as Husserl's and upon which I build for my proposal of an "intentional continuum" (Duranti 2015: chapter 11).

Let me suggest a few reasons for continuing to build on Husserl's ideas or rather for *returning* to his ideas after a long time of neglect by linguists and linguistic anthropologists. Husserl's 1900–1 *Logische Untersuchungen* was highly influential in Europe for several decades. Logicians like Rudolf Carnap and linguists like Roman Jakobson were inspired by Husserl's idea of a "pure grammar" and experimented with Husserl's method of apodictic evidence and his mereology to build their respective semantic and phonological theory (see Bar-Hillel 1957; Holenstein 1975; Aurora 2015). But the "pure grammar" part of Husserl's program was never fully realized and eventually his name disappeared from the reading lists of logic and linguistics courses in the United States, despite the fact that both Carnap and Jakobson, after migrating there, played a major role in the shaping of philosophy, linguistics, and linguistic anthropology in US universities. From an anthropological perspective on meaning, the most damaging aspect of this collective forgetting was not Husserl's project of a "pure grammar" but the loss of his broad conceptualization of "logic," which included insights on the relationship between thinking-speaking subjects and the "matter" (for which he later used the Greek word *hyle*) of the *Lautform* they interpreted (Albano Leoni 2015). Even the most universalistic program for linguistic inquiry of the twentieth century, namely, Chomsky's generative grammar, despite some family resemblance with Husserl's notion of "pure grammar" (Edie 1987: 37–59), never achieved the breadth of Husserl's life-long reconceptualization of meaning acts, from his *Logical investigations* to the *Crisis of European sciences* (Husserl 1970). Another reason for returning to Husserl is that, despite Searle's claims to the contrary (Searle 2005: 320), the latter's 1983 book on intentionality reads like a much simplified and mentalistic version of Husserl's *Logical investigations* (whether or not it was *intended!*). And it is in this respect that

Danziger is right to ask why I chose Husserl over Searle. But Husserl and Searle differ in the way they conceptualize meaning. In *Logical investigations*, Husserl borrows Brentano's notion of intentionality as the consciousness of something in the world and thus returns "to the things themselves." The *Umwelt* becomes a real partner of human consciousness and the a priori principles by which meaning is constituted are defined in non-psychological ways. Allegation of mentalism or psychologism would have an easier target in the first volume of *Ideas* (Husserl 1931), which was seen as, and in many respects is, a radical turn (and certainly not his last attempt to start over). Danziger's other objections against my promotion of Husserl's theory is also based on a mentalistic reading of Husserl's notion of "trading places," which would be contradicted by my own data from Samoa and by claims made by supporters of the thesis of the "opacity of mind." But "trading places" is a metaphor used by Husserl to capture the fact that we have a consciousness of the other as a separate being who acts in ways that could be ours were we to be in his or her place. The possibility of "trading places" is then first operating in what Husserl (2001) calls "passive synthesis," an unconscious embodied and affective engagement with the surrounding world, which crucially involves other human beings. As we become aware of their presence, we are able to know—and take into account—what another person may hear, see, etc., even though we cannot inhabit their body and their mind. We intuitively know that if we are facing someone coming toward us, we can hide a flower or a small gift by holding it behind our back. This is a manifestation of Husserlian intersubjectivity, which is foundational and broader than what has been called "collective" or "we-intention" by Searle and others.

Before we start to help someone who is trying to move a piano to a different spot in the room, we have a sense of the effort that it might require from looking at that person's body pressing against the piano. As a material object, it may first resist being pushed as we understand from the expression on the face of the person pushing. This moment is characterized as "trading places" as a form of empathy that is broader than Lipps' *Einfühlung*. It is a type of intersubjectivity that is the very foundation of our sense of objective time and space (Husserl 1989: 86) and a dimension of being-in-the-world that is constitutive of both subject (Ego) and world. As I argue in my book (Duranti 2015: 232), contrary to what is assumed by Searle, the social does not suddenly appear out of nothing or from the decision of two or more individuals to cooperate around a common task. As Husserl (1970: 252–3) wrote, "fellow men are necessary as actual, as known, and as an open horizon of those I might possibly meet. Factually I am within an interhuman present and within an open horizon of mankind; I know myself to be factually within a generative framework, in the unitary flow of a historical development in which this present is mankind's present and the world of which it is conscious is a historical present with a historical past and a historical future."

The individual as a responsible, *accountable* agent, which is what Enfield and Sidnell (2017) are interested in studying, can function the way it does, whether alone or with others, because it has been shaped, sustained, inspired, and constrained by others from infancy onward (Trevarthen 1980, 2011), albeit in culture-specific ways of *attending* to objects and other humans (e.g., Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Gratier 2003). To be an agent of past, present, and future acts, the individual anticipates the presence of, needs, and longs for others.

How to answer Gallagher's reminder that there is a debate on collective action (in its various designations) also among phenomenologists? The narrative thread of my book did not leave me room for a true engagement with the new literature alluded to by Gallagher. I was focused on providing a brief and, in a way, personal history of the contrast between speech act theorists' and linguistic anthropologists' views of what makes a speech act meaningful, starting from the early 1980s all the way to the return of the question of role of intentions in the discussion of the "opacity of mind" thesis proposed by Robbins and Rumsey (2008). I also felt reluctant to directly engage with a growing body of literature on group mentality, cooperative action, and collective intentionality without expanding the scope of my empirical investigation and theoretical sources. With this in mind, I have been collecting and studying cases in which a joint activity falls apart despite the apparently shared knowledge and shared commitment of the participants (for the first installment of this new line of research, see Throop and Duranti 2015). I have also started to retrace the historical roots of our current Western notions of inner or mental life in ancient Greek texts (Homeric epics, plays, Platonic dialogues, letters, poems, and treatises). This type of textual investigation of ancient written sources can benefit from an anthropological perspective on oral narratives (e.g. Bauman 1986; Ochs and Capps 1996; Silverstein and Urban 1996) while providing rich material for testing Gallagher's hypothesis about the narrative origins of the evaluation of individual and collective agency. My research strategy has been to combine a close attention to morpho-syntactic framing with an ethnographically informed understanding of the "action" that particular utterances perform, sometimes by simply describing an event (Duranti 1994). But there are several other reasons to celebrate the opening toward narrative proposed by Gallagher and Deborah Tollefsen (in press). Their proposal is an improvement on earlier conceptualizations of collective intentionality for at least three reasons: (a) it makes communication, or rather dialogue, central to the enterprise of establishing cooperation—this is, by the way, pragmatically more engaging than saying that communication is a necessary condition for doing things together (Tuomela and Miller 1985; Gilbert 1990); (b) it foregrounds the so-called collective intentionality of joint activities as something that is open to and thus vulnerable to negotiation (see also Carr 1986); and (c) it invites more subtle distinctions, including the typology originally proposed by Elisabeth Pach-erie (2011) and described by Gallagher.

Do these points of convergence suggest that I am ready to leave Husserl behind and start engaging more directly with contemporary phenomenologists, as suggested by Gallagher? Perhaps, but such an engagement would expose first and foremost a paradox, namely, that it might be the very distance from Husserl's times, terminology, and style that gives me a hermeneutic amplitude that I do not encounter when I read contemporary discussions of intersubjectivity under the guise of collective intentionality or shared cognition. Here is an example. I welcome Pacherie's (2008) acknowledgment of the "unknown or unpredictable features of the situation in which [what she calls "an intended action"] is eventually carried out" and the indeterminacy of "many aspects of the action" (2008: 184). This is consistent with the view I presented in chapter 11 of my book. But Pacherie also mentions that "a common conceptual representational format" is needed to guarantee "a form of global consistency, at the personal level, of our

desires, beliefs, intentions and other propositional attitudes” (2008: 184). Here I start to wonder what a shared “representational format” really is. My proposal for extending the notion of a socially distributed model of human cognition to a continuum of human intentionality avoids assuming that internal or mental representations do all the work in keeping the individual agent or the group coordinated, coherent, and effective. All kinds of intentional acts such as remembering, fantasizing, evaluating, anticipating, among many others, are made possible and sustained across time and space by means of culture-specific uses of shared artifacts. I would translate, then, the “consistency” Pachierie mentions in terms of the same set of affordances (Gibson 1986), leaving open the question of which of the participants in the same joint activity would take advantage of which affordances, at what moment of the interaction, and how. This happens with the artifact that jazz musicians use to remind themselves of the harmonic structure of songs they have not memorized. It is called “form” (or “the chord changes”) in the US and “la grille” in France (see figure 1).

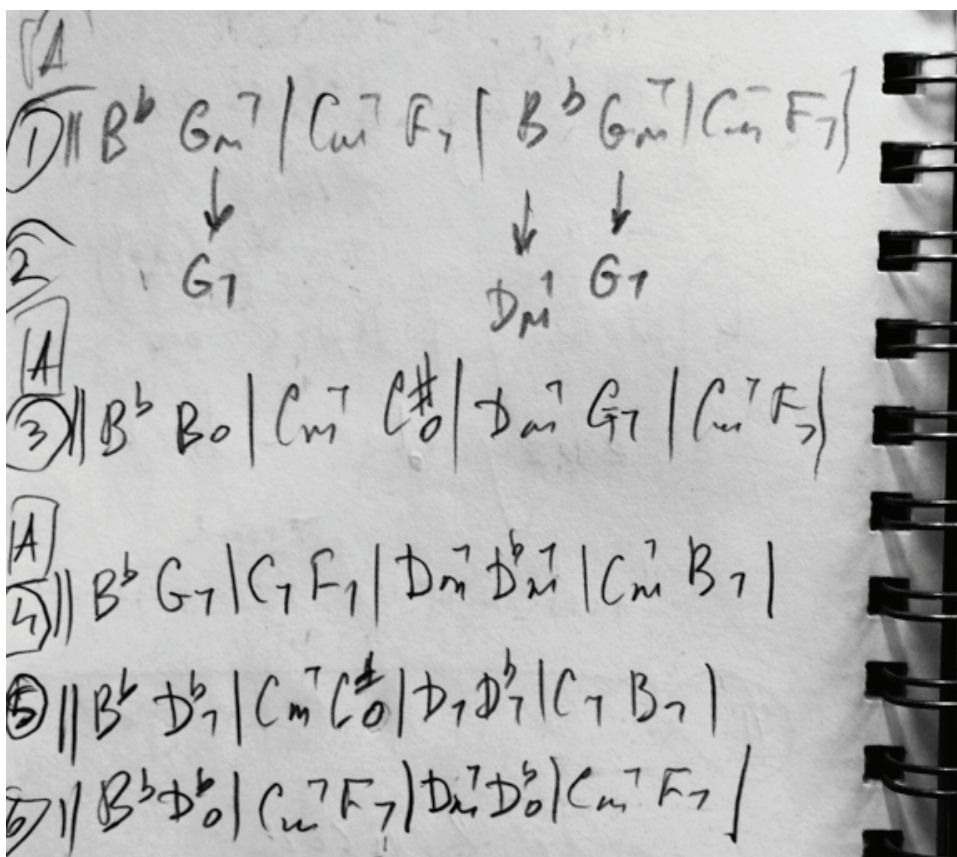


Figure 1: A “form” (or “the chord changes”) of a song for jazz musicians.

Let me close with a few words about Sidnell and Enfield’s carefully crafted comments. After a clear and detailed review of my main points and some of my examples, they agree with my claim that there is context-specific cross-cultural variation

in the “salience of intention,” but they maintain that this variation applies only to a meta-discourse of intentions—that is, to what speakers in different contexts and communities are able to say about what a given act meant—and not to the intentions or goals that are necessary to interpret social actors’ inferential processes and that support “the architecture of intersubjectivity in interaction.” They believe that we need to acknowledge such a (Gricean) level of intentionality, but since we cannot know “what is actually in others’ heads,” they propose to “reframe the concept of intention” in terms of “social accountability.” We can do this by looking at how people carry out actions, that is, at their practices. This is an analytic strategy inspired by Harold Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology and is based on the idea that social actors’ accountability and the intelligibility of their actions, utterances included, are crucial for the organization and functioning of social activity (Heritage 1984: 5). I am comfortable with the emphasis on accountability, which is closely related to the notion of responsibility discussed in my book. I am also sympathetic to their proposal to adopt Elizabeth Anscombe’s (2000) use of linguistic practices to understand what participants understand “intentions” to be. But here are some issues that still need to be addressed: (a) accountability cannot deal with everything that people understand or feel as happening (to themselves and others) in an “action;” (b) a theory of action based on accountability does not necessarily imply or support the notion of “intention” in the Gricean sense; (c) the “linguistic description” of “intention” implies that there is such a thing across cultures that can be named or described even though I have shown that this is questionable; and (d) Gricean intentions may not be at work in the more general and diffuse kind of intersubjectivity I mentioned above and further discuss in my book.

Minimally speaking, encounters as well as any anticipation or recollection of encounters, involves, to use the English translations of terms introduced by Alfred Schutz (1967), a world of contemporaries, a world of predecessors, and a world of successors. These “worlds” bring about knowledge and emotions that may remain hidden, veiled, and differentially distributed within a group. Sidnell and Enfield propose to use the linguistic practices described by Elizabeth Anscombe in her discussion of intentional acts. This is a good starting point, but it may not be the right strategy to capture what was not said or could not be described and yet, in some way, is there. The thesis of the “intentional continuum” allows for the possibility of both explicit and implicit understanding of people’s inner thoughts because it assumes that people go in and out of different stages and degrees of intersubjective attunement. How particular languages, genres, and registers allow for such attunement varies just like the relevant horizon of human action varies, regardless of whether it can be readily described.

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