

Shared Intentionality: Phenomenological Conception and Consequences in Terms of Waldorf Pedagogy

Johannes Wagemann

Alanus Hochschule für Kunst und Gesellschaft, Deutschland

ABSTRACT. Shared intentionality is well-known as a key aspect of social relation-building. Anthropological studies show that human infants begin early to establish social relations via shared intentionality, which is not typically restricted to the satisfaction of basic needs. Contrary to the widespread opinion that little children have to abstract meaning structures from incoherent sense data they are initially confronted with, in Waldorf education the early co-intentional skill is reasoned by a holistic state of consciousness of the child. Thus, it could not be a lack of common meaning structures which characterizes the mental state of children, but rather the intention to individualize adequate meanings at experienced breaking points occurring in the holistic state in order to explore the world and building social relations. Based on this in view, several psychological and philosophical models are examined in order to attain a sound conceptualization of shared intentionality. Furthermore, in children the required cognitive activity seems to stand in direct competition with the vital resources which let grow and flourish the body. That implies, as a pedagogical challenge, to not evoke intellectual skills too early but to invent adequate metamorphoses of meaning structures in communication and interaction with children in order to take their holistic mindset into account and to promote their healthy development.

Keywords: shared intentionality, species-specificity, meaning structure, mental/vital activity.

Overview

1. Introduction: Shared Intentionality as a Specifically Human Capacity
2. Conceptualization Via Meaning Structure-Based Models
 - 2.1 Social Psychology
 - 2.2 Social Philosophy
 - 2.3 Structure-Phenomenology
3. Interpretation of the Anthropological Findings
4. Waldorf-Pedagogical Implications
 1. Einleitung: Shared Intentionality als spezifisch menschliche Fähigkeit

1. Introduction: Shared Intentionality as a Specifically Human Capacity

In the last time, shared intentionality has gained a renewed research interest in the context of social cognition and different fields of related application (Satne & Roepstorff, 2015). Other related terms for this

phenomenon are *co-intentionality*, *joint intentionality* or *'we'-intentionality* which can be defined as follows: "Collective intentionality is the power of minds to be jointly directed at objects, matters of fact, states of affairs, goals, or values. Collective intentionality comes in a variety of modes, including shared intention, joint attention, shared belief, collective acceptance, and collective emotion." (Schweikard & Schmid, 2013). It is crucial to note that shared intentionality does not merely consist of equal intentions or motives of action in, say, two or more subjects toward a common sphere of objects (e.g., conference participants getting a cup of coffee during a break). Specifically, these individual intentions are only equal with regard to the content, they are not necessarily joint in the sense of 'we'-consciousness. But if the participants are going to say 'cheers' to each other raising their cups of coffee in order to appreciate a single person or the meeting at all, this would be a case of shared intentionality. So, shared intentionality seems to be more than a mere summation or aggregation of individual intentions: "Importantly, joint attention is not just two people experiencing the same thing at the same time, but rather it is two people experiencing the same thing at the same time and *knowing together that they are doing this*." (Tomasello & Carpenter, 2007, p. 121).

This mutual and reflexive awareness concerning a common object or topic, on the one hand, and the awareness of the other person(s) relating to this issue on the other, could be simplified to denote 'individuals as a group'. Precisely this double-sided nature of shared intentionality, which lies between individual and supra-individual aspects of consciousness, can be illustrated by two plausible assertions (cf. Schweikard & Schmid, 2013). First, it is reasonable to assume that the intentional states underlying shared intentions are individually experienced by single persons (Individual Ownership Thesis). Second, there exists something superior and connecting as a necessary condition for shared intentionality (phrased in the term 'group') that cannot be reduced to the individual mental states of persons (Irreducibility Thesis). As historical representatives for the irreducibility thesis, Durkheim (1994) and Scheler (1948) could be named. Regarding the individual ownership thesis we can refer to Weber (1922). Interestingly, a solution for this theoretical dilemma does not seem to be on the horizon in current debates. In current expositions, the scholars take more or less explicitly one of the two these positions, or focus on particular questions seemingly to obscure the basic problem rather than to address it, as will be seen in the following.

For this reason, this article lays out an integrative perspective proposing a theoretical concept of shared intentionality. However, this account will not be an abstract philosophical theory, but rather an anthropological concept complying with empirical as well as with phenomenological findings. Only such an integrative perspective can draw conclusions for practical fields like education, for instance. Empirical considerations arising from the anthropological studies of Michael Tomasello raise the question of the human species-specificity of shared intentionality (section 1). This latter aspect is important for the development of a new conceptual perspective because it will become clear that the specifically human forms of access to meaning structures must play a large role in the context of shared intentionality. Next the problem will be considered through some exemplary positions of social psychology, social philosophy, phenomenology and psychoanalysis. These ideas prepare the ground for considering a new perspective arising from the central thoughts and observations of Rudolf Steiner and Herbert Wittenmann (section 2). This integrative concept, in turn elucidates the empirical findings of Tomasello (section 3) before the conceptual ideas are illustrated in terms of Waldorf pedagogy (section 4).

An initial clue to the human species-uniqueness of shared intentionality is provided by anthropological studies scrutinizing the behavior of human infants in comparison to primates such as chimpanzees. Tomasello and his colleagues (2005, 2007) found two illuminating differences concerning the pointing gesture. First, in a hiding-finding game, infants at ages between one and two were shown a toy which was subsequently hidden in one of two containers. Then the adult gave communicative clues towards the container with the hidden toy either by ostensive gaze or by pointing with the index finger, both accompanied by facial gestures such as raised eyebrows. Whereas the human infants were able to correctly interpret these cues and to find the hidden toy, young chimpanzees were not. Although the apes succeeded in following the pointing gestures by gaze, they apparently failed to understand their meaning (Behne, Carpenter & Tomasello, 2005). Conversely, differences were observed when the pointing gesture was executed by individuals themselves. While primates were only observed to point in an imperative context, for example indicating specific parts

of their body to be scratched by others, children point to objects and persons in a declarative context already at a very early age. Whereas apes seem to merely manipulate and exploit others as ‘social tools’ for the benefit of their own well-being, pre-linguistic human infants seem to predominantly communicate just to share experiences and information with others. For human infants, the communicative and collaborative joint activity seems to be more rewarding than any instrumental goal (Tomasello & Carpenter, 2007)¹.

From the subtle but decisive distinction of human and primate social interaction two abilities as necessary preconditions for shared intentionality can be derived: First, to access a wide and common ground of meaning structures which are not restricted to some specific, especially selfish, patterns of behavior but also serve to establish and express social consciousness in itself. Although this access to meaning structures can be articulated by speech acts, in its original constitution it seems to be independent of already developed language ability. Second, the capacity to share mental states and to collaborate in an empathic and mindreading fashion is essential for shared intentionality. In this context, mindreading means to take the perspective of other beings and to potentially develop empathy or compassion, respectively, for *all* beings in the world, not only for relatives and conspecifics. For this, the ability seems to be crucial to perceive other beings with respect to their individual character, biographical conditionality and existential alterity as well as in their universal integrity. However, this does not in and of itself lead to adherence to any particular ethical standards – on the contrary, effective criminals also need to correctly understand their victims’ thoughts and feelings to achieve their goals.

In summary, it can be claimed that these two aspects of (already pre-lingual) access to meaning and the ability of empathetic perception are necessary for building up an *interspace* in the context of human sociality. Exactly the prefix ‘inter’ can align the search for an integrative and safe path right through the middle of the Scylla and the Charybdis (individual ownership / irreducibility) of shared intentionality.

2. Conceptualization Via Meaning Structure-Based Models

2.1 Social Psychology

Against this background, the conceptual modeling of shared intentionality for the social interaction of humans should certainly include in any way the *process of individual access to universal meaning structures* as a constitutive feature. However, the standard models in social psychology do not explicitly account for this dynamic dimension of meaning at most, as can be seen in the well-known triadic relation, or the POX model, for example (see Fig.1). This model of social interaction considers the relations of one subject or observer (‘person’, P) to a reified or ideal content (‘object’, X) as well as to another person or player (‘other’, O). For example, it is suitable for the modeling and evaluation of attitude changes in persons concerning consumer items: If a person actually dislikes a certain kind of candy bar or is indifferent at least, but keenly adores a famous movie star who appears in a commercial for this candy bar, then this person might develop a positive attitude in relation to the product and is going to buy it soon. Presumably, in this situation, the positive attitude concerning the movie star works, so to say, as a catalyst for the change of the consumer attitude of the potential customer. Negatively spoken, the initial aversion against the product in connection with the positive attitude concerning the celebrity and his or her positive attitude concerning the product (even if it is obviously faked) is being experienced as dissonance (Heider, 1956). To overcome the dissonance experienced as unpleasant the person changes his or her attribution or evaluation regarding the product – the triadic relation becomes balanced or harmonized in a way.

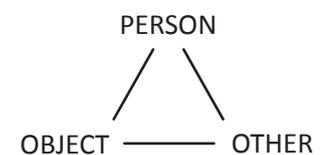


Fig.1: Triadic Relation (POX-Modell)

For the purpose of substantiating the phenomenon of shared intentionality, this model seems to be insufficient for two reasons: First, it only deals with the results of cognitive processes concerning persons and

1. “The evidence quoted for this claim is that while other primates seem to be apt strategic reasoners with an impressively well developed sense of what other individuals perceive, the propensity to declarative pointing behavior as observed in early human infancy (the capacity for joint intention), and the inclination to cooperation even where this does not immediately serve one’s own purposes is uniquely human.” (Schweikard & Schmid, 2013).

things. Although *Fritz Heider*, who laid the theoretical foundations for that model, mentions the realization process leading from the raw material of the proximal stimuli impinging from objects or other persons to the resulting percepts (Heider, 1958), he states that the main concern of his approach “[...] will be with ‘surface’ matters, the events that occur in everyday life on a conscious level, rather than the unconscious processes studied by psycho-analysis in ‘depth’ psychology.” (Heider, 1958, p.1)

For working at the level of the commonsense, it may be sufficient to methodically restrict oneself to phenomena like “how one person thinks and feels about another person, how he perceives him and what he does to him [...]” and respective causal analysis (Heider, 1958, p.1). But down this path, the dynamic access of meaning and its consequences for social interaction does not come into view. Surely, theories of balance as well as of attribution are inconceivable without referring to meaning; however, in a somewhat static manner, they do not scrutinize its individual accessibility and its ongoing generation process in relation to shared intentionality. In summary, the POX model focuses on mere quantitative values to be ascribed to the percepts by the perceiver: There are the options of a positive, negative, or neutral attitude to an issue or an object, exactly as decision making in computer use proceeds (Yes/No/Cancel). But in case of searching for a complete and sophisticated theory of shared intentionality, it seems that an immersion into the normally hidden layers of cognitive processes is unavoidable.

As a second inadequacy of the POX model for shared intentionality, it seems inappropriate to treat human cognition and evaluation of inanimate objects, on the one hand, and of persons, on the other, in the same way, whereas these should instead be distinguished with regard to their different structural manifestations of meaning. As asserted in the approach of symbolic interactionism developed by *Herbert Blumer*, in the interpretation of inanimate objects, meaning is unilaterally applied to the incoherent stimulus by the perceiver, whereas in social interaction it dynamically interchanges between two (or more) human individuals. This is because the percept – the other person in this case – also actively takes the role of the perceiver (Blumer, 1969). However, the concept of symbolic interactionism cannot really contribute to an exact understanding of the structural role of meaning in this interchange either as demonstrated through the logical confusion created from the following two claims:

“[...] symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact.” (Blumer, 1969, p. 5).

“The meaning of objects for a person arises fundamentally out of the way they are defined to him by others with whom he interacts.” (Blumer, 1969, p. 11).

Comparing these fundamental claims it remains dubious as to where and how meaning has to be located or generated. In the first quote it is suggested that meanings emerge in social interaction as totally anew, the second quote claims that they have to be culturally transmitted from knowing persons to other still ignorant ones. In the first case, we have to ask how any communication could be started without recourse to some already disposable meaning. And in the second case, it remains unclear from where the defining persons initially received the meaning to be passed on to others. – No matter how this problem is viewed, without the implicit assumption of a genuine accessibility to common meaning structures by human individuals, Blumer’s axioms lack consistency. Or, in other words: without the capacity to individually access commonly available meaning structures before communicating, all interchanged symbols would remain empty forms without any reference to meaning. Symbols would be unsolvable riddles like the pointing gesture in the hiding-finding game for the ape.

2.2 Social Philosophy

Also in social philosophy, it is important to note that only a few scholars so far have realized the relevance and dynamics of meaning structures in the sense of a primordial condition for social structure-building. In contrast to the procedural stance regarding meaning and social structure building, which is here attempted, currently discussed theories remain quite abstract. The early Martin Heidegger, for instance, ontologizes social interaction in the polarity of ‘Dasein’ (being-there) and ‘Mitsein’ (being-with) and so evades it from a more

closely phenomenological investigation by means of an unquestionable precondition (Heidegger, 1957)². This deficit of a developmental and dynamic dimension is exemplified by Arendt's philosophical discourse with, as well as her interpersonal relation to, Heidegger: The apodictic assertion of 'Dasein' and 'Mitsein' lacks the open interspace or space in-between, respectively, in which social relation could be developed lively and on an equal footing at first (Arendt, 1998; Prinz, 2012). Whereas Heidegger can be criticized with respect to his static and metaphysical conception of social reality, we find in Searle (2010) an attempt of naturalistic reduction. Searle, too, does not treat social processes phenomenologically but speculates about an "ontology of social institutions" with reference to speech acts without clarifying the epistemological grounds (Bühler, 2010). This and other approaches asserting the primacy of language for social interaction (e. g. Habermas, 1982) are fundamentally questioned by Tomasello's findings concerning prelingual communication and the conceptual conditions for shared intentionality arising therefrom. Without going into the details of the exemplarily adumbrated positions we can state that ontologizing theories, be it with a micro- or macro-social orientation, as well as verbal communication premising positions seem to be inappropriate for the development of a sound theoretical basis of shared intentionality. Furthermore, the authors mentioned either follow the individual ownership claim (Searle, Habermas) or the irreducibility claim (Heidegger) without providing a mediating argument.

A first and strong indication to the possibility of a phenomenological solution to this problem can be found in *Martin Buber* who regards the whole human consciousness – even in its objective references ("Es-Welt") – as emerging from a primordial (and pre-lingual) state of universal "saying thou"³. From this perspective, social connectivity in the sense of shared intentionality is innate to human consciousness (individual ownership claim) and, at the same time, points beyond individual consciousness by means of its relationship to the world as "thou" (irreducibility claim). Instead of deciding for one of the two positions this already introduces the motive of an »oscillation« between the own and the other's consciousness. In order to provide a more precise determination of this »oscillation«, we can refer to the German philosopher and social scientist *Ulrich Oevermann*, a follower of George Herbert Mead and C. S. Peirce: In his sequential analysis of social interaction, Oevermann explicitly highlighted the constitutive role of meaning structures before a decidedly empirical background. He went so far as to speak of an 'empirical' (Oevermann, 1996, p. 15) and 'autological level of reality' (Oevermann, 2008, p. 17) with respect to meaning structures. Furthermore, *Johannes Heinrichs*, also a German philosopher, should be mentioned for applying the trans-classical logic of Gotthard Günther to a four-valued model of social interaction. His model can be understood as a refinement of the triadic relation of social interaction which has to be phenomenologically differentiated with regard to the object. In Heinrichs's model, the object as the connecting sphere between the two subjects is divided into the object in a narrower sense on the one hand ("the world of *It*" in Buber's sense, 1958, p. 100) and the level of meaning structures (or 'sense-medium' in Heinrichs's words, Buber's universal *Thou*) on the other (s. Fig. 2, Heinrichs, 2007). This sphere is, of course, the stage for shared intentionality – even though it remains subconscious for the most part.

2.3 Structure-Phenomenology

Departing from these differentiated but nevertheless static models, a seemingly small but actually crucial step leads to the dynamic epistemology and social philosophy of *Rudolf Steiner*, which is also the basis for *Herbert Witzmann's* structure-phenomenology (Steiner, 1995; Witzmann, 1986). Drawing a distinction between the object and its meaning, it has consequently to be realized that the object in a primordial epistemic state should appear to us *without any meaning*. Of course, this logical inference remains hypothetical as long as it cannot be experientially founded. In this regard, Steiner and Witzmann developed a phenomenology

2. „Die zum Mitsein gehörige Erschlossenheit des Mitdaseins Anderer besagt: im Seinsverständnis des Daseins liegt schon, weil sein Sein Mitsein ist, das Verständnis anderer. Dieses Verstehen ist, wie Verstehen überhaupt, nicht eine aus Erkennen erwachsene Kenntnis, sondern eine ursprünglich existenziale Seinsart, die Erkennen und Erkenntnis allererst möglich macht.“ (Sein und Zeit, S. 123/4). „Das andere Seiende hat selbst die Seinsart des Daseins. Im Sein mit und zu Anderen liegt demnach ein Seinsverhältnis von Dasein zu Dasein.“ (124)

3. "[...] a saying of Thou without words, in the state preceding the word-form [...]" (Buber, 1958, p. 27).

of normally subconsciously proceeding mental actions and states as a first-person approach to experiential confirmation. Logically as well as empirically (in the sense of experimental third-person observations), this conclusion can be supported by the poverty-of-the-stimulus argument (from a linguistic perspective, Laurence & Margolis, 2001) and by the constructivist view on the nerve-sense system which could only provide incoherent ‘perturbations’ instead of meaningful regularities (Foerster, 1998; Maturana & Varela, 1987). However, based on a meditative training of attention as advised by structure-phenomenology, this assertion turns out to be immanently and completely observable by human individuals. This way, it becomes possible to simultaneously live through and observe this incoherent, critical mental state and its cognitive transformation into a meaningful percept. Therefore, it is not only a logical implication that every meaning noticed in objects has to be an earlier addition initiated by our mental activity, but also an empirical result (in the sense of first-person observation). To perform this addition of meaning to the raw, meaningless sensory data (“pure content of observation”, Steiner, 1995, p. 53), we must already have been able to access meaning structures (“universal concepts”, Steiner, 1995, p. 103) since birth. Otherwise, the capacity to phenomenologically observe our own active participation within the process of meaning acquisition and application requires a rigorous and patient mental training as adults and, at best, as researchers (Weger & Wagemann, 2015). – Because just this cognitive dynamic will reveal its vital importance for a sound understanding of shared intentionality below, it seems to be plausible to adopt the methodological and conceptual perspective of Steiner’s epistemology. From this experiential stance, objects are not already given as primordial entities which only have to be labeled with suitable words (“This is a house, a dog’ etc.) – but objects rather have to be built as unifications of pure concepts (common meaning structures in a universal sense) with pure percepts mediated by our mental activity (see Fig. 2)⁴.

With respect to *Jean Piaget’s* epistemological concept (and also Heider’s in a deeper sense), this can be interpreted as follows: At specific breaking points in incoherent sense data, a cognitive imbalance is experienced by the individual which has to be adjusted in an equilibration process (Piaget, 1985). According to Piaget, equilibration takes place in the two complementary activity forms of assimilation and accommodation. While assimilation, with respect to Steiner, can be understood as cognitive embedding of a pure (incoherent) percept into an integrating context of meaning (universalization), accommodation can be grasped as an adaptation of a universal meaning structure (“scheme”, Piaget & Inhelder, 2000, p. 81) to the situational constraints of sensual perception (individualization). In spite of this structural similarity between Steiner’s and Piaget’s epistemologies, both concepts are based on diametrically opposed assumptions regarding general meaning structures: Whereas Piaget believes that children learn to identify the properties of objects via abstraction⁵ – that means to obtain holistic qualities from sensually perceived fragments – Steiner asserts that cognition at all developmental stages could not progress from incoherent sense data to general structures. Rather conversely, it needs to begin with available holistic meaning (and be it only the concept of ‘something’) in order to realize consistent objects, because there is nothing meaningful to extract or abstract from sensual particulars in order to attain comprehension (Steiner, 1995; Witzmann, 1983, 1987).

4. With respect to the dispute between nativism and behaviorism, the Steiner/Witzmann account does not assume that meaning structures are bodily innate but rather that humans begin their life with an individual potential of mental activity for accessing meaning structures. Surely, this action potential has to be unfolded in education.

5. „[...] physical experience, which consists of acting upon objects in order to abstract their properties (for example comparing two weights independently of volume).“ (Piaget & Inhelder, 2000, p. 155)

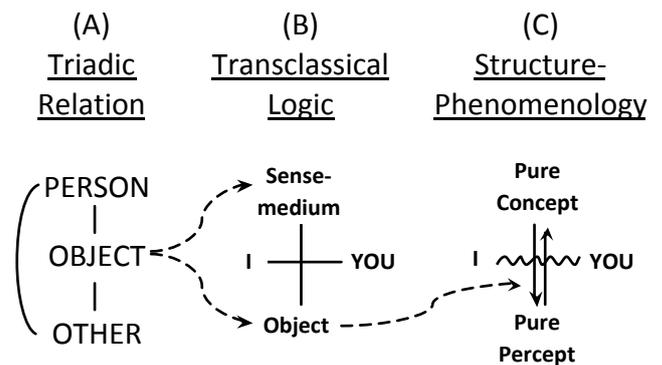


Fig. 2. Development of meaning structure based models

The step from (A) to (B) shows the first epistemological differentiation, which remains static though. The second step from (B) to (C) provides the possibility to experientially access the microgenetic dynamics of social relation (~) via procedural observation of object formation (↓).

Taken together, two main arguments can be put forward in favor of conceptualizing meaning as an ‘autological level of reality’, both standing in dynamic relation with the process of human cognition: The (third-person) empirical argument derived from Tomasello’s anthropological studies on the one hand and Steiner’s epistemological argument on the other (which also has a first-person empirical dimension as shown above). In order to explain shared intentionality in terms of the Steiner-Witzenmann concept, once again we have to focus on the experiential basic structure of cognition, that is the dynamic unification of percept and concept. In social interaction this basic structure appears in a modified form between the two subjects – methodically speaking, this refers to the second-person-perspective of observation: Both subjects as cognizing beings for their part (vertically symbolized in fig. 2) are alternately taking the roles of the percept and the concept by themselves (horizontally symbolized in fig. 2). They very quickly change these roles which are related to certain attitudes of activity, an including or perceiving one (analogous to universalization/assimilation) and a thinking and expressing one (analogous to individualization/adaptation)⁶. In the dimension of social dynamics, the respective content of meaning only serves as a carrier for interaction which is (“vertically”) accessible for both individuals. But rather the individual line of thought or the specific character of individualization, respectively, in which the content appears, is (“horizontally”) acting as the percept of the one person for the other person as a perceiver (Steiner, 1995; Witzenmann, 1986; Author, 2011). In a rapid, normally subconsciously exerted oscillation, this symmetrical or social variant of the general basic structure of cognition takes place between human subjects and conceptually substantiates the phenomenon of shared intentionality.

In the light of psychoanalysis, these structural aspects of the second-person-perspective of shared intentionality also seem to be discovered in *Jessica Benjamin’s* fine-grained observations (Benjamin, 2004). Following D. Winnicott and J. Lacan, she denotes the phenomenal field connecting two communicating individuals as ‘thirdness’ and comes to the conclusion that therapeutic development in the sense of coping conflicts can only take place if both persons (the analyst and the patient in this case) together create a common reality – a unifying but not regressively merging sphere beyond mere oneness or twoness, respectively⁷:

“In seeing the third primarily as an intersubjective co-creation, the analyst offers an alternative to the asymmetrical complementarity of knower and known, giver and given to.” (Benjamin, 2004, p. 20).

The third resides in the process of a symmetrical and mutual exchange of mental actions: surrendering to and immersing into the thoughts, emotions and intentions – that means the reality – of the other person on the one hand and asserting the own perspective of reality on the other. The creation of thirdness, as Benjamin says, builds an ‘energetic’ or ‘transpersonal’ bridge between both individuals (Benjamin, 2004, p. 18). Hence, the third could be grasped as a genuine new instance inherently containing a certain ‘lawfulness’ (Benjamin, 2004, p. 18) which can be interpreted as the inter-individually appearing form of universal content of meaning structures. Nonetheless, without this differentiation between content and form Benjamin conceptualizes thirdness as a general social competence already emerging in early pre-linguistic communication whose absence would result in two-valued power struggles between a subject and an object, a doer and a done-to⁸. – Following this elucidating approach, Benjamin acquires essential aspects of Steiner’s social philosophy which is finally rooted in his concept of the I-sense (Steiner, 1958; Witzenmann, 1987; Ross, 1996)⁹. However, given the range of phenomenological accordance between

6. “Hence, the relation means being chosen and choosing, suffering and action in one [...]” (Buber, 1958, p. 11).

7. Here, we may refer to Gotthard Günther’s philosophical interpretation of his Non-Aristotelian three-valued logic. In this concept, the second human subject is ascribed to a further ontologically irreducible position beyond first subject and object. In light of the history of human consciousness, this three-valued relation cannot longer be understood in terms of one- or two-valued conceptions of reality. (Günther, 1978).

8. “If we grasp the creation of thirdness as an intersubjective process that is constituted in early, pre-symbolic experiences of accommodation, mutuality, and the intention to recognize and be recognized by the other, we can understand how important it is to think in terms of building a shared third.” (Benjamin, 2004, p.19).

9. „[...] the thirdness of attuned play resembles musical improvisation, in which both partners follow a structure or pattern that both of them simultaneously create and surrender to, a structure enhanced by our capacity to receive and transmit at the same time in nonverbal interaction. The co-created third has the transitional quality of being invented and discovered. To the question of ‘Who created this pattern, you or I?’ the paradoxical answer is ‘Both and neither.’” (Benjamin, 2004, p. 18).

Benjamin and Steiner, her speculative neurophilosophical explanation referring to mirror-neurons, for instance, seem to be irrelevant.

Another venture towards the basic structure of shared intentionality having some implicit references to Steiner's concept can be found in *Gerda Walther's* work which stands in the Husserlian tradition of phenomenology. After scrutinizing the necessary conditions and side effects of we-consciousness, she conceptualizes the very phenomenon as a reflective iteration culminating in the empathetic identification with the other's experience (of whatever) and the empathetic awareness of the other of being encompassed by this identification (Walther, 1923). But because the iteration, in Walther's approach, terminates at this level of complexity, it could be understood only with difficulty in terms of the above described oscillating process taking place within the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions of mental action. The obvious question as to why the iteration should just stop at this level instead of dynamically perpetuating was raised by Schweikard and Schmid (2013). However, Walther's finding of two complementary conditions for we-consciousness can be assessed as a confirmation of the two basic forms of mental activity alternately distributed to both individuals. On closer inspection, the initial alienness of the other individual's experience, which allegedly has to be overcome by a "strange intertwining" (Walther, 1923, p. 75, transl. by the author) of the respective experiences, can be structurally analyzed as follows: This alien cannot be primarily based on a different experiential *content* – such differences can be more or less easily compensated by communication – but rather on the individual *form* of expression.

Therefore, the "inner agreement" (Walther, 1923, p. 80, transl. by the author) of both persons has to concern their individual characteristics of thinking, feeling and acting, whereas the content, as a universal meaning structure, only serves as the necessary carrier of communication. Because of her neglecting the structural distinction between *content* (universal meaning) and *form* (individual action, expression), Walther transfers the very process of interpersonal agreement into an unobservable space denoted as 'consciousness background' (Walther, 1923, p. 85, transl. by the author). There, she speculatively locates the 'social self' which would stand behind each individual 'center of the I' (Walther, 1923, p. 88, transl. by the author) – comparable to Benjamin's thirdness getting along without this distinction, too.

The foregoing examination clearly shows that the two theoretical claims described in section 1 (Individual Ownership / Irreducibility) not necessarily have to be seen in a contradictory relation. The scrutiny of the different approaches yield the possibility to integrate the theoretical polarity from the perspective of (structure-) phenomenology. Referring to Goethe's way of science, we can also speak of 'polarity and enhancement' (Goethe, 1982) whereby enhancement here is to be methodologically understood as the experiential extension of scientific observation towards the procedural layer of consciousness. Thereby, the individual ownership thesis can be expressed as the individual component of mental activity without which no consciousness content – also in the sense of shared intentionality – can occur. On the other hand, it became apparent that beyond the individual component to be performed by both (all involved) interaction partners there must be a supra-individual (conceptual, content-related) component which could enable the connection and interaction between the individual spaces of consciousness at all. According to the irreducibility claim, this third component cannot be reduced to the individual contributions of mental performance but rather has to be recognized as an autological level of reality. The integration of both theses consists of the (structure-) phenomenological finding that any content of human consciousness arises as a union of individual mental activity and supra-individual (universal-autonomous) content (Witzenmann, 1983). Against this expanded conceptual background, it is now possible to interpret the anthropological results concerning shared intentionality and finally draw pedagogical conclusions, too.

3. Interpretation of the Anthropological Findings

The anthropological findings described in Section 1 shall be interpreted based upon these conceptual considerations. For this purpose, first of all, the dynamic relation between mental activity and meaning structures comprehended as the experiential micro-genesis of phenomenal consciousness was shown to be of importance. Furthermore, the differentiation of this process in two aspects with regard to the *content*

(lawfulness) and the *form of mental representation* (generalized/individualized) of meaning structures was highlighted to be of significance for shared intentionality. And finally, the intertwining of two procedural variants (denoted as ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’) of this basic structure oscillating between concept and percept, or person and another person, respectively, turned out to elucidate the inner connection of thematically related cognition and social interaction.

Seen from this perspective, the failure of the ape in interpreting the pointing gesture does not mainly depend on difficulties in grasping the (universal) content of meaning (‘here the toy is located’) but rather on the ignorance of the referential (individualized) form of this content without reified appearance. In order to correctly understand this referential expression, the ability to perform *both* mental actions – individualizing (expressing individual forms of cognition on one’s own) and universalizing (opening to the cognition expressed by the other) – are necessarily required. Surely, in the act of gaze following, the chimpanzee opens himself to the occurrence of something which could be interesting to him. But because it cannot find the relation between the individual reference (to be seen in the ‘horizontal dimension’) and the universal content (to be seen in the ‘vertical dimension’), it fails in this challenge. This looks totally different for the human child who is able, at least in principle, to individualize meaning in countless situations as well as to trace back the procedural path of individualizing, referencing or indicating, respectively, to the universal content of the meaning. In contrast, the ape can follow the clue only in a one-way direction and is fixed to find there a reified content which could trigger a specifically hard-wired pattern of behavior (e. g. ‘playing’, ‘eating’ etc.). If it cannot find the referenced thing itself there, its participation in ”shared intentionality” terminates just at that point – and therefore, strictly speaking, should not be so indicated.

If we assume that, in human evolution one main subject of development, if not the one, is the acquirement of consciousness for ultimately everything, it would seem consistent to consider consciousness itself as a rewarding object of inquiry. And if we are to get a sound understanding of a unique characteristic of human life like shared intentionality, it is hardly surprising to realize that this phenomenon is deeply rooted in the process of consciousness. Moreover, the discussion hitherto has shown that there is no need to displace this topic to the consciously unobservable fields of brain processing or other philosophically motivated metaphysics – just because we are able to increasingly develop awareness for our active involvement in this process as elaborated by Steiner and Witzenmann. Therefore, the above considerations serve not only theoretical purposes but have also implications for many practical aspects of social everyday life as well as of professional fields like education, pedagogy, therapy, nursing, counseling etc. In the following last section, this perspective is exemplarily shown for one aspect of early childhood education developed before the conceptual background of Waldorf education.

4. Waldorf-Pedagogical Implications

Based on the preceding, it should be clear that meaning cannot and does not have to be injected into children’s heads, just as it cannot be derived from mere gestures or a symbol-exchanging ‘social interaction’ because children already dispose of common meaning in a wide scope¹⁰. But this sphere of meaning children live in, according to Steiner’s educational writings and lectures, is not yet individualized and practically available as it is for adults (e. g. Steiner, 1987b, 1989). In particular, Steiner characterizes little children as impartially opening themselves to their surrounding like an overarching sense-organ getting into bodily and emotional resonance with meaning (Steiner, 1989) – much more than any young animal. The crucial point now is that the cognitive dissection of the sensual percept and the meaningful concept do not seem to be as sharp in children as in adults. Nevertheless, the infant gradually has to find its ways to individualized meaning in order to realize distinct objects adequate to its developing personality. These ways can only be found in the course of shared intentionality in which not only contents have to be indicated but rather the individualizing formation of meaning structures could be interpersonally exchanged and conjointly explored. Hence, children dwelling in a holistic state of mind based on general unindividualized meaning

10. We do not want to cram knowledge into even an immature human being, a child; rather, we try to develop the child’s capacities so that the child no longer needs to be *compelled* to understand, but *wants* to understand.” (Steiner, 1995, p. 255).

(see also Buber, 1958, p. 25f.; Scheler, 1948, p. 266) are dependent on communication with adults in order to gradually become a citizen of our individualized subject-object-world¹¹. Or, in other words, the purpose of this communication is the rehearsing embodiment of universal meaning at specific breaking points – which emerge as points of individual interest – to be exemplarily exercised via shared intentionality.

It is a fact that human infants are raised with their parents much longer than other animals. As already explained, this can be understood in the context of a fundamental and differentiated introduction to the individualization process of culture-specific meaning structures as well as of the children's personality. But this is only one side of the coin – the other is to ask for the required activity resources to perform this adventure of development. It is also obvious that a major part of the activity available to children is used to make their bodies grow and flourish and to get a basic and embodied orientation in the world. The first three steps in this respect are to walk, to speak and to think (Steiner, 1989). In this context, a central pedagogical discovery by Steiner is the complementarity of two forms of activity: the vital activity required for children to perform these elementary steps of growth on the one hand and mental or intellectual capacity on the other. In other words, we can speak of different forms of energy: vital and mental energy which can be modeled as different appearances of one unitary but also adaptable development potential and which seem to stand in direct competition to each other. The more vitality and growth forces have to be allocated with regard to the stage of development, the less powers of individual consciousness could (and should) be challenged. This asymmetrical aspect of social relation building in education has been discussed in different contexts of social science and pedagogy (Oevermann, 2008; Author, 2013). In philosophical anthropology, thoughts supporting this view can be found in the works of H. Bergson¹² (1911) and A. N. Whitehead (1978), for instance; in biology R. Sheldrake (2012) projected a similar concept in the 'morphogenetic field' which shall integrate the different effects of vital formation of organisms and certain aspects of intellectual capacity, especially in terms of learning¹³.

Beyond these theoretical deliberations, the mentioned relation between vital and mental activity in children could be of practical relevance for education. For this purpose, a thorough phenomenological observation of children in different situations of daily life is required. Exemplarily, we are going to scrutinize some images of children here (see fig. 3): All children depicted appear inactive or calm in a certain way but not in the sense of being one with themselves, but rather of being distracted from themselves, sedated or paralyzed by something. Their posture is a bit sunken and their facial expression varies between gravity, bewilderment and a certain kind of sadness. In total, these phenomena can be expressed as a state of bodily and emotional inactivation or devitalization. So, how can this be explained? What we do not see immediately is that these children were photographed while watching television.



Fig. 3. "Disenchanted" („Entzaubert“, Hahn & Klemm, 2007)

11. Also B. Alan Wallace describes what he termed the “substrate consciousness” as “[...] the earliest state of a human embryo, and it gradually takes on the distinctive characteristics of a specific human psyche as it is conditioned and structured by a wide range of physiological, and later cultural influences.” (Wallace, 2011, p. 48)

12. “[...] we shall find that consciousness is the light that plays around the zone of possible actions or potential activity which surrounds the action really performed by the living being. It signifies hesitation or choice. Where many equally possible actions are indicated without there being any real action (as in a deliberation that has not come to an end), consciousness is intense. Where the action performed is the only action possible (as in activity of the somnambulistic or more generally automatic kind), consciousness is reduced to nothing. [...] From this point of view, *the consciousness of a living being may be defined as an arithmetical difference between potential and real activity. It measures the interval between representation and action.*” (Bergson, 1911, p. 144/5, italics in original).

13. Here, the hypothesis of “morphic resonance” between a teacher and her students could be named which refers to the overall learning effects of independent populations of rats escaping from a water labyrinth and humans performing a uniform intelligence test throughout many decades (Sheldrake, 2012, p. 272 f.).

In the first step, we can interpret these phenomena as an imbalance of the activities mentioned. The excessive recall for the intellectual performance of separating the subject of the child from the objects on the screen seems to overstrain its mental activity and therefore to paralyze its vital forces. In the second step, we can interpret this before the background of shared intentionality. In shared intentionality between a child and an adult, the subject-object relation could be cautiously accompanied within the social interaction. The mental and social performance of the adult creates a protecting shell or breeding ground, respectively, for the child. In contrast, for little children watching TV, the subject-object split is enforced without the possibility to lean on social interaction such as the empathic attendance in the individualization process of meaning concerning things and beings¹⁴. These children have to use or, more radically said, exploit their vital energy in favor of the intellectual performance to establish the distance between themselves and the objects displayed on the screen. The lively participation in cognition encompassing bodily and sensory mobility, which is normal for little children, seems to be frozen – a danger of which even neuroscientists have already urgently warned (Spitzer, 2006; Patzlaff, 2013).

Of course, the fact *that* social interaction cannot be underestimated precisely in early childhood education is not a novelty. However, the foregoing considerations can elucidate *why* a real and lively interpersonal relation – foremost in contrast to the virtuality and abstractness of electronic media – is simply indispensable. Beyond the mental microstructure developed in sections 2 and 3 it now becomes apparent that an adequate fostering of shared intentionality also has to consider the interdependency of the vital and mental activity potentials of the child. Therefore, from the adult's side this social interaction has to be aware of the sensitive balance of competing forms of action in the child's whole organism. The holistic, unindividualized mindset of children has to be perceived, respected, and supported – not primarily by 'child-oriented contents' but rather by the right level of individualization, or by the right dosage of subject-object split, so to speak. An example could be Steiner's advice to let little children play with primitive, not perfectly designed dolls which could stimulate the children's imagination to create a human being out of a napkin, for example, and to simulate social interaction with it (see also Buber, 1995¹⁵). Here, the crucial point is to avoid playing with ready-made products which enforce the subject-object split, but to understand the imaginative creation of social interaction as the very play in itself.

This example shows that one and the same content of meaning ('doll') may challenge the cognitive activity of the child in quite different ways in dependency of its individualized form of appearance. Of course, a proper selection of pedagogical adequate contents remains important, but for a good education and a succeeding socialization, in a deeper sense, it seems to be essential to focus on the implicit forms of mental activity and social interaction to be triggered by the individualization level of all things in the infant's environment. The latter could be an adequate allegory of the social interaction in which the individualizing process of meaning structures can be continually learned. Beyond any content, the cultivation of this formal or material-related aspect of education could found a 'learning of learning' and therefore an increasingly self-determined and conscious capacity for a lifelong development in community with other beings. To promote the unfolding of this dimension seems to be meaningful in order to equally develop social competence and a free-minded personality.

14. Although television hadn't been invented in Steiner's time, his statements concerning 'cinematography' may be elucidating in this context, for example: "[...] I was not so much interested in watching the movies but in observing the audience and I could quite assess that the medium film simply lies in the whole program of the materialization of mankind by absorbing materialism as it were into the habits of perception." (Steiner, 1987a, p. 357, transl. by the author).

15. "This 'fancy' [...] is the instinct to make everything into Thou, to give relation to the universe, the instinct which completes out of its own richness the living effective action when a mere copy or symbol of it is given in what is over against him." (Buber, 1958, p. 27)

References

- Arendt, H. (1998). *Vom Leben des Geistes*. München: Piper Verlag.
- Behne, T., Carpenter, M. & Tomasello, M. (2005). One-year-olds comprehend the communicative intentions behind gestures in a hiding game. *Developmental Science* 8/6, 492–499.
- Benjamin, J. (2004). Beyond doer and done to: an intersubjective view of thirdness. *Psychanalytic Quarterly*, LXXIII, 2004, 5-46.
- Bergson, H. (1911). *Creative evolution*. Transl. by Arthur Mitchell. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bohnsack, F. (2008). *Martin Bubers personale Pädagogik*. Bad Heilbrunn: J. Klinkhardt Verlag.
- Buber, M. (1995). *Ich und Du*. Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag.
- Bühler, A. (2010). John Searle: Making the Social World. The Structure of Human Civilization (Review), *Rationality, Markets & Morals*, Vol. 1, 12–15.
- Durkheim, E. (1994). *On Social Facts*. Orig. 1898, in: Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science, Martin, M. & McIntyre, L. (eds.), Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 433–40.
- Foerster, H. v. (1998). *Entdecken oder Erfinden. Wie lässt sich Verstehen verstehen?* In: Gumin, H., Meier, H. (ed.) Einführung in den Konstruktivismus (S. 41-88), München: Piper.
- Goethe, J.W. (1982). *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften (Bd.1-5)*. Steiner, R. (Hrsg.) 1883-97. Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag.
- Günther, G. (1978). *Idee und Grundriss einer nicht-Aristotelischen Logik. Die Idee und ihre philosophischen Voraussetzungen*. 2. Aufl., Hamburg: Meiner.
- Habermas, J. (1982). *Theorie kommunikativen Handelns. Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung*. Frankfurt a. M. : Suhrkamp.
- Hahn, W. & Klemm, D. (2007). *Entzaubert (Disenchanted)*. Exhibition catalogue by C/O Galerie Berlin.
- Heidegger, M. (1957). *Sein und Zeit*. 8. Aufl., Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Heider, Fritz (1958). *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. London: L. Erlbaum Ass. Publ.
- Heinrichs, J. (2007): *Ökologik. Geistige Wege aus der Klima- und Umweltkatastrophe*. Varna: Steno.
- Laurence, S. & Margolis, E. (2001). The Poverty of the Stimulus Argument. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 52, Vol. 2, 217-276.
- Maturana, H. & Varela, F. (1987). *Der Baum der Erkenntnis. Die biologischen Wurzeln des menschlichen Erkennens*. München: Goldmann.
- Oevermann, U. (2008). „Krise und Routine“ als analytisches Paradigma in den Sozialwissenschaften (Abschiedsvorlesung). Zugriff März 2011:
- Oevermann, U. (1996). *Strukturelle Soziologie und Rekonstruktionsmethodologie. Vortragsmanuskript*, Frankfurt a. M., Zugriff 2/2012:
- Patzlaff, R. (2013). *Der gefrorene Blick. Die physiologische Wirkung des Fernsehens auf Kinder*. Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben.
- Piaget, J. & Inhelder, B. (2000). *The psychology of the child*. New York: Basic Books.
- Prinz, A. (2012). *Beruf Philosophin oder Die Liebe zur Welt. Die Lebensgeschichte der Hannah Arendt*. Weinheim Basel: Beltz Verlag.
- Ross, M. (1995). *Soziale Wirklichkeitsbildung. Erkenntnistheoretische, methodologische und anthropologische Grundlagen bei Max Weber und Rudolf Steiner*. Genehmigte Dissertation an der Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät, Universität Dortmund.
- Satne, G. & Roepstorff, A. (2015). From interacting agents to engaging persons.

- Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 22, No. 1-2, 9-23.
- Scheler, M. (1948). *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*. 5. Aufl., F.a.M.: Verlag G. Schulte-Bulmke.
- Schweikard, David P. and Schmid, Hans Bernhard, „Collective Intentionality“, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/collective-intentionality/>>.
- Searle, J. (2010). *Making the Social World. The Structure of Human Civilisation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sheldrake, R. (2012). *Der Wissenschaftswahn. Warum der Materialismus ausgedient hat*. Frankfurt a.M.: O.W. Barth.
- Spitzer, M. (2006). *Vorsicht Bildschirm! Elektronische Medien, Gehirnentwicklung, Gesundheit und Gesellschaft*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Steiner, R. (1989). *Die pädagogische Praxis vom Gesichtspunkte geisteswissenschaftlicher Menschenerkenntnis. Die Erziehung des Kindes und jüngeren Menschen*. Acht Vorträge, Dornach, 1923 (GA 306). Dornach: R. Steiner Verlag.
- Steiner, R. (1987b). *Lucifer-Gnosis 1903-1908. Grundlegende Aufsätze zur Anthroposophie und Berichte*. (GA 34). Dornach: R. Steiner Verlag.
- Steiner, R. (1987a). *Die gesunde Entwicklung des Menschenwesens. Eine Einführung in die anthroposophische Pädagogik und Didaktik*. Vorträge in Dornach 1921/22 (GA 303). Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag.
- Steiner, R. (1958). *Die Philosophie der Freiheit. Grundzüge einer modernen Weltanschauung. Seelische Beobachtungsergebnisse nach naturwissenschaftlicher Methode*. Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag.
- Tomasello, M. & Carpenter, M. (2007). Shared Intentionality. *Developmental Science* 10/1, 121–125.
- Wagemann, J. (2013). Entwurf eines sozialanthropologischen Strukturmodells pädagogischen Erkennens und Handelns. *Research in Steiner Education* 3/2, 28-53.
- Wagemann, J. (2011). Meditation – research as Development. *Research in Steiner Education* 2/2, 35-49.
- Wallace, A. (2011). *Hidden dimensions: the unification of physics and consciousness*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press.
- Walther, G. (1923). Zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften. *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Phänomenologische Forschung*, VI, 1-158.
- Weber, M. (1922) *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Weber, Marianne (ed.). Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.
- Weger, U. & Wagemann, J. (2015). The challenges and opportunities of first-person inquiry in psychology. *New Ideas in Psychology* 36 (2015), 38-49.
- Whitehead, A. (1978). *Process and reality. An essay in cosmology*. Griffin, D. & Sherburne, D. (eds.). New York: The Free Press.
- Witzenmann, H. (1983). *Strukturphänomenologie. Vorbewusstes Gestaltbilden im erkennenden Wirklichkeitenthüllen. Ein neues wissenschaftstheoretisches Konzept*. Dornach: Gideon Spicker Verlag.
- Witzenmann, H. (1986). *Die Voraussetzungslosigkeit der Anthroposophie. Eine Einführung in die Geisteswissenschaft Rudolf Steiners. Erkenntniswissenschaft als Ontologie. Ein neues Zivilisationsprinzip durch meditative Bewusstseinswandlung*. Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben.