

PERSONS: POINTS OF CONDENSATION IN A SEA OF LIVING INTERACTIONS

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How does it happen that I give to my hands, in particular, that degree, that rate, and that direction of movement that are capable of making me feel the textures of the sleek and the rough? Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship, according to which they are... the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world... Through this crisscrossing within [my hand] of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate... [and] the 'touching subject' passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 133-134).

I.

INTRODUCTION

For the past 15 years or so, although I was originally trained in academic Psychology, I have been a Professor of Interpersonal Relations in a Department of Communication. Thus primarily, what I want to discuss with you today is the concept of the person as it arises for us out of the sea of everyday living interactions within which we live our lives, along with all the others (and othernesses) around us. A while ago (Shotter, 1984), I called my approach to social inquiry 'social ecology', and that is what I want to return to here today. So, instead of people as self-contained entities to be characterized by their possession of a particular set of properties, I shall be setting out a characterization in terms of their embedding in a set of dynamic, always changing relations to their surroundings – hence, my title.

Central to the work I want to present to you, will be the philosophical and theoretical work of Wittgenstein, Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Voloshinov, G.H. Mead, William James, H-G Gadamer, along with many others. While they all emphasize different aspects of our embedding in what I am calling 'the sea of living interactions' within which we live our lives, one way or another; they all also, it seems to me, emphasize the primacy of our spontaneous, living, bodily activity as it unfolds *within the active, expressive-responsive relations* we have to the others and othernesses around us – and it is our immersion in this 'sea', and the resources it provides for us, as well as the limitations it imposes upon us, that I also want to emphasize.

This 'immersed' way of being in the world contrasts starkly with that assumed in recent forms of modernist inquiry in the Human and Behavioral Sciences influenced, for instance, by Kant and Descartes (along with other modern philosophers), who all emphasized the central role of our deliberately intended activities as self-contained individuals in our knowledge-seeking activities. For instance, we find Kant (1970) claiming that:

Reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan of its own, and it must not allow itself to be kept, as it were, in nature's leading-strings, but must show itself the way with principles of judgment based upon fixed laws, constraining nature to give answer to questions of reason's own determining (p. 20).

Where Kant's stance here, clearly, follows on from that of Descartes (1968), who, in his *Discourse on the Method of Properly Conducting one's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences* of 1637, celebrated his proposed 'geometric' methods of inquiry as aimed at our becoming, 'as it were, masters and possessors of Nature' (p. 78).

In this view, the important processes of reason occur inside the heads of individuals and have the character of 'inner symbolic representations' of outer states of affairs – where our outer states of affairs are thought of as occurring merely in the empty and neutral space and time of the physicists. And we still far too often accept that the 'background realities' to our actions must take the form given them by Descartes (1968) long ago. In deciding to speak only of what he could clearly conceive, you will recollect that he resolved to speak 'only of what would happen in a new world, if God were to create, somewhere in imaginary space, enough matter to compose it, and if he were to agitate diversely and confusedly the different parts of this matter, so that he created a chaos as disordered as the poets could ever imagine, and afterwards did no more than to lend his usual preserving action to nature, and to let her act according to his established laws' (p. 62).

Such a reality of neutral particles in motion is, of course, unrestrictedly open to our mastery and possession, to our every manipulation.

However, if we emphasize the primacy of our spontaneous, living, bodily activities as they unfold spontaneously in responsive relation to the activities of the others and othernesses around us, rather than a neutral space and time, filled with neutral particles in lawful motion, we find ourselves always embedded in, as I have called them elsewhere (Shotter, 1993a), 'conversational realities'. And within such already ongoing, dialogically-structured realities, we find that what we can do deliberately is highly constrained. With each utterance in a dialogue, for instance, within a circumstance that is already structured to a degree, we can only propose a little further structuring; we can only *intend* a next action to the extent that it has been made available to us as a possibility by what has *happened* to us within the circumstance already.

Gadamer (2000), for instance, in describing his philosophical concerns, notes his crucial focus on: 'not what we do or what we ought to do, but [on] what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing' (p. xxviii). Hence, for *Gadamer* (2000), in contrast to the central role of willful activity depicted in Descartes's and Kant's philosophy above, our relation to our circumstances is quite different: 'We say "we" conduct a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner... Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it... the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will "come out" of a conversation... All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it - i.e., that it allows something to "emerge" which henceforth exists' (p. 383).

Wittgenstein (1980a), similarly remarks that: 'The origin and primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language - I want to say - is a refinement, "in the beginning was the deed" [Goethe]' (p. 31). And that by the word 'primitive' here, he means that 'this sort of behavior is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based *on it*, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought' (1981, no. 541).

While *Bakhtin* (1986) notes that: 'All real and integral understanding is actively responsive... And the speaker himself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding. He does

not expect passive understanding that, so to speak, only duplicates his or her own idea in someone else's mind. Rather, he expects response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth...' (p. 69). Thus, among the other features of such spontaneously responsive talk, is its orientation toward the future: 'The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word; it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by *that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word*. Such is the situation of any living dialogue' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 280, my emphasis).

Mead (1934) too outlines the influence of such a process within the single individual: 'That process... of responding to one's self as another responds to it, taking part in one's own conversation with others, being aware of what one is saying and using that awareness of what one is saying to determine what one is going to say thereafter – that is a process with which we are all familiar... We are finding out what we are going to say, what we are going to do, by saying and doing, and in the process we are continually controlling the process itself. In the conversation of gestures what we say calls out a certain response in another that in turn changes our own action, so that we shift from what we started to do because of the reply the other makes. The conversation of gestures is the beginning of communication' (pp. 140-141).

These remarks, by these four writers, set the scene for the dialogical, 'prospective'¹ concept of the person' I want to outline below – *dialogical*, because 'I' can be 'me' only *in dialogical relation to 'you'*; and *prospective*,

¹ I have taken the notion of 'prospective concepts' from Myhill (1952). In his view, 'beauty' is just such a concept. For, 'not only can we not guarantee to recognize it [beauty] when we encounter it, [for it is not, in Myhill's terms an "effective" concept], but also that there exists no formula or attitude, such as that which for example the romantics believed, which can be counted upon, even in a hypothetical, infinitely protracted lifetime, to create all the beauty that there is [for it is not a "constructive" concept either]' (p. 191). In other words, prospective concepts are concepts that cannot be arrived at by any known rational methods or procedures. Hence the value that Myhill attaches to the 'crystal clarity' imposed by mathematic logic on our thought processes, for 'it was here that we first had conclusive evidence of an essential rather than an accidental limitation on knowledge, and of the fact that this ignorance is but the obverse of creativity' (p. 192).

because as living, growing, and developing beings, able both to accumulate and to embody a shared (and sharable) cultural history, there is no end to what we as persons are and can be.

In other words, the concept of the person that I want to discuss, is a concept of people as being themselves *dialogically* open to further exploration and development of themselves (along with the others around them), and of their *concept* of themselves as being *dialogically* open to..., and so on, and so on; as well as of them as being open also to an exploration as to why some of the changes they may seek to make to themselves are more preferable than others.

II.

SEVEN THEMES

In leading up to what I now think should be the primary focus of our inquiries in our attempts to understand our own nature – that is, a focus on our *meetings* with the others and othernesses around us – there are seven introductory comments I want to make:

1) The first is that, in discussing the changes we might promote within ourselves, we must learn, I think, to talk about something which in fact, strangely, quite unfamiliar to us in the context of modern western thought, and which – if we are to do justice to its detailed characteristics and relationships – requires us to make some quite radical changes in our current modes of intellectual inquiry, as well as in the whole nature of our social relations with each other. The new topic that I want to confront us with, is simply that of 'life', the properties, the characteristics or *aspects* of living bodies, as enduring, self-maintaining, self-structurizing, self-reproducing, organic structures. For we seem to be rather badly served by the vocabularies currently available to us for describing the many different kinds of transitional forms occurring within such continually changing structures and relations. As William James (1967) noted: 'We live, as it were, upon the front edge of an advancing wave-crest, and *our sense of a determinate direction in falling forward* is all we cover of the future in our path... Our experience, *inter alia*, is of variations of rate and direction, and lives in these transitions more than in the journey's end' (p. 206, my emphasis).

2) Such structures change *internally* by growth and differentiation into more internally complex forms, while at the same time retaining their identity as the identifiable individuals they are. In other words, in all living

activities, there is always a kind of *developmental continuity* involved in their unfolding, such that earlier phases of the activity are indicative of at least the *style*, the *physiognomy*, of what is to come later. All changes 'gesture' or 'point' beyond themselves in either an indicative or mimetic way.

3) Thus, the earlier phases of a living activity are indicative of at least the *style* of what is to come later – thus we can respond to their activities in an *anticipatory* fashion. Indeed, just as acorns can only grow into oak trees and not rose bushes, and eggs produce only chickens and not rabbits, so all living activities, it seems, give rise to what we might call *identity preserving* changes or deformations – as T.S. Eliot puts it: 'In my beginning is my end'. By contrast, the dead Cartesian world, a world of mechanical movement, a world of forces and impacts, can only give rise to movements as a change in the spatial configuration of a set of separately existing parts.

4) In other words, instead of changes of a quantitative and repeatable kind, *ordinary* changes, changes taking place *within* a reality already well-known to us, we must become concerned with unique, only 'once-occurrent events of Being', as Bakhtin (1993, p. 2) calls them, first-time, irreversible changes of a *qualitative* kind. As living changes, these are irreversible, developmental changes, changes making something possible that was before impossible. Thus living movement, living change taking place in time, confronts us, with some quite new phenomena, needing some quite different concepts, if we are not simply to assimilate it to Cartesian forms of change, i.e., change simply as a re-arrangement, as a re-configuration, in a basic set of unchanging 'particles'. But in no way can the earlier phases of merely 'configurational' changes be indicative of the style of what is to come. Against a Cartesian background, such living changes – to the extent that they are not according to a law or principle but dependent on circumstances – can strike us as changes of an unpredictable kind, as changes that can strike us with wonder or amazement, as *extraordinary* changes.

5) This leads me on to a fifth comment: which is, that even the most complex of mechanical systems are constructed piece by piece from objective parts; that is, from parts which retain their character unchanged irrespective of whether they are parts of the system or not. In other words, they are constructed from *externally related* parts. But whole people as natural systems are certainly not constructed piece by piece. On the contrary, they grow, and in growing, they develop from simple individuals into richly structured ones in such a way that their 'parts' at any one moment in time owe not just their character but their very existence both to one another *and* to their relations with the 'parts' of the system at some earlier point in

time – their history is just as important as their logic in their growth.² In other words, they consist in *internally related* parts.

6) My sixth comment connects with those I have already mentioned above, it is to do with our taking into account what is already ‘there’, so to speak, in the background of our lives together, what it is in our surrounding circumstances that makes such developmental changes possible.

Here, I am particularly concerned to counter claims made by many who currently call themselves *social constructionists* – who take it that people communicate with each other in purely linguistic terms, seen in a structuralist (Saussure, 1911) or post-structuralist light (Derrida, 1977) – and who suggest, like Richard Rorty (1989), for instance, that because ‘there is nothing “beneath” socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human being’ (p. xiii), all the shared (or sharable) bases to our lives together can be deconstructed ‘all the way down’. That is, they argue, because all claims in favor a shared ‘ground of being’ are nothing more than persuasive rhetorical constructions, they can be opposed by other, equally persuasive constructions.

It is the seemingly radically shocking nature of this claim that has, I think, stood in the way of seeing the need for the more corporeally oriented developments that I would like to propose here. It has, I feel, stood in the way because it is nowhere near a radical enough claim! For such structuralist and post-structuralist views of human communication – as working in terms of a self-contained ‘linguistic system’ – leave Descartes’s account of our background reality – as ‘a chaos as disordered as the poets could ever imagine’ – in place. And this means, of course, that we cannot draw any shared guidance from our shared backgrounds in our controversies with each other as which of each other’s claims to adopt for the best. No wonder

² Because of this it is impossible to picture the life of living systems in spatial diagrams. As Capek (1965) remarks, ‘any spatial symbol contemplated at a given moment is *completed*, i.e., all its parts are given *at once*, simultaneously, in contrast with the temporal reality which by its very nature is *incomplete* and whose “parts” – if we are justified in using such a thoroughly inadequate term – are by definition successive, i.e., nonsimultaneous. The spatial symbolism leads us to forget the essential difference between juxtaposition and succession and to reduce the differences between the past, present, and future to simple *differences of position*: “past” events are symbolized by positions lying to the left of the point representing the “present”, while “future” events lie to the right of the same point on the same already drawn “temporal axis”. Thus the spatial diagram suggests the wrong idea that the successive moments already *coexist* and that their pastness and futurity is not genuine, but only “phenomenal” or “apparent”’ (pp. 162-163).

it provokes anger and diverts attention to what is important in social thought about the nature of human communication.

7) This leads me on to my final introductory comment, which is that I do not want to argue (in opposition to Rorty) that there is in fact already something definite 'there' in us, as individual beings in the world that, prior to any of the *meetings* we may have with the others and othernesses around us, that defines and delimits the nature of those meetings. Instead, what I want to claim, is that something very special happens when living bodies interact with their surroundings that we have not (explicitly) taken account of at all in our current forms of thought or institutional practices. Everything of importance to us as psychologists occurs within the context of living meetings, occasions when one form of life comes into contact with an other or otherness different from itself. The resulting relations have – not just a dialogically-structured character, as I once thought (Shotter, 1980, 1984, 1993) – but a *chiasmic* structure (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). What this means, is tremendously difficult to articulate, and a part of what I want to try to do below, is simply to draw out further the implications of this notion of chiasmically organized relations.

III.

MEETINGS AS JOINT, CHIASMICALLY STRUCTURED ACTIONS

Sometimes, something very special can occur on those occasions when two or more of us approach each other bodily, face-to-face, and engage in a *meeting*, in a joint action or dialogically-structured encounter. For in such encounters, when someone acts, their activity cannot be accounted as wholly their own activity – for a person's actions are partly 'shaped' by being *responsive* to the actions of the others around them. This is where all the strangeness of the dialogical begins ('joint action' – Shotter, 1980, 1984, 1993a and b). For our joint actions, in being neither mine nor yours, are truly 'ours'.

Hence, such activity is not simply *action* (for it is not done by individuals; and cannot be explained by giving people's *reasons*). Nor is it simply *behavior* (to be explained as a regularity in terms of its causal principles). It constitutes a distinct, third sphere of *transitional* activity with its own distinctive properties, always on the way toward what it *not-yet-will-be*.

This third sphere of activity involves a special kind of nonrepresentational, sensuous or embodied form of *practical-moral* (Bernstein, 1983) understanding, which, in being constitutive of people's social and personal

identities, is prior to and determines all the other ways of knowing available to us. Indeed, what is produced in such dialogical exchanges is a very complex 'orchestration' of not wholly reconcilable influences – as Bakhtin (1981) remarks, it includes both 'centripetal' tendencies *inward* toward order and unity at the center, as well as 'centrifugal' ones *outward* toward diversity and difference on the borders or margins. In being transitional, activities in this sphere lack specificity; they are only partially determined; they complex 'intertwining' of many different kinds of influences:

- They are just as much material as mental; constituted just as much by feeling as by thought, and by thought as feeling.

Their intertwined, complex nature makes it very difficult for us to characterize their nature:

- They have neither a fully orderly nor a fully disorderly structure, neither a completely stable nor an easily changed organization, neither a fully subjective nor fully objective character.

- They are also distributed or non-locatable – rather than 'in' individuals, they are 'spread out' among all those participating in them.

- They are neither 'inside' people, but nor are they 'outside' them; they are located in that space where inside and outside are one.

- They are neither wholly agentic in shaping their surroundings, nor are they wholly shaped by them – rather than having 'masterful' agency, we can say that they have 'participatory' agency.

- Nor is there in their transitions a succession with a separate 'before' and a separate 'after' (Bergson), but only a meaningful, developing whole which cannot divide itself into separable parts either in space or in time.

- But, nonetheless, as living activities, they can still have a 'style' and 'point' beyond themselves toward both events in their surroundings, and what can possibly come next for them in the future.

Wittgenstein (1981) describes the nature of our meetings well, I feel, when he says:

How could human behavior be described? Surely only by sketching the actions of a variety of humans, as they are all mixed up together. What determines our judgment, our concepts and reactions, is not what *one* man is doing *now*, an individual action, but the whole hurly-burly of human actions, the background against which we see an action (no. 567)... (see also 1980b, II, no. 629).

Indeed, it is precisely their lack of any pre-determined order, and thus their openness to being specified or determined *by those involved in them, in practice* – while usually remaining quite unaware of having done so! –

that is the central defining feature of the 'realities' whose characterizations or formulations we create in our meetings with each other. And it is precisely this that makes this sphere of activity interesting... for at least the two following reasons:

1) to do with the practical investigations we can conduct into how people actually do manage to 'work things out' between themselves, and the part played by the *ways of talking* we interweave into the many different spheres of practical activity occurring between us which enable such 'workings out'.

But also 2) for how we might *refine* and *elaborate* these spheres of activity, and how we might *extend* them into novel spheres as yet unknown to us.

IV.

CHIASMIC (INTERTWINED) RELATIONS

As I indicted above, my claim here today is that everything of importance to us in our lives together occurs in *meetings* of one kind or another. Something very special occurs when two or more living beings meet and begin to *expressively-respond* to each other (more happens than them merely having an *impact* on one another). There is in such meetings the creation of qualitatively new, quite novel and distinct forms of life, which are more than merely averaged or mixed versions of those already existing. As I intimated above, elsewhere (Shotter, 1980, 1984) I have discussed this under the heading of 'joint action', and more recently (Shotter, 1993 a&b) as 'dialogically-structured' activity, but here, following Merleau-Ponty (1968), I want to go a step further and talk of it as 'chiasmically-structured' activity.

My aim in doing this, is to try to begin to understand how *the living actions of the others* around us can 'enter into' our actions at crucial moments, not simply to change their shape or form, but to enrich our abilities to *relate* ourselves to our circumstances in such a way as to help us increase, so to speak, the *depth* of our relations to our surroundings. In saying this, of course, I am calling on – as Merleau-Ponty does also – the most immediately obvious example of chiasmic interweaving available to us in our binocular vision: for it is the chiasmic interweaving of our visual relating to our surroundings through our *two eyes*, gave rise to the *presence of depth* in our looking.³ In a moment, I want to turn to the discussion of how

³ We can also note that Bateson (1979), in *Mind and Nature*, makes the same point: 'From this elaborate arrangement [of the intertwining in the optic chiasma of two slightly

we can be influenced by other people's voices, but for the moment, let us stay with our visual relations to our surroundings.

Straightaway, we can note that, even with something as simple as looking over a visual scene, a picture, a painting, a sculpture, an art object of any kind, say, different *styles* of looking are available to us. There are different bodily ways of moving our eyes over the scene, and of 'orchestrating' into these ways, other bodily movements – we can move up closer to the painting or further away, adopt a new angle, pause for a moment to make a comparison (in fact or from memory), we can stop to ask a friend's opinion or to recall a text's account, and so on, and so on. And if in these movements we open ourselves to the 'calls' coming to us from the object as look over it, we find ourselves not so much looking *at* it – as in our instrumental gazing *at* an object we want to manipulate – as looking *according* to it.

Then, over time, if I 'dwell with' the work of art long enough, between it and myself, a *real presence* (Steiner, 1989) begins to emerge, a *presence* with 'its' own requirements, with 'its' own calls, to which I – if I am to do 'it' justice – must 'dwell with' responsibly, i.e., be *answerable* to all the 'calls' it exerts upon me.

When we 'look over' or 'look with' a picture in *this* way, 'I would be at great pains', says Merleau-Ponty (1964a), 'to say *where* is the painting I am looking at. For I do not look at it as I look at a thing; I do not fix it in its place. My gaze wanders in it as in the halos of Being. It is more accurate to say that I see according to it, or with it, than that I *see it*' (p.164).

Rather than looking *at* it, I look *beyond* it, or *through* it, to see other things in my world in its light; it is, would could say, a guiding or directing agency in my looking; it gives me a *way* of looking. Thus, as Steiner (1989) suggests, 'the streets of our cities *are* different after Balzac and Dickens. Summer nights, notably to the south, have changed with Van Gogh (p. 164)... It is no indulgent fantasy to say that cypresses are on fire since Van Gogh or that aqueducts wear-walking shoes after Paul Klee' (p. 188). Or, as Paul Klee himself remarked: 'In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were look-

different sources of information], two sorts of advantage accrue. The seer is able to improve resolution at edges and contrasts; and better able to read when the print is small or the illumination poor. More important, information about depth is created. In more formal language, the *difference* between the information provided by the one retina and that provided by the other is itself information of a *different logical type*. From this new sort of information, the seer adds an extra *dimension* to seeing' (p. 80).

ing at me, were speaking to me... I was there listening...' (Quoted in Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 167).

Wittgenstein (1980a) also noted the power of works of art to 'move' us in this way: 'You really could call [a work of art], not exactly the expression of a feeling, but at least the expression of feeling, or felt expression. And you could say too that in so far as people understand it, they resonate in harmony with it, respond to it. You might say: the work of art does not aim to convey *something else*, just itself' (p. 58).

But, just as paintings can 'instruct' us in a possible *style* or *way* of looking, a possible way of relating ourselves visually to our surroundings, so can certain pieces of text, or another's voice, also 'instruct' us in different possible *styles* or *ways* of relating ourselves to our surroundings as well. Indeed, just as we all can be spontaneously 'moved' by a piece of music being played in a concert hall, to some extent at least in the same way, while *listening* to its sequential unfolding over a period of time, so we can also all be 'moved', to a similar shared extent, in responding sequentially to any aspect of human expression – for, to repeat, what is at issue here is not the 'seeing' of a finalized form or pattern, but the intertwining of one's own living, bodily responsiveness with influences from something other than ourselves to create a 'real presence' between us, an influence that can instruct us in a new, possible way of going on.⁴

V.

CONCLUSIONS – 'WITNESS'-BEING

So, what I have dwelt on above – besides all the other points I have tried to make about the importance of our spontaneous living bodily expressive responsiveness to the others and othernesses around us – is the importance of our being able to adopt a certain attitude or stance toward the others and othernesses around us: rather than trying to relate to them as something that stands before us as a 'puzzle' or 'problem' that we must 'solve' if we are to understand them aright, I have talked of entering into living, dialogically-

⁴ This is the way that those of you who read Wittgenstein can – if you take the appropriate *dialogical* stance or attitude to his texts – experience his voice: Not as giving us new information which we had until then lacked, but as giving us orientation, helping find our 'way about' when we didn't know 'how to go on', helping us in this or that practical situation to make a connection or relation we might not otherwise have made.

structured or chiasmically-structured relations with them, and of allowing them in the course of our relations *with* them to teach us something utterly novel, utterly unique, something that we could not learn in any other way.

This leads, as I intimated at the outset, to the concept of the person as a *prospective concept*, that is, to it being the kind of concept that cannot be contained within any systematic or logical framework, and which is still open, in dialogically-structured, or better, chiasmically-structured exchanges, to further development... of a kind still to be explored dialogically... Thus, to end in a way that I hope captures and expresses something of what I have been trying to express above, I would like to end by contrasting what I will call 'withness'-being with 'aboutness'-being.

Withness-being ('withness'-talking, thinking, acting, perceiving, etc.) is a dynamic form of reflective interaction that involves our coming into living contact with an other's living being, with their utterances, with their bodily expressions, their words, their 'works'. It is a meeting of outsides, of surfaces, of two kinds of 'flesh' as Merleau-Ponty (1968) puts it, such that in coming into 'touch' with each other, in the dynamics of the interaction at their surfaces, another form of life in common to all participants, is created. All both touch and are touched, and in the relations between their outgoing touching and resultant incoming, responsive touches of the other, a felt sense of a 'moving' sequence of differences emerges, a sequence with a *shaped and vectored sense* to it.

In the interplay of living movements intertwining with each other, new possibilities of relation are engendered, new interconnections are made, new 'shapes' of experience emerge.

A reflective encounter of this kind is thus not simply a 'seeing' of objects, for what is sensed is in fact invisible; nor is it an interpretation (a representation), for it arises directly and immediately in one's living encounter with an other's expressions; neither is it merely a feeling, for carries with it as it unfolds a bodily sense of the possibilities for responsive action in relation to one's momentary placement, position, or orientation in the present interaction.

In short, we can be spontaneously 'moved' toward specific possibilities for action in such a way of being. And this where another person's *words in their saying* can be helpful – in entering into our inner dialogues, they can help to orient us, help us to be responsive to what we might otherwise ignore: 'Look at this, notice that, think about it this way..., and so on!'

Thus, only in this kind of spontaneously responsive being, in which we are related bodily to those around us, is it possible to be 'in touch with', or

'struck by', the *uniqueness* of the others and othernesses around us; and only in this kind of being is it possible to be 'moved by' another's words, and for us to carry them 'on our shoulder', so to speak, to 'remind' us of how to relate ourselves to the circumstances before us. As Merleau-Ponty (1964b) puts it: 'For more clearly (*but not differently*) in my experience of others than in my experience of speech or the perceived world, I inevitably grasp my body as a *spontaneity which teaches me what I could not know in any other way except through it*' (p. 93).

While in *aboutness-being*, in which we try to understand others only cognitively, by 'explaining' them to ourselves in terms of a theoretical framework, we stand over against them, and view them as if from a distance. Bakhtin (1984) calls this, taking a *monological* stance toward them, and in such a stance '(in its extreme pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness... Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive force*' (p. 293).

Such a style of understanding works simply in terms of 'pictures', but even when we 'get the picture', we still have to decide, intellectually, on a right course of action. This in this way of being, *interpretation* becomes a central issue.

And it is this style of being that has until recently dominated our academic and intellectual lives in the West. No wonder that we have come to place *theories* at the center of our lives as thinkers. But if instead of 'aboutness'-thinking, we begin to think 'with' an other's voice, with their utterances, in mind, we can begin to see another very different way in which what we call a 'theory' can be an influence on us. Literally, the words in which the theorist expresses his or her theory can, by moving us this way and that, 'instruct' us in our practical actions out in the world of our everyday, practical affairs. Then, if we respond to their words is *this way*, instead of turning away from the events of importance to us to bury ourselves in thought, in order to think of an appropriate theoretical scheme into which to fit them in order to respond to them, we can turn ourselves responsively toward them immediately. Indeed, we can begin an intensive, i.e., in detail, and extensive, exploratory interaction with them, approaching them *this way* and *that way*... 'moved' to act in *this way* and *that* in accord with the beneficial 'reminders'⁵ issued to us by others to us, as a result of their explorations.

⁵ 'The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose' (Wittgenstein, 1953, no. 127).

In other words, seeing *with another's words in mind* can itself be a thoughtful, feelingful, way of seeing, while thinking *with another's words in mind* can also be a feelingful, seeingful, way of thinking – a way of seeing and thinking that brings us into a close and personal, living contact with our surroundings, with their subtle but mattering details. And this, I think, is how we need to relate and respond to Wittgenstein's remarks, his utterances, to the nature of the very in fact practical philosophy he has bequeathed to us. And because so much of what I have said here to day has been influenced by his words; and because I think, once the nature of his philosophy is appropriately understood, its consequences are utterly *revolutionary*; I want to end in his honor with a few of his remarks.

Because we are renouncing the Cartesian aim of being 'masters and possessors of nature', and working instead merely as participants in what we are seeking to understand; and because we already embody in all of our spontaneous responses to events in our surroundings the beginnings of new understandings, Wittgenstein (1953) recommends that: 'We must let the use of words teach you their meaning' (p. 220). Thus in his philosophy, we are not seeking to discover anything entirely new: 'Philosophy [as he sees it] simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. – Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us. One might also give the name "philosophy" to what is possible before all new discoveries and inventions' (no. 126). Thus, instead of seeking explanations and solutions when we feel disquiet, he suggests another approach, for:

Disquiet in philosophy might be said to arise from looking at philosophy wrongly, seeing it wrong, namely as if it were divided into (infinite) longitudinal strips instead of into (finite) cross strips. This inversion of our conception produces the *greatest* difficulty. So we try as it were to grasp the unlimited strips and complain that it cannot be done piecemeal. To be sure it cannot, if by a piece one means an infinite longitudinal strip. But it may well be done, if one means a cross-strip. – But in that case we never get to the end of our work! – Of course not, for it has no end. (We want to replace wild conjectures and explanations by the quiet weighing of linguistic facts) (Wittgenstein, 1981, no. 447).

And if we do 'replace wild conjectures and explanations by the quiet weighing of linguistic facts' – while bearing in mind the ineradicable *chiasmic* relations of such linguistic facts to their surrounding circumstances – then, as I see it, we can begin to see how, not just the concept of the person,

but people themselves can further develop themselves, and their relations to each other, as a result of collaborative or dialogically-structured inquiries of a practical kind. Indeed, much work of this kind is already underway in the fields of psychotherapy, management studies, medical education and doctor patient relationships, regional development, and in public dialogue projects, as well as in many of the other practical activities that constitute certain crucial moments in our everyday lives (see details on the website <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~jds>). But detailed reference to that work is a topic for another day.

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