“Every new object, well contemplated, opens up a new organ of perception in us”
— Goethe

‘Withness’-thinking is the kind of thinking we require in dealing with the unique people and problems we meet in our everyday lives. It is not a new and special kind of thinking that requires special training to learn. We in fact already do it. It is the kind of thinking we employ everyday when someone says to us – from in the middle of our doing something with them – “Well, I don’t see how you can do that!” And we reply to them, “Simple, like this,” and show them how by our own example, or say to them, “Well, look at it this way,” and go on to give them a verbal image or picture of some kind – and they then say, “Oh, I now see,” and go on to act with either the example of our own action in mind, or with the image we’ve given them in mind, using one or the other to guide them in their acting. Even when we have to work in more abstract terms, doing calculations, say, even here we work-with, think-with, certain basic, taken-for-granted forms, certain ‘felt shapes’ or ‘styles of action’ to guide us.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: ‘withness’-thinking and the dialogical

“A mathematician is bound to be horrified by my mathematical comments, since he has not always been trained to avoid indulging in thoughts and doubts of the kind I develop. He has learned to regard them as something contemptible and, to use an analogy from psycho-analysis (this paragraph is reminiscent of Freud), he has acquired a revulsion from them as infantile. That is to say, I trot out all the problems that a child learning arithmetic, etc., finds difficult, the problems that education represses without solving, I say to those repressed doubts: you are quite correct, go on asking, demand clarification...” (Wittgenstein, 1974, no.25, p.382).

This first chapter is from a little book that I am writing for practitioners, for people who have to think ‘on the run’, in the moment, from within the midst of complexity and a special kind of (dialogical) uncertainty occasioned by always having always to act in relation to others acting. It is for people, like Wittgenstein above, who all along have had misgivings about the applicability of current academic modes of thought to the kinds of difficulties they face. It is to do with a kind of thinking that can only be conducted within fleeting moments, in the course of trying to work out how best to respond to unique and crucial events occurring around one NOW, at this moment in time. I have called it ‘withness’-thinking to contrast it with the kind of ‘aboutness’-thinking that we are much more used to talking about in our reflective discussions with each other. However, it is very different from the kind of thinking we go in for when we are withdrawn from action, and have time for contemplation. Hence, it is a kind of thinking that we are very unused to thinking and talking about. We don’t often pay attention to it. But, as we shall see, everything looks very different when one is ‘in motion’, involved in everyday life practicalities, from how it looks when one is uninvolved and standing still (or sitting down at a desk on one’s own!).
This little book is not yet finished. However, I am using this chapter here to introduce some notes that I hope will be useful, and will help toward introducing the idea of 'withness'-thinking.

Central to withness-thinking is the crucial role that other people's situated speech can play in shaping, not only our actions, but also who we take ourselves to be (our identity). Where by people’s “situated speech,” I mean speech that is responsive in its voicing, in the unfolding contours of its uttering, to the unfolding contours of the events occurring out in the situation both we and they share. Bakhtin (1984) calls this phenomenon, “hidden dialogicality,” and explains it thus: “The second speaker is present invisibly, his words are not there, but deep traces left by these words have a determining effect on the present and visible worlds of the first speaker... for each each present uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person” (p.197). It is because another’s voice can enter into us and influence our own inner dialogues in this way, that I called this short book “withness-thinking and the dialogical.”

************

Some three months after an original meeting, Arlene Katz (1991) explored with clients, mostly couples, their experience of a therapeutic reflecting team consultation. Below is a transcript of a segment from one of her interviews. She was interested in how the experience had affected their subsequent lives. As she puts it: “I wondered, what was the effect on this couple of listening to two, three, or more perspectives? Did it have an impact on how they now talked to each other?” (p.126). The husband, Daniel, had come away from the reflecting team experience with ideas which had begun to generate other ideas about how he might reflect differently on and within himself:

“D: ... the ways in which we reflect on ourselves... That has been interesting to me, it’s like having a Jiminy Cricket or a way in which you have another part of yourself looking at a particular way you’re doing things, and be able to say, ‘wait a minute, before I act in this particular way, maybe I can have other options here...’ Through some kind of very simple interjection of another perspective, maybe you can come up with another reaction in a particular situation dealing with another person.

AK: So those would be two instances where it was almost generative, where the idea generated other ideas?

D: That’s correct; it produced a kind of line of thought or action, or thought that could lead to action.

AK: So it wasn’t only generative in terms of other ideas, it was generative of ideas leading to actions.

D: Yes. I’ve used both of those two approaches in the intervening time... I’m aware of being able to do that now. What it gave me was a kind of new vocabulary or language to be able to talk to myself, to say ‘wait a minute’, or ‘what about...?’ Or ‘it doesn’t have to be perfect, let’s take a look at what isn’t perfect’... It was really a vocabulary that was being developed. The interesting thing was, it was a vocabulary about two specific individuals, that is, Karen and myself. And, therefore, the images had a lot more personal relevance... So, I felt it was the process in which you did have this focused attention.

AK: So, it was something about their following very closely to what you were talking about?

K: Yes. For me it was the delicacy and the close attention and caring” (pp.126-127).

And Katz goes on to remark about Karen’s experience, that she “had to overriding impression of a particular kind of atmosphere that allowed issues to be opened up, ‘a quality of the people involved that I would define by delicacy, gentleness, compassion’. She felt that the initial process of conversation between the interviewer and their therapist had been very effective; it was a “point of entry” and a way of setting the stage for what followed.

K: You or I could stand back and listen and say, ‘oh that’s true’ or ‘that’s not true’ from my experience. Rather than ... doing all the
talking oneself..., you could say, ‘oh, that’s not the way it is from my perspective?’

A: So that gave you a point of comparison.

K: Yes. Which isn’t to deny your experience... it’s like all these different facets of a jewel, and my facet is this and you’re seeing this facet” (pp.126-128).

While Daniel went on to make the following remark, in reply to Katz’s question: “So, in a way it had an effect on the way you talk to yourself?”

“D: It had an effect on the outcome which was a process, and my willingness, my internal willingness. [I think] by presenting an interactive process in which the two people are incorporated on an equal basis, everybody has an opportunity to reflect, everybody has an opportunity to say something. And it doesn’t appear to be hierarchical” (p.128).

**************

In a reflecting team session in family therapy (Andersen, 1990, 1991) – Tom Anderson now prefers the term “reflecting process” for, as we shall see, a special stance and style, i.e., “genre” (Bakhtin (1986), of talk is entailed – therapists who used to ‘observe’ behind a one-way screen, come out from behind it, give up their ‘professional voices’, and hold a much more expressive-responsive kind of conversation amongst themselves about the clients in therapy, a conversation that the clients are at liberty to listen into, and later themselves to respond to with their therapist. This move created a wholly different social dynamic in such therapy sessions. As Katz (1990) remarks: “The reflecting team is one way to have a particular kind of conversation on purpose, a dialogue that invites comparison of differing viewpoints... It is designed to give everybody concerned the opportunity to shift position on purpose, e.g., from listening to participating, from talking to listening, and back again... The comparison of these dual perspectives can promote a genuine double description” (p.109, my emphases). Where “the method of double or multiple comparisons,” as Bateson (1980) describes it, is a process in which the dynamic interaction of information from two or more different sources can create between them a uniquely new relational dimension. Thus, in discussing the external relationship of two creatures or between two living processes, he notes: “Relationship is always a product of ‘double description’; think of the two parties to the interaction as two eyes, each giving a monocular view of what goes on, and – together – giving a binocular view in depth. This double view IS the relationship” (p.146). We will explore the strange structure of such participatory situations, and their relation to both Bateson’s (1908) accounts of double description, Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) account of these special phenomena as chiasmic, i.e., involving a special kind of ‘intertwining’, and Bakhtin’s (1981, 1984, 1986) notion of the dialogical, in much greater detail later.

But let me begin to indicate here the radical novelty of the kind of processes of change we need to consider, as two similar, but slightly different phenomena begin to intertwine with each other. Consider first, simply, two sets of concentric circles: as one is moved horizontally to the left or right of the other, the pattern of rays (as below) emerges – and dynamically, as the circles more further and further apart, more and more rays emerge and coalesce while rotating up from the horizontal toward the vertical.

![Fig.1 Interference patterns](image)

But consider also our stereophonic music systems. In a true stereo recording of an orchestra playing in a hall, it is not just that the violins sound as if they are coming from where they were originally located, i.e., on the left, and violas, cellos, and double basses as if from the right, these days, with “surround sound,” one hears much more. Rather than simply coming just from the left loud speaker, the sound of the violins comes from both speakers, but in a subtly correlated way so that the sound waves meeting between the left and right speakers display complex interference patterns simulating, not just the violins coming from the left, but coming from the left in a concert hall (I owe this image to Peat (1990, pp.114-115). This is because when the orchestra was playing in a concert hall, the
sounds bounced off the walls and ceiling to create such interference patterns in the first place – and it is their reproduction which creates for us that same sense of space as existing around the instruments. A similar interweaving of recorded wave fronts in the realm of light waves occurs, of course, in the making of a hologram.

But to go further in the realm of hearing, as Bakhtin (1986) comments, “one of the means of expressing the speaker’s emotionally evaluative attitude toward the subject of his speech is expressive intonation” (p.85). Bateson (1972) also talks of intonation as carrying, “metacommunicative messages of [say] friendship or hostility” (p.151). And furthermore, as we all know from our experiences in listening to papers badly read at conferences, that unless the speaker’s talk is appropriately intoned, we find their talk inaccessible. While, in the opposite direction, if we can, so to speak, ‘tune in’ to a writer’s or speaker’s ‘tone’, it is a great help in arriving at a sure sense of their ‘point’, of their way of relating themselves to the topic of their talk. I will explore this issue of ‘interference’, ‘double description’, or ‘chiasmic’ interweaving effects, in greater detail later.

I begin with this episode from Katz’s account of client’s experience of the reflecting process, as it exemplifies a central aspect of what I want to discuss in this short book: the influence that other people voices, their embodied expressions, can have in changing and enriching our own inner lives. Indeed, as Daniel’s remarks suggest, they can work to help us develop, refine, and elaborate our own inner abilities to think reflectively and effectively about practical issues arising in the course of our everyday lives together – not just instrumentally, but as Karen’s remarks indicate, relationally. For the way in which we approach, or go up to ‘a something’ that we must deal with, what we might call our style or mode of address, ‘sets the scene’ for the kind of actions that can follow.

In subsequent chapters in this little book, in discussing these and related issues, I want centrally to discuss (among many others) the work of Wittgenstein, Bakhtin and Voloshinov, and Vygotsky. For it is these writers in particular, it seems to me, that have been crucial in orienting us toward paying close attention to the role of language, to the role of people’s embodied utterances, in our jointly conducting between us our everyday affairs. We are used to thinking of ‘putting our thoughts into words’, or thinking of ‘words as standing for things’, but all the writers mentioned above emphasize also, the direct effect that people’s words can have in spontaneously ‘calling out’ certain responses (of one kind or another) from the others to whom they are addressed. In other words, rather than a focus on patterns of already spoken words, they have focussed our attention on people’s words in their speaking, on the dynamic ways in which people use of words in the course of their other actions, and on the subtle details of how, as their use of words unfolds in responsive relation to those to whom they are addressed, people adjust their expressions accordingly. Their writings can help us to ‘get inside’ the dynamics of these moment by moment unfolding processes in which we, as living beings, i.e., as spontaneously responsive and expressive beings, directly and immediately influence each other in our daily activities.

Indeed, we can begin to illuminate Daniel’s comments above – about having “a kind of new vocabulary or language to be able to talk to myself” – with some remarks of Vygotsky’s on the role of others words, as children “grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (1978, p.88). For instance, he notes that slowly, as the child develops, he or she “begins to practice with respect to himself [or herself] the same forms of behavior that others formerly practiced with respect to him [or her]” (Vygotsky, 1966, pp.39-40). In other words, while children begin first to respond to the (gestural force) in the utterances of those around them – to stop their activities when their parents say “Stop!,” to look where their parents are looking when they say “Look! (and point at something),” and so on – they later begin themselves to use these forms of talk to influence their parent’s behaviour – and then, finally, to gain some self-control of their own behaviour by the use of such directive and instructive forms of talk. As I mentioned above, we are used to thinking of ‘words as standing for things’, and so on, but this use of words to directly and spontaneously ‘call out’ a response from another (or from ourselves), has mostly been ignored in past work on language.

But for Vygotsky (and, as we shall see, for all the other writers I will refer to below), this functional use of words to directly influence people’s bodily behaviour, is central. With regard to his studies of concept formation he says: “Our experimental study proved that it was the functional use of the word, or any other sign, as means of focusing one’s
attention, selecting distinctive features and analyzing and synthesizing them, that plays a central role in concept formation... Words and other signs are those means that direct our mental operations, control their course, and channel them toward the solution of the problem confronting us” (1986, pp.106-107). Thus, as children grow into the intellectual lives of those around them, “the greatest change in children’s capacity to use language as a problem-solving tool takes place... when socialized speech (which has previously been used to address an adult) is turned inward. Instead of appealing to the adult, children appeal to themselves, language thus takes on an intrapersonal function in addition to its interpersonal use” (1978, p.27).

In particular, in the special context of school classrooms, if we ask why children seem able to correctly solve problems involving scientific concepts more often than similar problems involving everyday concepts, we find Vygotsky (1986) replies: “Because the teacher, working with the pupil, has explained, supplied information, questioned, corrected, and made the pupil explain. The child’s concepts have been formed in the process of instruction, in collaboration with an adult. In finishing the sentence, he makes use of the fruits of that collaboration, this time independently. The adult’s help, invisibly present, enables the child to solve such problems earlier than everyday problems” (p.191).

Indeed, in many spheres of their lives, children can develop ways of using instructive talk for guiding themselves that were, at first, used both by others to influence them, and later by them to influence those others. As a result, they can begin to organize their own activities according to social forms of behaviour which, inevitably, will make sense to all around them. Children can be affected even in what, and how, they pay attention to events occurring around them. For, as children come to guide their own actions by use of their own speech to themselves: “The child begins to perceive the world not only through his [or her] eyes but also through his [or her] speech,” says Vygotsky (1978, p.32).

But let me turn now to Karen’s comments – on how the delicacy and the close attention and caring of other people’s words seemed open up a ‘point of entry’ and to set the stage for what followed – and note some of Bakhtin’s comments here on how a speaker’s relations to others, i.e., the whole multidimensional complex of interwoven influences at work in those relations, influence how that speaker voices their utterances, how they ‘shape’ the unfolding contours of their talk. So that within it, they can directly express the delicacy and caring of which Karen speaks, or equally directly, they can so easily express a lack of care and inattention to subtlety. “From the very beginning,” says Bakhtin (1986) a person’s “utterance is constructed while taking into account possible responsive reactions, for whose sake, in essence, it is actually created. As we know, the role of the others for whom the utterance is constructed is extremely great... From the very beginning, the speaker expects a response from them, an active responsive understanding. The entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of encountering this response” (p.94, my emphasis). In other words, as Bakhtin (1986) puts it, “an essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its addressivity... Each speech genre in each area of speech communication has its own typical conception of the addressee, and this defines it as a genre” (p.95), i.e., as talk with a certain style or overall grammar to it.

Again, used to thinking about words as standing for things, or as ‘picturing’ our already existing thoughts, we are unused to thinking of them always as working towards a future, as being influenced by something which does not as yet exist! This is where others are at work even in those of our activities in which we think of ourselves as being wholly in control of, wholly the authors of, our own actions. “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...” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.69).

Thus, among the other features of such 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). Thus, among the many other features of our spontaneously responsive talk in our everyday lives together, is its orientation toward the future, expressed in the anticipatory openings we provide for those to whom we address our talk – or don’t provide, as the case may be – to reply. “Thus, addressivity, the quality of turning to someone, is a constitutive feature of the utterance; without it the
utterance does not and cannot exist” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.99).

Thus, as we begin to ‘get inside’ the dynamics of the unfolding process occurring in words in their speaking, as we word our expressions, we can begin to see how it was that Karen felt that the very style of talk adopted by the reflecting team – irrespective of its content – opened a “point of entry” and set the stage for the new, much more multifaceted ways of talking, and thinking, they both came to adopt between and within themselves toward the difficulties they faced in their lives together. In other words, it was not just in its responsiveness (its attentiveness to the Daniel and Karen’s expressions), but in its addressivity (in its implied anticipations), that the reflecting team’s talk invited or ‘called out’ a whole special set of responses from Karen and Daniel – spontaneous responses that created the beginnings of their new ways of relating themselves to each other and to their circumstances. And as we have already seen, what is crucial in the reflecting team’s style of talk, if it is to do this, is “how the speaker (or writer) sense and imagines his [or her] addressee, and the force of their effect on the utterance... When constructing my utterance, I try actively to determine [his or her] response. Moreover, I try to act in accordance with the response I anticipate, so this anticipated response, in turn, exerts an active influence on my utterance (I parry objections that I foresee, I make all kinds of provisos, and so forth)” (p.95). Indeed, we reflect our addressee’s social position, rank, and importance in the tone of voice and vocabulary of terms we adopt, and in the moment by moment responsive-expressive contours of our expressions as they unfold. Thus, if we are to adopt an “intimate” style of talk, in which we perceive our addressees as more or less outside current frameworks of social hierarchy, as “without rank,” as Bakhtin (1986, p.97) puts it, then a part of establishing exchanges within which this is possible, is sensing and imagining one’s addressee is a particular way: “Intimate speech is imbued with a deep confidence in the addressee, in his sympathy, in his sensitivity and goodwill of his responsive understanding. In this atmosphere of profound trust, the speaker reveals his internal depths” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.97). It takes two, at least two – at least in the beginning – for us to be fully ourselves to ourselves, we cannot be so alone.

But how did Karen sense that this style of talk, this genre of intimate talk “without rank,” was a point of entry? In what way did it set the stage for what followed? Here, I think, we can turn to some of Wittgenstein’s remarks – utterances that work to provide us with what he calls “reminders” (Wittgenstein, 1953, no.127), i.e., remarks that call to our attention things that in some sense we already know.

Wittgenstein’s (1953) is well known to us for his claim that: “For a large class of cases-though not for all-in which we employ the word ‘meaning’ it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (no.43). He is also well known for calling the whole activity within which we use language, “the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the ‘language-game’” (no.7), and for going on to claim, like Bakhtin, that our use of our words, our utterances, only make within inside the context of a language-game. This is a tremendously important point, and serves to focus our attention on the fact for all of us, our words only have their meanings out in the contexts of their use – even Samuel Johnson worked backwards from the uses of words (in literature) in the previous 200 years (Hitchings, 2005). But if this was all he had said about the meaning of our words – that they had no meaning outside a language game – this would leave us puzzled as to how we could ever say anything new. How could we ever interweave our old and familiar words into activities in new ways, how we could ever come to grasp the unique meaning of a unique individual?

What he is, perhaps less well known for, is his remarks on the beginnings of new language-games. Here, again like Vygotsky and like Bakhtin, he notes people’s living susceptibility to respond spontaneously to events occurring around them. Thus, as he sees it: “The origin and primitive form of the language-game is,” says Wittgenstein (1980a), “a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language – I want to say – is a refinement, ‘in the beginning was the deed’ [quoting Goethe]” (p.31). “The primitive reaction may have been a glance or a gesture, but it may also have been a word,” he notes (Wittgenstein, 1953, p.218). “But what is the word ‘primitive’ meant to say here?” he asks, “Presumably 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” (Wittgenstein, 1981, no.541). This is the key: the point of entry, the start of new ways of thinking, acting, seeing, judging, and communicating, in short, the start of new ways of relating ourselves to our surroundings, can be found in such ‘striking, moving, or arresting moments’ (Shotter and Katz, 1998).
Indeed, once we begin to recognize the existence of the vast realm of ceaseless, continuously ongoing activity spontaneously occurring between us and all the others and othernesses around us – the realm “not of what we do or what we ought to do, but [of] what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing” (Gadamer, 1989, p.xxviii) – then we realize that we have been like the proverbial fish who were the last to discover water. We have not given our conversationally intertwined activities the attention they deserve. For conversation is not just one of our many activities in the world. On the contrary, we constitute both ourselves and our worlds in our conversational activities. For us, they are foundational. The unceasing flow of speech intertwined activity between us, this background realm of living activity within which we are all inextricably immersed and from out of which and back into which all individual actions emerge and rely on if they are to make sense, is a surprisingly immense terra incognita still awaiting study and articulation. Wittgenstein (1980a) describes the state of affairs thus: “Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I could express has its meaning” (p.16). Just as with our binocular vision – where we are centrally aware of an object over there, but remain quite unaware of the amazing relational dynamics taking place in the background as the views from our two separate eyes are combined in the optic chiasma, moment by moment, to array a whole landscape before us, in changing aspects and varying depths as we move within it – so we easily remain unaware of the similar relational dynamics at work in the background to many of our other everyday activities as we progress through them. This does not mean to say, however, that because our speech intertwined activities constitutes the usually ignored background within which our lives are rooted, they need remain so. For, it is from within our conversational activities themselves that we can draw attention to certain of their crucially important features that would otherwise escape our notice. Thus we can come to a grasp aspects of their nature through talk itself, even when a vision of it as a whole, in theory, is denied us. This is the power of Wittgenstein’s methods of inquiry into the “logical grammars” inherent in our talk.

**********

Wittgenstein’s methods are responsive, descriptive and creative. They work in terms of continually offering concrete, detailed, and sometimes extraordinary examples. Thus, what he offers us are not assertions, prescriptions, or aphorisms; he is not giving hints for possible explanations, offering hypotheses, or describing actualities... etc... but making “remarks.” In other words, he is voicing utterances that draw our attention to what usually goes unnoticed; and it is crucial that we are in a responsive relation to him and his writings for his remarks to ‘call out’ appropriate responses within us.

**Remark** / / v. & n (from the Concise Oxford English Dictionary):

v.
1 tr. (often foll. by that + clause) a say by way of comment. b take notice of; regard with attention.
2 intr. (usu. foll. by on, upon) make a comment.

n.
1 a written or spoken comment; anything said.
2 a the act of noticing or observing (worthy of remark). b the act of commenting (let it pass without remark). [French remarque, remarquer (as re-, mark1)]

Thus our ‘hearing’ his ‘voicing’ of his remarks is important too: For, to repeat, he is not giving us patterns of already spoken words, patterns that are important to us because of their form or content. The ‘point’ of what he has to say is there, in his words, in his speaking of them, and, in our responses to them as he speaks them!!!

*******

In recent years, there has been an upheaval in our thought about ourselves and our ways of relating ourselves to the world around us – a shift from thinking of ourselves as static, outside observers of an objective world, able to take a ‘point of view’ in regarding it as ‘out there’, to thinking of ourselves as active agents, continually on the move, immersed in the world along with many others similar to ourselves, needing to ‘get into’ situations and to ‘see them from all sides’, while being just as much acted on by events in our surroundings as able to act back upon them. It is a move away from the study of an immaterial mind hidden in the heads of individuals to the study of embodied social practices visibly to those involved in them (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, and von Savigny, 2001). It is also a move away...
from systematically ordered simplicities and certainties to complexities – 
“there is complexity if things relate but don’t add up,” as Mol and Law (2002, p.1) very nicely put it. I will say more about these changes later. But 
let me say here, that in my view, for those of us interested in studying and 
coming to an understanding of human affairs from within their own 
everyday participation within them, not only are things now in flux, still on 
the move, but that is how from now, I will claim, on they should stay. We 
must not return once again to the charm and attraction, and easy 
formulation, of fixed and static views. We must learn how to shift our 
attention away from supposed, eternally constant forms hidden away
“behind appearances” (the old Greek dream), to shift away from the urge to 
discover stable rules laws, or principles in terms of which each new event 
can be understood as repeating in some sense essential features of past 
events, and turn toward a focus on first-time, unique events occurring out in 
the world between us and the others and othernesses around us. It is a shift 
to what occurs in our unfolding relations, in our meetings, with these others 
and othernesses – an overall shift from a focus on static Being, on what can 
be thought of as eternally existing, to a focus on ongoing Being or 
Becoming, on what at each moment in time are unique, only “once-
occurrent events of Being,” as Bakhtin (1993, p.1) put it.

In other words, we must begin to teach ourselves how to think and 
to talk, and to characterize our understandings of our circumstances, while 
in motion. We are well versed in thinking and talking about understandings 
gained from static standpoints. We talk of seeing things from a place, 
position, or point of view, from within a perspective or framework, in terms 
of static shapes, forms, or pictures. We are very unused to talking of things 
from within our ongoing, unfolding relations with them. Indeed, the shift 
from thoughtful understandings gained in contemplation to practical 
understandings gained while in action is, we shall find, quite revolutionary. 
Everything we thought we understood and had the vocabulary to describe, 
changes. For instance, while many may still see philosophy as primarily 
oriented toward gaining a kind of knowledge (or wisdom) that ultimately is 
recorded in a book, Wittgenstein (1953) suggests a much more practical 
definition. As he sees it, “a philosophical problem has the form,” he says, 
“[o] I don’t know my way about” (no.123). And it is solved, he suggest, 
when we can say to someone (and to ourselves), “Now I can go on!”” 
(no.151). I mention Wittgenstein’s more practical less intellectual, more 
poetic reformulation of our disquiets here, as these two metaphorical 
expressions – the one of a kind of difficulty, the other of having overcome it 
– are central to what I want to offer in this short book.

************

If instead of theoretical talk in classrooms and committee rooms, we begin 
to focus on actual practices in a context and begin to attend to the details of 
our activities together, i.e., to our actual ways of relating ourselves to our 
particular surroundings, we realize that the world of practice is not very 
familiar to us. This is because in most of our reflective talk, we withdraw 
ourselves from our ongoing actions and contemplate them as, so to speak, 
as uninvolved outsiders, viewing them in terms describable to others, i.e., as mostly in objective terms, in terms of features readily visible 
to others. Occasionally, of course, we resort to subjective talk – ’it seems to 
me’, ‘I think that X is the case’, or ‘I feel so and so’ – but then we feel we 
are not talking of something actually existing out in the world between us; 
we are talking of something inside only our self as an individual.

As we make the shift from static, uninvolved thinking, however, to 
dynamic, involved thinking, as we shift from thinking in terms of our 
surroundings as consisting in separately identifiable parts to thinking of 
them in living, relational terms living, our whole relation to them changes. 
Instead of being an external observer, standing over against or apart from 
what we are inquiring into, we become involved participants on the great 
stage of life (to paraphrase Niels Bohr’s famous comment). However, if we 
are to resituate ourselves in our lives in this way, as interested participants 
rather than as disinterested observers, we need to acknowledge that our 
focussing on the idea of “participation,” not only changes our whole way of 
seeing the world around us, but also changes both what we take it to be, as 
well as our whole way of being in it.

Just by way of introduction, I will list some of the changes 
entailed in how we think about a range of crucial notions currently very 
familiar to us:

• things – will be known by their ‘place’ or ‘position’ in a dynamic 
  complex of unfolding interrelations (a ‘landscape’ or ‘ecology’), 
  instead of their ‘natures’ being known ‘in themselves’, in terms of 
  their ‘properties’. 


time – in participatory time-space, everything remains ‘present’ in the moment and it all, irretrievably ‘latter’ together (see Whorf, 1956), instead of time passing on, and events passing us by, as if ‘moments of time’ are ‘spatialized’ for us like beads on a string.

• space – in participatory time-space, everything is related to everything else, our expressions (thoughts) produce responses, instead of separate, discrete, and unrelated events, spaces, and objects.

• thinking – is thinking always with another, as if in an inner dialogue with them, instead of it being thought of as inner calculation (‘figuring things out’).

• knowledge – comes to be a practical matter of ‘knowing one’s way about’ (where to go, what to do next), instead of being able both to ‘picture’ a future state of affairs and to argue convincingly in favour of acting to bring it into existence.

• perceiving (our ways of seeing) – come to be expressed in our immediate bodily responses to our circumstances, instead of being deliberately thought out as cognitive interpretations.

• learning – becomes something that happens incidentally and effortlessly in participatory contexts (Lave and Wenger, 1991), instead of requiring self-conscious, effortful attention to a teacher’s instructions in a classroom.

• teaching (practices) – becomes (as in Wittgenstein’s ‘teachings’) a matter of pointing out previously unnoticed details in concrete contexts, and of providing concrete exemplars of right practice, instead of the enunciation of abstract general principles.

• communication – becomes a relationally-responsive matter to with unique individual making unique points in unique circumstances, instead of giving general, decontextualized, information.

• valuing (judging) – comes to be manifested both in one’s responsibility, and the addressivity one adopts, towards the Others and othernesses around one, instead of a cognitive judgment, calculated in terms of a fixed set of dimensions.

• context – is the ‘here and now’, ‘the present moment’, the ongoing context in which we live, work, think, talk, etc., that we constitute this way and that as convenient in our communications with others: instead of what we see as the context later, when we retrospectively ‘apply’ our ‘knowledge’ in our intellectual ‘analyses’ of our activities.

And, to single out a number of central notions:

• theory – will come to be expressed in the form of an (often, narrative) account (Shotter, 1984), working in a practical, relationally-responsive manner to influence how persons responsive to it will orient or relate to events in their surroundings, instead of being presented in terms of a single, systematic order of connectness, working in a cognitive representational-referential manner to determine a specific course of action.

• anticipating the future – will come to be seen as undertaking certain preparations (training, building sensitivities, adopting certain stances, etc.), instead of requiring planning (of setting out pictured goals and frameworks in talk and writing in round-table meetings).

• changing how we live and work – becomes a matter of putting into our lives and work a new kind of dialogically reflective practice, instead of ‘putting theory into practice’.

• chiasmic change (Shotter, 200x, 200x) – indeed, the whole idea of change, perhaps, changes more than any of our other basic, background ideas, for all dialogical changes occur as the result of new articulations, new refinements and elaborations being chiasmically interwoven into our already existing practices and activities (more on this topic later).

All these changes, then, in the taken for granted meanings of all these basic terms (and more) will be necessary in making the switch from ‘aboutness’-thinking to ‘withness’-thinking in our discussions as to what to do for the best with respect to the difficulties we face in our everyday lives together. What we have taken for granted, consequently, becomes rather unfamiliar to us.

************

My reasons for choosing to call the kind of thinking required if we are to think while ‘on the run’, while ‘in motion’, withness-thinking, are not immediately obvious, so I will try to explain them.
First, I was impressed by Wittgenstein’s (1980a) comment, that the beginning of a new language-game is to be found in our spontaneous reactions to events occurring around us. Indeed, for many years now I have also been influenced by Vygotsky’s (1962) claim that a basic law of development is that “consciousness and control appear only at a late stage in the development of a function, after it has been used and practiced unconsciously and spontaneously. In order to subject a function to intellectual and volitional control, we must first possess it” (p.90). In other words, it is a unique other or otherness, something other than ourselves, that spontaneously calls out new responses from us – and it is responses to otherness that are responsible for our psychological development, not anything intrinsically within us. This also gives us a clue as to how it is possible for us to come to unique, first-time, only once-occurrent understandings – clearly a problem for those of us who must deal with the passing moments of everyday life.

Next, in discussing the special kind of looking we employ when looking at a painting (by Cezanne, say), Merleau-Ponty (1964a) notes: “I would be at great pains 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 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). In other words, instead of factual, aboutness-seeing, in which we gaze at something with the aim of ‘fitting it into’ a schematism of some kind already in mind, we can begin here to make sense of what we might call a withness-seeing. For, after having seen one Cezanne, we can begin to look over other paintings with the image of a Cezanne picture in mind that shapes and instructs our looking – the Cezanne painted has ‘taught’ us, or we have ‘learnt’ from it, a certain ‘way or style or genre of looking’ that we can now apply to other Cezanne’s, to other paintings. Similarly, with a piece of reading in mind, 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) – it is not that after reading Wittgenstein we see language as a game, or as a city, and that’s the end of it, but with a city in mind (which city: Paris (wheel and spoke), New York (grid), London (mess))?; we look to see if language has different ‘regions’, so to speak, like business, entertainment, university, sports, etc. districts, and whether it has a centre, suburbs, a countryside, archeological layers, etc., etc. It is a looking and a seeing that is already ‘primed’, so to speak, to notice the occurrence of possible connections and relations between momentary features of our surroundings that might otherwise be missed. Indeed, as Bakhtin (1986) puts it with regard to our listening to another’s speech, to repeat, our listening must be an “actively responsive” listening which “constitutes nothing more than the initial preparatory stage of a response (in what ever form it may be actualized)” (p.69).

These are the initial reasons for my calling this style of thinking, withness-thinking. But there is another reason, to do with the influence that another’s voice can have upon us. As Vygotsky (1986) noted above, when discussing the influence of an adult’s instructive talk on a child’s behaviour, to repeat: “the adult’s help, invisibly present, enables the child to solve such problems earlier than everyday problems” (p.191). Indeed, the work of all the people I have mentioned so far – Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty, and many more – illuminates how another’s voice, “invisibly present,” can exert its influence in shaping our conduct in our own everyday affairs. And it is especially the crucial role that other people’s situated speech, their utterances that are immediately responsive to our utterances, that I want to discuss below.

Very generally, as I hope is already clear, the switch from past ways of thinking about thinking – as taking place in terms of inner calculations or information processing – to thinking about it as entailing inner, multi-voiced dialogues, requires a considerable number of changes in how we orient or relate ourselves to the new, once-off events occurring in our surroundings that we must cope with. Indeed, as I mentioned above, a major change is in the ways we orient towards events occurring in our surroundings: Instead of, in the face of difficulties, seeking more information, more facts, we must (as in Merleau-Ponty’s example, of letting Cezanne’s paintings ‘teach’ us a uniquely new way of looking at paintings) let certain concrete, exemplary events teach us the new orientations, the new forms of approach and the new background expectations and anticipations, we need if we are to ‘see’, i.e, to responsively understand, the unique meanings in the once-off events occurring around us.

But there is one important step more in all of this: Although I must mentioned above that Wittgenstein (1953, no.123) talked of our “not
knowing our way about inside the landscape of whole set of interconnected problems, the field of problems he concern himself with, was mainly the field of philosophical problems – the problem of knowledge, of language, of mind, of meaning, of logic, etc., etc.. Whereas, for those of us with a more practical horizon, who have to think in the moment, from within the midst of a special kind of dialogical uncertainty due always to having to act in relation to others acting, we need to know our way about inside ourselves, i.e, inside our own inner mental activities – we need to know how best to compose ourselves to approach that particular confused and confusing circumstance, this particular distraught person, that seemingly misleading way of talking, this puzzling way of behaving, and so on. As Wittgenstein (1980a) notes about working in his kind of philosophy, that it “is really more a working on oneself... on one’s way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them)” (p.16). Exploring what is entailed in this task of building up within oneself that whole landscape of anticipatory sensitivities required to meet new, unique people and circumstances, and then of being able both to find how one is placed at any one moment within it, and to find one’s way about within it, thus to know how next to go, is the task of the rest of this little book.

CHAPTER TWO

The dialogical, joint nature of human activity

“Language lives only in the dialogical interaction of those who make use of it. Dialogic interaction is indeed the authentic sphere where language lives... Dialogic relationships are reducible neither to logical relationships nor to relationships oriented semantically toward their referential object, [these are] relationships in and of themselves devoid of any dialogical element. They must clothe themselves in discourse, become utterances, become positions of various subjects expressed in discourse, in order that dialogic relations might arise among them...

‘Life is good’. ‘Life is good’. Here are two absolutely identical judgments, or in fact one singular judgment written (or pronounced) by us twice... We can, to be sure, speak here of the logical relationship of identity between two judgments. But if this judgment is expressed in two utterances by two different subjects, then dialogic relationships arise between them (agreement, affirmation)” (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.183-184).

“The given and the created in a speech utterance. An utterance is never just a reflection or an expression of something already existing and outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable, and, moreover, it always has some relation to value (the true, the good, the beautiful, and so forth). But something created is always created out of something given (language, an observed phenomenon of reality, an experienced feeling, the speaking subject himself, something finalized in his world view, and so forth). What is given is completely transformed in what is created” (Bakhtin, 1986, pp.119-120).
Something special happens when one living being acts in the presence of another – for, by its very nature, the second being cannot but help respond to the activities of the first. But the first did not just act out of nowhere either; the first acted in response to events in its surroundings too. Thus at work in the world of living beings, is a continuous flow of spontaneously responsive activity within all such beings are embedded. We can called activity of this kind “joint action” (Shotter, 1980, 1984), or we can call it “dialogically-structured activity” (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986), or later, “chiasmically intertwined activity” (Bateson, 1972; Merleau-Ponty, 1968).

**Joint action, ‘our’ action**: We cannot not be responsive both to those around us [others] and to other aspects [othernesses] of our surroundings.

**Thus**, in such spontaneously responsive sphere of activity as this, instead of one person first acting individually and independently of an other, and then the second replying, by acting individually and independently of the first, we act jointly, as a collective-we.

**And we do this bodily**, in a ‘living’ way, spontaneously, without us having first ‘to work out’ how to respond to each other.

**This means that when someone acts**, their activity cannot be accounted as wholly their own activity – for a person’s acts are partly ‘shaped’ by the acts of the others around them – this is where all the strangeness of the dialogical begins.

**Hence**, our actions are neither yours nor mine; they are truly ‘ours’.

**Hence, meaning is present in all our inter-activity**: “The mechanism of meaning is present in the social act before the emergence of consciousness or awareness of meaning occurs. The act or adjutice response of the second organism gives to the gesture of the first... the meaning it has” (Mead, 1934, pp.77-8).

**Wholeness**: “Sawing and dancing are paradigm cases of dialogical actions. But there is frequently a dialogical level to actions that are otherwise merely coordinated. A conversation is a good example. Conversations with some degree of ease and intimacy move beyond mere coordination and have a common rhythm. The interlocutor not only listens but participates with head nodding and ‘unh-hunh’ and the like, and at a certain point the ‘semantic turn’ passes over to the other by a common movement. The **appropriate moment is felt by both partners together in virtue of the common rhythm**” (Taylor, 1991, p.310)... not in virtue merely of a common rhythm, but in virtue of each move in the interplay ‘satisfying’ at each moment an appropriate constitutive expectation, thus to constitute a ‘sensed whole or unity’.

**Dialogically-structured activities occur, then, only when we enter into mutually responsive, living, embodied relations with the others and othernesses around us – when we cease to set ourselves, unresponsively, over against them, and allow ourselves to enter into an inter-involvement with them.**

It is here, in the intricately timed ‘orchestration’ of the interplay occurring between our own outgoing, (responsive) *expressions* toward those others (or othernesses) and their equally responsive incoming *expressions* toward us, that a very special kind of understanding of this special phenomenon becomes available to us. We can call it a “relationally-responsive” understanding to contrast it with the “representational-referential” understanding we are more used to when we withdraw from action and become contemplative.

“A ‘bit’ of information is definable as a difference that makes a difference” (Bateson, 1972, p.286).

**The optic chiasma**

It takes at least two ‘somethings’ to create a difference. “The stuff of sensation [is]... a pair of values of some variable, presented over a time to a sense organ whose response depends upon the ratio between the members of the pair” (p.79). A simple and familiar case of “double description” is, as already mentioned, binocular vision. About it, Bateson (1979) comments: “The innervation of the two retinas and the creation at the optic chiasma of pathways for the redistribution of information is such an extraordinary feat of morphogenesis [i.e., the creation of new forms] as must surely denote great evolutionary advantage... The binocular image, which appears to be
undivided, is in fact a complex synthesis of information from the left front in the right brain and a corresponding synthesis of material from the right front in the left brain. Later these two synthesized aggregates of information are themselves synthesized into a single subjective picture from which all traces of the vertical boundary have disappeared” (pp.79-80).

But what is most important is, that in this dynamic, chiasmic intertwining a new and unique “relational dimension” – depth – is created (as Bateson says, morphogenesis occurs). As he notes: “the seer adds an extra dimension to seeing” (p.80).

But for this to occur, dynamically, the differences that make a difference, that give rise to cases of “double description,” must be “similar differences,” for the relevant “relational dimensions” created to arise in “interference” effects. Thus, for the utterance of a second person to be in a truly dialogical relation to the first, and to be ‘creative’ in Bakhtin’s sense, the second utterance must be in a spontaneously responsive relation to it. Hence the power of the requirement – in Tom Andersen’s (1990) “reflecting process” and Jaakko Seikkula’s (1995, 2002) “open dialogue” – that every said must be in response to what has already been said in the therapy session. Also, Harry Goolishian’s dictum: “Listen to what clients really say, not to what you think they mean.”
constitutive of people’s social and personal identities, is prior to
and determines all the other ways of knowing available to us.

- Activities in this sphere lack specificity; they are only partially
determined.

- They are a complex mixture of many different kinds of influences.

- They are just as much material as mental; they are just as much
felt as thought, and thought as felt.

- Their intertwined, complex nature makes it very difficult for us to
classify 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.

- While they can exhibit progressive changes, they can also exhibit
retrogressive ones too.

- They are also non-locatable - 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.

- Nor is there a separate before and after (Bergson), neither an agent
nor an effect, but only a meaningful, ‘enduring’ whole which
cannot divide itself into separable parts – a whole that, in
enduring, dynamically sustains itself in existence [“duration”].

“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” (Z. no.567)... (cf also 1980, 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 their central defining feature.
And: it is precisely this that makes this sphere of activity
interesting... for at least two reasons: 1) to do with practical
investigations into how people actually do manage to ‘work
things out’, and the part played by the ways of talking we
interweave into the many different spheres of practical activity
occurring between us; 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.

********

- The situation as agentic: because the overall outcome of any
exchange cannot be traced back to the intentions of any of the
individuals involved, the ‘dialogical reality or space’ constructed
between them is experienced as an ‘external reality’, a ‘third
agency’ (an ‘it’) with its own (ethical) demands and requirements:
“The word is a drama in which three characters participate (it is
not a duet, but a trio)” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.122)... a third agency is
at work in dialogical realities.

********

- The specificatory function of language: Thus, “human discourse
takes place in and deals with a pluralistic, only fragmentarily
known, and only partially shared social world” (Rommetveit,
1985, p.183).

- “...vagueness, ambiguity, and incompleteness - but hence also
versatility, flexibility, and negotiability - must for that reason be
dealt with as inherent and theoretically essential characteristics of
ordinary language” (p.183).

- “There is hardly any more efficient way of evading the
complexities of ordinary language use than to dissociate it from
actual use and explicate its syntactic and semantic rules under
stipulated ‘ideal’ conditions” (p.185).

- Thus, in such circumstances, “even apparently simple objects and
events remain in principle enigmatic and undetermined as social
realities until they are talked about” (p.193).

- It is only from within a living involvement in such an ongoing
flow of dialogical activity, that we can make sense of what is
occurring around us.

- These are not understandings of a situation, which allow it to be
linked to realities already known to us, but new, first-time
understandings which are constitutive for us of what counts as the
significant, stable and repeatable forms within that flow.
CHAPTER THREE

Wittgenstein’s methods: the role of ‘reminders’ in withness-thinking

“Nothing is hidden” (1953, no.435).

“What makes a subject hard to understand – if it’s something significant and important – is not that before you can understand it you need to be specially trained in abstruse matters, but the contrast between understanding the subject and what most people want to see. Because of this the very things which are most obvious may become the hardest of all to understand. What has to be overcome is a difficulty having to do with the will, rather than with the intellect” (1980, p.17).

“If I had to say what is the main mistake by philosophers of the present generation, including Moore, I would say that when language is looked at, what is looked at is a form of words and not the use made of the form of words” (1966, p.2).

Reorienting, re-positioning, re-relating oneself to one’s surroundings, and to one’s goal within them: becoming a ‘participant’ agency rather than a ‘masterful’ agent

The change in attitude we need, if we are to begin to understand Wittgenstein’s methods, is to begin to focus, not on what we do consciously and deliberately, but on what just happens to us, spontaneously and unconsciously in our everyday living involvements in which language is used, i.e., on our spontaneous reactions to people’s use of words, including our own reactions as well as those of others.

A person’s responsive reactions to events in their surroundings are always expressive in some way to those around them of the person’s attitudes, evaluations, or feelings regarding the events in question – we can see that the man over there was ‘taken by surprise’, that that woman was ‘upset’, that the child in the shopping mall ‘wanted to be picked up’, etc.

Hence, in focusing on word use in Wittgenstein’s sense, we cannot just focus on words as separable, countable entities in our investigations, we must focus on those events or moments in our lives in which we are in an expressively-responsive, living relation with the others and othernesses around us, moments or events when the words we use are merely an aspect in or of a larger whole – a surrounding situation into which they are complexly interwoven or (chiasmically) intertwined.

In other words, we must focus centrally on our words in their speaking, rather than on the patterns to be found in our already spoken words. The task is to work from within the still ongoing moment of speaking, not to look back on completed, past speech acts.

************

The everydayness of his methods in his ‘grammatical investigations:’ ‘instructive’, ‘attention directing’, ‘new expectation creating’ talk:

“What, then, is the kind of understanding are we seeking here? What does ”grammatical” mean for Wittgenstein?

It will be useful to remind ourselves that he wants ”to bring words back from their metaphysical use to their everyday use” (1953, no.116).

But what holds our everyday use of words together, so to speak?
When I say: “Pass the salt, please,” and you do (and also feel I have been polite to you too), what makes such an exchange possible? Clearly, when as children we grow ‘into’ the communal life of those around us, we come, literally, to embrace a whole background of shared expectations and anticipations, shared “feelings of tendency, often so vague that we are unable to name them at all” (James, 1890, p.254).

So, as I see it, what Wittgenstein means by his “grammatical investigations,” are investigations which bring to light the shared ‘valencies’ or ‘structurizing tendencies’ always already at work in all those situations into which we all, spontaneously, interweave our use of language, and which lead us into interlinking our use of words at one moment with how we might use of them in the next moment – but not in terms of their forms, but in terms of their uses, their meanings, what we are doing in our uses of them.

His “grammatical” investigations can, thus, be seen as part of a “living tradition” – our tradition – as a special “reflective” insertion into the very tradition by which, and within which, we all in fact live our daily lives. Where this living tradition cannot be found either in “official ideological rhetorics,” nor in the store of facts we can learn in schools and libraries, but only out in all the different practical activities in terms of which we actually conduct our daily lives together.

As MacIntyre (1981) puts it: “A living tradition … is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition” (p.207). “Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict” (p.206). In a living tradition, various images speak for themselves, they ‘itch at our ears’, we hear their voices. As Gadamer (1975) puts it, “… a tradition is not simply a process we learn to know and be in command of through experience, it is language, i.e., it expresses itself like a ‘Thou’. A ‘Thou’ is not an object, but stands in a relationship with us” (p.321) – but we are “bewitched” by some of these images: “A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (1953, no.115).

In other words, he seeks to teach us methods for use in our investigations of our own immediate everyday circumstances, so that we may come, so to speak, to feel more ‘at home’ in them… so that we may come to feel so at home in the ‘landscape’ of all our uses of our language, that we can find our ‘way about’ inside them all without needing to consult a map, i.e., so that we can ‘go on’ without needing to refer to any ‘theories’ or ‘inner mental representations’ or ‘pictures’… and feeling no longer feel bewildered or disoriented, we can “awake to wonder” (CV, p.5), to the amazingness of the ordinary.

Thus, the methods of “grammatical investigation” he is trying to teach us, orient us towards how we understand our use of words in this, that, or some other unique and particular context… they are methods for confronting ‘once-off’, ‘first-time’, unique events in all their detailed uniqueness… and for drawing our attention to the fact that in coming to an understanding of how to ‘go on’, we make use of many of these details without usually noticing that fact… his methods work to draw our attention to what we normally ‘expect’ and/or ‘anticipate’ in such ongoing, everyday circumstances, and need to anticipate, if we are to act correctly – but such anticipations occur (happen) to us only when we are ‘in motion’, in the course of ‘going on’. If we stop or are stuck, they disappear, and we become disoriented.

The task is, to get back in motion!!!

**********

His methods, then, are responsive, descriptive and creative… and they work in terms of continually offering concrete, detailed, and sometimes extraordinary examples…

Thus, what he offers us are not assertions, prescriptions, or aphorisms; he is not giving hints for possible explanations, offering hypotheses, or describing actualities… etc… but making “remarks.” In other words, he is voicing utterances that draw our attention to what usually goes unnoticed; and it is crucial that we are in a responsive relation to him and his writings for his remarks to ‘call out’ appropriate responses within us (see Concise Oxford English Dictionary defn of “remark” in Chap one). Thus our ‘hearing’ his ‘voicing’ of his remarks is important too: For, to
repeat, he is not giving us patterns of already spoken words, patterns that are important to us because of their form or content. The ‘point’ of what he has to say is there, in his words, in his speaking of them, and, in our responses to them!!!

But crucial to our being able to respond to them, is our sharing of a ‘background’ set of anticipations and expectations to other people’s use of words – in, as I remarked above, our sharing of a ‘living tradition’ with him. Hence is remark that: “The investigation is to draw your attention to facts you know quite as well as I, but which you have forgotten, or at least which are not immediately in your field of vision. They will all be quite trivial facts. I won’t say anything which anyone can dispute. Or if anyone does dispute it, I will let that point drop and pass on to say something else.” (Wittgenstein, 1976, p.22).

This is why he calls his remarks “reminders,” for, “something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it [cf. Augustine], is something we need to remind ourselves of” (1953, no.89).

************

In other words, what Wittgenstein wants to draw to our attention in his remarks, in his “grammatical investigations,” is that, if we are to gain the kind of practical understanding he seeks, we can in fact make use of some of the very same methods we used in gaining that practical kind of understanding in the first place. Thus, in his remarks, in wanting to draw our attention to how people in fact draw each other’s attention to things, he can use the self-same methods as they themselves use... as can we in our own investigations!!

************

This, then, gives us a first clue to Wittgenstein’s methods. For, although they are as many and as various as those we use in life itself, they are all related in that they work in just the same way as our ‘instructive’, ‘directive’, and ‘organizational’ forms of talk in everyday life work. For example, we continually ask questions (“What are you doing?”; “What are you thinking?”; “What’s your idea?”, and so on); we ‘point things out’ to people (“Look at this!”); ‘remind’ them (“Think what happened last time”);

‘change their perspective’ (“Look at it like this”); ‘place’ or ‘give order’ to their experience (“You were very cool... or: you acted like a madman); we ’give commands’ (“Do this.” “Don’t do that”); ‘organize’ their behavior (“First, take a right, then... ask again...”); and so on.

These are all instructive forms of talk that ‘move’ us, in practice, to do something we would not otherwise do: in ‘gesturing’ or ‘pointing’ toward something in our circumstances, they cause us to relate ourselves to our circumstances in a different way – as if we are continually being ‘educated’ into new ways of relating.

Indeed, in one of his very first remarks (questions), he asks how we were first taught our words. For, among other things, such a consideration brings to our attention the original circumstances of the teaching, where “one thing that is immensely important in teaching is exaggerated gestures and facial expressions” (1966, p.2), that emphasize the “characteristic part [they play in], a large group of activities... the occasions on which they are said...” (1966, p.2).

It is the gestural function of these instructive forms of talk – they are both ‘indicative’ (i.e., pointing) or ‘mimetic’ (i.e, expressive gestures) – that is their key feature, that gives them their life: for they ‘point beyond’ themselves to features in the momentary context of their utterance... in the context of our doing something in the actual everyday living of our lives (see the comments on them working within a ‘living tradition’ above).

The ‘everydayness’ of his concerns cannot be emphasized enough. Having been taught in our school learning that ‘proper’, ‘rational’ forms of thought must be general, objective, and disinterested, and work within or being ‘framed’ within, logical systems, we feel somehow awkward in talking in everyday concrete terms... as if somehow jejune, as if we were not properly competent thinkers.

But he cannot be there with us in our actual everyday circumstances, helping us deal with our actual concrete muddles. So how can his writing in a book, many years ago help us? Wittgenstein uses his ‘instructive’ or ‘educative’ forms of talk to draw our attention to what is there for us, in our circumstances, what there before our eyes, that we fail to see, in the circumstances of our own talk... his remarks are not aimed at drawing our
attention to his circumstances, to his version of things... they work to draw our attention to what is, in fact, already known to us.

Hence, whatever event we may talk of, we must put it in its ‘home’ surroundings. “One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to look at its use and learn from that. But the difficulty is to remove the prejudice that stands in the way of doing that. It is not a stupid prejudice...” (no.340).

Bewitched by the images that ‘itch at our ears’ into thinking that various other events must be at work if we are to explain the event that troubles us, we look in the wrong place for an understanding of how next to act. Wittgenstein’s methods are aimed at releasing us from our bewitchment, at showing us that – at particular detailed moments in our actions – other possibilities were or are available to us: “Our investigation is not directed toward phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the ‘possibilities of phenomena’” (1953, no.90).

Further methods:

This then gives us some further clues to some of his other methods. Below, I list a set of five methods, and the goal they seem at which they are aimed, which we can see as working in sequence:

- **1) Deconstruction:** First, his remarks can work to arrest or interrupt (or ‘deconstruct’) the spontaneous, unself-conscious flow of our ongoing activity, and to give “prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook” (1953, no.132).
- Thus his talk is full of such expressions as “Think of...,” “Imagine...,” “It is like...,” “So one might say...,” “Suppose...,” and so on, in which he confronts us with a concrete scene or vignette featuring a particular aspect of human conduct. Where these are all designed “to draw someone’s attention to the fact that he [or she] is capable of imagining [something]... and his acceptance of the [new] picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently: that is, to compare it with this rather than that set of pictures. I have changed his way of looking at thing” (1953, no.144).
- Thus, in provoking us to bring new responses to our words and actions into play, he shows us further possibilities in a circumstance that previously we had overlooked. Alone, however, such a move could be more confusing than clarifying.
- **2) Questions:** Wittgenstein uses questions (in response to what he sees as ‘philosophical’ questions, i.e., decontextualized, general questions) to help us remember, or recall to mind, the ‘grammar’, or to put it in other words: the detailed inter-relationships between our use of words and concrete features in their surroundings at the moment of their use, in coming to an understanding of each other in particular everyday life settings.
- His questions redirect our inquiries away from the abstract to the concrete, and challenge us to resolve our questions – the vents that trouble us – in the context in which they were first experienced.
- In so doing, he not only directs our attention toward unnoticed details in our surroundings, but he also redirects our expectations regarding the kind of answers we expected from our inquiries.
- Often, he does this simply by showing us that we can rephrase the question in other words, thus to arouse other expectations.
- For example, we are less perplexed by the expression ‘the explanation of meaning’ than by ‘the meaning of a word’, because the description of the first expression involves both words and the actions into which they are interwoven, and is thus less likely to lead us to look for an entity or process which we might call ‘meaning’.
- **3) The continued use of ‘particular examples’**: “Not only rules, but also examples are needed for establishing a practice. Our rules leave loop-holes open, and the practice has to speak for itself” (OC, 1969, no.139).
- Living concrete examples – as a counter to the ‘images’ in a tradition whose voice ‘itch at our ears’ – can work to ‘call out’ new, first time responses in us.
- “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]” (1980, p.31). “But what is the word ‘primitive’ meant to say here? Presumably 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” (Z, no.541).

- Works of art also have something to teach us.
- He connects art and pedagogy. In contrasting the spirit of his writings with the spirit of his times he writes, “people nowadays think that scientists exist to instruct them, poets, musicians, etc., to give them pleasure. The idea that these have something to teach them - that does not occur to them’ (CV 36e). . . the greatest art offers us images by which to imagine our own lives . . . within which to see ourselves...

- Thus LW’s writings are inclusive in the sense that they invite response through both their tone and form; the reader is never the recipient of an (artificially) completed philosophical theory or system, but a participant in the investigation, along with LW . . . a failure to respond appropriately is like a failure to understand a piece of art, rather than understanding facts or theories . . . one hasn’t got wrong, one simply hasn’t ‘got it’... 

- 4) Images, pictures, metaphors: This suggests to us a fourth method that is often of importance: By the careful use of selected images, similes, analogies, metaphors, or ‘pictures’, he also suggests new ways of talking that not only orient us toward sensing otherwise unnoticed distinctions and relations for the first time, but which also suggest new connections and relations with the rest of our proceedings.

- Indeed, the idea of language-games falls into this category: “Language-games are the forms of language with which a child first begins to make use of words . . . If we want to study the problems of truth and falsehood, of the agreement and disagreement of propositions with reality, of the nature of assertion, assumption, and question, we shall with great advantage look at primitive forms of language in which these forms of thinking appear without the confusing background of highly complicated processes of thought. When we look at such simple forms of language use the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent” (1965, p.17).

- 5) Comparisons: This brings us to a fifth and perhaps most important of his methods, making comparisons: using various kinds of objects of comparison, e.g., other possible ways of talking, other “language games” both actual and invented, etc., he tries “to throw light on the facts of our language by way of not only similarities, but also dissimilarities” (1953, no.130). For, by noticing how what occurs differs in a distinctive way from what we otherwise would expect, such comparisons can work, he notes, to establish “an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end in view; one of many possible orders; not the order” (1953, no.132).

- The importance of the use of comparisons - often the comparison, or the bringing into living contact, of different scenes (see note 15) - cannot be overemphasized.

- Such dialogical juxtapositions work in a living way to create a circumstance in which differences are realized and articulated: here, we use our words like this; there, we use them like that. That is, in providing new occasions for the realizing of new differences, they create a new ‘movement’ of thought, a new ‘gesture’.

- Indeed, if we turn to some remarks of his on how we understand the theme in a piece of music, we find him likening the music’s movement to human speech and other gestural movements. “... the theme... is a new part of our language; it becomes incorporated into it; we learn a new gesture” (1980, p.52). But: “Doesn’t the theme point outside itself?,” he asks. “Yes, it does! But that means: - it makes an impression on me which is connected with things in its surroundings - e.g., with our language and its intonations; and hence with the whole filed of our language-games” (1981, no.175).

- In other words, such dialogical juxtapositions bring to life new gestures, new ways of pointing beyond our immediate circumstances to bring to light new connections and relations between and within them. Indeed, as we cross boundaries and ‘move’ from functioning within one language game to an other, we can experience the changed commitments, urges, wants, desires, and temptations, as well as the ways of handling, looking, and evaluating, associated with each.
6) übersichtliche Darstellung: Where the point of all these methods, and the slow and painstaking exploration of the landscape of our uses of language they engender, is expressed in his notion of a “perspicuous representation or simply a clear overview (Ger: übersichtliche Darstellung):” “A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of our use of words. - Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’” (1953, no.122).

If we are ‘to find our way about’ inside our own linguistically shaped forms of life, we need to grasp the ‘landscape’ of their internal relations, or their ‘grammatical geographies’, so to speak. But to achieve such a synoptic sense of its immense complexities, as well as curing ourselves of the many temptations to see it as much more simple than it in fact is, we also have to explore its grammatical geography close up, in detail, without end.

Further remarks of relevance to his methods:

“... it is, rather, of the essence of our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything new by it. We want to understand something that is already in plain view. For this is what we seem in some sense not to understand” (no.89).

“We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place. [For] these are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: in spite of an urge to misunderstand them” (1953, no.109).

“When philosophers use a word - ‘knowledge’, ‘being’, ‘object’, ‘I’, ‘proposition’, ‘name’ - and try to grasp the essence of the thing,” he comments, “one must ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? - What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (no.116).

“The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known” (1953, no.109). “Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is” (1953, no.124).

“It is the business of philosophy, not to resolve a contradiction by means of a mathematical or logico-mathematical discovery, but to make it possible for us to get a clear view of the state of mathematics that troubles us: the state of affairs before the contradiction is resolved... The fundamental fact here is that we lay down rules, a technique, for a game, and then when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed. That we are therefore as it were entangled in our own rules.

This entanglement in our own rules is what we what to understand (i.e., Get a clear view of).

It throws light on our concept of meaning something. For in those cases things turn out otherwise than we had meant, foreseen. That is just what we say when, for example, a contradiction appears: “I didn’t mean it like that.” The civil status of a contradiction, or its status in civil life: there is the philosophical problem” (no.125).

“The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there is something one couldn’t do. As if there really were an object [a mental state or process, a social structure or set of rules or norms, an oppressive State apparatus], from which I derive its description, but I were unable to show it to anyone. – And the best that I can propose is that we should yield to the temptation to use this picture, but then investigate how the application of the picture goes” (Z, no.374, my additions).

“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) (1981, no.447).
CHAPTER FOUR

Living beings, meetings, entanglement, and chiasmic relations

Notes on ‘living beings’:

1. Style, identity, developmental continuity

- Living bodies, organic forms are enduring, self-maintaining, self-reproducing, self-structurizing structures.
- They change internally by growth and differentiation into more internally complex forms, while retaining their identity as the identifiable individuals they are.
- In other words, there is always a kind of developmental continuity involved in the unfolding of all living activities.
- Thus, the earlier phases of the 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.
- In other words, all living activities give rise to what we might call identity preserving changes or deformations – as T.S. Eliot puts it: “In my beginning is my end.”

- The Cartesian world, you realize, is a dead world, a world of mechanical movement, a world of forces and impacts in which movement is thought of as a change in the spatial configuration of a set of separately existing parts – which, in their changes, they can ’wear out’!

- Living movement, living change taking place in time, confronts us, we shall find, with some quite new phenomena, needing some quite different concepts, if we are not simply to assimilate it to Cartesian forms of change – our sense of the ‘style’ of what is to come!

2. Internal relations:

- Even the most complex of ’man-made’ systems, machines for instance, 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.
- But whole people as natural systems are certainly not constructed piece by piece; on the contrary, they grow.
- 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.
- Because of this it is impossible to picture natural systems in spatial diagrams. As Capek (1965, p.162) remarks, “any spatial symbol contemplated at a given moment is complete, 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” (in Shotter, 1984, pp.42-43).
- All changes ‘gesture’ or ‘point’ beyond themselves (Brentano – intentionality).

Meetings (events occurring within dialogically-structured, joint actions):

- In turning away from abstract theories, and toward a direct focus on the unique concrete details of our living, bodily involvements – or participations – in the world around us, we have become concerned with what goes on within the different ‘inner worlds of meaning’ we create in our different meetings with the others and othernesses around us, and with noticing the ever present background flow of spontaneously unfolding, reciprocally responsive inter-activity between us and our surroundings.
- It is as ‘participant parts’ within this flow, considered as a dynamically developing complex whole, that we all have our being as members of a common culture, as members of a social group with a shared history of development between us.
- It the recent discovery of this previous unnoticed background of spontaneously responsive, living bodily activity that is one of the most important features of our new approach.
This approach has much in common with Reason and Goodwin’s (1999) “science of qualities.” They also emphasize our embedding in a ceaseless, unfolding flow of becoming, and the need to focus on “complex emergent wholes” (p.281). They too suggest that “our feelings in response to natural processes are not arbitrary but can be used as reliable indicators of the nature of the real processes in which we participate” (p.293). They also focus on the importance of the contrast between participatory understandings occurring in meetings, and objective forms of understanding in which we place ourselves at a distance from, or over against those we presume to study. “Participation now enters as a fundamental ingredient in the human experience of any phenomena, which arises out of the encounter between two real processes that are distinct but not separable. The human process of becoming and that of the ‘other’, whatever this may be to which the human is attending. In this encounter wherein the phenomenon is generated, feelings and intuitions are not arbitrary, idiosyncratic accompaniments but direct indicators of the nature of the mutual process that occurs in the encounter. By paying attention to these, we gain insight into the emergent reality in which we participate” (Reason and Goodwin, 1999, p.293).

What we must emphasize is the joint, dialogical, or chiasmic (i.e., complexly intertwined) nature of the activities occurring in such meetings. But, in having introduced this emphasize on the importance of such meetings, I want to emphasize even more the nature of their initial approaches to such meetings. For these ‘set the scene’, so to speak, for how participants will react to everything occurring within the event of their meeting. It clearly makes an enormous difference if we approach another person on meeting them with a clenched fist ready to strike, or with an open hand ready to shake their’s. To do this, we must learn how to see what is around us ‘in depth’, as offering us a ‘space of possibilities’ for our actions. Such a sense only emerges for us from within our dialogically or chiasmically-structured meetings with the others around us.

We have already (in Chapter one) seen how two very similar orderly processes can ‘interfere’ with each other to produce a third form of order to which both contribute. Entanglement is the term used in quantum physics to denote phenomena which two entities, no matter how far away from each other they may be, are in some strange manner, inexorably linked (Aczel, 2001).

Entanglement: “When two systems, of which we know the states by their respective representation, enter into a temporary physical interaction due to known forces between them and when after a time of mutual influence the systems separate again, then they can no longer be described as before, viz., by endowing each of them with a representative of its own. I would not call that one but rather the characteristic trait of quantum mechanics” (Erwin Schroedinger, “Discussion of probability relations between separated systems,” Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc, 31, p.355, 1935).

In other words, after having interacted with each other, and move away from the interaction, they are now each, so to speak, ‘infected’ with each other.

Merleau-Ponty (1968) and the Chiasmic:

In chapter one, we have already noted Bateson’s (1980) use of binocular vision (along with Moiré interference patterns) as examples of strange kind of phenomena that can occur when two or
more slightly different forms of order actively interact with one another (when what he calls “double description” occurs): in formation of a different logical type is created.

Merleau-Ponty (1968) has also noted this phenomenon: “The binocular perception is not made up of two monocular perceptions surmounted; it is of another order. The monocular images are not in the same sense that the things perceived with both eyes is... they are pre-things and it is the thing” (p.7).

What Merleau-Ponty means by “pre-things” here, can be understood by turning to the account of dialogical realities given in Chapter Two. There, we noted that everything, every thing, was, so to speak, in a precursor state, neither object nor subjective, neither wholly orderly nor wholly disorderly, and so on. As we put it there, the open nature of a dialogical reality is such that it is up to those involved in it, in practice, to provide whatever they take to be the best linguistic formulation of the things it – bearing in mind that each such formulation carries with it implications for how we should anticipate future steps. For it is very easy, as Wittgenstein shows, to mislead ourselves.

**********

In his last unfinished book, written just before he died, Merleau-Ponty (1968) tried to explore what it would be like to try to install ourselves, and conduct our thinking, from within such still open, yet to be fully specified circumstances:

“If it is true that as soon as philosophy declares itself to be reflection or coincidence it prejudices what it will find, then once again it must recommence everything, reject the instruments reflection and intuition had provided themselves, and install itself in a locus where they have not yet been distinguished, in experiences that have not yet been “worked over,” that offer us all at once, pell-mell, both “subject” and “object,” both existence and essence, and hence give philosophy resources to redefine them” (From Merleau-Ponty, Ch.4 The Intertwining - the Chiasm, 1968, p.130).

**********

Abduction and withness-thinking: By talking of the chiasmic relations that can occur in the meetings between two or more events that differ from each other, but are still close enough to ‘interfere’ or ‘resonate’ with each other, like Bateson (1980), Merleau-Ponty (1968) wished to open up a whole new realm of previously unthought of activity – a strange realm of activity in which “withness-thinking” works. Bateson (1980) called it “abduction,” and characterized it thus:

“We are so accustomed to the universe in which we live and to our puny methods of thinking about it that we can hardly see that it is, for example, surprising that abduction is possible, that it is possible to describe some event or thing (e.g., a man shaving in a mirror) and then to look around the world for the other cases to fit the same rules that we devised for our description. We can look at the anatomy of a frog and then look around to find other instances of the same abstract relations recurring in other creatures, including, in this case, ourselves” (p.157).
CHAPTER FIVE

Two kinds of responses to an ‘experienced difficulty’: “Aboutness”-talk versus “withness”-talk

“... the difficulty – I might say – is not that of finding the solution but rather that of recognizing as the solution something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it. “We have already said everything. – Not anything that follows from this, no, this itself is the solution!” This is connected, I believe, with our wrongly expecting an explanation, whereas the solution to the difficulty is a description, if we give it the right place in our considerations. If we dwell upon it, and do not try to get beyond it. The difficulty here is: to stop” (1981, no.314).

Scene setting:

There is a tendency to treat circumstances we find bewildering or disorienting, ones which are strange and new to us, as posing a problem for us. Thus we often respond to such events by seeking a solution to them, by trying to explain them.

There is, however, an altogether different way of responding: we can ‘enter into’ a dialogically-structured relationship to them, and, as we ‘dwell on, with, or within’ them for a while, gradually gain an orientation toward them as their ‘inner nature’ becomes familiar to us - much, say, as we get to know our ‘way around’ inside a city which is at first unfamiliar to us by exploring its highways and byways according to the different projects we try to pursue within it.

In becoming familiar with something in our surroundings in this way, we come to know not just their inert, objective nature, but to know them in terms of a whole realm of possible responsive, living relations that we might have to them. We orient toward them in terms of their yet-to-be-achieved values, the (grammatical) ‘calls’ they might exert on us to ‘go on’ with them in one way rather than another.

The development of a sensitivity to such calls is not a part of the problem-solving process. Below I set out some notes relevant to these two stances, these two very different ways of responsively relating ourselves to our surrounding circumstances:

1). Problem-solving: the continual monological rediscovery of sameness – “aboutness”-talk about an other:

Sequence of steps:

- treat the newness or strangeness as a problem to be solved
- analyze it into already known elements
- find a pattern or order amongst them
- hypothesize an agency responsible for the order (call it, say, SYNERGY or some other such ‘stuff’)
- find further evidence for it
- enshrine it in a theory or theoretical system
- theories, way of thinking, become central in giving shape to our actions
- manipulate the strangeness (now known in terms of the theory) to produce an advantageous outcome
- call this ‘the solution’ to the problem
- turn ‘to apply’ the theory elsewhere

Properties of the process:

- it is a search for regularities
- it establishes a single order of connectedness among certain perceived aspects of one’s circumstances
- occasionally, ‘the solution’ can occur to one ‘in a flash of insight’
- it works wholly within the realm of the already known to elaborate it internally

Effects on the self of the investigator:
the SELF remains unchanged in the process
we remain outside the other or otherness, we are ‘set over against’ it
we are not engaged or involved with it
we acquire extra knowledge about it in the form of facts or information
we gain mastery over it

2). Entering into a dialogical relationship with an other; “withness”-talk with an other — beginnings and beginnings and beginnings, but no endings

Sequence of steps:
- treat the other or otherness as still radically unknown to us
- ‘enter into’ dialogically-structured relations with it, become involved or engaged with it
- we must ‘open’ ourselves to being spontaneously ‘moved by it’
- relate to it responsively and responsibly - this is crucial: we always know when a person is ‘with’ us or not, whether at a party they are responsively ‘following’ us, or whether they are looking over our shoulder to find others they want to be with
- this sense of contiguity, of contingency, of the other’s responses to us being contingent on our own, is very basic - present even in new-born children
- to ‘enter into’ dialogically-structured relations with another requires ‘tact’, ‘courtesy’
- we must not only ‘follow’ the other, but also provide opportunities for them to ‘follow’ us
- the other ‘calls on’ us - comes both to be ‘with’ us, as well as to ‘call out’ responses from us
- the other can affect us, move us - their meaning for us in the responsive movements they ‘call out’ from us
- we are ‘answerable (partially) to’ their calls as they are (partially) to ours - we do not reply to every aspect of their influence upon us
- an ‘it’ appears between us: produced neither solely by ‘me’ or by ‘you’
- the ‘it’ is our it: there is poiesis at work between us - the sensed creation of form

the form has a shaped and vectored sense to it
central to giving shape to our actions is our sensitivity or sensibility to the particular details of the other’s responsive activities
as we ‘dwell on, with, or within’ the other, there is a gradually growth of familiarity with its ‘inner shape’
we have a sense of the value of its yet-to-be-achieved aspects - the prospects it offers us for ‘going on’ with it
we gain orientation, a sense of ‘at homeness’, we come to find our ‘footing’, to know our ‘way about’ in relation to it

Properties of the process:
- “once-occurrent events of Being” are crucial - single, unique events that make a difference: we talk in terms of what we are ‘struck by’
- we establish multiple, complexly ordered sense of connectedness among the perceived aspects of the other or otherness: a synopsis of trivialities
- our familiarity with it grows only gradually and is never finished
- it works at the boundaries between the radically unknown and the realm of the known to expand its boundaries

Effects on the self of the investigator:
- the SELF is changed in such encounters
- we become involved with, immersed in, the ‘inner life’ of the other or otherness
- everything we do is partly shaped by the other in being a response to what it might do
- at first wholly ‘bewitched’ by its ‘voice’, as our familiarity with it grows, its voice becomes one voice among the many other voices with us
- rather than knowledge of its nature, we gain orientation toward it, i.e., we grasp how to ‘go on’ with it
- we never gain mastery over it - others can always surprise us, no matter how familiar to us they have become.
CHAPTER SIX

‘Withness-thinking’ and ‘aboutness-thinking’

“Thus Hienroth observes properly: that my [i.e., Goethe’s] faculty of thinking is “objectively active [gegenständliches Denken]”, whereby he means to say that my thinking does not separate itself from its objects; that the elements of the objects, the concrete intuitions (Anschauungen) enter into that thinking and are most inwardly permeated by it in form; that my way of seeing (anschauen) is itself a thinking, my thinking a way of seeing – a procedure said friend does not wish to deny his approbation” (Goethe, HA, 13: 37, quoted in Brady, p.97).

As I see it, abstract and general theories are of little help to each of us in the unique living of our unique lives together, either as ordinary people or as professional practitioners. While the specific words of another person, uttered as a ‘reminder’ at a timely moment as to the character of our next step within an ongoing practical activity, can be a crucial influence in its development and refinement. Thus, following Goethe’s comments above, while resonating also with Wittgenstein and Bakhtin, we can outline a distinction between ‘withness-thinking’ and ‘aboutness-thinking’ as follows:

- Withness (dialogic)-thinking is a form of reflective interaction that involves coming into living contact with an other’s living being, with their utterances, their bodily expressions, their words, their ‘works’.
- It is a meeting of outsides, of surfaces, of two kinds of ‘flesh’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), such that they come into ‘touch’ with each other.
- They both touch and are touched, and in the relations between their outgoing touching and resultant incoming, responsive touches of the other, the sense of a ‘touching’ or ‘moving’ difference emerges.

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

- It gives rise, not to a ‘seeing’, for what is ‘sensed’ is invisible; nor to an interpretation (a representation), for our responses occur spontaneously and directly in our living encounters 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.

- For it gives rise to a ‘shaped’ and ‘vectored’ sense of our moment-by-moment changing placement in our current surroundings – engendering in us both unique anticipations as to what-next might happen along with, so to speak, ‘action-guiding advisories’ as to what-next we might do.

- In short, we are spontaneously ‘moved’ toward specific possibilities for action in such thinking.

- Aboutness (monologic)-thinking, however, is unresponsive to another’s expressions; it works simply in terms of a thinker’s ‘theoretical pictures’ – but, even when we ‘get the picture’, we still have to interpret it, and to decide, intellectually, on a right course of action.

- Thus, in aboutness-thinking, “(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” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.293).

- In other words, it works simply in terms of ‘pictures’, thus, even when we ‘get the picture’, we still have to decide, intellectually, on a right course of action – “The cat sat on the mat, the mat was red, the cats was black – get the picture?” “Yes, so what?”

Thinking ‘with’ an other’s voice, with their utterances, in mind: Here, then, we can begin to see another way in which what we call ‘theory’ can be an influence in, literally, ‘instructing’ us in our practical actions out in the
world of our everyday, practical affairs. Instead of turning away from them, and burying ourselves in thought in an attempt to fit them into an appropriate theoretical scheme in order to respond to them later, in its terms, 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’ (Wittgenstein, 1953, no.127) issued by others to us, as a result of their explorations. 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 one into a close and personal, living contact with one’s surroundings, with their subtle but mattering details. This is a style of seeingful and feelingful thought that can be of help to us in our practical daily affairs, and in further explorations of our own human lives together—in ordinary interpersonal communication, psychotherapy, intercultural communication, management, administration, government, etc., and, in fact, in science, in understanding how ‘aboutness (monologic)-thinking’ actually works.

**********

“The exact sciences constitute a monologic form of knowledge,” says Bakhtin (1986): “the intellect contemplates a thing and expounds upon it. There is only one subject here-cognizing (contemplating) and speaking (expounding). In opposition to the subject there is only a voiceless thing. Any object of knowledge (including man) can be perceived and cognized as a thing. But a subject as such cannot be perceived and studied as a thing, for as a subject it cannot, while remaining a subject, become voiceless, and, consequently, cognition of it can only be dialogic. Dilthey and the problem of understandings Various ways of being active in cognitive activity. The activity of the one who acknowledges a voiceless thing and the activity of one who acknowledges another subject, that is, the dialogic activity of the ackknowledge. The dialogic activity of the acknowledged subject, and the degrees of this activity. The thing and the personality (subject) as limits of cognition. Degrees of thing-ness and personality-ness. The event-potential of dialogic cognition. Meeting. Evaluation as a necessary aspect of dialogic cognition” (p.161).

**********

The distinction between ‘action’ and ‘behavior’ in scientific Psychology: “... It is only because people themselves know whether they intended their activity or not, and whether they achieved what they meant to achieve, that they are able to answer such questions; beings unable to distinguish between what they intended and what just happened would find such questions quite senseless. Besides being crucial in everyday life, though, such a distinction is crucial in the conduct of science, absolutely crucial: it is only because we can sense, when acting in accord with theories of what the world might be like, whether the results of our actions accord with or depart from the expectations engendered by the theories, that we can ever put such theories to empirical test — this is the only way of establishing the nature of a theory’s purchase on reality. If people were unable to distinguish between what happened as a result of their intentional activity and what just happened, by itself, there would be no basis for scientific inquiries at all. Thus, no other more fundamental basis for deciding the truth of empirical matters exists; nor will one ever be found — not as some have proposed, in the organizational complexity of matter — for how could it ever be established as a true basis?” (Shotter, 1975, p.86).

**********

The kind of learning involved here begins by being “struck,” with our noticing of, as Bateson (1979) puts it, the “differences that make a difference” (p.453). With more space, I would have liked to have explored the method of “social poetics” (Katz and Shotter, 1996a; Shotter and Katz, 1996; Katz and Shotter, 1996b; Shotter, 1998; Cunliffe, 2002), for use in developing within a collaborating group, not only a sensitivity to subtle and fleeting events of importance in their shared practice, but also a vocabulary for creating and sustaining the appropriate ‘ways of looking’, i.e., of paying attention. But to sum up, in such self-reflecting and self-developing practices:

– Practitioners become co-researchers, and researchers become co-practitioners, as each articulates what they have been ‘struck by’ in the unfolding process.
– Both researchers and practitioners alike are engaged in creating
sense about lived experience. This sense emerges in the
collaborative dialogical activity between them. As a result,
practice, teaching and research are all enfolded with each other, as
one in-forms and creates the other in a evolving, generative
fashion.

Both inquiry and learning in this process becomes a matter of
“practical authorship” (Shotter, 1993) in which teachers and
students, managers and workers, researchers and practitioners, all
collaboratively construct what they create and learn together.

And in such creative/learning conversations, participants may
develop “practical theory” together - Goethe: “Let us not seek for
something beyond the phenomena - they themselves are the
theory”.

“Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain.
For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us”
(Wittgenstein, 1953, no.126).

As Brulin (1998) has pointed out, while the high Humboldtian ideal of the
university as the home of the highest and best form of scholarship and
science has motivated the opening of universities everywhere, it is just this
dream which has also led to their “noble seclusion,” to the sobriquet of them
as being “ivory towers.” Thus, while “the established research society
interprets the third task as an obligation to propagate popular science
information, thereby hoping to save the High Science dream and the
position of noble seclusion. More and more researchers, lecturers and
students in Sweden have started to discuss how universities can generate
knowledge in interactive cooperation with practitioners, without reducing
the quality of their two traditional tasks. In other words, how can the
universities carry out the three different tasks to the best of their abilities?”
(p.125). This too, is the question I have tried to pursue in the notes making
up this short book on “Withness-thinking and the Dialogical.”

References:

York: Four Walls Eight Windows.

Andersen, T. (1991) The Reflecting Team: Dialogues and Dialogues about

trans. by C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press.

by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1986) Speech Genres and Other Late Essays. Trans. by

Bakhtin, M.M. (1993) Toward a Philosophy of the Act, with translation and
notes by Vadim Lianov, edited by M. Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.


Fontana/Collins.

formation in interactive cooperation with practitioners. Concepts
and Transformations, 3, pp.113-127.

York: Van Nostrand.

(2): 128-146.


(Ed.) The Reflecting Team: Dialogues and Dialogues about

Katz, A.M. and Shotter, J. (1996a) Resonances from within the practice:
social poetics in a mentorship program. Concepts and
Transformations, 2, pp.97-105.

Katz, A.M. and Shotter, J. (1996b) Hearing the patient's 'voice': toward a
social poetics in diagnostic interviews. Social Science and
Medicine, 46, pp.919-931.

becoming 'present' to each other and to themselves. In Paré, D.
And Lermer (Eds.) Collaborative Practice in Psychology and

Participation. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University
Press.


---

Human Systems, 9, pp.81-93.


