

December 2016

The Art of Interpretive Dialogue: An Ontology of Human Experience and the Emergence of Meaning in Everyday Life

Sophia N. Gallagher

Oglethorpe University, ngallagher@oglethorpe.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/ojur>

 Part of the [Interpersonal and Small Group Communication Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gallagher, Sophia N. (2016) "The Art of Interpretive Dialogue: An Ontology of Human Experience and the Emergence of Meaning in Everyday Life," *Oglethorpe Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/ojur/vol5/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oglethorpe Journal of Undergraduate Research by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

The Art of Interpretive Dialogue:
An Ontology of Human Experience & the Emergence of Meaning in Everyday Life

Nicole Gallagher

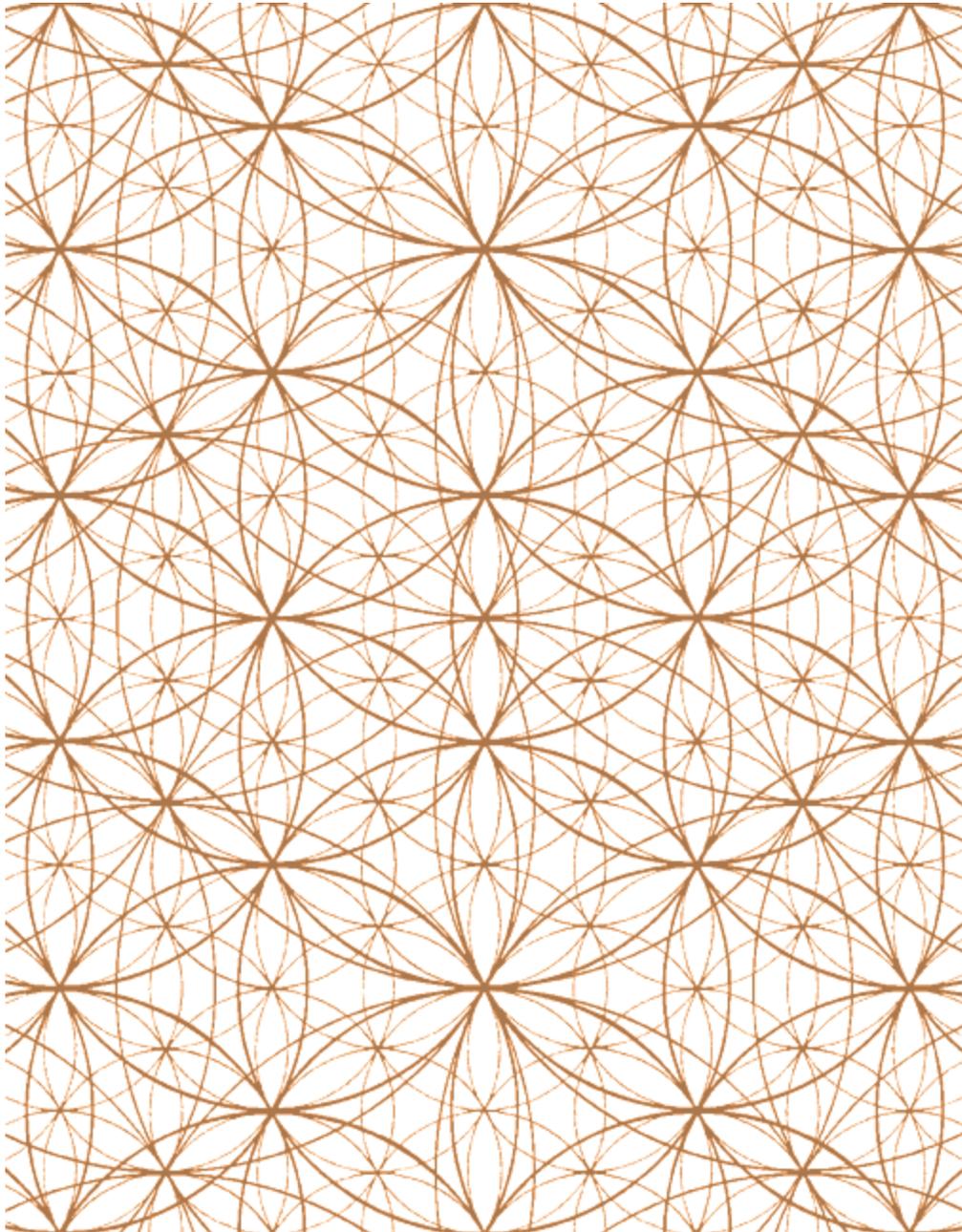


Table of Contents

I. Introduction	2
a. necessity of the inquiry	
b. outline of the argument	
c. theoretical foundations & inspirations	
d. preview of original contributions	
II. Fundamental Ontology of Human Experience.....	9
a. experience & world as mutually constitutive	
b. experience as temporally and spatially situated	
c. affect	
d. understanding, interpretation, and expression	
e. discourse & language	
f. meaning	
g. conclusion of the ontology	
III. A Model of Communication.....	39
a. transmission vs transactional models of communication	
b. communication as a transactional process	
c. communication as the co-creation of shared meaning	
IV. The Principles of Interpretive Dialogue	43
V. Suggestions for Further Exploration & Research.....	58
VI. Bibliography.....	60

I. Introduction

Abstract:

With the ultimate intention of seeking a kind of dialogue that facilitates personal, relational, and collective growth and may be practiced in our everyday lives, this paper examines the fundamental role of interpretation and communication in all human experience. The overall work is positioned at the intersection of Philosophical Hermeneutics and Interpersonal Communication, and begins with an ontology of human experience as the inextricable relation between the experiencer and what is experienced, contextually situated as temporal and embodied, and conditioned by the three interrelated processes of affect, understanding, and discourse as they are mediated by an unique constitutive framework. The ontology concludes with an account of meaning as an emergent feature of experience, and is followed by a proposed model of communication as a transactional process through which meaning is co-created. The culmination of this work is presented in the six principles of 'interpretive dialogue': an instructive account of communication through which the conclusions reached throughout the theoretical foundation may be purposefully and artfully applied to practical situations. To engage in interpretive dialogue is to encounter the Other with profound openness by recognizing the limits of one's own interpretation, and thus allowing Truth to emerge through the dynamic interplay of varied perspectives.

Keywords: Interpretive Dialogue, Meaning, Interpretation, Hermeneutics, Interpersonal Communication, Heidegger, Gadamer, Human Experience.

a. Necessity of the inquiry

Many of the atrocities of contemporary society are not due to lack of resources but rather our inability as individuals to recognize the limits of our own interpretive perspective and the unwillingness to allow the perspectives of those that oppose us to challenge and inform our own. The exploitation of human beings for capitalistic gain & insatiable consumerism, bipartisan political standstills, the murder of unarmed black men at the hands of those that are meant to protect them, homophobia, religious persecution, racial and gender inequality, are all a testament to the disastrous results that flow from such unwillingness. In order to address the issues we face, we must learn to communicate in such a way that our differences are not only respected but celebrated and our words are not only heard but revered for allowing access to the profound insight held within each unique worldview.

Our differing perspectives isolate us from each other, constructing seemingly insurmountable barriers between us, and yet it is exactly these variations of seeing the world that form the infinite brilliance and beauty of human diversity which characterizes our existence. In the age of global and immediate communication, it is absolutely imperative that we learn to build bridges between our views and allow truth to emerge through the tensional interplay of disparate perspectives. In what follows, I will argue that by recognizing the fundamental role that interpretation and communication play in human experience, we may engage in a kind of dialogue that fosters a harmonious and dynamic heterogeneity and may be practiced in our everyday lives.

b. Outline of the argument

In this thesis, I will begin by examining the nature of human experience (Part II); specifically, the interrelated processes that comprise it (i.e. affect, understanding, and discourse), the conditions that both make possible and determine the limits of our potentiality for experience (i.e. constitutive framework as embodied and temporally situated), and the nature of meaning itself. Subsequently, I will propose give a model of interpersonal communication that is consistent with given ontological account of human experience (Part III). Finally, I will present an instructive approach to conversation as the art of interpretive dialogue in which participants in dialogue can collaboratively provoke and facilitate personal, relational, and collective growth (Part IV). However, prior to embarking on this ambitious exploration through the forest of ontological inquiry, I will provide a brief overview of the monumental work in hermeneutics that has forged a path on which to begin, the contemporary scholars whose efforts have helped

illuminate the way to our intended destination of communication, and finally I will give a brief preview of the original contributions I have made to build on this body of work and provide a map for others to follow.

c. Theoretical foundations & inspiration

The present work rests on the shoulders of philosophers Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, as well as the communication scholars who have worked to shed light on the overlap between philosophical hermeneutics and interpersonal communication research, predominantly John Stewart, Michael J. Hyde, Stanley Deetz, Ronald C. Arnett, and Kenneth White. The tradition of hermeneutics has generally been concerned with “illuminating the conditions for the possibility of understanding and its modes of interpretation.”¹ However, the term “hermeneutics” defies clear definition as the tradition has undergone a variety of transformative movements in its history and its contemporary use spans a wide array of disciplines and purposes. Thus, the meaning of the term is quite ambiguous and contingent on the one who is using it (which, indeed, seems so utterly fitting). Following Heidegger and Gadamer, the present account views understanding and interpretation not merely as some rational activity we often engage in, but rather as a constitutive process by which the world is disclosed to human experience immediately upon all engagement with it and primary to any theoretical contemplation. With understanding and interpretation given such ontological significance, all philosophical inquiry into human experience becomes hermeneutic inquiry, and

¹ *The Hermeneutics Reader*. (2006) Edited by Kurt Mueller-Vollmer. New York: Continuum, 9.

should be conducted accordingly. Thus, any inquiry into the nature of communication must rely on the study and practice of hermeneutics as well.

The following discussion owes its inspiration to Heidegger's attempt in *Being and Time* to construct a fundamental ontology of human experience as a inextricably unified structure in which the very nature of experience and of the world are necessarily relational and interdependent (what Heidegger calls *Dasein's* Being-in-the-world). Further, I have adopted Heidegger's explication of affect, understanding, and discourse as the temporally and spatially situated², mutually arising³ processes that disclose the world to us in a particular way.

Gadamer's efforts in *Truth and Method* and in the later essays of *Philosophical Hermeneutics* further develop Heidegger's briefly stated but profound insight into the historical/temporal nature of understanding and its mutually constitutive relation to language and dialogue, bringing hermeneutics in close relation to communication scholarship. Gadamer's argument for the inescapability of one's preconceptions, and his notions of "hermeneutical consciousness," and genuine dialogue as a kind of dialectic with character of play, all have inspired my own formulation of the principles of interpretive dialogue.

Having had a prior interest in theories of communication and rhetoric studies, I had originally read these texts with the aim of drawing out their potential application to everyday communication and seeking how hermeneutics can be used to establish a greater sense of empathy between people. Upon discovering that much work had already been done in pointing to

² While credit ought to indeed be given to Heidegger for introducing the concept of *Dasein's* spatiality (see example of the chair "touching" the wall [BT 55.5]), please note that my explication of spatial situatedness as "embodiment" has primarily been inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*.

³ For the sake of clarity, I have chosen the phrase "mutually arising" in place of Heidegger's term, "equiprimordial," to denote how these three processes are all interrelated and equally as primary in giving rise to human experience.

the relation between hermeneutics and interpersonal communication, I realized I was not alone in observing the significance of the connection, and turned to the following communication scholars for guidance as my pursuit became intensified. While exploring my original intention for this thesis of designing and conducting a qualitative study on interpersonal communication in families, I was made aware of the profound methodological significance of hermeneutics for communication research through the work of Leonard C. Hawes,⁴ Stanley Deetz,⁵ John Stewart,⁶ and Ronald C. Arnett.⁷ Somewhere along the way, I gradually turned away from qualitative research and instead doubled my efforts in trying to grasp the complexities involved in the ontological implications of Heidegger and Gadamer's hermeneutics for the nature of language and communication. The work of Deetz⁸ and Stewart⁹ provided much guidance in reconceptualizing language, while the work of Michael J Hyde and Craig Smith¹⁰, Kenneth White¹¹, provided guidance in grasping the mutually constitutive relation between understanding

⁴ Hawes, Leonard C. (1977) "Toward a Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Communication" *Communication Quarterly*, 25. p42-50

⁵ Deetz, Stanley (1978) "Conceptualizing human understanding: Gadamer's hermeneutics and American Communication Studies" *Communication Quarterly*, 26. p12-23; Stanley Deetz. "Hermeneutics and Research in Interpersonal Communication." *Interpersonal Communication: essays in phenomenology and hermeneutics*. ed. by Joseph J. Pilotta. (1982) The Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, Inc.

⁶ Stewart, John (1981) "Philosophy of Qualitative Inquiry: Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Communication Research" *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 67. p109-121; Stewart, John . (1994) "An Interpretive Approach to Validity in Interpersonal Communication Research" *Interpretive Approaches to Interpersonal Communication*. Edited by Kathryn Carter and Mick Presnell. SUNY Press: Albany. p45-82.

⁷ Arnett, Ronald C. (2007) "Interpretive Inquiry as Qualitative Communication Research" *Qualitative Communication Research*, 8:1.

⁸ Deetz, Stanley (1973) "Words without things: Toward a social phenomenology of language" *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59. 40-51.

⁹ Stewart, John (1986) "Speech and human being: A complement to semiotics." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 72. p55-73; Stewart, John (1995) *Language as Constitutive Articulate Contact: Toward a Post-Semiotic Philosophy of Communication*. Albany: SUNY Press

¹⁰ Hyde, Michael J & Smith, Craig. (1979) "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen but Unobserved Relationship" *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 67. p247-363; also: Hyde, Michael J. (1982) "Transcendental Philosophy and Human Communication" *Interpersonal Communication: Essays in phenomenology and hermeneutics*. Edited by Joseph J. Pilotta.

¹¹ White, Kenneth (1994) "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophy of Language: A Constitutive-Dialogic Approach to Interpersonal Understanding." *Interpretive Approaches to Interpersonal Communication*. Edited by Kathryn Carter and Mick Presnell. SUNY Press: Albany. p83-114

and communication. Finally, John Stewart's¹² criticism of empathic/active, listening approaches and arguments in favor of what he calls interpretive/dialogic listening led me to critically examine my goal of using hermeneutics to establish a greater sense of empathy through dialogue and eventually develop my own instructive approach to dialogue with a goal that is more consistent with the nature of human experience, understanding, and communication. The work of these communication scholars strengthened the significance of language and communication, providing even more substance to my conviction that dialogue can enable profound personal and collective transformation.

d. Preview of original contributions

Beyond synthesizing the various insights of these thinkers into a single cohesive and comprehensive account, I have made several original contributions that build upon this body of work. First, I have sought to distance myself from Heideggerian terminology in an attempt to make the prolific insight held within Heidegger's convoluted language and the profound ontological and ethical implications for interpersonal communication more accessible to the general reader. In order to do so, the majority of my efforts have gone into assimilating such an exhaustive ontological account of experience so intimately that I may adapt it to my purposes and articulate its complexities in a voice that is entirely my own (Part II).

Second, I have altered and expanded upon the analysis of affect in light of the recent developments of an interdisciplinary movement called the "affective turn" (Part II; section c).

Third, I will present a novel ontological account of meaning (Part II; section f). This departure

¹² Stewart, John. (1983) "Interpretive Listening: An Alternative to Empathy" *Communication Education*, 32:4. p379-391; Stewart, John. (2006) *Bridges Not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication*. 9th Edition. Edited By John Stewart. New York: NY: McGraw Hill.

from Heidegger and Gadamer is in response to a feeling of incredulity raised by their inability to adequately address the meaningful yet non-linguistic nature of ineffable experiences. Fourth, I propose a model of interpersonal communication that is consistent with the ontology of human experiences and emphasizes rather than ignores the complex contextuality of meaning (Part III).

Finally the culmination of such efforts is presented in the crux of my contribution: the principles of interpretive dialogue (Part IV). While this instructive approach to conversation is inspired by the work of Gadamer and Stewart, it is a novel application and integration of the ontological assertions reached throughout this thesis presented in such a way that allows them to be practiced in our everyday lives. The entirety of this work is devoted to this development and implementation of a kind of dialogue that enables personal, relational and societal growth and may serve as a path for ushering in of a new way of living in heterogeneous harmony where the multiplicity of perspectives are not only respected but celebrated for enabling us to collectively explore the depths and varieties of human experience.

Part II. Fundamental Ontology of Human Experience

Any attempt to enhance the effectiveness of the listening process that does not first address the ontological source and context of that process will be limited in its success.¹³

a. Experience and world as mutually constitutive

In order to reach a cohesive fundamental ontology of human experience, we will take as our starting point the assertion that everyday human experience is necessarily bound to the world we inhabit in an inextricable relation that is mutually constitutive. It may appear problematic that such a starting point is a simplistic restatement of the conclusion presented in the introduction. However, as we shall see, this approach is necessary in hermeneutic investigation as there is no presuppositionless point from which to begin. And so, our starting point is posited from experience and explored with deeper and deeper complexity. Each assertion along the way that presents a new puzzle piece to the overall ontology should be judged on whether it is consistent with the entire picture and whether it applies to the reader's experience, rather than the impossible standard of following from unbiased premises.

That human experience is inherently tied to the world is not in itself apparent. This essential relation is ontologically prior to any theoretical or rational contemplation which, by virtue of its very functioning, enforces a distinction between subject and object, and as such this primary unified relation remains hidden from us most of the time. For this reason, an initial defense of this starting point is needed. It seems easier to accept that the essence of our experience is contingent upon the world it observes and engages with, than it is to conceive the reversal in which the essence of the world is contingent upon our experience of it. In fact, to

¹³ Hyde, R Bruce. (1994) "Listening Authentically: A Heideggerian Perspective on Interpersonal Communication" *Interpretive Approaches to Interpersonal Communication*. Edited by Kathryn Carter and Mick Presnell. SUNY Press: Albany, p181.

most of us, it seems utterly obvious that the opposite is true. That is, we go through our lives feeling like isolated subjects standing over and against a world of objects and others that hold a clear distinction from us. We feel as though we engage with a world whose intrinsic nature exists independently of our engagement. Often we strive to comprehend the world in such a way that our knowledge can be said to be purely objective and free from the biases of subjectivity.

However, this description seems to ignore the incomprehensible depth and variety of human experience. Through our every engagement with the world there emerges an infinite richness of the moment within the context of the whole of our own existence. What can be said of the intrinsic nature of a hillside as it is experienced with drastic difference when encountered by an artist, a real estate developer, and a farmer?¹⁴ As each encounters the hillside their present experience is inextricably tied to their previous training and their future goals. They do not encounter an already meaningful hillside and place upon it their own personal meanings and hopes, but rather encounter it immediately as fitting within the framework they have already developed. As humans we make sense of the world through our already made and continuously developing constructs helping us place the present moment into a unified whole in which our own being is intrinsically tied. Throughout the following discussion, I will argue that this is not merely true of the beauty or utility of a hillside, but of our every encounter with the world, from the mundane to the profound.

The ontological account I will present below will be an examination into the nature of this encounter between experience and world as disclosive. “Disclosure” here means a kind of revealing in which what is revealed is neither externally *in* the world nor internally *in* our

¹⁴ I owe DiCenso for the inspiration of this example, from his (1990) *Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth: A Study in the Work of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur*. Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia.

experience, but rather is the meaning that emerges as the world is given to experience in a particular way. The following ontology seeks to address how meaning is disclosed within human experience by first examining how human experience is temporally and spatially situated (II;b), and then investigating the three interrelated processes by which experience relates to the world: affect (II;c), understanding/interpretation (II;d), and discourse (II;e). The final section of the ontology (II;f) revisits the question of meaning in light of this procession of examinations and proposes a comprehensive account of the meaning of meaning.

In the following discussion of the disclosure of meaning as mediated through affect, understanding, and discourse, I will first use ‘meaning’ in its ordinary everyday sense, and allow it to grow in complexity and precision as the entire ontology evolves. Similarly, since affect, understanding, and discourse are mutually arising and thus intrinsically interrelated, I will revisit each process accordingly, adding depth to each explanation as they gradually are able to be grasped in light of each other. Throughout the explanation of each process, the inseparable relation of human experience and the world will continuously be made apparent.

b. Present Embodiment: experience as temporally and spatially situated

In order to examine the interrelated processes that disclose the world to human experience, we must first acknowledge the necessary conditions that underlie each process. First, experience is necessarily temporally situated in that it is always only an experience of the present. However, we do not experience some isolated present, but rather the present as bound within a past and future. As such, the part and the whole are in constant transformation. That is, we make sense of present experience in virtue of past experiences and future expectations, and

conversely as we try to integrate our present experience into the whole of our lives, the whole transforms with each new experience. This temporal situation underlies each constitutive process of human experience, but is perhaps most clearly exemplified in the discussion of understanding and interpretation (II;d).

Second, experience is spatially situated in that consciousness is necessarily embodied.¹⁵ While the ‘now’ of experience is the present, the ‘here’ of experience is the body through which we can encounter the world at all. Experience is always inextricably tied to the body through which it operates, and as such, the constitutive processes of experience are all necessarily embodied. While the body is that in virtue of which experience is possible, it also presents the limits of potential experience, as each of the constitutive processes are conditioned by the body’s capacities in encountering and engaging with the world. The interrelated processes of affect, understanding, and discourse become unified in human experience as they mediate the ceaseless interplay of embodied ‘here’ with the entire world and the present ‘now’ with the whole of time.

*c. Affect*¹⁶

We shall use affect as a starting point of our investigation into the three mutually arising processes that make up experience. A preliminary definition of the term affect as used here, is the process by which humans relate to the world through feeling¹⁷; that is, the way we encounter the world affectively, or feelingly, or the way the world is revealed to us *as felt*. In this sense, the

¹⁵ This has been predominantly inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s argument in *Phenomenology of Perception* for the necessity of embodiment as that which enables and unifies experience and the rejection of the body as an object distinct from the subject inhabiting it.

¹⁶ For the process I have called “affect”, Heidegger uses the term “state of mind” or “attunement”, depending on the translation.

¹⁷ In a parallel way, we shall see, understanding is the way we encounter the world comprehendingly, similarly affect is the way we encounter the world emotionally.

process of affect is prior to any differentiations or significations, rather, it immediately arises between the experiencer and what is experienced as an emergent process of the relation itself. Emotions, on the other hand, may be defined as the differentiation and naming of what is given in affect. Emotions are shaped through specific cultural and social contexts.

In the last two decades, there has been a resurgence of academic interest in the nature of affect and emotion. This interdisciplinary movement, referred to as the “affective turn,” seeks to restore the significance of affect as a critical aspect of our experience that ought not to be disregarded, and challenges the conventional oppositions between mind and body, emotion and reason, discourse and affect, public and private, etc. A specific example of such efforts is the work of Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Her work integrates the Heideggerian conception of affect as that which is neither internal nor external, but as that which we use to negotiate the boundaries between I and the Others. The process of affect is that in virtue of which various aspects of the world are presented to the sphere of consciousness *as* threatening, *as* repulsive, or *as* desirable, etc. Ahmed argues that “emotions, which respond to the proximity of others, do not respond the way that they do because of the inherent characteristics of others: we do not respond with love or hate because others are loveable or hateful. It is through affective encounters that objects and others are perceived as having attributes.”¹⁸ This point is significant for our discussion of meaning as relational and the inextricable unity of subject and object in immediate pre-theoretical experience. In this way, what is encountered in the world is immediately disclosed in a particular way (e.g. *as* repulsive) *through* the process of affect, giving it a kind of primary significance.

¹⁸ Ahmed, Sarah. (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd Edition. Edinburgh University Press 52

Further, Ahmed explores how “naming emotions involves different orientations towards the objects they construct.”¹⁹ The distinction and connection between affect and emotion is a common theme within literature of the “affective turn”. As mentioned previously, emotion is often used to refer to the feelings that are named. Affect is the process of relating while emotions are the differentiation of that process. The labels with which we name our own emotions are socially constructed and thus vary by culture. I use the term affect here to mean the process of relating to what is encountered affectively as mediated through a socially constructed framework of emotions (i.e. the totality of potential ways we may emotionally encounter the world). For example, the emotion of shame has drastically different associations in Eastern cultures than it does in Western cultures (e.g. in what situations one normally experiences shame, the duration and intensity of shame in response to particular stimuli, how to appropriately display/express one’s shame, etc.). In this way, the framework, formed through our social interactions, is the extent of one’s potentiality to be affected by, or feel, the world as it is experienced. Affect, the emergent process itself, is mediated through this framework as it is applied to the present situation and develops into emotions, here understood as the actualization of our potentiality.²⁰

This framework is necessarily temporally situated, in that it functions solely in the present situation yet utilizes associations developed in past experiences (e.g. appropriate emotional reactions in particular circumstances, objects or words that are emotionally loaded within the culture - “terrorism,” for example) and concern for the future (e.g. your car is seen *as* frustrating when it won’t start, by being associated with fun weekend plans), in order to immediately relate to what is encountered affectively in the present. Further, this framework of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p14.

²⁰ It will later be shown how this development is paralleled in the process of understanding as the potentiality presented by the conceptual framework achieves actualization in interpretation.

affective potentiality is necessarily embodied in that the process of affect is not distinct from the body through which the world is perceived and the physiological processes involved in emotion. In this way, while it is in virtue of the body that we may affectually engage with the world in the first place, it is also the case that the extent to which the world can be emotionally experienced is determined in part by one's embodiment.

Beyond its temporal and spatial constitution, affect is also conditioned by the two other processes of discourse and understanding. The sociality of the emotional framework intimately connects it to the process of discourse, as the involvement of naming emotions necessarily entails the conceptual framework of understanding. Though admittedly superficial, this preliminary account of the interrelatedness of these processes is sufficient for our brief account of affect. We will now turn to a more detailed examination of the complex process of understanding and its development to interpretation.

d. Understanding, Interpretation & Expression

The process of understanding as a mode of disclosure should be distinguished from its typical use as a kind of obtainment of knowledge through some contemplative activity. Understanding as used here is the ordinary everyday process of immediate and thus pre-contemplative apprehension of the world. The immediacy through which we comprehend everything we encounter in some particular way, prior to any kind of contemplation, is apparent upon reflection. For it is not necessary to think about what a doorknob is, what its used for, and how it is used before we may take hold of it, turn it, and push (or pull), in order to enter a room.

Rather, it takes merely seeing a doorknob for a wealth of subconscious information to be immediately brought forth in the using of it, as we do sometimes almost mindlessly.

Further, as we use the doorknob, it cannot be the case that we merely grasp what it is in itself as an isolated object. We can only make sense of the doorknob in its relation with the door, the entrance, the room on either side, the variety of doorknobs and the distinct ways we must turn them, the lock, the key, etc. Implicit in our immediate understanding of the doorknob is the material with which it is made, its function and an evaluation of how well it is fulfilling that function, the humans who designed, constructed, shipped, sold, purchased, and installed it, the humans who have and will use it, the social norms that dictate whether or not we should knock before using it and whether we must return it to its original position after we use it. In this way, our engagement with every object, person, event, and idea in the world, is made possible by this wealth of information of which we are, for the most part, wholly unaware. Here we must ask what makes this process possible; i.e. what are the conditions of understanding?

It is important to remember that the term ‘conditions’ contains a double sense: as both the limits of understanding and also as that which makes understanding possible. First, understanding is necessarily temporally situated. Through the process of understanding we make sense of what is encountered in the present through what is given by the past (our preconceptions) and our expectations for the future (our anticipated ends). Both of which, our preconceptions and our anticipated ends, are situated within larger conditional situations. That we immediately grasp the doorknob comprehendingly (i.e. immediately seeing the doorknob *as* for opening doors) is in virtue of all the interrelated concepts in which the concept of doorknob is entangled have been formed through every single past experience in which a doorknob was

encountered, all coming forth for use in the present situation. Despite having never encountered this particular doorknob before, one may encounter it as a doorknob within the same class as every doorknob encountered before it in virtue of our *already* having a preconception of doorknob with all its relations.²¹

Further, the availability of such preconceptions are given in virtue of our particular perspective and the roles through which we approach the world. For example, the doorknob-related preconceptions I have formed were made available to me through my perspective as a student of average height, and as such are quite different from the preconceptions made available to an interior designer, a (hypothetical) doorknob salesman, or people with disabilities. I am not given access to such preconceptions until I take on those roles (or, I shall argue, engage in interpretive dialogue with those in such roles).

Moreover, our preconceptions, and the perspective through which they are formed, are necessarily situated within the historical period and cultural standards within which we find ourselves “thrown,” to use Heidegger’s term. Our historic and cultural situatedness both provides and constrains the possibilities of perspectives or roles we may take on, and thus the concepts that are made available to us. One could never develop a concept of doorknobs during a historical period in which there are no doors. That is not to say that discoveries cannot be made or that one cannot form a concept new for its time, for that would deny the very possibility of societal development and revolutions in ideology. However, new concepts and discoveries are not reached in a vacuum, they are developed within an already given and continuously evolving

²¹ This (as well as what follows) is what Heidegger refers to as the “fore-structure” of understanding, which is comprised of three hierarchical levels - the fore-conceptions, fore-sight, and fore-having. These correspond respectively to what I call here one’s preconceptions, perspective/roles, and one’s historical/cultural situation.

social world, and are thus expansions and reworkings of concepts formed through one's existence in that social world, which is necessarily historically and culturally situated. For Gadamer, it is through this recognition of the limits imposed by the historical placement that makes possible our understanding, that we may see our own understanding as inherently finite in its contingency.

Conversely, yet intimately related to our preconceptions, the process of understanding is conditioned by our image of the future. The way in which something is immediately apprehended is conditioned by its relation to our own ends. For example, we grasp the doorknob in relation to its role in fulfilling our end of opening the door. Like the web of interrelated preconceptions, our ends associated with using the doorknob similarly remain below our awareness. Further, our ends are similarly situated within a hierarchy of greater conditions. For example, one may use the doorknob in order to open the door, in order to enter the room, in order to use the computer within the room, in order to apply for a job, in order to make money, in order to pay the rent, in order to have shelter, in order to survive, in order to _____ (I shall refrain from offhandedly asserting the ultimate purpose of continuing our own existence). Admittedly, the example is too simplistic to be realistic, but nevertheless serves to illustrate how the end for which we do anything is situated within a hierarchy of ever greater ends, and as such is never an isolated occurrence but rather inherently involved with a complex chain of expectations, regardless of whether or not we are aware of it.

Moreover, this projection into the future which conditions all understanding is inextricably tied to what is given by our past. That is to say that our ends are conditioned by our preconceptions, the perspective and roles we take, and our historic and cultural placement. One

would not use the computer in order to find a job, had their concept of job not been related to the concept of computer, or if they were a stay at home parent and thus not in need of a job, or a stay at home parent in the 1950's before there were computers to even have a concept for. Conversely, the past experiences through which our preconceptions were necessarily formed when the past was once the present, and so were conditioned by the anticipated ends of that moment. It is in this way that the finite process of understanding, which may only occur as applied to the present situation, is nevertheless an event which emerges through the inextricable weaving of one's past, present, and future, extending infinitely beyond one's own existence.

This interrelated web of preconceptions one develops throughout their lifetime is what is meant by the phrase 'conceptual framework.' The conceptual framework, as the condition for understanding, is both that which makes understanding possible and that which determines the extent of one's present capacity to apprehend the world. Through our conceptual framework we structure reality in such a way that it may make sense to us. It is an interrelated network of concepts used to categorize our encounters with particulars and integrate them within the larger whole (i.e. the entire framework). As humans we incessantly perceive the world in terms of consistent patterns of similarities and differences. A concept is an abstract mental category that encompasses a single recognizable pattern, through which we may encounter a particular as an instance of an entire class or category. The conceptual framework one has is the entirety of their recognizable patterns organized to such a level of complexity that they may be combined and contrasted in an infinite amount of ways. This enables us to use what is familiar to us to make sense of what is unfamiliar in the present. Unless one is abnormally isolated from the world, we constantly encounter objects, events, people, and ideas that are unfamiliar to us in our everyday

life and almost effortlessly apprehend and assimilate them into our already existing yet extraordinarily malleable conceptual framework.²²

What is immediately grasped in understanding are all the potential ways we can pattern (i.e. apply concepts to) what is encountered, and thus make sense of our experience. What is encountered is immediately grasped in virtue of the totality of potential concepts that may be used to make sense of what is encountered in its relation to the whole framework. When we walk into a classroom and sit down, we do not merely apprehend the object *as* chair, but rather, upon encountering it the potentialities of grasping it *as* yellow, *as* used for sitting, *as* too close up, *as* too far back, *as* uncomfortable, *as* comfortable, *as* structurally sound, *as* ugly, *as* in the way, *as* facing the wrong direction, *as* unoccupied, *as* broken, etc.²³

Moreover, just as the concept of chair is related to these concepts, each of these concepts exists in its own set of relations. The concept of ‘facing the wrong direction’ makes sense only in relation to the concepts of ‘blackboard’ and ‘professor’. This long winded example is intended to illustrate that we never make sense of an object through a single concept, but rather through all the concepts related to that concept, and all the concepts related to those concepts, and so on, *ad infinitum*. It is in this way that we may say that, on some level, every single moment of understanding brings the entirety of our conceptual framework into play as a dynamic dance between one’s whole lifetime and the present experience continuously transforming each other and producing perpetually emerging meaning.

Interpretation is the development of pre-contemplative understanding in that it is the actualization of certain potentialities immediately given in understanding. Interpretation is a

²² Anyone who has experienced the mental fatigue from an experience of culture shock will empathize with the inclusion of the restrictive ‘almost’ before ‘effortless’.

²³ This is what Heidegger calls the “seeing-as” structure of understanding and interpretation

restriction of the given potentialities in that it enables us to grasp what is encountered as this and not that. For example, say the same student from earlier attended a modern art museum and spent a great deal of time on the design floor admiring the furniture exhibit. That student sees a chair designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and sees a chair *as* art for the first time (i.e. a new relation is formed between the student's concept of 'chair' and 'art', thus transforming the framework as a whole). Now, when the student enters the classroom and encounters the familiar object through his concept of 'chair', the potential concepts through which he can make sense of the chair listed previously now include the addition of 'as art'. However, given the context within which the student is encountering the chair, namely the classroom, it is likely that his interpretation of the chair will include the relation to the concept of 'for sitting' and exclude the concept of 'art.' As the student approaches the object in this particular context, the potentialities given in his immediate understanding are developed in such a way that through the process of interpretation the potential for encountering the chair as that which is used for sitting is actualized and the potential for encountering the chair as a work of art is not. When the student revisits the museum, the same potentialities are made available to him and yet in this context, the chair made by Frank Lloyd Wright is encountered as a work of art, and definitely not as used for sitting. Conceived in this way, *all* interpretation is constituted by the primary process of understanding, which is necessarily conditioned by one's temporally situated embodied conceptual framework.

There are two significant implications of the foregoing presentation of understanding and its development in interpretation. First, there can be no interpretation that is free of preconceptions. However, as Heidegger argues, to view this as a limitation imposed by an inescapable vicious circle is to remain blind to the ontological structure of understanding by

failing to recognize the elevated status of the pre-conceptual framework as a necessary condition of all understanding and interpretation. This ‘hermeneutic circle’ is not vicious; it is the very structure of our capacity to make sense of the world at all. Therefore any attempt to “set aside” one’s preconceptions in order to reach an “unbiased” understanding is an incoherent notion based on misguided assumptions of the nature of understanding and interpretation. Instead, by recognizing the necessarily constitutive status of one’s preconceptions, we may work to uncover them, so they may be subjected to critical evaluation and transformed, strengthened or discarded accordingly.

Second, the continuous process of understanding and its development in interpretation usually remain as unconscious processes. The conceptual framework, as that *through which* all understanding and interpretation occurs, remains hidden from us, just as the lens of one’s eye remains hidden from sight. How can one be made aware of their own interpretive process so that their hidden preconceptions may be uncovered and made available for critical evaluation? The answer to this question is the very purpose of Gadamer’s *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Within the realm of interpersonal communication, herein lies the central motivation for the present work. The answer to this question is what I have called the art of interpretive Dialogue, and will be discussed at length in Part IV below.

For now, we will continue our examination of this process through its further development in the expression. Just as the process of interpretation is a restriction of the potentialities given in understanding, the expression is a further restriction of the actualized potentialities given in interpretation. Once an interpretation is spoken (or written) aloud in the form of an expression, it is made explicit. That which has been interpreted and made explicit in

speech is ‘pointed out’ and given a definitive character, and as such is made shareable with others through being communicated.²⁴ In this explicit form, the expression is distinct from its fundamental constitutive forms in that it is capable of being an object that may be encountered and understood through theoretical contemplation, whereas what is given in pre-theoretical understanding and interpretation can only be grasped through engagement with it in the present. The definitive character of what is explicitly ‘pointed out’ in an expression is cut off from the totality of the conceptual framework from which it derives so that it can be made external and shared. It is only when what is said in the expression is again ‘taken up’ by another and grasped through the other’s understanding and interpretation that it may reenter the conceptual framework, albeit a different one than from which it came. An account of the communicative process briefly introduced here will be given in greater detail following the subsequent section on discourse and language.

e. Discourse & Language

How is discourse different from being merely a series of expressions? An expression, as described previously, is the development of what is apprehended in understanding and interpretation (viz. the externalization of one’s conceptual framework as it is applied to the given situation) into a form that is made explicit and sharable, and as such may stand in relation to the other’s experience as what is encountered through the process of discourse. Discourse, as a mode of disclosure of meaning, is our very engagement with the social world. The social world is not merely the interactions of individuals, but rather is the world itself as it is shaped and inhabited

²⁴ Heidegger, Martin. (1962) *Being and Time*. Trans Macquarrie & Robinson Oxford: Blackwell, p199.

by humans, who are fundamentally social beings. The roads we drive on, the shopping cart we use to carry our groceries, and the keys we lock our doors with, are all apprehended by us *as such* in virtue of the socially agreed upon concepts and functions we associate with them. Such meanings are disclosed to us through our interactions with others. As social beings, our birth begins a continuous process wherein we make sense of the world through how it is presented to us by others. Discourse, defined broadly, is the process by which all human interaction occurs, and through this process we are able to assimilate these shared social meanings into our own framework for understanding. Discourse is that through which our individual conceptual frameworks are formed and interact with one another. Just as affect is the immediate process of relating to the world affectively, and understanding is the immediate process of relating to the world comprehendingly, discourse is the process of relating to the world intersubjectively. That is, since our own conceptual frameworks are formed and transformed through our social engagements, the way the world appears to us through our framework is not purely our own isolated relation with it, rather our every interpretation is intrinsically bound of with that of others.

If an expression is an articulation of my individual conceptual framework as that through which the world is made intelligible to me, then discourse is the articulation of the whole framework through which the world can be made intelligible at all at a given historical and cultural period. This constitutive collective framework is language.

In order to explicate the complex role of language in constituting human experience, I will first discuss language as a system that operates on multiple levels, then expound on this

notion by clarifying language as fundamentally lived, and finally argue for the significance of the implications of this view by discussing language as a point of access to an infinity of meaning.

As the framework can be seen as an interconnected system of parts, the linguistic framework can be conceived of as a system of symbols associated with the ‘parts’ of interrelated concepts. These symbols function to help define the boundaries between concepts and make them sharable. This system operates on a macro level as the collective framework manifested as a language. The public language system one inherits and inhabits is the sedimentation of the conventions of meaning of the historical and cultural situation; the worldly manifestation of the collective experience of the culture having undergone a concretion and restriction through application in discourse. Language as the collective framework comprises the totality of potentiality for understanding of the historical-cultural situation in which we are thrown. This system is public and shared and as such enables humans to collaboratively construct their own individual conceptual framework by providing a common ground on which we may engage with others.

The individual conceptual framework is then embedded in a kind of private language system; the assimilation of the public language into a personal system throughout a lifetime of engaging in discourse. This micro level system of language is the totality of interrelated symbols in which meaning as personally experienced is sedimented into discrete parts (as concepts). Similar to the macro level, the micro level language symbols help create the boundaries between concepts, divide meaning as the experienced whole into parts that are sharable. Further, the infinite potential ways of combining language symbols into larger structures (e.g. expressions, conversations, books, etc) serve to express and create new associations between concepts (e.g.

the expression “the sky is blue” forms an association between the concepts “sky” and “blue”) Therefore, all of our concepts and their associations - our very way of apprehending the world - are inherently bound up with the collective conceptual framework. All private language originated from the public language, and as such the public is always with us in every moment of understanding and no experience is purely our own. Conversely, all public language only exists in so far as it is lived in individual experience through the conceptual framework as manifested by one’s private language system.

In then follows that, fundamentally, language functions as lived language. The framework itself is merely a whole comprised of interrelated parts which serves to divide meaning into patterns of similarity and difference and categorize such patterns for ease of access in the present structuring of experience. The linguistic framework is that which provides, maintains, and transforms the boundaries and interrelatedness of such categories. In this way, linguistic symbols do not merely “represent” external things in the world or internal mental concepts, nor are they an instrument or tool used to store and transmit already existing meanings. Language cannot be used and then put aside. Rather, language pervades our every experience in that it constitutes the framework that reveals the world to experience in a particular way; the medium through which meaning is disclosed by differentiating the whole of meaning as experienced into parts that may be grasped, preserved, and shared. Language as lived is the application of an infinite network of intersubjective shared meaning converging within a single present embodied experience of the world.

In this way, language has a sort of paradoxical nature in that it serves as a point of interplay between contrasting realms of the personal and the collective, of the historical and the

present, of the infinite and the finite, and of interpretive object and the interpretive act. For hermeneutics this does not present a problem but merely a point from which to begin. We may abandon the goal of “getting behind” language to the “real” meaning by recognizing language as the mediator between realms; by recognizing language as that which discloses an infinity of meaning within a part of speech. As such, language is never distinct from the meaning from which it both originates from and produces, but rather is the very point through which to access the whole in which it is inherently embedded. What is expressed in language may be a restriction upon the totality of conceptual relations involved in its original understanding, but it is never wholly distinct from it. Every expression shared through language is an opening up of an entire world. In a rare moment of eloquence, Gadamer perfectly encapsulates language’s constitutive role as the mediator between realms in the following passage:

Every word breaks forth as if from a center and related to a whole, through which alone it is a word. Every word causes the whole of language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear. Thus every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid to which it is related by responded and summoning. The occasionality [& contextuality] of human speech is not a causal imperfection of its expressive power; it is, rather the logical expression without being able to express it totally. All human speaking is finite in such a way that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be explicated and laid out.²⁵

f. Meaning

We must now address the question of meaning more fully. How can there be an infinity of meaning that is distinct but never wholly separate from the meaning of an expression? How is experiential meaning related to linguistic meaning, expression meaning, conceptual meaning,

²⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer(1975) *Truth and Method*. Trans by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G Marshall. London, Bloomsbury Publishing, p474.

etc.? What *is* meaning? This question inherently involves a wealth of complexities that are incredibly difficult to wrap one's mind around as it is literally an inquiry into the meaning of meaning, and as such often leads to an infinite regress, and ends in the feeling of despair for the inquirer.²⁶

In order to address these questions, I will review the ontological account of experience presented thus far and propose a novel account of meaning in its most fundamental form, placing it at the center of the entire ontology. Then, I will improve upon the explication given previously of the three mediating frameworks (emotional, conceptual, and linguistic) by presenting them anew as a single integrated framework constitutive of the three mutually-arising interrelated processes that comprise experience. Next, I will examine how the nature of meaning constitutes its more derivative forms (e.g. linguistic meaning, concept meaning, etc) as they are merely a restriction upon the framework's totality of associations that give meaning its significance. I will then explore how the framework mutually constitutes the emergence of meaning, and examine how the enormous complexity of the framework's inherent interconnectedness remains embedded in its larger and smaller manifestations, and how this structure gives meaning an incomprehensible contextuality that can never be transmitted, only shared to various degrees. Finally, I will argue that Heidegger's conflation of meaning with the framework itself makes his definition unable to adequately account for the experience of ineffability and then illustrate how such occurrences might be addressed and explained under my proposed ontology.

²⁶ More nights than I would like to admit, I have worked myself into a state in which the elusive nature of meaning is suddenly made clear, only to have it slip away from my (cognitive) grasp and retreat back to the depths of paradoxical, incomprehensibility from which it came, resulting in many long, fruitless, desperate hours spent trying to retrieve it. The current account is at the expense of many such nights.

Thus far, I have presented an account of human experience as the unification of the three interrelated processes of affect, understanding, and discourse. These three processes are modes of disclosure through which the world is revealed to experience in a particular way. The constitutive frameworks that both make possible and conditions these processes serve to mediate between the world and experience's necessary temporal and spatial situatedness by enabling present embodied experience to be informed by our past and future encounters with the world.

As such, human experience is an event of disclosure between experience and the world, in which the meaning of both self and world are inextricably tied. What is disclosed *is* meaning, as a unified whole experienced through the embodied present. Meaning is *relational* in that it emerges 'in between' consciousness and the world. Meaning is *contextual* in that it emerges from the temporal and spatial contextuality of being; the experience of the present in its relation to the whole of past, present and future, and experience of embodiment in relation the whole of the world it inhabits. Meaning is the whole of experience, as disclosed through affect, understanding and discourse, mediated through the constitutive framework. As such, meaning is *affective, interpretive, and intersubjective*. Meaning is neither internal (i.e. subjective) nor within what is encountered (i.e. objective), but the relational-contextual experience of encountering itself as it is structured through the modes of disclosure.

Experiential meaning is determined by the processes through which it is disclosed and the constitutive structure as it is necessarily conditioned by the temporal and spatial/bodily context in which the whole process itself is situated. Conversely to the frameworks as the totality of potentialities for experience, the emergence of meaning as experience encounters the world through such frameworks is the actualization of certain potentialities. At every moment that

meaning is disclosed, the mediating structures are transformed accordingly, thus illustrating a continuous transformation of the whole through the part, and vice versa. Therefore, meaning as experienced is essentially relational (between consciousness and the world) and contextual (between the part and the whole). *Meaning is the whole of Being as it is centered upon the here and now, experiencing itself through a finite vantage point that continuously transforms as it encounters the infinite in an ongoing event of co-creation.*

In order to reach a deeper understanding of how such continuous, dynamic transformation occurs, let us revisit and revise the previous account of the frameworks as the conditions of the processes that comprise experience. Having now seen how the three interrelated processes of affect, understanding, and discourse work intimately together, we may condense their respective frameworks into a single framework (with conceptual, emotional and linguistic dimensions) that encompasses the totality of one's potentiality for experience (i.e. all potential ways the world can disclose itself). The mediating comprehensive framework serves as the structure for all experience in its function as a network or system for establishing and recognizing patterns of similarity and difference in what is encountered, categorizes and differentiates meaning into constituent yet deeply interrelated parts, and negotiates the boundaries of those parts.

I will continue to refer to the contents of the framework as 'concepts' as the term most aptly denotes their essential role of categorizing meaning in such a way that enables our past and future encounters with the world to play a profound role in making sense of our present embodied experiences. However, it is imperative to keep in mind that the ceaseless presence of the affective process as concepts are applied to the world gives emotional connotations to every

concept, and the role of discourse in originating the social construction of our concepts, and in allowing us to share these categories and the feelings associated with them, enable the linguistic formation of concepts. The emotional and linguistic aspects of the framework further delineate the boundaries between concepts, even between self and world, as well as strongly impact the strength of associations between concepts.

Meaning as described previously has pertained exclusively to the meaningfulness of every whole, integrated, contextual human experience as it encounters the world it inhabits. However the word ‘meaning’ is used in a variety of ways that are less far reaching. In accordance with the given ontological account, I argue that all other uses of the term are constituted by and are a restriction of the more fundamental nature of meaning as the relation between experience and what is encountered and the countless interrelated conceptual-emotional-linguistic associations with that are involved in this experience. According to the present account, the meaning of “such & such” is a matter of how it is disclosed to experience in its relation to the whole in which it is a part, as the whole is applied to the present context. The meaning of “such & such” is a restriction of the entire, integrated experience of meaning to a particular aspect; it is the totality of associations involved as experienced.

When one examines the meaning of a particular aspect of human experience, (whether it is conceptual meaning or the meaning of things, linguistic meaning, interpretive meaning, the meaning of an emotion, or an abstract idea, or the meaning of an expression) they are attempting to restrict the contextuality of meaning as fully experienced by eliminating or ignoring the majority of the interrelated conceptual associations at play as the entire constitutive framework is applied to the present situation and instead focus on a limited few that pertain specifically to

aspect under investigation. I certainly don't condemn this as it is entirely necessary to ask such questions and to avoid getting lost in the infinite regresses that often results in pursuing questions of meaning as such.

However, too often communication scholars, philosophers of language and linguists alike will blindly strip meaning of its constitutive associations and restrict it to its derivative forms without paying heed to the depth that is lost. I do not propose that when someone walks into a room outraged at what is going on inside and yells "what is the meaning of this?!", that his request to know the meaning of the situation should be met with an exploration into the incomprehensible amount of conceptual associations involved in its happening. Rather, I propose that we recognize that no explanation of the situation could ever be complete due to the nature of meaning as necessarily relational, contextual, integrative, intersubjective, interpretive, and affective. The complex contextuality of meaning gives it a kind of immense fullness that makes it impossible to transmit "effectively", only shared through experience to a greater or lesser degree.

Meaning and the totality of concepts that comprise the framework are reflexively constitutive in that meaning both emerges from and feeds the dynamic interplay between what is encountered in the world and the constitutive framework, presenting ceaseless opportunities for transformative growth. We have already explicated how meaning emerges from the framework's application to present experience, but it remains to be seen how meaning can conversely be the content of concepts and thus maintain the framework's capacity for enabling one's past experiences and future ends to implicitly inform and condition present experience. When meaning emerges through the application of certain concepts and their totality of associations

with what is encountered, the meaning that emerges from that particular occurrence becomes sedimented within the relevant concepts (as shared meaning is sedimented in the collective concepts), deepening their disclosive capacity, and transforming the entire framework. Whenever that concept is employed in the present, it can then bring forth its meaningful contents and unify all past experiences and future hopes involving the concept within a single cohesive, temporally situated, embodied experience.

Upon attempting to grasp how the individual framework could be both a part of the whole collective framework shared in discourse, and simultaneously a whole which encompasses the entirety of one's preconceptions as its constituent parts, it became apparent that extent of contextuality involved in every emergence of meaning is incomprehensible. The framework operates on multiple levels with increasing complexity as it encompasses multiple individual frameworks to form a larger collective framework of shared meaning, as exemplified by language as the worldly manifestation of this collective framework.

Conversely, much like the nature of fractals, the framework may also increase in complexity by turning inwardly to further and further differentiate the aspects of experience, as often occurs when one learns a new skill or specializes in a given discipline and begins to notice ever more subtle distinctions within her world. As the complexity of the framework increases, the formation of ever increasing concepts and relations between them allows for greater and greater division of the world into parts, which then establishes more and more relations between concepts, continuously increasing the potentiality for experience. To clarify my point through contrast, in a very simplistic universe the amount of combinations that can be made between its constituent parts are much more limited. Since one's potentiality for experience is conditioned by

the extent of the available conceptual relations within the whole framework, the tendency for life to increase the complexity of its form increases the complexity of the embodied framework and presents ever more possibilities for Being to explore its own potential.

Further, the temporal and spatial constraints that condition the framework and mark the limits of our potentiality for experience will become less and less restrictive as technological advancements encourage global communication and rapid circulation of ideas to become the norm. Discourse, as the process by which our individual framework interacts with and assimilates the shared meaning of the collective framework, will enable an unprecedented degree of intersubjectivity of meaning as the collective framework expands its reach. Such global developments would provide even further support for the necessity of interpretive dialogue during these critical times.

Finally, if all experience is mediated through the constitutive framework, then how might one account for ineffable experience that are too expansive to be described or expressed? Since Heidegger and Gadamer give language universal significance (i.e. they contend that all experience is linguistic since all concepts are formed and maintained in language), they are unable to sufficiently address how ineffable experiences can be meaningful despite that language is inadequately applicable to them.²⁷ For Heidegger, this stems from a conflation of the constitutive framework with meaning as such.²⁸ According to the present account, the disclosure of meaning is mediated *through* the constitutive framework, but as an experience of relational contextuality, it cannot *be* the framework itself. Therefore, we may account for ineffable experience as that which transcends the linguistic dimension of framework and employs such a

²⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) *Truth and Method*. Trans by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G Marshall. London, Bloomsbury Publishing. p400-403 & 452-453

²⁸ Martin Heidegger (1962) *Being and Time*. Trans Macquarrie & Robinson Oxford: Blackwell

great extent of the past, present and future meaning sedimentated in the framework, that the fullness of the experience is maintained without boundaries normally enforced by language. Perhaps what is encountered is affectively experienced in such a way that the experiential meaning is not immediately differentiated and structured, and yet it is still experienced meaningfully, here and now. In this way, one may have an experience of music or a piece of visual art in which the affective process is mediated through the framework, bringing forth immense associations contextually embedded in one's past and future, while transcending the linguistic dimension of the framework, thus making it impossible to express of the meaning of the experience of encountering that piece of music or art. It is a purely embodied, present experience that wholly captivates us without strict conceptual or linguistic delineation.

Further, it could be argued that spiritual experience is that which transcendence is even more all-encompassing. Perhaps spiritual experience is transcendence beyond not only the constitutive framework, but the temporal and spatial situatedness as well. Experience of meaning as such would be experience that transcends the limits of embodied present consciousness in such a way that one may temporarily hold the capacity to experience themselves as eternal and omnipresent. One may try to interpret the experience after the fact by attempting to make sense of it by fitting it into their already existing framework developed through the language of a particular religious tradition, yet such an interpretation will never encompass the grandiosity and limitlessness of the experience itself.

g. Conclusion of the ontology

The fundamental ontology of human experience proposed here presents experience as the disclosure of meaning which unifies experience (as that which encounters) and the world (as that

which is encountered) in an inextricable relation. Experiential meaning is inherently contextual due to the temporal and spatial situatedness of experience. That is, experience is always embodied and present, and so experiential meaning is always of the here and now within the context of the everywhere and the always. Meaning is relational and contextual in that it is disclosed in the relation between experience and the world as encountered through the three continuous, interrelated processes of affect, understanding, and discourse, that together comprise human experience as it is mediated by the constitutive framework through which the embodied present is made sense of within the context of the past and future.

The process of affect is the way in which experience relates to the world affectively. The process is mediated by the framework of conceptual relations and their emotional dimensions. Emotions are the way affect as experienced through the framework can be conceptualized, differentiated and named. Since affect is a continuous and immediate process, one is always in a state of feeling that is constantly transforming as the framework structures the present experience of world and the present experience of feeling transforms the framework. Meaning that is disclosed in experience always has this affective dimension.

The process of understanding is the way experience immediately (i.e. pre-theoretically) and continuously relates to the world comprehendingly. The framework through which understanding occurs is totality of conceptual relations formed throughout one's lifetime (given by one's historical cultural situation through language), and is thus the totality of potentials ways in the world may be apprehend. The potentiality of meanings given in understanding are restricted and actualized in interpretation so that particular meanings are experienced and not others, and as such meaning as disclosed is always interpretive.

The process of discourse is the way experience relates to the world socially, in that my experience is never my purely my own as it is perpetually bound to experiences of others through meanings that are intersubjectively shared among us. Discourse enables us to form and transform our own conceptual framework by engaging with others through a common shared language, that is in itself a worldly manifestation of the collective framework (the totality of concept and conceptual relations available in one's historical and cultural placement) as that in which shared intersubjective meaning is sedimented. Through discourse, our every encounter with the world and other allows us to engage with and assimilate the collective framework into our own individual framework, uniting the whole with the part through language. As such, our own constitutive framework has a linguistic dimension that helps create the boundaries of the conceptual relations through which the world is revealed to us. Since meaning is disclosed through a framework that is constructed socially through discourse, all meaning is intersubjective.

These three processes that comprise experience are intimately interrelated and mutually arising, all mediated through and recursively transforming a single constitutive framework. Meaning emerges in the relational union of experience and the world as encountered, as the present embodiment of experience occurs within the context of the whole of time and space. Human experience is the disclosure of meaning with the fullness of its relational, contextual, affective, interpretive, intersubjective nature. Such complex nature of meaning prohibits it from ever being "effectively transmitted." However, I believe that meaning can be shared and co-created in between people to a greater or lesser degree. The following two parts of this thesis are an exploration of this belief. In the following Part III, I will present a model of

communication that I have developed which follows from the proposed ontology of human experience in which communication plays a significant role as a fundamental process for the disclosure of meaning and the transformation of the constitutive framework. This model of communication attempts to put forth a theory of what communication is and how it works in a way that recognizes the nature of meaning as relational, contextual, affective, interpretive and intersubjective. In Part IV, I outline the principles of interpretive dialogue; an instructive account I have developed to explore the ways in we can engage in a kind of dialogue that enables meaning to be shared to a greater and greater degree, with the ultimate end goal of engendering personal, relational, and societal growth.

Part III. A Model of Communication: A Transactional Process of Co-creation of Shared Meaning

a. Transmission models of communication

Any account of communication that does not address the complex relational contextuality of meaning embodied in each expression will be limited in its success. Such limitations are exemplified by early linear-transmission models of communication in which a message is transmitted from sender to receiver and the effectiveness of the communication is judged as a matter of whether or not the intended meaning of the speaker was received. Though the limitations of this model have been recognized and new models have been put forth to improve upon it, this transmission model, nevertheless, has greatly influenced the way we commonly conceive of the communication process. The often sought goal of trying to “get behind” what is said to the “real” meaning exemplifies the pervasive influence of this model.

b. Communication as a Transactional Process:

Transactional communication is a collaborative and dynamic process whose interdependent elements continuously change over time. The three interdependent elements of communication are the experience of each communication through their respective constitutive frameworks and the situation in which the communication is occurring. Each of these elements transform in relation to each other as the communication progresses and shared meaning emerges.

The transactional model proposed is a collaborative process between *communicators*, rather than between a sender and receiver. Communication is transactional in that both

communicators interchangeably and sometimes simultaneously engage in both expression and interpretation. Neither is the sender or the receiver. The transactional model acknowledges that each communicator necessarily experiences the interaction through his or her distinct frameworks and recognizes the nature of meaning as relational, contextual, affective, interpretive, and intersubjective. Therefore, meaning could never be transmitted from one communicator to another, as meaning could never be entirely divorced from the framework through which it has emerged.

Instead, meaning may be shared to different degrees as the communicators establish more and more overlap between their respective frameworks by forming new relations between their own preconceptions so that their own potentiality for understanding may encompass the others meaning. As communicators form new conceptual relations, they are continuously transforming their own entire framework through their dynamic engagement with what is said.

c. The Co-creation of Shared Meaning

How can meaning be shared and co-created? Recall that meaning is what is disclosed in the relation between the experiencer and what is experienced, as the present is affectively-interpretively-intersubjectively experienced within the contextual whole mediated by the constitutive framework of conceptual associations. Meaning is created in that every present embodied experience is a unique encounter as the continuously transforming framework reveals the world anew. This constantly transforming relation is thus a continual creation of meaning that is then sedimented in the framework itself.

In communication there are two experiencers encountering the same communication event. Meaning is co-created in that while we are experiencing the event through our own framework, our framework is being transformed as we are able to see the world in a new way through the words of the other, as each expression gives us access to their whole framework as it is applied to the subject matter under discussion. The extent to which the meaning is shared is a matter of degree. Meaning involves the totality of conceptual associations (and their linguistic, emotional dimensions) that are being applied to the present. The degree of shared meaning corresponds to the amount of overlap between their available conceptual associations. For their to be overlap, the linguistic meaning of an expression must be have associations with concepts and emotions in both frameworks. As the framework marks the limits of one's capacity to interpret what is said, each communicator must expand their framework to encompass the other's potentiality for interpretation and expression. Such expansion requires the formation of new associations between linguistic and conceptual-emotional aspects of the framework, which can occur throughout the communication process.

The end goal of communication is not a matter of whether some "intended" meaning was effectively transmitted, nor a matter of laying aside one's preconceptions and biases to empathize with the other's internal world. Rather, I propose that we communicate in order to validate our own existence through the externalization and sharing of the meaning disclosed in our experience so it may be truly heard by others.²⁹ The extent to which we feel "truly heard" is a matter of our capacity to articulate the fullness of our experience and the capacity of others to share in the fullness of that meaning through their own processes of affect, interpretation, and

²⁹ The significance of this need is explored by Michael J. Hyde in *The Life-giving Gift of Acknowledgement*. (Purdue University Press, 2005).

discourse. In the following section I will propose a style of dialogue that may facilitate this kind of shared meaning, and by doing so, provoke personal, relational and collective growth.

Part IV. The Principles of Interpretive Dialogue

Reaching an understanding on the subject matter of a conversation necessarily means that a common language must be first worked out in the conversation. This is not an external matter of simply adjusting our tools; nor is it even right to say that the partners adapt themselves to one another but, rather, in a successful conversation they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. *To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.*³⁰

In this section I have attempted to outline the principles one may follow in order to engage in a kind of interpersonal communication that I called 'Interpretive Dialogue'. Interpretive dialogue expands upon the goal of ordinary, everyday communication of bringing participants to a greater degree of shared meaning in that it ultimately seeks to engender personal, relational and/or collective growth in a purposeful way.

1. *Interpretive dialogue is an art.*

There is no method for how to one ought to conduct interpretive dialogue. A strict step by step plan would close the participant off to the complexities of human experience and deny the all pervasive influence of one's own preconceptions. The art of interpretive dialogue is highly responsive in that it trains the participant to respond openly to the problems the discussion raises to one's own conceptual framework, and adapt their approach accordingly. The art of interpretive dialogue encounters the other not as an object to be studied and known, but rather a being in their own right whose unique way of apprehending the world enables us to co-construct new meanings together. A method of dialogue could never account for the infinite meanings that

³⁰ Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1975) *Truth and Method*. Trans by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G Marshall. London, Bloomsbury Publishing, p387

may arise from the complexity of human experience and the transformation that can occur when two complex beings openly collaborate in dialogue. Thus the following principles are not step by step guides, but rather fundamental features of interpretive dialogue that may be put forth in accordance with the essential structure of interpretation that I have outlined previously. These features are to be heeded in an artful way, meaning that the ways in which they can be followed are creatively manifested in light of the many variables of the present situation encountered, including the distinct conceptual frameworks of those in conversation, their emotional & linguistic associations, their respective intended ends, the subject matter being discussed, the context in which it is discussed, etc. As an art, one's ability to skillfully engage in interpretive dialogue with others continually develops over time through genuine practice. Finally, as an art, the event of interpretive dialogue facilitates the co-creation of meaning within the present that is *mutually sculpted* between participants through the meeting of their distinct formative pasts and envisioned futures.

2. In Interpretive Dialogue, what is held in common between communicators is valued as the starting point from which to expand.

As social beings, we are never entirely isolated from one another in virtue of the common ground we always already fundamentally share; i.e. language. By recognizing the constitutive nature of language as the intersubjective framework through which our own conceptual framework is formed, we are able to view participants in dialogue not as isolated subjects but as always already inherently connected within the intersubjective common ground that language provides. Under this view, the meaning of an expression is not merely a representation of one's

intended internal meaning, but rather is a development of (and thus rooted in) one's own experiential meaning as mediated through their entire conceptual framework and as such is an expression of their experience of being. We may share in this meaning to the extent that our own framework encompasses a certain degree of the other's conceptual relations. Language is that which makes such overlap possible, as linguistic meaning is the sedimentation of expression meaning, and as such it remains rooted in meaning as experienced, though it is a restriction and standardization of such. I understand the meaning of what is said in virtue of how it fits within my own conceptual framework, which, like that of the other's, was formed within the common language through which the dialogue is presently occurring. Interpretive dialogue embraces this conception of language as common ground as a starting point from which we must work to further develop and deepen the shared understanding it enables.

Beyond what is given in language, participants in dialogue may hold in common any number of past experiences or future hopes that may also serve as starting points in establishing an initial sense of connection. For example, the non-profit organization, Parents Circle - Families Forum, attempts to open up dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians whose family members have been killed in the conflict. This shared experience of grief as a result of Israeli-Palestine conflict establishes a common ground on which dialogue may occur between members of the opposing sides. Rami Elhanan, an Israeli participant in the forum, writes in her personal story, "We must be prepared to listen to 'the other'. Because if we will not know how to listen to the other's story we won't be able to understanding the source of his pain and we should not expect the other to understand our own pain. Here is where it begins and here it will end."³¹

³¹ Rami Elhanan (2006) "Parents Circle Families Forum - Personal Stories: Replacing Pain with Hope" <http://www.theparentscircle.org/Story.aspx?ID=415#.VWUnEGRViko>

On a more local scale, what is held in common may be the shared goal of building a playground in the neighborhood, and so also perhaps also a shared love for their children. Though they may disagree on the means to achieve this goal, they may begin interpretive dialogue by first explicitly establishing this connection in feeling and intention & creating a sense of mutual identification, and thus build a solid foundation on which to discuss their differences in perspective.

3. In interpretive dialogue, differences in perspective are acknowledged and celebrated.

Rather than assuming the similarities between participants in dialogue, and instead acknowledging the differences in perspectives and the limits of our understanding, participants may uncover their own hidden preconceptions and biases that enable their understanding, while also allowing new meanings to emerge from engaging with the others perspective.³²

When differences in perspective are acknowledged and brought forth during interpretive dialogue, our own conceptual framework is made available to us through the recognition that certain concepts that we would normally use are inapplicable to the current situation. This is no small point. In contrast to other approaches in communication scholarship, miscommunication is not something to be avoided but rather is the springboard from which deeper understanding and

³² The former assertion - revealing hidden preconceptions - is related to Heidegger's analysis of the breakdown of a tool. Heidegger examines one's experience when trying to use a tool that has broken and asserts that when our typical understanding of it as tool breaks down, the network of relations through which the meaning of that tool is mediated becomes available to us for reflection. All the concepts within our own conceptual framework that are related to that tool - the concepts in virtue of which we can encounter the tool comprehendingly- are illuminated in our discovery that they are suddenly inapplicable to the current situation.

personal growth can take place.³³ This ‘breakdown’ in communication has the ability to show us what is normally hidden from us, namely the framework through which the world is understood.

For example, imagine a conversation with a friend regarding the tendency for fathers to be overprotective. After talking for a few minutes, your friend admits that their own father was an alcoholic and left when they were a child. As a result, it now becomes clear that your concept of ‘father’ (e.g. as perhaps inherently interrelated with your concepts of ‘overprotective’, ‘loving’, and ‘supportive’, etc.) through which you are understanding the dialogue, is unsuited in understanding your friend’s experience as their concept of ‘father’ is involved in a very different set of conceptual relations (e.g. ‘abandonment’, ‘unreliable’, ‘destructive’, etc.). The recognition of such differences in perspective allow us to recognize our own assumptions and in doing so we can find more suitable concepts and form new conceptual relations, so that a greater degree of shared meaning may be reached.

The strength of interpretive dialogue lies in its appreciation of the differences between people as that which brings to light our own hidden structure of understanding and through this we may transform our own framework in such a way that new potentiality for meaning can emerge, thus increasing our capacity to apprehend the world and others in a multiplicity of ways. In this way, it is through recognizing our differences that we may establish similarities with others³⁴ and are able to gain access to their world in a more genuine way.

³³ A psychology/linguistic experiment has provided much evidence in support of this principle through their findings that “adults routinely process language egocentrically, adjusting to the other’s perspective only when they make an error.” Boaz Keysar, Dale J. Barr, & William Horton. (1998) “The Egocentric Basis of Language Use: Insights From a Processing Approach.” *American Psychological Society*. Cambridge University Press, p46.

³⁴ Epley et al. (2004) found that participants in communication often perform egocentric biases by overly assuming that the other has the same common ground of information. Further, they found that this egocentric effect was lessened when the participants in communication were made aware of their differences in perspective.

4. *The approach of interpretive dialogue is to actively seek to expand one's own meaning through genuine questioning.*

As we have seen, it is impossible to understand anything outside one's own preconceptions, as it is in virtue of our preconceptions that understanding is made possible at all. Thus, seeking to "put yourself in the other's shoes" or to see the situation "without bias" is an incoherent and impossible notion. It is only through the expansion of one's own potentiality for experience through the formation of new conceptual associations that one's constitutive framework may overlap, to some degree, that of the other's, thus expanding upon the common ground that allows for new meanings to emerge between them.

This may be achieved through genuine questioning. As Palmer states, "Questioning then, is a way that man contends with and draws Being into showing itself."³⁵ In interpretive dialogue, questioning is used to help the other to expand upon their account so that one may gain a more genuine picture of the way in which the meaning of what is discussed is disclosed to the other. In other words, the questioner seeks to bring out into the open the conceptual-linguistic-emotional associations that constitute the meaning of what is said. In order to grasp the full meaning of what is said, one must gather more information of the subject matter's relation to the whole framework. This examination of the part (the meaning of what is said) to the whole (the conceptual framework through which the meaning emerges) is accomplished through genuine questioning of the other.

The inclusion of the word 'genuine' is meant to distinguish this type of questioning from questions which do not strive towards truth through the transformation of oneself, but instead

³⁵ Palmer, Richard E. (1969) *Hermeneutics*. Evanston, Northwestern University Press, p150.

seek to merely confirm one's own preconceptions through manipulative questioning. Genuine questioning involves effortful listening that is not distracted by thinking of what to say next, but is fully attentive to what is said and responds with questions that allow for elaboration. In doing so, the partners in dialogue may further clarify how the linguistic meaning of what is said relates to the experiential meaning that constitutes their conceptual framework, thus enabling them to reach a shared understanding of the subject matter through the overlap of their respective conceptual frameworks.

5. Interpretive dialogue requires a profound openness that allows the subject matter to be revealed through others.

For Gadamer, “real experience is that in which man becomes aware of his finiteness.”³⁶ One must be open to the potential for truth in what is expressed by the other despite the challenges it may present to one's own beliefs, and so simultaneously they must be open to the finiteness of their own perspective in its inherent inability to encompass all potential meanings of the subject matter. Openness is the recognition that the framework through which the world is revealed is historically situated and thus is inherently limited in its reach, and the recognition that interpretation can never encompass all potential meanings, since the subject matter can always be presented in new ways. To engage in interpretive dialogue openly is not to seek definitive knowledge but rather, it is to accept this continuous transformational process as never final. It is to recognize that the infinite nature of meaning can only be accessed through our finite capacity

³⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1975) *Truth and Method*. Trans by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G Marshall. London, Bloomsbury Publishing, p320

to apprehend it, and to embrace the continual restructuring of the finite framework through which the infinite is encountered.

Interpretive dialogue requires recognition of the potential for truth of the other's words. The kind of 'openness' prescribed here does not suggest one ought to lay aside their own beliefs to be open to the other, since it is in virtue of having already available preconceptions that we can make sense of what is said at all. Rather, openness welcomes new conceptual relations to be formed so that new meanings may emerge as the subject matter is experienced through our continuously modified framework.

Our perspective is necessarily finite in that it is a *particular* orientation to the world and as such it cannot access every potential orientation (though it may continuously expand its reach). Therefore, concern for a kind objective account of the subject matter is misguided and preoccupation with who is 'right' or 'wrong' prevents one from understanding the subject matter in light of its multiplicity of potential meanings; i.e. the multiplicity of ways it may be experienced. When participants interact with an openness to the disclosive capacity of the other's speech and an openness to the inherent limits of their own understanding, the art of dialogue "consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength."³⁷ One must listen with a desire to "find what is different yet applicable to one's own position."³⁸ This notion is often absent in discussion in the form of debates and heated discussions in which a defense of one's beliefs is of utmost importance. In practicing the art of interpretive dialogue we learn to feel comfortable with putting our whole conceptual framework

³⁷ Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1975) *Truth and Method*. Trans by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G Marshall. London, Bloomsbury Publishing, p376.

³⁸ Deetz, Stanley (1978) "Conceptualizing human understanding: Gadamer's hermeneutics and American Communication Studies" *Communication Quarterly*, 26. p 20

at risk for the sake of allowing ourselves to be open to the subject matter as it discloses itself to us in a new light through the Other.

Such openness is by no means easy. In fact, there are several natural human tendencies that work against our capacity for openness. Human beings are biologically predisposed to experience uncomfortable cognitive dissonance when their own beliefs or ideas are threatened, often leading us to avoid cognitive dissonance and protect our self-image by limiting our capacity to grasp the opposing ideas. Second, our brains constantly seek to save mental energy by using heuristics (i.e. mental shortcuts) to automatically process new information below our conscious awareness, making us less able to be made aware of things that do not fit into this limited structure. Third, human motives of maintaining power, control, authority, and financial gain are often all-consuming and prevent the fostering of humility and openness. To counteract these human tendencies and maintain a sense of openness in dialogue requires the cultivation of self-awareness and mindfulness, the capacity for effortful listening, and dis-identification with one's own framework (i.e. the recognition that 'I am not my thoughts' so that we may transform the framework without subconsciously posing a threat to one's own existence). However, it remains to be seen why one would participate in interpretive dialogue and seek to overcome such natural human tendencies.

6. The goal of interpretive dialogue is personal, relational, and collective growth.

For this reason, it is not possible to force another to engage in interpretive dialogue. To practice interpretive dialogue is purely a personal decision that can only be pursued by the individual him/herself, for the sake of personal, relational, and collective growth. However, there

is reason to believe that by following these principles ourselves, we may lead by example and others may become more likely to engage in such purposeful, artful, open dialogue themselves as they see the fruits of such practice.

The goal of all communication is to reach shared meaning and to evoke the feeling of being truly heard by establishing overlap in the participant's conceptual, emotional, and linguistic associations within the framework that mediates our every expression. Interpretive dialogue seeks to share meaning to such a degree that encourages profound and collaborative transformation on multiple levels. Each level for potential growth will be discussed in turn:

Personal growth:

“Man only knows himself insofar as he knows the world” -Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The extent of our potential ways of experiencing the world are marked by the limits of our embodied and temporally situated framework. As was discussed previously, this framework - comprised of our categorized past experiences and envisioned futures - is that which mediates our every experience, and is thus typically hidden from us, as the lens of our eyes is hidden from our sight. Through interpretive dialogue we may gain access to this hidden framework, and transform it by forming new associations by merely engaging with others, and using their perspective to experience the subject matter anew. The principles outlined here seek to facilitate and promote such self awareness and the development of new associations between concepts, thus expanding one's potentiality for experiencing the world.

To illustrate such expansion of potentiality for experience, imagine the following scenario: A security guard is sitting on a bench looking out at the fog that covers the property he

is supposed to guard for the remainder of the evening. He grimaces at the moist air and envisions an uncomfortable night spent entirely outside walking around the property in slightly damp clothing. Though perhaps overly simplistic, for our purposes we can say that in the security guard's framework, the concept of "fog" holds an association with the concept of "unpleasant" and "uncomfortable" and so in the present he interprets the fog *as* unpleasant and uncomfortable. As the security guard is sitting on the bench, mentally preparing himself for the evening in store for him, a student exits the building behind him and greets him with a "good evening." Before heading to her car she expresses outloud, "Oh my, the fog is so beautiful, it makes everything look so surreal." Under the present account, such an expression can be conceived of as a manifestation of the student's entire framework as it is applied the present situation, and as such it provides the security guard access to an entire worldview in which "fog" is bound to a different totality of associations, one of which is the concept of "beauty." By merely being present to hear the student's expression, and being open to the potential truth of it, the security guard has expanded his potential for experiencing the fog. A new association has been formed within his own framework between his concepts of "fog" and "beauty," and thus the affective dimensions of each. Therefore, by expanding his potentiality for experience through an encounter with another, his evening spent amidst the fog may be beautiful rather than uncomfortable and unpleasant.

Such transformation is the goal of interpretive dialogue, as it allows us to continuously see ourselves and our world in a new light, cultivate awareness of our preconceptual biases and provides the opportunity to let go of what no longer serves us and strengthen the conceptual associations that are in line our convictions. By expanding and deepening our own framework,

new opportunities may emerge in our lives as we suddenly become able to *see* them when they fit within our framework *as* a potential for the first time.

Personal development can be achieved through interpretive dialogue in that the expansion of one's possibilities of experience enables a greater depths of meaning and the greater capacity to experience the multiplicity of ways the subject matter can be encountered. In such a way, one is gaining help along their search for truth through their every engagement with others.

Relational growth:

Whether a relationship is between family, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, teachers, students, or merely strangers, the power of validating the other's experience by allowing them to feel truly heard and understood is transformative and empowering. Through interpretive dialogue we may, to some degree, gain access to another's worldview and thus lessen the feeling of isolation we, as humans, so often experience. However, the capacity to gain access to another's worldview requires us to expand our own so there may be an overlap between them. As this overlap develops, the relationship may become stronger as it rests more and more on a foundation of shared meaning and a deeper intimacy may emerge as familiarity with the other's worldview increases.

In this way, the motivation to strengthen or heal a relationship can provide enough reason for one to practice interpretive dialogue in their everyday life. Through interpretive dialogue, new relationships can begin by establishing a strong foundation and old relationships can become healthier over time. Old wounds of the relationship can be worked on by learning to communicate in a way that brings out what is hidden and allows it to be heard fully and validated

so they can begin to heal. In families, intergenerational barriers can be overcome as members learn to see and respect each others differences. In friendships, feelings and ideas may be shared with great intimacy and genuine empathy. In professional relationships, intentions can be communicated with honesty and integrity and concerns can be expressed with trust. In teacher/student relationships, new information can be passed down in a way that is relevant and easily sharable. There is limitless potential for transforming our relationships to be more strong and healthy through interpretive dialogue- a capacity that is undoubtedly needed in our modern society so often characterized by alienation. Relational growth is essential for providing fertile ground for both personal and collective growth.

Collective growth:

Through interpretive dialogue, one learns to put their own framework at risk of transformation without feeling threatened. By acknowledging differences in perspectives (and thus our hidden biases) and finding overlap in relations and expanding that overlap (e.g. a common goal), compromises may be achieved that respectfully take into account the perspectives and concerns of all those involved. This is an advantage at multiple levels: on a local scale where community development and engagement is very much needed as well as a societal scale where global issues impact a great number of lives.

A community can thrive when its members are varied in interests and skills yet united under a common purpose. Interpretive dialogue is well suited for enabling the growth and strength of community by starting from what is held in common and moving towards shared meaning through bringing out differences with openness and asking for elaboration and

clarification with genuine questioning. Such establishment and strengthening of communities is of utmost importance as individuals increasingly lack political influence and struggle to care for both the youth and the elderly on their own. Communities can take many forms and have varied intentions - a large family, neighborhood/geographic location, professional/unions, political orientation, personal interests, learning/academic communities, support groups, etc. Regardless of the foundation for the community in which one is a part, they all provide a sense of confidence through strength in numbers and lessen the growing feeling of isolation and hopelessness. Communities establish a feeling of unity in shared purpose or experience. Moreover, though interpretive dialogue may only be conducted by individuals, it may nonetheless be used in a group setting in order to reach collective decisions both within and between communities.

On a larger scale, interpretive dialogue can aid in solving major social issues by emphasizing the need for shared meaning to first establish mutual understanding, before trying to reach some compromise. All social issues are rooted in the perspectives and actions of individuals, and as such may be addressed through more grass-roots efforts to achieve empathy through interpersonal dialogue (as is exemplified by the Parents Circle Families Forum organization).

In this way, interpretive dialogue may serve as a path to harmonious existence on both a communal and societal level. This is not some idealistic dream but rather an achievable vision when pursued earnestly by individuals seeking personal, relational, and collective growth. It is not achieved overnight, but rather is practiced every day as we seek to overcome counteractive human tendencies that inhibit our ability to be open to that which challenges our own

perspective. Transformation does not occur at the hands of some easy, top-down solution, but rather is the result of our continual, arduous effort as individuals to be more aware of our hidden structures and change our habitual responses. All change, on any level, begins with the individual and their desire to contribute. As such, it is imperative that we maintain our motivation and do our part to usher in a new way of living in heterogeneous harmony where the multiplicity of perspectives are not only respected but celebrated for enabling us to collectively explore the depths and varieties of human experience.

V. Suggestions for Further Exploration & Research

The following are suggestions for how the present account can be expanded upon in the future. First, the role of affect ought to be explored more extensively, as it is the least examined of the three interrelated processes of experience, despite being equally as significant and constitutive as understanding and discourse. Beyond the expansion of the ontological account, the highly significant role of affect and emotion for interpretive dialogue should at least be included, if not given its own principle.³⁹

Second, how the conclusions drawn throughout the present discussion relate to the formation and maintenance of one's self-identity should be more explicitly presented. Specifically, an explanation of self-identity as the continuously transforming totality of conceptual associations one has with the concept "me" (including the emotional and intersubjective dimensions of every association) ought to be given.

Third, the overall account may benefit from a more nuanced explication of the temporal and embodied situatedness of experience in relation to the potentiality and actuality of human existence. Though mentioned briefly throughout the work, there is more to be said of the *framework* as equivalent to our *potentiality for experience*, and more can be said of *meaning* as equivalent to *actualization as experience*, as it emerges in the present relation between experiencer and what is experienced, as it is mediated and contextualized by framework through the interrelated processes of affect, understanding, and discourse.

³⁹ The extreme importance of affect in facilitating openness to opposing & controversial ideas was illustrated extensively in episode 555 of popular podcast, *The American Life*, titled "The Incredible Rarity of Changing Your Mind." The episode can be streamed online: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/555/the-incredible-rarity-of-changing-your-mind>

Fourth, the model of communication as a transactional process requires further elaboration, explanation through concrete examples, and (if possible) illustrations through diagrams. The extreme complexity and contextuality of each moment of communication makes an attempt at such efforts quite difficult, but given enough time and perseverance I do believe that a thorough and clear explanation is possible.

Fifth, an added appendix containing a list of other models of communication, language, meaning, etc., would provide instructive to readers both familiar with the relevant discourse, as well as those unfamiliar and looking for additional perspectives. Such a list ought to include an explanation of how these models relate to the current account (i.e. an explication of similarities despite differences in vocabulary, and differences with a defence for the chosen route).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the present work is lacking in its current state without the supplemental account of practical applications of the principles of interpretive dialogue. The principles remain mostly in abstract terms and would perhaps be easier for the reader to comprehend and apply to their own life if they were accompanied by concrete examples of how they have been applied in specific situations. The integrity of such reports ought to be maintained by following the guidelines of qualitative research⁴⁰ and by striving for a kind of validity that is consistent with the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger⁴¹. The potential practical applications of Interpretive Dialogue are immense, but we must pursue them and sharing such accounts (while always maintaining self-reflexivity) in order to collectively judge its success and adjust the principles accordingly. Only then may theory and practice

⁴⁰ As outlined by Sarah Tracy (2013) in *Qualitative Research Methods: collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

⁴¹ Such an account of validity is expertly outlined by John Stewart (1994) in "An Interpretive Approach to Validity in Interpersonal Communication Research" *Interpretive Approaches to Interpersonal Communication*. Edited by Kathryn Carter and Mick Presnell. SUNY Press: Albany. p45-82.

function in a dynamic synergy that is capable of bringing about profound personal, relational, and collective transformation.

VI. Bibliography

Ahmed, Sarah. (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd Edition. Edinburgh University Press

Arnett, Ronald C. (2007) "Interpretive Inquiry as Qualitative Communication Research" *Qualitative Communication Research*, 8:1.

DiCenso, James J. (1990) *Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth: A Study in the Work of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur*. Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia.

Deetz, Stanley (1978) "Conceptualizing human understanding: Gadamer's hermeneutics and American Communication Studies" *Communication Quarterly*, 26. p12-23.

Deetz, Stanley (1973) "Words without things: Toward a social phenomenology of language" *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59. 40-51.

Deetz, Stanley (1982) "Hermeneutics and Research in Interpersonal Communication." *Interpersonal Communication: essays in phenomenology and hermeneutics*. ed. by Joseph J. Pilotta. The Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, Inc.

Epley, N., Keysar, B., VanBoven, L., & Gilovich, T. (2004). "Perspective Taking as Egocentric Anchoring and Adjustment." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87, 327-339.
<http://psychology.uchicago.edu/people/faculty/keysar/23_jpsp2004.pdf>

Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1975) *Truth and Method*. Trans by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G Marshall. London, Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. (1977) *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans by David E Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press

Hawes, Leonard C. (1977) "Toward a Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Communication" *Communication Quarterly*, 25. p42-50

Heidegger, Martin. (1962) *Being and Time*. Trans Macquarrie & Robinson Oxford: Blackwell

Hyde, Michael J & Smith, Craig. (1979) "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen but Unobserved Relationship" *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 67. p247-363

Hyde, Michael J. (1982) "Transcendental Philosophy and Human Communication" *Interpersonal Communication: Essays in phenomenology and hermeneutics*. Edited by Joseph J. Pilotta.

Hyde, R Bruce. (1994) "Listening Authentically: A Heideggerian Perspective on Interpersonal Communication" *Interpretive Approaches to Interpersonal Communication*. Edited by Kathryn Carter and Mick Presnell. SUNY Press: Albany.

The Hermeneutics Reader. (2006) Edited by Kurt Mueller-Vollmer. New York: Continuum

Keysar, Boaz, Barr, Dale J, Horton, William S. (1998) "The Egocentric Basis of Language Use: Insights from a Processing Approach" *The American Psychological Society*. Cambridge University Press. p46-50.

<http://psychology.uchicago.edu/people/faculty/keysar/12_keysarbarrhorton.pdf>

Krznaric, Roman. (2014) *Empathy: A handbook for revolution*. London: Random House.

Mulhall, Stephen. (1996) *Heidegger's Being and Time*. London: Routledge.

Palmer, Richard E. (1969) *Hermeneutics*. Evanston, Northwestern University Press.

Russon, John. (2008) *Human Experience*. Albany; SUNY Press.

Stewart, John (1981) "Philosophy of Qualitative Inquiry: Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Communication Research" *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 67. p109-121

Stewart, John. (1983) "Interpretive Listening: An Alternative to Empathy" *Communication Education*, 32:4. p379-391.

Stewart, John (1986) "Speech and human being: A complement to semiotics." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 72. p55-73.

Stewart, John . (1994) "An Interpretive Approach to Validity in Interpersonal Communication Research" *Interpretive Approaches to Interpersonal Communication*. Edited by Kathryn Carter and Mick Presnell. SUNY Press: Albany. p45-82.

Stewart, John (1995) *Language as Constitutive Articulate Contact: Toward a Post-Semiotic Philosophy of Communication*. Albany: SUNY Press

Stewart, John. (2006) *Bridges Not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication*. 9th Edition. Edited By John Stewart. New York: NY: McGraw Hill.

Tracy, Sarah (2013) *Qualitative Research Methods: collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

White, Kenneth (1994) "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophy of Language: A Constitutive-Dialogic Approach to Interpersonal Understanding." *Interpretive Approaches to Interpersonal Communication*. Edited by Kathryn Carter and Mick Presnell. SUNY Press: Albany. p83-114

"The Incredible Rarity of Changing Your Mind" *This American Life*. Episode 555
<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/555/the-incredible-rarity-of-changing-your-mind>

The Parent Circles-Families Forum. <http://www.theparentcircle.com/>

Cover Image: "The Glyph Maker" by Charles. L. Gilchrist. (Fractal scaling of the Flower of Life pattern.)