

POSITIONING THEORY AND MORAL STRUCTURE OF CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

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ABSTRACT

In every scientific endeavour one must try to locate the sources of activity. In physics these are fields, in chemistry ions and so on. What are they in social sciences?

Persons.

Persons are morally protected embodied centres of reflexive consciousness. They are actively engaged in deploying bodies of knowledge in joint activities with others. The sense of personhood is analysable into a sense of living a continuous trajectory in space and time – tied to mode of embodiment, and a sense of 'self'. This comprises beliefs about one's past life, capacities and powers, social location and so on, including bodies of knowledge and belief apropos of correct and proper action. The sense of one's selfhood does require a conversational community, and a developmental psychology such as that of Vygotsky.

The duality of personhood is reflected in the grammar of the 1st person, which indexes the content of an utterance with the place and moment of utterance, with the presumed moral status of the speaker, and, in some cultures, with the social status of the speaker relative to interlocutors.

Social constructionists believe that people are the only sources of efficacy in the human world, apart from the material effects of the environment. However, people can do only what they know how to do. Boundaries of social knowledge are boundaries of intelligible social action. Moreover, people do only what they believe is the right thing to do, and, of course not always then.

Positioning theory is an analytical scheme that can be used to reveal the inter-relation between speech acts, social meanings of what is said or done;

local clusters of rights and duties that influence what people choose to do out of all they know how to do; and story lines, the cultural schemas for living out strips of everyday life.

Constraints on and opportunities for action arise through *local* acts of positioning.

THE TRUE DOMAIN OF THINKING

To appreciate the significance of positioning analyses one must first reflect on some main features of the relations between language and thought and language and action. Thinking has many forms, but the form that is of paramount importance for most people is thinking as the use of cognitive tools to carry out the tasks of everyday life. The most important cognitive tools are symbols, usually words and other language like devices, and models and other forms of iconic representation. Only recently has it been realised by psychologists that thinking can be communal as well as individual, public as well as private.

That insight leads to reflections on the question of where and when people are thinking. The domain of thinking is intrapersonal and interpersonal. Thinking is not only an Individual – Personal activity but also a Social – Public one. For example, the process of remembering includes conversational as well as introspective activities. Members of a family group, or a committee, or the golf club reminisce, each contributing something to the construction of a version of the past. It is communally constructed, and each member takes away with them some version of that version on which further action is often based. It follows that there are exterograms, records of the past outside the brain of a person, as well as engrams, traces of the past incorporated in the long term memory. There are legible material things, such as diaries, photos and monuments. There are the relevant sayings and doings of other people. These are all resources for acts of remembering, often over riding personal recollections.

There are plenty of examples of thinking spanning both the Individual – Personal Social – Public domains. In deciding what to do a person will spend time on private reflections of the consequences of a plan of action, perhaps attempting to imagine the future in some concrete way. However, often there are public discussions; people go about seeking advice on the best course of action. There are influences from the unstated opinions of others which may show up indirectly in what they do and say. There are

informal varieties of the formal decision procedures involving agendas, resolutions, amendments, votes and so on.

Clearly interpersonal relations must enter into communal forms of remembering, deciding, problem solving and so on. Among the most important are rights and duties and their distribution among the people involved.

VYGOTSKY'S PRINCIPLE

According to Vygotsky all higher order mental processes exist twice; once in the relevant group, influenced by culture and history, and then in the mind of the individual. The development of a human being is dependent as much on interpersonal relations as it is on individual maturation. Here is the famous passage from Vygotsky (1978: 57):

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals (Vygotsky, 1978: 57).

The appropriation of public-social practices as personal-individual skills comes about by a kind of psychological symbiosis. When an activity is in the Zone of Proximal Development, Vygotsky's rather clumsy phrase, the less skilled member of a dyad tries to accomplish some task (which may be recognizing the task required in the first place). If the junior member is unable to carry through the performance correctly, the senior or more skilled member supplements the efforts of the less competent in such a way as to bring the task to a successful conclusion. The junior member copies the contributions of the senior next time the opportunity arises. Thus individual – personal skills are transferred in social – public performances.

Sometimes the contribution of the more skilled member of a group is hands-on showing and guiding, sometimes it is accomplished by words and other signs. Whatever device is employed one thing is of paramount importance in the unfolding of such an episode – the distribution and acknowledgement of rights and duties among the members. In both communal thought processes and in Vygotskian development the distribution of power in the group is closely tied in with the assignments and appropriations of rights and duties.

It is important to emphasize that Vygotsky's ideas about how a human mind is formed do not imply social determinism. People are capable of and actually do transform the cognitive skills, moral principles and so on, that they acquire by psychological symbiosis. Some of these transformations are spontaneous; some are due to the influence of other persons, life events, even the material environment. The human mind is dynamic.

So too is the moral order of close encounters.

THE CONCEPT OF A PERSON

The concept of 'person' is intimately linked with manifold moral considerations. Part of my aim in this paper is to take a somewhat different stance to the way these linkages come to be and are maintained. Discussions of moral attributes of persons in society, and particularly with regard to law and economics, begin from the assumption that the structures in which the concepts of 'person' are to be considered are of very broad dimensions. Perhaps consideration is given via reflections on the rights of human beings as recognized and protected in international law, which presupposes at least potentially a scope as large as humanity. Discussions of the effect of globalization the economic order of the pre-conception of the person as an economic unit, a fortiori, have a global reference. In this paper my focus is on the creation and maintenance of moral orders and their embedded persons on a very small scale, and in the course of short-lived, even ephemeral human encounters.

DUALITY OF THE CONCEPT OF 'PERSON'

The concept of 'person' has an ontological aspect: a person is member of a loosely bounded domain of basic particulars, singular beings that collectively constitute the world of humanity.

The concept of a 'person' has a moral aspect: being a person attracts certain kinds of normative demands, both on how a person is to be treated, and how a person is to act. Persons are morally protected and morally constrained.

So far so commonplace. However, two recent developments in the philosophical analysis of personhood contribute some novel perspectives on what it is to live as a person in a community of persons. At the same time

these developments raise the perennial issue of the proper balance between rights and duties in a new way.

In keeping with the discursive turn in psychology, the linguistic devices by which personhood is expressed and recognized has become a focus of study. The main thrust has been to deepen and broaden an understanding of the role of pronoun grammars in the discursive construction of social orders.

In keeping with the recent emphasis on the study of very small scale, ephemeral and fine grain social encounters, the study of local moral orders, local distributions of rights and duties to perform acts of various kinds has been a focus of attention.

Taking these trends together leads to an interest in more dynamic aspects of human life than social structures, institutions and roles.

ONTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Every so often a philosopher comes to realise and to remind the rest of us that human life is lived in a world of words and other symbolic devices. Life is, among many other things, a story. Boethius, as Enrico Berti reminds us (Berti, 2005), took the 'rationality' of humanity to be a matter of fact, not only 'reason' but the mastery of discourse. Shotter, following Wittgenstein, imagines the human form of life as an evolving pattern of language games, activities in which the word is an essential ingredient. In accordance with this intuition we might say that persons are eddies or vortices in the great ocean flow of conversation, of symbolic interaction in general. People are speakers and hearers. This has a moral dimension: if my interlocutor is to be required to listen to me, I am equally required to listen to whatever he or she might say. Speaking and listening are internally related aspects of linguistic capacities.

It is also true that persons are embodied centres of reflexive consciousness. The phrase I have chosen to express this aspect of the ontology of personhood already involves a resolution of the debate over the priority of bodily identity and continuity of self-consciousness as the prime criterion for continuous singular personhood. I shall presume that in all practical contexts the prime criteria have equal weight unless special circumstances can be brought into deciding whether this being is one and the same person as that.

The practice of psychiatry, the demands of the law and such matters of commerce as financial responsibility make it a conceptual matter that there is just one person per body. More than one person per body is stigmatised

as Multiple Personality Disorder, and the exotic customs of some strange cultures that sometimes require more than one body to support just one person are indeed presented as strange, even unintelligible.

In this paper I propose to show how the grammar of the first person is the prime device by which these two domains of individuals are bound together into a coherent social order. The linguistic property that makes this possible is 'indexicality', the necessity to know certain personal things about the speaker before the sense of what has been said can be completed.

TEMPORALITY

Not only do the tools of thought and action change with time, but so too do the distributions of rights and duties among a group of people. The individuals involved in communal cognitive activities are the bearers of a complex and labile psychology, some of which can be captured in a discussion of 'selves'. Though the English word 'self' does not translate easily into most other languages, for instance into Spanish, nevertheless the concept can be appropriated as a term of art for scientific purposes. We must take account of how the mutability and multiplicity of self ties in rights and duties in thought and action.

Persons 'have' selves. There seem to be four main items in personhood that the word 'self' is currently used to pick out, in philosophical schools and communities influenced by the use of English as the analytical language.

1. There is the *embodied self*, which comes down to the unity and continuity of a person's point of view and of action in the material world, a trajectory in space and time. The embodied self is singular, continuous and self-identical.
2. Psychologists use the phrase 'self-concept' to refer to the beliefs that people have about themselves, their skills, their moral qualities, their fears and their life courses. But this concept covers a significant variety of sub-concepts.
 - a. There is the *autobiographical self*, the hero or heroine of all kinds of stories. Research has shown how widely the autobiographical selves of real people can differ from story to story. This is not a matter of telling falsehoods, but of differences of emphasis depending on audience and situation.
 - b. There is the *social self* or selves, the personal qualities that a person displays in their encounters with others. This 'self' too is mul-

tiple. We have different repertoires of attributes appropriate for showing in different circumstances.

What can change? Clearly the embodied self is invariant under the kind of transformations that occur in everyday life. Changing jobs or partners, the birth and death of family members, even moving into a new linguistic community, does not disrupt the continuity of the sense of a trajectory of life through space and time. When memories fade and anticipation of the future dims the continuity of self fades with it, and though a living human body is before us sometimes we are forced to acknowledge it is no longer an embodied self. Moreover, the repertoire of social selves and the stories with which one marshals one's life may and do change, sometimes in radical ways.

Persons have rights and duties which are also distributed in a variety of ways, depending on many factors, some of which involve the selves comprising the personhood of an individual. Here we encounter the province of 'positioning theory', the study of the way rights and duties are taken up and laid down, ascribed and appropriated, refused and defended in the fine grain of the encounters of daily lives. The analysis of 'positioning' will occupy the second main section of this paper.

THE LANGUAGE ANGLE

Language is the prime instrument of thought and social action. In following up the line of argument of the discussion so far, we must abandon a widely held presupposition of much psychological and sociological research, namely the stability, transcultural and even transpersonal intelligibility of language. In so far as there are psychologically and sociologically significant varieties of language, so there are many dimensions along which we find multiplicities of selves.

Indexicality

Certain useful expressions, such as 'here', 'now', 'this' and pronouns and inflexions of the first person, cannot be fully understood in any context, unless the listeners are aware of who is speaking, where and when the person is speaking, and various other characteristics the speaker is known or believed to possess, such as moral character. This is the property of indexicality. The content of what is said is completed in sense by use of these special words to index it with the relevant attributes of the speaker.

'Put this here now!' To obey the command the person addressed needs to know who is speaking, where and when the words are being uttered and the right the speaker has to issue such an order.

For the English 'I' we have the following indexical forces:

1. Spatial location of embodied speaker.
2. Moment of utterance.
3. Moral standing of speaker, for example is the speaker known to be reliable.
4. Social status of speaker, for instance what rights and duties the speaker is endowed with or claims for him or herself.

It is easy to see that the grammar of 'I' is a prime device by which the person as speaker is tied to the person as an embodied centre of reflexive consciousness. In this way for all the complexity of its inner nature, each human being is, or should be, one and only one person.

There are many pronoun systems and other person denoting devices in the world's languages. Indo-European languages reflect a sense of self as a unique, independent individual. Oriental languages reflect a sense of self, personhood, in which interdependence is prominent. For example, there are differences in patterns of self-reflection between users of languages in which pronouns index sayings with the speaking individual's responsibility for what is said, largely independently of their social affiliations, family membership and so on, compared with those in which pronouns index speech acts with the family group or social category to which a person belongs. In Japanese there are many first person pronominal expressions, the use of which displays the speaker's and the hearer's sense of relative social position. 'Watakushi' is used to display higher status than is displayed by the use of 'watashi'. There is even a form, 'ore', which can be used to index a speech act as one's own, but which exempts the speaker from the moral commitments of what he might say. ('He' is needed in this account since pronoun use differs between men and women.) Modern urban Japanese speakers largely omit pronouns, reflecting differences in the modern Japanese sense of self from the socially dominated sense of personhood of the past, and, at the same time, a sense of the lingering expressive power of the explicit pronominal forms.

This kind of research, along with ethnographic studies of social customs, the law and so on, enables one to see that while people in Japan, Indonesia and other cultural domains in the East have just as robust a sense of themselves as embodied centres of consciousness, subtle differences in the personhood can be seen in the fine details of the moral patterns of personal encounters.

It is worth noticing that Indo-European languages do not inflect the first or second person for gender or for age, though most inflect the second person for social status. These differences in personhood are marked in different ways. English speakers have various linguistic devices for addressing the old, mostly slightly derogatory. Gender marking appears formally only in the third person in European languages, though it is discernible in the participles. 'Soy cansado' ('I'm tired') can be said only by men, and 'Soy cansada' only by women.

Transitory Significances

Languages are unstable, in the sense that *significance of utterances* is likely to vary from time to time and situation to situation. For example, there are subtle changes of the word 'captain' from its use in ships, teams and planes. Technically context includes indexicality, the contribution to the meaning of an expression from knowledge of the place, time and person of utterance which I have just discussed.

Then there is historicity, the way a word's current use is loaded with its past history. No one can use the words 'twin towers' now in the kind of generic descriptive way for some architectural feature, as it was used before '9/11'.

For the purposes of the presentation of the creation and maintenance of small scale and ephemeral social order the way that social relations partly determine the *moment by moment significance* of utterances will be of paramount importance. For example, take such a simple utterance as 'I am going out; I might be some time'. Think of the way being married sets up a pattern of social relations between a man and a woman and so informs the significance of utterances such as 'I am going out; I might be some time'. And then think of these words as famously uttered by Captain Oates on Scott's ill-fated Antarctic expedition, as he wandered off into the blizzard to relieve his companions of the burden of caring for him. This aspect of the meanings of speaking and acting is one of the central aspects of the field of 'positioning theory'.

MORAL CONSIDERATIONS OF SCALE

Discussion of the moral status of persons in large scale structures, such as national constitutions, international law, globalised economies and so on, have been dominated since the seventeenth century by discussions of rights.

Every Constituent Assembly sets about devising its own Bill of Rights, modelled perhaps on the realization of Tom Paine's rhetorical developments of Lockean political philosophy. Rights legislation is exemplified wonderfully well by the amendments to the American Constitution inspired by Hamilton. I look in vain for a Bill of Duties.

It is no good saying that settling the 'rights of man' settles the matter of duties. These are not reciprocal as *moral* concepts. There are all sorts of non-moral ways in which the assertion of one's rights can be satisfied by the actions of those deemed responsible. For example, there is coercion, there is endless complaining, and there is even the enforcement of action on an idle or venal bureaucrat by a court and so on. A culture of rights in which there is no place for a sense of duty among those delegated to satisfy them, is only too possible. The reciprocal to 'rights' might be no more than a sullen compliance under pressure of demand and the need to fulfil a job description.

However, on the scale at which the processes analyzed by Positioning Theorists take place, there is a growing sense of the relevance of duty as a moral concept, that is as incumbent on one's conscience, a matter of what it is to be a good person. Part of the thrust behind the development of Positioning Theory has been the need those of us who pioneered this approach have felt to revive the sense of duty, as a felt moral demand. There should be no need for the poor to assert their rights. The sense of duty of the better off should have been enough. That it has not been in the last century is a matter of significance.

Foregrounding rights and duties pushes other moral concepts into a secondary place. For example, the virtues of tolerance, benevolence and so on, along with the utilitarian emphasis on the moral importance of happiness, have no place in the moral universe of Positioning Theory.

Moreover, points of growth of moral sensibility are often found at locations in which some people have come recognize supererogatory duties. A few people began to feel a duty to the natural environment, a supererogatory duty that gradually metamorphosed into the formal duties expressed in legislation. There is no such thing as a supererogatory right!

POSITIONING THEORY

Positioning Theory is the study of the nature, formation, influence and ways of change of local systems of rights and duties as shared assumptions about them influence small scale interactions. Positioning Theory is to be

seen in contrast to the older framework of Role Theory. Roles are relatively fixed, often formally defined and long lasting. Even such phenomena as 'role distance' and 'role strain' presuppose the stability of the roles to which they are related. Positioning Theory concerns conventions of speech and action that are labile, contestable and ephemeral.

Positioning Theory is also independent of considerations of motivation, except in so far as declarations of motives are social acts, aimed at making one's actions intelligible to others and sometimes to oneself. Positioning Theory is particularly opposed to explanatory theories of human action that posit motives as causes. For the most part people are best thought of as trapped within discourse conventions. In the simplest case, everyday conversations, one's freedom to utter this or that statement is circumscribed by what has been said before and the conventions at work in shaping a conversation of a certain kind.

Conditions of Meaningfulness

There are three relevant background conditions for the meaningfulness of a flow of symbolic interactions. The media of such interactions include linguistic performances, but also other symbolic systems. People make use of religious icons, road signs, gestures and so on in the maintenance of the flow of actions constitutive of a social episode.

a. The local repertoire of *admissible social acts* and meanings, in particular the illocutionary force of what is said and done. Illocutionary force is the effective, then and there social significance of a speech, gesture or social action. (Austin, 1959). The same verbal formula, gesture, flag or whatever, may have a variety of meanings depending on who is using it, where and for what. Uttering 'I'm sorry' may, in certain circumstances, be the performance of an apology. It may also, in the UK, be a way of asking someone to repeat what has just been said. It may be a way of expressing incredulity. There are no doubt other uses for the phrase.

b. The implicit pattern of the *distribution of rights and duties* to make use of items from the local repertoires of the illocutionary forces of various signs and utterances. Each distribution is a position. A mother has the right to discipline her child in whatever way law and custom allow, but a visiting neighbour does not. The right to issue the reprimand 'Nice little girls say "Thank you"' is only available, properly, to a parent and perhaps a grandparent. Catholics have a duty to confess their sins individually, while Protestants do not. Positions have this in common with roles, that they pre-

exist the people who occupy them, as part of the common knowledge of a community, family, sports team and so on.

c. Every episode of human interaction is shaped by one or more *story lines* which are usually taken for granted by those taking part in the episode. The study of origins and plots of the story lines of a culture is the work of narratology. There are strong connections too to autobiographical psychology, the study of how, why and when people 'tell their lives' and to whom. A train journey may be told as a 'heroic quest', and what would have been complaints about lateness according to one story line become obstacles to be bravely overcome. A solicitous remark can be construed as caring according to one story line, but as an act of condescension according to another (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Even in a brief schematic summary one can see the great variety of story lines that may be realised in an encounter. The structural sequences of the acts that constitute episodes of social life can be ordered by at least the following background assumptions of a culture.

1. Story lines.
 - a. Folk tales and fairy stories.
 - b. Histories.
 - c. Soap operas and the like.
2. Ceremonies.

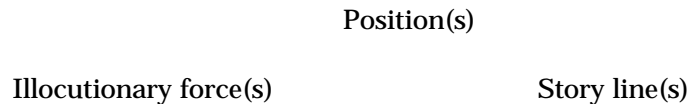
Managed by an existing script, rule book or manual

 - a. In the actors' native language, such as a wedding ceremony in Europe.
 - b. In a formal language, such as the Latin used in the degree giving ceremony at Oxford.
3. Customs.
 - a. Never explicitly formulated, such as the way one should introduce a stranger to the members of one's family.
 - b. Passed on one to another informally, for example to who, when and how much should one give as a tip.

THE POSITIONING 'TRIANGLE'

The three background conditions mutually determine one another. Presumptions about rights and duties are involved in fixing the moment by moment meanings of speaking and acting, while both are influenced by

and influence the taken-for-granted story line. Challenges to the way an episode is unfolding can be directed to any one of the three aspects. We can represent this mutuality schematically as follows:



Each such triangle is accompanied by shadowy alternatives, into which it can modulate, or which can sometimes exist as competing and simultaneous readings of events.

There is a possible fourth vertex, the physical positions and stances of the actors, for example, the doctor is standing while the patient is lying down on the table; Hitler and Mussolini in Chapman's film, outdoing each other in elevating their chairs; studies of layout of furniture in offices, which is differentiated by the status of the person whose office it is.

POSITIONING ANALYSIS

Some examples will illustrate the value of using Positioning Theory to analyze the underlying structure of moral presuppositions that influence the unfolding of an episode. How is the distribution of rights and duties created and maintained in short term close human encounters?

Example: Taking charge

Marga Kreckel's (1981) studies of life in a working class family revealed the positioning structure of episodes of collective remembering. The family consisted of middle aged parents and three sons each of whom had a partner. Discussions frequently involved creating a version or story of events of the past, in the process of deciding some future course of action. The fiancée of the youngest son tried to make contributions to the remembering project but her suggestions were *never* taken into account. She was positioned as lacking any right to conduct memory work. Power and the right to adjudicate disputes as to 'what really happened' was taken by the mother. She positioned herself as the authority on the events of the previous weekend, and so appropriated both the right and the duty to admit or refuse contributions to the agreed family history.

After the Osaka earthquake the newspapers reported how a person with no official standing had taken charge of rescue operations. He began to issue orders to people which were obeyed without question. The community positioned him as 'the person in charge', thus ascribing certain rights to him, supporting his own taking on of duties.

Example: Attribution of Personal Qualities Creates and Changes Positions

In giving an account of a scientific controversy Gilbert & Mulkay (1982: 390) show how a damaging character description ascribing certain faults to the leader of a rival research team served to weaken the standing of the team, disputing the right of the leader to be taken to be authoritative on the structure of a certain compound. The effect of this repositioning echoed round the positioning triangle, to change the illocutionary force of the publications of the rival team. The story line changed from 'sober scientific research' to a 'mad scramble for fame', involving not dishonesty, but self-deception. Paraphrasing a quotation we have a rival declaring 'She is so competitive that her results are suspect', that is she has lost the right to be believed. Declaring that a scientist's results are 'self-deception' is to transform their overt illocutionary force from fact stating to mere speculation. Latour and Woolgar (1979: 119) report a conversation in which a rival's character was described as 'he never dared putting in what was required, brute force'. In this phrase he is positioned as lacking the right to be heard in the scientific community.

On the other hand ascriptions of good character strengthen the rights inherent in a position and again changes illocutionary force of what has been said. 'You are a very honest person, so we can trust you to keep promises' is a paraphrase of an exchange between Dr. Kissinger and Secretary Brezhnev reported in the Kissinger transcripts of his conversations with foreign statesmen. Shortly afterwards Kissinger repositions himself with respect to Brezhnev in a conversation with the Chinese, when he seems to approve a remark by Ambassador Huang apropos the Russians: '... first they will bully the weak and are afraid of the strong. And that their words are not usually trustworthy'. Kissinger's repositioning is confirmed by a remark to a British diplomat that the Soviet leaders 'capacity to lie on matters of common knowledge is stupendous' (Moghaddam & Harré, 2003: 150-153). In the last remark we have an explicit re-interpreting of the illocutionary force of Russian speech acts, so that the positioning and the story line of the Kissinger-Brezhnev conversations are retrospectively revised.

As a general rule acts of positioning are preceded by and justified in accordance with attributes of personal qualities to the person or persons being positioned. Both rights and duties demand competencies of various sorts, so beliefs about lack of skills and abilities relevant to a certain task can be used to deny, delete or downgrade a default position.

Example: Simultaneous but Incompatible Positionings Possible with Same words

A recent study of the documents produced by and interviews with the protagonists of the two sides in a dispute between the Georgetown community and Georgetown University over the University's development plans yields nicely to positioning theory. Each party to the dispute read the very same sentences, uttered by the protestors and by the University authorities as having quite different illocutionary force. Each side constructed a story line in which the opposition was cast as villainous and dishonest. Statements by activists against development of University housing, such as 'They should not build any more dormitories' were interpreted by their authors as examples of a brave stand against the bullying tactics of a privileged institution. The story line was roughly this: 'The University is encroaching on the city without a right', that is the activities of the community spokespersons were legitimate protests. The very same utterances were interpreted by some on the side of the University authorities as typical expressions of jealous resentment. (Harré & Slocum, 2003: 130-135).

Example: Malignant Positioning

Tom Kitwood (1990) introduced the term 'malignant psychology' to highlight the catastrophic effects of a priori psychological categorising of people with declining powers in old age. Sabat (2003) introduced a development of this idea in his expression 'malignant positioning'. This reflected a stance from which the ways that sufferers from Alzheimer's Disease were positioned in such a way that a demeaning and destructive story line was set in motion.

Two brief illustrations of malignant positioning should make the concept clear. Speaking of sufferers from Alzheimer's a caretaker says 'They don't know anything anymore'. In this remark a description of the apparent loss of cognitive capacities by the elderly is used as a positioning move, deleting certain rights, for example to be heard. Thus the utter-

ances of As are not listened to, and the story line is of non-humanity. More startling still is the remark of a physician who introduces his story line when he says 'Treating an Alzheimer's patient is like doing veterinary medicine' (Sabat, 2003: 87).

The result of malignant positioning is more complex. Sabat (2001) describes in detail the lives of several sufferers from Alzheimer's Disease. Positioned as having no right to be heard, on the presumption that such people have nothing worth listening to, the sufferer is cut off from communal cognition, and the thinking together that is such a feature of language using beings like ourselves. The strain of waiting for the person with word finding problems to complete the expression of a thought quickly gives way to impatient dismissal of the other as any sort of conversationalist.

Sabat reports the striking effect on the willingness with which a regular visitor to the day care centre continued to struggle to express his thoughts of officially appointing him to the Georgetown University research team, studying the condition. This man re-entered the communal conversation. In this and like ways the effects of malignant positioning can be reversed by the restoration of rights (and sometimes the taking on of duties), that is by repositioning the person. At the same time the dynamics of Positioning Theory transforms the story line of daily episodes equally dramatically. From seeing the days events as 'mere filling', Sabat's retired professor came to see it, and so to live it, as ongoing research.

CONCLUSION

The advent of Positioning Theory as a development of Vygotsky's conception of the person in an ocean of language, in intimate interaction with others in the construction of a flow of public and social cognition, opens up all sorts of insights and research opportunities. Moving beyond the overly restrictive frame of Role Theory and the logical fallacies of a Sociology of Casually Efficacious Structures it offers a conceptual system within which to follow the unfolding of episodes of everyday life in new and illuminating ways. The person in the Law and the person in the contemporary climate of sensitivity to avoidable poverty have been presented as a being locked into a contestable system of rights. By changing the scale of the investigation one can begin to redress the balance between rights and duties, as well as making visible the moral orders of those close encounters which make up the greater part of our lives.

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