



Husserl, intersubjectivity and anthropology

Alessandro Duranti

University of California, Los Angeles, USA

Abstract

In this article, the notion of intersubjectivity is re-examined by going back to its original formulation by the philosopher Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century. On the basis of a careful reading of Husserl's books and lecture notes, four claims are put forward that help clarify in what sense intersubjectivity is a broader and more fundamental notion than currently assumed in the social sciences. In particular, it is argued that for Husserl intersubjectivity is more than shared or mutual understanding and is closer to the notion of the possibility of being in the place where the Other is. Furthermore, intersubjectivity is the source of objectivity and not always or necessarily something to be achieved or negotiated through verbal communication or other means. In fact, in its most basic sense, Husserlian intersubjectivity includes a mode of participation in the natural and material world that does not even require an immediately perceivable human presence. Following this discussion, it is suggested that the full range of meanings of intersubjectivity found in Husserl's writings can be used as the basis for a study of the human condition that has a chance to unite all subfields of anthropology as practiced in the US. With this goal in mind, six related but distinct domains of intersubjectivity are proposed.

Key Words

anthropology and phenomenology • human sociality • intersubjectivity • mutual understanding

INTRODUCTION

In this article I show that a number of currently widespread interpretations of intersubjectivity in the social sciences conflict with the ways in which the concept was first introduced and then elaborated by Edmund Husserl over a period of three decades. For Husserl, intersubjectivity is the most basic quality of human existence, which is constitutive of the Subject and of the very notion of an objective world. By exploring the role of the living human body, empathy, tools, and the natural and cultural world, Husserl

comes to see intersubjectivity as a domain of inquiry that spans the entire scope of human experience. Taking inspiration from this perspective, I suggest that intersubjectivity could be the common ground on which to found a truly interdisciplinary study of human sociality. As a contribution toward this goal, I propose an interpretation of Husserl's concept of intersubjectivity in terms of six basic domains, to be understood as each connected to the next and yet with slightly different manifestations and presuppositions. These domains include the natural world as a shared world of experience as well as the co-world made possible by the language faculty in all of its realizations.

In the following discussion of Husserl's writings and the uses or interpretations of his ideas by new generations of scholars, my goal is not to claim that Husserl owns the concept of intersubjectivity, nor do I claim to be offering an historical account of such a concept. I merely want to suggest that it is worth returning to Husserl's original ideas because they offer us a view of human sociality that is often ignored despite its relevance to anthropology and other social sciences.

INTRODUCING A PHENOMENOLOGICALLY-BASED NOTION OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

The notion of intersubjectivity promoted here ranges from acts in which one is minimally aware of the presence of an Other to acts in which one actively works at making sure that the Other and the Self are perceptually, conceptually, and practically coordinated around a particular task. In many of these acts, language as a human faculty and specific language varieties as socio-historical implementations of such a faculty (e.g. American English, Italian, southern Peruvian Quechua) are likely to be involved. In many other cases, however, a great deal can be said to be happening without the involvement of language(s). By stating this, I am not merely invoking the classic and problematic distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication, nor am I alluding to universal versus culture-specific properties of interaction. The absence of language does not mean that communication is not happening. People go in and out of social encounters, managing to maintain a joint focus of attention that entails *some* form of communication that does not rely on spoken or written language (e.g. Goodwin, 2000; Kendon, 1990). The theoretical issue is whether we should distinguish among different ways or degrees of sociality. The empirical issue is whether we *can* distinguish, that is, find the evidence of a priori, categorical, or emergent differences in co-presence. Great progress has been made on these issues within the last half a century, but there is still considerable confusion about what constitutes interaction or communication (and the extent to which interaction is involved in communication or vice versa). It is precisely in this regard that intersubjectivity as a fundamental dimension of human experience and human sociability has become an attractive notion to students of human interaction and human cognition. When properly understood, intersubjectivity can constitute an overall theoretical frame for thinking about the ways in which humans interpret, organize, and reproduce particular forms of social life and social cognition.

There is no question that a return to Husserl's original concept of intersubjectivity brings with it a number of unresolved issues, which are compounded by Husserl's tendency to return again and again to the epistemological and ontological foundations of his philosophy while providing very few exemplifications of what he had in mind.

One important issue is the extent to which Husserl's notion of intersubjectivity is based upon or affected by his commitment to the transcendental Ego – a position that is linked to his discovery of the 'epoché' and his rejection of an anthropologically oriented phenomenology (see below). I will here follow Alfred Schutz, one of Husserl's most informed and creative interpreters within the social sciences, and assume that there is plenty to learn from Husserl's discussion of intersubjectivity without having to accept all of his theoretical choices or go down all the paths that he invited us to follow.

After clarifying Husserl's position on what he saw as an 'anthropological' approach within phenomenology, I will make four claims, each of which is meant to correct a widespread, albeit not necessarily universal, interpretation of intersubjectivity in the social sciences. Afterwards, I will propose a model of intersubjectivity that divides it up into six gradient domains. This model, I propose, could be of relevance to all subfields of anthropology.

HUSSERL'S STANCE ON ANTHROPOLOGICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

In proposing to adopt some of Husserl's ideas for anthropological theory, we cannot ignore the fact that Husserl himself wrote against the very idea of adopting an anthropological perspective within phenomenology (e.g. Husserl, 1931c, English translation 1981). His position, however, must be contextualized and clarified. Husserl's criticism of anthropological – as well as of psychological¹ – approaches must be understood as a rejection of any *philosophical* perspective that would tend to naturalize human experience instead of examining its a priori, transcendental foundations. He saw Dilthey, Scheler, and Heidegger as making this mistake.² After the publication of the 1900 edition of *Logischen Untersuchungen* (Husserl, 1970a), Husserl became preoccupied with defining a method that would not be 'limited by anthropological-historical facticities', as he called the accidental details of human evolution and human history (Dilthey and Husserl, 1981[1911]: 205; see also Biemel, 1981). This criticism, however, was not against anthropology as an empirical science dedicated to the study of human societies and human behavior. In fact, as understood by Schutz and other phenomenological scholars, Husserl's method and some of his key concepts can be – and have been – of great use in the social sciences, sociology in particular (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984; Throop and Murphy, 2002). For anthropology, one obvious connection with Husserl's work is what he called *die natürliche Einstellung*, at first translated in English as 'the natural standpoint' (Husserl, 1931b) and then, later, as 'the natural attitude' (e.g. Husserl, 1998). This is a very anthropological notion that can be easily rendered as 'the cultural attitude', given that Husserl uses 'natural' in this case as meaning taken-for-granted rather than belonging to the world of nature (Duranti, 2009) (see below).

One of the first philosophers to propose an 'anthropological' reading of Husserl was Enzo Paci, who, writing in the 1960s, recognized Husserl's rejection of naturalism as similar to the position taken by Claude Lévi-Strauss (Paci, 1973; see also Kultgen, 1975). More recently, Husserl's writings have been shown to be relevant to a number of anthropological issues or themes. These include the experience and representation of time and temporality (Gell, 1992; Gingrich et al., 2002), experience (Jackson, 1998; Throop, 2003), musical and verbal performance (Berger, 1999; Berger and Del Negro, 2002), empathy (Hollan and Throop, 2008), and socialization (Duranti, 2009).

In adding Husserl's notion of intersubjectivity to this list of issues and topics, I am not the first. For example, in a number of publications, Michael Jackson (1996, 1998, 2005) argued that intersubjectivity should be a key concept in anthropological inquiry and has shown how this could be done. In his *At Home in the World* (1995), for example, Jackson effectively experimented with a kind of writing that is aimed at reproducing the experience of living in the Tanami desert of Central Australia with Warlpiri who are themselves struggling to represent collective memories of the relationship between human lives and their land. In working out the meaning of being-at-home for the Warlpiri, for himself, and for other people in the world, Jackson pushes the limits of anthropological writing by embracing an anthropology of experience that draws from Husserl and a number of other authors including William James, John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In all of these writings, Jackson is committed to an existentialist project that expands the boundaries of the concept and practice of ethnography. Turning it into a project for anthropology as a whole is challenging. The difficulty, in my view, is only in part an issue of a linguistic opacity, as Knibbe and Versteeg (2008: 58) argued about phenomenological anthropology in general. The real challenge is to show that phenomenological concepts can be of use not only in some areas – such as the study of healing (e.g. Csordas, 1990) or sorcery (Kapferer, 1997: 4–5) – but in all subfields, regardless of their specific object of inquiry. With this ambitious goal in mind, I will translate Husserl's complex and nuanced discussions of intersubjectivity into a finite series of claims, each of which is meant to be subject to a theoretical, analytical, and methodological evaluation, through which it may be adopted, modified, or rejected.

FIRST CLAIM: INTERSUBJECTIVITY IS MORE THAN SHARED OR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Starting in the 1960s, intersubjectivity officially entered the social and behavioral sciences³ in Europe and the US (e.g. Natanson, 1973). This was made possible by the publication of a number of books that, inspired by Husserl's then available writings, changed then current ways of thinking about self, society, and communication. These books included, among others, the English translation of Schutz's 1932 *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt: eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie* (Schutz, 1967), the translation of Merleau-Ponty's 1945 *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), Harold Garfinkel's (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, and Ragnar Rommetveit's (1974) *On Message Structure* (see also Rommetveit, 1976).

Despite the extensive references to Husserl in Merleau-Ponty's and Schutz's publications, the adoption of intersubjectivity by the majority of other scholars did not include a discussion, elaboration, or critique of Husserl's ideas. The outcome was that within one or two generations intersubjectivity came to be detached from Husserl's name and became understood in the restricted sense of 'shared' or 'mutual understanding' (Newson, 1978: 31; Rogoff, 1990; Rommetveit, 1974; Tomasello, 2007; Tomasello et al., 2005; Trevarthen, 1977; Trevarthen and Huble, 1978). Jerome Bruner, for example, in boldly suggesting that psychology should be about intersubjectivity, defined it as 'how people come to know what others have in mind and how they adjust accordingly' (Bruner, 1996: 161). Although figuring out 'what others have in mind' might be what social actors try to accomplish in their daily interactions, it is a bit problematic as a

universal condition for human sociality for a number of reasons. One is that the theory of interpretation as mind-reading appears to be culture-specific rather than universal. Ethnographers, especially those working in the Pacific, have encountered a number of societies in which people either refuse to engage in mind-reading or argue that one cannot really know what is in the mind of another human being (see articles in Rumsey and Robbins, 2008, for a recent review of this issue). Regardless of whether one sees these local theories as misguided or ideological (in the sense of ‘false consciousness’), the point is that the inferential calculus of attribution of intentions to social actors is not (Iaconi, 2008) and cannot be at work all the time (Du Bois, 1993; Duranti, 1993, 2006; Richland, 2006).

A strictly psychological interpretation of intersubjectivity as the matching of one person’s mental state with another’s mental state is problematic because it ends up reducing the force of the concept of intersubjectivity and thus risks reproducing the same crisis of meaning that Husserl himself denounced as the danger of unreflective science (e.g. Husserl, 1970b).

The popularity of the interpretation of intersubjectivity as shared or mutual understanding can be traced back to the English translation of a number of terms used by Husserl and later discussed by Schutz. The original terms are all compounds that include the German word *Wechsel*, translatable in English with words such as ‘change, exchange, reverse, succession, rotation’ (Messinger, 1973: 602). Among them, we find *Wechselverständnis*, *Einverständnis*, *Wechselverständigung* (Husserl, 1989: 86–7 [pp. 81–2 of German edition]), and the phrase *sich mit uns . . . verständigen können*. In translating these terms into English, there has been a tendency to render them with the expression ‘mutual understanding’, starting with the 1931 English translation by W.R. Boyce Gibson of the first volume of Husserl’s 1913 *Ideen* (the only volume that Husserl published during his lifetime). Here is an example in which ‘mutual understanding’ appears within the context of Husserl’s discussion of the unity of consciousness and the human body, which he considers to be a starting point for the establishment of a shared social and cognitive world:

. . . it is only through the connecting of consciousness and body into a natural unity that can be empirically intuited that such a thing as *mutual understanding* between the animal natures that belong to one world is possible, and that only thereby can every subject that knows find before it a full world containing itself and other subjects, and at the same time know it for one and the same world about us belonging in common to itself and all other subjects. (Husserl, 1931: 149–50, §53; emphasis mine)

Some 35 years later, the term ‘mutual understanding’ is also found in the third volume of Schutz’s *Collected Papers*, where he discusses Husserl’s notion of intersubjectivity at great length (but, notably, the term is *not* found in Schutz’s more popular book, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, where he uses instead the expression ‘We-relationship’):

How, in the frame of the natural attitude, is mutual understanding (*Einverständnis*) in principle possible? The answer given by Husserl in *Ideen I* (Par. 53) . . . refers to

the experience of a linking of consciousness and body (*Leib*) to form a natural, empirical unity by means of which consciousness is located in the space and time of nature, and which, in acts of ‘empathy,’ makes possible reciprocal understanding between animate subjects belonging to one world. (Schutz, 1966: 51–2)

The inclusion of the German original term (*Einverständnis*) in the quote above suggests that the translator had some doubts as to whether or not the ‘mutual understanding’ would adequately convey the meaning of the original. A different translation, ‘agreement’, is provided by the translator in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, in a passage about Schleiermacher’s theory: ‘Understanding is, primarily, agreement (*Verständnis ist zunächst Einverständnis*)’ (Gadamer, 2002: 180).

When we examine Husserl’s second volume of *Ideen*, the compound word *Wechselverständigung* does not seem to mean ‘the understanding of each other’ but the understanding made possible by the possibility of exchanging places, as made clear in the notion of ‘trading places’. This is made explicit in the next section.

SECOND CLAIM: INTERSUBJECTIVITY IS THE POSSIBILITY OF ‘TRADING PLACES’

For Husserl, intersubjectivity means the condition whereby I maintain the assumption that the world as it presents itself to me is the same world as it presents itself to you, not because you can ‘read my mind’ but because I assume that *if you were* in my place you *would* see it the way I see it. This is captured by the notion of *Platzwechsel*, that is, ‘trading places’ or ‘place exchange’, which is made possible by empathy (see also De Bergoffen, 1996: 54; Depraz, 2001: 173; Schutz, 1962).⁴

The things posited by others are also mine: in empathy I participate in the other’s positing. E.g., I identify the thing I have over and against me in the mode of appearance (with the thing posited by the other in the mode of appearance). To this belongs the possibility of substitution by means of *trading places*. Each person has, at the same place in space, ‘the same’ appearances of the same things – if, as we might suppose, all have the same sensibility. And on this account, even the ‘view’ of a thing is Objectified. Each person has, from the same place in space and with the same lighting, the same view of, for example, a landscape. But never can the other, at exactly the same time as me (in the originary content of lived experience attributed to him) have the exact same appearance as I have. My appearances belong to me, his to him. (Husserl, 1989: 177; emphasis mine)

This view is also found in one of the ‘constituents’ listed by Garfinkel (1967: 55) to characterize Schutz’s notion of a scene that is ‘known in common with others’, that is, ‘[t]hat the actual determinations that the event exhibits for the witness are the potential determinations that it would exhibit for the other person were they to exchange positions’ (Garfinkel, 1967: 56).⁵ In both cases, the idea is not that we *simultaneously* come to the *same* understanding of any given situation (although this can happen), but that we have, to start, the *possibility* of exchanging places, of seeing the world from the point of view of the Other. Intersubjectivity is thus an existential condition that can *lead* to a shared understanding – an important achievement in its own terms – rather than being

itself such an understanding. This is made clear in the following passage where Husserl states that nature itself is an intersubjective reality. This does not mean that we have a mutual understanding of nature but that nature, by being something we share with other beings, can be one of the conditions for us to come to a shared understanding of the world at large (what he calls here ‘things and people’).

Nature is an intersubjective reality and a reality not just for me and my companions of the moment but for us and for everyone who can come to a *mutual understanding* with us about things and about other people. There is always the possibility that new spirits enter into this nexus; but they must do so by means of their Bodies, which are represented through possible appearances in our consciousness and through corresponding ones in theirs. (Husserl, 1989: 91)

The sentence that is here translated as ‘who can come to a mutual understanding with us about things and about other people’ reads in German: ‘für uns und alle, die sollen mit uns in Verkehr treten und sich mit uns über Sachen und Menschen verständigen können’ (Husserl, 1952: 86). A translation that stays closer to the original would read: ‘for us and all those who must enter into an interaction with us and can come to an understanding with us about things and people’. It should be noted that there is no German word corresponding to the English ‘mutual’ and that the word ‘can’ (*können*) suggests that Husserl recognized intersubjectivity as, first of all, the *possibility* of an understanding, not necessarily its *accomplishment*.

THIRD CLAIM: INTERSUBJECTIVITY IS THE SOURCE OF OBJECTIVITY

For Husserl, the world of ‘the natural attitude’ is a world full of values and, most importantly, it is a ‘practical world’, with which I typically engage before any kind of theoretical understanding of what things or people are like (Husserl, 1931b: 92–3; 1998: 53). In this world, I experience others as subjects like me, who have a similar relationship with their surrounding world (Husserl, 1931b: 94). Despite the fact that we see the world with different clarity and from a different point of view and therefore that for each of us things have a different physical appearance – I might see one side of a car while you might see the other side – I assume that we end up with the same objective world (Husserl, 1998: 55–6; 1969: 233).⁶ For Husserl, this common world is an accomplishment that is made possible first of all by empathy (*Einfühlung*), understood as the primordial experience of participating in the actions and feeling of another being *without* becoming the other (Husserl, 1969: 233; Stein, 1989). This kind of empathetic (and hence non-rational, non-cognitive) understanding of Others comes out of our exposure to their bodies moving and acting in ways that we recognize as similar to the ways in which we would act under similar circumstances.

It is clear that *the apprehension of the Body plays a special role for the intersubjectivity* in which all objects are apprehended ‘Objectively’ as things in the one *Objective* time and one *Objective* space of the one Objective world. (In every case the exhibition of any apprehended Objectivity whatsoever requires a relation to the apprehension of a

multiplicity of subjects sharing a mutual understanding [*Wechselverständigung*].) (Husserl, 1989: 86; emphasis in the original)

Husserl here (and elsewhere) takes advantage of the distinction in German between *Leib*, the living body, and *Körper*, the body conceived as a physical object, to explain how our own Body⁷ (*Leib*) and the Body of others play a crucial role in establishing our perspective on the objects by which we are surrounded.⁸

... the Body [is] the bearer of the zero point of orientation, the bearer of the here and the now, out of which the pure Ego intuits space and the whole world of the senses. Thus each thing that appears has *eo ipso* an orienting relation to the Body, and this refers not only to what actually appears but to each thing that is supposed to be able to appear. (Husserl, 1989: 61)

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If it is the Body that allows for intersubjectivity, it means that for Husserl intersubjectivity refers to or implies a level of understanding that is not (at first) rational (e.g. based on traceable inferential processes), but pre-logical and pre-propositional (Depraz, 1995). As Schutz (1967: 27) explained: 'we first observe the bodily behavior and then place it within a larger context of meaning'. This is the part of Husserl's view of human consciousness that some neuroscientists and cognitive scientists find attractive (Petitot et al., 1999). According to Gallese (2003: 520), 'Whenever we are exposed to behaviours of others requiring our response, be it reactive or simply attentive, we seldom engage in *explicit and deliberate interpretative acts*. The majority of the time our understanding of the situation is immediate, automatic and almost reflex-like.' In other words, according to neuroscientists, like Gallese, who have been studying 'mirror neurons', to understand a situation and act it is not always necessary to 'translate the sensory information about the observed behaviour into a series of *mental representations* that share, with language, the propositional format' (Gallese, 2003: 520, emphasis in the original; see also Gallese et al., 2002; Iaconi, 2008).

Within anthropology, in the 1970s, a number of authors began to engage in a critical appraisal of ethnographic fieldwork, including its socio-political and epistemological assumptions. Out of those reflections came stances and claims that closely resemble some of Husserl's, as shown by the following 'thesis' proposed by Johannes Fabian (1971: 25): 'In anthropological investigations, objectivity lies neither in the logical consistency of a theory, nor in the givenness of data but in the foundation [*Begründung*] of human *intersubjectivity*' (emphasis in the original). In revisiting his earlier work, Fabian himself has, in fact, recently proposed a phenomenological reading of it (Fabian, 2007: 20–1).

FOURTH CLAIM: INTERSUBJECTIVITY IS A PRECONDITION FOR INTERACTION

In working through the concept of intersubjectivity and its implications, Husserl anticipated and indirectly inspired, through such interpreters as Schutz and Harold Garfinkel (Heritage, 1984), the work on face-to-face interaction and on embodiment that has become so central to a number of approaches in the social sciences, including the interactional view of language (e.g. Duranti, 1992, 1997; Duranti and Goodwin, 1992; Goodwin, 2000). The importance of the physical presence of an Other for the constitution of the Self is made apparent in statements such as the following:

. . . the world for everyone presupposes that, in my ego . . . every other ego receives sense and acceptance *as* an other ego. Someone ‘else’, others – these have an original relation to me who experience them and am conscious of them in other manners. With everything, naturally, that belongs to their sense (their sense for me): Such as that someone else is here ‘facing me’, bodily and with his own life, and has me now, in like fashion, as *his vis-à-vis*; that I with my whole life, with all my modes of consciousness and all my accepted objects – am *alter ego for him*, as he is for me; and, in like fashion, everyone else for everyone else; so that ‘everyone’ receives its sense; and in like fashion, we and I (‘as ‘one among others’) as included in ‘everyone’. (Husserl, 1969: 237–8)

Schutz fully understood, early on, the implications of Husserl’s work for the social sciences and for the articulation of Max Weber’s plan to capture the subjective meaning of social behavior (Schutz, 1967: 6). In adopting and expanding on Husserl’s view of the centrality of intersubjectivity (renamed ‘we-relationship’) to the constitution of human experience, Schutz made intersubjectivity a cornerstone for the kind of interpretive social science that Weber had championed but had not been able to fully realize. Schutz knew that intersubjectivity for Husserl was the (universal) condition of human existence, the *sine qua non*, of humanity, through which and on the basis of which our surrounding world can be experienced and given meaning.

[Intersubjectivity] is the fundamental ontological category of human existence in the world and therefore of all philosophical anthropology. As long as man is born of woman, intersubjectivity and the we-relationship will be the foundation for all other categories of human existence. The possibility of reflection on the self, discovery of the ego, capacity for performing any epoché, and the possibility of all communication and of establishing a communicative surrounding world as well, are founded on the primal experience of the we-relationship. (Schutz, 1966: 82)

In this view, intersubjectivity is, first, not a *product* or an *effect* of communication but a *condition* for its possibility. Over time, however, especially within constructivist perspectives, intersubjectivity has come to be seen as something that must be achieved through particular activities including the use of language and other kinds of communicative resources. For example, for Keith Sawyer (2003: 9), writing about group creativity, ‘intersubjectivity is fundamentally social and collective, and must be negotiated’. For Robert Prus (1997), intersubjectivity is the achievement of ‘mindedness with the other’

that is made possible by a variety of everyday and ritual activities (e.g. anticipating encounters, seeking clarification, assessing encounters, terminating or reinvoking communication, dealing with children, providing remedial instruction). For Emanuel Schegloff (1992, 2006), intersubjectivity is at times lost and can be 'defended' or 'restored' through 'repair mechanisms' available to people involved in spontaneous conversation.

Differently from these authors, for Husserl intersubjectivity was predominantly a theoretical rather than a practical problem. He wanted to find a way to reconcile the intersubjective quality of human experience with its subjective foundation (see Theunissen, 1984: 15–16). The question was: if we start from individuals (i.e. monads), how can we explain the formation and existence of community (e.g. Husserl, 1931a; 1960, §55)? As shown by a close reading of the books published throughout his life and by the posthumous lectures and notes published in *Husserliana*, Husserl started to address this problem in 1905 and continued to work on it until the end of his life.

For Sartre, Husserl never overcame the problem because, given that his starting point was always the transcendental Ego, the Other could never be anything but an 'Alter-Ego', an entity always outside of the world of the Ego (Sartre, 1943; Schutz, 1962: 183–5). For others, although Husserl might not have solved the intersubjectivity problem, he at least indicated the path towards a possible solution (e.g. De Bergoffen, 1996; Depraz, 2001; Zahavi, 2001).

I will not take a stance as to whether the problem of intersubjectivity as defined by Husserl is solvable. Instead, I want to build on his discussion of intersubjectivity to claim that, before being an interactional problem, intersubjectivity is, at its most fundamental level, the existential condition for there being practical problems of the kind observed and defined by constructivist scholars. It is this condition that makes possible the awareness of the presence of others even before communication occurs. There is intersubjectivity, in other words, even when others are not present. This is made explicit by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1996: 113) but is already implied in Husserl's first volume of *Ideen* (Husserl, 1913) and especially in his concept of the 'natural standpoint', as aptly summarized by Schutz in the following passage:

... even in the natural standpoint, a man experiences his neighbors even when the latter are not at all present in the bodily sense. . . . He finds himself surrounded by objects which tell him plainly that they were produced by other people; these are not only material objects but all kinds of linguistic and other sign systems, in short, artifacts in the broadest sense. (Schutz, 1967: 109)

INTERSUBJECTIVITY AS AN UMBRELLA NOTION FOR ANTHROPOLOGY

Considering the claims made so far, I think it is safe to say that intersubjectivity for Husserl covers a wide range of meanings and phenomena which include in some cases 'understanding each other', but in other cases simply refer to the mere awareness of others who see the world, nature included, from their standpoint but, by manifesting behaviors that resemble our own, contribute to the making of one objective – shared or sharable – world possible. If we accept this premise, we can say that to see intersubjectivity in a truly Husserlian fashion means to think of it as, first and foremost, the

possibility of human interaction and human understanding, a possibility that is at times realized by the mere evoking of an Other's presence (as when we perceive the surrounding natural world as a cultural world that has been touched, modified, exploited, or enjoyed by other human beings), and at other times it is presupposed by the presence of tools and artifacts that were made by humans. This means that intersubjectivity should be conceptualized as including an original or primordial level of participation in a world that is co-habited even when no one is visible or hearable. I believe that this is the level that Schutz identified as the very condition for the achievement of interactionally (and linguistically) mediated intersubjectivity, including the very specialized type of intersubjectivity that has come to be known as 'shared' or 'mutual' understanding.

This more general and more basic notion of intersubjectivity is found in a number of authors who took inspiration from Husserl's work and, in some cases, tried to combine it with Heidegger's conceptualization of human life as *Dasein*. Thus, Merleau-Ponty adopted the view that phenomenology is a philosophy for which the world is always *déjà là*, 'already there,' even before we reflect on it, like an inalienable presence (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 7). Such an inalienable presence is always a world of others, a social world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 420). Other authors have come to similar points of view. For example, Karl Löwith (1928), in a critique of Heidegger's notion of *Mitsein* (co-being), said that before the *Welt*, 'world', there is the *Mitwelt*, a co-world (see Wolin, 2001: 81–2).

Taking these positions into consideration, I will renew earlier attempts to make intersubjectivity central to the anthropological enterprise by proposing to think of it in terms of varying and gradient forms. I believe that such a gradient notion can promote a real collaboration among the different branches of anthropology and can therefore constitute the starting point for a truly interdisciplinary study of human sociality. I would even venture to say that intersubjectivity, properly understood and differentiated in its related and yet distinguishable existential modes, aspects, and domains, could turn out to be just as important but hopefully not as vague as the notion of culture.

Intersubjectivity as an umbrella notion for anthropology should include the following:

1. The experience of the natural world, which by being shared, already constitutes a 'form of community'. This concept is articulated by Husserl in statements such as the following:

The first thing constituted in the form of community, and the foundations for all other intersubjectively common things, is the commonness of Nature, along with that of the Other's organism and his psychophysical Ego, as paired with my own psychophysical Ego. (Husserl, 1960: 120, emphasis in the original)

The notion of a 'shared natural world' is related but not identical to the notion of 'shared' or 'mutual' understanding mentioned earlier. The natural world we inhabit is shared because it has perceptible and interpretable traces of others having been 'there' (or 'here'). Within anthropology, Australian aborigines are the first that come to mind in this respect because of the rich ethnographic descriptions of the Dreaming and the special relationship with land and places that it entails (e.g. Morphy, 1998; Myers, 1986,

2002). But most, if not all, ethnographers have first noticed and then have tried to capture their hosts' experience and representation of nature as part of a lived world.

To exist in communities entails that there is 'a *mutual being for one another*' [ein Wechselseitig-für-einander-Sein] (Husserl, 1960: 129). This way of being there for one another will become 'growing old together' for Schutz ('growing older' is both 'natural' and 'cultural').

Our awareness that we inhabit a world that is also inhabited by others who happen to be like us is an attribute that we share with other species. What is special about human intersubjectivity is that it includes the potential for what Husserl called a 'theoretical attitude'. This is a phenomenological modification (Husserl, 1989: 7; Duranti, 2009), a reorientation (*Umstellung*), whereby we make the world in which we live and we usually take for granted – the world of the 'natural attitude' (see above) – into the object of our thoughts (we make it 'thematic') (Husserl, 1970b: 281).

A particular kind of theoretical attitude is at work when scientists try to come up with a new model to account for some phenomena. But the scientists' theoretical attitude is a further modification of the type of reorientation that is quite frequent in our everyday life, like when we step out of the flow of ongoing activity – what Bergson (1922, 1938) tried to capture with his notion of *durée* – to provide a representation and, simultaneously, an assessment of our experience. Language is particularly well suited for such acts (see below) but is not the only medium through which we theorize. Sometimes a sudden movement of our body can communicate a change of attitude that indexes or invites reflection, before it is encoded in language or some other conventional medium.

2. The experience of the world as apprehended through the senses, which, in the 'natural attitude', are always in combination with our empathetic co-presence with other living bodies, whose actions reveal their intentionalities (i.e. their being 'about' something, oriented toward some place as a physical and social goal). Yet, we want to make sure we do not forget that being in the world means also smelling, touching, and actions that involve the rest of our sensory abilities (Finnegan, 2002; Hamilton and Whitehouse, 2006).

3. The experience of the natural world as a world through which human presence and human labor has already been transformed into a 'cultural world' [*Kulturwelt*]. This is the world of 'places' as opposed to 'spaces' (Casey, 1996) and the world of artifacts, from buildings to tools used for transforming nature into food, shelter, and clothes. For example, archaeologists think even of a clearing made by humans on the ground as an 'artifact'. It involves action, labor, goals, preparation, and plans, all elements of subjectivity that we associate with 'agency'.

4. The participation in a world inhabited by Others, always perceived and understood as particular types of beings, e.g. 'students' and 'teachers', 'musicians' and 'audience members', 'friends', 'acquaintances' and 'strangers' or 'the people seen on television today'. This world of Others, apprehended as well as theorized through language and other semiotic means, is active and relevant even when the Others are not physically co-present. In this 'activation' tools play a crucial role.

5. The being-with of specific encounters, interactions, joint activities, in the present as well as in the remembered past and in the anticipated future, as expressed in the future perfect (Schutz, 1967). This world of 'doing together' is a pragmatic world, that is, a world constituted by our actions and made sense through them. Such actions cannot

but be subjected to practical, moral (Levinas, 1969, 1985; Taylor, 1985), and aesthetic evaluations, which are both the conditions and the consequences of what we call ‘human interaction’. Just as it is naïve to think that interaction begins when people start to talk with one another (Kendon, 1990), it is equally naïve to ignore that there are multiple ways of being with others, only some of which are culturally recognized or subject to reflexivity (Berger, 1999; Berger and Del Negro, 2002). Socialization is a life-long process and project whereby we are exposed to and guided to interacting with others in such a way that we become accountable for both our doing and our not-doing – or saying and not-saying. Socialization is also at work in particular fields, including academic disciplines. The being-with of ethnographers is itself subject to socio-historical constraints and expectations, as discussed by Fabian (1983) in his critique of the ‘denial of coevalness’, that is, the description of the Other as not only inhabiting another place but also another time.

6. The complex, varied, and yet highly specific type of being-with that is made possible by the language faculty and by its actualization in particular human languages, dialects, styles, genres, and registers. To rethink the language faculty and so-called natural historical languages from the point of view of intersubjectivity helps us overcome the pre-conceptions that have been accumulated over time on the ontology of language while reconnecting language and languages to a much wider range of faculties and phenomena that define our way of being in the world. We need to become aware of the fact that language displays and invokes intersubjectivity even before it can be decoded according to grammatical or lexical information. The mere use of a language, even before its denotational meaning can be processed and decoded, establishes the possibility of encountering an Other at a level that is projected as highly sophisticated and specific (Duranti, 2004).

Through language we make explicit our theoretical attitude, like when a person says ‘I love this ride’ while driving (Duranti, 2009: 214) or when a musician instructing young members of a large Latin jazz ensemble says ‘rhythm is the foundation of this music’, thereby stepping out of the activity of playing music to make playing itself thematic and simultaneously providing a theory of its ‘essence.’ Language use is always simultaneously practical and theoretical activity.

SUMMING UP

The notion of intersubjectivity promoted here ranges from acts in which one is minimally aware of the presence of an Other to acts in which one actively works at making sure that the Other and the Self are perceptually, conceptually, and practically coordinated around a particular task. In many of these acts language as a human faculty and specific languages as socio-historical realizations of such a faculty (e.g. French, Japanese, Hopi) are likely to be involved. In many other cases, however, a great deal can be said to be happening without the involvement of language(s). The theoretical issue is whether we *should* distinguish among different ways or levels of being together. The empirical issue is whether we *can* distinguish, that is, find the evidence of categorical differences in and of co-presence. Partly thanks to new recording technologies, great progress has been made on these issues within the last half a century, but there is still considerable confusion about what constitutes interaction or communication (and the extent to which interaction is involved in communication or vice versa). It is precisely

in this regard that intersubjectivity as a fundamental dimension of human experience and human sociability can help. It can provide an overall theoretical frame for thinking about the ways in which humans interpret, organize, and reproduce particular forms of social life and social cognition.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have reviewed the notion of intersubjectivity as originally theorized by Husserl and compared it with the same notion as assumed and elaborated upon by a number of scholars in philosophy and in the social sciences since the 1930s. I have argued that the common assumption that intersubjectivity means ‘shared’ or ‘mutual’ understanding is a later development of the concept and something that is much more specific and restricted than that originally envisioned by Husserl. As indicated by Schutz, Husserl’s view of intersubjectivity is much more basic and foundational. Whereas the possibility of coming to a common understanding should indeed be one of the phenomena covered by the notion of intersubjectivity – and for this goal conversation analysts have much to offer – Husserl’s original concept is much broader in scope and does not require the achievement of shared agreement or mutual understanding. Instead, at the interactional level intersubjectivity for Husserl implies a kind of perspective-taking that is best characterized with metaphors such as ‘trading places’ rather than ‘achieving understanding’. In Husserl’s writings intersubjectivity includes the human relation with the natural world, the role of tools and other artifacts in evoking other minds and other lives, the sense of belonging to a community or to a particular relationship even when others are not co-present, the participation in particular types of social encounters, the access to and use of human languages and other semiotic resources. These and other experiences provide a broad spectrum of what we understand as the human condition. With this in mind, I have identified six intimately related but different domains of intersubjectivity to be collectively thought of as a manifold notion that can help establish a common ground for all branches of anthropology as the science of human sociability.

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Notes

- 1 Husserl's distinction between phenomenological and psychological analysis is made clear in his discussion of meaning in *Logical Investigations* (Husserl, 1970a) as well as in his lectures on the theory of meaning in the summer semester of 1908 (Husserl, 1987), where he distinguished between the changing content of psychological acts (*psychischen Akte*) and the unchanging character of 'meanings' (*Bedeutungen*).
- 2 In writing to his colleague Georg Minsh on 3 August 1929, Husserl contrasted his own approach with that of Dilthey, Scheler, and Heidegger, which he criticized for being a form of 'anthropology': 'I . . . understood phenomenology as a radical and universal "humanistic science," in a far more radical way than Dilthey did, due to the phenomenological reduction . . . – whereas Dilthey stuck to the historical humanistic sciences, and consequently to the already given world, and to anthropology' (Kisiel and Sheehan, 2007: 397).
- 3 The distinction between behavioral and social sciences is part of a classificatory system used in a number of universities in the US, but it is by no means universal. In most European universities, the term 'social sciences' often covers both behavioral and social sciences. In France, the term 'sciences humaines' is more commonly used and covers an even wider semantic field, including disciplines that in the US would be thought of as the humanities. The socio-historical rather than merely arbitrary quality of these distinctions is made apparent by the fact that, within the University of California system, the department of linguistics is at times part of the social sciences (e.g. at UCLA) and other times part of the humanities (e.g. at UC Berkeley).
- 4 Husserl's idea of 'trading places' resembles the concept of 'putting oneself in the place of another', which is found in a number of German poets and philosophers. For example, Christian Gottlob Heyne wrote about putting oneself (*sich versetzen*) into the world, position, and mode of thought of the author one is reading. Herder urged readers to '*fühle dich in alles hinein*', that is, 'to feel yourself into everything' (1774: 612, cited by Pigman, 1995). The notion of putting oneself in the place of another was extended to works of art by Friedrich Theodor Vischer, who coined the term *Einfühlung* to explain aesthetic appreciation (see Pigman, 1995).
- 5 I thank Emanuel Schegloff for drawing my attention to this passage.
- 6 'Whatever holds good for me personally also holds good, as I know, for all other men whom I find present [*vorhanden*] in my world-about-me [*in meiner Umwelt*]. Experiencing them as men, I understand and take them as Ego-subjects, units like myself, and related to their natural surroundings. But this in such wise that I apprehend the world-about-them and the world-about-me objectively as one and the same world, which differs in each case only through affecting consciousness differently. . . . Despite all this, we come to understandings with our neighbors, and set up in common an objective spatio-temporal fact-world as *the world about us that is there for us all, and to which we ourselves none the less belong*' [*Bei all dem verständigen wir uns mit den Nebenmenschen und setzen gemeinsam eine objektive räumlich-zeitlich Wirklichkeit, als unser aller daseiende Umwelt, der wir selbst doch angehören*]' (Husserl, 1931b: 94–5; German text in brackets added, see Husserl, 2002: 52)
- 7 I am here maintaining the convention, among some of Husserl's translators, to use 'Body' with a capital 'B' for *Leib* and 'body' for *Körper*.

8 '... all that is thingly-real in the surrounding world of the Ego has its relation to the Body' (Husserl, 1989: 61) ['... *alles Dinglich-Reale der Umwelt des Ich seine Beziehung hat zum Leibe*' (Husserl, 1952: 56)].

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ALESSANDRO DURANTI is Professor of Anthropology and Dean of Social Sciences at UCLA. He is an expert on language as a cultural practice, political discourse, verbal performance and jazz improvisation, human agency and intersubjectivity. He has carried out fieldwork in (Western) Samoa and the United States. His books include *From Grammar to Politics: Linguistic Anthropology in a Western Samoan Village* (1994), *Linguistic Anthropology* (1997), and *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology* (2004). He is the recipient of various awards, including the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, the UCLA Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award, and the American Anthropological Association/Mayfield Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. *Address*: Department of Anthropology, 341 Haines Hall, Box 951553, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095–1553, USA. [email: aduranti@anthro.ucla.edu]
