

Knowledge, intersubjectivity and social practices

Conhecimento, intersubjetividade e práticas sociais

Conocimiento, intersubjetividad y prácticas sociales

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ABSTRACT: The paper focuses on the concept of intersubjectivity and its importance for guiding community actions and the consequent construction of new social practices. Authors who have an epistemological reference in the focus of interrelationships, emphasizing the field of interaction as the locus in which encounters, mismatches, problems, and solutions to human issues occur, are presented. The concepts of Jacob Levy Moreno, creator of psychodrama, are laid out to support the premise that there is no possibility of one man alone; instead, there will always be a man and the other, a role and its counter role. That being said, affectivity is one of the nuclei that generate bonds and the development of groups, while, according to Moreno, the greatest expression of affectivity is the release of spontaneity-creativity.

Keywords: Intersubjectivity; Interpersonal relationship; Social action; Psychodrama.

RESUMO: O artigo enfoca o conceito de intersubjetividade e sua importância atual para a orientação das ações comunitárias e consequente construção de novas práticas sociais. Apresentam-se autores que têm uma referência epistemológica no enfoque das interações, privilegiando o campo da interação como o lócus no qual ocorrem os encontros, os desencontros, os problemas e as soluções das questões humanas. Indicam-se os conceitos de Jacob Levy Moreno, criador do Psicodrama, para sustentação da ênfase de que não há possibilidade de um homem sozinho, sempre haverá o homem e o outro, um papel e o seu contra papel. Ainda, a afetividade é um dos núcleos geradores dos vínculos e do desenvolvimento dos grupos, e de acordo com Moreno, a maior expressão da afetividade é a liberação da espontaneidade-criatividade.

Palavras-chave: Intersubjetividade; Relações interpessoais; Ação social; Psicodrama.

RESUMEN: El artículo se centra en el concepto de intersubjetividad y su importancia actual para guiar las acciones de la comunidad y la consecuente construcción de nuevas prácticas sociales. Se presentan autores que tienen una referencia epistemológica en el foco de las interrelaciones, privilegiando el campo de interacción como el lugar en el que ocurren encuentros, desajustes, problemas y soluciones a problemas humanos. Los conceptos de Jacob Levy Moreno, creador del Psicodrama, están indicados para apoyar el énfasis de que no hay posibilidad de un hombre solo, siempre habrá hombre y el otro, un papel y su papel contrario. Aún así, el afecto es uno de los núcleos que genera vínculos y el desarrollo de grupos, y según Moreno, la mayor expresión de afecto es la liberación de la espontaneidad-creatividad.

Palabras-clave: Intersubjetividad; Relaciones interpersonales; Acción social; Psicodrama.

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Received: 02 May 2020 – Accepted: 07 Oct 2020

Section Editor: Scott Giacomucci



INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the concept of intersubjectivity and its current importance for guiding community actions and the consequent construction of new social practices. The theoretical framework is centered on authors who have developed epistemological references focusing on interrelationships and who give particular thought to the field of interaction as the locus in which encounters, mismatches, problems, and solutions to human issues occur.

Esteves de Vasconcellos (2018), a family therapist and the author of works in the field of Systemic Epistemology, points out that traditional science has based its assumptions on three dimensions: simplicity, stability, and objectivity. Historically, studies and research have always been viewed through this highly limiting lens. Advances in the theoretical discussions in psychology, Sociology, and Education received contributions from other fields of knowledge such as Physics, Chemistry and Astronomy, which radically and unquestionably changed the knowledge produced in the social and subjective fields (Esteves de Vasconcellos, 2018).

Only by shifting the focus from simplicity to that of complexity can we recognize that interactions occur in particular contexts that are localized and culturally qualified. The assumption of objectivity has continued to be valued but has become newly directed towards intersubjectivity as the main characteristic of reality's construction. That is, we recognize that we are all that has been called "participant-observers" and, similar to a jazz band, we interact by both feeding and being fed by an audience. Thus, we are simultaneously observers and creators of reality (Esteves de Vasconcellos, 2018). This shift moves us from an assumption of stability to that of instability, where we can appreciate the flow and constant transformation possible in a world of movement, a continuous becoming. This perspective appreciates the unpredictability and indeterminacy generally present in social phenomena.

Hence, it is posited that theoretical orientation is included in clinical practice, with action that includes observation and intervention in studying relationships. The practice is professional action put into observation and intervention, occurring in the field of interrelationships. The same components that are desirable for clinical practice are equally pertinent for research. In this particular case, the choice of action-based research stemming from psychodrama practice in the field of knowledge can undoubtedly inform our epistemology, bringing substantiality and innovation to our thinking. With psychodrama, the reality is understood to be complicated, problems are produced in relationships, and solutions are found in conflict resolution and conflict zones (Esteves de Vasconcellos, 2020).

The dissemination of knowledge and research is a social and interactional activity produced in public environments, one which must return to the public because of a commitment made in this relationship. This point of view is a synthesis devised from dialogue and continued collaboration among those involved, implicating the parties' adaptability or whoever else participates. The most important issues are the completion of the production task, the implementation of some action, and the dissemination of the results stemming from these partnerships. As Fonseca Filho (1980) would say, this continuity is based on the awareness of the social actors and their sense of cosmic belonging which take place at the Encounter, or: "the reconnection of the cosmos through latent cosmic elements" (p. 97) in each person involved. Moreover, since man is a cosmic being (Moreno, 1993), the Encounter also presumes the presence of creativity-spontaneity, which is released at the moment of mutual surrender (Moreno, 1975). This dialogue should contemplate a space for impromptu, surprise and silence (Anderson, 2020). It allows for the presence of spontaneity as part of this "almost equation", which is a call for responsibility in speaking and listening, as well as respect for differences. This interaction and everything that results from it contains a relational responsibility (Marra, Omer & Costa, 2015) →

that indicates that we cyclically occupy places of protection (me) and requests for protection (to others), in an interchangeable process. When taking the role of needing protection, one experiences the “injured child” (or victim role), a position that will strengthen the inverse condition of a “rescuer or protector”. In this example of role reciprocity, or any other reciprocal encounter, there is an intersection between me and you in the spaces between the self and the non-self you in the spaces between the self and the non-self and mentexts can provide the necessary space for the expression of love that recognizes the other (Moreno, 2008).

INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Intersubjectivity, as a parameter to discuss human relations, has increasingly reached space for reflection that involves authors from different areas and different theoretical fields. At the international level, we have Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2004), Edgard Morin (2002), Humberto Maturana Romesín and Francisco Varela Garcia (1997) and Maria José Esteves de Vasconcellos (2018); while Marilena Grandesso (2017) should be mentioned at the national level (in Brazil). In historical terms, Jacob Levy Moreno, the creator of Psychodrama, would be at the head of the set of authors mentioned to contribute to the creation of an epistemology that places human interaction on par with all the physical and metaphysical dimensions of the universe. He sees man only in intersubjective terms.

Santos (2004) also discusses how our theory impacts our understanding of reality. Transformations and changes in living values have become pervasive in our characterization of relationships. One could say that reality is, at the same time, too real and very banal. It appears that contact with the world, manifested in so much contradiction and dissonance, affects interactions. The implications of this are seen in sudden movements of detachment or disruptions or perhaps with over-identification that encroach upon personal identity and, at the same time, bring a lack of initiative or excess accommodation that does not translate the covert suffering. The result is missed opportunities for authentic connection.

The author states that the challenges are fivefold: economic, global, individual, political, geographical, and national. In this paper, we aim to deepen only individual and political nature, since groups are made up of members who have both a personal and a political role in group organization. Concerning individual nature, the aspect that stands out is the exacerbation of individualism and the protagonist’s revaluation. This embodies a paradox that holds challenges to democracy since it reveals a human who is at the same time more anxious for democracy, but also more accommodated, more shaped by consumerism and general conformism. From the questions that are constructed by these natures, the author seeks to understand the role of the social sciences in this context, and, specifically for the aim of this text, what role groups may have in improving collective problems.

Intersubjectivity is at the root of the solution, according to the theoretical position of Santos (2004). This author indicates space-time for citizenship, constituting the community dimension in which neighboring relationships are created, and physical and symbolic contexts can change power relationships by introducing equality relations. What Santos advocates here is for the equal value of both the knowledge produced by those in authority and that produced by common sense. Because it is a double epistemological rupture, each of these types of knowledge acquires a new dimension of value: objective and scientific knowledge that brings advance and change, and the specific knowledge of common sense that brings immediate utility. Citizenship is achieved with the value given equally to both dimensions (Santos, 2000).

For Maturana Romesín and Dávila Yanes (2009), actions and language are configured in the domain of emotions. Human growth occurs in a culture within a network of conversations, where there is conjoined participation with other members of



that culture, in the slow and continuous consensual transformation in which it is immersed. These authors draw attention to the patriarchal character of this culture that surrounds everyone, causing many paradoxical behaviors and that end up expressing only patriarchal thought. This conceals the need for the exchange of loving behaviors or, in the authors' statement, of matrixic behavior (Maturana Romesín & Verden-Zöller, 1997, p. 140): "Biologically, love is the emotion that constitutes the domain of actions in which the other is accepted as he is at the present moment...". Humberto Maturana Romesín also argues that love is the emotion that underlies our societies' social fabric, one which, over the past years, the sciences and knowledge produced have moved away from, directing their attention to the power games present in relationships. For this author, the game is an action that transcends intentionality or any operational conduct. Human beings undertake relational games that have the function of expressing a language and yet confirm the existence of the other. Babies play with their mothers through body expressions and expansions, and movements that are construction of signs that define the relationship. Therefore, one may say that love is the emotion that shapes group relationships and that intersubjectivity are the organization that promotes and sustains love. Finally, it is important to point out that, for Maturana Romesín, the human being is a unit with an autopoietic organization. Autopoiesis is a form of organization of the living being that organizes itself. This means that a human being has the tools for self-management, self-definition, and self-guidance¹ (Maturana Romesín & Varela Garcia, 1997).

In this sense, Moreno's idea on "treating" humanity suggests that no uniform therapeutic action can be prescribed "in so far as humanity is not a unit" (2008, p. 41). The unity of humanity depends on the loving interactions that circulate. The problem does not lie in the differences but in the tensions that arise from attractions and repulsions that are at the service of personal interests and not community and interpersonal interests. This dynamic needs to be reversed to alleviate the suffering and disunity that are an imprint of our time - the issue of the general public interest needs to be prioritized over that of the individual.

Petraglia (1995) states that, for Edgard Morin, the subject is the author of his organizing process. This concept brings Morin closer to Moreno since both perceive the subject as an "I" that is always with the "you". The condition of man's self-organization also approximates Morin to Maturana Romesín, insofar as he conceives man in autopoietic development, as has been pointed out above. For Morin, the subject is never alone because his development takes place in interrelationships. Thus, his self-organization is, in fact, a self-eco-organization.

It is essential to resort to Morin (1995) and his Theory of Complexity, in which he points out that action supposes complexity because action includes the unforeseen, chance, initiative and the possibility of change. This author sees the human being as a non-trivial machine, a machine from which we cannot predict and directly correlate all responses to know all the stimuli. Besides, the human being is seen as a planetary being, requiring us to develop our planetary consciousness, the awareness that we are part of an earthly coexistence (Morin, 2000). Morin (2002), in his outstanding work *The Method*, points out that man is, above all, a trinity composed of individual/society/species. Each of these dimensions contains the others. Each is complementary and can also be antagonistic to the others. Like the other authors mentioned, Morin focuses on the indissolubility of fraternal ties that mark our presence in society. Each of these aspects is the middle and end of the other, connected and inseparable, forming a unit with a multiplicity of faces. More recently, it is necessary to add updated dimensions of the same principles, including the concept of perceiving and acting in a network (Esteves de Vasconcellos, 2015) and the advent of the vision of globalization. The latter brings about other parameters of action, such as the need to take care of the whole (the global) without neglecting the regional (the local) (Morin, 2000). Community actions are an example of the implementation of this principle. A phrase adapted

1. This is related to Zerka's concept of the "autonomous healing center" within each person, or Jacob Moreno's idea of each person is a potential genius – see *To Dream Again: A Memoir* (Z. T. Moreno, 2012) and *Autobiography of a Genius* (J. L. Moreno, 2019).

from Esteves-Vasconcellos (2014) work is taken as inspiration: “We observers talk and distinguish ourselves in dialogues and social networks.” This sentence can be interpreted to mean that we, the social actors, interact in social contacts and problematic situations for which we are called upon to act. Santos (2000) argues that when considering the connection between the reality of the whole, its parts, and their interconnections, our perspective must encompass both the more extensive system and each specific part at the same time. Therefore, citizenship must be exercised in both a general and a specific arena, and actions must concentrate on comprehensive and directed principles towards benefits of a more focal condition (Esteves-Vasconcellos, 2014).

INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN MORENO’S PHILOSOPHY

Based on his criticism of the traditional model of science, Moreno created a “science of social relations” to encompass the various interconnections and manifestations of social and human phenomena dissociated by scientism. In doing so, he exposes the epistemological rupture of scientific thought (Conceição, Penso, Costa, Setúbal & Wolff 2018).

For the creator of Psychodrama, there is no possibility of man alone; there is always a man and the other, that is, for each role, there is a counter role. Affectivity is one of the nuclei that generate bonds within-group development (Moreno, 1972). The most significant expression of affectivity is the release of spontaneity-creativity, with which biopsychosocial homeostasis is achieved². For Moreno, spontaneity is “a plastic aptitude for adaptation, mobility and flexibility of the self” (Moreno, 1974, p. 144), which catalyzes creativity through the performance of social roles. The complementary action of social relationships generates the social atom³The nucleus of all individuals with whom a person is affectionately related or “the smallest functional unit within the social group” is the nucleus. Every person can be positively, negatively, or neutrally related to an indefinite number of people who, in turn, respond to this relation positively, negatively, or neutrally. It is this configuration that constitutes the social atom. As the individual grows, the atom expands and so does the network of social relations. What Moreno calls the social atom designates a social space “defined by intersubjectivity, and which circumscribes a field of interaction for various subjects; interpenetration, opposition and synthesis of the current and the virtual, the real and imaginary, the co-conscious and the co-unconscious” (Naffah Neto, 1997, p. 171).

The social atom has an essential operational function in forming society, as it intersects with other social atoms, potentially forming new social networks. Sociometry, the study of the interrelationships in a group, studies social reality regarding 1) the balance of the social atom; 2) the intensity with which an individual is accepted or rejected; 3) affective expansiveness, which shows the number of individuals with whom the person relates and the intensity of these relationships; and 4) the dynamism of the group (Knobel, 2004).

The proximity and intensity of social relations generate bonds between individuals and configure a unique and specific relational and group dynamic, resulting from the exchange of conscious and unconscious contents. Moreno (1972) describes these as co-conscious and co-unconscious, in which the tele and transfer phenomena work concurrently and simultaneously. The author defines the tele as the reciprocal feelings of attraction or rejection that individuals experience within a relationship or social atoms. The tele is intersubjectivity in its essence (Costa, 1990). Currently, the concept has been widely revised (Aguar, 1990; Nery, 2003; Perazzo, 1994) as an eminently inter-psycho phenomenon, responsible for establishing bonds and which functions



2. Moreno and modern interpersonal neurobiologists (Cozolino, 2014) call this *sociostasis*.

3. For Moreno, the network of role relationships = cultural atom; the network of social relationships = social atom.

as the input for co-creation. Aguiar (1990) developed the concept of co-creation, which is joint creation, made possible by the combined spontaneity factor of the encounter of the people involved. Moreno also relates transference to social roles' performance, giving it a social dimension of mutuality and related to the moment. This understanding is the foundation for the term co-transference⁴ (Aguiar, 1990; Nery, 2003).

Intersubjectivity that is, subjective exchanges between people, is composed of the co-conscious and co-unconscious states and their tele (co-creation) and co-transfer phenomena. Co-creation, therefore, comes from social reality, a result of external reality and the sociometric matrix. There is a common unconscious (co-unconscious) in social reality, which generates social dynamics and their linked standardizations. The external reality is the formal reality of the roles and social atoms of individuals. The sociometric matrix is the everyday reality within which affective structures and influences are hidden, such as affinities, identifications, and choices for the realization of primary and secondary interactional projects (Nery & Conceição, 2006).

Moreno (1974) indicates that the first method of group action is the “interactional” method whose most remarkable characteristic is mutual assistance⁵ offered between the members of the group. Group action (what Moreno originally referred to as group therapy) aims to integrate the individual with the group forces surrounding him and favor group integration itself, in a recursive movement in which both the individual and the group act and are responsible for the phenomena of reciprocity of the group. The group is a microcosm for two other groups in which we find ourselves simultaneously: the family and our micro-society (our community, for example). There is a fundamental rule for belonging to the group as a solution: spontaneity. How does the group exist and how is it created? This occurs through spontaneity, cooperation, and the integration of its members. Moreno refers to the term catharsis of integration⁶, whether it be individually or in a group, since what happens to the individual also matters to the group.

In other words, the process of each individual's development within the group impacts group development. Initially, Moreno (2006) thought of a method of action as a spiritual practice that could express the spontaneity and creativity that lead the human being to take ownership of his destiny and the universe. Therapeutic action can take the human being to an existential realm, which Moreno calls the First Universe Encounter, filled with the immediate and direct experience of love.

The social network concept is present in the structure of the Psychodrama/Sociodrama enactment as a social, spatial, and relational organization. In these contexts, the hierarchy of those who know more and those who know less disappears. In creating the scene, everyone collaborates and adds their visions. The functional unit is the engine of cooperation that builds the relationship between the components of the scene. The audience, which joins the functional unit in a non-hierarchical network, offers support and validation for the developing script, made possible by the telic involvement that permeates the group and its relationships; and the action reflects the “conversation” in which everyone participates.



4. For Moreno (1975), the psychoanalytic term of contra transference is just a double hand steering transference.

5. What Irving Yalom and Molyn Leszcz (2006) call altruism – also called “mutual aid” in the social work with groups field

6. According to Almeida (2010), a catharsis of integration is an original concept developed by Moreno and it refers to an affective-emotional ab-reactive response, which emerges from the dramatic action that is produced and expressed during an operative or therapeutic piece of work with group dynamics.

Moreno (1993), when commenting on the history of Psychodrama, narrates his trajectory in structuring the method as a form of group psychotherapy. He points out other concepts that are relevant to understand the democratizing aspect of the Psychodramatic Method. One of his points is that a patient is a therapeutic agent for others, and one group is a therapeutic agent for other groups. He calls this “the principle of therapeutic interaction” (1993, p. 25), and suggests that all social interactions are, in themselves, potentially therapeutic. The therapeutic group must fulfill this function effectively. Sociometry and sociometric interventions are required to enhance the efficiency of societal functioning, and Sociometry would be the method adopted to avoid inefficiency. Individuals and groups can become, in Moreno’s view, auxiliary therapists within the community.

The group maintains itself by absorbing new members and welcoming diversity. Group cohesion is linked to the development of the tele (Moreno, 2008), which, the more developed it is, the more conditions it offers for approximating contacts and affectivity. The leader’s role is well defined as a participant and member of the group, albeit with a unique role. The psychodramatic conduct of group action emphasizes the “act-hunger” of the group members and seeks to understand verbal communication and body expression to explore the participants’ spontaneous potential. Thus, the dramatization socializes the personal, creating the possibility of sharing and identification through collective creation (Fleury, Marra, & Knobel, 2015).

This synthetic description of a psychodramatic therapeutic group can also be applied when we think of an intervention group in the community. In this context, our focus is on the group’s constitution as the protagonist of community action.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

There has been an increasing demand for training in group management, mainly by professionals dealing with teams of psychosocial care services and health providers who seek to improve group techniques. As Fonseca Filho (1999) points out, the different psychotherapeutic practice modalities were the result of their respective socio-cultural contexts and responded to the demands that translate the values that were in force in specific historical moments. Thus, what the author calls “the age of groups”, which occurred around the 1960s, reflected values of solidarity and community experience that historically coincided with the heyday of humanistic psychology. Are we currently experiencing a revitalization of such values with a growing interest in group approaches?

In the face of the current crisis in paradigms, it may be worth posing the question of what directions postmodernity is pointing towards for psychotherapies. The emerging postmodern paradigm highlights and values complex causality, the dialogical principle, autonomy, and integration, rather than dichotomization, diversity, local and singular knowledge, and the renewal of epistemological knowledge possibilities. Notwithstanding the current paradigm crisis, what does this postmodern shift mean for the field of psychotherapy?

One can foresee that psychotherapy paths are projected towards a more significant social commitment with the needy populations that have historically been excluded from the possibility of access. This new professional requirement, which is practical and ethical, is required, in addition to an ethical posture of seeking the subject’s autonomy and flexibility for change. The psychotherapist’s opportunity to be a transforming agent of social reality, bringing openness and respect to previously marginalized populations, increases as long as his attitude of not knowing favors the outbreak of new senses (Anderson, 2017). In face-to-face encounters, the required care protocols can prevent the possibility of a real encounter and lessen the chance of the emergence of the tele and spontaneity. On the other hand, in intersubjective communication, the more attentive and attuned



the therapist is about his own perceptions, sensations and feelings, the more present he will be in the meeting situation and the closer to capturing the intercommunication of consciences.

When turning to the theoretical and methodological proposals of action in Psychodrama, we have the resource of Sociometry, or the science of social laws, including Sociometry, Sociodynamics and Sociatry. Sociometry is the science of the structure of social groups, Sociodynamics is the science of measuring human relationships, and Sociatry is the science of the treatment of social systems (Moreno, 1993). Thus, this paper offers a system of thought and action with groups of people, ranging from evaluating interactions to the possibility of changes in relationships. Hence, Sociometry, as a set of perceptual investigative dimensions (Sociometry) and intervention (Sociodynamics and Sociatry), postulates “a scientist who... should recognize his situation within the researched reality and act as an agent or a ‘catalyst’ for the latent transformations that emanate from it” (Naffah Neto, 1997, p. 129). Sociatry, in turn, “expands the... work of explaining, developing and transforming intersubjective relationships, in a dimension that focuses on social tensions and ideologies, in the broader forms of manifestation (...)” (Naffah Neto, 1997, p. 135). In short, an authentic dialogical relationship promotes the production of new knowledge, which in the interplay of conversations of different subjectivities, recreates the old. In other words, in co-conscious and co-unconscious productions, new possibilities for newly co-constructed knowledge arise and the creation of new social interventions and practices.

How can the reality of practical experiences, innovations, or experiments offer answers to complex problems that have a strong interdependence on specific groups, such as the family, vulnerable population or victims of violence? The adoption of an intersubjectivity paradigm presents configured proposals in the form of psychosocial intervention and is primarily aimed at groups that are served in public institutional contexts. One can find practical descriptions already in progress that constitute possibilities and bring together an epistemology of intersubjectivity, complexity and context-oriented action. Examples of these practices are described in Marra, Omer & Costa (2015), Conceição et al. (2018) and Conceição & Marra (2019). In all these situations, what prevails is spontaneity as a factor of transformation, approximation, and creating a facilitating context for communicating serious issues through “games”. Moreover, Morenian spontaneity creates the conditions for the emergence of the empathic linkage necessary for therapeutic group work. As Mudry, Nepustil and Ness (2018) point out, transformational action is much more important in giving value and emphasizing the essence and the rediscovery of oneself in the face of other established relationships.

CONCLUSION

This article sought to promote and defend the ideal of human interactions, privileging individual, group and professional actions by focusing on authors who disseminated, throughout the 20th century, the ideas of the greater value of exchanges that occur in relationships. The ideas recovered here are based on intersubjectivity, the space of the relationship between people, and the recognition of the nature of politicity that is always present in actions involving group interactions. The “glue” to the acceptance of the other and life in society is love, as well as the recognition of the complexity in everyday life that indicates the direction of the mediations necessary for any group and / or professional work. Morenian contributions were also added to stimulate the expression of spontaneity as an adequate response to the construction of conflicts that permeate the contexts of relationships. The instruments proposed by Jacob Levy Moreno, Sociometry, Sociatry and psychodramatic action offer an open and favorable field for the emergence of creative expression. Furthermore, finally, the concept of cosmic consciousness, developed by Moreno and Morin, poses the permanent nudging that we are cosmic beings, all inhabitants of the same space, the global space, all equally responsible for human and planetary life (Moreno, 2008; Morin & Kern, 1995).



AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Both authors contributed equally for this article.

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