



Tom Andersen, Fleeting Events, the Bodily Feelings They Arouse in Us, and the Dialogical: Transitory Understandings and Action Guiding Anticipations

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Although Tom Andersen talked a great deal of the importance of his 'inner dialogues,' he did not explicitly talk of himself as being a *dialogical therapist*. However, in trying to articulate what is important in the nature of all *dialogically-structured* practices, I want to use examples of his therapeutic practices, Tom Andersen's way of being Tom Andersen, examples that in fact exhibit many relevant features of such dialogically-structured practices. Central to them all is a move away from the Cartesian idea that events in the 'outside' or 'external' world are *represented* or *pictured* within us in some way (i.e., in our heads somewhere), and a move towards, a *responsive* understanding, a felt *tendency* or *anticipation* to go on in a *particular* way in relation to a *particular* circumstance out in the world at large. Something that the *generalities* described in theories, models, recipes, sets of principles, etc., that are common to all situations do not do.

Keywords: inner dialogues, transitory understandings, action guiding anticipations, attunements, orientations, particularities

Key Points

- 1 *Dialogically-structured practices* move beyond a focus on an individual in a relationship, towards a focus on the unfolding in-the-moment dynamic relatedness of all persons.
- 2 Dialogical practices are informed by the premise that we are *responsive living dialogical beings* who continuously influence and are influenced by invisible intermingling currents of relational activity.
- 3 The nature of relational responsiveness within these currents is influenced by *transitory understandings* and *anticipatory guiding principles*.
- 4 Transitory understandings emerge from thinking that just happens within such currents; anticipatory guiding principles emerge from a felt sense of how others will respond.
- 5 Coming to speak in *dialogue* within this moment-by-moment unfolding process involves *spontaneous responsiveness*.
- 6 Becoming *oriented* to the flow of this moment-by-moment unfolding process involves *embodied responsiveness*.
- 7 In moments where professionals are tempted to *un-relate* to those before them, dialogical practices offer ways to *re-relate* to them in a therapeutic dialogue.

...the life in which we therapists are particularly interested in comprises meanings and feelings which shift all the time; they are there for a second and have passed away the next second (Andersen, 1996, p. 119).

I used to think that we have movements and feelings and language inside us ...[But] we are in them: in the movements, in the feelings, and in the language. And we do not shape them, they shape us (p. 122).

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Tom Andersen – although he talked a great deal of the importance of his ‘inner dialogues’ – did not explicitly talk of himself as being a *dialogical therapist*. However, in what follows, in trying to articulate what is important in the nature of all dialogically-structured practices, I want to use examples of Tom’s *way of being* Tom Andersen (Shotter, 2007) that exemplify many relevant features of such practices (Seikkula, 2011). Central to them all is a move away from the Cartesian idea that events in the ‘outside’ or ‘external’ world are *represented* or *pictured* within us in some way (i.e., in our heads somewhere), and a move towards, following Bakhtin (1986), a *responsive* understanding, a felt *tendency* or *anticipation* to go on in a *particular* way in *particular* circumstances: something that the *generalities* described in theories, models, recipes, sets of principles, etc., do not do.

On Coming to Speak Through (Dia) the Flowing Stream of Meaning (the Logos)¹ From Within Which We Have Our Being

To begin with, crucial to the turn to the *dialogical*, as I see it, is that it is not only a turn away from the self-contained individual, but also a turn away from the idea that the world in which we live consists for us, merely in the earth beneath our feet – furnished as it is with all kinds of individual ‘othernesses,’ along with a whole host of other, individual human beings – as well as the sky above our heads. It is also a turn away from the ancient Greek idea of reality as consisting of *perfections* or *ideal forms* always hidden from us *behind appearances*. Instead, we live as *spontaneously responsive* living, dialogical beings, intimately related to our surroundings, immersed within an oceanic world of ceaseless, intra-mingling currents of activity that influence us as much, if not more, than we can influence them.

Indeed, many of these currents are in fact *invisible* and as such only available to us in terms of *felt* time-shapes.² For we are not at all like machines with already well-defined inputs, leading to equally well-defined outputs, unresponsive to the larger contexts in which we must operate. We are much more like plants growing from seeds, existing within a special ‘confluence’ (Gergen, 2009) of intra-mingling influences, rooted within the chiasmic intra-acting³ of many different flowing streams of energy and materials that our bodies are continually working to *organise* in sustaining us as viable human beings.

On Coming to Dialogue – Our Spontaneous Responsiveness

Buffeted by the wind and waves of the *social weather*⁴ around us, we inhabit circumstances in which almost everything seems to merge into everything else; we do not and cannot observe this flow of activity *as if* from the outside. Indeed, it is too intimately interwoven in with all that we are and can do from within it for any aspects of it to be lifted out and examined scientifically as an object on a laboratory bench. For after all, wherever we move, we will still find ourselves within one or another region of it, and we are too immersed in it to be aware of its every aspect.

We are thus continually uncertain as to *what* the situation *is* that faces us, and *how* we might act within it for the best. The continuous flowing nature of the ‘speech chain’ is typically⁵ described by Bakhtin (1986) thus:

...all real and integral understanding is actively responsive ...And the speaker himself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding ...he expects

response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth . . . [thus] any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances – his own and others’ – with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (builds on them, polemicizes with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener). Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances (p. 69).

Indeed, being immersed as listeners within the same intra-mingling flow of activities as those speaking to us, we do not have to wait for them to complete their utterances before we can, in practice, begin to understand their speech sufficiently to start to respond to it. For present to us in our spontaneous bodily responsiveness to people’s voicing of their utterances as they unfold, are not only *action guiding anticipatory understandings* of what next they might possibly say – such that, often, when perhaps they hesitate and seem to be searching for the ‘right word,’ we can often offer an appropriate possibility ourselves – but also *relationally-responsive, ‘transitory understandings’* (see section on *becoming oriented* below) occurring in us spontaneously, no doubt as a result of the countless hours of training we have had in our prior involvements both in our culture, and in our professional circumstances.

On Coming to Dialogue – Our Anticipatory Understandings

Thus, besides the thinking that *we* as adult thinkers *do* deliberately and know of ourselves as doing, there is a kind of thinking that *just happens within us* without our being aware of it. It emerges within us as a result of our having undergone a whole set of *particular languaged experiences*. It *shows* or *displays* itself in our actions or utterances in the *just-happening-thinking* we do as we read or hear a question and begin to *orient* ourselves towards answering it; or when we hear a new word used in an already familiar context; or as we inwardly search for the ‘right’ words to give voice to an experience.

And the kind of learning occurring here, as we gain more and more experience of crucial events in our professional lives and as we try to bring words to such events, is not at all like the more deliberate, formal learning we do in a class room. For in classrooms we engage in a process in which events that already make one kind of sense to us informally are artificially de-contextualised, and placed within theoretical schemes or systems of a formal kind to make a wholly new and different sense, all in the service of *explaining* them causally. We can liken it to the task of trying to learn a *second language* solely from a text-book. Whereas, the kind of learning that gives rise to spontaneously occurring, embodied forms of thought and talk occurs in relation to events much more like those giving rise to our *first-language* learning. Those around us, who are already skilled at such *just-happening* forms of thought, talk, and acting, simply *show* us how to act as they act, how to attend to what they attend to, how, in fact, *to be* like them.

For what is special about such learning is that, at first, our teachers cannot just use words or utterances to designate ‘things’ already well known, for the ‘things’ so designated would have to be seen as such independently of language, and that is clearly not the case. Thus their words cannot at first be ‘signs’ in the sense of pointing beyond themselves to a ‘something else’ or this or that kind in our shared

surroundings. Initially, their expressions must *do* something to us and within us, within the immediate situation we share. It is a matter of their arousing in us shareable evaluative feelings, in shareable circumstances, by their use of shareable expressions.

For example, a mother teasing her child while playing with a 'popup' toy says: 'It's coming ...it's coming ...it's coming ...HERE it comes!', and in so doing she creates a tense expectation of a 'something' appearing into view, that is satisfied by the *presence* of a THISNESS witnessed in common by both her and her child, in relation to which they both express recognition and delight.⁶ And it is in many such similar circumstances as *this* that children hear, and listen to, words being *used* by others in *their efforts* to guide them towards relating themselves to the circumstance before them *in the same way* as these others do. The dictionary definition of a mother's words being here all but irrelevant to her pacing and intoning of them. But as we grow older, the actual words we begin to use do begin to matter. Why? Because as Bakhtin (1986) points out, people's different wordings of their utterances arouse different anticipations within us of what is possibly going to happen next:

The utterance is related not only to preceding, but also to subsequent links in the chain of speech communication ...[F]rom the very beginning, the utterance is constructed while taking into account possible responsive reactions, for whose sake, in essence, it is actually created ...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).

On Coming to Dialogue – Our Attunements

But before bringing this section to a close, and moving to exemplify the powerful influences the words of others can exert upon us through some cases of Tom Andersen, let me return to the issue of what it is to be *dia-logical*. In shifting from a world of pre-existing, separate, self-contained, objective entities to a world of unending, intra-mingling, flowing activities, as Tom Andersen points out, certain *dynamic stabilities* can appear fleetingly, but because of their powerful *existential* nature, they can be sustained within a person's being-in-the-world for some long period of time.

Thus to speak and to listen to words *dia-logically* entails all of those involved speaking and listening in relation to the unfolding contours of the flow of activity within which they are all immersed. Indeed, crucial here is the fact that, in being able to share *experiences* in shared *circumstances*, not only can we come to share *feelings*,⁷ but in sharing the wording of these experiences, we can come to share very particular *anticipations* as to how the others around us *will* respond to those events.⁸

Indeed, if it really is the case that we occupy a fluid, indeterminate, not-yet-finalised reality, in continually having to step out into an uncertain future, our expectations as to how those around us *will react* are crucial. Will they respond with curiosity and love towards us, or with incomprehension and disorientation? Bakhtin (1993) puts it nicely, I think, in saying:

The unity of the actual and answerably act-performing consciousness, on the other hand, should not be conceived as the contentual constancy of a principle, of a right, of a law⁹ ...The word that would characterize this more accurately is *faithfulness* [being-true-to], the way it is used in reference to love and marriage ...The emotional-volitional tone of a

once-occurrent actual consciousness is conveyed more aptly by the word *faithfulness* [being-true-to] (p. 38).

That is, we need to *show* or to *display* in our actions a kind of *concern* in which we *do justice* in our talk to the flow of experience within which we are actually immersed, a *way* of expressing in our actions and utterances our engagement with it that enables the others around us to sense also that we are *with them* within that same flow – in other words, we feel ‘in touch with’ each other. As Seikkula and Trimble (2005) put it, the process of healing and change in network and *Open Dialogue* meetings entails the emergence of a ‘powerful emotional attunement, an experience most people would recognize as feelings of love’ (p. 465) – a claim that I will return to in a later section.

From within the flow: becoming oriented, very basically and in the moment

The notion of *an orientation* figured prominently in the previous section. Why? As I see it, there are two kinds of *difficulty* that we can face in life, not just *one*, difficulties that we all, indiscriminately, tend to call *problems*. There are *difficulties of the intellect* and *difficulties of orientation* or *ways* of relating.¹⁰ We can formulate difficulties of the intellect as *problems* which, with the aid of clever *theories*, we assume we can solve by the use of a ‘manipulational’ form of reasoning, by making use of inner mental representations which correspond to an outer reality in the sense set out long ago by Heinrich Hertz (1894/1956):

‘We form for ourselves images or symbols of external objects,’ he said, ‘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).

Difficulties of orientation, however, are of a quite different kind, for they are to do with how we *relate* ourselves bodily towards events occurring around us, with the *ways* in which we see them, hear them, experience them, and value them – for these are the *ways* that determine, that ‘give shape to,’ the lines of action we *resolve* on as appropriate within the situations in which we find ourselves to be in.

Becoming Oriented within the Flow – Our Embodied Spontaneous Responsiveness

Indeed, it is precisely the unique *transitory understandings* that occur within us as we move around from within our immersion in the unfolding flow, that give us both a sense of ‘where we are now,’ in relation to the others around us, as well as *action guiding anticipations* as to ‘where we might go next.’ We thus *show* or *display* our *orientation* towards the circumstances we are in, in terms both of the *just happening thinking* that occurs within us and by the *just happening acting* that goes along with it. But to repeat, we are unaware of their genesis, because these influences emerge within us *dialogically*, as a result of our having participated in a whole set of intra-mingling experiences that cannot be traced back to the actions of any particular individuals. So, although these kinds of understanding and acting are not at all determined genetically, like blue eyes, in having their genesis in our relations (after birth) to those around us, we still often talk of them (metaphorically) as being ‘inherited’ from those within our family settings.

But clearly, the very powerful *emotional attunements* that we can feel in our *dialogically-structured* relations with those around us – such that their words can ‘touch’ us

in our very being – can cut both ways. We can find ourselves coming to embody, spontaneously, certain understandings that are in no way understandings that we have to ‘work out,’ self-consciously, and deliberately for ourselves, certain very basic ways of relating or orienting ourselves to our surroundings that are, so to speak, imposed on us by others. In being fashioned in responsive relations to local circumstances, they can never be merely mechanical repetitions of previous utterances; they emerge as *dialogically-structured* holistic unities,¹¹ without it being possible for us to trace their occurrence back to the intentions of any of the individuals involved.

Indeed, such influences can be at work within us, without our having any conscious awareness of their nature; they are not thus easily available to us for alteration, for our own, inner cause-and-effect thinking is essentially *monological*. An example of Tom Andersen’s (1996) bears this out:

A woman had felt sad for a long while relating that she could never ask for help, even when she was sick. Help had to be given by others, not asked for by her. ‘Because,’ she explained, ‘independence was a big word in my family. We were supposed to be independent.’ [JS: The voice of her father and mother at work in her – see the second final sentence in this quote.] A shift in her face and a drop in the voice when she uttered the word ‘independent’ indicated the meaningfulness of the word. When she was asked: ‘If you looked into that word ‘independence,’ what might you see?’ she first said that she did not like the word very much. Asked what she saw that she did not like, she put her hands to her face and said, weeping: ‘it is so hard for me to talk about loneliness . . . yes, it means staying alone.’ As she told how hard it had been to stay alone in order to fulfill all expectations of her being independent, she cried and her body sank in resignation. She talked for a long while without interruption and started to wonder if she would be able to fulfill those expectations. Being more and more eagerly involved in her own discussion, her voice raised, and her neck and shoulders raised, and she talked more and more angrily as the idea of being-in-the-world as independent was forcefully challenged. Asked what her mother would see in the word, she replied that she would see strength; her father would also see strength, but of another kind. Her sister and grandmother would also see what she did (p. 212).

By asking *her* to look further into that word, *independence*, Tom Andersen was able to help her, so to speak, to bring the monological influences of that word, *independence*, at work within her back into her experiencing a *dialogical* relation to it; she could hear herself articulating the many different meanings in different circumstances it had for her – she was thus able to come to a much more well-articulated understanding of how it oriented her in relating both to herself, and to all the others and othernesses in her surroundings.

Our immersion in an already ongoing flow of *socially shaped* activity means that, even before we or another person speaks or acts, if we are sufficiently emotionally attuned to its unfolding dynamics, we can have a sense, not only of ‘where,’ so to speak, it is ‘going,’ but of ‘what,’ at a certain moment in time, is a ‘transitional understanding’ of importance to a speaker. It ‘shows up’ in the ‘emotional-volitional tone’ (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 28) of a person’s speech, in the efforts speakers make to express in the dynamic contours of their unfolding utterances the precise ‘shape’ of their feelings.

And Tom Andersen (1996) is aware of this. In characterising his therapeutic attitude to his client’s utterances, to their expression of words, he comments as follows: ‘The listener who sees as much as he or she hears will notice that various spoken

words “touch” the speaker differently. The speaker is touched by the words as they reach his or her own ears. Some words touch the speaker in such a way that the listener can see him or her being moved’ (p. 212). These ‘in the moment’ sensings can be crucial in orienting one as a therapist in identifying a person’s ‘more basic’ orienting attitudes towards themselves and the rest of their surroundings.

Becoming Oriented within the Flow – Our Sensing of Similarities

Although these (in fact transitory) understandings are often talked of as *patterns* out in the world, they are better thought of as *similarities* sensed as occurring within the unfolding temporal contours of a person’s talk and actions. Why? Because we are concerned not with shapes or forms, but with *meanings*, not with *representational understandings* that we can picture in words, but with *responsive understandings* that can guide us in our actions. In Bateson’s (1972/2000) terms, it is ‘a difference that makes a difference’ (p. 286) in a particular context that matters; for it is this that allows us to sense, not what a speaker’s words mean *in general*, but what *a particular speaker uniquely means* by using them. As Voloshinov (1986) puts it:

The task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding ...its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e., it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity ...its specific variability [is important] ...[thus] the constituent factor for understanding the linguistic form is not recognition of ‘the same thing,’ but understanding in the proper sense of the word, i.e., orientation in the particular given context and in the particular give situation – orientation in the dynamic process of becoming and not orientation in some ‘inert state’ (pp. 68–69).

Bakhtin (1981) describes what he calls *authoritative discourse*:

‘The authoritative word,’ he says, ‘demands that we acknowledge it ...It binds us ...We encounter it with its authority already fused to it...It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers ...It can be profaned. It is akin to taboo, i.e., a name that must not be taken in vain ...It demands our unconditional allegiance ...It is indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it stands and falls together with that authority’ (pp. 342–343).

Thus, as such, we cannot enter into dialogue with it, even though – because of the deep emotional attunement we shared with the authoritative sources influencing us – we came to embody it *dialogically* as a very basic way of relating (or orienting) ourselves to events in our surroundings.

In other words, we end up in what, following Bakhtin (1984) again, he calls a one-way, monological form of relationship to such experiences, for if we try to ask people *why* they act in this way, they cannot say; monologic forms of thought are unresponsive to our words: ‘Monologue is finalized and deaf to other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force’ (p. 293). Or as Jaakko Seikkula (2002) puts it:

Monological dialogue refers to utterances that convey the speaker’s own thoughts and ideas without being adapted to the interlocutors. One utterance rejects another. In dialogical dialogue utterances are constructed to answer previous utterances and also to wait for an answer from utterances that follow. New understanding is constructed between the interlocutors (p. 268).

This is a major condition for the possibility of the *Finnish Open Dialogue* approach, which I will discuss later.

Tom Andersen (1996) brings to light further, powerful influences that the words of others can have on our sense of ourselves and on our relations to our surroundings:

One woman who had been hospitalized at a mental hospital for a year finally came to family therapy. Besides herself and her family and the family therapist, the doctor-in-chief at the hospital and her nurse contact at the ward were present. When she was asked if she had been given any diagnosis, she said: 'a manic-depressive psychosis.' When she was asked if that diagnosis made any difference, she said it changed her life. She could no longer laugh and be happy nor be sad and cry, because she could see on the faces of those around her that they thought she might go manic or she might become depressed. She therefore had a new inner voice speaking to her all the time: 'Don't be happy and don't be sad! Don't laugh and don't cry!' (pp. 123–124).

Becoming Oriented within the Flow – Our Action Guiding Anticipations

Bakhtin (1981) suggests, words addressed to you by those in authority can be central in 'shaping' our very basic ways of relating ourselves to ourselves and to our surroundings. For, to repeat, by coming to share shared feelings in shared circumstances, which are *worded* for us by authoritative others, we can come to embody very particular *anticipations* as to how those others around us *will* respond to us – will they respond to us with curiosity and love, or with incomprehension and bewilderment? As Tom Andersen's 'independence' example shows, the expressions of others can powerfully shape how we *will expect* others to respond to us.

Two final examples in this section come from Tito Mukhopadhyay (2000) and Naoki Higashida (2013), two boys diagnosed as severely autistic who, without having learned to speak, were taught to write by their mothers – Tito simply by his mother pointing to the letters of the alphabet written on a piece of paper, and Naoki using a cardboard keyboard. Without going into too much detail, the point I want to make here is that both boys talk of their anticipations of how others *will* respond to them, and how their anticipations shapes their actions: 'It pains when people avoid us and the schools refuse to take us,' writes Tito Mukhopadhyay (2000):

I faced it and felt that every day there may be others like me who are facing the social rejection like me. I must make the point clear that *it is not lack of social understanding which causes the weird behaviour*, but it is lack of getting to use oneself in the socially acceptable way, which causes the weird or the undesirable behaviour (p. 57).

While Naoki Higashida (2013) writes:

I can't believe that anyone born as a human being really wants to be left all on their own. What we're anxious about is that we're causing trouble for the rest of you, or even getting on your nerves. This is why it's hard for us [autistic people] to stay around other people (p. 47).

How we anticipate others will *respond to us* when we try to do things is, clearly, a major fear in us all – not only in ordinary people, but also in all those of us, who as professionals, even with our years of experience, must confront yet again the

uncertainty in meeting with a new client. What can we do to live with that uncertainty with equanimity? Indeed, to embrace it with anticipation and wonderment!

Open dialogue and the practicalities of love: From principles to action guiding feelings

In adopting the orientational stance of knowledgeable professionals, intent upon bringing our professional expertise to bear on the circumstances in question before us, we can be easily tempted to *un-relate* ourselves to the people before us as the unique individuals they are. Instead of relating to them in terms of who they are and to their needs, we can begin to treat them merely as instances of a type. But, as I indicated above, only if we can allow ourselves to respond spontaneously to their unique and spontaneously expressions, can we *re-relate* ourselves to them in such a way that they arouse in us the uniquely appropriate *transitory understandings* and *action guiding anticipations*.

It is this process that can enable us to ‘go on’ to respond to them in an appropriately therapeutic manner. But what does *that* entail? Perhaps something akin to what we call love? A relationship which Bakhtin (1993), to repeat, suggested ‘should not be conceived as the contentual constancy of a principle, of a right, of a law ...[but as entailing] *faithfulness* [being-true-to], the way it is used in reference to love and marriage’ (p. 38).

Dialogue and Love – Calling Forth a Becoming

In picking all the examples I referred to above, both from Tom Andersen and from the boys whose *loving* mothers taught them to write (and I wish I had space for many more), I was *thinking with* (see Shotter, 2005, 2011) some comments about the nature of the practicalities of *love* by Max Scheler (1954/1913). I first drew on these comments many years ago when my main focus was in child development, and I was interested in the special attention a mother paid to her child’s activities. He notes that:

If we love any human being, we certainly love him [*sic*] for what he is; but at the same time we love him also for what he *might* be, according to the possibilities of perfection inherent in his being. Our eyes are fixed upon his ideal image which we grasp in, through and behind his empirical traits; yet we are indifferent as to how far it is reflected and realized in his actual state. At the same time, our love is the most potent force that can lift him from one to the other. It carries before him his own purified, and, as it were, redeemed and transfigured likeness, as a challenge to follow and to reach it; it is like a voice calling: become what you are! Become in reality what ideally you are in design! (p. 153).

In other words, what one person can do for another that is crucial to their development – be it a child, or a sports-person, or to help a disoriented or disturbed person to feel more ‘at home’ in the world – is to notice and be responsive to *the possibilities of perfection inherent in his or her being* – to be the voice calling: ‘*Become in reality what ideally you are in design!*’

But to be able to do this, either to become this kind of voice, or – which is perhaps more important – to introduce to the client another voice or other voices that can exert that kind of influence on them, we must attend in a special way to the other person’s behaviour: we must not attend to it objectively, just in terms of its

observable and countable aspects, but in terms of what it is *reaching* or *gesturing* toward, what it is *pointing* toward as a possibility for the future. 'Love does not simply gape approval, so to speak, at a value lying ready to hand for inspection,' he says:

It does not reach out towards given objects (or real persons) merely on account of positive values inherent in them, and already 'given' *prior* to the coming of love. For this idea still betrays that gaping at mere empirical fact, which is so utterly uncongenial to love. Love only occurs when, upon the values already acknowledged as 'real' there supervenes a movement, an intention towards potential values still higher than those already given and presented. In so doing, love invariably sets up an '*idealized paradigm of value*' for the person actually present (Scheler, 1954/1913, p. 153).

And it is the unique *transitory understandings* (that also give us a sense of 'where they stand' in relation to us) and unique *action guiding anticipations* (that also give us a sense of 'where they might go next' in relation to us) that can only arise in our spontaneously responsive, dialogically-structured relations with another person – understandings and anticipations that are *unique* to that other person – that give us the possibility of either being that the voice that calls to them: *Become what you are trying to become, stay trying to go to that ideal place that you are trying to reach!*

Dialogue and Love – Possible Turning Points

In these remarks, Scheler (1954/1913) outlines what lovers actually *do* in relation to those they love: they notice *small details* that others ignore; they *see beyond* their factual nature to what they *might mean*, to what they 'point toward' in the future; they are prepared to relate to *possibilities* not yet actual, to *imagine* a future that might never come to fruition. That is why I say that Scheler is outlining some of the *practicalities* of a loving relationship.

And I see a similar dynamic at work in Seikkula and Trimble's (2005) account of the role of *dialogue* in network meetings and in the *Open Dialogue* approach to treating psychosis, schizophrenia and other severe psychiatric crises:

Certain experiences have come to mark for us turning points in the healing process. They include strong collective feelings of sharing and belonging together; emerging expressions of trust; embodied expressions of emotion; feelings of relief of tension experienced as physical relaxation; and, perhaps surprisingly, ourselves becoming involved in strong emotions and evidencing love . . . The feelings of love that emerge in us during a network meeting are neither romantic nor erotic. They are our own embodied responses to participation in a shared world of meaning cocreated with people who trust each other and ourselves to be transparent, comprehensive beings with each other (p. 473).

Although neither romantic nor erotic, such feelings depend on all concerned being immersed in a shared flow of shared feeling in shared circumstances. The emotional attunement at work among those engaged in such meetings is clearly of an unusual kind; it is not often present at all in the meetings, and in the conversations, that go on mostly in our everyday and professional lives.

In our professional lives, we think of ourselves as needing to be rational, as needing to give reasons for our actions, as being able to articulate the principles, rules, laws, regularities, generalities, etc., that regulate our actions as the professionals we are. Being unable to say why we act as we do would make us look somewhat

professionally incompetent. Yet the unique *transitory understandings* and unique *anticipations* we need to work with arise only out of fleeting, 'once-occurrent events of Being' (Bakhtin, 1993).

Or as Tom Andersen (1996) put it in one of the epigraph quotes above: '...the life in which we therapists are particularly interested in comprises meanings and feelings which shift all the time; they are there for a second and have passed away the next second' (p. 119) ... 'Life is ... composed of small events, which each happen only once' (p. 122). They do not fall into well-defined categories. If this is so, how can we give any reasonable account of what it is that, as therapists, we are actually *doing* in working merely in relation to the *feelings* aroused in us by our client's words and actions. How can we account for our actions?

It is at this point I would like to turn to William James' (1890) *Chapter IX: The Stream of Thought*, and the infamously introspective account of 'the study of mind from within' (p. 224) that he provides us with there. About the stream of thought he writes: 'What strikes us first,' about the stream of thought, he said, 'is [the] different pace of its parts.' Like a bird's life, it seems to be made of an alternation of flights and perchings ... *Let us call the resting-places the 'substantive parts,' and the places of flight the 'transitive parts,' of the stream of thought'* (p. 243).

He then goes on to remark that:

The truth is that large tracts of human speech are nothing but *signs of direction* in thought, of which direction we nevertheless have an acutely discriminative sense, though no definite sensorial image plays any part in it whatsoever ... Their function is to lead from one set of images to another ... Now what I contend for, and accumulate examples to show, is that 'tendencies' are not only descriptions from without, but that they are among the *objects* of the stream, which is thus aware of them from within, and must be described as in very large measure constituted of *feelings of tendency*, often so vague that we are unable to name them at all (pp. 253–254).

Dialogue and Love – Our Acutely Discriminative Sense

What is crucial here is that, although the *feelings of tendency* aroused in us by people's words are so vague that we are unable to *name* them at all, we nonetheless have *an acutely discriminative sense* of their directive function in shaping our thought and talk. It is continually at work within us, and without it, we would be totally disoriented in our everyday social lives. We immediately sense, for instance, that someone has not only asked us a question, but a specific question requiring a specific answer – such that if we fail to answer it as required, they will put it to us again. We sense whether their approach to us is friendly, hostile, superior or humble, whether they are 'in tune' with us, or 'on another wavelength,' and so on.

So, although our experiences *from within* the flow are not at all like bounded entities with clear beginnings and endings – for even as they occur, they are always on the way to somewhere else – in our having *an acutely discriminative sense* of the anticipations such *feelings of tendency* arouse in us, it is not at all difficult for us to say what they are *like*. We can describe them metaphorically, in many different ways according to, and sufficient to, the purposes in hand. In other words, such feelings, in being capable of *directing* our thought, have agency; they can move us, this way and that.

Indeed, it is James' noting of the fact that I particularly want to highlight here, for it is in the course of performing our actions, in *trying* to get them right, that we are clearly aware in a very immediate fashion of that discriminative sense in 'shaping,' so to speak, our actions and utterances, even though we lack any 'inner representations' (definite sensorial images) of the *tendencies* at work within us.

Thus, if a *dialogue* is to turn into a *therapeutic dialogue*, to become a healing dialogue, a dialogue oriented toward helping a person to become an integrated 'whole' again, then, it seems to me, there is a need to introduce into it voices that notice and respond to these fleeting hints in a person's behaviour, a voice that 'arrests' the routine next step a person is about to take in accord with their own 'rational' logic, and which introduces to them another possibility – but not just any old possibility, but one clearly inherent in their unique expressions of their being-in-the-world (Scheler, 1913/1954).

In his strikingly successful early response team approach to the treatment of psychotic episodes, Jaakko Seikkula (2002) also notes the necessity to see psychotic reactions:

as attempts to make sense of one's experience and to cope with experiences so difficult that it has not been possible to construct a rational spoken narrative about them . . . An open dialogue, without any preplanned themes or forms seems to be important in enabling the construction of new language in which to express difficult events in a person's life . . . [and] to allow different voices to be heard concerning the themes under discussion including the psychotic experience (p. 264).

But it is precisely these unique understandings and anticipations that arise only in our spontaneous responsiveness to the others and othernesses around us that are lost if we assume that we must respond to our clients in terms of wilfully planned, de-contextualised actions, expressed in accord with a rational schematism.

Conclusions: Moving From 'After the Fact Principles' to 'Before the Fact Feelings'

Jaakko Seikkula (2011) remarks that although, as he sees it, it is possible to develop 'dialogical practices within many types of contexts and with many types of client, children, adolescent, adults and families . . . in many different settings . . . what has surprised me is the enormous difficulty therapists with extensive experience in a particular therapeutic method have in adopting a dialogical way of working with clients. For as I see it, dialogue is not a method; it is a way of life' (p. 185). Indeed, as Carina Hakasson (2009) has shown in her *Family Care Foundation*: 'When people from apparently different life conditions come together and share experiences with one another, something happens. What will happen depends on the culture that surrounds us and how it leads its life. It also depends on who I am and how I relate to myself and to the other. . . . Thanks to these differences something is created that is useful, not only in one's own life, but also in the life of the other. It does not come about without hardship, painful moments and times of hellish doubts. However, it does happen, . . . almost everything is possible to the extent that we collaborate and take both ourselves and the other seriously' (pp. 18–19).

In other words, the very same everyday life activities which we engage in with the others around us that can deeply disturb us in our mental lives, are the activities that can help to move us on from such disturbances. Yet, as I intimated above, without a nameable *method* or *approach*, without a set of explanatory principles in terms of

which to supply an account of one's activities when asked, it seems as if one does not know *what one is doing*. Without a set of distinctive principles to hand, our professional competency would seem to be at stake. Yet, in conclusion, I want to speak against any urge to codify them. There is another way in which to *account to others* for one's skills, as a special selection from everyday life *ways* of acting.

Jaakko Seikkula (2011, p. 184) often presents the whole *Open Dialogue* approach as working in terms of seven principles. But my worry is about the formulation of such 'principles' – born of my now extensive experience of being in many institutional settings, in which I have been in the role of trying to *implement* 'plans' handed down to me by 'planners' working altogether elsewhere from the setting within which they are meant to be *implemented*. It is these *crucial small details, unique to each setting in which one must work*, that are, or may be, ignored in such 'principles' or 'plans'; they cannot be captured in the *generalities* within which such plans are formulated. The trouble with such 'principles' and 'plans' is that they are 'after the fact,' and 'beside the point': they are 'after the fact' in that they can only be formulated after a whole exploratory, trial and error period involved in developing a working practice; and they are 'beside the point' in that they do not arouse in those reading them, or hearing them uttered, the *feelings of tendency* and acute discriminative sensings that are needed in guiding one towards being *therapeutic* in one's exchanges with one's clients. Without the acquisition of these embodied sensitivities, such principles are empty of meaning.

What *is* it, then, that makes one's exchanges *therapeutic* as such, rather than just interesting, everyday exchanges? If an everyday dialogue is to turn into a *therapeutic dialogue*, to become a healing dialogue, a dialogue oriented toward helping a person become an integrated 'whole' again, then it seems to me, there is a need for those around that person to notice and respond to the fleeting hints in their behaviour of the *new person they could become* (Scheler, 1954/1913). Voices are needed around them that 'arrest' the routine next steps the person was about to take – the steps they were about to take in accord with the inner, *authoritative voices* that rule their actions, the voices they have come to embody in their deeply emotional attunements with others in the past – and which introduces to them another possibility, not just any old possibility, but one already clearly inherent in his or her being (Scheler, 1954/1913).

But also what seems to me especially distinct about psychotherapeutic dialogues is that, within them, therapists both speak, and listen, to their clients in ways that are often *poetic*, in ways that 'touch' or 'move' them, in ways that stimulate clients to draw on their own resources; to develop new ways forward, fashioned in *their* terms, not in *ours*.

An example here is from an unpublished case of Tom Andersen's.¹² A husband was physically abusive to his wife and son. After an appropriate setting had been achieved amongst all involved, Tom went on to ask the man: *If your hand, on its way to hit, stopped and talked, what might the words be?* He had difficulties comprehending the question, so it was repeated three times, and as that happened I said to myself: *It is not surprising that he can not find words . . . for some in some situations (may be most often men?) it might be more easy to beat than finding words . . .* Finally he said: 'Stop doing what you are doing. What you do is not right.' Then he was asked how he would say those words, and that question also had to be repeated several time before he said: 'I would say it calmly, slowly and firmly.'

How is it that Tom Andersen came to ask that man this question? What guided him towards it, for he was not acting in terms of any principles, plans, or models? As I see it, what is needed is for us to work in terms of ‘before the fact’ guiding feelings, the *unique just happening* feelings that occur within us as a result of our emotional attunements and our immersion within the ongoing flow of activity occurring amongst all concerned. To emphasise this, I want to end this article with two crucial remarks, one from Tom Andersen and the other from Jaakko Seikkula.

Tom Andersen (1992), in recounting *What I think today*, went on to say: ‘I see life as the moving of myself and my surroundings and the surroundings of those surroundings towards the future. The shifts of life around me come by themselves, not by me. The only thing I can do is to take part in them. To take part is to learn to use the repertoire of understandings and actions that have come from the various experiences I have had over the years . . . When life comes to me, it touches my skin, my eyes, my ears, the bulbs of my tongue, the nostrils of my nose. As I am open and sensitive to what I see, hear, feel, taste, and smell I can also notice “answers” to those touches from myself, as my body, “from inside,” lets me know in various ways how it thinks about what the outside touches; what should be concentrated on and what not . . .’ (pp. 54–55).

While Jaakko Seikkula (2011) states, ‘The paradox of dialogue may be in the simplicity and complexity of it on the whole. It is as easy as life is, but at the same time dialogue is as complicated and difficult as life is. But dialogue is something we cannot escape, it is there as breathing, working, loving, having hobbies, driving car. It is life’ (p. 191).

In other words, Seikkula sees being *dialogical* as simply something that belongs to life, not as a special therapeutic method at all. And I think Tom Andersen, if he was still alive today, would agree.

Endnotes

- ¹ Hillman (2001) describes Heraclitus’ notion of the flux within which we live thus: ‘His name for this changing flux, or process, in today’s terms, is “fire,” a metaphor for the shifting meanings of truth. Therefore, the verbal account, or *logos*, of the world is also fire. Truth, wisdom, knowledge, reality – none can stand apart from this fire that allows no objective fixity’ (pp. xii–xiii).
- ² See Daniel Stern (2010) who calls such time-shapes ‘vitality affects’ (p. 41), a term he first coined in discussing how a 10 month old – who, after many failures, *opens her face towards her mother in delight* on succeeding in placing a puzzle piece correctly – is responded to by her mother who intones ‘Yeah’ in such a way that the contours of its *unfolding dynamics* are very *similar* to the contours of her child’s expression (Stern, 1985, p. 140). In this instance, it was not *what* the mother said, but *how* she said it that was important; for it is in the *emotional-volitional* tone of our utterances that we communicate our *orientations*, our *ways of relating* ourselves to events occurring in our surroundings (Bakhtin, 1993, pp. 33–34) – see later sections for an account of gaining an *orientation*, and how it differs from *problem-solving*.
- ³ I take the notion of ‘chiasmic’ from Merleau-Ponty (1968, Chap 4), who means by it processes in which events, issuing from two or more sources, *intra-mingle* with each other in such a way as to form a kind of unique, holistic unity, without merging with each other, nor by superimposing themselves on each other, with each particularity retaining its particularity; I speak of *intra-action* rather than *inter-action*, because within flowing, holistic activities, no pre-existing entities can exist as such to be available for what we talk of as *inter-acting*.
- ⁴ I take the phrase ‘social weather’ from Lyn Hoffman (2006) who offers it as a metaphor that captures many facets of my view of *communication*. She writes: ‘In his view, communication is like a social weather. It fills our sails, becalms, or sometimes wrecks us. Sensing what is called for in a particular

context, responding correctly to gestures like an extended hand, feeling a black cloud settling over a discussion, are all examples of a weather system that can impact us in concrete and material ways' (p. 68).

⁵ He refers variously to the speech 'process,' 'flow,' 'chain,' at many points in his writings.

⁶ See endnote 1: By echoing her child's expression of recognition and delight, the mother affirms in the emotional-volitional tone of her utterance her shared *orientation* with her child.

⁷ See later William James' (1890) of our *feelings* as 'feelings of tendency' (p. 254), i.e., as providing a *direction* to our activities.

⁸ Many of the fears that disable us in our relations to others are aroused by such anticipations.

⁹ I have used this quote from Bakhtin (1993) to 'trailer' the issue (see *Conclusions* section) of whether stating *principles* as such can be helpful in our implementing *dialogical* practices, or whether other kinds of statements might be of greater use.

¹⁰ Wittgenstein (1980) suggests that: 'What makes a subject hard to understand . . . 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 . . . What has to be overcome is a difficulty having to do with the will, rather than with the intellect' (p. 17) – it is the *just-happening-thinking* that occurs in us unnoticed that can (*dis*)orient us, and thus (mis)lead us into relating to an event as something *objective* rather than as *meaning* something to us.

¹¹ See endnote 3.

¹² A case in an unpublished paper by Tom Andersen given to me while I was working with him.

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