

## **DARKNESS IN THE THEATRE: THE PERCEPTION OF THE EMBODIED SELF IN ACTION**

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*Drawing on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, especially his concept of bodily space, the author elaborates the parallel between the actor on stage, inhabiting many characters, and the person in the world, acting in within alternative sets of meanings. By juxtaposing Kelly's geometric model of personal meaning with Merleau-Ponty's basically theatrical view of the bodily situational space in which we each find ourselves, the paper explores the dimensionality of that lived space from which our ideas of geometric space are abstracted. While the two views may seem at odds—with Kelly making our meaning construction accessible by giving our attentiveness to it a geometric structure, and Merleau-Ponty emphasizing the fundamental inaccessibility of the mystery of how meaning derives from bodily experience—taken together they point us toward a deeper understanding of what Kelly might have meant by saying that a person “lives in anticipation.” This consideration of the actor as person and vice versa leads to a theatrical view of bodily experience in which the person is seen to inhabit multiple spaces of meaning, navigating among them as an actor would set aside a character and take up or ‘become’ another. By showing how spatial movement and meaningful action are intricately intertwined, the paper points toward a consideration of a person’s kinaesthetic sense as much more than a sense of movement—in fact as the perception of the meaning of their own embodiment in action.*

Key words: *personal constructs, embodiment, acting, phenomenology*

In pointing to dimensionality as a significant quality of all experience, the Psychology of Personal Constructs is asserting an essentially spatial or geometric conception of meaning. But this “geometry of meaning” is not a static geometry. Within its framework any change can be viewed as a kind of motion. Indeed, as George Kelly said, “Our emphasis, if anything, is even more strongly upon the kinetic nature of the substance with which we are dealing. For our purposes, the person is not an object which is temporarily in a moving state but is himself a form of motion,” (Kelly, 1963, p.48). He later said that, “One way to think of the construct is as a pathway of movement.” (Ibid. p.128) My own practical work is built upon a synthesis of PCP with the work of FM Alexander, which he termed “psycho-physical re-education.” What I want to do here is to draw on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty to explore the foundations of my work, and also to make some fundamental points about the special significance of the kinaesthetic sense as the sense of our own selves in action.

### **SPACE AS A WAY OF RELATING TO THINGS**

A central premise of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is the primacy of perception, the claim that original experience is prior to any abstractions which we may draw from it. It is whole individual experience from which all other understanding derives. All of our theoretical constructs, all models of material reality, all principles which we may use to account for the events we experience—all of these are *abstracted* from that original personal experience, and are thereby secondary to it. Whether in the case of my perception of a world or of my perception of my own self, the whole is in an essential sense *prior* to the parts because it is the context within which they *are* parts. Merleau-Ponty's insistence on the primacy of perception has much in common with the views of John Dewey, whose philosophy and psychology Kelly said, “can be read between many of the lines of the psychology of personal constructs” (ibid, p.154).

In a series of papers, Trevor Butt has discussed various points at which Merleau-Ponty's work has much to contribute to the psychology of personal constructs—particularly in emphasizing the bodily dimensions of construing. In this paper I want to give particular emphasis to the *bodily spatiality* that Merleau-Ponty finds at the root of perception. An exploration of this spatiality can help lead us to a consideration of personal meaning for a whole person—meaning that is constructed, and also embodied.

Merleau-Ponty's idea of spatiality is derived directly from his idea of the primacy of perception for the incarnate subject. The spatial quality of an individual's situatedness is bound up both with the pre-objective roots of his perception and with his embodiment as a perceiving subject. As a conscious subject, I project space around myself, locating objects in it. This space has as its origin that irreducible "here" of the incarnate subject, and, in Merleau-Ponty's words, it "...is not a spatiality of position, but a spatiality of situation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.100). "Space is not the setting in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the positing of things becomes possible...we must think of it as the universal power enabling them to be connected" (ibid, p.243). Thus at root spatiality is not a property of an arrangement of objects, but rather a quality of my relationship to them; indeed it is the power of the perceiving subject to perceive objects as connected. But in common experience things can be "connected" in many ways; the connection of geometric distance and direction is only one way. The ordinary space of geometry—the space of position—can be seen as a subset of the more general space of situation. It is the prototypical space precisely because it is the most abstracted from whole experience. But all perception has a "space-like" structure. If we consider the ordinary visual experience of, for example, looking at a lamp on a table, or of a more general experience of construing the shape and position of the lamp in physical, aesthetic, cultural or political terms, we find ourselves speaking of the "perspective" from which we observe it.

The spatiality from which we derive these perspectives is, however, more than a passive framework for perception, more than an empty space in which perceivable events happen. Both ordinary

geometrical space and the more general space of meaning are grounded in what Merleau-Ponty called "bodily space," and thus have a "kinetic nature." Spatiality has everything to do with motility. It is because it is a space in which I *move* that it can be one in which I perceive. When I view an object from a given perspective, I do not perceive merely an image bound to that perspective. I perceive a whole object, and part of what makes it possible for me to perceive a whole object as such is my ability to move in relation to it. The appearance of an object as it does under present conditions, viewing the lamp from a particular angle under particular lighting conditions, for instance, is inseparable from the context of the other ways it would appear under other conditions. I may literally move to a different part of the room to view the lamp from a different angle, or I may change the lighting. I may or may not actually do so, but it is, in Merleau-Ponty's view, the *possibility* of moving in relation to the lamp that makes it possible for me to perceive it *as* a lamp, with such and such shape, colour, etc. But I could go even further. I could view the lamp, or in some other way interact with it, from a political rather than a physical "perspective." Not only what attributes, but what *kinds* of attributes I notice are themselves conditioned by the perspective I take, and again it is the possibility of taking different perspectives that is the root of my ability to perceive the lamp as such, and to include it in meaningful experience. So while perception holds a primacy over all abstractions that may be drawn from it, perception itself is possible only in a context of action. From a physical, aesthetic or diplomatic perspective, I may perceive the lamp to be cylindrical or pleasingly textured or in an insulting location. These attributes of the lamp are meanings for me from my perspective, and in the context of the other perspectives I might have taken. To perceive it as cylindrical is to know the shape beyond the rectangle I see from the side and the circle I would see from above. To perceive it as inviting is to anticipate reaching out to touch its surface. To be insulted by its position is to appreciate what it would mean to be sitting on the other side of the table. In each case the "taking of a new perspective" is a kind of movement in a space of meaning, and it is fundamentally a bodily movement. As we will see later, the kin-

aesthetic sense, as the sense of a person's own bodily movements, has a special status, and special limitations, in relation to all of the senses by which we perceive the world outside ourselves.

### **FROM OBJECT SPACE TO MEANING SPACE**

How then do we get from a space in which I grasp objects to a space in which I grasp meanings? And from there to inhabiting a world that has meaning for me, and in which my own movements can bear meaning? The answer, I believe, lies in the interplay between the dimensionality of my experience and its continuity. The spatiality of my own body and that of the external universe—the inner and outer dimensions of meaning—are woven together in the continuity of ongoing bodily experience. It is that continuity, that ongoing unity of bodily action, that makes them not merely the dimensions of a space in which I observe, but those of a world in which I act. And their interplay within that continuity gives life a dramatic quality. Both Merleau-Ponty and Dewey emphasize the dramatic quality of personal experience. If, as George Kelly has it, persons are essentially scientists in their anticipating and interpreting of events, then they are also actors in their dramatic engagement *with* events. We can illuminate this bodily spatiality by examining the actor on stage as a specific example of a person in a role.

All existence is situated existence. I exist as a subject insofar as I maintain myself in distinction from the objects of my world. And there can only *be* objects in a world at all because I, as the subject, can say, "I am here" in relation to them. Every possible set of connections among meaningful objects by the situated body-subject is a possible world which that subject may inhabit and with reference to which she can define herself and her actions. According to Merleau-Ponty, "The essence of consciousness is to provide itself with one or several worlds, to bring into being its own thoughts before itself as if they were things (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.130)...and the possession of a body implies the ability to change levels and to 'understand' space" (ibid, p.251). Thus the existence of the incarnate subject consists in constituting for itself at any given moment one spe-

cific world or combination of worlds, and the continuation of that existence depends on the ability to shift from one such world to another. Questions of meaning are always questions of relationship between knower and known. "I am" is a simple assertion; *what* I am is only definable *in relation*. But if space is "the universal power enabling [things] to be connected," then meaning is not in relation to what is, but rather to the ways in which things might have been otherwise. As Kelly says it,

*So any statement we make can well be regarded as the answer to a question we ask—a biased question—and emerges as an indicated choice between alternatives previously posed. Furthermore any act, or experience, can be regarded as having such dimensional properties.... Any act, or feeling, or statement bears equally upon its subjective antithesis without which it has no psychological significance to the person involved. (Kelly, 1979, p.116)*

What I think Kelly is reminding us of in this statement is that cognitive or verbally expressible constructs are in no way primary. Indeed it is quite the opposite; such constructs are themselves drawn from the wider "dimensional properties" of experience. Even more than that, meaning is always in relation to intention. For my personal meaning is not only a relationship between myself and an environment that I "know," it is a relationship inescapably bound up with my actions and purposes within my environment. Such attributes as the "steepness" of a mountain only have the significance they have for me in relation to, for example, my intention to climb it. Any given level of situatedness, any given level of a space of meaning may be abstracted, but the whole only occurs in relation to the embodied intentionality (in Merleau-Ponty's phrase, the "incarnate subjectivity") of a person *in* a situation. Through examination of pathological cases in which the patient lacked precisely this ability to move easily from one "setting" to another, and of experiments in the alteration of the perceptual field, Merleau-Ponty found that "what counts for the orientation of the spectacle is not the objective body but a virtual body with its phenomenal "place" defined by its task and situation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.249). Later he concludes that

“our body and perception always summon us to take as the centre of the world that environment with which they present us. But this environment is not necessarily that of our own life” (ibid, p.285).

### WHAT ACTING REVEALS ABOUT ACTION

It is here that we may draw the parallel between the ordinary person and the actor on stage. The ability to act and to function as an integrated “body-subject” depend on the freedom to choose the level of situational space in which we are to operate, to choose our task and select a set of meanings from those possible for the objects around us. Referring to the actor on stage as a model for the normal person acting in life, Merleau-Ponty says that, “To act is to place oneself for a moment in an imaginary situation, to find satisfaction in changing one’s ‘setting.’ (ibid., p. 135) ...the normal man and the actor do not mistake imaginary situations for reality, but extricate their real bodies from the living situation to make them breathe, speak and, if need be, weep in a realm of imagination” (ibid., p. 105). To act, whether in this sense, on stage, or in life, is an act of reconstruction of meaning. It is not to represent the world but to create a new world that we may inhabit for a time. It is to “take on” dimensions of meaning within which we go beyond attempting to reproduce what we know toward the creation of new experience that is similar to what we know in certain ways. In Kelly’s terms, we are free not only in the dimensions of our construction of meaning but also in the level of its dimensionality. Indeed, we seem to find ourselves free at levels of construction below that at which our conscious attention resides and at the same time determined with respect to levels above it. True freedom then, includes the freedom to move among the levels themselves. This is very close to Merleau-Ponty’s “the ability to change levels and to ‘understand’ space.” It is important to note, however, that since bodily space is the ground from which all other spaces spring, this ‘extrication’ of my real body is never complete.

It is further notable that I can freely take up any of the possible levels of situational space

only because I can never fully be an object for myself. This is one sense in which Merleau-Ponty can describe the spatiality of the body itself as “the darkness needed in the theatre to show up the performance” (ibid., p.100).

It is the constant task of consciousness to establish and maintain the boundaries and contours of a given world, to shape the forces by which that world’s meanings arise, to maintain the global setting always in the explicitly possible grasp of the subject, and thus to continue to give meaning to the self in relation to that world. Indeed, one might want to say that consciousness *is* the performance of this task. This is analogously the task of the theatre and specifically the actor on the stage. A major aesthetic and ontological question has long been, just what is produced on the stage? What do actors *do*? It can be seen in this frame that what they do is precisely to take on a virtual body that is different from (though grounded in) their own habitual body, and it can be further seen that drama consists of creating a world that such virtual people inhabit. A theatrical world is thus not a representation of reality but a reality in and of itself. But it is a world intended to have objective existence for-an-audience. This may be clarified by considering the real “darkness in the theatre” and how it is that Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor can express what it does. In the theatre, the whole world of the play is on the stage; it is a world set off by the rapid transition to the zone of indeterminacy that is the darkness. This world on stage can only *be* a world by being contained within the darkness in the theatre. So also in the life of perception; to cast our gaze anywhere invariably precludes us from seeing somewhere else. To construe our world according to a given set of dimensions makes other dimensions of construction unavailable in that moment. To follow a particular “pathway of movement” renders other pathways inaccessible.

### WHAT IS PERFORMANCE?

If we define performance in a general sense as engaging in an activity as if the quality of the activity matters to us in some way, whether or not anyone happens to be watching, then Performance, in the theatrical sense, is activity in which

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the quality matters precisely because someone is watching. It is a performance “for” that someone. The audience “stands for” the perceptual subject; the stage is a world for them, and they, in darkness, are not objects for themselves. Traditionally, an added aspect of this theatrical darkness has been that it conceals the spectator from the characters of the play; they are the unseen viewer—safe from the gaze of the other—subject, but not object. They are perceptually “on stage,” that is, they are in the world of the play—but are not present to the other in the characters’ world. They can see and hear that world, but they cannot “act” upon it. Each audience member is a disincarnate being, a presence having no *body*. In the last half-century or so several theatrical experiments have been directed toward breaching that protective darkness—as it were, illuminating the viewer from behind and making them potentially object-for-the-character. The darkness is commonly breached in a particular limited way when one goes to a play “with someone.” The transition to darkness is rapid, but it is neither instantaneous nor total.

Having defined the space of the play as the area of the stage, we then proceed to build an environment in that space and characters begin to inhabit it. This discloses another essential distinction between the two kinds of space. Space of position is itself taken to be empty; objects are merely *in* it and it is thus independent of them. But the space of situation, whether as given for-the-audience or for-the-character is wholly wrapped up with those objects which are in it—the set, props, lights, costumes, etc.—and with the movements of the characters which inhabit it, and the very structure of its spatiality is determined by them. The space projected onto the stage by a body-subject (for example, the director) is on one hand an empty area to be filled, and on the other hand an infinity of possibilities to be shaped and formed into the world of the play.

**“ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE...”**

Just what is the actor’s stance in this world, both as actor and as character? The actor takes on the phenomenal body of the character and situates it in the world of the play just as in “real life” a person as body-subject takes up a particular task

or a particular environment of meaning. Just as we may speak of the musician assimilating her instrument into her body, literally “incorporating” it for the task of expressing her musical intention, so the actor, in shifting levels, slips his real body into the new phenomenal body of the character and moves as if it were an instrument that has been assimilated to itself. This is the root of the great concern on the part of actors for the flexibility of their “instrument,” for if an actor has a certain fixed habitual way of moving he will be incapable of fully portraying any character whose habits are inconsistent with that fixed pattern. The classic case is the film star who in role after role basically plays himself. If a large enough audience likes his habitual character he may make a great deal of money, but he is in only a limited sense “acting.” The often-overlooked issue, which incidentally, accounts for the consistent interest in the Alexander’s work among actors, is that it is not enough to cultivate greater access to one’s habitual repertory. One must be able to set aside aspects of one’s habitual self. It is not enough to be able to play characters who have habits that I lack; I also want to play those who lack habits that I have. But this latter task is much more difficult, and this difficulty is a model for the one we all face when we find ourselves unable to respond to our situation as we would like. We find ourselves literally unable to embody the meaning that we wish to convey when the pattern of that embodiment is inconsistent with our general habitual patterns of action. It is as if we find ourselves free, in bodily form, to move in one direction among the levels of construction, but not the other.

On stage this is the crux of the technical problems of motivation and appearance. When actors speak of their character’s “motivation” or of their actions as being “motivated,” they are referring to the ways in which those actions—or rather how those actions are carried out—relate to their characters’ objectives. That is, how well do the characters’ intentions, the actions that express them and the situation in which the characters find themselves fit together. In Kelly’s terms, if the characters are “living in anticipation” then so will the audience be. The world of the stage is a replication, and not a duplication of the everyday world. The task of the theatre is not to be realistic but to be convincing, not to be complete but to be

global. Thus, for example, what would normally be a ladder may be a tree—not a representation of a tree but a “tree” in the world of the play. It is, as object for-the-characters, a tree, and they will react to it accordingly. The audience must at once be able to know the ladder objectively as a ladder and see it through the eyes of the character as a tree.

In life we face a similar need to recognize that an object can have very different meanings simultaneously in different contexts. Just as the actor must have the flexibility to live in more than one reality at a time, the rest of us need the flexibility to live with an openness to multiple interpretations of reality. Dewey repeatedly pointed out that the more we learn, the greater our need for flexibility, but that, unfortunately it is often the case in habitual practice that the more we know the greater the tendency for routine and rigidity.

Every figure presented on the stage including the characters’ actions must have sufficient and proper background—must be “motivated” in the space of situation. The actor-as-character acts within the situation of her world and at the same time the actor-as-actor is aware of herself as object for the audience and for the other actors. Maintaining the balance between the sincerity of motivation of the character and moving so as to be seen as the character is the skill of the great actor. This is accomplished by situating the character as firmly as possible in her environment. One typical method is to invent an autobiography of a character which has at least as many details of her past life as are needed to motivate her action as given in the script. The more detailed this work is, the more complete will be the character’s “history,” the more dimensions of meaning will be evident in the world the character inhabits, and thus the more real their situatedness. Every word the character says, every gesture she makes, embodies meanings from the character’s world. For that is in a sense what history is—the flow of the situatedness of the subject. Once they have assumed the characters’ pasts, the actors can fully locate themselves within their characters’ present situation, and fiction then counts as much as reality.

### **“...AND ONE MAN IN HIS TIME PLAYS MANY PARTS”**

In “real life” of course, we each already have our history fully worked out, and thus every word and gesture is already the embodiment of personal meaning. The point of this discussion is that we are each actors in the worlds of our own experience, and we inhabit the world that we think of as our reality in just this way. Living is a matter of taking on virtual worlds that we in-habit (i.e. engage with our habitual bodies). “All the world’s a stage...” has become the cliché that it is because we recognize that, just as science is the refinement of the anticipatory quality of experience into a formal endeavour, so the world of the stage is the distillation of the dramatic quality of ordinary life. The act of reconstruing, of choosing other dimensions along which to make sense of things is also an act performed by a person as a whole. It is also the taking on and inhabiting of a new world with just these dramatic qualities. Beneath the dispositions toward certain patterns of action that we call habits lies the dimensionality of the habitual space of meaning out of which we construct the world in which we act. For us as for the well portrayed character, there is a continuity between the unquestioned dimensions of meaning that we fail to see as the framework of our interpretation of events and those dimensions of action that are the structure of our habitual routine reactions. Just as a good actor is free to “inhabit” a wide range of possible roles, living in many worlds on the same stage, so every human individual has the capacity to step beyond the world of his habitual construction to inhabit, not just to view, but to live in alternate constructions. In life every event that might be termed a stimulus is a perturbation of the balance in the organization of the whole web of a person’s embodied meanings. It produces a moment of “drama” in which the whole system of the person’s habits must reorganize to produce the person’s “response,” that is, his answer. If the person is too ill, too tired, too rushed, or too bound by routine, then one of his habits may dominate, as if in an attempt to maintain the balance, and the moment collapses before any substantial reorganization can occur. What follows is a linear product of the stimulus and the dominant habit, a mechanical

“reaction” rather than a “response.” This is like a novice actor who tries to “act” old by hunching over and shuffling. What the audience sees is these specific choices filtered through the young actor’s own habitual efforts and tensions. However, if the web of habit and meaning is complex and flexible enough to allow the drama to continue for a time, then what follows is a dramatic response of the whole person. This is more like the actor who directs his attention toward the task of not interfering with his own natural coordination, giving him the flexibility to step outside his own habitual patterns in such a way that what the audience sees is a whole person. Then the mere thought of age makes him appear older to the audience without the need to “do” anything in particular. Dewey argued that the significance of experience, and its aesthetic value, lie not so much in the maintaining of a balance as in the qualities embodied in how balance is repeatedly lost and restored. Thus his support for Alexander’s work, which he saw as a means for *insisting* on that small dramatic space in which a richer restoration, and a fuller response can be achieved.

There is one more apparently technical point that turns out to have great practical significance. We may think of space as a sort of pre-existing emptiness in which objects are located, just as we may think of a stage as an empty space prior to and independent of all of the various plays that will come to be produced upon it. But the stage is only a *stage* in relation to those plays that are on it. It is only prior to them in retrospect—only empty in anticipation of them. In just this way the space of meaning, the dimensions of experience, may seem to be an empty space that waits to be filled with the events of my life. And indeed, dimensions that I have made explicit, or those that I have come to habitually use, do pre-structure subsequent perceptions and actions. They become the coordinates of a space which I in-habit, and which predisposes me toward seeing and doing things in familiar ways. This space is not prior to my experience; its dimensions are drawn *from* it. It is only empty in anticipation of future events, and even future events will remain open to new interpretation. In the case of ordinary geometry, certain relationships obtain within a set of orthogonal xyz-coordinates. Yet these dimensions are not prior to the space in which I draw my figures. I am free to set my origin where

I will, and choose which way the x-axis shall go, or indeed even to use cylindrical coordinates instead. It is only if I come to routinely make the same choice that it comes to appear to have priority. Just so with meaning in general, and especially the “felt meanings” of my kinaesthetic construing. What characterizes experience is not its dimensions but its availability to be understood dimensionally. Just as it is the presence of the actors—their movement on stage—that creates the space in which the play takes place, similarly, it might be said that natural actions create the space in which they occur. But just as an actor in a production of a play that has gone on too long may go through the same motions in a routine way, so the person whose actions have become habitual performs them in the way that has come to feel “normal.”

#### **MOVEMENT AS A THEATRE OF EMBODIED MEANING**

In one of his last works, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty returns to these matters again, drawing a connection between knowing and what he calls the “I can.” In the process he elaborates a quite distinct, kinaesthetic context. What is true for the relationship between my sense of sight and the visible is also true for my sense of touch, in perhaps an even deeper way. I can at one level feel texture, roughness, smoothness, etc. At another level *what* I touch is not textures, but objects. But I do not simply touch them in the abstract, nor do I cast a tactile “gaze” on them. To touch a thing I must reach for it. To feel its shape and texture I must move my hand across its surface. And this is not potential movement, the projected act that I might make. To touch a thing is to engage in actual movement in relation to it. What may be the implicit ground for the spatiality of visual or auditory perception is always explicit in touch. I must move myself to touch the thing. Whether I turn my head to look or reach out my hand to touch, as I move to perceive an object, I find my knowledge of it already in a context of action. But there is more. There is something peculiar, even paradoxical, about reaching out to touch an object. As I reach out with my right hand to touch something, I can feel my own hand—a touch, as it were, from the inside;

I can also see my hand moving toward and over the thing touched. I can even touch that right hand with my own left hand. I am a part of the visible even as I am the one who sees. I am both the one who touches and am open to my own touch—in both internal and external ways. My left hand touches my right as it might touch any other object, except, of course that my right hand returns the touch. And also, as my right hand moves, I “feel” the movement. In a sense my right hand touches itself in movement. The practical consequence of this for-itself/in-itself distinction is that although I am open to my own touch, although I am at least in part visible to myself, although I can hear my own voice, I do not feel or see or hear myself in quite the same way that I perceive the rest of my world. The difference has everything to do with the kinaesthetic. I may make a video or audio recording of myself performing some act and then later watch or listen to it and have an experience something like that of other people observing me in action. I may even make use of these observations to learn to improve the quality of my performance. But watching myself on a video monitor *while* I perform some action is a very different experience from watching a videotape of that same performance later. There is a story about how the author, Arthur Koestler, after having lived in the U.S. for some forty years, chanced to hear a tape recording of his own voice and was surprised to hear that he still spoke with a distinct accent. For years he had “heard” his own voice as sounding just like the American voices around him. Koestler speculated that all that time he had had an habitual expectation of how his voice sounded which he had been perceptually comparing with itself. Of course the expectation always matched itself and thus he never recognized that his voice actually sounded different. It was only when he heard the sound of his voice while he was not at the same time producing it that he was able to make an “objective” comparison and hear his own accent. We have no way, however, of recording kinaesthetic images for later “feeling” separated in time from the action itself. As Merleau-Ponty says, “Just as it is necessarily ‘here’, the body necessarily exists ‘now.’” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.140) So it may be difficult to test the hypothesis that all of our inner experience of

feeling ourselves in action exhibits this kind of characteristic distortion.

It is in this kinaesthetic realm of self-perception where the relation of the person in everyday life and the actor on stage becomes most concrete. It is in the kinaesthetic dimensions of meaning that the problem of the person who is unable to embody a reconstruction of himself finds its paradigm in the actor whose habitual movements narrow the range of characters he is able to faithfully portray. As Butt points out in relation to enactment,

*... the bodily involvement in playing a role, along with the interactions it entails, leads to a knowledge of that role-position which may or may not be spelled out in language. Perhaps fixed roles could be written so as to place more emphasis on posture, movement and comportment. When we see psychological processes as not just cognitive reflections, but embodied, it opens up new ways of moving into and experimenting with new roles.* (Butt, 1998, p. 112)

What I am arguing here is simply that while it is important to recognize psychological processes as embodied, we may fruitfully go beyond this to consider posture, movement etc. in their own right. For each of us in everyday life, as for the actor on stage, our own bodies are the ‘instruments’ of our actions, and what each of us can express with this instrument depends on how we use it.

This brings us back to FM Alexander, whom I mentioned at the beginning. His work was basically the development of an educational method for exploring, in practice, what Dewey called the “continuity of mind and body in action.” The hidden dilemma in everything I have discussed so far is the problem of habit. Because kinaesthetic perception is the perception of my own movements, then as Alexander put it, “The act and the particular feeling associated with it become one in our recognition.” (Alexander, p.131) What Alexander found was that often when we act habitually, using what he called “unconscious direction” of ourselves, we initiate the act in a way that interferes with the natural coordination of ourselves as moving organisms. But this way of acting comes to “feel normal” to us. From a Kellian



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perspective we might say that our acting as we do embodies a commitment to a certain fixed kinaesthetic construal” of the task at hand. This, of course, makes change problematic. The more I try to be right, the more I am driven to the very construal that led me wrong in the first place. And because my construing is “felt” rather than “thought,” it never occurs to me that a reconstruing is possible. What Alexander’s technique amounts to is a means for holding open that small “dramatic space” I spoke of earlier long enough to allow for just such an embodied reconstruing of kinaesthetic meaning. As Alexander developed his method for re-educating ourselves in the continuity of *bodily action*—and our perception of ourselves in action—what he did not do, and why I have worked to bring his work and Kelly’s together, is to fully enough appreciate the dimensionality of meaning. This interweaving of the continuity of perception and action with the dimensionality of personal meaning embodied in action is what I have called “conductivity” or sometimes “conductive reasoning.” To quote Merleau-Ponty one last time,

*“Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts.”* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.88)

Whether I consider myself as a ‘corporeal form’ in ordinary physical movement, or as a ‘form of movement,’ in Kelly’s sense, engaged in meaningful personal acts, the kinaesthetic sense is my means of my own perception of myself *in* movement. It is thus a central, and as yet largely unexplored, factor in all human meaning.

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