

Book Review

Henri Bortoft (2012). *Taking Appearances Seriously: The Dynamic Way of Seeing in Goethe and European Thought*

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Upstream Thinking, Reversals, and Bortoft's New Realm of Inquiry into Different *Possible Ways* of our Being Human

“This book is about a different way of thinking”
(Bortoft, 2012, p. 10).

“A change in the *way* of seeing means a change in *what* is seen”
(Bortoft, 1996, p. 143).

“What is said does not encapsulate its own meaning, as if it could be fully understood independently of the context within which it is said – where ‘context’ refers to everything that is meant ‘with’ the text (con-text) but which remains unspoken. What is said ‘carries with it the unsaid’, i.e., what is not said but is intended along with what is said” (Bortoft, 2012, p. 162).

Henri Bortoft's new book, *Taking Appearances Seriously: The Dynamic Way of Seeing in Goethe and European Thought*, is, I think, of crucial relevance to

those of us concerned with conducting action research. For in particular, in his discussion of ‘upstream’ thinking as opposed to ‘downstream’ thinking, he emphasises what it is like to have to conduct one’s investigations from within the midst of still ongoing, complicated, multi-dimensional, fluid circumstances. His point is, that at the moment, we try to conduct our inquiries too much in downstream terms, i.e., by making use of already well defined concepts, when the developmental processes involved begin upstream, in terms of much more diffuse, still-to-be-differentiated terms, and it is these that we need to understand. This is very much in line with Toulmin and Gustavsen’s (1996) concerns in their book, *Beyond Theory*. Indeed, as Stephen Toulmin (1996) remarks, in noting that in their approach to *participatory action research*, that he and Bjorn Gustavsen reverse the usual agenda: in which research is based in theory, and instead, they also move upstream by taking as their “starting point the ways in which action research is actually designed and carried out ... [so as] to grasp the actual experience of the action researchers” (pp. 2-3).

This is a crucial move. For in action research, something that was not even contemplated as a possibility prior to the research, can emerge in the course of the research, not as its final result, but as a crucial next topic needing investigation. Conventional research portrays practitioners as people who simply choose and reflect (or reflect and choose). It fails to portray them as participants caught up in already ongoing processes who must produce *from within them*: in the face of both the constraints and limited resources their circumstances offer them, recognisable utterances and actions, recognisable sounds and movements. Involved is a kind of understanding and thinking *from within* one’s immediately present circumstances, what elsewhere I have simply called *witness-thinking* (Shotter, 2005).

It is a kind of momentary knowledge that one can only have *from within* one’s active, ongoing relations with the others and othernesses in one’s surroundings, and which disappears as soon as one’s active involvements with them cease. Thus the process involved is not a simple one-pass, input-output process; it involves a *developmental trajectory*, a movement from diffuse global origins, to more differentiated outcomes. As Gustavsen (1996) makes clear, while field experiments and job design workshops had not in themselves been able to initiate change on a large scale, “they demonstrated that changes that are to encompass

work organisation need a *developmental procedure* at the local level” (p. 18): a most important realisation. Organisational changes cannot just be implemented, *tout court*, they involve an unfolding flow of events in which, at each stage, possibilities become available that were not present earlier.

Bortoft’s concerns are very similar: His concern is not simply with our experiences, but with what is involved in our *coming to* an experience, the developmental flow of our relations to our surroundings and the nature of the events involved.

I begin with two quotations from his new book, *Taking Appearances Seriously*, and one from his 1996 book, because currently, we seem to be living within a mass illusion: that our *world*: those basic aspects of our surroundings beyond the ‘milieu’ or *cultural environment* within which we live our everyday social lives, consists in a realm of separate, already existing, countable things related to each other in terms of precise rules, laws, or principles, all of which are discoverable and can be picked out and talked about with the others around us, unambiguously, in technical terms. In other words, we seem to think that the contexts within which what is said and done do not matter at all to us, and our ordinary everyday language is a constraint on our thinking clearly. Thus, from within this illusion, any bewilderment we experience can only be a consequence of our ignorance: yet more self-contained, de-contextualized (scientific) research is still needed. Indeed, the pinnacle of this illusion is the belief, first voiced by Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), that: “The universe cannot be read until we have learned the language and become familiar with the characters in which it is written. It is written in mathematical language, and the letters are triangles, circles and other geometrical figures, without which means it is humanly impossible to comprehend a single word. Without these, one is wandering about in a dark labyrinth”: in other words, the only *proper* knowledge available to us, is knowledge that can be expressed in mathematical *forms* in terms of which leads to our acting on the basis of *calculations*. Yet in the world today, it is just these notions, of generality, objectivity, and universality, that are in crisis.

The possibility of our living in a less ‘finished’, more streaming, ‘fluid’ world, still open to unforeseeable, ‘first time’ novel developments, in which particular, unique details matter, is excluded within this illusion. Under Descartes’ (1596-1650) and Kant’s (1787/1970) influence, we have taken it that

unless we follow “the secure path of science”: which seems to entail an inquirer to “bring out what was necessarily implied in the concepts that he himself had formed *a priori*” (p. 19), we will end up with “a merely random groping” (p. 17) and our inquiries will be fruitless. Yet, as is now well-known, in remarks before the House of Representatives in October, 2008, Alan Greenspan, the former Federal Reserve chairman, conceded that the global financial crisis has exposed a “mistake” in the free market ideology which had guided his 18-year stewardship of US monetary policy. He called the financial crisis a “once-in-a-century credit tsunami” and that it had “turned out to be much broader than anything I could have imagined.”

But this is just one small example of the many other ‘tsunamis’ that have befallen us in current times. As a result of the many other *actual* tsunamis, tornadoes, floods, mud-slides, and earthquakes that have occurred in recent years that those in the more practical professions have not been well-prepared to deal with: especially those in economics, medicine and health care, environmental management, the crafting of social policy, the growing gap between the rich and poor, etc., etc., the question at last begins to emerge: “Might there be another *way*, another form of reasoned inquiry that might help us in acquiring a *prospective sense* of what hasn’t happened yet, a way of recognising *tendencies* at work leading to circumstances that might be (or might not be) advantageous for us, as well as recognising *resources* or *provisions* in our present circumstances, useful to us in taking *needed* (not necessarily *wanted*) next steps?” Can there be a new field of inquiry with its own subject matter and its own methods of inquiry, aimed at providing a new kind of knowledge, that we might call “guiding resources,” for use prior to the conduct of our more situated inquiries, that enables us to ‘see’ the possible openings available to us within them, for taking a next step in innovating new developments in our practices? I think, quite clearly, there can be, and Henri Bortoft’s account of why we need to *take appearances seriously* and to understand the importance of training ourselves in the *dynamic way of seeing*, is a very important step towards our coming to do these two things.

Turning from downstream to upstream understandings in the flow of everyday life activities

“Philosopher consiste à invertir la direction habituelle du travail de la pensée”
(Bergson)¹

Henri Bortoft begins his book with an experience that was clearly of great importance to him: indeed, it seems to have been a major *guiding resource* in shaping his orientation toward the new kind of thinking needed in taking appearances seriously. He recounts taking a walk in the countryside in an effort to allay his anxiety before beginning a set of classes entailing a whole new way of teaching. Instead of talking to a class of students *about* hermeneutics and phenomenology, he faced the task of trying to give them at least “a taste of this way of seeing for themselves” (p. 17). At a point in the walk, he stopped on a bridge over a flowing river. Looking downstream at the river flowing away from him, he inexplicably felt uneasy. Only when he turned in the other direction to look at the river flowing towards him, did he feel better: “I began to be drawn into the experience of looking, plunging with my eyes into the water flowing towards me. When I closed my eyes I sensed the river streaming through me, and when I opened them again, I found that I was experiencing the river flowing towards me outwardly and through me inwardly at the same time. The more I did this, the more relaxed and free from anxiety I began to feel” (p. 18).

The feeling did not last, however, and as he walked down the long corridor toward the classroom, his anxiety was at its height. But as he opened the door, expecting to fall into an abyss of embarrassment, he heard himself saying: “Our problem is that where we begin is already downstream, and in our attempt to understand where we are we only go further downstream. What we have to do

¹ Bortoft uses this quotation from Bergson’s 1903 essay *Introduction to Metaphysics*, to point out that if we are to think *from within* the continuous flow of an undivided reality, then we have, in Bergson’s words, to “to invert the habitual direction of the work of thought” – even though this means “the mind has to do violence to itself” and must “reverse the direction of the operation by which it habitually thinks.” Yet, as we shall see, once we have explored a few of the *reversals* entailed in going ‘upstream’ in our thought, and ‘got into the habit of it’, many previously bewildering problems will vanish in the process.

instead is learn how to go back upstream and flow down to where we are already, so that we can recognise this as not the beginning but the end. That's phenomenology!" (p. 18). And it is this still not fully articulated, global whole: the idea that upstream 'things' are not yet fully formed but that they become more well articulated in the course of their flow downstream, that Bortoft uses as a hermeneutic, as an "organising idea" (Bortoft, 1996),² that is *implicitly* at work in him *making sense*, i.e., giving *meaning*, to what, *explicitly*, he does say.

Indeed, Bortoft's turn here to hermeneutics is, I think, of even more importance than his turn to phenomenology. 'Brought up' as a student of David Bohm (e.g., see Bohm, 1980) to think in holographic terms : for in a hologram, a whole visual scene is 'present, so to speak, in every point on the whole photographic plate, while every point in the scene is 'present' in the whole plate, "it became obvious immediately that the holographic approach to wholeness, with which it was intended to replace the systems approach, had a form which is very similar to that of the hermeneutic circle, and hence that what we thought of as a 'holographic' survey could equally well be thought of as a 'hermeneutic' survey" (Bortoft, 2012, p. 15). What is different, however, is that in our everyday lives, a *developmental* flow of undivided activity is at work. Thus, rather than simply being already 'present', both the relevant 'whole' and its 'parts', says Bortoft, using Heideggerian terminology, 'presence' or 'come-to-presence', i.e., *emerge*, together within a period of time.

In this *way* of seeing, then, unique, uncompleted 'time-shapes' thus become more important to us in our inquiries than nameable, completed spatial-shapes, i.e., forms or patterns out in the world. They become more important because they arouse *tense feelings* within us, unique *expectations* as to what we next *need* to make contact with as we move around in our surroundings, if we are to relieve the *felt* tensions they arouse in us; they can thus both *motivate* and *guide* us in our conduct of our inquiries.

² "The role of the organising idea in cognitive perception is of such an active kind that if the idea changes, then *what* is seen changes. In this case what is seen is changed *from within the seeing itself*, and not by the addition of a further sensory factor. The new organizing idea makes it possible to see what has not been seen before. The transformation can be quite dramatic" (Bortoft, 1996, p. 142).

It is the character of these action motivating and action guiding *sensings* that we must try to attend to as we begin to make the difficult move to go back upstream, and to try to make sense of what it is like to ‘flow down’ to where we already think of ourselves as being. We must try to shift our attention away from *what* we tell others (and ourselves) we are attending to, and try instead to attend to what is involved in our *doing* it. We must attend to the *particular details* of what is involved in our *acts of looking* in order to see the distinct, nameable ‘things’ that we can point out to others as being *what* we are looking at, or observing. Doing this, we might notice that we first blink our eyes, and then wait while we allow them to attain a point of fixation and to arrive at a clear focus; we might then, perhaps, just point, and say, “look at that!”, or we go further, and try to choose some appropriate words to express *what* we are focussing upon, ‘no, it’s not actually the gate I was looking at, but it’s bright yellow colour; I’ve not seen such a bright yellow as that before.” Similarly with our acts of listening in order to hear something, and so on. But there is still something missing from this account. Seeing or hearing some ‘thing’ is an *achievement* of ours, and we need to undertake an organised sequence of *tasks* in ‘bringing off’ such achievements successfully: or else our experiences remain radically indeterminate, and we have to say, “yes, I can hear a noise, but I can’t make out at all what it is.”

Indeed, we not only might fail to achieve a clear outcome in making sense of *what* we take ourselves to be seeing or hearing, we can also quite easily be stupid or careless in what we claim to have arrived at perceptually. Taking appearances seriously means, among many other things, accepting that a kind of *reasoning* is at work in our making sense of what is occurring around us, and it can be done well or badly according to what we *try* to do in our efforts at doing it well.

What Bortoft is introducing us to, then, in recounting the formative influences at work on him in his river experience, is that in our everyday lives we face *two* kinds of difficulty, not just one. There are those seeming more prominent kinds of difficulty that we talk of as *problems*, that we can think of as *solving* by fashioning a logical, intellectual framework within which to think. But there is another kind of difficulty, and there are those other kinds of difficulty that we might call, difficulties of *orientation*, difficulties to do with finding a *way* of relating oneself to one’s surroundings. And clearly, as Bortoft turned from his *downstream* view of the river’s flow to an *upstream* view, his whole *felt sense* of

his engagement with its flow changed. Not only did a “Gestalt switch”, as in the ambiguous duck/rabbit figure, occur, but more than that: as he ‘turned’ to relate himself in a new direction to the river’s flow, he was spontaneously ‘taught by it’ a new way of making *sense* of its flow, of it as flowing *through him* inwardly as well as outwardly towards him. Here was a distinct, dynamical ‘time-shape’ that he could use to think *with*: not a framework *within which to think*, but an organising idea to keep ‘alongside himself’, so to speak, as he gathered fragments of experience here and there and attempted to find inter-related places for each of them within a larger unity. This is a process in which we can arrive at, not a completed, objective understanding that we can give a name to, but a *performative*³ understanding that we can make *use of* in ‘shaping’ what we *enact* and *say*, in very precise fashion in fact, what it is *like*.

Reversals

This, of course, leads to a reversal of one of the basic priorities in Western thought: Instead of ‘cool reason’, our feelings⁴ and sensings come to be of first importance. It is our *sensing of similarities (and differences, which inform us of a uniqueness)*, not our seeing of patterns, that becomes a human capacity of primary importance to us: indeed, it is basic to our seeing a pattern *as* something that we are prepared to call (name as) a pattern. But this is just one reversal among very many others.

Among some of the first shifts entailed, once we switch to upstream thinking, is a shift in the *starting point* for all our subsequent inquiries. As we saw above, in the Cartesian/Kantian scheme of things, inquirers must “bring out” what is necessarily implied in the concepts that they themselves have formed *a priori*. It

³ I am deliberately using the word ‘perform’ here to resonate with Austin’s (1962, 1970) notion of ‘performative’ utterances which, as well as *stating* facts, also ‘do’ something out in our social worlds.

⁴ I talk of feelings rather than of emotions, as I’m thinking of the way blind people feel their way forward through the ‘upness’ or ‘downness’ of the terrain before them as they scan it with their long canes, or how we feel the slipperiness of the snow and ice on the road through the steering wheels of our cars, and so on, through to the feelings of ‘friendliness’ or hostility’, ‘carefulness’ or carelessness’, etc. we can feel expressed in the unfolding dynamics of people’s expressive activities.

is thus assumed that our inquiries must be *deliberately* conducted inquiries, inquiries in which we intentionally set out to discover some ‘thing’ we think of as being already in existence awaiting our discovery of it. And in such inquiries, we make certain *observations* on the basis of what our prior theories predict we should expect to see: where our theories work in terms of *idealisations*,⁵ that is, in terms of events that are brought into being only in the specially prepared conditions of the experimental laboratory, conditions which are hardly ever realised in the hurly-burly of everyday life.

In other words, we have far too readily assumed the separateness, and thus already determinate nature of reality: that it already consists of separate, nameable, elemental things in motion according to pre-established laws. Whereas, ‘things’ in our everyday lives, however, are much more indeterminate, and a lot of our learning is of a much less deliberate kind: the development of our sensitivities to thing-like structures in our surroundings; the way our utterances within our mother tongue are intra-related with them; and many other features to do with *being-like* the others in our immediate surroundings, all just seem to *happen* to us. They *co-emerge* in the course of our practical involvements with the others around us.

Thus we badly need to make ourselves a bit more aware of the easily unnoticed or ignored ‘inner moves’ we execute within ourselves and amongst us in arriving at a sense of something as being a ‘thing’ for us in our surroundings. Thus, before proceeding any further, I would just like to list in note form some of the ‘reversals’ in our taken-for-granted ways of thinking about how our inquiries might best be conducted. Perhaps the first and most important is:

1. Instead of starting downstream, with idealised, theoretical simplicities, and building up to complexities, we can find starting points for our inquiries upstream, and begin *from within* the midst of our embedding in the complicated flow of our local circumstances.

⁵ As is well known, friction, air resistance, and other contextual details are usually ignored in physical theories, just as Chomsky (1965) talked only of “an ideal speaker-listener” (p.3), and again, ignored in his theories of linguistic competence how we shape our utterances in relation to the circumstances of their utterance.

And, as we will see, this is not as bewildering a starting point for our inquiries as at first we might think. For, after all, we are not like, say Oliver Sacks's (1985) Dr. P: the man who mistook his wife's face for a hat, in that we do not continually have to 'figure out', on the basis of fragmentary evidence, as to whether the tall, human height shapes around us, covered in cotton, woollen, and other fabrics, are actually living human beings or not. We come to *sense* that fact, immediately and directly, along with many, many others, as we gradually learn, without any explicit, classroom teaching, how *to be* fully responsible, enculturated members of the society into which we have been born. To use a phrase of William James (1890), we have "an acutely discriminative sense" (p. 253) of the unique (music-like?) 'time-shapes' of such *dynamic* unfolding movements, even when no particular nameable 'thing' as such comes to mind. Other important reversals are:

2. Our bodily movements out in the world are more important to us than our thinkings: "In effect, *movement forms the I that moves before the I that moves forms movement*," says Sheets-Johnstone (2011, p. 119).
3. Our activities shape our brain as much as our brain shapes our activities.
4. "Mind arises through communication by a conversation of gestures in a social process or context of experience – not communication through mind" (Mead, 1934, p. 50).
5. "... humans do not converse because they have inner thoughts to express, but they have thoughts to express because they converse" (Billig, 1987, p. 111).
6. "We think that we give meaning to words, whereas in the first place it is words that give meaning to us" (Bortoft, 2012, p. 139).
7. What *just happens* to us is much more important to us than what we achieve in our *wanting* and *doing*, it provides the 'background' from out of which our wantings and doings emerge and into which they return to exert their influence.

8. Feelings as judgements... beginning with *feelings* rather than calculations... our sense of a 'something' as being of value and thus of importance to us... even if we don't yet know of its nature...
9. *What I* as an agency thought *I* was 'bringing forth' begins to act in me as itself an agency to teach me a new 'way of looking', or a 'new way of thinking'... a new style of painting comes on the scene, we are at first disoriented, but later we find that *it* has taught us a new 'way of looking'⁶.
10. Mechanistically we talk of stimuli *causing* responses, yet it is the living responses of organisms that constitute, i.e., give not form but value to, the stimuli that they orient towards.
11. Rather than *regularities*, or *repetitions*, or *rhythms*, we need to work with *singularities*, *particularities*, or *contextualised details*... what are usually dismissed in scientific psychology as 'anecdotes'.
12. What is initially *indeterminate* is initially of more interest us in our inquiries than what is already well-known to us... rather than the continual re-discovery of sameness, our interest is in discovering what wasn't in any way foreseeable.

As we move upstream, so to speak, to those beginning-moments in the flow, say, of speech communication, we find events occurring of a quite *different kind* to those which can develop from them later (Shotter, 2002, p. 121). Upstream, although already articulated, differentiated, or specified to a degree, they are still open to yet further differentiation or differencing: but now, only *from within* the differencing or articulation that has already occurred. A male student says to a female student: "There's a really interesting movie on at the campus cinema this evening." And she straightaway replies: "Are you telling me, or asking for a date?" She's relationally clever; she recognises he is deliberately expressing a

⁶ "The origin and primitive form of the language game 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' [Goethe]" (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 31). "But what is the word 'primitive' meant to say here? Presumably that this sort of behaviour is *pre-linguistic*: that a language-game is based *on it*, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking not the result of thought" (Wittgenstein, 1981, no. 541).

still *indeterminate* meaning, open to a number of replies, to avoid the responsibility of explicitly asking for a date.

Indeed, in all these reversals, the upstream reversal is in fact more basic, because more open to determination, than a downstream generality, and provides the wholistic, but rationally invisible, context of possibilities *within which*, hermeneutically, its *thin*, ‘stripped down’, logical meaning becomes apparent.

Bortoft explores this point in a perhaps more strikingly material fashion in relation to plant growth. He notes that the difference between a wild and a cultivated rose is that, botanically, rings of stamens in the wild rose seem to have ‘metamorphosed’ into rings of petals, one organ seems to have turned into another, while in other flowers, we can seem to see the reverse: “So that when we look at a water lily the overall effect is that we [also] seem to ‘see’ one organ turning gradually into another one. *But this is not what is happening*: a petal does not materially turn into a stamen. Rather, what we are seeing here is one organ manifesting in different forms, and not one organ turning into another one: i.e., no finished petal changes into a stamen. The metamorphosis is in the embryonic stage of plant growth and not at the adult stage” (p. 64, my emphasis). An earlier indeterminacy later becomes more specifically determined in different ways from within different developmental contexts.⁷

It is at this point that he introduces what is, perhaps, the most important idea in the book: the idea of the *self-differencing* organ. What we find when we go upstream, is that “if one and the same organ presents itself to us in different forms, then each organ *is* that organ, but differently, and not *another* organ – Proteus is always one and the same Proteus, not another Proteus” (Bortoft, 2012, p. 71). This means that, whatever nameable ‘thing’ or ‘object’ we might see before us at any one moment in time, we should look to see in its appearance, in its *way of appearing* as such to us, the *ways* in which it can “become different from itself whilst remaining itself instead of becoming something else” (p. 71).

⁷ This is an approach already being applied in stem cell treatments for blood disorders. In our bone marrow, there are two types of *Stem cells*: primitive (immature) cells, myeloid and lymphoid stem cells (these derive from even more primitive cells called common *pluripotent* stem cells). Some of these cells remain as stem cells while others go through a series of maturing stages (precursor or blast cells) before forming into mature blood cells.

For it is in this *movement*, in self-differencing, developmental dynamics of living movement: in the flow from up- to downstream, that we can *sense* the *meaning* of such movements for us; their meaning is not to be found in their finished, objective *forms*. And this is how what in downstream thinking are seen as two opposite and separate, contradictory tendencies can seem to be at work within the same organism.

And so this theme continues on into the penultimate chapter: *Catching Saying in the Act*, where Bortoft remarks: “Although we may talk about ‘language and the world’, the ‘and’ is fictitious because it implies that we could have ‘language’ and ‘world’ *separately*. But in fact we cannot, even though we are accustomed to thinking as if we could” (p. 147, my emphasis). Indeed, we meet exactly this separatist thinking when people talk of a person’s “body language,” as if on the one hand, there is their spoken language, and on the other, their expressive, bodily, gestural movements, when in fact they are all of a piece. “It only looks like language *and* the world: as if they exist independently and are brought together extensively, when we begin downstream with the world already languaged. But if we shift upstream to try to catch language in the act, then we find, not just that language discloses world, but that language and world are disclosed *together*. The ‘language-world’ is really the concrete phenomenon, from which ‘language on its own without the world’, and ‘world on its own without language’ are abstractions” (p. 149). Our growing into a languaged world when young really is a matter of our growing into a certain, specific *way* of being a certain kind of human being. To fully learn to speak another *first* language, is learning to live in another *world* altogether.

And all this means that, as Bortoft makes very clear in a short final chapter, that we have got it seriously wrong in thinking that we ‘picture’ or ‘represent’ *in consciousness* what is ‘out there’ in the world at large, and that we can find the *meaning* of people’s words as expressions of their ‘thoughts’, by assuming that it is *contained* in the *forms of words* appearing in their utterances: which is, of course, the assumption made in countless research inquiries based in interview transcripts. It is *transitions* that matter, and we express our *meaning* in the *differencing* that occurs as we move on from one ‘state of affairs’ to another. Thus it is our *words in their speaking* that matter to us, not the *patterns in words already*

said. We don't have to wait until a person has finished speaking before we can sense 'where they are trying to go' in their speaking.

Conclusion: On coming to be human, differently

As we saw above, as we grow into the languaged world around us, we grow into a *consciousness*, into a sharing *with* (con~) the others around us of a *languaged-awareness* (~scientia) of *our* surroundings. As such, it is a languaged awareness which in its upstream incarnation, as Bortoft (2012) makes magnificently clear in this book, is forever open to yet further development, but which in its downstream *forms* can easily become 'fossilised'. And it is difficult not to over-emphasise the importance: in social policy making, health-care, financial affairs, economics, environmental thinking, etc., etc., of the shift in our thinking that Bortoft is outlining in this book. If we are still going to think *on paper*, we need to a great deal of imaginative work to make clear to ourselves the *social* and *human* consequences of our actions. We cannot just rely on what *ideally* they should be; we need to understand actually what they *will* be.

I began this review of it by suggesting that we currently seem to be living within a mass illusion. Bortoft (2012) succinctly expresses it as manifesting in our current assumption that, "truth is what is discovered by science,... and as such it takes the form of being the very same for everyone," and "we can see this very clearly in the universalism of the mathematical style of thinking which has gradually dominated since the time of Descartes: and which is now applied so widely that we just take it for granted, even though there are many kinds of situation where it is highly inappropriate" (p. 168). Whereas, "what we can call the 'hermeneutic style of thinking' *turns this inside out*. What looks like the sheer plurality of many different viewpoints, and hence seemingly subjective becomes instead objective manifestations of something coming-to-be differently in different contexts and situations" (p. 168, my emphasis).

Our current downstream thinking is, we can say, (i) *beside the point*, in that it orients us toward seeking regularities, already existing forms, which diverts our attention away from those fleeting moments in which we have the chance of noticing previously unnoticed events that might provide the new beginnings we seek; it is also (ii) *after the fact*, for our aim is to understand the as-yet-non-

existent activities involved our approaching nature differently, not that of discovering already existing factual states of affairs. Or, to state it differently, as thinkers, concerned only to bring out what is necessarily implied our *a priori* concepts, we arrive on the scene too late, and then look in the wrong direction, with the wrong attitude: (i) *too late*, because we take the ‘basic elements’ in terms of which we must work and conduct our arguments to be already fixed, already determined for us by an elite group of academically approved predecessors; (ii) *in the wrong direction*, because we look backward toward supposed already existing actualities, rather than forward toward possibilities; and (iii) *with the wrong attitude*, because we seek a static picture, a theoretical representation, of a phenomenon, rather than a living sense of it as an active agency in our lives.

To orient ourselves intellectually, in relation to still developing phenomena, we require another mode of inquiry. But where might we begin our explorations in the search for it, if we cannot begin from our *a priori*, theoretical assumptions and suppositions? We can only begin with our *noticings*, and with the *acutely discriminative sense* that we can have of their qualitative nature. We can thus begin, both with our own sensings, and with our noticing the spontaneous expressions of others as they respond to events occurring to them in their surroundings.

As an example of someone who has been very clear about the need to adopt such a different starting point, is Amartya Sen (2009) in his book, *The Idea of Justice*. He begins it by quoting Charles Dickens’s who, in *Great Expectations*, put these words into the mouth of the grown up *Pip*: “In the little world in which children have their existence, there is nothing so finely perceived and finely felt, as injustice” (p. vii), where the grown up *Pip* is recollecting a humiliating encounter with his sister, *Estella*. In other words, Sen wants to begin his inquiries, not by asking what a perfectly just society would look like (Rawls, 1971), but from our *felt sensing of a something being* unjust, from our *disquiets*, from our feelings of *things being not quite right*.

Why? Because: “What moves us, reasonably enough,” he remarks, “is not the realisation that the world falls short of being completely just, which few of us expect, but that there are clearly remediable injustices around us which we want to eliminate” (p. vii). Thus, by situating ourselves within a particular practical situation in it is possible to have a *shared sense*, along with all the others around us, of a particular *injustice* at work; there is a real chance of all involved, working

together, to arrive at a way of remedying it. For they can all find in such a situation both a guiding motivation, and, as they mentally move about within it, *ways* to bring to light the *resources* needed to move on from that injustice, where the *ways* needed will involve their *thoughts* and *ideas*.... not to be used as explanatory devices, but as “organising ideas” to think-with, to hold alongside themselves as aids in our coming to a *felt sense* of what the particular injustice in question is both *like*, and yet also *different*.

Indeed, as Toulmin (2001) notes: “Not for nothing did Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, present ‘cruelty’ as something we can recognise for what it is, with the same confidence that we identify a triangle; nor does one need to be an Athenian, or even a Hellene, to share in such human perceptions. We recognise these things in our hearts, and only perversity or corruption can blind us to them” (p. 214).

Thus, my overall aim in exploring Bortoft’s new, dynamic way of seeing in *Taking Appearances Seriously*, has been to pursue this question: “Is it possible to devise, as part of a new approach to the study of actual everyday life activities, a special way of ‘seeing’ them which will not, on the one hand, distort their nature, but which will, on the other, allow us as professional social and environmental scientists to deepen and enlarge our understanding of them?”, and I think on the basis of what Bortoft offers us in *Taking Appearances Seriously*, the answer, clearly is: “Yes!” In other words, we need to relinquish the still unfulfilled dream, and, as he sees it, the *forever unfulfillable* dream, of our gaining the very general objective results we currently seek in our inquiries, and to be content with the limited, partial, and situated results that we *can in fact obtain*: which, in the end, both he and I believe, will turn out to be, perhaps surprisingly, to be of far greater practical use and value to us. And in the process, we would become very a different kind of human being.

And in particular, in relation to participatory action research, as Toulmin (1996) points out, like clinical medicine, we are seeking *phronesis* (practical-moral wisdom – PMW) rather than *episteme* (a theoretical-explanatory grasp – THG). In our urge for quantitative knowledge, we tend to forget that THG depends on PMW, for scientists with no sense of responsibility for their own actions would not be able to distinguish what occurs, and what does not, as a result of their manipulations in the testing of their theories. But PMW is a kind of

knowledge, Toulmin (1996) points out, whose focus is “particular not universal, local not general, timely not eternal, concrete not abstract (p. 3). It is learned along with our leaning of our everyday language, and is the source from which all our more theoretical forms of talk and calculational sign-systems are derived. In moving upstream, in taking a more developmental stance in our inquiries, we must get in touch with, as Bortoft suggests, the processes within *what* we talk of as *having experienced* emerges; we need to get a sense of the unfolding process involved; to re-experience the *coming into experience* of the topic or issue in question.

Toulmin (1996), in outlining what is involved in doing this, quotes Wittgenstein (1953) as advising: “Don’t think, but look!” (no. 66). Where the kind of looking needed is a *participatory, exploratory looking*, not *external observing*; that is, it is a looking *from within* our involvements with others in relation to the shared task in hand, with the aim of noticing previously unnoticed details. External observing often leads, as Rorty (1979) puts it, to “a self-deceptive effort to eternalise the normal discourse of the day” (p. 11), in which by “eternalise”, he means, make into a central, fixed, golden principle, a stable anchor point around which our further inquiries *must* rotate.

Thinkers who are looking at spread sheets, at information or data *on paper*, are not thinking like participants in everyday life activities; they are not thinking *with* or *from within* a dynamic sense of the actual concrete circumstances in which later they must act. They are working in terms of generalities, not particular details. They have no use for the *feelings*, for the *sensings*, that they *will* find happening to them, feelings which *will* occur within them as living bodies in response to the particular events that *will be* occurring around them. They ignore these events as mere *appearances*, for it is the supposedly simple *hidden orders* behind or underlying such appearances that such thinkers must seek: in assuming the future will be like the past, they want to know the *causes* of such events. The *details* of the *to-be-present* circumstances, and what *anticipations* they might then arouse, are thus unimportant to them.

This, as we have seen, is to *reverse* the flow of events, to assume that what occurs downstream as the *result* of a developmental flow of events can be taken as the upstream starting conditions for a similar flow of events elsewhere. But if we are to avoid this, if we are to characterise the *specific* openness and *specific*

indeterminacy, and thus the limited possibilities available for our next steps, within a uniquely specific situation, then we must be careful in the language we use. Indeed, the importance of our *use* of language in our participatory looking cannot be over emphasised. As Bjorn Gustavsen (1996) remarks: “In recognising the constitutive role of language for the way in which reality is perceived, the nature of language, and the formative processes behind it, [become] key issues for the theory of science... Everyday language... is not so much a series of pictures of reality as a set of instruments enabling people to *deal* with reality. Each word is an arbitrary collection of signs or sounds: its meaning is found in its *use*” (p. 7). For the way people act in and towards situations is very much influenced by the ways they talk about them, i.e., atomistic talk is associated with atomistic thought and action; relational talk with relational thought and action. And this is what Bortoft is doing here in his new book: he is trying (as he entitles one of his later chapters) *To Catch Saying in the Act*, to bring us to a recognition of what the event of something coming-to-be in language is like, what it looks like, feels like, and sounds like: thus to notice the part these features play in our inquiries.

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