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Abstract: Despite the intuitive appeal of sharedness and its related paradigms of intersubjectivity, collective intentionality and dialogue, this essay proposes a conception of human interaction and sociality by developing a view of radical contextualism. Its starting point is that notwithstanding - or possibly as a direct consequence of - the intuitive appeal of these universalist positions, they remain insufficiently radical in terms of a theory of cognition, empirically weak in the face of the mediality of our social and individual worlds and epistemologically blind to non-realist alternatives. The paradox - and genuine contingency - is that both positions are concerned with questions which seem at first glance to be shared and yet reveal themselves to be contingent connections.

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Title Page

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Radical Contextualism and the Limits of Sharedness

Radical Contextualism and the Limits of Sharedness?

1. Context or Contexts?

Despite the intuitive appeal of sharedness and its related paradigms of intersubjectivity, collective intentionality and dialogue, this essay proposes a conception of human interaction and sociality by developing a view of radical contextualism. Its starting point is that notwithstanding – or possibly as a direct consequence of – the intuitive appeal of these universalist positions, they remain insufficiently radical in terms of a theory of cognition, empirically weak in the face of the mediality of our social and individual worlds and epistemologically blind to non-realist alternatives. The paradox – and genuine contingency – is that both positions are concerned with questions which seem at first glance to be shared and yet reveal themselves to be contingent connections.

This special issue appears shortly after a 2009 volume entitled Collective Intentionality, edited by Hans Bernhard Schmid and David P. Schweikard and running to some 854 pages. Their concerns is to distinguish between 'parallel individual action' and 'shared actions', which they see as being constitutive of individual activity. For Schmid and Schweikard, then, 'most actions […] are located in the context of shared activity' (2009: p. 12) while what is intended is key. Individuals are not neglected but encountered in the sharing of intentions. But it remains misleading to say that when we decide to go for a walk we are engaging in shared activity whether in terms of contexts (my walk occurs one hour before I am due to leave for the airport and I have not yet packed my case; your walk will be followed by a visit to the GP) or affective intentions[1] (your walk is intended to create a space for discussion; my walk seeks to kill time). Tracing theories of collective intentionality back to a rather apologetic reception of Wilfrid Sellars' 'magical instrument' of practical philosophy:

> The concept of the we-intention is nothing short of the very core of Sellars' response to this question [of the synthesis of the objective and the subjective]. We-intentions are on the one hand without doubt attitudes and on the other not merely *subjective*, but *intersubjective* (Schmid and Schweikard, 2009: p. 30 – my translation)

When translated into simplified terms, this externalist construct loses much of its magic: 'we-intentions are held by individuals although individuals retain their own intentions. It is perhaps too unkind to refer here, with Niklas Luhmann, to intersubjectivity as an expression of embarrassment which indicates that we can 'no longer sustain the subject' (Luhmann, 2005: p. 162). Even methodologically there is an autology problem: in an effort to map out a programme for empirical work, Schmid and Schweikard seek to identify the 'systemtic locus of collectivity in analyses of collective intentionality' (p. 46 – my translation) with a slippery slope into the valley of distributed cognition. And yet

[1] Here, I adopt Schmid's and Schweikard's nomenclature of affective, cognitive and conative and intentions (p. 42).

they are surely right to signal a risk of reductionism in the contrary view that only individuals and not collectives cannot be subjects of intentional attitudes (p. 52).

The central idea which underpins this article is the need to review theoretical accounts of human communication based on the intersubjective paradigm of which sharedness is a derivative. I have referred elsewhere (2007, 2008, 2009) to these accounts as expressions of an intermonadological fallacy which is part of a dominant tradition in discourse linguistics, theoretical pragmatics, social psychology and language philosophy in which communication is understood in terms of universals, understanding, common ground or dialogue or intersubjectivity where the claims we make in our speech are taken as read and where 'parasitic forms' are consigned to the margins. Against this legacy of a theory of universal understanding in various disciplines there is a clearly discernible growth in debates in vagueness (and let us leave aside questions of epistemology for now), in uncertainty and communication, and in non-literal language in which semantics are destabilised (Recanati's work is a good example here). Contextualist accounts have become almost mainstream in theoretical pragmatics while in sociology there has been a paradigm shift to the discussion of risk and liquid modernity.

In Social Structure and Semantics Niklas Luhmann argued that Enlightenment thinkers had extrapolated a general theory of society from idealised, face-to-face encounters in which reason would take shape and influence power. This risk is not eliminated by contemporary theories of sharedness or collective intentionality. As Luhmann so cogently argued, the semantic of interaction emerged in deferred state from the outset: given the conflict between social interactions and functional economic needs, an interactive model of society could only be proposed counterfactually. As a result, social theory retreated into commonality. Commonality is a concept based on nostalgia for an age of putative reciprocity and unity and, like the related concepts common sense and its latter-day equivalent, intersubjectivity, is a paradox; its thematisation started as its prospects receded from view. I submit that the same accusations can be levelled at accounts of sharedness or collective intentionality.

The concept of rational interaction inherited from the semantic of interaction is accompanied by both weak and strong claims. According to the strong claim interaction is synonymous with generalised modes of interaction, and often conceptualised as dialogue, exchange of meaning or even intersubjectivity. The broad aim of this article is to propose a theory of interaction which is at least designed to go beyond the semantic of interaction in Luhmann's critique and consider the implications for the subject in this process. Here, I adopt the conventional separation of the self as a 'singular inner being' and a person as a 'socially defined, publicly visible embodied being' (Harré, 1983: p. 26); by contrast, the 'subject' is the epistemic confluence of both inner and social self and person with clear agentic properties. The central argument presented here is that, however defined, some prevailing conceptualisations of the communicating self remain within the semantic of interaction and need to deal more adequately with complex human communication. It is not sufficient to resolve the problem of solipsism which so exercised Husserl by invoking some intermonadological community or intersubjectivity. To continue, it is necessary to consider the concept of context which translates so fluently across social and human sciences.

2. Semantic and Pragmatic Uncertainties

Cappelen and Lepore in *Insensitive Semantics* claim that they can correct the mistakes of contextualist accounts of speech acts in view of their failure 'to account for how we communicate across contexts'. Their programme of semantic minimalism means that even the accompanying concept of speech act pluralism rests on an irreducible semantic core. The utterance context can only 'in part' determine everything a speaker says (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. 5). This semantically stabilised concept of speech act context anchored to a semantic core (where semantic content is not to be conflated with speech act content) is offered as a correction of what are described as radical or moderate contextualist theories (grouping the later Wittgenstein, Searle and relevance-theoretical approaches). Moderate contextualism seeks to expand the basic set of context-sensitive expressions, arguing that many sentences claimed by semantic minimalists to express a complete proposition are in fact incomplete. The semantic minimalist counter-argument is that contextualist accounts mistakenly conflate what is said or expressed or stated – that is speech act content – with semantic content. The various cases adduced by contextualists locate context shifts not in semantic contents but in the truth values of utterances of knowledge ascriptions amongst other categories. Crucially for Cappelen and Lepore, the inference of what is said or expressed in the content of the speech act is driven by intuition (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. 31). Two key questions arise from the speech-act emphasis of contextualist accounts:

(a) What the relevant variability is (what is said, claimed, expressed or what have you).
(b) What kinds of comparisons constitute solid semantic evidence.
(Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. 33)

The innocence of question (b) masks an explicit shift from contextualist semantics and pragmatics to semantic core theory. This is valid for a semantic theorist but undermines the interdependency of semantics and speech acts as expressed by Sperber and Wilson: '[c]ontextual information is needed to resolve what should be seen as [the] semantic incompleteness […]' (Sperber and Wilson, 2001: p. 188 cited in Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. 35). The weakness of the semanticist bias of Cappelen and Lepore is revealed in one crucial methodological preliminary, namely the removal of 'ambiguity, syntactic ellipsis, polysemy, nonliterality, vagueness' (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. 42) as 'irrelevant factors'. Thus, 'there's no close and immediate connection between semantic content and speech act content' (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. 58). This fateful excision of irrelevance (or 'noise'), without which there would be no communication, ultimately renders Semantic Minimalism inadequate to the development of a theory of human communication (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. ix) and paradoxically aligns it with Austin and Searle in their methodological marginalisation of the parasitic etiolations of language. For both early contextualist and semantic core theories excommunicate 'noise'. Despite this inadequacy of semantic minimalism to a theory of human communication, which will require more detailed exposition below, semantic minimalism does throw up a salutary theoretical challenge to contextualist assumptions which run the risk of becoming mainstream if they have not already become so. The messianism is apparent on both sides. It is important to challenge the notion that the contextualist examples Cappelen and Lepore adduce are actually radically contextualist. There is, of course,

actually nothing epistemologically radical at all about the speech act contextualism of Austin or Searle: epistemologically speaking, neither bids farewell to a fundamentally realist understanding of man, language and knowledge. As Searle has argued, anti-realist theories (he means constructivism) run counter to views that an independent reality exists as 'our common-sense idea' (Searle, 1995: p. 158). Social actors thus escape solipsism, forming 'we intentions' based on an intuitive belief in external reality. Realists or correspondence theorists such as Searle have claimed that radical constructivist theories are a 'non-sequitur, a genetic fallacy' for it is wrong 'to infer from the collective neurophysiological causal explanation of our knowledge of the external world to the non-existence of the external world' (Searle, 1995: p. 159). It is argued below that neither semantic minimalism nor putatively radical contextualism in its conventional form in theories of pragmatics offer a genuinely context-sensitive account of the very uncertainties of communication which actually make communication necessary in the first place.

Austin saw the felicity of the utterance as an act in terms of its appropriateness given the circumstances. And yet the question does need to be posed as to whether Austin truly is representative of the radical contextualist tradition as Cappelen and Lepore argue. For while felicity conditions of appropriateness, speech act execution, speaker intention and conduct contextualise the act in terms of its local semantic content, felicity conditions themselves are stabilised by an inchoate universal pragmatics: 'for many purposes the outward utterance is a description, true or false, of the occurrence of the inward performance' (Austin, 1971: p. 9). The local contexts of felicity are at the same time implicitly universal contexts of truth: 'And this, it seems clear, commits us to saying that for a certain performative utterance to be happy, certain statements have to be true' (Austin, 1971: p. 45). This is no radical contextualist account. Austin's truth-theoretic epistemology stabilises local circumstances. Similarly, the literal/non-literal distinction is not value-neutral when it comes to a theory of context.If, on Austin's account, 'all utterances' are 'infected' by 'other kinds of ill' and if '[l]anguage in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use […]' (Austin, 1971: pp. 21–22) then the theory of felicity conditions imposes clear distinctions between the parasitic and the literal. The literalist view is, in itself, a qualification of Austin's transcendental contextualism. Attention will return to this point below.

While Cappelen and Lepore also describe Searle's theory of background assumptions as the prototype of radical contextualism, these assumptions are in no sense free-floating or contingent. Context for Searle is not a factor of the double or multiple contingency of interaction,[2] but a context rooted in truth-theoretic semantics. As Searle put it: 'the literal meaning of a sentence only determines a set of truth conditions given a set of background assumptions and practices' (Searle, 1969: p. 226). And the fundamentally important concept of intentionality locks any local context into a transcendental theory of understanding in language. Consider Searle's early statement on intentionality:

[2] See Talcott Parsons, 1951.

> To say that a speaker S meant something by X is to say that S intended the utterance X to produce some effect in a hearer H by means of the recognition of the intention. (Searle, 1969: p. 43)

The argument put forward here is in favour of a more radical contextualism and involves several steps: (1) What semantic minimalism describes as radical contextualism is not radical; (2) Semantic minimalism reifies the semantic core and in so doing is inadequate to a theory of communicative interaction; (3) An interaction theory of radical contextualism is still to be formulated; (4) Its formulation presents a tougher challenge to semantic minimalism. Notwithstanding these criticisms, the challenge laid down by Cappelen and Lepore is, as noted above, welcome. Attention now returns to the relationship between semantic minimalism and speech act pluralism for while the former is rejected here, the latter can be incorporated as part of radical contextualist account of communication. In simplified terms, the starting position for the discussion below is as follows:(1) the theory of speech act pluralism is plausible and potentially radical; (2) the theory of semantic minimalism is contrived; it truncates communication. According to the thesis of speech act pluralism, our intuitions are informed by considerations which include: (1) facts about speaker's intentions and beliefs; (2) facts about the conversational context of utterance; (3) other facts about the world; (4) logical relations (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. 193).

Given these plural considerations, explicit utterances are 'incompletely encoded'. The central thesis of speech act pluralism is then striking for its radical potential: 'no one thing is said (or asserted or claimed, or …) by an utterance: rather, indefinitely many propositions are said, asserted, claimed stated etc.' (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. 199). One of these propositions is the core semantic content. The move away from 'utterance centrism' to 'contextual two-dimensionalism' entails that speech act content is not fixed by facts about speaker, audience etc.: 'We think facts not known or available to the speaker (or his audience) can make a difference' (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. 201). In other words, speakers do not have privileged access to the content of their speech acts and speakers need not believe everything they sincerely say. Despite the plurality of propositions in any given speech act and despite the unavailability or inaccessibility of knowledge about other speakers, worlds or about the speaker himself, the proposition is claimed to contain the core semantic content. Cappelen and Lepore conclude:

> How is it that we can understand what was said by an utterance […] when that utterance took place in a context radically different from ours (and we know little or nothing about that context)? The answer should be obvious by now: We can always understand part of what the speaker said […]. (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005: p. 205)[3]

This article seeks now to modify the theory of speech act pluralism and integrate it into a theory of a radically contextualist theory of communicative interaction. If communication derives from finite words and syntactical forms and universalist truth statements it must become sterile – a predictable exercise in redundancy or the ergodic (statistically regular) processes to which information theorists referred. Even subsequent classical accounts

[3] Cf. Brandom, 1998.

remain wedded to universal claims and in so doing end up in aporetic positions or theoretical dead-ends (this will be pursued below). Uncertainty is theoretically and empirically central to communication. We can reformulate the view of Cappelen and Lepore as a commitment to a form of semantic invariantism (context insensitivity) according to which the semantic core is not susceptible to context shifts. On this view, the semantic core is not susceptible to contextual shifts of utterance, it is propositionally stable or regular. By contrast, speech act pluralism expresses the shifts not in semantic proposition, but in performative utterance. The opposing view, which has been extremely influential in linguistic pragmatics, can be described generally as contextualism. Whereas many theorists (probably an overwhelming majority in fact) in communication and pragmatics would subscribe to a form of contextualism, in philosophical semantics, it is decried as 'mild form of relativism' (Ludlow, 2005: p. 3) or 'relativism tamed' (Williamson, 2005: p. 91). The unpalatable conclusion of contextualist accounts is that it is not the utterance or the speaker which determines meaning but the ascriber of that meaning – the hearer. As Ludlow puts it, the 'ascriber calls the shots' depending on his context of utterance (Ludlow, 2005: p. 15). In part at least, this account can be made compatible with theories of uncertain communication.

Over and beyond such arguments, namely in epistemological terms, the strong transcendental claims of dialogical or intersubjectivist accounts of interaction become problematic.I would like to describe this problem, in allusion to Husserl, as the inter-monadological fallacy. The intermonadological fallacy rests on the assumption that there can be such things as shared cognitive contexts and mutual knowledge. Epistemic theories of vagueness (where vagueness is a consequence of our ignorance of the world) are also not compatible, prima facie, with radical accounts of communicative interaction. It might almost seem that vagueness, as Williamson ironically suggests, makes contextual variation almost irresistible. And yet, 'if our word "know" is context-sensitive, why is that not obvious to us?' (Williamson, 2005: p. 102). The concept of vagueness is closely related to the lack of determination of language which is cognitively determined (by a similar lack of determination) and as such can be imported into social communication theory at an appropriately abstract level as porosity ('higher-order vagueness corresponds to contingency in which worlds are possible' (Williamson, 1999: p. 128). In terms of social theory, the concept of higher-order vagueness may introduce an element of contingency into questions of reference for vagueness is not a description of some imperfections of an originally precise language. Complex vagueness can be made operational in social communication theory at an appropriately abstract level as the complex of unstable relationships between the agents, structures and environments of communication. In epistemological terms, the distinctions systems (or actors for that matter) make are never sharp and they are never sharp because realities are constructed by communications at a point in time and in a certain place. The epistemic view mounts no challenge to the principle of bivalence – that statements must be either true or false: 'In cases of unclarity, statements remain true or false, but speakers of the language have no way of knowing which' (Williamson, 1998: p. 3). Vagueness is not some defect of some precise language but instead is occasioned by our conceptual limitations in what could be termed a complex environment: 'The cause of our ignorance is conceptual; its object is the world' (Williamson, 1998: p. 269). Thus, the vagueness of language is brought about by our lack of knowledge about the world. In such

circumstances, statements cannot be precise while the principle of bivalence still obtains. In his defence of the epistemic view that our lack of knowledge induces vague statements, Williamson can still argue that 'full understanding' is possible and that 'to know what a word means is to be completely inducted into a practice that does in fact determine a complete intension' (Williamson, 1998: p. 276). However, even full induction into a (communication) practice fails to guarantee knowledge of what a word means. Meaning is stabilised in a potentially static way at variance with the uncertainty of social communication processes of higher-order vagueness. If signs are seen as vague this does indeed imply that there is always potentially extension to a wider field, even allowing for the constraints noted above. Additionally, however, semiotic vagueness is not merely a question of referential drift.

Thus, frustratingly, Williamson argues for context invariantism: 'however vague the term, its meaning does not permit variation in content across contexts' (Williamson, 2005: p. 105). Thus, the connection between vagueness and uncertainty is left underexplored in the context of human communication. A communication-theoretical account of contextualism does take account of epistemic context and communicative context. Another pragmatic process is free enrichment or specifisation of context which is a pragmatic process which is not actually triggered linguistically. Other pragmatic processes not triggered linguistically include loosening (the application is contextually dropped) and semantic transfer (where the output is a different concept to that concept expressed by the input) (Recanati, 2004: pp. 24–26). The theory that emerges is thus radically different from that espoused by Cappelen and Lepore:

> The primary pragmatic processes that are involved in determining what is said include not only saturation (and disambiguation) but also optional processes such as free enrichment, loosening and semantic transfer. Those processes take us from the literal meaning of some constituent (the meaning that is linguistically encoded, or that which results from saturating the linguistically encoded meaning) to a derived meaning which may be richer, poorer, or involve some kind of transfer. I hold that, for such processes to take place, there is no need to antecedently compute the proposition literally expressed. (Recanati, 2004: p. 27)

Sperber and Wilson also challenge the semantic minimalist view that semantic interpretation can deliver something determinate as a complete proposition, arguing instead that that interpretation can only deliver semantic schemata that require pragmatic contextualisation: '[…] Whenever there is semantic undeterminacy, some form of pragmatic disambiguation must take place before the process of semantic interpretation can start' (Sperber and Wilson, 2004: p. 57). From within the contextualist tradition of relevance theory Carston argues that the underdeterminacy thesis is needed to take account of the fact that there is more to an utterance than discrete manifestation or 'ostensive stimuli' (Carston, 2002: p. 11).The Underdeterminacy Thesis actually comprises three sub-theses, namely that: 'Linguistic meaning underdetermines what is meant'; 'What is said underdetermines what is meant' and 'Linguistic meaning underdetermines what is said' (Carston, 2002: p. 19). The third is the core thesis: also known as the underdeterminacy thesis or the semantic underdeterminacy thesis. While the undeterminacy thesis is a much more plausible contextualist account of pragmatic

interaction it also points to the mistaken view that contextualism is epistemologically radical. Indeed, for all the effort expended on a theory of underdeterminacy, the default epistemology is still the intermonadlogical fallacy. There is, as Carston argues, a 'mental interaction of speaker and hearer' (Carston, 2002: p. 3). In other words, underdeterminacy does not equate to indeterminacy (no determination of the 'fact of the matter'); underdeterminacy means merely that the proposition 'cannot be determined by linguistic meaning alone' (Carston, 2002: pp. 20–21) but will be determined by pragmatic extensions. One could argue that the semantically underdetermined utterance is a porous form of marked communication form and unmarked pragmatic processes of interpretation, disambiguation, selection, inferencing and so on.

3. Sociality

In terms of social theory, the integration of social actors by means of relationality presupposes a common network of references. This network facilitates the meeting of social actors in situations of intersubjective reciprocity as set out in The Theory of Communicative Action. For it is here that Habermas places Husserl's horizon of expectation grounded in the lifeworld in the social sphere (by dropping the phenomenological method), and thus recontextualising the concept as a social lifeworld (Habermas, 1992a.2: p. 124). In this way, Habermas can refer to the factual force of counterfactual presuppositions as part of the universalisation principle of argumentation. Diskurs is reflective interaction which presupposes 'reversible' speaker perspectives based on the 'intersubjective authority of a common will' (Habermas, 1992b: p. 160):

> Here, too, the perspectives interlock in an interpersonal framework of communication whose presuppositions are improbable: world perspectives that have been refracted by reflection are linked up with the roles of opponents and proponents who criticise and defend validity claims. (Habermas, 1992b: pp. 159-160 – emphasis added)

The society of social lifeworlds rests on communications in which opinions and standpoints can be contested. When shorn of phenomenological premises, the lifeworld as a concept acquires the character of background knowledge on which all actors may draw. Each communicative speech act accordingly raises three ideal validity claims: (1) truth; (2) truthfulness; (3) correctness and in so doing creates a three-fold relationship consisting of subjective dimension (of the speaker); an objective dimension (of the listener) and an intersubjective dimension (of society): '[…] The interpreter who understands meaning is experiencing fundamentally as a participant in communication, on the basis of a symbolically established intersubjective relationship' (Habermas, 1992b).

Rational lifeworld communicative practices have the capacity for communicative renovation in a communication 'threatened by entropy' (Habermas, 1995b: p. 552 – my emphasis) where entropy is considered to be the opposite of a rational communication which is inclusive on account of its very rationality. However, as Shannon and Weaver argued, entropy means uncertainty in communication and this uncertainty cannot be subtracted from multiple pragmatic contexts and enrichments. Habermas's pragmatics of social integration seriously neglects the fact that this factor of contingency is essential to

social functioning and the complex reality constructions (S.J. Schmidt) used to communicate over this are an essential part of communication and therefore society. An ideal communication community, the related normative concept of consensus or dialogical mutuality rely heavily on counterfactual ideals that can be invoked in order to challenge the growing gulf between self-referential media and financial systems, abuse of power and 'violations' of language games on the one hand and our subjective communicative experiences on the other. Habermas himself makes explicit the universal pragmatic premises of his communication theory and thereby places it at such a distance from everyday language that its plausibility can be rightly criticised:

> [Under – CG] the microscope every understanding proves to be occasional and fragile. By contrast, philosophical hermeneutics investigates the interpretative competence of adult speakers from the perspective of how speaking and acting subjects make incomprehensible utterances in an alien environment comprehensible. Hermeneutics is concerned with interpretation as an exceptional accomplishment, which becomes necessary only when the relevant segments of the lifeworld become problematic […]. (Habermas, 1992a.1: pp. 130–131 – emphasis in original)

The reconstruction of the ideal conditions of communicative action shift the perspective from the invariables of (phenomenologically defined) consciousness to the pragmatics of contexts of reference. Husserl's phenomenological method is incapable of escaping the aporias of the philosophy of the subject and only a critical-pragmatic social philosophy can grasp the context of reference as a context of meaning. These contexts possess their own grammars (in Wittgenstein's sense of the term) and operate as forms of the organisation of knowledge or epistemic orders (Foucault). This means that a lifeworld without grammar – norms, rules, ideals – is inconceivable. The lifeworld is composed of a 'context which constitutes the horizon and processes of understanding among social actors, a reservoir of assumptions and organised cultural values' (Habermas, 1995a: pp. 590–591). Actors in the lifeworld, unlike actors in the system, communicate rationally without seeking to impose their views. On Habermas' account, when Luckmann perceived the lifeworld as a social a priori which cannot be problematised, but at best destroyed, then it follows that he was abandoning the connection between intersubjectivity and communicative practice. Once the lifeworld is blinded to the enactment of dissent on a rational basis the loss of the legitimation basis of modern societies is inevitable. The ideal reader communities of Kant's time have given way to the extensively fragmented and mediatised, and therefore diffuse, network communications, the porosity of these communications making resistance to the autism of system imperatives possible. This strangely porous character of communication cannot be grasped by the stable concept of the lifeworld proposed by Luckmann:

The one-sidedness of the culturalistic concept of the lifeworld becomes clear when we consider that communicative action is not only a process of reaching understanding; in coming to an understanding about something in the world, actors are at the same time taking part in interactions through which they develop, confirm and renew their memberships in social groups and their own identities. Communicative actions are not

only processes of interpretation in which cultural knowledge is 'tested against the world'; they are at the same time processes of social integration and socialisation. (Habermas, 1992a.2: p. 139)

4. Uncertain counterfactuals and the limits of realism

Habermas provides a subtle account of his consensus theory as a normative ideal which is intimately interwoven with the constant possibility of negation and whose 'existence' is contingent; consensus appears as a disruptive mechanism. It would fall outside the scope of this chapter to reconstruct the various critiques of Habermas's counterfactual ideality in their entirety. Suffice it to say that many quite simply ignore the subtlety and critical intent of the role of counterfactuals in communication processes. One of the exceptions to this group of critics is Manfred Frank, who is concerned that the concept of intersubjectivity can be used as a camouflage to sweep away any notion of subjectivity. Following Sartre, his alternative proposal is to locate all subjective energies in the subject and not in the abstraction of intersubjectivity, which serves merely to neutralise the subject:

All socialisation must – this was the correct intuition of Sartre's social philosophy – start from the individual: it is the source of all understanding, and an understanding of social relations is measured by the self-knowledge of the subject. Rather than presuming to accuse the subject of being unable as a point of (allegedly unacknowledged) self-transparency to make the transition to intersubjectivity transparent, intersubjectivism appears to be beset by the converse problem, that of failing to move from the presupposition of a social apriori to the individual which is merely assumed and not explicated in the expression 'inter-individuality'. (Frank, 1995: p. 528)

It is doubtless defensible to challenge the irreducibility of the subject and to undertake the productive attempt to place the relations of various social subjects on a pragmatic communicative footing. At the same time, the success of this attempt remains determined by the premises established in The Theory of Communicative Action. This means that the attempt to escape the philosophy of the subject by means of a theory of intersubjectivity can only be understood in the confines of the philosophy of the subject. The 'reality guarantee' of intersubjectivity, even as a counterfactual ideal, stands and falls with the assumption of the rational subject itself. Intersubjectivity compromises the subject and itself.

From within the critical realist paradigm, without abandoning the theory of universal pragmatics, Habermas has more recently appealed for a revised concept of linguistic reference without abandoning realist foundations. Accepting that there is no representational correspondence between language and facts, he argues for a new concept of reference which will be able to explain how it is that speakers can refer to the same object. In realist terms, the 'objective world' is still held to be the backdrop for our assertions or 'a system for possible references' in which reference can be made to the same object: 'The presence of possible alternatives expresses the realist intuition that we

refer provisionally to an extension of the concept which is assumed to be independent of language' (Habermas, 1999: p. 37 – my translation). Conceding that his earlier work on a formal pragmatic framework had resulted in a narrow focus driven by his theoretical strategy, Truth and Justification focuses on two principal questions: ontological naturalism and epistemological realism. The former relates to a possible reconciliation between the 'unavoidable normativity' of a linguistically structured lifeworld which predates our birth on the one hand and the 'contingency of the natural development of socio-cultural life forms' on the other. The latter epistemological question explores the reconcilability of the 'assumption of an identical world independent of our descriptions' with the fact that there is no possibility of any direct, unmediated access to 'pure reality'. This is clearly an example of revised philosophical realism rooted nonetheless in strong claims – the normativity of the lifeworld or the assumption of a world beyond our contingent descriptions. The same realism emerges from the sustained belief in the complementarity of an intersubjectively shared lifeworld and the pragmatic assumption of an objective world. A different epistemological architecture would, naturally enough, produce a different set of premises. Even after abandoning Kantian pragmatism a case can still be made for 'transcendental analysis' as the 'quest for the presumably general, but only de facto unavoidable conditions' for social and communicative action. There is also evidence of attempts at further, perhaps rather unexpected reconciliation when Habermas reapproximates the Erlangen school of constructivism: self-reference is seen as a 'precondition for the rationality of persons'.

Habermas proclaims that the philosophy of consciousness is exhausted and in this case 'the symptoms of this exhaustion should dissolve in the transition to the paradigm of mutual understanding' (Habermas, 1990a: p. 296). Several influences coalesce in this theory of a post-subjective mutual understanding. Habermas's normative dichotomies need to be dropped but without sacrificing the enterprise of critical theory. Background knowledge is not immune (Habermas, 1992c: pp. 90–91) to the 'problematisation pressure of contingency-generating experiences' and only becomes fallible when it is communicated. It is still important to note, however, that such fallibilism in no way atomises the subject (Habermas, 1999: p. 158). Habermas further insists on the importance of the social in that the 'public practice of a language community comes before the epistemic authority of a subject' (Habermas, 1999: p. 141). Similarly, his reception of the work of Robert Brandom seems to suggest a willingness to consider more carefully the construction processes of understanding which, potentially at least, make the idea of a universal pragmatics unstable. For instance, in a personal communication to Habermas, Brandom wrote:

I have in mind thinking of communication as somewhat like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers: they are doing very different things – at least moving in different ways – but are coordinating, adjusting, and making up one dance. The dance is all they share and it is not independent or antecedent to what they are doing. (Brandom cited in Habermas, 1999: pp. 176–177)

In the course of this a mutual co-ordination exercise, we become aware of the autonomous moves of each partner, governed only by two separate contexts and the uncertain dynamic of a shared move. It is worth returning

to Recanati at this point for he argues that normally we do not have to reason to understand what others are saying since communication, in its most basic form, is not constitutively inferential (Recanati, 2004: p. 38). For Recanati, there are two forms of conscious inference: effortful, explicit reasoning and primary, spontaneous inference. And the contingencies of contexts mean that there is no limit to the amount of contextual information that can affect pragmatic interpretation. It is this elasticity of context that makes formal universal pragmatics at best only a half-answer. However, Recanati, too, offers a simplistic cognitive-communicative account of what 'successful communication' could look like. It is worth reconstructing this view at some length:

To communicate that p is therefore to act in such a way that the addressee will explain one's action by ascribing to the agent the intention to communicate that p. For communication to succeed, the addressee must not only understand that the agent does what he does in order to communicate something to her; she must also understand what the agent tries to communicate. To secure that effect the communicator will do something which will evoke in the addressee's mind that which he wants to communicate. (Recanati, 2004: p. 54)

Recanati argues that semantic interpretation does not deliver complete propositions: it delivers only semantic schemata: 'either semantic interpretation delivers something gappy, and pragmatic interpretation must fill the gaps until we reach a complete proposition' – Recanati, 2004: p. 54). The theory of universal communication rests on such semantic porosity ('gappiness'), semiotics, radical interpretability, cognitive enrichments and multiple contexts. Accepting that there is no representational correspondence between language and facts, Habermas also argues for a new concept of reference by means of which it can be explained how speakers refer to the same object. And yet once residual transcendental claims are dropped and uncertainty considered in relation to the communicative interactions between selves and society it becomes clear that there is no guarantee that our references transcend language in making reference to an external reality. There is some sense then that his revised realism after the pragmatic turn and these elements of constructivism as being pursued towards some kind of synthesis in which the real enemy is a mentalism which mythologises the given (Habermas, 1999: p. 21). This shift towards a constructivist realism (as Mitterer might put it) accepts the end of the immediacy of sensorial impressions and the need for an acceptance of second-order experience. However, even here this constructivist move is embedded in action theory since only acting subjects are capable of such second-order experience. Habermas recognises that our 'truth claims' are confronted with those of others – thus opening up the possibility of inquiry into logics which take diversity and multivoicedness seriously, for everyday communicative practice is not otherwordly:
Transcendental consciousness loses the connotations of the 'other-wordly' – it has come down to earth in the desublimated from of everyday communicative practice. The profane lifeworld has taken in the transmundane space of the noumenal. (Habermas, 1999: p. 26 – my translation)

Even so, in the desublimated or profane lifeworld of communications tensions persist between idealised or counterfactual claims and the facticity of everyday life. Understanding and communication cannot avoid producing idealisations if the lifeworld

is to sustain itself as a communicative social sphere. The 'normative gap' so characteristic of society is thus also marked by ambiguity – the idealised counterfactuals of communicative communities and the facts of the uncertainties of their communications.

Despite his recognition of the tension between the contingencies of subjective communicative practice and lifeworld idealisations, Habermas argues that linguistic pluralism does not actually induce a plurality of incommensurable language worlds. The counterfactual force, which requires constant revision precisely because of its counterfactuality, of a transcendental communication community interrupts the contingencies of self and communication in such a way that the:

detranscendentalised constitution of a world-generating spontaneity is at least reconcilable with the expectation that we discover generally distributed characteristics which characterise the very constitution of sociocultural forms of life. (Habermas, 1999: p. 29 – my translation)

A provisional definition of the term detranscendentalisation implies recognition of the unavoidable situatedness of the subject and also his capacity for constructing realities. As part of a commitment to what he terms 'weak naturalism', Habermas argues that representationalism ('realism without representation') cannot account for our communication of reality. Instead, reality only emerges in resistance, the 'facticity of constraint' which confronts our attempts at problem-solving and learning. In this sense, an objective world is an operative assumption (Annahme) as a system of possible references of objects (Gegenstände) and not facts (Tatsachen). Weak naturalism, then, suggests that our organic constitution and cultural forms of life have a 'natural origin' which is amenable to an evolution-theoretical approach. There are strong connections between weak naturalism and the facticity of constraints to which we are all ontogenetically exposed in the processes of adaptation and construction which mean that the contingency of community is not reducible to an aleatory process. However, although the abandonment of the principle of the transcendental subjectivity of consciousness is plausible and indeed necessary, its replacement category – the detranscendentalised intersubjectivity of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1999) is a logical contradiction. Intersubjectivity, once shorn of its transcendental counterfactuality, is no longer intersubjective.

Ultimately, whether or not Habermas is able to reconcile his realism with his own constructivist admission that we make assumptions about reality, objectivity, truth and others is open to some sceptical questioning. Although it is unproblematic to say that ideal truth assertions are contingent on language, this relates to only one aspect of the multiple contingency of communication. The other aspect of contingency is that there is no guarantee that our references transcend language in establishing a reference to a 'reality' outside our own reality constructions; and if they do, it is only by means of imputations (von Glasersfeld) of other possible worlds. These imputations are also constructions, and, therefore, context-sensitive or contingent. In other words, the notion of reference does not imply the certainty of semantic mapping of an object in the sense proposed by Putnam, but instead assumptions about temporary the social stabilisation of 'objects'. These assumptions are uncertain and thus unavoidably dynamic, autonomous and socially constitutive.

For Habermas, reference must remain epistemologically realistic in the sense that the concept of reference to an objective world is retained. His proposal makes use of a 'detranscendentalised intersubjectivity of understanding' which eschews a monadological understanding of language universes (Habermas, 1999: p. 29): 'By orienting themselves to unconditional validity claims and imputing accountability to each other speakers aim beyond all contingent and purely local contexts' (Habermas, 1999: p. 25 – my translation). Here, detranscendentalisation does not mean contextualism. For Habermas, contexts can be transcended by epistemic claims that are pragmatically negotiated and exchanged amongst speakers. In other words, society is cohesive because speakers are embedded into common contexts of reference which in turn make shared knowledge and consensus as a counterfactual ideal a possibility and remove the danger of social disintegration. Is it however the case that speakers overcome – 'transcend' – the contingency or locality of their experiences by raising validity claims, however counterfactual or, as Habermas argues, imputational, these may be? While it is certainly a fact that society resolves contingency by recursive redundancies (codes) in order to operate, there is a dualism implied in counterfactuality as an alternative to factuality. Communicative interaction, in other words, should not be taken as resolved by or in intersubjectivity. Equally, it should not be superficially denied or comfortably dismissed either as monologues or as an intersubjectively constrained dialogism for neither understanding of interaction offers an adequate account of the uncertainties of communication.

5. Detranscendentalisation

Habermas's most consistent development of the concept of detranscendentalisation occurs in his essay 'Kommunikatives Handeln und detranszendentalisierte Vernunft' in his 2005 work Between Naturalism and Religion. The project of the detranscendentalisation of the subject is intimately connected to an interpretation of a situated reason. It means that the subject is held to encounter itself in the world without entirely losing its spontaneous capacity to construct that world. If the project of a reflexive modernity based on critique and the exchange of validity claims is incomplete, as Habermas's writings testify, then the project now finds itself at a crossroads. It can either 'lose its way in the sands of historicisation or contextualisation' and forfeit all legitimacy in a complex world of almost infinite complexity, or, conversely, Reason 'embodied in historical contexts' can somehow 'internally' retain the force of 'internal transcendence'. The argument put forward here is that if human autonomy and communication complexities are to be taken seriously at all, then contextualism needs to be brought into sharper relief. This would entail the abandonment of the latter view that an internal transcendental force remains intact. Even with the multiple fractures of our current world experiences, rationality is still considered to be the essential precondition for social interaction since without it speakers would have no capacity to distinguish between understanding and misunderstanding. Since Habermas pursues the latter view of an intersubjective detranscendentalisation, he can argue that socialised subjects are situated in lifeworld contexts and their actions and communications coincide. The

implication is that there is an objective reference point of a world held in common, which Habermas describes as a 'formal-pragmatic presupposition'. This account of detranscendentalisation does not amount to a contextualist, and far less to a radical contextualist, view of human understanding. Kant's transcendental idealism gives ground to an internal realism which in itself generates an internal transcendence through the objectivity-generating frame of reference. The real, as opposed to the ideal, is not capable of being expressed in language. The realist assumption of an objectively shared and intersubjectively negotiated world goes hand in hand with a 'grammatical pre-understanding' meaning that speech communities do not encounter objects as neutral. There is an acknowledgement embedded in this essay of the purified normativity of the Theory of Communicative Action when Habermas seeks to integrate and neutralise parasitic forms of communication:

They [speakers – CG] understand what the other is saying or thinking. They learn from information and from the objections of the other and draw inferences from irony or silence, from paradoxical statements, allusions etc. When opaque behaviour becomes incomprehensible or when communication breaks down we are dealing with communication as a reflexive form. In this sense, a presupposition of rationality cannot be denied but can be rebutted indirectly. (Habermas, 2005: p. 44 –my translation)

Habermas notes that participants in communication are convinced not by the strategic actions of a 'communicative design' based on some form of pure performativity but by the 'substance of reasons' given. This epistemic emphasis carries with it implications for communication. Either the mentalist programme is abandoned – and Reason along with it – or that paradigm is anchored in the concept of communicative reason. To the first camp Habermas assigns Davidson and to the second Dummet and Brandom. Davidson is taken to wish to defuse the normativity of language by means of empiricist assumptions whereas Brandom wishes to reconstruct that normativity. Here, again, this work belongs to the first camp for it can neither accept the concept of intersubjectivity nor accept that there are context-transcending communications. The attraction of Davidson's model lies in the fact that it operates with pragmatically plausible and contextually sensitive concepts of charity, interpretability and appeal, stressing the importance of taking something to be true and our imputation of rationality to each other irrespective of grounds given. These imputations are all the more plausible for they are fallible (Habermas, 2005: pp. 61–64): 'the normative element in interpretation is introduced by the necessity of appealing to charity' in making sentences (Habermas, 2005: pp. 65–66) – my translation). Habermas adopts the stronger claims of Brandom's theory, rejecting the modest claims that make Davidson's model open to questions of autonomy and context variation. The critical point, which anchors Habermas's recent work in epistemological realism, is the epistemic argument that grounds can be known:

[…] the communicative exchange always takes place, as it were, against the backdrop of an implicitly simultaneous discoursal shadow theatre, since a statement is only understandable to someone who knows for what reasons […] it is acceptable. (Habermas, 2005: pp. 78–79 – my translation)

Although Habermas supports Brandom in the commitment to the project of rationality rooted in the assertion and rebuttal of grounds, he is critical of the fact that Brandom neglects the 'cognitive relevance of the second person', with the result that the pragmatic relationship between question and answer is not conceived as a dialogic exchange. Brandom falls prey to two faults, therefore: objectivism and individualism. He privileges the objective because he neglects the addressee in favour of an 'audience'. Addressee and questioner thus find themselves in monological relationships, isolated from each other. Since 'the individual appears able to secure epistemic independence from collective authority of a given linguistic community by no means other than through monological distance' (Habermas, 2005: p. 81). This means there is a need to take account of idealising preconditions that 'all relevant grounds and information that can be secured play a role' (Habermas, 2005: pp. 82–83).

With this strong idealisation the mortal spirit encounters the transcendental insight into the inescapable grounding of objectivity in linguistic intersubjectivity. (Habermas, 2005: p. 83 – my translations)

Whereas Habermas argues that validity claims are unconditional and therefore also context-transcending, I argue that detranscendentalisation leads inexorably to a post-transcendental understanding of communication in which autonomous actors negotiate realities as ongoing and therefore dynamic and uncertain evanescent constructions without the support of a realist frame of objective references. In other words, the post-transcendental worlds in which we find ourselves and which we construct are not amenable to intersubjective theories of understanding and social cohesion. Since we 'read' others' minds in communication, we are constantly located across a range of shifting contexts. That those contexts never meet is not a recipe for social breakdown but for a reassertion of a theory of the contingency of human autonomy and pressure for renewal of forms of social organisation that finally catches up with the multiple uncertainties we face.

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