Cartesian Change, Chiasmic Change: The Power of Living Expression

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> Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one might think. (Wittgenstein, 1953, no.527)

> Sometimes a sentence can be understood only if it is read at the r*ight tempo.* (Wittgenstein, 1980, p.57)

> A theme, no less than a face, wears an expression . . . Yet there is no paradigm apart from the theme itself. And yet again there *is* a paradigm apart from the theme: namely the rhythm of our language, of our thinking and feeling. And the theme, moreover, is a new part of our language; it become incorporated into it; we learn a new *gesture*. (Wittgenstein, 1980, p.52)

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

> ((meaning is a physiognomy)). (Wittgenstein, 1953, no.568)

> I begin to understand a philosophy by feeling my way into its existential manner, by reproducing the tone and accent of the philosopher. In fact, every language conveys its own teaching and carries its meaning into the listener's mind . . . There is thus, either in the man who listens or reads, or in the one who speaks or writes, a *thought in speech* the existence of which is unsuspected by intellectualism. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.179)

My general concern in this paper is with understanding certain kinds of change and the importance they might have in our lives. Thus before proceeding any further, I must make some preliminary comments about the kinds of change I mean. I have three comments to make. The first is that I will not be concerned here with how something well-known to us changes, that is, with changes of an orderly kind that can be explained in terms of principles, rules or conventions, with what we might call *ordinary* changes. Instead, I want to consider changes that happen unexpectedly, surprising changes, changes that strike us with amazement or wonder, *extraordinary* changes. Or, to put it another way, in-

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stead of changes taking place *within* a reality already well-known to us, I want to focus on changes in the very character of what we take our reality to be. In short, instead of changes of a quantitative and repeatable kind, I will be concerned with first-time, unique, irreversible changes, novelties, changes of a *qualitative* kind.

My second introductory comment is that, in discussing change, I want to emphasize something that, although quite ordinary and familiar to us in an everyday sense, is nonetheless a new topic in relation to modern Western thought. The new topic is simply that of "life," the properties, characteristics or *aspects* of living bodies, of organic forms as enduring, self-maintaining, self-reproducing, *structurizing structures*. There is, in other words, the creation of qualitatively new and distinct forms of life in the meetings among those already existing. If we are to do justice to "life's" detailed characteristics and relationships, we must make some radical changes in our current modes of intellectual inquiry (if not, in fact, the whole nature of our social lives together).

Third, we must take into account what is already 'there' in the background of our lives. Such an account is impossible to claim from purely linguistic, structuralist or post-structuralist versions of social constructionism, which hold that deconstruction of all the shared or shareable bases to our lives together can be carried 'all the way down,' so to speak: "That there is nothing," as Rorty (1989) puts it, "'beneath' socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human being" (p.xiii). With its seeming radicalness, this claim has prevented social constructionism from being taken seriously in many quarters. This is because it is not radical enough. The ire it provokes comes from the fact that Rorty's, and other such purely linguistic or post-structuralist versions of social constructionism have left in place Descartes' (1968) account of our background reality as "a chaos as disordered as the poets could ever imagine" (p. 62). From this position, we are given no shared guidance in our controversies with each other, nor do we have a basis for deciding which claims among us are best adopted.

The centrality of living meetings: chiasmic interweavings

I do not wish to argue that there is in fact something definite already 'there' in us, as individual beings in the world, prior to any of the meetings we may have with the others and othernesses around us, which define and delimit the nature of those meetings. But I do want to claim

that something very special happens when living bodies interact with their surroundings, and that we have not (explicitly) taken this into account in our current forms of thought or institutional practices. The resulting relations have not just a dialogically structured character, as I once thought, but a *chiasmic* (or dynamically intertwined) structure. What this means is tremendously difficult to articulate, so what I want to do is simply draw out the implications of this notion of chiasmically organized, dynamic relations.

As a first step, let us just note that when we look over a visual scene, a landscape or another's face, and our eyes flick and jump from one point of fixation to the next, we nonetheless still see a seamless whole, a 'something' to which we can relate ourselves; and when we read a written text made up of quite separate printed elements, we develop a sense of all the elements as contributing toward or as playing a participant part in a meaningful whole; and so on. And further, in such activities we all more or less see the same whole, the same landscape, the same face, the same story or set of technical instructions or whatever; and if there are some disagreements over exactly what it is before us, we can make use of what we do agree on to discuss the features we see differently. In other words, in many temporally unfolding circumstances (but not in all), there is something special in the sequencing of our activities, in their temporal succession. If the separate elements we encounter seem to unfold in a special way, not just haphazardly but according to a certain *style*, they give rise in all who encounter them a *shared* or at least *shareable* background sense of meaning intelligible to others but prior to any thought or deliberation (in essence, spontaneously).

This claim that our human activities are not just formless, that not just anything can follow or be connected with anything, is clearly related to Wittgenstein's (1953, 1974) claim that most of our activities on investigation seem to have a "grammar" to them. And as he sees it, it is their *shared* grammar that we *must* observe if our expressions and utterances are to be intelligible to those around us. It is this and not the constraints imposed on us externally by a physical reality that makes it impossible for us just to talk as we please: "Grammar is not accountable to any reality," he claims, "it is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it) and so they are not answerable to any meaning and to that extent are arbitrary" (Wittgenstein, 1974, no.133, p.184).

Now to many, this may seem as outrageous a claim as the claim that there is no prior, already fixed and categorized physical reality to which to appeal in adjudicating the worth of our claims to truth. But it at least has the implication that any person's claim to others regarding the nature of things and events must be couched in a certain shared *style*. If the claim is not presented in a shared style, it will not be properly understood by those who are addressed; the claim will be confusing and misleading. In other words, though there may be no prior criteria to which to appeal in judging *the truth* of a person's claims – for their truth must be investigated in terms of their entailments – there are criteria immediately available as to *their intelligibility* in the context of their utterance. These criteria arise out of the fact that all the elements involved are mutually determining, interwoven, or inter-related with each other in a certain way, in essence, according to a certain style or grammar.

But why should we call this kind of 'mutual determination' chiasmic? In choosing this term, I am following Merleau-Ponty (1968), who called the second to last chapter of his book *The Visible and Invisible* – Chapter 4, "The Intertwining - The Chiasm." But in further elaboration of the above comments (about the synthesis of our separate fixations on aspects of a visual scene into a complex visual whole), I also want to mention the fact that both Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968) and Gregory Bateson (1979) take the chiasmic nature of binocular vision as paradigmatic of the special nature of our living relations to our surroundings. To quote Bateson (1979):

> 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 . . . From this elaborate arrangement, two sorts of advantage accrue. The seer is able to improve resolution at edges and contrasts; and better able to read when the print is small or the illumination poor. More important, information about depth is created . . . In principle, extra "depth" in some metaphoric sense is to be expected whenever the information for the two descriptions is differently collected or differently coded (pp. 68-70).

In other words, much more is happening here than the mere blending, amalgamating or interweaving of separate constituents which remain

identifiably separate even when complexly interwoven. Something utterly new and quite novel is being created. Indeed, something quite radical is entailed, as we shall see, in the recognition of the fact that our relations to our surroundings are not just simply relations of a causal kind, or of a systematic, logical or rational kind either, but are *living*, dynamic relations.

In fact, though it may seem surprising to say it, I don't think we have made a proper attempt at all – in either our ways of thinking and talking, or in our institutional ways of relating ourselves practically to the others and othernesses in our surroundings – to acknowledge the fact of our *livingness* and the fact that we live in surroundings that are *also living*. We still simply pre-suppose a non-living world of earth and rocks, of oceans and gases, to which we must simply adapt or die, a world which is just 'there' independently of our living participation within it, and to which we relate, officially, in only a dead, mechanical way.

The nearest we have gotten to taking seriously life and living being is in our concern with "cognitive psychology" and a "philosophy of mind." But even here we have assimilated our "mental lives" to the activity of digital computers, dead mechanisms.

Living expression

While extremely clever and ingenious, however, the computer model of the mind is far from convincing. Most of us, despite the vehemence of the arguments presented to us, still feel far from spontaneously compelled, on entering our places of work in the morning, to greet our computers as we greet our colleagues. Certain *responsive and expressive qualities* still seem to be lacking *in the movements* of their 'bodies.' It makes no sense at all to talk in this responsive and expressive way of computers as having "bodies" at all.

Indeed, in everything that I will have to say below, I shall want, either explicitly or implicitly, to assume the s*pontaneous, living, expressive-responsiveness of our bodies*, i.e., our ability to immediately and directly affect or 'move' the others around us, bodily, in a meaningful fashion, and to be affected by them in the same way. And we can immediately note here the *chiasmically organized nature* of the expressive-responsiveness of our bodies: for example, if I were speaking to you in

person, you could see my body moving in synchrony with the voicing of my utterances, my hands in synchrony with my intoning of my words, my eye movements with my pauses, and my facial expressions with certain of my linguistic emphases. I shall use the word 'orchestration' to denote the unfolding structuring of these intricately timed, creative intertwinings and interweavings of the many inter-related participant parts or 'bodily strands' of our responsive-expressions.

But this term 'orchestration' – the attempt to capture in a form of words the whole notion of the chiasmically organized e*xpressive-responsiveness of our bodily movements* – is just one of the new expressions we will need as we begin, seriously, to focus on life and on the activities of living beings. Indeed, as we proceed, I will need to introduce a whole raft of radically new expressions for the nature of living responsive expressiveness.

Straightaway, let me add another: Instead of the kind of movements or changes we are used to – in which a set of separate elements of reality take up a sequence of different instantaneous configurations or positions in place at different instants or moments of time – we must recognize the existence of self-sustaining, living unities, enduring through time. Such unities, rather than undergoing changes of place or position in space, exhibit expressive or *physiognomic* changes, dynamic changes *within the boundaries* of their growing and developing, self-sustaining bodies, short-term changes (as in facial expressions and bodily gestures) as well as long-term ones in overall *style*, which, as we will discover, are *expressive* in some way of events of importance to their life. Indeed, although such physiognomic events are bodily events occurring out in the world observable to all, it is events of this *physiognomic expressive* kind that we take as indicative of a living being's 'inner' or 'mental' life.

Along with these new notions, there are a number of others: Having emphasized our *spontaneous* responsiveness to each other's bodily expressions – the fact that as gestures (of either an indicatory or mimetic kind) they directly call out bodily responses without our having first to 'work out' how to respond – we need to distinguish between first-person and third-person uses of such expressions: people can, at the moment of their use, *tell* us something about themselves, about their own unique 'inner worlds of consciousness' (see Shotter, 1984, Ch.9), or they can use them to refer to events out in the world shared between us.

Further, I must emphasize the *occasional* or *occasioned* nature of the events of importance to us – the fact that they only happen in "meetings," and as such, owe their unique character (their physiognomy) to the unique meetings within which they occur.

What is formed in such meetings, we shall find, is itself like the momentary creation of a new, living, *organic unity* which is self-sustaining as long as all those participating in it – as long as all its 'participant parts' – sustain their spontaneously responsive, dialogically-structured relations to each other. Once they cease their 'living relations' to each other, *the unity of their meeting* disappears. But while 'it' lives, such *meetings* grow and take time to develop, to refine and to articulate themselves, just as any other living organism.

But, to return once again to what seems to be the most unusual concern I want to introduce here: the chiasmic organization of such meetings, the complex, dynamically intertwined character of the living unities to which they give rise, cannot be wholly captured in subjective nor in objective terms; neither are they wholly orderly nor wholly disorderly; nor need they in fact be constituted wholly from living components but may incorporate dead and inert parts in certain regions too.

For these reasons, such living unities are best called *primordial*, not in the sense of being old or being located in the distant past, far from it, but in the sense of being the more richly intertwined origin or source from out of which we can differentiate our more focal concerns (our concerns with language and speech, for instance) – while at the same time also attending to the developing web or network of chiasmically intertwined relations, usually ignored in the background, within which our focal concerns actually have their being.

We can also call such meetings *primordial* in the sense that they are the basic units, the starting points, the living contexts within which we can situate everything that we take to be of importance to us in our inquiries below. This claim has resonances with Wittgenstein's (1980) claim that "the origin and primitive form of the language game is a reaction" (p.31). What he means by the word "primitive" here, he notes elsewhere, is 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). But it has resonances also with Merleau-Ponty's (1968) search for a new, non-metaphysical starting point for philosophical inquiry: "If it is true," he says,

"that as soon as philosophy declares itself to be reflection or coincidence it prejudges 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" (p.131). Indeed, as we continue, we shall find that many of our central, taken-for-granted concepts – especially those of space, time, matter, and motion (Capek, 1961) – will need re-consideration. All these issues and more will arise within my discussion of the new topic in Western thought – of life and living beings.

The classical world: a static pictorial world configured in terms of a set of separate 'elements of reality'

Why have we failed to acknowledge the distinct nature of life and living processes? Because, I think, to extent that we have attempted at all, we have attempted to take account of life and living processes by trying to *formulate scientific theories of them*. But this failure is not an intrinsic weakness or deficiency within the very idea of forms of inquiry aimed at achieving publicly shared and tested understandings. Rather, for reasons which will become apparent very shortly, it has to do with the requirement that such inquires into the nature of life and living processes be conducted in terms of *theoretical representations* of them. As Hertz (1954) put it, it is a process in which, "in endeavoring . . . to draw inferences as to the future from the past, we always adopt the following process. We form for ourselves images or symbols of external objects; and the form that we give them is such that the necessary consequents of the images in thought are always the images of the necessary consequents in nature of the things pictured" (p.1).

What Hertz sets out in detail here, then, are the general features of scientific *theories*. They are concerned with establishing repetitive patterns in formal structures, where the formal structures in question are set out in terms of instantaneous configurations of separately existing elements, which change by being reconfigured, instant-by-instant, into new configurations according to formal rules, laws or principles. But it is impossible to do justice to living beings and living activities within such constraints.

For what we (or most of us) sense as distinct in life and in living phenomena has to do with what is directly manifest in unfolding temporal relations occurring in events of a *physiognomic expressive* kind, and not at all to do with what can be argued from concatenations of instantaneous configurations of an otherwise unrelated collection of particles. Life is something that immediately 'strikes' us as such, not something some of us have accepted as an opinion, supported by arguments. Indeed, all the approaches that count for us as *scientific* approaches to these problems inevitably allow *only* for what I am calling a Cartesian notion of change: a conception of change that inevitably, despite all our best intentions, 'captures' and 're-colonizes' all our new ideas, and sets them back yet again within the old, dead and static world that we have tried to leave behind. For embedded in our everyday ways of talking and conducting our relations with each other and the rest of our surroundings, there are certain abstractions, certain concepts of which we must now 'cure' ourselves, particularly, as I indicated above, those concepts of space, time, matter and motion, inherited by us from the Greeks, but sharpened up for scientific purposes in the 17th century, particularly by Descartes.

Wittgenstein's (1953) plaintive remark in this respect is well-known: "A *picture* held us captive," he lamented, "and we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (no.115).

Thus the kind of progress he sought was of a kind quite different from what many still see as scientific progress – if, that is, it must be conducted in *pictorial* terms. But it can be said that he still sought *enlightenment* (in Kant's 1784 sense) as a process that releases us from a state of 'immaturity,' in which we are led by the authority of someone else's opinions, when the use of our own capacity to reason is called for. To release us from our 'bewitchment' by Cartesian opinions, as to the proper 'foundations' for our claims to truth, he sought to re-introduce us, not to "any new information, but [to remind us of] what we have always known" (no.109). This is done, not by training us in any new "methods" of science, but by provoking us into adopting a "new attitude" toward our surroundings – where, by a "new attitude," I mean a new way of relating or orienting ourselves toward the others and othernesses around us. Rather than distancing ourselves from them, with the aim of mastering and possessing them, our new task is that of being *participants* in a larger whole.

In his new task, then, Wittgenstein (1953) saw enlightenment as simply noticing and acknowledging – and offering for our acknowledgment – a whole range of inter-connected phenomena that had not before been noticed. And one thing he brought to our notice is that there is something very special about living, human bodies. In exploring the question: "What gives us *so much as the idea* that living beings, things, can feel?" (no.283), he went on (here and in other explorations) to fix on our spontaneous, unthinking, bodily reactions to events occurring around us as basic, our being 'struck' by something, as the crucial points of departure for the new philosophical methods he wanted to introduce to us – methods aimed at releasing us, as mentioned above, from authorities external and prior to those relevant in the circumstances of our current involvement. What should we notice about the difference for us between dead and living things? "Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead," he notes, "is not the same. All our reactions are different" (no.284).

And they are *really* different. Here, Wittgenstein's (1953) insistence on the primacy of our spontaneous, unthinking responses to events occurring around us comes to the fore. Whether we see something as a living thing or not was not, for Descartes, a matter of our immediate bodily response to it, but a cognitive matter, something we had to 'work out.' As he suggested: "If I look out of the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves . . . Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I *judge* that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgment which is in my mind" (Descartes, 1968, p.21).[1] Wittgenstein's insistence that we begin with our actual reactions and responses to events, not with speculations and theories that must "let the use of words teach you their meaning" (Wittgenstein, 1953, p.220), allows us at last to begin to respond adequately to living events, to living activities.

In a moment, then, I want to explore further the new beginnings offered us by Wittgenstein. But before I do, I must go a little more deeply into the Cartesian concepts still unnoticed and unremittingly active in the background of everything we currently do and say, not only in our everyday activities but also in our intellectual inquiries, even when we think of ourselves as being especially vigilant. Their influence is so

pervasive that I think it is impossible to bring them all to light in an article as brief as this. Let me here highlight the one I take to be central. Promising deep and effective knowledge of the natural world, Descartes' philosophy held out the great hope that:

> . . . knowing the force and the actions of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all other bodies that surround us . . . we should be able to utilize them for all the uses to which they are suited and thus render ourselves masters and possessors of nature (Descartes, 1968, p.74).

Instead of being victims, we could, he suggested, become masters of our fates.

Prior to Descartes, everything in the cosmos was characterized by greater or lesser degrees of value, of perfection according to a hierarchical scheme with matter at its foot and God at its summit. By excluding values and reducing everything tangible to matter in motion according to mathematically expressible laws, Descartes destroyed the older notions of the cosmos. God is no longer present in the world, nor for that matter is man, in the sense of having any obvious place assigned there for his own self. As a mind, quite separate from the world as matter, the role of man himself can only be that of dominating his surroundings and becoming master and possessor of the natural world, utilizing it for all the uses to which it is suited. And that world itself, containing as it does only matter in lawful and orderly motion, becomes, as we shall see, both a timeless and lifeless place.

If we are ever to study ourselves without emasculating ourselves in the process -without destroying our own ability to transform ourselves - it is Descartes's account of our being in the world (his ontology) and the accounts of how we came to know its nature (his epistemology) that we must replace. For though we may have had quite a number of very new thoughts about the creative, constructive nature of our relations to the others and othernesses around us, it is still in terms of the same basic concepts of space and time, and of matter and motion inherited from Descartes that we have been trying to express these new thoughts.

We can get a sense of what these basic concepts are from Descartes' own account of our world in his view. He sets it out as follows:

> In order to put these truths in a less crude light and to be able to say more freely what I think about them, without being obliged to accept or to refute what are accepted opinions among philosophers and theologians, I resolved to leave all these people to their disputes, and to speak only of what would happen in a new world, if God were to create, somewhere in imaginary space, enough matter to compose it, and if he were to agitate diversely and confusedly the different parts of this matter, so that he created a chaos as disordered as the poets could ever imagine, and afterwards did no more than to lend his usual preserving action to nature, and to let her act according to his established laws (Descartes, 1968, p.62).

In other words, Descartes sets out here, not a living world, not a growing or developing world, existing in the cosmos as a complex, internally inter-related, indivisible unity with continuously emergent, uniquely new aspects and characteristics, but a world made up of a fixed number of separately existing particles of matter in motion, which, at any chosen instant in time, can simply take on a new configuration.

The 'move' to an orchestrated, indivisible world of 'invisible presences'

In other words, as I mentioned above, to the extent that it contains nothing else but a *limited* set of particles of matter in orderly motion, such a world is both lifeless (as matter cannot be created *ex nihilo*), and, because it is possible for such a limited amount of matter to reappear in the same configuration – to repeat itself, so to speak – a timeless place. Indeed, in such a world, as Laplace (1886) realized, an intellect that was vast enough could, by knowing the position and velocities of all these basic particles, "embrace in the same formula the motions of the greatest bodies in the universe and those of the slightest atoms; [and as result] nothing would be uncertain for it, and the future, like the past, would be present to its eyes." In such a world as this, all change would only be of a quantitative nature, changes of configuration; there can be no qualitative changes, no creation of novelty, no unique, first-time occurrences, no events which could, like works of art (Wittgenstein, 1980, p.58), have their unique meaning *in themselves*.

Here, then, we have a basic set of concepts – of space and time, and of matter and motion – in terms of which we in fact conduct almost all

our daily enterprises. This is the *picture* currently holding us captive, for this is what lies in our language and what we repeat to ourselves inexorably, in our ordinary daily activities, in our institutional and administrative practices, and in our intellectual inquiries. Indeed, it is a picture of the world *as a picture* (a 'pointillist' picture, in fact) – "we are indicating by the very choice of the word its most significant feature: its *pictorial* character" (Capek, 1961).[2]

Indeed, we can now see why those versions of social constructionism that leave this Cartesian picture in place raise so much anxiety over their deconstruction of everything that seems fixed and solid within it.[3] For a background that has been decomposed into "a chaos as disordered as the poets could ever imagine," cannot exert any structured or guiding influence of a shared kind on those immersed in it.

But notice its origins, note Descartes' relation to his surroundings within which he fashions this 'view': he fashions it as a thinker, and as a deliberate, self-conscious actor. He is not a participant in any ongoing practical action, concerned to engage with and make himself understood in the action to the others around him; he never acts spontaneously, in responsive reaction to events occurring around him; he is acting alone, deliberately concerned with being the master and possessor of nature.

Indeed, whatever the movements of those he observed "crossing the square," he is unmoved or untouched by them. Should one of them turn to catch sight of him at his window, how would he react, how would he respond? For the meeting of people's eyes, our eyes with those of animals . . . the spontaneous "interplay of gaze and expression" (Sacks, 1985, p.8) . . . is something very basic in our lives. Spontaneously, we sense ourselves in contact with more than just a dead body in motion; we have become involved with a being that has a soul, an 'inner life'; and we know straightaway if they have that same attitude toward us. As Goffman (1967) points out, our's and other people's sense of offence is direct and immediate if we feel those around us are not properly honoring their "involvement obligations." "My attitude towards him," says Wittgenstein (1953), "is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul" (p.178).

If we attend, then, to the kind of meeting occurring between Descartes and his surroundings, the relations between them, we find them somewhat distant. The surroundings that concern him are 'over

there'; it is an 'external world'; he is not himself a *participant* within it. He is merely thinking of himself as 'viewing' it. Thus in this 'thought-view,'[4] space holds a privileged place, and it is treated as an immutable, unchanging, homogeneous, causally inert, empty 'container,' a place in which separate 'particles' of matter may occupy different 'positions.' Time is secondary to space, and often thought of as a fourth, 'spatial' dimension. As such, it too is an empty, neutral, unchanging 'container.' While instants *of* time are differentiated by their succession, time is prior to change: changes occur *in* time. As unchanging containers, both space and time are there for things to happen in them. The only changeable stuff is matter, not within itself, but in its location; it may change its position in space. Hence, our feeling that what is of central importance for us are static *structures* or our linguistic *representations* or our ways of *picturing* such structures in language in making sense between us of what counts for us as a world.

But let us note again that this kind of world is not the world that contains us as active *participants* within it, the world in which we, along with the others and othernesses around us, have our being within a dynamic interplay. It is, to repeat, the world of an individual who has withdrawn himself from such shared participatory involvements, and who has turned himself instead only toward the aims of mastery and possession. Thus for such an individual, this is an 'external world,' a world in which time has been 'spatialized' as merely another spatial dimension, as an already existing dimension of reality in which the future positions of the particles making up a configurations 'await,' so to speak, occupation. It is thus 'natural' in such a reality to think of motion as following a path in space, a space which is 'there' both before and after the motion.

But in the dynamic time of life and living, in irreversible time in which things grow and develop, internally articulate and refine themselves, flower, blossom, and reproduce themselves in others of their kind, and then die, in this kind of time, movement and motion cannot simply be a change in position in a pre-existing space. Motion is to do with the creation of novelty; it is *physiognomic* in that it is an "organic deformation" (Whitehead, 1975, p.160), or "coherent deformation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.91), a qualitative change *within* a living whole. And what is special about such living wholes – even such entities as paintings, pieces of music or written texts – is that just like the other persons

around us, they can have *agency*, that is, they can exert an influence on us through their *expressions*; not the direct impact of a physical force, but the kind of influence another can exert on us by, for instance, calling our name, the kind of influence that plays upon our inescapable responsiveness as living beings to events of concern to us occurring in our surroundings. It is in this kind of world in which we live and participate.

The 'agency' of real but invisible presences

But how shall we talk of it, how shall we – n*ot picture it or view it*, for that again will lead us back into all the difficulties of timelessness we must avoid – but *express a sense of it* in some way? And what does it mean to say that such a world is populated with *agencies* over an above the individual agencies of the individual people around us? How can something like a text – that seems to be a dead thing in itself – exert an invisible influence upon us? What does it mean to talk of the r*eal but invisible presences* influencing the *style* of our lives at the moment, to talk, say, of the current 'grammar' of our language, or of what it is like to have to live, currently, in what we might call 'the age of money'?

Well, strangely, there is no shortage of familiar, everyday activities *which only take place over time*, to which we can refer as paradigms for orienting ourselves to what is entailed in identifying the nature of *felt understandings*, what it is to have a *shaped and vectored sense* of a circumstance without in fact having a visual or pictorial image of it. Consider, for instance, the simple activity of another's question to us; or that of reading and understanding a piece of writing; or, to take Wittgenstein's example, listening with understanding to a piece of music.

Let us first consider a piece of music, a simple melody unfolding in time: The first point to make is about its *successive* nature, and the sharp distinction between the *internal relations* involved in an unfolding temporal succession and the *external relations* constituting a structure formed by juxtaposing a set of parts in space. As long as its 'movement' continues, the musical expression remains incomplete. At each particular moment a new tone is added to the previous ones, or more accurately, each new moment is constituted by the creation of a new musical *quality*. A picture, a spatial array contemplated at any given instant is complete; it is a *static* structure with all its parts given *at once*, simultaneously. Our experience listening to a piece of music is very different. In spite of the

irreducible individuality of each new tone, its *quality* is 'tinged' or 'colored' by the whole preceding musical context into which it 'strikes,' and which in turn, it retroactively changes by contributing to the emergence of a new musical quality.

The 'building' or 'construction' of a musical phrase over time is thus very different from the construction of a structure in space. 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. This is what is meant by saying they are *static* structures constructed from *externally* related parts. Such structures only have their character when they are complete: we put in the last engine part, switch on, and drive away; any attempt to drive a car before all its parts have been installed is courting disaster. But in something like a piece of music, all its 'participant parts' have a *living* relation with each other; that is, as we noted above, they constitute a *dynamically* emerging or *growing* structure, a *structurizing structure* one might say. As such, they develop from simple, already living individuals, into richly structured ones. They do not have to wait until they are complete before they can express themselves. They develop in such a way that their 'parts' (if we are still justified in using such a term) 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 whole at some earlier point in time. In other words, their *history* – where they have come from and where they have been headed – is just as important as the instantaneous logic of their growth.

Consider again a piece of music: as we have noted, while the individual tones are not externally related units from which the melody is additively built, their individuality is not simply absorbed or dissolved in the undifferentiated unity of the musical whole. Each individual tone matters and makes a difference while being related to the whole. Thus, the musical phrase is a *successively differentiated whole* which remains a whole in spite of its successive character and which remains differentiated in spite of its dynamic wholeness. In other words, as a dynamic whole, it resists description in terms of any one s*ingle order of connectedness*; hence my comment above that we might designate such living wholes as *primordial*, in the sense of being the richly intertwined origins or sources from out of which we can differentiate our more ordered con-

cerns. Yet, we are able to attend to the web of chiasmically intertwined relations within which the constituent parts have their being.

The pressure to form *theoretical pictures* (as in Hertz's account of the proper way of proceeding in science) leads us to forget the essential difference between the juxtaposition of parts in space and the unfolding succession of qualities in time. It also leads us to reduce the differences between the past, present and future to simple *differences of position*: 'past' events being symbolized by positions lying to the left of the point representing the 'present,' while 'future' events lie to the right of the same point on an already existing 'time line' drawn in space.

Above I raised the question of what it is for something, seemingly dead in itself, to nonetheless have agency, in the sense of it being able to give shape to our actions over and beyond the shape that we alone might give them.

To get a handle on what is at issue here, let me ask you to consider two preliminary orienting pieces of material: one is George Mead's (1934) claim that: "The mechanism of meaning is present in the social act before the emergence of consciousness or awareness of meaning occurs. The act or adjustive response of the second organism gives to the gesture of the first organism the meaning it has" (pp. 77-78). I quote this to make the point, already made by Wittgenstein above, that meaning begins with our spontaneous responsive reactions. Such reactions can be thought of as beginning a sequential process of differentiation, of specification, of making something within a still undifferentiated array of possibilities clear and distinct while still, of course, embedded within that same array. To appreciate what is at stake here, consider reading an article on social constructionism and coming across a sentence expressing this rhetorical question: "What are the differences between AA's and BB's versions of social constructionism, considering that AA developed his version with an American background as an objection to experimental *social* psychology, while BB developed his in a British context, not only in objection to the experimental approach to *developmental* psychology, but also in objection to the whole idea that human behavior could ever be likened merely to computation and understood in *formal* terms?"

While we hold the question 'in mind,' so to speak, as 'point of orientation' as we mentally assemble the landscape within which we are going to attempt to answer it, without being able to articulate its influ-

ence, we keep 'hearing its voice' and 'answering to' its calls. It works as both a provocation and a guide. In the jargon I have been using currently, it provides us with a shaped and vectored sense of the landscape in which we must make our 'moves' if we are to respond to the questioner as he or she already anticipates and expects. For there is in the very asking of the question in those terms a veritable grammar determining what will count as an acceptable answer or not. In other words, prior to us having any clear conscious awareness of the events in our surroundings exerting specific, describable influences on our conduct, such influences are there (as Mead puts it) "before the emergence of consciousness or awareness of meaning occurs," and we crucially need to take note of this.

But this is not easy. As I have already suggested, such agentic influences, although very real, are often invisible. To give one last example of how, nonetheless, we are very familiar with such phenomena, let me say a few words about stereophonic listening: Listening to current stereo recordings of an orchestra playing in a hall on a system with "surround sound," it is not just that the violins sound as if they are coming from the left, where they were originally located, and the violas, cellos and double basses as if from the right, but one hears much more. The recording sounds as if the orchestra is playing in a hall *in which the sounds bounce off the walls and ceiling*; there is a sense of space around the instruments. 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 phase differences between 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*.[5]

The hall, and its size and general volume, is of course invisible, but its spatial extent is nonetheless 'there' in our hearing of the music. Our seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling and body orientation (or near-far, up-down, right-left, etc) are all there complexly and dynamically intertwined in our sense of our relation to our surroundings. Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty (1968) notes with respect to the nature of our chiasmically organized perception of our surroundings: "Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world. It is a marvel too little noticed that every movement of my eyes -- even more, every displacement of my body -- has its place in the same visible

universe that I itemize and explore with them, as, conversely, every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile space. There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable" (p.134). In other words, to repeat the point made above, the complex dynamic realities which here we are calling chiasmically organized are not constituted from causally related parts, nor from any rationally related parts either, nor are they formed by any kind of mixing or blending or averaging we can imagine. Here, in the very emergence of the new concept of chiasmic relations is the very emergence of a uniquely novel quality into our thinking of a previously unencountered kind.

Conclusions

What I have been arguing then is that previous accounts of social constructionism have been nowhere near radical enough. Embedded in the background against which many of the arguments in their support where formulated, is an unexamined Cartesianism. So, although the *theories* and *metatheoretical* suppositions proposed seemed to overcome its self-contained individualism – the idea that all that was important to our mental lives was contained within the heads of individual people – it did not overcome the idea of our social realities being composed of a limited set of separate "elements of reality." Hence, in many versions of social constructionism, it seems as if there are no prior connections or relations between the elements that might go into a construction, thus 'anything goes.' Thus advocates of this approach, instead of looking for prior justifications for the worth of their claims – that, for instance, we should study the concrete details of our actual practices rather than seeking to discover principles on which they are (or might be) based – set out their pragmatic advantages (e.g. Rorty, 1989).

We can agree that there are no prior justifications with which to appeal for one's claims to worth. But to agree that there is no prior shared background structure of feelings of anticipation and tendency, even if that background is one without a long history but created at that moment of meeting when one living being acknowledges the presence of another, would be to agree that there is no shared basis of judgement to form agreements. Indeed, though such a form of social construction-

ism might seem to overcome individualism, it does not overcome the "possessive individualism" (Macpherson, 1962) central to the current rise of conservative politics: "Its possessive quality is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them" (p.3). As is perhaps obvious, this relates to Descartes' notion of persons as self-contained thinkers who are not spontaneously inter-related via their spontaneous, living bodily responsiveness to the others and othernesses around them; with his conception of the aims of inquiry as mastery; as well as with his conception of reality as separate elements in, so to speak, Brownian movement in relation to each other (a society, in other words, of anonymous strangers).

But what exactly *is* the reality in which we live? Like St Augustine when asked about time, we know perfectly well in our everyday practices what it is, most of the time, or else we would spend even more of our time in chaos and confusion than we do. It is only when we try to formulate its nature that we run into trouble.

But now, due to recent understandings from Wittgenstein, Bakhtin, Merleau-Ponty and others, we know some of the causes of our self-generated confusion. In our studies of language, for instance, as long as our attention is shifted from our actual experience of "words in their speaking" to the patterns of "already spoken words," the static shapes and forms we put down on a page – whenever we shift our attention from our lived experience of a temporally forming whole to its static representation – such self-generated confusion is inevitable.

The word "reality" is like any other word in our language, and as such, we must learn to use it properly. In line with Wittgenstein's (1953) claim that we must "let the use of [your] words teach you their meaning" (p.220), after having looked at the examples above to do with our understanding of temporally unfolding phenomena, I want to argue that if we want to hang on to the word *reality*, and I for one do, then it must be used in totally new ways. Reality can no longer be restricted to what we might call a purely 'local' meaning, for the nonlocal implications of the chiasmic ordering of our perceptual contacts with our surroundings suggest that what happens in one region of space is inevitably related with other, often very distant, regions of our lives – as, for instance, when I remember a quote from Vico, and use its agency to guide my present thought.[6] The chiasmic organization of our realities suggests

that the influences at work in them are related in ways that defy explanation in terms of any currently known connections, interactions, fields, pushes or pulls of a physical kind operating merely in space. There is a 'wholeness' about a chiasmically organized world that is totally alien to older, mechanistic ways of thinking.

Disciplined to think logically, to think that geometry and arithmetic and other forms of calculation are the only properly disciplined modes of thought, we have given ourselves over to the authority of single, hierarchically structured forms of disengaged thought. What might it be to think in a disciplined but engaged fashion, in a way which follows the contours, so to speak, of the shaped and vectored sense one has of the particular situations in which one might find oneself embedded in one's meetings with others?

Elsewhere (Shotter, 1998), I have discussed different styles of writing, and in particular, Wittgenstein's style. Among other devices, he produces, we might say, a "montage of metaphors," and in so doing, brings together into a single work a number of different 'pictures' or 'part pictures' arranged so that they form a chiasmically organized whole. In other words, we have here a sequence of images presented to us just as those presented us in looking over a landscape or another person's face. While all remaining distinctly themselves, this sequence of abruptly alternating scenes or images, the juxtaposing of discrete or contrasting elements, a set of remarks that "are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of these long and involved journeyings" (p.ix), can create in us a 'contoured' sense of what that landscape is. And this, in the examples I have presented here, is what I have been trying to do too.

Like any dynamic whole, it will exhibit a synthesis of unity and multiplicity, of continuity and discontinuity; but it cannot be the unity of an undifferentiated, instantaneous spatial whole, nor can it be a plurality of merely juxtaposed units. Further, although it has continuity, it lacks continuity in the mathematical sense of infinite divisibility, but it certainly doesn't have the discontinuity of self-contained, rigid, atomic particles. Its continuity is of a chronotopic kind, of a time-space kind, but quite what that is remains, perhaps, open to further articulation. I cannot claim here by any means to have given a definitive account of chiasmically organized realities. I have made a small beginning with what we might call a prospective concept – something that must of its

very nature remain eternally open to further articulation. But what I can say for certain is that future notions of reality ought to be devoid of *all* static, merely spatial forms, including even those which are subtly and implicitly present on seemingly abstract mathematical notions (like chaos and complexity theories).

The positive significance of our "turn to language" in social constructionism is not just in the way in which it has released us from the need to give prior (foundational) justifications for all our claims, but in the ways it has begun to orient us toward our experience of word *use*, and in particular, toward our detailed sensing of the temporally unfolding experience of the *chiasmic* interweaving of our voicing of our words in with the events occurring at the moment of their voicing. This has led some of us right away from abstract theorizing to the discovery of the *nonvisual dynamical patterns* actually occurring with us as we speak and listen. It has also alerted us to the need for forms of writing that create such dynamically experienced patterns in our readers, structurally similar to those we actually experience in our acting, in our everyday practices. Thus, rather than merely gaining a sense of that reality over there from a set of pictures that we might view in an art galley without ever going out into the actual world at large, the n*onvisual dynamical patterns* that we can come to embody, in following Wittgenstein's methods, can help us in actual fact to come to be more 'at home' in our own human world.

Notes

[1] "But can't I imagine that the people around me are automata...?" Says Wittgenstein (1953), "Say to yourself, for example: 'The children over there are mere automata; all their liveliness is mere automatism.' And you will either find these words become quite meaningless; or, you will produce in yourself some kind of uncanny feeling, or something of the sort" (no.420). Clearly, Descartes felt no such linguistic difficulties as these, as one doesn't, so to speak, in talking solely to oneself.

[2] See also Heidegger (1977), "The age of the world picture." As Heidegger remarks here, the term "world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture" (p.129).

[3] "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and vener-

able prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed one become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face . . . The real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men" (Marx, MER, 475-76, quoted in Berman, 1982, p.21).

[4] In actual vision, we do not see *separate, independent, elements of reality*; in fact, in 'pointillism,' *chaismic* relations (of blending or intertwining) emerge as we look over the points of paint to create a 'luminous' effects.

[5] I owe this image to Peat (1990, pp.114-115).

[6] Another implication of the 'local'/'nonlocal' distinction though, might be our treatment of ethnic grievances. Minority groups in the United States can easily use the Constitution to vociferously exert their 'rights'. A 'local' response to such grievances is to treat each one in isolation of, seemingly, its own individual merits. A cacophany of competing grievances results, with no common view of what kind of social contract, what kind of infrastructure of justice there might be that could reconcile them equitably. American blacks are right to argue that they have been systematically discriminated against, so are women, so are the poor. A 'nonlocal' response would address all these grievances over time in a way which would hold American society together through an infrastructure of justice that is neutral to all minority groups and mindful only of equivalent disadvantage.

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