ABSTRACT: All our higher mental functions are mediated processes, says Vygotsky, and signs are the basic means used to master and direct them. But how can this be if our words and other signs work only in a purely representational, ‘picturing’ fashion? For they still need interpreting as to their meaning. The ‘inner observation’ problem remains unsolved. Our significant expressions must also work on us in another way: by the living expressions of others producing spontaneous bodily reactions from us. The approach taken, then, in the article below, is that consciousness is a socially responsive elaboration of our animal sensitivities to, and awareness of, events occurring in our relations to the others and othernesses in our surroundings. Thus, far from it being a special, private, inner theater or workshop of the mind, its emergence depends completely on the intertwining or intermingling of our ‘inner lives’ with the ‘inner’ lives of those around us. In this view, our consciousness then becomes no more strange to us than the fact of our ‘livingness’ – a fact that is at once both ordinary in the sense of being very familiar to us in our daily practical lives, as well as being quite extraordinary to us in our intellectual lives. This article is thus, just as much an exploration of the move from mechanical modes of thought to those appropriate to living processes, as it is about consciousness.

“Etymologically, of course, the term ‘consciousness’ is a knowledge word. This is evidenced by the Latin form, -sci-, in the middle of the word. But what are we to make of the prefix con- that precedes it? Look at the usage in Roman Law, and the answer will be easy enough. Two or more agents who act jointly – having formed a common intention, framed a shared plan, and concerted their actions – are as a result conscientes. They act as they do knowing one another’s plans: they are jointly knowing.” (Toulmin, 1982, p.64).

“If language is as old as consciousness itself, and if language is a practical consciousness-for-others and, consequently, consciousness-for-myself, then not only one particular thought but all consciousness is connected with the development of the word. The word is a thing in our consciousness... that is absolutely impossible for one person, but that becomes a reality for two. The word is a direct expression of the historical nature of consciousness” (Vygotsky, 1986, p.256).

“... in the process of development the child begins to practice with respect to himself the same forms of behavior that others formerly practiced with respect to him” (Vygotsky, 1966, pp.39-40).

At the end of his great work, Thought and Language, Vygotsky (1986) remarks: “We cannot close our study without mentioning the perspectives that our investigation opens up. This is even more momentous a problem than that of thinking; what I mean is the problem of consciousness” (p.256). And he continues this remark with the sentences quoted in the epigraph above, and goes on to end
it by saying: “The word is a direct expression of the historical nature of human consciousness... A word relates to consciousness as a living cell relates to a whole organism, as an atom relates to the universe. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness” (p.256). In this, I think Vygotsky is absolutely right, and below I want to explore, in the context of our living of our lives together, what he means in his claim, that a word – which becomes “a reality for two” (or more people), but is an impossibility for one – constitutes a microcosm of human consciousness. I want to begin this exploration, then, by noting the special importance he attaches to taking “the conception of word meaning as a unit of both generalizing thought and social exchange” (Vygotsky, 1986, p.9, my emphasis), rather than as an element. Where, in making this distinction, and in choosing word meaning as his unit, he wants to identify the “single living cell... the ‘psychological’ cell” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.8) that retains the characteristics of the whole in which it has its characteristic being.

In taking this approach, he is, as we shall see, very critical of those methods of analysis in psychology that “try to cut through the knot of the problem instead of untangling it” (Vygotsky, 1986, p.3), i.e., that analyze all the different aspects of our mental abilities into a collection of separate and self-contained functions. In particular, as he saw it, “the analysis of verbal thinking into two separate, basically different elements [a linguistic and a behavioral element] precludes any study of the intrinsic relations between language and thought” (p.3, my emphasis). It is this emphasis on the usually ignored intrinsic relations that are already in existence for us in all the talk of thought and language, of consciousness and action, and so on, that goes on between us, that I want to focus on.

In focusing on Vygotsky’s notion of word meaning as a unit (but not, as we shall see as an element) in our analyses, in line with various Wittgensteinian connections, I also want to link with Bakhtin’s (1986) emphasis on the role, not of the finished forms of our words, or on the patterns they make, but on our embodied utterance or expression of them, on their dynamic role in shaping and organizing our activities out in the world of our everyday practical affairs. And indeed, as Kozulin, in his editor’s introduction (Vygotsky, 1986, p.lvii), and the editors in the Minick translation (Vygorsky, 1987, p.v), both make clear, when Vygotsky speaks of language in the title of his book, is it speech, the act of voicing one’s words, the responsive effects produced by our expressive activities, not language as a formal system, that is central to his concerns. But here we must add that, along with a focus on a persons’s responsive reactions to events in their surroundings, we must also focus on the way in which such responsive reactions are always expressive in some way to those around them of the person’s attitudes, evaluations, or feelings regarding the events in question – we can see that the man over there was ‘taken by surprise’, that the woman was ‘upset’, that the child ‘wanted to be picked up’, etc. Hence, in focusing on word meaning in Vygotsky’s sense, we cannot just focus on separable, fixable, or countable entities in our investigations, we must focus on those events or moments in our lives in which we are in an expressive-responsive, living relation with the others and othernesses around us, moments or events when the words we use are merely an aspect of, or a unit within, a larger whole – a surrounding situation into which they are complexly interwoven or intertwined. In other words, I will be focusing centrally on our words in their speaking, rather than on the patterns to be found in our already spoken words. The task is to work in the still ongoing moment of speaking, not to look back on completed, past speech acts.

What’s in a word?: word meanings

In taking the activity of word meaning (rather than word shapes or forms) as a microcosm of human consciousness in this expressive-responsive sense, I will not, of course, be exploring the question: “What is consciousness?”, i.e., what mysterious kind of substance can it possibly be? Instead, my exploration will be much more of a Wittgensteinian (1956) kind. Thus instead, I want to explore the consequences of asking such questions as: “What are the different kinds of things we do in distinguishing some of a person’s actions as done consciously, from others that we say are done unconsciously?” “What role, socially, does this distinction play in further the practicalities of our lives together? This may seem to be scratching in a place very different from that in which we feel the itch over the question of consciousness. However, by investigating the
practical details exhibited in the many and various concrete circumstances that incite us to describe a person’s conduct as “conscious” or “unconsciousness,” i.e., the circumstances to which we are spontaneously responsive in this way, we can come to an understanding of the important practicalities of human conduct that we ‘pick out’ and attend to by the use of such expressions, and why attention to such practicalities is of importance to us.

Indeed, in focusing on those aspects of our behavior in which we act spontaneously, in an animal way6; I will be following Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) major claim, that all our higher, voluntary, mental functions have their origins in lower, spontaneously occurring forms. Higher forms are developed from lower ones by interweaving into them socio-cultural structures of our own human invention, structures passed on to us by those around us which enable us to deploy the ‘natural’ or spontaneous reactions already available to us according to our own humanly ‘invented’ ends. While as individuals, clearly, we develop our own abilities to conduct ourselves in ways that are both intelligible to the others around us, and (for the most part) considered by them to be legitimate, we remain unaware of both the relations amongst our own mental activities and those between them and our surroundings; we are unable to turn around on them, so to speak, to give an account of them to others. It is our being instructed by others in such ways of accounting for our own mental activities, i.e., by them relating themselves to our actions in such a way as to draw our attention, in verbal terms, to the relevant relations, that we can come to free ourselves from our own, immediate, impulsive responses to events in our surroundings. In others words, it is through the words, the utterances, of others, that we can come to act in a voluntary, conscious manner, in a way in which we ourselves are responsible, or ‘answerable’, for our own conduct.

But, to suggest that consciousness is a socially responsive elaboration of our animal sensitivity to, and awareness of, events occurring in our relations to the others and other nesses in our surroundings, is to make a suggestion that, in the current climate of mainstream opinion, seems to be the opposite of the case. For this means that, far from it being a special, private, inner theater7 or workshop of the mind (Baals, 1997), its emergence depends completely on the intertwining or intermingling of our ‘inner lives’ with the ‘inner’ lives of those around us8. In this view, then, our consciousness then becomes no more strange to us than the fact of our ‘livingness’ – a fact that is at once both ordinary in the sense of being very familiar to us in our daily practical lives, as well as being quite extraordinary to us in an intellectual sense at the same time. And in this view also, not only is “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other” (Lacan, 1977)9, but, if Vygotsky is right, consciousness owes its complexity and dynamic structure to the responsive-expressive talk of the others around us as well. Indeed, to go further: it means that, rather that it being something special, hidden within the deep interior of each of us individually, we are all participating within it together – as its original meaning of what everybody knew, all together seems to suggest. By beginning simply with a unquestioned analysis of our own immediate experiences as individual thinkers and experiencers, we fail to notice the intrinsic, spontaneously occurring relations already in existence between us in the background of our lives together. But these are crucial if we are to have any chance of understanding the complexities of each other’s claims, without having to scratch our heads over the interpretation of every word, even the most simple ones.

In line, then, with this emphasis on the thoroughly social nature of consciousness, I also want to conduct this exploration in the light of Toulmin’s (1982) account of the word’s etymology in con (with)- scientia (knowing) in Roman Law, i.e., in designating a witnessable or witnessing knowing along with others. As he sees it, for the last 350 years, since Descartes’s time, a string of practical, concrete terms, all having unproblematic, everyday uses – whether as verbs (“Do you mind?”), as adverbs (“Did you do that consciously?”), as adjectives (“That was a thoughtful act on your part!”) – “have been converted... into so many broad and general abstract nouns, which have then been construed as names for the most personal, private flux of sensory inputs, kinesthetic sensations, and so on” (p.53). In this transition a whole family of words, “whose historic use and sense had to do with the public articulation of shared plans and intentions has been taken over into philosophical theory as providing a name for the most private and unshared aspects of mental life... The term ‘consciousness’ has thus become the name for a flux of sensory inputs that is seemingly neither con-, since each individually supposedly has his or her own, nor scientia, since the sensory flux is thought of as “buzzing and booming” rather than cognitively structured or interpreted “ (p.54).
However, in the *con-scientia* view of consciousness that I want to explore here, i.e., of it as witnessable knowing along with others, to say that we are *conscious* in our acting, that we *know* what we are doing in our acting, is to be able to give a verbal account of our actions to those around us who might challenge us. That is: we can verbally describe the component acts that made up the action we have just completed, in terms both of their relations to events in our surroundings and their mattering to us, i.e., their reasons, what we were trying to do in our doing of them. In brief, to be conscious, is to possess a verbally expressible, reflective awareness of one’s own mental processes. Indeed, it is in just *this* sense that Vygotsky (1986) talks of consciousness: “We use *consciousness*,” he says, “to denote awareness of the activity of mind – the consciousness of being conscious. A preschool child who, in response to the question, ‘Do you know your name?’ tells his name, lacks this self-reflective awareness: He knows his name but is not conscious of knowing it” (p.170).

Our project here, then, with respect to those of our utterances in which we make use of the word “consciousness” or any of its cognates, is in line with Wittgenstein’s (1953) project when faced with all such philosophically problematic words: “When philosophers use a word – “knowledge”, “being”, “object”, “I”, “proposition”, “name” – and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (no.116). And here our task is precisely similar: to bring out into the open the really quite large number of crucial distinctions, both in our responses to our own actions and in our responses to the actions of others, we in fact make spontaneously in ‘going on’ with our practical, everyday affairs with the others around us. It is a kind of ‘philosophical’ investigation that helps to set out “what is possible before all new discoveries and inventions” (Wittgenstein, 1953, no.126), i.e., the usually unnoticed, spontaneous background expectations and anticipations, the responsive expressions, in terms of which we all ‘go on’ with each other in our everyday practical affairs.

### ‘Inside’ our living activities

Currently, consciousness is treated by many as a strange, private theater within us somewhere from within which, as individuals, we live out our lives (Baars, 1997). However, when it is conceptualized in this way it seems to confront us with an unfathomable mystery. What, materially, could possible be the nature of such an ‘inner space’? I haven’t sufficient space here to turn to a comprehensive critique of this view and of the Cartesian metaphysics it motivates, but clearly, in the current climate of what is thought of as the appropriate approach to the problem of consciousness, the kind of investigation I am proposing is somewhat unusual, strange kind of inquiry. If we are already embarked on the scientific task of discovering what “consciousness” *is*, the task of clarifying to ourselves our own use of our own words, is a rather unnecessary task, isn’t it? Surely the word “consciousness” will come to mean whatever we discover it to mean in our researches! This, however, at every stage in such investigations, rests on the assumption that there is only one function – a representational or ‘picturing’ function – for our words in our transactions with each other.

We can find such a view expressed, for instance, in Haughland (1993) who, in commenting on the fact that artificial intelligence didn’t originate with computers or with advances in technology, suggests that it arose out of “a central tradition in Western philosophy, thinking (intellection) essentially is rational manipulation of mental symbols (viz., ideas)” (pp.3-4) – where what is meant by the rational manipulation of mental symbols is the reconfiguring of abstract structural patterns according to an unambiguous set of rules or principles. But here, of course, Haugeland is concerned with the goal I mentioned above – that of creating a consciousness, a mind, de novo, ex nihilo, in something non-living or non-human, i.e., with answering the question: “What is consciousness?”

Here, perhaps, given Vygotsky’s very different attitude to word meaning, i.e., to our use of words, is a suitable point to mention Nagel’s (1982) famous exploration of consciousness in his paper: “What is it like to be a bat?” For he seems, at first sight, by raising the question in a
different form – that “there is something that it is like to be that organism – something that it is like for the organism” (p.392) – to be suggesting a quite new approach to the problem: in terms of “an objective phenomenology not dependent on empathy or the imagination... [whose] goal would be to describe, at least in part, the subjective character of experiences in a form comprehensible to being incapable of having those experiences” (p.402). But let us look at the complexities of what is involved here at little more closely: Firstly, to confront other living beings, is to confront beings which, in relation to us, clearly have, so to speak, “a life of their own”12. But there is a difference here between bats and other human beings: to ask: “What is like to be a bat?” is a quite different kind of question from, “What is it like to be a mathematician?” For, we can ask mathematicians to tell us, in a way that we cannot ask a bat. And they can at least try to tell us of the nature of their world (according to their own degree of eloquence) in their own terms. For we can expect, when addressing mathematicians with such questions, that they will respond with various kinds of living, expressive reactions, to which we in turn will be responsive. And, as we shall see, it is in the ‘orchestrated contours’ of the dynamic unfolding of people’s spontaneous responsiveness to events in their surroundings, in the sequentially unfolding nature of their 1st-person living expressions, that they can display their own unique ‘inner’ lives to the others around them (Johnston, 1993; Mulhall, 1990) – empathy or imagination on our part is not needed. Indeed, it is only ‘from within’ the living interplay occurring between them and us, that they can communicate to us what they ‘think’ and ‘feel’ about events in our common surroundings.

This attitude to word meaning, i.e., that a primary function of words is to evoke spontaneous reactions in those to whom they are addressed, is central to Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) whole approach to language. For crucial to our relations with the others around us (and to our being able to instruct our children into being members of our community), is our expressive-responsive use of our words, our utterances, to influence their behavior spontaneously, to exert a direct and immediate effect on how they direct their attention, organize and shape their actions, and so on. This is typified in the following remark about the function of words, our uttering of them, in the formation of our higher (socio-cultural) mental processes: “All the higher psychic functions are mediated processes, and signs are the basic means used to master and direct them. The mediating sign is incorporated in their structure as an indispensable, indeed the central, part of the total process. In concept formation that sign is the word, which at first plays the role of means in forming the concept but later becomes its symbol” (1962, p.56, my emphasis)13. In other words, besides and quite secondary to their representational use, is another use: “Our experimental study proved that it was the functional use of the word, or any other sign, as means of focusing one’s attention, selecting distinctive features and analyzing and synthesizing them, that plays a central role in concept formation... Words and other signs are those means that direct our mental operations, control their course, and channel them toward the solution of the problem confronting us” (Vygotsky, 1986, pp.106-107)14.

We are not very used, perhaps, to paying much attention to this more spontaneous, and in fact, unconscious aspect of our language use, particularly in the social and behavioral sciences – in which, as I intimated above, in discovering what a psychological function – such as consciousness, perception, thinking, memory, etc. – is, we feel we face an empirical task, rather than a conceptual one. Indeed, although it might pain us to accept it, with respect to our conscious awareness of our own linguistic activities in this sphere, we must liken ourselves to the preschool child Vygotsky describes above: We know spontaneously how to use our words correctly in our everyday practical affairs, but, despite the extensive programs of research in scientific psychology, we still remain somewhat unconscious of the criteria we use in judging the appropriateness of the words we utter in conducting our practical, everyday affairs – we are unable verbally to describe them, and thus, to make them witnessably known.

Involved in this task of trying to become more accountably conscious of our own mental processes, is a special kind of practical-social knowing that, elsewhere, I have called a “knowing of the third kind.” (Shotter, 1993a and b). It is concerned with the articulation of an “insider’s” understanding of what is involved in carrying out an action is a social situation – i.e., it is not a “knowing-that” (Ryle, 1949), a knowledge that can be formulated in terms of facts or general principles, nor is it a “knowing-how,” the knowledge of a craft or a skill – it is the unique, particular, kind of knowledge one has “only from within a social situation, a group, or an
institution... which... takes into account (and is accountable to) the others in the social situation within which it is known” (Shotter, 1993a, p.7). In other words, it is an account of our consciousness activities that is of use to other human beings who are seeking – not to create consciousness, de novo, in something non-living or non-human – but to elaborate, develop, extend, or to refine their own relations to the others and othernesses around them, so as to deal with them in a conscious manner, in a less impulsive more deliberate manner. I will thus be concerned with giving answers to such questions as: “What are we doing within ourselves, as speaker-actors within the moment of speaking and acting, to direct and organize our expressive actions in the effort to relate them appropriately to their circumstances?” “In what terms might we best describe, ‘map’, or account for, the ‘inner movements’ occurring within us as we give ‘shape’ to the contributions we make to the activities in which we are participating?” “What hints might we give to someone wanting to develop a better judgment of other people’s feelings?”15 With the answers being given in terms of the “noticings,” or “directings of attention,” required – both within our surroundings and within our own outer and inner activities – if we are to become more masterful agents in the control of our own activities.

The temporal structure of our living activities

Let me straightaway add here, that my concern with this kind of ‘knowing from within’ (the situation) resonates directly with Vygotsky’s (1987)6 remarks, on the differences between the analysis of a whole into its separate elements, and what he calls “unit analysis.” In making this most important distinction he notes: “The first of these forms of analysis begins with the decomposition of the complex mental whole into its elements... The essential feature of this form of analysis is that its products are of a different nature than the whole from which they are derived... Since it results in products that have lost the characteristics of the whole, this process is not a form of analysis in the true sense of the word. At any rate, it is not ‘analysis’ vis a vis the problem to which it was meant to be applied” (p.45, my emphasis). And he continues: “Because it causes the researcher to ignore the unified and integral nature of the process being studied, this for of analysis leads to a profound delusion. The internal relationships of the unified whole are replaced with external mechanical relationships between two heterogeneous processes” (p.46). “In our view, an entirely different form of analysis is fundamental to further development of theories of thinking and speech. This form of analysis relies on the partitioning of the complex whole into units. In contrast to the term ‘element’, the term ‘unit’ designates a product of analysis that possesses all the basic characteristics of the whole” (p.46)7. His distinction here, then, between the complex, internal relations characteristic of a living whole, and the heterogeneous, external relations characterizing a mechanical whole, is crucial to my whole account here. As he puts it, the nature of the whole – that makes possible the meaningful use of our words, our utterances, in shaping, directing, and organizing people’s behavior, our own included – is lost in any analysis of it into only externally related elements. In fact, strictly, to still call the word-forms we arrive at as a result of such an external analysis “words” is, as he remarks, is to make ourselves victims of “a profound delusion.”

For Vygotsky, then, each unit, each ‘part’ of a living whole, retains as a microcosm all the essential characteristics of the macrocosm. This is clearly not the case with the parts of a mechanism. The parts of a machine are, so to speak, objective parts, which have their own character, irrespective of whether they are parts of the machine or not; they owe none of their characteristics to their intrinsic relations with any of the other parts. But the ‘parts’ of a living whole cannot exist in isolation like this, apart from all the others with whom, quite literally, they have grown into existence. Indeed, the living whole within which they have their being has itself grown from a simple living ‘cell’ into a richly structured one in such a way that, at any one moment in time, all its ‘units’ or ‘parts’ owe, not just their character, but their very existence both to one another and to their relations with the ‘parts’ of the system at some earlier point in time – that is, their history is just as important as the ‘logic’ of their relations in their growth. Because of this, it is important to add, it is impossible to picture, i.e., represent, living wholes in spatial diagrams, for such wholes contemplated at a given moment are always incomplete, i.e., even in all their ‘parts’ they are always on the way to being other than they are. In other words, its ‘units’ or ‘parts’ – if we are justified in using such inadequate terms at all – have, necessarily, both a
temporal as well as a spatial aspect and thus, by their very nature, ‘point’ both from a past and toward a possible future (see Shotter, 1984, pp.42-43).

Indeed, time and temporality are central to the nature of people’s living activities, their meaningful expressions. Thus, to attempt to analyze them into a sequence of instantaneous spatial configurations, into a sequence of separate, objective parts, each lacking an intrinsic before and after, would, as Vygotsky puts it, result in “products that have lost the characteristics of the whole.” Instead, it is important for us to accept that in all living activities, there is always a kind of developmental continuity involved in their unfolding, such that earlier phases of the activity are indicative of at least the style, the physiognomy, i.e., the unique living identity, of what is to come later. There is a characteristic ‘shape’ to their unfolding in time. Thus, just as acorns only grow into oak trees and not rose bushes, and eggs only produce chickens and not rabbits, so all living activities, it seems, give rise to what we might call identity preserving changes or deformations – their possible ends are already ‘there’ in their beginnings. In other words, our spontaneous, expressive-responsive bodily activities, our words in our uttering of them, always ‘point beyond’ themselves, toward a limited set of possibilities in the future. Thus, in having internal rather than external relations to their surrounding circumstances like this, they have an indicative or mimetic, i.e., a gestural, relation to them (even if their surroundings are invisible to those witnessing only the activities) – in other words, rather than simply ‘add-on’ extras, they are always ‘participant parts’ in a larger whole. It is the intrinsic developmental continuity of all our living activities that, to repeat, provides us with the usually unnoticed background of expectations and anticipations we arouse in each other by our responsive expressions, the spontaneous expectations and anticipations in terms of which we all ‘go on’ with each other in our everyday practical affairs. And it is this that makes it possible for them to link their actions in with our’s in an intelligible manner. For they also live out their lives from within the same surroundings as we ourselves, and are, or can be, oriented toward the same features in the same way as ourselves. Indeed, it is a central part of what it is for us to be a member of a linguistic community, that we are able to use (to express) a word with the anticipation that the others around us will respond to our use of it just as we expect. If they don’t, then we wonder whether they are in fact ‘one of us’.

This effect of our expressions, to be able to ‘point’ in at least a partially specified manner, from a past toward a future, is crucial, as we shall see, in understanding how another’s words can be constitutive of our own, conscious activities, and is something quite inimical the Cartesian approach to change and movement. That approach, as is well-known, considers change and movement only as changes in the configuration of a set of independently existing, externally related, independently existing elements, in Vygotsky’s terms – an account of change that by its very nature, loses all the phenomena that arise in our of our living, expressive-responsive relations with the others and othernesses around us. For it is this non-representational, expressive-responsive use of our words that allows them to be both the means in forming our concepts, and to be the mediational means used in mastering and directing higher mental functions, or consciously performed activities – for in applying our words to ourselves, we cannot not be spontaneously responsive to their use.

New beginnings in new reactions: the intrinsic creativity of our everyday meetings

What also arises out of our special nature as living things, is that many things of importance to us, and within us, occur only in meetings of one kind or another between or within us. Indeed, something very special occurs when two or more living beings meet and begin to respond to each other – much more happens than them merely having an impact on one another. There is always in such meetings the creation of qualitatively new, quite novel and distinct forms of life which are more than merely averaged or mixed versions of those already existing. Elsewhere (Shotter, 1980, 1984) I have discussed this under the heading of “joint action,” and more recently (Shotter, 1993a&b) as “diagonally-structured” activity, but here I want to go a step further and, following Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) account of its nature in his last book, talk of it as intertwined or “chiasmically-structured” activity18.

With all the points above in mind, we can now make contact with the primacy in
Vygotsky’s psychology, not of thought and cognition, but of people’s activity. And as I see it, one of his most important emphases in this respect, is his statement of what he takes to be an important general law of development, “that consciousness and control appear only at a late stage in the development of a [mental] function, after it has been used and practiced unconsciously and spontaneously. In order to subject a function to intellectual and volitional control, we must first possess it” (Vygotsky, 1962, p.90).

What is of crucial importance in the early stages of the development of a mental function, are our spontaneous, living, embodied reactions to events occurring around us. Vygotsky emphasizes this focus on our embodied activity thus: “To the biblical ‘In the beginning was the Word’, Goethe makes Faust reply, ‘In the beginning was the deed’. The intent here is not to detract from the value of the word, but we can accept this version if we emphasize it differently: In the \textit{beginning} was the deed. The word was not the beginning – action was there first; it is the end of development, crowning the deed” (1962, p.153/ 1986, p.255).

At this point, it will be useful to draw attention to various remarks of Wittgenstein, relevant to the beginnings of language-games (for he also emphasizes our deeds in quoting the same maxim from Goethe’s Faust): “The origin and primitive form of the language-game,” he says (Wittgenstein, 1980a), “is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language - I want to say - is a refinement, “in the beginning was the deed”” (p.31). “The primitive reaction may have been a glance or a gesture, but it may also have been a word,” he notes (Wittgenstein, 1953, p.218). “But what is the word ‘primitive’ meant to say here?” he asks (Wittgenstein, 1981). “Presumably that this sort of behavior is \textit{pre-linguistic}: that a language-game is based \textit{on} it, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought” (no.541).

I quote these remarks of Wittgenstein’s here, to draw our attention to the way in which we can find the possibilities for beginning quite novel and unique modes of thought in our spontaneous, unthinking, responsive bodily reactions to events occurring around us, events occasioned either by the others or an otherness in our surroundings. In such circumstances, the new modes of thought in question are not in any way mere repetitions of, or even rearrangements of, already existing modes of thought, but really are quite unique, first-time ways of thinking in relation to the unique practical circumstances (the others and othernesses) with which we are in fact confronted. Indeed, if we could not begin new modes of thought in some such way, we would be unable in our meetings with new people, come to any grasp of them as the unique individuals they are, with a unique history and inner life that is their’s alone. It is these unique 1st-person expressions that seem to ‘come out of the blue’ that give us the sense, in fact, of another person as having an ‘inner world’ that is hidden from us. But irrespective of whether such 1st-person expressions are accurately linked to a mysterious inner realm or not, they can in fact ‘tell’ us what the person’s anticipations and expectations are, thus enabling us to ‘go on’ with them, to respond to them appropriately.

Indeed, with respect to people’s outer expressions of inner feelings, it will be useful to must add here, following Wittgenstein (1953), that “the characteristic mark of all ‘feelings’ is that there is expression of them, i.e., facial expression, gestures, of feeling” (no.513). We do not first see facial expressions, hear vocalizations, and changed rhythms of breathing, and then “make an inference that he is feeling joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features. – Grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face. This is essential to what we call ‘emotion’” (Wittgenstein, 1980, II, no.570). Indeed, we can go further. As Merleau-Ponty (1964) points out, “I know unquestionably that the man over there \textit{sees}, that my sensible world is also his, because \textit{I am present at his seeing}, it is \textit{visible} in his eyes’ grasp of the scene” (p.169). Wittgenstein (1953) expresses this feature of our reactions to living expression, as opposed to the mere noting of dead shapes, succinctly in his remark: “Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead, is not the same. All our reactions are different” (no.284). Our reactions here are not the result of thought, but are spontaneous and unique, first-time responsive expressions of our attitudes to events occurring around us.

To sum up so far then, following Vygotsky (and Wittgenstein), I am suggesting that our spontaneously responsive, living, bodily reactions to the others and othernesses around us can be seen as the source of all our later, ‘higher’, more conscious (\textit{con-scientia}) mental functions – the
source of our ‘minds’, as some people might put it. And in claiming this, clearly, I have in mind Toulmin’s (1982) comments above, that the original Roman Law meaning of people acting consciously, was of two or more of them acting jointly, acting from within a shared intention, thus being ‘concerted’ or ‘orchestrated’ in their actions. In other words, even while all alone, we are in all our conscious activities, even while all alone, we are engaged in a reflexive ‘loop’ of activity, so to speak, which both goes out from us in our anticipatory bodily activities which, at the same time, returns to us with a sense of their outcome. Thus, in our conscious activities, we are continually monitoring the result of our activities ‘out there’ to make sure they meet criteria of con-scientia – for our task in all our self-controlled, deliberate activities, is to show that they are based on a knowing witnessable by the others around us, that they meet public criteria of intelligibility, that we can account for them by giving acceptable reasons for them 21.

In emphasizing the importance of our spontaneous, unthinking, involuntary, unconscious activities, I want to re-emphasize the point already made above: that Vygotsky sees all our higher, deliberately self-controlled mental functions as being constituted in different ‘orchestrations’ of already existing, spontaneously occurring lower functions. This, along with his emphasis on the internal relations between mental functions and on consciousness only evolving “as a real whole” (p.167), leads him to be critical of all methods aimed at teaching word meanings, teaching concepts; they cannot be ‘explained’, taught by drilling or memorization (1986, pp.149-156). But they can when influenced by instruction, as we will see in the next section, if the instruction works to systematize, or to give an ordering to the child’s already acquired, spontaneous (but disorderly) understandings.

In brief, what I have been emphasizing above, then, something that is to an extent inimical to our current cognitive approach in psychology, is that very little of our behavior is under our own control. Indeed, my concern in this article is almost wholly with, as Gadamer (1989) puts it, “what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing” (p.xviii). This might seem to be of much less interest to us than a focus on our deliberate actions. For it would seem to decrease rather than increase the opportunities available to us for progressing and improving our own lives. But in fact this is only so if we too tenacious in holding on to our individualistic, Cartesian heritage, with its suggestion that all human development must happen solely within us as individuals. The fact is that it is not by our learning yet more facts, yet more information about what already exists for us in our surroundings, that we can change the ways in which we live our lives. Our task is to change the ways in which we relate ourselves to our surroundings, and to do that, we must learn new ontological skills, new ways of being a person (Shotter, 1984). To learn new ways of orienting ourselves toward our surroundings, new ways or styles of addressing and making ourselves answerable to the others and othernesses around us, we must explore what other ways of inter-relating aspects of our surroundings, what other relational-dimensions, we might bring into existence between us, other than the mere extension of our already existing forms of thought.

But to see how this is possible, we must turn to explore further Vygotsky’s emphasis on the expressive-responsiveness of our living activities, and how it is this – in people’s use of words in their meetings with the others around them – that allows such words, such utterances, to be the means by which the further articulation and development of their consciousnesses can be achieved.

Structuring and re-structuring the complex interfunctional relations in our higher mental abilities.

Let me begin this section by repeating Vygotsky’s (1986) remark that “words and other signs are those means that direct our mental operations, control their course, and channel them toward the solution of the problem confronting us” (pp.106-107). But let me now add, that words cannot have this kind of influence on our mental activities because of their representational function, representations require interpretation. They can only have it because of our immediate and direct, spontaneous, living, bodily responses to them, and are in that sense (whilst their understanding might at an earlier time have been mediated) are now being understood in an unmediated way22. And it is in this way that words can enter into and become the intermediate means by which all our higher mental functions can be structured and re-structured. This is possible again because of Vygotsky’s (1986) special way of conceptualizing the wholistic unity of consciousness: “The unity
of consciousness and the interrelation of all psychological functions were, it is true, accepted by all” he says;

“the single functions were assumed to operate inseparably, in uninterrupted connection with one another... It was taken for granted that the relation between two given functions never varied; that perception, for example, was always connected in an ideal way with attention, memory with perceptions, thought with memory... Yet all that is known about psychic development indicates that its very essence lies in the change of the interfunctional structure of consciousness. Psychology must makes these relations and their developmental changes the main problem, the focus of study, instead of merely postulating the general interrelation of all functions” (1986, pp.1-2).

What Vygotsky is doing here, then, is opening up the possibility of consciousness having, at any one moment in time, a dynamic, fluid, and thus continually changing, unitary structure to it, rather than it having an unchanging static structure. And of development as consisting in the gradual complexifying of its structure, not by the step-by-step adding in of extra (externally related) component parts, but by our learning to ‘orchestrate’ within ourselves, the many different, dynamic, ‘mental movements’ that can be spontaneously ‘called out’ as responses in us – responses of looking, thinking, remembering, relating, judging, etc. – by our uttering of different words to ourselves in our own “inner speech” (Vygotsky, 1986, p.182 et seq.).

Although by now, once we have appreciated the unbroken continuity between our bodily expressions and our spontaneous responses to them (the internal relations within the living unity of our speech, our expressive-responsive activities, and us acting in ways the others around us find meaningful), we can also appreciate that our inner speech need not always be strictly structured in (dictionary) words – gestures, facial expressions, tones and rhythms of voice, etc., may all be influential in giving structure to, in mediating, our higher mental functions. Vygotsky (1986) notes this in his comment: “Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency, which holds the answer to the last ‘why’ in the analysis of thinking... [And] to understand another’s speech, it is not sufficient to understand his words – we must understand his thought. But even that is not enough – we must also understand its motivation” (pp.252-253). Indeed, to repeat, we find Vygotsky (1986) expressing just this view in following Goethe in his claim that “In the beginning was the deed” (p.255) – a focus on the whole expressive-responsive activity of our bodying forth our utterances is required if we are to understand how we can be so affected by each other’s words.

This, then, is the power of people’s living expressions: they do not just passively represent a circumstance beyond themselves as a dead picture needing interpretation; they have ‘life’ of their own. Not only do they actively ‘call’ on us to respond to them in a characteristic fashion, but in ‘pointing beyond themselves’, so to speak, they expectantly orient us toward, i.e., bodily prepare us for, the occurrence of something to an extent specific not yet visible in our surroundings. In this sense we can say that they are uniquely expressive of invisible but “real presences” (Steiner, 1989; Shotter, 2003), agentic presences at work in an individual’s ‘world’ shaping their conduct. These are the same forms of behavior that, in the process of development, that others formerly practiced with respect to him or her, that the child now begins to practice with respect to him or herself (see Vygotsky, 1966, pp.39-40, quoted as an epigraph above).

To get a more detailed sense of what in practice these forms of behavior are like, let us consider a mother saying to her son, as he comes into the kitchen from the garden, leaving dirty footmarks from not having wiped his feet on the doormat: “Stop! Just look at what you’ve done! There... behind you... on the floor... all those dirty footmarks! Wipe your feet next time.” Imagine the sequence, her pausing, her pacing, intonation, her exaggerated facial expressions, her body postures. Imagine the sequential unfolding of her son’s reactions as he responds to her utterances. Imagine him not turning to look behind him, and his mother repeating: “Look behind you... on the floor... look when I tell you to look... what do you see? Tell me... tell me out loud!” She doesn’t just issue her talk toward him with her eyes and ears closed to his reactions. Only if he reacts bodily at each moment as she expresses her displeasure toward him as she expects him to react,
only if he acknowledges at each moment in their unfolding interactions that he understands her as she wants him to understand her, will she go on to her next step in ‘teaching him to behave’, in teaching him the traditional ways of ‘going on’ in his culture!

It is by the use of her expressions, her gestural use of her words, that she responsively commands and directs various aspects of her son’s behavior: she stops his ongoing movement, disrupts his pursuit of his own aims, re-focuses his attention, and directs him to select distinctive features of his own behavior for attention, and to link or synthesize them to other spheres of behavior in his life – the evaluative dimension of clean/dirty. By her words, she is controlling, directing, and channeling his actions. Indeed, we can see here that some of the most important things we can say to another person, if we are to bring about any changes in their ways of being in the world, are “Stop!, Look!, Listen!” – for it is with these words that we can break into the routine flow of their activity, and can in practice ‘deconstruct’ (Derrida, 1977) their practices, thus to bring their attention to aspects of their own activity previously unnoticed by them. Indeed, this drawing of our attention to previously unnoticed aspects of our own ongoing behavior, is one of Wittgenstein’s (1953) central methods in his philosophy, in his attempt to point out to us possibilities in our circumstances that we have previously overlooked: “...we shall constantly be giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook” (no.132).

What we have here, then, is a focus, not on the kind of understanding of something we have in a science, where we understand, i.e., explain, an event in terms of its theoretical representation, but the kind of understanding we have another person’s utterance of our everyday exchanges with them. Rather than a representational-referential understanding, we have what we might call an understanding of a relationally-responsive kind24. Here, then, is the crucial way in which words – not dead word-forms or patterns, but spoken words in the course of their being bodied forth by a living speaker – can exert a moment by moment ‘shaping’ function in the sequential unfolding of a person’s activities. And what earlier is spontaneously ‘called out’ from us by others around us, according to their requirements, we can later come to ‘call out’ spontaneously from ourselves, according to our own requirements.

In all of this, I have de-emphasized the static, representational, picturing function of our words, the purely formal patterns that can be found, spatially arrayed within them, after they have been spoken. The time has now come to emphasize the importance of these formal patterns and the systems, the orders of connectedness that can be set out within them, the discipline they require. For, although the mother described above is instructing him in the traditions of his culture, she is not contributing very directly in his intellectual development. It is here, in this sphere of a child’s development, that systematic and orderly forms of talk (often expressed in written forms, or in scientific terms, or both), provided to the child by someone already versed in their expression, can exert a very important influence in their mental development.

There is insufficient space available in this present article to be able to outline fully Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) account of the mediational influence such systematic and orderly forms can exert in structuring our higher mental functions – the influence of learning written forms of speech is, Vygotsky (1986, pp.180-183) claims, of especial importance. It can provide us in its syntax with ordered structures that enable us to conduct our own intellectual activities in ways that, not only can be routinely elaborated far beyond what is known to us in our immediate experience, but are still couched in terms intelligible to others. It is especially by being instructed in scientific schemes, Vygotsky (1986) suggests, that the child makes such intellectual gains. He gives the following example illustrating a young child’s understanding of causal relations: “A child of eight or nine uses because correctly in spontaneous conversation; he would never say that a boy fell and broke his leg because he was taken to the hospital. Yet that is the sort of thing he comes up with in experiments until the concept “because” becomes fully conscious. On the other hand, he correctly finishes sentences on social science subjects: “Planned economy is possible in the U.S.S.R. because there is no private property—all land, factories, and plants belong to the workers and peasants.” Why is he capable of performing the operation in this case? Because the teacher, working with the pupil, has explained, supplied information, questioned, corrected, and made the pupil explain. The child’s concepts have been formed in the process of instruction, in
collaboration with an adult. In finishing the sentence, he makes use of the fruits of that collaboration, this time independently. The adult’s help, invisibly present, enables the child to solve such problems earlier than everyday problems” (p.191).

What Vygotsky sees as happening here, due to the invisible presence of the teacher’s words, is the gradual shift of the child’s ‘lower’ spontaneous understandings – which have the advantage of being rich in empirical content, but also the disadvantage of not being consciously available to us to use as he pleases – into a new realm: “The strength of scientific concepts lies in their conscious and deliberate character. Spontaneous concepts, on the contrary, are strong in what concerns the situational, empirical, and practical. These two conceptual systems, developing “from above” and “from below,” reveal their real nature in the interrelations between actual development and the zone of proximal development” (p.194) – for it is in that zone that the teacher’s systematic and disciplinary words “from above” can “reach down,” so to speak, to in-form, i.e., to give form from within, the child’s otherwise disorderly everyday understandings25. In other words, what might seem to be the empty verbalisms of abstract, scientific schemes of thought, can be used by the child to gain a degree of deliberate and voluntary control over his or her everyday understandings.

Conclusions: opening up a whole new (old?) realm of research

In other words, Vygotsky sees our consciousness, our deliberate and voluntary control over our own behavior, as developing, not simply by our ceasing to be spontaneously reactive to events in our surroundings – we must still retain our spontaneous reactivity to be able to ‘follow’ the activities of the others around us, instantaneously and unthinkingly – but by our learning to master our own reactions by deliberately directing our own attention to certain features occurring in our surroundings, rather than others, by giving ourselves the appropriate verbal instructions. “It is surprising to us,” Vygotsky (1966) remarks, “that traditional psychology has completely failed to notice this phenomenon which we can call mastering one’s own reactions. In attempts to explain this fact of ‘will’ [traditional] psychology resorted to a miracle, to the intervention of a spiritual factor in the operation of nervous processes, and thus tried to explain the action by the line of most resistance, as did, for example, James in developing his theory of the creative character of the will” (pp.33-34, my emphasis).

What we have discovered in our explorations, then, is that by turning ourselves outward, toward others, rather than inward, toward our own supposed inner workings, we have found aspects of our relations with the others around us that are crucial to us becoming more conscious (con-scientia) in our relations with them. Thus, far from the others around us being competitors with us for limited resources, unless we all offer each other the resources we need to refine or articulate the ‘inner structure’ of our consciousnesses further, we will all suffer. This, then, is the influence of the utterances of others, of their responsive-expressions, their spoken words. They can exert a constitutive effect on our consciousnesses – especially the words of our predecessors and ancestors, our parents and other teachers, the writers and artists around us. Indeed, just as they gave themselves over to the ‘calls’ exerted upon them by the words of others in their surroundings, so can we, if we give ourselves over to their ‘calls’, come to be influenced by their words in the same way – the importance of Vygotsky’s words here, being precisely a case in point.

In this view of consciousness, then, as witnessable knowing along with the others around us, to say that we are conscious in our acting is not simply to say one thing, to ‘explain’ a person’s actions in terms of a special ‘inner theater’ or ‘inner workshop’ (Baars), or in terms of the ‘rational manipulation of symbols’ (Haugeland). It is to explicate the concept of consciousness as a unit of word meaning, so that, as an aspect of our lives with others, we can understand, and account to others, the reasons for our own myriad uses of the word ‘consciousness’ in an unconfused manner. To be able to do that, however, requires us to be reflexively aware, not only of the features in our surroundings to which we are being attentive, and also of the relations and connections26 between them we think important, but of many other aspects of our own inner functioning also. In other words, as a mediating sign that we use to master and direct our own responses to the actions of the others and othernesses around us, our task is to describe the (indefinitely) many roles the word
Primarily, in acting consciously, we are acting voluntarily and deliberately, as we ourselves require, rather than as our circumstances require. In doing this, we are controlling our own initial spontaneous reactions to events in our surroundings through the linguistic direction of our own reactions. An aspect of our being able to do this, is being able linguistically describe the units into which our actions are partitioned, and to correct us if we seem (in publicly shared terms) to be acting incorrectly; that is, we can ‘answer for ourselves’, offer ‘justifications’ and ‘excuses’ for our actions, ‘plan’ and ‘deliberate’ on our actions, ‘cultivate a critical conscience’, and so on. In short, we can act in an ‘accountable’ manner; that is, we can account to the others around us, in verbal terms, for our actions if so required, thus to demonstrate that others can be witnesses to our claims to know what we are doing. Indeed, we can often go further, for we can teach others our ways of relating ourselves to our surroundings – not by ‘explaining’ things to them in abstract terms, but by our use of words at crucial moments in their activities as a means in making them consciously aware of features in their own spontaneous ways of acting. But we can only do this if we are in control over our own relations to our own surroundings. Among the abilities we require if we are to achieve such control, is the ability to pay deliberate attention to things, to conduct our own remembering ‘logically’, i.e., according to a prior, systematic scheme, to notice and describe differences, and ultimately, compare things in terms of their similarities (i.e., make generalizations). And as we do this, as we ‘internalize’ what is out in the public and interpersonal world around us and interweave these ‘outer’ forms of activity into our own ‘inner’ ways of conducting our mental activities, so we can become ‘skillful’ in their conduct, so that, eventually, our ‘higher mental activities’ can come to resemble our ‘spontaneous’ one – and we can once again become unconscious of their nature.

Yet there is a danger: To explore the development of our intellectual capacities, we can begin to explore the effect of (chiasmically) interweaving – as indeed Vygotsky (1978, 1986) did – many other externally devised orderly schematisms into our ways of responding to events in our surroundings: explicit syntactic schemes, numerical schemes, spread sheets, visual diagrams and other displays, and so on, and so on. All of which, in providing us with formal schematisms to ‘logicialize’ our thought, help to render it conscious and voluntary, to bring it into our own individual control. But we must remember that when we ‘logicialize’ on own inner workings in this way, and orient ourselves toward our surroundings in terms of the ‘single orders of connectedness’ they provide, we inevitably ‘respecify’ those events in terms of ‘essential’ features as determined by the imposed scheme. We thus limit ahead of time, how we will respond to them. We can thus quite easily make ourselves deaf and blind to their real nature, to their true, dynamic complexity. In other words, to repeat once again Vygotsky’s (1987) most important point, such a move, intellectually, can result “in products that have lost the characteristics of the whole” (p.45) – we can lose our grasp on all the phenomena that arise out of our living, expressive-responsive relations with the others and othernesses around us.

This danger is, in my estimation, most acute in the current form of our everyday interpersonal relations. For it is perhaps worth reminding ourselves here, that all the emotional and moral ambiguities of our outer lives, and the influence of the voices of others in and on our actions, are of necessity carried over and chiasmically interwoven into the structure of our ‘inner lives’, into the forms of our consciousness, enabling us to (if ‘enabling’ is at all the right word) master our reactions. But if, under the influence of the systematic words of our teachers and the
other intellectual authorities around us, we have mastered our reactions to such an extent that, instead of reacting spontaneously in a bodily way to another person’s actions, our spontaneous reactions are always of a cognitive kind, then we have to think how we will react to them, then how we will react is a continual matter of interpretation, choice, and calculation. In such circumstances, we quite literally can be said to have lost touch with one another, and thus become opaque to each other, and perhaps even to ourselves – for our ‘inner lives’, as we have seen, are revealed only in those of our expressive-responsive activities occurring out in the world between us. As Vico (1968) described it in 1744, in such circumstances people, “no matter how great how great the throng and press of their bodies, ...live like wild beasts in a deep solitude of spirit and will, scarcely any two being able to agree since each follows his own pleasure or caprice” (para.1106).

In this article, then, I have been trying to reorient our current intellectual focus away from cognitive matters, away from our deliberately planned and executed activities, and toward those occurrences that happen to us over and above our wanting and doing (Gadamer) – our spontaneous ways of acting, and the anticipations and expectations to which, in the course of their flow, they give rise. To do this, we must of necessity, try to ‘get inside’ them as they occur; we try to know them, intellectually, ‘from within’ in the same way as they are known spontaneously, from within a person’s acting. This task of ‘getting inside’ our own shared ways of witnessable knowing along with others, is something of a wholly new kind of project for psychological inquiry. But is it? Isn’t it just to try to follow Vygotsky’s original project as he so carefully articulated it so many (some 70 to 80) years ago? Could it be that we have fallen into the very pitfalls in the mainstream approach that he so carefully tried to avoid? In my judgment, I think we have. Thus, to close this article as I began it: I quoted Vygotsky (1986) as saying that we cannot close our study without mentioning the perspectives that our investigation opens up. “This is even more momentous a problem than that of thinking; what I mean is the problem of consciousness” (p.256) – and now we can, in understanding its dependence upon people’s relations with those around them, how momentous it is. For, it opens up the problem of consciousness for the dispossessed, for the handicapped, for the excluded, and for all the other variously underprivileged amongst us – for if they are to share the living of their lives with us, then they too need the opportunities to be instructed into the witnessable ways of knowing shared by all the rest of us. And as Billig (1999) has also pointed out, it opens up a new way of making sense of what is unconscious for us in our relations with each other, what we visibly or hearably are not, often ideologically, talking about in our conversations with each other. An untold amount of work now remains to be done.

References:


1. By the term ‘historical’ here, Vygotsky does not mean we must study events in the past that might have something to do with consciousness now. “To study something historically means to study it in the process of change;” he says (Vygotsky, 1978, p.75), “...to encompass in research the process of a given thing’s development in all its phases and changes - from birth to death - fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for ‘it is only in movement that a [living] body shows what it is’” (p.75).

2. Here, he claims to draw his inspiration from Marx: “The whole of Capital is written according to the following method: Marx analyses a single living ‘cell’ of capitalist society - for example the nature of value. Within this cell he discovers the structure of the entire system and all its economic institutions... Anyone who could discover what a ‘psychological’ cell is - the mechanism producing even a single response - would find the key to psychology as a whole” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.8).

3. Wittgenstein (1975) makes very similar observation as to what is required here: “Why is philosophy so complicated?... Philosophy unties knots in our thinking... but to do that it must make movements which are just as complicated as the knots” (no.2, p.52).

4. “All real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing more than the initial preparatory stage of a response (in what ever form it may be actualized). And the speaker himself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding. He does not expect passive understanding that, so to speak, only duplicates his or her own idea in someone else’s mind (as in Saussure’s model of linguistic communication mentioned above)” (p.69). Indeed, let me add here, that Voloshinov (1986) notes that for Saussure’s structural linguistics, it is a “system of self-identical forms that becomes the essence of language” (p.56, my emphasis).

5. This is not to say that the orderly patterns or ‘logical’ systems to be found in our words (retrospectively, i.e., in our completed utterances) are not also, as we shall see, of the utmost importance.

6. “In the history of the child’s cultural development we met with the concept of structure twice. First, this concept arises in the very beginning of the history of the child’s cultural development, forming the initial factor or point of departure of the entire process; secondly, the very process of cultural development must be conceived
as a change of this initial, basic structure and a rise, on its basis, of new structures characterized by a new correlation of the parts. The former structures we shall call primitive; they are the natural, inborn psychological whole conditioned mainly by biological characteristics of the mind. The latter structures arising in the process of cultural development we shall call the higher structure because they represent a genetically more complex and higher form of behavior” (Vygotsky, 1966, p.31).

7. The word theater is, of course, connected with our English word theory. Aristotle used the word theoria to designate those arts in which objects of contemplation can be set out before like characters in a play – whose actions we observe but cannot influence.

8. The terms ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are being used, then, with special meaning here – to make not a spatial or geographical distinction, but one of an agentic kind. We cannot talk of agents as being located like objects simply in space, for they manifest their character not just in space but also through time: hence, although ‘within’ us in the sense of belonging to us, our agency is not necessarily something spatially confined within our bodies; agents may express their mentalities out in the world in what, through time, they do there. And the segments of reality agents occupy are not to be specified geographically, as particular locations in space, but by a quality of ‘connectedness’ between the events ‘within; the segment not possessed by those ‘outside’ it. This is discussed by William James (1890, p.237): there is to our personal consciousness, he suggests, a “sensible continuity;” that is, there is a sense of all the parts of our actions belonging together and being inwardly connected as parts of a common whole – the natural name for that common whole being, James states, is “myself, I, or me.” A much longer, but still preliminary exploration of these issues can be found in Shotter, J. (2002).

9. In Lacan’s (1977) terms, the Other is a symbolic order which “organizes the relations between the subject and the real world” (p.xi, my emphasis).

10. Wittgenstein (1953) remarks: “The feeling of an unbridgeable gulf between consciousness and brain-process: how does it come about that this does not come into the considerations of our ordinary life? This idea of a difference in kind is accompanied by slight giddiness, – which occurs when we are performing a piece of logical sleight-of-hand... When does this feeling occur in the present case? It is when I, for example, turn my attention in a particular way on to my own consciousness, and, astonished, say to myself: THIS is supposed to be produced by a process in the brain! – as it were clutching my forehead. –...But I did not utter the sentence in the surroundings in which it would have had an everyday and unparadoxical sense. And my attention was not such as would have accorded with making an experiment. (If it had been, my look would have been intent, not vacant.)” (no.412).

11. As he puts it, to the extent that computers can manipulate arbitrary ‘tokens’ in any specifiable manner whatever, “we need only arrange for those tokens to be symbols, and for the manipulations to be specified as rational, to get a machine that thinks... Indeed, if that traditional theory is correct [that intellection is essentially the rational manipulation of symbols], then our imagined computer ought to have ‘a mind of its own’: a (genuine) artificial mind” (Haugeland, 1993, p.4).

12. This distinction is to do with the way in which we deal with our sense of how something is real for us, of how its nature is not just open to any interpretation we wish to put upon it. While scientific or objective realism wants to talk of things in our surroundings as having a life of their own independent of us. The distinction is to do with the way in which we deal with our sense of how something is real for us, of how its nature is not just open to any interpretation we wish to put upon it. While scientific or objective realism wants to talk of things in our surroundings as having a life of their own independent of us. I want, following Rudd (2003), to talk of them as having a life of their own in relation to us. Rudd (2003) calls this “expressive realism,” and as I see it, it is quite consistent to hold to an expressive realism within the context of a thoroughgoing social constructionism (Shotter, 1984, 1993a&b).

13. This paragraph is missing from the 1986 Kozulin translation, but appears on page 126 of the Minick translation.

15. Note here Wittgenstein’s (1953) remarks about whether there is as such a thing as “expert judgment” in this sphere, and whether it can be taught (p.227): “Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through ‘experience’.-Can someone else be a man’s teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right tip.-This is what ‘learning’ and ‘teaching’ are like here.-What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right. Unlike calculating-rules.”

16. Here, I will quote from Minick’s (1987) translation, as this issue is spelt out there in much more detail. Indeed, with regard to the three translations of Vygotsky’s Thought and Language, or Thinking and Speech, I will mostly quote from Kozulin’s 1986 translation – it being now perhaps the most accessible to everyone. But I will quote from the other translations when I think (for my purposes) the phrasing is more evocative. (Given Vygotsky’s account of the meaning and the sense of words, he would have much to say about the effect of different translations on our actual, practical responses to his written words.)

17. See note 2 on Vygotsky’s (1978) concern to “discover what a ‘psychological’ cell is...” and his thought that this would lead to “the key to psychology as a whole” (p.8).

18. In using the term chiasmic, I am following the lead of Merleau-Ponty (1968) who entitles chapter 4 – in his book The Visible and the Invisible – “The Intertwining - The Chiasm.” I cannot pretend to say what “chiasmic or intertwined relations” in fact are. But what is clear, is that here is a sphere of living relations of a kind utterly different from any so far familiar to us (such as causal or logical relations) and taken by us as basic in our intellectual inquiries. As a hint of what is meant here by referring to the unusual nature of such relations, let me remind you that Bateson (1979), in Mind and Nature, noted that the chiasmic interweaving of our visual relating to our surroundings through our two eyes, gave rise to the presence of depth in our looking.

19. Slightly different translation in 1986, p.168, and in 1987, p.183. I quote the 1962 version here, as it has been one of the most influential ideas – the idea that one can only deliberately do something if, so to speak, a ‘provision’ for it already spontaneously exists in oneself or in one’s circumstances (cf., Vico’s notion of providence) – in my work over many years.

20. “We do not see the human eye as a receiver, it appears not to let anything in, but to send something out” (Wittgenstein, 1981, no.222).


22. Just as Wittgenstein (1953) notes that “there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call ‘obeying the rule’ and ‘going against it’ in actual cases” (no.201), so we can say the same with regard to word meanings: our understanding of them in these cases is exhibited in our spontaneous responsive understanding of them in the context of their use -- see note 3 also, on Bakhtin’s (1986) account of responsive understanding.

23. That is, ‘in’ the individual’s dynamic relations to the others and othernesses in his or her surroundings.

24. See note 3 on Bakhtin’s (1986) relationally-responsive account of our understanding of people’s utterances.

25. It is worth noting here, Wittgenstein (1953) remark that in such uses of language we can “establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language... not the order” (no.132). It is only too easy to mislead oneself in one’s linguistic studies into believing that one has established the order.

26. “A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’...” (Wittgenstein, 1953, no.122).

27. See Wittgenstein’s (1963) remark in note 16.
28. This is where Wittgenstein’s (1953) philosophical investigations have their most crucial application: in revealing the ‘pictures’, the philosophical representations of our human circumstances, that are so extensively interwoven into our everyday uses of language, that we cannot “get outside” (no.115) of them sufficiently to critically examine them.

29. The drawing of our attention to previously unnoticed aspects of our own ongoing behavior, is one of Wittgenstein’s (1953) central methods: “… we shall constantly be giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook” (no.132).

30. See the discussion in Shotter (1984, p.112, pp.116-117), of the ‘political economy of developmental opportunities’ that exists in our societies in the West, in which some people clearly gain more of their fair share than others.