

‘LIVING MOMENTS’ IN DIALOGICAL EXCHANGES

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Abstract: In this article, we want to discuss Tom Andersen’s focus on the role of certain special kinds of ‘arresting’, ‘moving’, ‘living’, or ‘poetic moments’ occurring in therapeutic dialogues. In doing this, we see him as exercising a special practice, the practice of a *social poetics* (Katz and Shotter, 1996). As we see it, instead of seeking a universal, cognitive understanding of such events, supposedly revealing of their true nature, a social poetics must ‘move’ us toward a new way of ‘looking over’, or participating in, the particular ‘play’ of unique events unfolding in the conversations between us. It is only by being able continuously to create new links and connections between events within that ‘play’, in practice, that those involved in a dialogue with each other can reveal both themselves and their ‘worlds’ to each other. And it is in such living moments between people, in practice, that utterly new possibilities can be created, and people ‘live out’ solutions to their problems they cannot hope to ‘find’ in theory, solely in intellectual reflection on them. We explore Bachelard’s, Bakhtin’s, and Wittgenstein’s work in relation to these issues.

“... 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” (Tom Andersen, MS in press, p.2).

“... at the still point, there the dance is...” (T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets)

In the *Epilogue* to his 1991 book “The Reflecting Team: Dialogues and Dialogues about the Dialogues,” Tom Andersen notes that among the things he would have omitted if he had been writing it now, would have been the words *explain* and *explanation*: “These words belong, as I see it today, to that part of the world where the physical sciences exist,” he says (p.157). In other words, the activity of explaining things belongs, as Wittgenstein (1953) would say, to a particular “form of life” with its associated “language-game.” As such, it belongs to a particular *disciplinary* sphere of human activity in which one must ‘get things right’: in such spheres, one must act according to pre-established standards, and talk and/or write *about* things in accord with procedures for proving one’s statements *true*. In this limited sphere “the movements of the inner life are so slow that it looks as though [things are] dead,” Tom Andersen adds (p.158). In contrast, “the world that we who use dialogue as a ‘method’ for change work in is composed of *living* [our emphasis] people and their meanings... If I had written the book today, the words *explain* and *explanation* would have been replaced by *understand* and *understanding*,” he [end p.81] writes (p.158). For, to continue Tom Andersen’s comparison, human problems in psychotherapy are not addressed by seeking new pieces of information, to solve them by explaining them. They are solved by therapists helping their clients create new ways of understanding things already known to them, to create new ways of ‘going on’ in their lives by interconnecting and relating old facts in new ways. In such a process as this, “we want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand,” says Wittgenstein (1953, no.89). We seek a way of talking which leads to “just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’” (no.122), which can draw a client’s attention to some of the other possibilities open to them that their current forms of talk led them to overlook.

In this account of Andersen’s work, we want to draw attention to the central value he puts on *living* activities and processes. We want to fashion a new way of talking and writing that reflects this same value: that relates to human phenomena - not as something dead, to be talked *about* - but as something living that must be related to in a living way. As we see it, words do not on their own *do* anything: they do not stand for things, nor represent ideas. They have a meaning only in those situations in which living human beings make some *use* of them

in relating themselves to other living human beings. In these situations, living people bodily *respond* to each other's utterances and voicings, and in so doing, not only do they *relate* themselves to each other, but they also relate themselves to their surroundings. However, as already completed patterns, representations of such voicings and utterances risk lying dead on the page (or in the reader?). They lack a living involvement with their surroundings; they do not point or gesture toward anything outside themselves. But, if we view people's words in their speaking as deeds, as actions, as *doing* something - rather than as already spoken forms or patterns - then we can see people's living, voicing of their words as serving "countless different kinds of use" (Wittgenstein, 1953, no.23). Indeed, a crucial use of words is to 'move' or to 'strike' others by the saying or the writing of certain words at certain moments, to use such words to draw their attention and ours to aspects of *their* own sayings and doings, to unique details of their lives, that might otherwise pass us both by unnoticed, and particularly, to yet-to-be-created relations between such details. Indeed, as Andersen says: "Some words touch the speaker such that the listener can see the talker be moved" (MS in press, p.5). We shall call this way of talking *relational-poetic*, and, as we shall show, it is an important aspect of Tom Andersen's psychotherapeutic practice.

We feel it is important to draw attention to it here, as it is a way of talking that leads to a kind of understanding that is both extraordinary (in the sense of it is still unfamiliar in our talk and writing 'about' understanding) and ordinary (in the sense of it being utterly commonplace) at the same time. To contrast it with the "representational-referential" form of understanding more well known to us in our intellectual studies, in which, individually, we 'picture' states of affairs, we shall call the kind of understanding to do with us, in a dialogical situation, 'seeing connections', a "relationally-responsive" form of understanding (Katz and Shotter, 1996). It is a kind of understanding which can begin in just those moments when a speaker *pauses* after [end p.82] having finished their utterance, and awaits another's response to it. For it is in such moments as these - if we are not just to act routinely and mechanically, according to pre-established demands - that we must responsively bridge a gap or an opening. And to do that, we must spontaneously *create* a connection or relation appropriate to the unique circumstances at hand. Indeed, it is just moments of this kind that Tom Andersen explores when he notices a shift in a client's being (in relation both to him and to their circumstances) as they utter a certain word, and he asks the person: 'If you looked into that word, what would you see?' Beginning with such moments, relationally-responsive understandings can be articulated further: "Answers to these kinds of questions have let me learn that there are always emotions in the words, there are other words in the words, sometimes sounds and music in them, sometimes whole stories, sometimes whole lives," he says (MS in press, p.6). Such words can take a grip on our being to such an extent that we can find ourselves 'possessed' by them; our further actions can be 'rooted' in them; and as we continue to respond to their reverberations in us, they can change us in our being.

Much is at work, then, in these moments when, to use Bachelard's (1991) terms, a new "poetic image" is suddenly originated in us, when a new "flare up of being in the imagination" occurs (p.xiv). For, to be 'struck', or 'arrested' by another's words, is not just to understand them in terms of a single kind of connectedness, so to speak, to fit them into an already well-known, single form of life - thus merely to elaborate its rule over all else - but to find oneself *resonating* to a whole multiplicity of other, many quite new possibilities. As Bachelard (1991) puts it with respect to a poem: "In the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it, it is our own. The reverberations bring about a change of being. The multiplicity of resonances then issues from the reverberations' unity of being... The image offered us by reading a poem now becomes really our own... It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression and a becoming of our being. Here expression creates being" (pp.xviii-xix). And it is to the special nature of such poetic images originating in arresting moments - to their possession of a *fullness of sense*, of seeings and hearings, of touchings and feelings, of flavors and smells, and so on - that we wish to draw attention.

Three vignettes

In order to have something to think *with* or *through*, we would like to begin with three moments that we were arrested by in practice.

In a halting but increasingly clear voice, in the reverie following a reflecting process consultation (in which Tom Andersen was in fact the consultant), after the comments of the reflecting team, the wife in a couple offered:

"It's the tenderness...that's something that is real easy to lose sight of...It gives me the ability to take a deeper breath and go back into the world... It's like hearing English again in a foreign country..." [end p.83]

Another client, at the end of a session in which he had been invited back to reflect on the practice of psychotherapy as he had experienced it, on how things were currently for him, and on what he was now struck by, said:

Though who I am is nebulous and still emerging, I am no longer confused and lost. The pain that's part of my life is now a sense, not a fixed concept... Maybe something has changed in me that I don't have to know... there are so many mysteries... like life has so many mysteries...

And in a medical teaching setting, in the course of reflections following an interview, an elderly man - who had been invited in, not for therapy, but to help medical students learn about interviewing (Katz and Martin, 1994) - shifted from expressing his sense of despair to being a teacher, to telling the students the meaning of an ordinary, but crucial experience for him in his life:

"I think that's true of anyone in a nursing home if there's no place for them to go, they just begin to wonder, 'What good am I?,' I think that's a natural thing."

And in the course of its telling, in the change from 'patient' to 'teacher', his body changed, from that of a man in pain, withdrawn from the world, to that of an active agent, engaged in the life around him.

There is something special, we feel, in the voicing of utterances such as these. They are voiced by people who are speaking, not only *for themselves*, individually - as they had previously - but now also, *with others*, dialogically. Instead of merely talking *about* themselves, what they say is voiced 'into' a conversational space between them and the others around them; their talk is now both relational and responsive. In moments such as these, rather than simply having to play out a role assigned them in an alien reality, people feel able to play an immediate and active part in the joint constructing and elaborating of a shared reality. Whereas, previously they had talked mainly of their own past pain and disorientation, their own past confusion, they are now exploring something that has become important to them from within the shared moments between them and the others around them. The first reminds us of how easy it is to lose sight of *tenderness* - of that special caring way in which one feels valued as a someone, as who one is, without have to 'work at it' - and how she can now take a "deeper breath," for it feels like 'coming home' in a foreign country. The second tells us that his pain has become a part of the background to his daily life, not a foreground 'thing' demanding his continual attention. The third wants to tell doctors an important fact about the lives of those in nursing homes. And there is now a fluidity and energy in their voicing of their utterances, a bodying forth of their words into the world that was lacking in their previous demeanor. Why? Because, we suggest, they have now become *participants* in a special form of life; they have come to inhabit a new 'world' such that they now feel invited or motivated to give these kinds of response - a 'world' in which they feel they are safe, in which they belong and have a rightful place.

But what has occasioned such a change as this? What occurred, moment by moment, such that this form of life - in which they feel 'at home' and are now energized to go on with new options, with a new stance - came to replace their previous forms of life [end p.84] in which they were 'stuck', 'imprisoned', 'silenced', or just otherwise 'reduced' in some way. Indeed, to go further, what is it about the 'atmosphere' created in this way of working, of people interrelating with each other, such that its effects can appear, not only in psychotherapy, but in many other different domains: in medicine, clinical work, research, teaching, and in ordinary, daily life? How might we get a grasp, a sense, or a 'picture', of this kind of 'world'? And, is there is something special in Tom Andersen's *style* of relating to those around him that 'invites' them into such a form of life?

Tom Andersen has, in his writings, of course, discussed the nature of the issues involved here, drawing his inspirations in the past from Bateson, Maturana, and Goolishian. Stimulated by Harry Goolishian's turn to Wittgenstein and to a more 'conversational' stance - he emphasizes a way of talking with people that is a poetic, lively, involved form of talk. Thus, rather than metaphors emphasizing a single order of connectedness, Andersen uses living, moving, feelingful metaphors, such as, exchanges in conversations as the rhythms of inhalation and exhalation of breath, of words as 'touches' or bodily 'movements', of them as having a 'forming' as well as an 'informing' part, and so on. For, as Andersen sees it, "talking is a bodily activity, [and] the whole body is formed or re-formed in the moment of an utterance... Life is therefore 'composed' of small events, which, each of them happen only once" (MS in press, p.7); and in this process, "language and words are like searching [and shaping] hands," he says (MS in press, p.7). Indeed, in our use of language, in our speaking of our words, we embody a way of proceeding, of 'going on', of orchestrating the flow of our energies, a rhythm of acting, shaping, stopping, reflecting, switching positions, revising, looking back, looking forward and sideways, and so on - we embody *ways*

or *styles* of responsively relating to our circumstances, shifting between different activities at different moments.

Andersen's noticing of 'moving moments' in dialogue.

Central to our whole account of Tom Andersen's *style* of psychotherapy here, then, is our noting of his focus on certain phenomena rather than others: those to do with the fact that we are *living*. And, just as Wittgenstein (1981) claims that "only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning" (1981, no.173), so Andersen also claims that "every word is part of the moving of the body. Spoken words and bodily activity cannot be separated" (MS in press, p.5). Or, to put it another way, "language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.183). And there are two points that he especially emphasizes that we would also like to mention: One is, that he attends to the relations between bodily rhythms of breathing and the rhythm of people's shifts between listening, thinking, and talking, the small pauses before the start of inhaling and the start of exhaling, and so on. Indeed, "there are so many similarities between the exchanges of conversation of a fellowship and the exchanges of breathing of an individual that I let the understanding of one," he says (p.32), "inspire the understanding of the other... During the cycle of conversation one also [as in breathing] needs a small pause before talking (acting) and a small pause before listening [end p.85] (sensing)... Conversations needs pauses, enough for the thinking about the process of the conversation to take place." About such pauses Bakhtin (1986) remarks, "these pauses differ essentially from both grammatical and stylistic pauses... One expects them to be followed by a response or responsive understanding on the part of another speaker" (p.74). Indeed, without such pauses, without others responding to details and nuances, without participants taking the time needed to let each other's utterances resonate within them, the conversation between them cannot be a *caring* conversation. Witness in this connection the words of the first woman mentioned above: for her too, the ability to 'go back into the world' is associated with the ability to take a deep breath again, to pause, to be able again to take time to 'take in' what is around her.

Tom Andersen also notes the fact that "the body works without the mind's noticing it" (p.26); or, to put it another way, that "an interesting overall discovery [over the years] has been that practical changes occurred first... [and are] followed by attempts to understand the changes..." (p.167). Indeed, Andersen quotes Harry Goolishian as saying: "We don't know what we think before we have said it" (MS in press, pp.7-8) - and here we can add Wittgenstein's (1953) comment: "Let the use of words teach you their meaning" (p.220). In this respect, not only the remarks of the second client are noteworthy - that something has changed in him that he's not wholly aware of - but also his attitude toward his lack of knowledge: it doesn't upset or disturb him. In fact, as we shall see, he's 'intrigued' by it; it opens a door to new possibilities. To put it briefly: In this sphere, our practices of a new life often seem to precede the theory of them. Indeed, as we shall suggest, once we understand how to reflect on our life's practices... *in practice*... we can then reflect on our living of our lives... as we live them... moment by moment... rather than, as it were, having to take 'time out' from them, and to view them as if from afar, in terms of a theory.

In making such observations as these, Tom Andersen, we feel, has drawn the attention of all of us to something very crucial in the therapeutic process that has not yet been sufficiently articulated or elaborated: the momentary, bodily 'moving', not-easily-picturable, 'living' nature of our conversational practices. He emphasizes the momentary, shifting nature of our responsive-relational understandings. For, as living beings, we cannot be indifferent to the world around us. We must continuously react and respond to it directly and immediately, whether we like it or not, without having 'to work it out', and in so doing, we *connect* and *relate* ourselves spontaneously to our surroundings in one way or another. Indeed, it is this that gives the human voice its power: As we give voice to our words into the world, it is not just the static form or the picturable patterns of our words that is important; but our unfolding bodily movement in their production. The others around us cannot not respond to our voicings, to our utterances. Thus others, in our presence as individual, active "I's," do not move independently of us; their movements are not wholly their own; they are 'colored' by our, individual movements - but our individual movements are also 'colored' by theirs. Thus, the momentary movement between us is not individually ours or theirs alone, but ours as a "we." Activity of this shared, dialogical kind - which elsewhere called "joint action" (Shotter, 1993a and 1993b) - always gives rise to the experience that [end p.86] what is created within it, is experienced as an 'it', as an external, objective entity - as not yours nor mine, but as ours. Thus, not only is a reality with its own kind of existence constructed *between* us, but also, as a result of our involvements in such moments, we come to embody a certain selective sensitivity, a sensibility, a certain *way* of reacting and responding to our surroundings *from within* the relations between us constituting them. And these jointly shared *backgrounds* are the "seen but unnoticed" (Garfinkel, 1967, p.41) backgrounds to all else that happens between us.

Andersen's talk of such bodily inter-activities is indicative, we feel, of the fact that all changes in the being of an individual, in their sensibilities, originate in joint, social, or dialogical exchanges, in processes that go on, not first as ideas in one or another person's head, but are woven into the fabric of activities between them, in their practices. Indeed, what constitutes a life with a living flow to it, a life in which one does not feel 'stuck' or 'imprisoned' within a stagnant backwater, is a life in which one feels one *understands* what is occurring as it occurs, a life in which one can continually creatively respond to the novel and unique features of one's circumstances in an ongoing, shifting manner. Such a form of life seems to involve in its practical conduct just that kind of 'orchestrated' understanding which, as we have already noted, that consists in 'seeing connections', first in one way and then another, which we have called a 'responsive-relational understanding'.

The nature of this kind of 'shifting', 'mobile', relational form of understanding maybe unfamiliar to us - at least against the traditional theoretical and philosophical background of what the nature of our understanding is usually taken to be, i.e., as some thing 'in' our individual heads or minds, rather than something 'in' our social practices. Thus we must try to point out its singular, but nonetheless, everyday 'living' nature straightaway: Consider, for example, living in a city. After a while, we can develop such a 'sense' of the relations between its streets and squares, and so on, that we can 'move around' in it with a degree of comfort. That is, we can 'go on' from where we are to where we want to get to, without it ever being necessary for us to be able to bring to mind a single, overall, fixed picture of it. Our use of language is somewhat similar: we are confident in our interrelating of its parts, and in relating our use of it to our current circumstances, but we cannot *say* in any simple sense what its nature as a unitary whole is. As 'in' our journeys through our city so in our talk: we just simply and continually *show* that we 'know' it in our continual *use* of it. Indeed, we can exhibit such relational forms of understanding in the same 'moment-by-moment', practical way - i.e., in practice - for instance, our knowings of what a person is, a society, a self, a mind, or a relationship; the style of an artist's paintings, a genre of writing, our grasp of a philosophy or a theory, etc, and so on.

These are all concepts with "blurred edges" (as Wittgenstein (1953, no.71) put it in discussing our knowledge of games); they are 'things' or 'styles' that we know in practice, without the practice yielding up to us, any single, fixed and distinct picture upon which it is seemingly based. Thus, if we do have to explain to someone what "games" are, we cannot do it by giving a simple definition or single example; we give a whole range of examples. As Wittgenstein (1953) remarked: "One gives examples and intends [end p.87] them to be taken in a particular way. - I do not, however, mean by this that he is supposed to see in those examples that common thing which I - for some reason - was unable to express; but that he is now to *employ* those examples in a particular way" (no.71). And the fact is, there are many living human activities, practices, of this kind, in which never seem to come to possess a single, overall, final, fixed, God's-eye-'picture' of their overall character. Yet, we can often become fairly sure of the kinds of phenomena that nonetheless will 'belong together' to make up a whole. So, although we cannot form a simple, describable image - for there is always something else any such a *image* always fails to capture - we are nonetheless able to continually and confidently 'make connections' in various spheres of activity as required in practice. In other words, what we grasp in our living involvements with cities, language, with a collection of paintings, with a friend's behavior, with all human phenomena that are in some sense in a living relation to each other, is an embodied *way of acting in relation to them*, i.e., what we have already called either a form of life, or a practice.

This is why the *differences that make a difference* (Bateson, 1972, p.453) are so hard to locate and to identify in such forms of understanding. For the differences are not to be found in static pictures, nor in fixed inner mental representations or ideas, but in the moving, momentary, dialogic, living relationships that occur in the streams of life between us. Or, to put it another way, the new ideas, or thoughts, or images that we think of as coming to guide our ways of acting in the world do not just spring into our heads 'out of the blue'; they originate in differences (in relations) which have a sensed connection: whose origins are to be found in our spontaneous, unnoticed, responsive or dialogic bodily reactions and relations to our surroundings. Where, as Andersen (1991) says, a *idea* has the character of a "glimpse," a momentary noticing of an aspect of a "moving picture," containing "all the qualities that correspond to the senses of seeing, smelling, tasting, touching and also sensations from 'inside' the body..." (p.23). So how can we capture what is meant by such a kind of momentary understanding if we cannot capture it in a single, fixed and comprehensive picture?

Paradoxically, we can still do it by the giving of pictures, but now we must do it by the giving of two or more pictures, with the hope that the kind of understanding "which consists in 'seeing connections'" will emerge in us 'seeing' the relations or connections, the 'movement', between them. As Andersen comments: "Many people have

not grasped Bateson's idea. They believe that there is one correct history and one correct picture... [But] those following Bateson's idea might be intrigued by what they heard that another person saw or heard or smelled or tasted or touched in the situation - things which s/he did not notice. These new aspects of the moving 'picture' of the situation could stimulate differences in his/her own evolving 'picture'.. And these differences contribute to the person's shading his/her moving picture" (p.17). Hence his additional comment that "questions that often clarify problematic situations are those that comprise comparisons and relationships" (p.17).

Putting Bateson's 'idea' in the language of ideas, however, still too easily invites, we feel, the language of static pictures; we move too easily back into talk of things hidden inside the heads of individuals, and fail once again to take notice of events happening [end p.88] out in the space between them. Thus, we would like to try to steer a course toward a language of momentary doings, of changing activities, of practices and movements. For if, as Andersen remarks, the meanings and feelings in which we are interested are there for a second and have passed away the next, then one of the tasks of a therapist is to say something that that will help people both recollect what they already know, but now re-arranged so as to reveal new connections and relations not before grasped or even glimpsed... at the moment it will help! To do that, we must say something about the special nature of such moments. So let us begin to move in that direction by introducing the notion of dialogic, living relationships - and the idea of reflecting on our practices in the practice of them - through some examples.

Reflecting on practices in practice

*"... And do not call it fixity
Where past and future are gathered..."* (T.S. Eliot)

An example of the kind of momentary, ongoing circumstance that intrigues us, is mentioned in Tom Andersen's (1991) book. He writes of a meeting with a family, in which the teenage daughter of the mother's first marriage often ran away, and also did some shoplifting. The mother had had two new babies, and the stepfather seemed more attentive to his own two children than to his stepdaughter. As Andersen puts it, the nature of the crucial event is as follows: "One of the team members, feeling that the teenager had been excluded from the new family, talked about how he thought the girl might feel. When he reached the words, "Maybe she feels she is excluded," he had difficulty continuing. The feelings in the team member were so strong that he had to take several breaks to be able to finish. The family was stunned, and the runaway and shoplifting disappeared overnight" (p.62).

How should we understand the family's understanding of such an event? What is it to be momentarily 'stunned', to be 'struck', 'arrested', or 'moved', by another person's words? What is occurring in such a moment? How is it, that the crucial change seemed to emerge from out of the exchange without any problem-solving thought, argument, deliberation, reasoning, persuading, etc., having to take place?

With these questions in mind, we return to the second client mentioned above: after finishing therapy, he was invited in to reflect on how things are now, as well as affording us another vantage point from which to articulate our practice in practice - another form of reflecting process that adds the voice of the client (Katz, 1991). In the course of these reflections, this young man talked of his initial sense of alarm and loss of intuition: "When I first came in, I was suffocating, now its changed in intensity and in proportion to the rest of myself. Though who I am is nebulous and still emerging, I am no longer confused and lost. The pain that's part of my life is now a sense, not a fixed concept. A lot of the time, it's just normal... It may be there but the sense of alarm is gone." This alarm - about the sudden onset of strange, involuntary, bodily movements that had at times been accompanied by shaking, screaming, and even striking himself - had been [end p.89] increased by the range of explanations of those he consulted with previously: a meditation teacher, body workers, a psychic, a Jungian analyst and two past-lives therapists. In contrast, he now described the recent clinical work... as "just talk," but of a particular sort: "...it was different because we just talked... we could like bite off what we could chew or something. And so we just focused on my family and things like that mostly, which was really helpful, and sort of stabilizing in a way, you know"... "It opened up new ideas... the kind of talk we have here; on the way here I may have a thought, and it opens a new door - it just seems to fit."

As he looked back, he recounted that early on in the work the movements began to die away gradually. Though he now had a different sense, or understanding of these movements, he still could not explain them. “And maybe that’s something changed in me, that I don’t have to - like there’s so many mysteries...” “As he now spoke, *this* sense of ‘mystery’ seemed very different from the bewildering nature of his initial alarm: “You don’t have to be threatened by a mystery. And before I’d felt threatened. It was like a... darkness... I was petrified by it. Now I sense a lot of depth in myself or something; somehow it’s not so threatening.” And when asked what he thought had got the movements to die away, there was a long, long pause; he took deep breaths, and answered:

Well... (long pause)... I’m not sure, but, maybe - though this is just a thought - it was something that was trying to draw my attention to certain things, like my relationship to my family, and once I’d started paying attention - and I know there’s a lot more work, and a lot’s been done - that maybe that was... kinda like a message... although I don’t know, to tell you the truth... But I’m not sure how important it is to know... (our emphasis)

And, as he talked of his past experiences, he ‘re-experienced’ the alarm of the ‘movements’ and loss of his intuition ‘in’ his talking of them. He ‘showed’ in his embodied gesturing of his words how the sense of ease in his body had been previously replaced by a fixed sense of disconnection. He recounted how his need to know, or sense of ‘not knowing’, had previously ‘arrested’ him, how back then, it had felt like choking - a fixed sense of terror. As he spoke now, in direct contrast, there was a sense of movement, that he could ‘go on’ with his life. What he was struck by at this moment had a very different character to it: rather than fixity or stuckness, there was a shifting, moving stance, a coinciding of both stillness and movement. As he moved back and forth from being in the experience to reflecting on it, new possibilities emerged, and with it a new “sense of his own agency” (Goolishian, pers. comm). In his words, he described a journey of how his initial sense had changed from ‘alarm’ to ‘mystery’, and then to ‘just one of those things’: “One thing is that it’s over and it doesn’t really matter... Its not like arresting my life the way it was before.. it was really choking...Coming to psychotherapy was really healing... now a different thing I’m dealing with - a new day, a new problem.”

Let us underscore this: the energetic way he spoke embodied a new ability to reflect on his living of his life, not just with us, but with and for himself, in the course of his [end p.90] living of it. His utterances contained multiple stances, and as he spoke, his movements were now fluid and responsive rather than static and repetitive. In coming to embody these poetic-relational forms of talk (as is clear from the transcripts above), rather than his body being alien to him, he became re-embodied: that is, as Andersen notes (see above), he was ‘struck’ or ‘moved’ to reflect on his own words by his own very speaking of them. He shifts continually, moment by moment, between different ways of being, different ‘worlds’. In such shifting moments, as we have said, there is a simultaneity of both stillness and motion. His talk is now rooted in his life’s experiences - “though who I am is nebulous and still emerging, I am no longer confused and lost” - and he now speaks from within each experience, moving back and forth from the past to his present sensibility, and to possibilities for the future. And as he does so, he shifts from reflecting on new possibilities from within a past experience, to looking back on it from the present... all the time navigating in these shifts, between the past alarm, the equanimity of the present, to the possibilities he now saw in the future. In his utterances, he seems to fluctuate, moment by moment, between participating in a number of different dialogues that all, however, seem to have a similar focus... within the ‘movement’ of his talk. There now seems to be a “still point,” a sense of where for him “the dance is.” He seems to possess, not a single “poetic image” of his life’s course, but a way of creating such images as and when required: “... the pain that is a part of my life is now a sense, not a fixed concept,” he says. The move to this state of affairs seemed to have been occasioned by a “something that was trying to draw my attention to certain things, like my relationship to my family...” (see note three). He has become the beneficiary of a new, dialogical way of being, a new relational practice, that was created jointly, by him and his therapist, as the openings (the gaps and pauses) unfolding in the dialogue between them were spontaneously bridged.

Thus now, it is as if this client has come to incorporate within himself a variation of the kind of dialogue involved in the reflecting process. And so doing, he can move from talking with the therapist (reflecting on her practice), to a similar dialogue within himself, and from being within it to reflecting on it, and so on. In this shifting dialogicality, he can move among and be responsive to a whole range of situated realities, and in speaking and recognizing all the different voices arising from them, he shows that he now knows his ‘way about’ in his own life; he has come to feel ‘at home’ in it. So, although he cannot predict all his life ahead of time, he is only alarmed about

not knowing how to 'go on' when it arrests his life, if there were to be a fixity, a stuckness... if the 'shifting movement' in his life were to get stuck...

Conclusions

Above, then, we have focused on the importance Tom Andersen attaches to the special, living moments in people's talk when they are 'moved', 'struck', or 'arrested' by what they say, when a shift in their (and our) being occurs. As he himself remarks, "the words that prompt these movements are the ones that particularly attract my interest" (Andersen, MS in press, p.5). Such moments can only occur between living human beings, in [end p.91] reacting and responding to each other's speech, as they spontaneously bridge the gaps opened up between each other in a dialogue. They are of crucial importance because it is in these fleeting moments that something utterly extraordinary, utterly new and unique, spontaneously occurs: new "poetic images" (Bachelard) are created in the dialogical spaces between people... that can, perhaps, if responded to appropriately, become incorporated into people's ways of being in the world. The essence of a poetic image, as Bachelard (1991) notes, is its "fullness," it is "essentially variational, and not, as in the case of the concept, constitutive" (p.xv); it has a sensed, complex, mobile 'shape' to it rather than a stable, fixed structure. Thus, instead of specifying a single order or dimension of connectedness, they seem to awaken indefinitely many forms of connectedness that afford unending exploration. Again, as Bachelard (1991) puts it, they take "root in us," they "become a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses" (p.xix); they originate new forms of life in us.

These open, poetic forms of talk can appear, however, in many contexts, not only therapeutic ones. Indeed, because they are originating forms of talk, they can be carried outside the consultation room - witness the evidence from our second client above. For they involve ways of talking, the use of words, that gesture toward something in one's circumstances at the moment of their use. Let us finally, return to a glimpse of the old man in our third vignette above. In the initial medical interview his despair was palpable as he recounted his past experiences of being in a rehab center following surgery, and his sons came to him to inform him that he was going to a nursing home. His life had become more and more narrow and unfamiliar to him. Unfamiliarity turned to loneliness and loneliness to isolation. A shift in his whole demeanor came, however, when, after the interview, he was included in the reflections on the interview. He began to participate in a quite different way; he shifted from being the object of their concern, to being there with them, in the moment, with something of worth to tell them. From being a patient, he shifted to being a teacher, as he, among other things offered, "Well, I would have liked to have been asked [about going to the nursing home]. I would have liked to have a try on my own. The outcome probably would have been the same, but I would have liked to try a bit on my own." The change in the old man's 'energy' and sense of connection was striking; he sat up, became active and alert, his attention now fluctuating between what the others were saying and what he wanted to say himself. Now, the momentary space between all present was open to a multiplicity of possibilities, to other ways the old man could 'be'. He became someone with dignity and self-worth.

Andersen (MS in press) discusses precisely this circumstance as he talks about the shift from professional language to ordinary language, to the words of the client: "Neither individuals nor families is a certain way. They change all the time. In periods a family is enmeshed, in others disconnected. In some contexts social... Being a therapist it is most easy to make a family that appears happy to feel guilty and ashamed and angry... And it is not the most difficult to make a family that appears sad to feel happy. The therapist I try to be myself is not to concentrate on what the family is, but to find out, together with them, how they might live their lives differently" (MS in press, p.10). But to [end p.92] do this, he must help to set a certain scene, to stage a certain form of life, one of an open, creative, conversational kind that invites or affords the clients the opportunities to entertain (to play with) different meanings that are meaningful to them. How he does this, the nuances and details of it, is what we have tried to celebrate in what we have written here: how people can be afforded the dignity to explore possibilities for living their lives differently, and more fully.

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