

Edmundo Balsemão Pires  
Burkhard Nonnenmacher  
Stefan Büttner-von Stülpnagel  
*Editors*

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Kirill Postoutenko  
*Sankt-Petersburg / Konstanz*

**SOCIAL IDENTITY AS A COMPLEMENTARITY OF  
PERFORMANCE AND PROPOSITION  
(THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS OF  
REFLEXIVE AND INTERACTIVE IDENTITY)**

**I. Parrot and Monsieur Jourdain: Obscurity of Social Identity and Necessity of Coordination between Self-Reflexivity and Code-Reference.**

In Daniel Defoe's novel *The Life and Strange Suprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner (1719)* there is a handful of touching passages which put the main message of the novel – hosanna to the moral and economical individualism – into question. Indeed, even such a courageous and enterprising survivor of a shipwreck as Robinson Crusoe may occasionally feel lonely and get sentimental. Before Robinson gets acquainted with another human being on an island, his choice of conversation partners is reduced to a parrot, able (as many parrots do) to imitate human speech. It is this humble creature that moves a stern and seasoned sailor to tears:

*I was so dead asleep at first, being fatigued with rowing, for part of the day, and with walking the latter part, that I did not wake thoroughly; but dozing thought I dreamed that somebody spoke to me; but as the voice continued to repeat, 'Robin Crusoe, Robin Crusoe,' at last I began to wake more perfectly, and was at first dreadfully frightened, and started up in the utmost consternation; but no sooner were my eyes open, but I saw my Poll sitting on the top of the hedge; and immediately knew that it was he that spoke to me; for just in such bemoaning language I had used to talk to him and teach him; and he had learned it so perfectly that he would sit upon my finger, and lay his bill close to my face and cry, 'Poor Robin Crusoe! Where are you? Where have you been? How came you here?' and such things as I had taught him. However, even though I knew it was the parrot, and that indeed it could be nobody else, it was a good while before I could compose myself.<sup>1</sup>*

It comes as no surprise that Robinson Crusoe was relieved to hear parrot and not a human stranger waking him up: at home, domesticated alien is usually preferable to the unfamiliar conspecific. What seems to be more remarkable is the emotional outburst of the

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Defoe. *The Life and Strange Suprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719). - Daniel Defoe. *The Novels*. Vol.1. London, 2008, p. 162.

pet owner who was perfectly aware that he was using his Poll as a dummy, a sort of natural recording device unable to decode human language. Why was Robinson so deeply touched?

It seems like Defoe's protagonist indulged in the illusion of conversation in which both sides, linguistically speaking, were "taking turns", i.e. paying attention to the other and constructing their sayings accordingly – something he sorely missed in his involuntary solitude. This illusion of understanding between a parrot and a man was created not only by the ability of a pet to replicate his owner's sayings - if that were the case, a tape recording of Robinson's voice would have produced a similar effect, which is unlikely. Rather, it was the actual presence of a being, endowed with a similar speech apparatus (vocal chords) and a manifested ability to use it in a way noticeable to humans ("singing") which provided a fertile ground for planting the idea of mutuality. A false syllogism worked: two simple ideas of Robinson - '*I understand what I say*' and '*I understand what the parrot says*' lead him to believe, if only for a moment, to the symmetrical pair of beliefs - '*The parrot understands what he says*' and '*The parrot understands what I say*'.

Astonishingly, all the four statements could be true if the criteria of mutuality is not strictly enforced. Indeed, the birds know that they sing, have a definite repertory of messages and use them purposefully (in response to their own needs or environmental circumstances).<sup>2</sup> This means that Pell was not only saying something in Robinson's language, but was simultaneously saying something in his own language; moreover, to the extent that he was able to perceive sounds produced by Robinson, the parrot could have had his own understanding of what the latter was saying to him. Robinson Crusoe, in his turn, understood his own speech addressed to Pell, and Pell's "words" addressed to him. The fact that a parrot and a man do have some sort of conversation is due to the circumstances that 1) both recognize communication as a specialized social practice based on distal interaction and reciprocity (the parrot learns and imitates Robinson's words using the same organs as his mentor does, and Robinson listens to Pell and sheds tears) and 2) both recognize themselves as subjects (stable and active participants) in this communication.<sup>3</sup> But the fact that precludes the *real* communication between a man and a parrot is not the absence of self- and other-understanding in any of them but the lack of a social mechanism which would make these understandings comparable and couple them into a single interaction practice.

Let's adjust the content of the "conversation" to the article's topic and imagine that all Robinson was saying was '*I am Robinson Crusoe*' (in human language) and all his parrot was saying was '*I am Pell*' (also in human language). Surprisingly, the situation would not change much. In Robinson's statement we may detect two distinct meanings of 'I' - *self-reflexivity* (a stable and active agency producing *this saying here and now*) and *code-reference* ('a socially accepted form of referring to all such agencies *in this language*'). In Pell's saying,

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<sup>2</sup> Lesley J. Rogers, Gisela Kaplan. *Songs, Roars and Rituals: Communication in Birds, Mammals and Other Animals*. Cambridge 2000, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Stability and activity are understood here as two general properties of living systems – which are the organizational closeness and the ability to react to the environment (see, for instance: Erich Jantsch. *The Self-Organizing Universe*. Oxford, 1990, p. 29). In the current context "stability" and "activity" mean "being a separate living being" (at least for the duration of the conversation) and "being able to communicate".