

Bateson, Double Description, Todes, and Embodiment: *Preparing Activities* and Their Relation to *Abduction*

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“We can look at the anatomy of a frog and then look around to find other instances of the same abstract relations recurring in other creatures, including, in this case, ourselves. This lateral extension of abstract components of description is called *abduction*, furthermore I hope the reader may see it with a fresh eye. The very possibility of abduction is a little uncanny, and the phenomenon is enormously more widespread than he or she might, at first thought, have supposed” (Bateson, 1979, p. 157).

“I have to ‘catch onto,’ or ‘get,’ whatever I know by anticipating it, and then somehow confirming this anticipation by an actual (present) response to the thing anticipated. It is the terminal (postanticipatory) response to a thing that enables me to know it; to fix it as certainly having a certain meaning; to put an end to the ambiguity of its merely anticipated, suspected character; finally to *de-termin*e it, to give it a *de-termination*” (Todes, 2001, p. 64).

In what follows below, beginning with Bateson (1979) and following Todes (2001) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), I want to explore the possibility of there being for us, as living beings, a much more fundamental, unreflective, *bodily way* of being related to our surroundings than the ways that become conspicuous to us in our more cognitive reflections, a way of relating that becomes known to us only from within our movements in our surroundings. Indeed, to go further, I want to suggest that without this multi-stranded, *embodied* “background” (perceptual) understanding of the specific field of possibilities in which, in each changing moment, we are embedded, we would not only lack all orientation, but in not knowing “where we are”, we would also, literally, “not know what to do next”. But even worse, perhaps, especially for us as academics and intellectuals, is the fact that we would also be incapable of not only being able to put our new theories to the test, we would also be incapable of any creative or flexible thought relevant to the difficulties we face—for we would lack any sense of whether our thought was in fact related to, i.e., relevant to, the circumstance before us or not. In fact, not only would we lack the “inner standards” against which we judge whether evidence is in fact evidence, or whether a proof is in fact a proof, we would also lack the capacity to judge how any unique step in a unique situation

was uniquely relevant to overcoming the unique difficulties with which it confronted us. Indeed, this issue—the unique nature of our living, *bodily* relations to our surroundings and their influence on us in “shaping” our practical activities—is the long ignored “elephant in the room” in modern philosophy, although we shall find that in one guise or another it has made its appearance in the works of many other thinkers.

A WHOLLY NEW KIND OF DIFFICULTY IN SOCIAL THEORY: THE ROLE
OF EMBODIED SPONTANEOUS ANTICIPATIONS

Indeed, among those who have noticed the importance of our spontaneous, bodily responsiveness to events in our surroundings is Vico (1968; Shotter, 1983, 2007; Verene, 1981), in his *Scienza Nuova* of 1744. There he suggested that it is in people’s bodily running to hide from thunder that a first shared feeling in a shared situation—a first collectively shared moment of common reference within a group of people—a first “sensory topic” (para.495) was created. And in going on to react to thunder as the “big words” of an invisible “big being”, they also created a first poetic, “imaginative universal” (para.381). As Vico (1968) saw it, “the first men of the gentile nations . . . in their robust ignorance, did [all this] by virtue of a wholly corporeal imagination” (para.376). But it is difficult for us “to enter into the vast imagination of those first men, whose minds were not in the least abstract, refined, or spiritualized,” Vico thought, “because they were entirely immersed in the senses, buffeted by the passions, buried in the body” (para.378). We cannot easily capture such a completely feelingful, pre-conceptual way¹ of being in the world in the intellectual terms required of us in our currently rational forms of discourse—as Vico foresaw, a more poetic form of expression is required in alluding to its nature².

Williams (1977) is another who has drawn our attention to the central role in our making of social worlds to “structures of feeling.” As he points out, one of the most fundamental mistakes we make in the study of society, is to take social events that have already been accomplished and to present them, retrospectively, as a series of steps toward a foregone conclusion. He expresses this mistake thus: “In most description and analysis, culture and society are expressed in an habitual past tense. The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products . . . [as a result] relationships, institutions and formations in which we are still actively involved are converted, by this procedural mode, into formed wholes rather than forming and formative processes” (p. 128).

Prospectively, of course, in their actual performance, acting toward the future, people do not at all act like this. As Garfinkel (1967) recognizes, rather than making our social worlds from already existing components according to already existing rules, we make them on each occasion afresh in *ways* that we *anticipate* others will

recognize: “The anticipation that people *will* understand, the occasionality of expressions, the specific vagueness of references, the retrospective-prospective sense of a present occurrence, waiting for something later in order to see what was meant before, are sanctioned properties of common discourse. They furnish a background of seen but unnoticed features of common discourse whereby actual utterances are recognized as events of common, reasonable, understandable, plain talk” (p. 41). Indeed, in a living conversation, as Bakhtin (1981), for instance, notes, “the word . . . is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word; it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by *that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word*” (p. 280, my emphasis). It is the presence of our embodied *anticipations* in structuring our actions that all retrospectively oriented descriptions of our social activities fail to take into account.

Perhaps most central at the moment in explicitly noting the role of our *embodied* anticipations in shaping our spontaneously expressed actions in our social lives, is Pierre Bourdieu (2000) with his concept of *habitus*. He begins his attempt to “objectively define” (p. 129) our “practical comprehension” of our world as distinct from our “intellectual comprehension” of it, by noting that “I . . . comprehend this world . . . *because* it encompasses and comprehends me; it is through this material inclusion—and what follows from it, the incorporation of social structures in the form of dispositional structures, of objective chances in the form of expectations and anticipations, that I acquire a practical knowledge and control of the encompassing space . . . But I cannot comprehend this *practical comprehension* unless I comprehend both what distinctively defines it, as opposed to conscious, *intellectual comprehension*, and also the conditions (linked to positions in social space) of these two forms of comprehension” (p. 130, my emphasis). Thus, for Bourdieu, “I” as an intellectual “subject” concerned to execute a rational intention, concerned to take action on the basis of calculated profits and losses, can never be completely the subject of my own practices. As a social agent, I am endowed with *habitus*, it is inscribed in my body as a result of regularities encountered in my past experiences. “Having acquired from this exposure a system of dispositions attuned to these regularities, it [my body] is inclined and able to anticipate them practically in behaviours which engage a *corporeal knowledge* that provides a practical comprehension of the world quite different from the intentional act of conscious decoding that is normally designated by the idea of comprehension” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 135).

What Vico, Williams, and Bourdieu bring to our attention, then, is that between the more objective and mechanical accounts of the external *causes* supposedly shaping our activities in the world, and the more subjective, cognitive accounts of people’s *reasons* for their actions, there is the need for a third, spontaneously operative, embodied, perceptual mode of understanding, an understanding of the specific field of possibilities in which we are, in each changing moment, embedded.

Without it, as we have seen, we would lack all orientation. In other words, it is a kind of understanding to do, not with facts or information, but with our grasp of *what kind of context* we are in, with what our surroundings *require* of us, with the “calls” they exert upon us to respond within them in *appropriate* ways—a kind of knowing³ that shows up in our *readiness to respond* in a particular way, spontaneously, to a unique and particular circumstance. It is, as Todes (2001) puts it, a readiness that is expressed in how we *next act* in the attempt “to put an end to the ambiguity of its merely anticipated, suspected, character” (p. 64)⁴.

Thus, as I see it, we face here a wholly new kind of difficulty in social theory: As I shall argue much more fully below, the difficulties we encounter here are not difficulties that we can formulate as problems which can be solved by the application of rational thought; they are not intellectual difficulties. They are difficulties of a very different kind. They are *orientational* or *relational* difficulties, difficulties to do with our *embodied expectations* in relation to the things and events we encounter within them, difficulties of a kind that can only be overcome by relating ourselves to our surroundings differently. Thus to be told *about* the importance of our embodied anticipations in shaping our practices generally, is not to provide us, as practitioners, with the specific orientation we require to be *ready to act appropriately* in response to unique contingencies occurring in our current, unique circumstances. A more bodily engaging form of activity is required. So although Bourdieu (2000) suggests that: “The schemes of habitus, . . . being the product of incorporation of the structures and tendencies of the world, . . . *make it possible to adapt endlessly to partially modified contexts*, and to construct the situation as a complex whole endowed with meaning” (p. 139, my emphasis), such an “in theory” account (of the possibility of endless adaptation) is of little practical help to us as actual practitioners—as managers of organizations, economists, physicians, psychotherapists (and other people-workers), and also as innovative thinkers and actors of all kinds—who must, “in the moment”, find (or sense) “a best way” of acting from within the midst of a complex but quite unique situation.

It is what the practical sensing of that “best way” looks like (or better, feels like) from within the ongoing performance of our everyday practices that I want to discuss below—for, as will become clear as I proceed, I think that *that* is exactly what we all must do, continuously, if we are to conduct (as we mostly do) our everyday affairs effortlessly, without having continuously “to work out” what to do.

What I think is missing in all the accounts of the role of our embodied anticipations in shaping our activities in the world outlined above, is reference to the spontaneous responsiveness of all living activities to things and events occurring in their surroundings. As a consequence of this responsiveness, all our activities always involve the intertwining of two of more sources of activity—they have what we might characterize as a *joint* (Shotter, 1993) or *dialogically structured* (Bakhtin, 1986) nature—and hence they are always creative of uniquely new “somethings” that are responsively related to their surroundings. It is those elusive “somethings” and their transitory contextual meanings that I want to try to characterize below.

Bakhtin (1986) notes their nature thus: “Actual contextual meaning inheres not in one (single) meaning, but in two meanings that meet and accompany one another . . . [contextual meaning] always exists among other meanings as a link in a chain of meaning, which in its totality is the only thing that can be real” (p. 146).

This, then, is the difficulty we face here. *Real* meanings, the meanings that actually influence and shape our actions *in practice*, are ephemeral. They are “only once-occurrent events of Being” (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 2), and are thus not things that we can capture in representational theories; they are not things that we can itemize and talk *about* in isolation from their surroundings. And yet, as I intimated above, it is their practical sensing as we perform our everyday activities that we all must do in conducting them effortlessly, without stopping to think about what to do next. Clearly, the descriptive task here is a difficult one; it is of the “fish being the last to discover water” variety, for it is our usually unnoticed orientations, our unnoticed expectations, that determine what is to count for us as the context of our more deliberate actions. Wittgenstein (1953) characterizes the nature of our *disorientation* here thus: “The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one’s eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him.—And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful” (no. 129).

Because of this difficulty, that of finding an appropriate *orientation* to the difficulty we face here, I want to approach it, not by trying to describe what I think has not been well-described before, but indirectly⁵, via an initial discussion of Bateson’s (1979) notion of “double description” and his use of Bertrand Russell’s (1908) theory of *logical types*. In other words, I want to provide some *preparing activities*, some experiences that might be helpful in arriving at some of the new background expectations required to “see” some old issues in social theory in a new light.

PATTERNS THROUGH TIME: “PICTURELESS” THOUGHT

Let me begin, then, to introduce Bateson’s (1979) special notions of “double description” and “abduction” by considering a number of different phenomena:

- (1) Many, including Wittgenstein (1953), provide a number of different metaphors for language: e.g., language as a city, as a toolbox, as a game, etc., etc. What is it that allows/enables us to see all of these metaphors for language as in fact metaphors?
- (2) Often, in talking of what can be taken to be a “striking moment” (Shotter & Katz, 1996), others immediately reply: “Oh, I have an example of *that!*,” and then proceed to tell of something very different, but which all concede, *is* in fact a similar example of *that*. What is it that allows us to “see” the similarity?

- (3) We listen to a friend describing a difficulty currently faced. Gradually, we “get the picture”, we gain a sense of the difficulty described. What is its nature such that we feel that now, we can offer something useful in the resolution of the difficulty?
- (4) A mathematician working in number theory, say, notices the properties of a number sequence and wonders if it is repeated throughout the whole number system. He/she needs to invent/discover a framework within which a proof can be constructed. Initially, he/she looks for relevant analogies (Poincaré, 1958). What guides his/her judgment in choosing a possibly relevant approach?
- (5) I listen to a psychotherapist’s “reflections”, “ponderings”, “hypotheses”, “interpretations”. They all seem irrelevant to me. But suddenly, I hear an utterance that “touches” me. Why? What is going on in me such that I can be “touched” in this way?
- (6) A physiotherapist must help a woman who, after breaking her collarbone on falling off a horse, now holds her right shoulder behind and lower than her left shoulder. Simply telling her to hold it up and forward is no use at all, the woman soon lets it drop back again. The physiotherapist wonders if the woman can think of a word or image that might help her keep it lifted forward. At first, nothing occurs to her. Then suddenly, she has the image of a sailing boat flying a spinnaker, and this does the trick. What could possibly have evoked such a suitable image?

What is it in our involvements with events in our surroundings that makes all these six, and many other such similar phenomena, possible? What is the character of a person’s inner sense of a circumstance such that it can “give shape” to a range of (but not just to any) expressions? What in us allows us to accept superficially very different events as having a deeper similarity? How can different surface forms be similar at a “deeper” level, or similar surface forms be different at a “deeper” level? What in us functions as a “standard” against which we can sense current deviations from it? And so on.

But to go a step further: How is the distinct character of this inner sense of such current and past circumstances arrived at? What kind of original involvement in a circumstance is required for us to come to embody its nature *as an organic whole* within ourselves, i.e., as “a something” with its own unique and specific character that makes it amenable to the attempts outlined above to express its detailed features, perhaps in an image of some kind, but also in other media of expression? In other words, what kinds of *preparing activities*⁶, self-consciously engaged in, can get us *ready* to notice, immediately and spontaneously, the kinds of events relevant to our acquiring such relational or orientational understandings—where, by *being ready to do something*, I mean what we often talk of as being in possessions of a “habit”, an “instinct”, an “inclination”, etc.? I am using the term “readiness” as I want to suggest both that what is at issue here is to do with our situated expectations and anticipations, and also, that as such, these “attitudes” or “inclinations”,

or whatever, are much more fluid and open to situated development than has been previously thought.

It is in answer to these kinds of questions that the notion of *abduction*—(1) our being “carried away” unexpectedly by an other or otherness to a place not previously familiar to us, or (2) of “carrying over” a deeper similarity to a number of seemingly rather different situations—becomes of central relevance.

To make use of this ability myself—to “see” of something similar in a whole set of seemingly disparate occasions or events—let me say that the six phenomena above (along with many many others) are, not only all connected to each other, but further, as I see it, they are also all connected with Bateson’s (1979) well known challenge: “What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all four of them to me? And me to you? And all six of us to the amoeba in one direction and the backward-schizophrenic in the other?” (pp. 16–17).

In beginning to answer his own question, Bateson (1979) draws our attention to circumstances in which the phenomenon of “double description” occurs, that is, to “cases in which two or more information sources come together to give information of a sort different from what was in either source separately” (p. 31). As he sees it, double description gives rise to information of a different “logical type”⁷ from that in the two (or more) sources, e.g., the interplay between two musical tones gives rise to “beats”, between two similar visual arrays to Moiré patterns, and in particular, with our two eyes to binocular vision—in line with my overall project in this paper, I will call this different kind of “information”⁸ a “relational or orientational *way*”⁹ of knowing” that we come to possess and express in our embodied coping with events occurring in the world around us, and *only* in our embodied coping (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Todes, 2001). It is a way of knowing which brings to our attention the *possible relations*—what we might call the “relational dimensions”—existing as a dynamical outcome of the inter-acting of objectively observable phenomena which are not in themselves objectively observable. Indeed, our grasp of such dimensions is only available to us *subjectively* when we appropriately oriented, bodily, toward the phenomena in question¹⁰.

I have many reasons for adopting this “relational” and/or “orientational” terminology, as I will explain further below, but for the moment, let me simply offer the assurance that it is very much in line with Bateson’s own expressed intentions¹¹. However, as Bateson initially expressed the challenge in his question—what pattern connects?—he can easily be read as directing us toward the possibility of there being an as-yet-undescribed but identifiable *thing*, a pattern, already out there in the world which, if we can capture it in an *appropriate concept*, will give us the key we need to understanding the unity of the mind and/in nature. For he talks of the existence of a “*wider knowing* which is the glue holding together the [growth] of starfishes and sea anemones and redwood forests and [communication in] human committees . . . a single knowing which characterizes evolution as well as *aggregates* of humans” (p. 13). What *is* this wider knowing, this “glue”? Can we produce a more explicit description of it?

The temptation to try to conceptualize it is hard to resist, as is apparent in Hui, Cashman, and Deacon's (2008) discussion of this notion. But is his aim in fact a conceptual one? Clearly, it is not. He introduces what he wants to express thus: "What must now be said is difficult, appears to be quite *empty*, and is of very great and deep importance to you and me" (p. 17)¹². Then, after noting that *comparisons* of creatures at a number of different levels—parts with parts of the same creature (first order), the forms of different creatures with each other (second order), and then, comparisons between the comparisons (third order)—he goes on to remark that "the *pattern which connects is a metapattern*" (p. 20).

But what *is* that *metapattern*? How, practically, might we make use of it in guiding our relations to the biosphere in a more "friendly" manner? It is at this point that we begin to get puzzled, for it certainly cannot be a static, formal pattern that can be displayed as a spatial picture. As Bateson (1979) comments: "I warned some pages back that we would encounter emptiness, and indeed it is so. Mind is empty; it is no-thing. It exists only in its ideas, and these are again no-things. Only the ideas are immanent, embodied in their examples. And the examples are no-things. The claw [of the lobster or crab], *as an example*, is not the *Ding an sich*; it is precisely *not* the "*thing in itself*". Rather, it is what the mind makes of it, namely, an *example* of something or other" (p. 20).

As we shall see, these are all useful comments, and we shall draw on them later in our attempts to take Bateson's notions further. But he still has some further useful comments to draw on, to steer us away from expecting a visually seeable pattern, a simple spatial arrangement of parts. "In truth, the right way to begin to think about the pattern which connects is," he says, "to think of it as *primarily* (whatever that means) a dance of interacting parts . . ." (p. 22).

Then, in further developing this aspect of his thesis, he uses a story (which he says he has used before) of a man who asks his computer: "Do you compute that you will ever think like a human being?" The computer replies: "That reminds me of a story" . . . all of which leads Bateson on to asking the questions: "What is a story that it may connect the As and Bs, its parts? And is it true that the general fact that parts are connected in this way is at the root of what it is to be alive?" (p. 23), and then on to giving his own answer: "I offer you the notion of *context*, of *pattern through time*" (p. 23) . . . whatever *it* is that Bateson is trying to grasp here, "it" is clearly difficult to describe.

Finally, however, we are, I think, beginning to get a "feel" for what it is: As a "metapattern," a "dance of interacting parts," a "story," a "context," a "pattern through time," etc., the "patterns" of concern to us cannot be visible, spatial patterns that can be "pictured"; they are "pictureless". The dream of arriving ultimately at a static pattern, a pattern that can be thought of as existing all-at-once in space, eludes us. Instead, we must turn our attention to processes *unfolding in time*, to something like, say, "musical shapes", to the invisible "time contours" of events—to "shapes", we must add, that never come to an end (for life only comes to an end in death!); they thus always generate further anticipations of yet more to come.

ON “ENTERING INTO” THE *CONTEXT* WITHIN WHICH WE HAVE OUR BEING:
FROM CONCEPTS TO HOW OUR EMBODIED “EMPLACEMENT” CAN DETERMINE
OUR ACTIONS

The importance of our being influenced by the unfolding, invisible time-contours of the events in which we are involved is nowhere more important, clearly, than in our conduct of our everyday, practical affairs. For there, our perception of the unique meaning of a person’s utterance, say, at each precise moment in a situation, is intertwined in with all the other influences at work on us at that moment in shaping and directing our precise response to it. But, let me emphasize, it is not the utterance in itself that exerts a self-contained influence on our actions; it is the difference that it makes to and in the context of its occurrence that matters. And we are a living part of that context, in some kind of close relation to its dynamically unfolding, continually changing, nature as a system or network of relations or differences. Indeed, as Bateson (1979, pp. 211–219) suggests (as I will outline further below), it is only because we have developed, in the course of all our previous, living involvements in such inter-activities, an embodied capacity to respond, immediately and spontaneously, that we can respond in this *flexible, contexted* manner.

At this point, however, I would like to connect with the assurance that I offered above, that the *relational* or *orientational* terminology I have adopted is very much in line with Bateson’s own expressed intentions. Although, as I said earlier, there are many reasons for adopting it, let me now draw attention to an example Bateson (1979, pp. 132–134) gives by way of clarifying his reasons for making use of Bertrand Russell’s idea of *logical types*: In discussing Pavlovian-style experiments, in which dogs must discriminate and pick one of two very similar shapes to gain a reward, and become very disturbed when the stimuli become too close to choose, he points out that in moving from the statement: “the dog *discriminates* between the two stimuli” to the statement: “the dog’s *discrimination* breaks down”, researchers have shifted from a statement of one *logical type* to another—from talk of something (1) out in the world that can be *seen*, to talk of something (2) abstract or imaginary, i.e., *the dog’s discrimination*, a mysterious ability located somewhere, perhaps, inside the dog. It would have been much better, he feels, if from the very beginning, researchers had described what the dog was learning in its training, was not simply the meaning of the difference between the two stimuli, but that “*this is a context for discrimination*. That is, that he [the dog] “should” look for two stimuli and “should” look for the possibility of acting on a difference between them. For the dog, this is the “task” which has been set—the context in which success will be rewarded” (p. 113).

These comments of Bateson’s, clearly, in shifting the context within which we think of a specific phenomenon—here, a dog’s learning—shifts the background landscape of possibilities within which we make sense of the actually observed events. We now see them as having different *implications*, as “pointing toward” different future possibilities. As Wittgenstein (1980) puts it, work in (his kind of

practical) philosophy works, not to give one any new information, but is “really more a working on oneself . . . On one’s way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them)” (p. 16). And this, along with many other of Bateson’s remarks and observations, is how we can “see” his remarks on the conditioning experiment above as functioning: they work to shift our attention away from difficulties of an intellectual kind to a concern with orientational or relational ones.

In my estimation, however, Bateson ends *Mind and Nature* in a disappointing, but not wholly uninformative manner—my disappointment is that he never quite manages to bring all his relevant wanderings to a sharp focus on “the necessary unity” that he is trying to articulate. The relevant unitary vision of the relations between Mind and Nature remains elusive; it still seems to be immersed in and spread out over the shadowy background to the landscape we encounter in the tour Bateson takes us on over it in his book.

Why is this? What is lacking? As I see it, in formulating his project as that of seeking “the pattern which connects,” in spite of all his own provisos to the contrary—that the idea that it is a no-thing and is immanent only in the examples that embody it—he diverts our attention (even if he did not wholly divert his own) *toward* still seeking a “something” (*the* pattern) that can be conceptualized as a general idea. He seems to be setting us a *theoretical* task, the seeking of a “something” that we need to sit down and think about. In other words, even in his own terms, the phrase—the pattern that connects—is of the wrong *logical type*. It shifts the expected focus of our talk away from something that can be *seen*, to talk of something abstract or imaginary, a hidden *something* that perhaps, one day, we might represent within a theoretical framework of some kind, thus to extend our cognitive capacities in some way. We feel we need to seek the workings of a mysterious *organizing or form creating agency* located somewhere, out in the world at large, the world that is responsible for who and what we are.

Strangely, in *Naven*, Bateson (1936) was very aware in his earlier work of what was involved in working with such an “inner sense”. There, he was critical of such Functionalist anthropologists as Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski for failing in their “analytic terms” to capture the “emotional tone or ethos” of a culture. As he saw it, a more *artistic* form of writing was required. For: “The artist is content to describe culture in such a manner that many of its premises and the inter-relations of its parts are implicit in his composition . . . He can choose words whose very sound is more significant than their dictionary meaning and he can so group and stress them that the reader almost unconsciously receives information which is not explicit in the sentences and which the artist would find it hard—almost impossible—to express in analytic terms” (Bateson, 1936, p. 1). In other words, in the terms I introduced above, analytic uses of language aimed at providing representations of factual states of affairs can rarely arouse also in readers, the relevant *felt inner movements* that are expressive of the actual spontaneous responses of a people to the circumstances they face. In other words, our task is to explore the detailed character of the events that can happen within us in the unceasing

inter-activity unfolding between us, and others and othernesses around us, as we live out the practicalities of our everyday lives in our relations to them.

As I intimated above, such sequences of ceaselessly unfolding “time contours” cannot be captured in any unchanging spatially arrayed form. There is always “more to come” within such activities, they are always unfinished. But, nonetheless, as we will see in relation to Todes’s (2001) work discussed below, the need to *work towards the achievement of a whole*, as a project, as a prospect, is so central to our (bodily felt) concern to be well oriented, i.e., to be “at home”, in our surroundings, that we must treat it as an overarching tension at work in motivating many (if not all) of our everyday activities.

With this in mind, let return to note here what Bateson said above, in suggesting *what* it was that the dogs in the Pavlovian discrimination experiments learned: it was not, he claimed, simply knowledge of the difference between two stimuli, but that *this* is a “context for discrimination,” and that in it, the dog *should expect* to have to discriminate between two possible stimuli, and then, as a consequence, *should also expect* to act in one way or another. In other words, as I suggested right at the beginning of this article, what they learned was not a new fact or piece of data, but something very different, something of a relational or orientational kind to do with what they *must* become “set” to respond to.

Thus, if we are to orient ourselves, as investigators, as to what is involved in arriving at a sense of what the pattern *is* that can connect a set of disparate fragments into an intelligible whole for us, we must reject “the grammar which tries to force itself on us here,” as Wittgenstein (1953, no. 304) remarks. Indeed, as Bateson (1979) himself also notes: “*contextual shaping* is another term for *grammar*” (p. 27), and the contextual shaping exerted on us by the word “pattern”, sends us off in a search for “its” nature.

Instead, we must turn (or re-turn) our attention to aspects of events in our surroundings to which we can in fact attend—for it is our attention to certain aspects of our surroundings as we move around and act within them, that can play a crucial role in what I have called above, the *preparing activities* appropriate to our acquiring a “readiness” to act in these surroundings. What kinds of activities can influence what we *expect* to occur in the situations we currently inhabit?

PREPARING ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICAL HERMENEUTICS

As I see it, a kind of *practical* hermeneutics (Shotter, 1984) is involved, a process that does not begin with a pre-established order (or orders) to which some puzzling facts must be assimilated, allowing them to be explained as particular instances of a general rule (or law) with all their uniqueness lost. “It begins with one’s immersion within a chaotic whole in its full individuality, as the whole it *is*—known globally to be of a certain kind (a work or therapeutic situation, the meeting of a stranger, the telling of a story, etc., etc.)—and it then proceeds to

specify or articulate, in a back-and-forth effortful movement, an order adapted to the undistorted accommodation of the original chaotic whole" (Shotter, 1984, p. 63). In such a process, an at first indeterminate "something" comes to be understood by it coming to play a part, to serve a function, within the larger whole that one must "work toward" to accommodate it.

I want to call it a practical rather than an interpretative hermeneutics, as I want to suggest, following Todes (2001), that as we move around in the world, step-by-step, our bodies have to capacity to form for us, from a set of situationally inter-related fragments, a word of inter-connected things around us—an outcome that our body can, on occasion, of course, fail to achieve. For, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) puts it: "Apart from the probing of my eye or my hand, and before my body synchronizes with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning . . . Thus a sensible datum which is on the point of being felt sets a kind of muddled problem for my body to solve. I must find the attitude which *will* provide it with the means of becoming determinate . . . I must find the reply to a question which is obscurely expressed" (p. 215). In Ryle's (1949) terminology, motivated by a vague overall grasp of the kind of *achievement* required, we must search around inside ourselves for a sequence of relevant *tasks* (actions) that will, ultimately, realize it. But let me note, the achievement here is not one of an intellectual kind, it is an achievement of a practical kind, an orientation, a way of relating that can lead directly to a way of acting—and it is clearly not one that can be arrived at without a good deal of "exploratory" activity, i.e., preparing activity, aimed at achieving a certain kind of "at homeness" in the relevant surroundings.

Now it is not that Bateson is unaware of the importance of such preparing activities. For he ends *Mind and Nature* by comparing the *marksman's* firing of a rifle at a static target with the *hunter's* firing of a shotgun at a flying bird. A marksman, he points out, will try to line up the sights of the rifle with the target and pull the trigger when it appears to have the correct alinement—in this case, "what is significant," says Bateson (1979), "is that the act of self-correction can occur *within* the single act of shooting" (p. 211). Whereas, there is no such possibility of such a considered act of error-correction within the single act of the huntsman firing a shotgun: "What must happen [with the huntsman] is that an aggregate of information is taken in through the sense organs . . . and [on its basis] the gun is fired . . . [Thus] the man who would acquire skill with a shotgun . . . must practice his art again and again, shooting at skeet or some dummy target. By long practice, he must adjust the *setting* of his nerves and muscles so that in the critical event, he will "automatically" give an optimum performance" (p. 211)¹³.

In other words, in learning to shoot a rifle, a marksman needs only to learn how to relate him or herself, bodily, to an already *determinate* set of conditions, while the shotgun shooter has continually to deal with *indeterminate* circumstances. Thus he or she must develop the capacity to go out to meet an upcoming circumstance with an action already shaped by an appropriate anticipation, thus to *determine it (the circumstance) further in the very moment of action*—as one does, say,

with one's feet when walking up or down stairs, a fact that becomes apparent to one when there is one less or one more step than expected.

Clearly, what Bateson (1979) has to say here is of relevance to our concerns with embodiment (as I indicated above). Whilst the marksman "does not need to change *himself*" (p. 216), the shotgun shooter clearly does; he must somehow "adjust the *setting* of his nerves and muscles," says Bateson (p. 211). In practical terms, this means that the shooter must come, automatically and spontaneously, i.e., without conscious deliberation (for there is no time for it), to *anticipate* the flight of the bird and to shoot guided by its influence—in experiential terms, he must build up within him or herself, an appropriate range of *action guiding anticipations* (Shotter, 2005) that are continuously updated in response to environmental changes.

Central to everything I have said above, then, is a turn away from dead, mechanical, one-way cause and effect processes¹⁴, toward a focus on the two-way *spontaneous responsivity* of living and growing forms, on their spontaneously responsive reactions both to each other and to the othernesses in their surroundings. As we shall see, this switch in focus entails a number of others: (1) a move away from a concern with the causal influences exerted on us by the past, toward a concern with how our *anticipations* of the future shape our perceptions and actions in our present circumstances; also (2) a move away from the idea of all the entities of importance to us being all-already-there in existence for us at any one moment in time, toward the idea of them becoming more and more *determinate* for us as we involve them more and more in our activities in relation to them; but most importantly, along with these two (3) a move away from a concern with the *universal* problem of our relation to our world, to a concern with our understanding of our own, individual, *local* situation within it.

Thus, what is new in the approach that I want to try to articulate further here, building on the scene set by the discussion of Bateson's ideas above, is the claim that a local situation is *only* understandable to us in terms of the *felt unity of our body* as we actively move around and progressively engage ourselves with the others and the othernesses in that situation. Furthermore, what is also new, is the claim that all our subsequent thought—abstract or otherwise—presupposes the *achievements* arrived at in that activity. Indeed, our ways of thinking can be understood as our *ways of responding* to these achievements; we cannot, as Descartes thought, no matter how hard we may try, start with a "clean slate", and implement new and "rational" ways of experiencing the things around us, uninfluenced by the embodied results of our previous involvements. To repeat, as Bateson notes, these are not matters open to our free will; they are to do with "setting the scene" within which, what we can be conscious of, appears to us.

Bateson (1979), as we saw above, hints at this idea in his claim that in circumstances in which "double description" occurs, information (sic) is created that is "of a sort different from what was in either source separately" (p. 31), information (sic) of a different "logical type." Furthermore, as he sees it, in many important situations, it comes to reside, not in the heads of individuals in terms of ideas or

concepts, but in the “*setting* of our nerves and muscles” (p. 211) in the form of an automatic *preparedness to respond* in a particular manner to a particular circumstance. But it is in the remarkable work of Samuel Todes (2001) that we can find this theme extensively developed in ways which, as we will see, enable us to describe more clearly the kind of *preparing activities* required for us to acquire such embodied “readinesses”.

TODES AND OUR *EMBODIED WAYS* OF INTER-RELATING OURSELVES WITH
OUR SURROUNDINGS: OUR *NEED* TO FEEL “AT HOME” IN THE WORLD

Central to Todes’s whole approach is a very new and very different approach to human motivation, an approach that places our need to feel “at home” in our surroundings, so to speak, as basic to the kind of being that we are in the world—a need very different from, say, the need for self-actualization that tops Maslow’s (1943) “hierarchy of needs.” For what Maslow sets out in his hierarchy are not, as Todes see it, needs but *desires*, things that we already *know* we want. Whereas, for Todes (2001), “a need, unlike a desire, is originally given as a pure restlessness; as the consciousness of one’s undirected activity. It begins with the sense of a lack in oneself, *without* any sense of what would remove that lack . . . Now the whole sense of our exploration and discovery of the world is prompted by the sense of having been initially lost in the world . . . Our whole quest of discovery is thus initially prompted by need rather than desire. It is initially directed not to get what we want but to discover what we want to get” (p. 177).

In other words, Todes brings to our attention the fact that we must continually worry about how to “be” in the world. Not knowing “where” we are, we don’t know “what to do next”, how to “go on” with our lives. We must continually puzzle as to how we might relate ourselves to the others and othernesses around us. Thus Todes focuses our attention on our *orientational* or *relational* needs—what we could, in Bateson’s terms, describe as our need to know what kind of *context* we are currently “in”, and what “it” requires of us, what it “calls” upon us to do. For each new situation we encounter arouses in us afresh, the need to gain an orientation towards it, a way of identifying and relating ourselves to the others and otheresses we encounter within it. Rather than a process of conscious reasoning, *difficulties of orientation* or *relational difficulties*, have to be overcome by *resolving* on a *line of action*, a *style*, or a *way* of proceeding with respect to each other and/or to our shared circumstances, something that must be accomplished practically, in the moment, in relation to the sensed, anticipated outcomes of one’s projected actions.

I have already outlined the distinction between difficulties of orientation and difficulties of the intellect above. In doing so, I drew on Wittgenstein’s (1980) remark that: “What makes a subject hard to understand . . . is not that before you can understand it you need to be 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). Thus, as he puts it, what work in (his kind of practical) philosophy is aimed at, is not to provide any new information, but to change one in one's very self, to change "one's way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them)" (1980, p. 16). Changes of this kind cannot be effected by argument, by giving people good reasons to adopt new thoughts, new beliefs. One can only be changed in one's very being by being "moved" by an other or otherness, a "strangeness" that can "move" one in ways that one is unable to move oneself¹⁵. A relational or orientational difficulty thus presents us with almost the reverse of an intellectual problem—in which we derive something unknown from an array of data already well known—for it is only *after* we have discovered/created a way of *relating* ourselves to and attending to our surroundings, that the data relevant to our achieving our goal can be brought to light (and then, be applied in *solving* problems).

To acquaint ourselves in much more detail with what is entailed here, let us begin again with a simple paradigm example: that of visually fixating on an object in our field of vision. If I look out of my window, toward to church spire on the horizon, it takes a moment (especially now that I am older) for my two eyes, (a) to each find the same point of fixation (so that I don't get double vision), and also (b) for them to come into sharp focus. I now switch to the words on my computer screen. Automatically, my eye muscles re-converge my eyes to a much nearer fixation point, and (attempt) again to achieve a sharp focus. I do not have to deliberate on this to "find out" how to do it. It happens. My body does it for me.

Indeed, it is perhaps worth it at this point to add a remark about binocular vision. For as Bateson (1979) remarks, it is in terms of the slight but related *differences* between our two eyes that, not only can seers improve contrasts and resolution at edges—thus to read more easily when the print is small or the illumination poor—but much more importantly, a sense of *depth* is created. Depth as such is invisible, but what we seem to see when seeing "in depth", is how near to or how far from us things are in relation to our bodies, i.e., what can be reached without moving, and what movements are required to reach other things. As Bateson (1979) puts it, "the *difference* between the information provided by the one retina and that provided by the other is itself information of a *different logical type*. From this new sort of information, the seer adds an extra *dimension* to seeing" (p. 80).

In such a situation as this, then, we must gather bits and pieces of visual data ("information", in Bateson's sense) in such a way as to have (1) a sense of how the results of each "looking" links in with all the others to form a unitary whole, a comprehensive sense of the landscape before us, thus to provide us with (2) a sense of what next would be very likely to appear if we were to look to the left, to the right, up, down, or further afield, and so on, and how we would be placed within such an array—how, bodily, in terms of our readinesses for action, we would be oriented within it. In other words, as I indicated above, at work here is what we might call a process of *practical hermeneutics*, in which, in the back and forth

movement between part and whole, we gain a sense, not only of how each part upon which we fixate is “placed” in relation to the whole, but also of how we ourselves are “placed” in relation to it.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes our experience of viewing pictures in an art gallery thus: “For each object, as for each picture in an art gallery, there is an optimum distance from which it requires to be seen, a direction viewed from which it vouchsafes most of itself: at a shorter or greater distance we have merely a perception blurred through excess or deficiency. We therefore tend towards the maximum of visibility, and seek a better focus as with a microscope” (p. 302). Or, our viewing of an object: “If I draw the object closer to me or turn it round in my fingers in order “to see it better”, this is because each attitude of my body is for me, immediately, the power of achieving a certain spectacle, and because each spectacle is what it is for me in a certain kinaesthetic situation. In other words, because my body is permanently stationed before things in order to perceive them and, conversely, *appearances are always enveloped for me in a certain bodily attitude*. In so far, therefore, as I know the relation of appearances to the kinaesthetic situation, this is not in virtue of any law or in terms of any formula, but to the extent that I have a body, and that through my body I am at grips with the world” (p. 303, my emphasis). In other words, “things” are seen by me as such *from within* my living relation to them, not in an objective relation of “I think that”, but a living relation of “I can”—where the “I can” is laid out before me in terms of the field of possible actions seemingly open to me.

We can take this situation—of our becoming more *visually* “at home” in our surroundings—as a paradigm for many of the other tasks we face on a much more extensive scale in our becoming more “at home” in our surroundings, i.e., of our becoming more bodily *ready* to respond, spontaneously, to contingencies as they arise. Indeed, in becoming, say, a certain *kind of professional person*—e.g., a landscape painter, a mathematician, an actor or theatre director, a lawyer, a business person, etc., etc.—it is not a matter of learning how to puzzle out in one’s head how to act in certain situations; it is a matter of coming to act in a direct and spontaneous way guided by one’s anticipation-arousing perception of one’s surroundings. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) puts it: “Movement is not thought about movement, and bodily space is not space thought of or represented . . . to move one’s body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of representation” (pp. 137–139). In other words, we do not need to refer to a mental schematism of some kind (a theory or a model) in order to act in a skillful manner, we simply need to act *in response to* our sense/perception of our current situation.

To be able to do this, we must be able, i.e., have the ability, to sequence our activities in such a way that, not only does each difference-that-makes-a-difference occur as a living response to a previous difference making event, but also, each must occur in accordance with how the “somethings” that we seek to see “out there”, *require us* to order them.

Our experiences with visually ambiguous figures can, perhaps, be informative here as to what such abilities are like. For instance, with the well known faces/vase or duck/rabbit figures, if we first look with the overall schema of a face to guide us in our expectations, we could first look *from* what could possibly be a forehead *to* an expected eye region, and then *to* an expected nose region, and so on, looking eventually *from* all these details (if each of these expectations is to an extent fulfilled) *to* the overall perception of a face—in short, a face-way-of-looking can thus be satisfied by the figure. Similarly, with a vase-way-of-looking, we can look *from* a bowl region *to* a stem region *to* a base region, and find that *that* can be satisfied by the figure too. Thus generally, we can say that our *ways* of looking, listening, etc., work in terms of a precise sequence of anticipations as to what next to expect to see or hear, *given* what we have seen or heard so far.

EMBODIED SKILLS AND EMBODIED ACHIEVEMENTS: THE “DAWNING”
OF AN AWARENESS

In my estimation, William James (1890) described the character of these sequentially ordered anticipations of a specific kind, these embodied “readinesses” very well when, with respect to speech, he suggested: “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 . . . 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” (p. 253, p. 255, my emphases).

What James suggests here in relation to speech, I suggest can be generalized to many other situations in which the character of sequentially unfolding events is in question: faces are seen as faces not because of their similar *spatial* characteristics but because they are all amenable to a face-way-of-looking, all vases to a vase-way-of-looking, all ducks to a duck-way-of-looking, all rabbits to a rabbit-way-of-looking, and so on. Similarly for a whole set of *ways* of hearing. What a class of things would seem to have in common, then, is not a set of static formal properties, but their occasioning of an embodied activity with a distinctively “shaped” dynamic to it. Indeed, as Bateson put it, “it is this *responsiveness to difference* that we shall use to distinguish its functioning as “mental” . . . The stone is affected by “forces” and “impacts,” but not by differences” (Bateson and Bateson, 1988, p. 17). In other words, they each afford us the opportunity to go out to meet them with a distinctive “mental movement”, an appropriate and distinctive *way* of responding to them “at the ready”, so to speak.

But how is it possible for us to go out to meet something which, until we begin to get more closely “in touch” with it, is very largely unknown to us? How can

we approach something with a degree of confidence that initially is known to us only vaguely and globally—in “outline”, so to speak—so that whatever it turns out to be, however it may act, we can have the appropriate responses to *its* responses to us “at the ready”? For, as I noted above, instead of a set of already determinate entities, we confront a whole circumstance that is at first bewildering, vague, or of an otherwise indeterminate character for us.

Noting this, noting the impossibility of conducting deterministic processes of approach, we might be tempted, yet again, to try to *explain* them theoretically. Following Prigogine (1996), we might feel it very appropriate to describe their character as *chaotic*. For, as he notes, as chaotic processes unfold in time, they involve “both deterministic processes (between bifurcations) and probabilistic processes (in the choice of branches)” (p. 69)—where local “fluctuations” determine the “choices” made at each “bifurcation”, at each choice point or the making of a difference. Thus, chaotic processes do not simply unfold in pre-determined ways, nor in a random “anything goes” fashion. They manifest at each stage in their emergence the “realization” of one or another possibility *that is influenced in its realization by its relation to local circumstances*. But more than this, they also manifest further possibilities of development, growth, or inner articulation, which will be influenced in their realization by whatever local circumstances are present at that later time; and so on. Chaotic processes thus have an unpredictable orderliness to them that would seem to be very like many of the processes we have discussed above—only when we look back on their outcomes do we see the “patterns” they have produced.

We fail to notice these “retrospective” tendencies in our everyday dealings with things and events in the world because, as Polanyi (1958, 1963) points out (but see Todes’s account of our “retroactive determination” of objects below), we see *from* a set of “subsidiary awarenesses”¹⁶ within us *to* something “over there”, *to* some *thing* of which we are “focally aware,” a thing that we *stand in relation to*, i.e., as if *separate* from it. Thus, the bodily activities that lead us to a focal awareness of *something*, a something that seems to have its being apart from us, remain in the background, unnoticed, and we mislead ourselves into trying to describe an always unfinished process in terms of its finished products.

While Prigogine (1996) provides us with an account of chaotic processes from an outsider’s point of view, Polanyi (1958) begins to take us into the events occurring inside us. For instance, in describing the hammering in of a nail, he notes: “When we bring down the hammer we do not feel that its handle has struck our palm but that its head has struck the nail. Yet in a sense we are certainly alert to the feelings in our palm and the fingers that hold the hammer. They guide us in handling it effectively, and the degree of attention that we give to the nail is given to the same extent but in a different way to these feelings . . . I have a *subsidiary awareness* of the feeling in the palm of my hand which is merged into my *focal awareness* of my driving in the nail” (p. 55).

Thus, from inside unfolding activities with a chaotic structure to them, we might say that in approaching any new circumstance as an active agent, if Polanyi

(1958, 1963) and Todes (2001) are correct, although initially we sense the circumstance as being already specified to a degree, we also sense it as open to being specified still further. Indeed, we also feel, to an extent, that its further specification depends both on us, *and* on our unfolding relations to it. For instance, we see a movement, but is it a mechanical or living movement, if living, is it of an animal or of a human being; and so on, and so on? We do not know at first how to relate or to orient ourselves towards such events appropriately; but as we explore or interrogate them further, we can come to a more determinate grasp of them.

In other words, our seeing or hearing something in such a way as to be bodily oriented toward it, i.e., to have an appropriate response to it “at the ready”, is not something that just happens to us in an instant—as a camera takes a snap-shot, say. Such “seeings” and “hearings” are, as Ryle (1949) termed them a while ago, *achievements*. And in saying this, Ryle wanted to make a crucial distinction between what he called “achievement verbs” and “task verbs”. For, as he remarked, “the differences, for example, between, . . . hunting and finding, . . . listening and hearing, looking and seeing, travelling and arriving, have been construed [in previous philosophy], if they have been noticed at all, as differences between coordinate species of activity or process, when in fact the differences are of quite another kind. It has been all too easy to overlook these differences, since we very often borrow achievement verbs to signify the performance of the corresponding task activities, where the hopes of success are good” (p. 143).

Indeed, we often say that we *are* following a theory in our actions, when really we should be saying that we are *trying* to follow a theory. This, then, opens up the possibility of an inquiry into whether we are in fact following it or not, i.e., whether we are successfully *achieving* the *task* of following the theory or not. Where, a major difference between the logical force of task verbs and their corresponding achievement verbs is that when we talk of achievements, “we are asserting that some state of affairs obtains over and above that which consists in the performance, if any, of the subservient task activity” (Ryle, 1949, p. 143). In other words, for doctors to cure their patients, they must both treat them *and* the patients must get well again—“an autobiographical account of the agent’s exertions and feelings does not by itself tell whether he has brought off what he was trying to bring off” (Ryle, 1949, p. 144). So, although we may use an achievement verb *in anticipation* of success, there is always the possibility that we will have to revise the usage in the event of failure.

Thus, each new situation that we approach, or which approaches us, presents us with the task of determining its nature in relation to our need *to be oriented or related to our surroundings*, our need for what Todes (2001) calls *poise*. Where: “As soon as I am poised in my circumstance, I know *what I* am doing. I know not merely what movements I am making. I know at once, by doing it, not merely what *I*, with my body, am doing, but also *what I* am doing, i.e., something about those objects to which I am doing something with my body . . . To be

poised is to be *self*-possessed by being in touch with one's *circumstance*. To lose touch is immediately to lose one's poise" (Todes, 2001, p. 66).

For instance, we are uncertain when we approach another individual how we will be received, and if well received, will he or she make a difference to us that matters to us. Thus we *prepare* ourselves to meet them. We first adopt a positive attitude, say, one of friendliness rather than hostility, and we thus hold out our hand, open, ready to shake their's. Happily, we see them do the same. Next comes the moment when our hands *make a first contact*, and we begin both to grip each other's hands and to move our hands up and down in some sort of synchrony, not by one pulling or pushing the other's hand up and down but by each anticipating each other's movements to such an extent that neither puts undue pressure on the other. When this happens, we can (to an extent) *sense the other's sensitivity towards us*, whether their attitude to us is "off hand" or not. Normally, we don't notice the subtlety and amazing complexity of this synchronized, "interaction ritual" (Goffman, 1967); but its subtlety can become very evident to us if the other person seizes our hand and "pumps" it when we're not "ready" for it. We think of them as uncouth or as social maladroitness in some way. It is our initial *poise* in such an activity, however, that makes the ensuing exchange one of such possible subtlety.

Or, to take another example (Todes' example): instead of getting ready to shake someone's hand, consider now catching a ball. The ball begins to come towards us; with our eyes on the ball we begin to "cup" our hands forward "at the ready", and as the ball makes its first contact with our hands, we begin both to close our hands upon it while drawing in a gradual deceleration to dissipate some of its momentum. For someone who has not yet developed the skill of "catching", who tries to wait till the ball hits their hands before "closing" them, the ball bounces out of their open hands long before they react. It is our being *poised* to catch that makes our catching possible.

CONCLUSIONS: ABDUCTION IS PERVASIVE

Central to the approach I have taken above, then, is Todes' (2001) claim that, in each new situation we encounter, our primary human need is to become oriented towards it, to gain *poise* within it, to come to be bodily ready to answer to the "calls" it makes upon us. Possessing poise, we can take the time required, make the exploratory moves we need to arrive at an articulated sense of its *uniqueness*. Lacking poise, we are awkward, we lack spontaneity, we think that we must *think about* the difficulty we face, i.e., treat it as an intellectual difficulty, and that we must "work out" how to act. But if we do try to overcome a relational or orientational difficulty by thinking about it, we will withdraw ourselves from our further involvement in the situation, and make use only of what we already know. Inevitably, this will result in us failing to appreciate the uniqueness of the situation

we face. We will approach it and act within it only in terms of the general, “one size fits all”, concepts we already possess.

But if Todes (2001) is correct, we cannot come to know the unique character of things and events in our surroundings in this way—by seeing, or hearing, or touching them for an instant, and then by turning away from them to bury ourselves in thought *about* them, no matter how good or complex we think our theories representing them may be. Our coming know what is uniquely “there” before us, in a way that orients us bodily toward it, is an orientational or relational difficulty, not an intellectual one. Resolving it not only takes time, but rather than insight, it also involves a gradual “dawning” with a very special sequential structure to it. It consists in three phases: An initial *preparation* phases before beginning to get “in touch” with it, followed by a tentative, easily reversible, exploration phase—for example, “we touch something preparatory to taking hold of it; we taste before eating; we get a whiff of something before smelling it by taking in a deep breath; we look at or listen to something in order to see or hear it” (Todes, 2001, p. 273)—while finally, we “get it”. We “grasp” what we have made “graspable” by arriving at a “livable” relation between our now *readied* body, and the “thing” it is now ready to “grasp”.

Entailed in this back-and-forth, co-evolutionary process, described variously by Bateson (1979) as the method of “double description” (p. 31), or as “the method of double or multiple comparisons” (p. 99), is our ability to intertwine our outgoing activities *towards* the others and othernesses around us, in with the activities back coming into us *from them* as a result, thus to arrive out an embodied outcome—an outcome of a different logical type both to our *and* to their activities. It is this that enables us to go out to meet them with appropriate kinds of response “at the ready”, so to speak. In other words, in such a process, we can *prepare* ourselves; we can come to embody a perceptual skill that will enable us to anticipate how those around us will react to how we react them. In the course of such *preparing activities*, the *setting* of our nerves and muscles becomes *adjusted to the character* of events occurring around us, and as a result, we can gain an understanding of the kind of *context* within which we are placed. This not the understanding of a fact or of a piece of information, but an understanding that “sets the scene”, so to speak, for *what* it is that *we need to be “ready” to see, to hear, to touch*, etc., in our current surroundings, *in relation to* what currently we are trying to do within them.

But in what can such an understanding, as a set of “readinesses”, consist? It cannot simply be in a set of already determinate forms or templates, for as we have already seen, we are not so much searching for a particular entity as searching for a *style* of approach, an orientation, a *way* of relating ourselves to our surroundings, globally. What seems to be entailed, is our gradually coming to embody the sense of a distinctive “mental movement”, an unfolding temporal process which involves paying sequential attention to features in our surroundings *in relation to* our possible bodily responses to them—a “*manner of search*,” as Bateson (1979, p. 99) called it, related both to how we “move around” in our surroundings, *and to what*

next to expect as a result of each movement. Indeed, as Todes (2001) puts it, as a result of our coming to embody such a “manner of search” appropriate to our current circumstances, “our [perceptual] skills [become] inscribed in the flesh of our percipient body as outwardly directed dispositions ready for deployment in grasping objects. As such, they are modifications of our interior readiness” (p. 267).

Thus, to return again to our experiences with visually ambiguous figures: Although the faces or the vase in the faces/vase ambiguous figure are both schematic in the extreme, as we switch from one way of seeing to the other, we *feel* that indeed we confront at least a *representation* of a pair of facing faces or a vase. As we look with a vase-expectation from one aspect of the figure to another and find our expectations satisfied (and similarly, for the pair of facing faces), although nothing before our eyes changes, our whole bodily *poise* is changed: we now orient ourselves toward the phenomena before us quite different, expecting, say, to put the figures on the paper to use in quite different ways—to make quite different comparisons between them and differently shaped faces or vases, to place them in different surroundings, to categorize them differently, and so on.

But more than this: the faces/vase ambiguous figure presented to us may be large or small, elongated or widened, drawn in many different colours and/or styles, and yet we can still see either faces or a vase in it. Thus here we can see that the “pattern that connects”—that connects “the crab to the lobster . . . and to you and me in one direction, and all six of us to the amoeba in one direction and to a schizophrenic person in the other” (Bateson, 1979, pp. 16–17)—cannot be a pattern of a merely formal kind. It cannot consist in a static, spatial shape. What influences us must be in a dynamical pattern, unfolding in time, in which all the beings mentioned as connected above, are all connected by our looking over them in same *way*, by our applying the same, chaotically structured, manner of search to them, with the aim of arriving at (in Todes’s sense) a *poised* way of relating ourselves to them all. Thus our poised approach to *living*, as distinct from *dead* things, is quite different—as Wittgenstein’s (1953) puts it: “All our reactions are different” (no. 284).

It is our embodied *readiness* to approach a whole range of different events with a similar *style* or *way* of looking, listening, etc., with a similar *set* of anticipations “at the ready, so to speak, that I see as exemplifying what Bateson (1979) calls, following C.S. Peirce (1903), *abduction*—“the lateral extension of abstract components of description” (p. 157) across from one situation to another, often very different, situation.

However, when C.S. Peirce (1903) introduced the notion of *abduction*, he introduced it as being the first stage of a deliberately conducted form of scientific inquiry, an inquiry that could begin with the disappointment of an expectation, the noticing of an anomaly or a surprising fact, or being “struck” or “touched” by an event to which, at first, one seems to lack an appropriate response. Thus he saw abduction as a source of initial *hypotheses*. But in logic as such, abductively derived hypotheses have always had a bad press, for they seem in themselves to

lack any *determining* force; no *necessary* consequences can be drawn from such abductively derived inferences or formulations.

As we have now seen, this criticism is entirely justified. But, as we have also seen, it is to pitch the primary importance of abduction in quite the wrong sphere of concern. If the *preparing activities* we have discussed can be seen as being the source of distinctly shaped mental movements, as giving rise to something very like James' (1890) feelings of tendency—that is, to signs of direction in thought which we cannot name but of which we have an acutely discriminative sense—that can guide us in our actions, in our talk, and in other relevant judgments in our practical everyday activities, then it will not be in our thinking, but in our acting, in our practices, that abduction will primarily manifest its force, a very powerful *determining force*.

But this, of course, is just to treat of one aspect of abduction—the second aspect mentioned above to do with “carrying over” a similarity of *not a merely formal kind* into a number of seemingly rather different situations. What of the first aspect: our being “carried away” by a unique other or otherness to a place not previously familiar to us? It is this that is its most puzzling aspect, for it has to do not only with our coming to deal with such events when they occur for a very first time, but also with our coming to know the unique character of a uniquely new “something”, to know it in its uniqueness without assimilating it into a category of things already well-known to us . . . and later, to face the secondary task of characterizing its uniqueness in words.

Facing a new situation, a new event, a new piece of music or painting, a new piece of text, a set of forms that we have not previously encountered, we look over it or them puzzled. We need to discover a new way of looking at, over, or into such figures or sequence of forms, etc., to “see” in it or them the possibilities they might express or portray, we need a new way or ways of looking quite different from those we already embody. Thus at first, our inquiries begin with our disquiets, with a sense of a restlessness, a consciousness of not yet being wholly “at home” in our surroundings, a sense of a lack in oneself *without* any sense at first of what would remove that lack. This is the first step in the practice of our inquiries, not our theorizing. And our theorizing must find its guidance *from within* our initial attempts, not to get what we want, but to discover what it “is” that we want to get (Todes, 2001).

But at first, if the situation, event, etc., is uniquely new, we either do not yet possess an appropriate “manner of search”, or, we do not yet know which of all those we do possess will give rise to a *felt mental movement* of a kind similar to that we are currently experiencing. But as we look over the new circumstance, as we look from one focal feature to another—pausing at each step to try to make a comparison between *this* felt movement, and felt movements already known to us—we can begin to develop within ourselves a sense of a felt movement both appropriate to it *and* to our need to feel “at home” in the world. Thus, as I begin to “orient” myself toward what is before me—an orientation that is

achieved by my body spontaneously adjusting its relations to its surroundings in such a way as to receive back from the world the responses it *anticipates* in the way I go out towards it—I begin to find that my body, spontaneously, teaches me a *way* or *style* of relating myself to what is before me. As Merleau-Ponty (1964) puts it: “more clearly (*but not differently*) in my experience of others than in my experience of speech or the perceived world, I inevitably grasp my body as a *spontaneity which teaches me what I could not know in any other way except through it* (p. 93).

Thus, if the work above is correct, then, there is for us, as living beings, a much more fundamental, unreflective, bodily way of our being related to our surroundings than those that have become known to us through our theorizing, a way of relating or orienting toward our surroundings that becomes known to us from within the unfolding dynamics of our engaged involvements and movements around and within them. But also, it is a way of relating to our surroundings that we, as academics and intellectuals, can easily come to lack, if we fail to take the trouble to actively involve ourselves in the practical, *preparing activities*, productive if such embodied understandings.

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Acknowledgements. A first version of this paper was presented at the BPS History and Philosophy Section Annual Conference, 25th–27th March 2008, Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford. I would like to thank four anonymous readers for their careful comments on a first draft of this paper. They helped me considerably in making its *practical thrust* much more salient.

NOTES

¹ By the word “way” here and elsewhere, I mean the way we bring off an *achievement* by undertaking an organized sequence of *task* activities, each one aimed at satisfying an anticipated outcome before moving on to the next—as, for instance, we must do if we are to “see” two “faces” (rather than a “vase”) in the faces/vase ambiguous figure. See the discussions of this achievement, and of the distinction between “task verbs” and “achievement verbs” as outlined by Ryle (1949), provided below.

² “I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: Philosophy ought really to be written only as *poetic composition*” (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 24).

³ Elsewhere (Shotter, 1993), I have called it a “knowing of the third kind.”

⁴ The notion is not, of course, without its history in psychology. The notion of *mental set*, or of thought *directed* upon an object (intentionality), was already implicit in the act-psychology tradition dating back to Franz Brentano (1874).

⁵ This is in line with the major switch of focus exemplified in this article, away from the aim of devising yet another new way of thinking, and toward focusing on specifying the kinds of *preparing activities* appropriate to getting us ready to notice previously unnoticed events occurring in our surroundings, events relevant to our resolving on a more appropriate line of action within them.

⁶ As we shall see, there is a pervasive temptation in the West, especially among academics and intellectuals, to approach all the difficulties we face as difficulties of an *intellectual* kind, as essential *problems* requiring a *solution*. However, as I have already begun to make clear, I hope, there is in the lives of human beings another whole great sphere of important activities, that of *preparing activities* in which acquire the “readinesses” to act in many circumstances of our lives, immediately and spontaneously. Wittgenstein (1953) refers to such activities by means of the catch-all term “training.”—for example: “. . . the teaching of language is not explanation, but training” (no. 5).

⁷ Bateson (1979) explains what he means by this distinction very well by way of an example (pp. 132–134), an example which I will discuss more fully later in the paper.

⁸ I have put Bateson’s term “information” in scare quotes, as I myself will not use the term. In Bateson’s own terms it is, as we shall see, a term of the wrong, or at least inappropriate *logical type*.

⁹ The notion of a *way* (see endnote 1) of relating ourselves to events in our surroundings will, later, become crucial.

¹⁰ For instance, we can only see Moiré patterns if, say, two gratings are near to each other slightly out of line, and perhaps, moving slightly in relation to each other.

¹¹ Again, reference to the example he discusses (pp. 132–134) will make this clear.

¹² And he goes on to add: “At this historic juncture, I believe it important to the whole survival of the whole biosphere, which you know is threatened” (p. 17), a comment he thought worth making even in 1979.

¹³ Bateson (1979) names the process by which we seem to set out and graduate a scale, a set of standards, that we can use to place a range of events in relation to each other, *calibration*. About it, he remarks, “‘calibration’ is related to ‘feedback’ as higher *logical type* is related to lower. This relation is indicated by the fact that self-correction in the use of the shotgun is necessarily possible only from information derived from practice (i.e., from a *class* of past, completed actions)” (pp. 211–212, my emphasis). Where, in other words, the relevant information is arrived at only in those events in which “double description” occurs (see also endnote 16).

¹⁴ Whether those processes are talked of as entailing “circular causality” or not.

¹⁵ Elsewhere, Arlene Katz and I (Katz and Shotter, 1996, 1998, 2004) have developed a whole approach to social inquiry, that we call the methods of a social poetics, built around being “struck by” the occurrence of particular events.

¹⁶ We can equate these to James’ “feelings of tendency.”

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