University of Alberta

Understanding and Storytelling in Psychology: A Social Poetics Approach to Aboriginal Residential School Stories

by

Chris B. Lepine

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Psychology

Edmonton, Alberta
Spring 2007

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-29889-3
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-29889-3

"Man, the centre of this perspective, is at the same time the *centre of construction* of the universe. And by expediency no less than by necessity, all science must be referred back to him. If to see is really to become more, if vision is really fuller being, then we should look closely at man in order to increase our capacity to live. But to do this we must focus our eyes correctly."

– Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1975)

Dedicated to the former attendees of the Canadian Indian Residential School system and their families, whose legacies we all share in.

Abstract

This thesis introduces Shotter's "social poetics" approach as a set of social-cultural psychological methods useful in coming to understandings of personal expression in psychological research. Specifically, the social poetics approach is used as a way of coming to understandings of the experiential narratives of aboriginal men and women who survived the Indian Residential School system in northern Canada. The social poetics approach is shown to be a set of methods conducive to more "personal" research styles that understand stories and storytelling as expressions of culture-bound personal worlds. I argue that ethnological and participatory research methods are valuable extensions of the social poetics approach that can improve the researcher's sensitivity to cultural meanings. Implications for the use of social poetics in "cultural understanding projects" are discussed.

Acknowledgements

Researching and writing a thesis is no small task, and is as much my work as the work of those who assisted, inspired, and tolerated me throughout its gestation. To this end, I wish to thank my friend and partner Stacey for her unconditional patience, love, and understanding throughout the life of this paper. I wish to thank my family for donating their homes, in which much of this thesis was conceived and written. I must thank my supportive mother; her endless prodding and encouragement has always provided me with the motivation necessary to complete my academic studies. I wish to heartfully thank the Mikisew Cree First Nation for their constant support throughout my academic endeavors, both past and future. I wish to thank my supervisor Dr. Cor Baerveldt and colleague Dr. Leo Mos for providing untiring patience, friendship, counsel, inspiration, and creative guidance from the very beginning. It is difficult to express the gratitude I have for the extent to which they fostered an academic environment where an education of personhood truly became possible.

Of course, this thesis would not have been possible without the generous support of the friends and acquaintances I spoke with during my field work in the north – especially those who attended the Indian Residential School system and had stories to tell of it.

Finally, I must thank Sharon Rose ("Sam") Lepine, whose passing came at a crucial time during the writing of this thesis and will never be forgotten.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is written as a first step toward understandings of aboriginal narratives in northern Canada. Specifically, the ambition of this paper is to eventually come to more psychological understandings of the experiences of ex-attendees of the "Indian Residential School" system in Canada, through the lens of contemporary thinkers in social and cultural psychology.

The particular research practices that this paper begins to articulate were conducted as part of a brief ethnological study of an isolated community located in northern Alberta. During that summer, I was given the opportunity to volunteer, work, learn, and live as a productive member of the community along with permanent residents. Simultaneously, this participation gave me the opportunity to examine the possibilities for conducting psychological research practices in a northern community of mixed ethnicity. The fieldwork began with the assumption that traditional scientific psychological research practices would be insufficient means for coming to understandings of aboriginal cultural practices, and therefore the study was approached with willingness to attempt alternative research methods. While many approaches to experiential research in cultural psychology already exist, this paper problematizes the notion of using any one method as a means for understanding in psychology.

While I worked in the community, I was astonished by the number of residents who had attended the residential school system in the north and had stories to tell about their experiences of it. These people, many of whom had become

productive members of the community, frequently told me the importance of 'moving on' after their residential school experiences. Many agreed that 'getting stuck' in the kind of psychological trauma that they associated with residential school accounted for alcoholism, poverty and suicide among community members. As I listened to their stories, and their reflections upon those stories, I realized that an entire 'way of feeling and thinking' about residential school already existed in the community, and was not immediately understandable for those outside of the experience; especially many approaches in traditional social psychology.

Following such a realization, this thesis attempts to articulate ways of coming up with answers to the question, 'How can we appropriately understand the experiential narratives of residential school ex-attendees in a primarily aboriginal community?' In other words, what *worlds* do these people live in, and are those worlds accessible to psychological inquiry? Finally, if such inquiries are possible, how might our investigations provide opportunities for meaningful understanding between aboriginal residential school survivors and mainstream society?

The Necessity of New Methods in Psychological Investigation

Where classical scientific methods in social and cultural psychology have traditionally focused upon the production of hypotheses for empirical testing, Shotter has illuminated alternative approaches to 'understanding' the nature of the world we live in. This paper begins by articulating interrelated concepts that arose from taking a critical interpretation of Shotter's work, and shows how these themes contribute to a

new practice of psychological understanding in contemporary cultural research and their relevance to my particular form of investigative practices. Accordingly, this paper should not be considered a complete chronological exegesis of Shotter's work. Rather, the paper focuses on articulating several specific concepts in Shotter's work that inform his "social poetics" approach to research. Furthermore it must be understood that Shotter's interests in psychological investigation are not in creating methodological tools for academic uses, but are rather in showing how real people use social psychological tools in mundane life; he subsequently shows how these 'tools' might contribute towards a richer social psychology.

In complement to the anti-objectivist stance that Shotter argues through his work, this study attempts to avoid taking "colonialistic" approaches that force external theories upon behaviour (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Instead, I chose to focus on taking people's expressions seriously and attempting to understand their meanings *from-within* their personal circumstances. In that vein, I took an approach that Shotter himself describes as *first* conducting our selves primarily as *persons*, "and only secondarily, still within a personal context", as *scientists* (Shotter, 1984, p. 9). That is, I try to avoid the situation that Katz & Shotter (1996) refer to as a "retrospective-objectivist stance", whereby after participating in deeply personal conversations we look back upon them as distant non-participants of such relations. Consequently, this paper also attempts to avoid treating residential school stories as textual data such as we might see in more narratological traditions that stress narrative structure and form (for examples, see Gergen and Gergen, and Landau, in Sarbin, 1986). In that way, the

field studies that I conducted might be understood as a kind of cultural training – an attempt at educating myself in the general character of the normative relations of the community, while the studies completed after the field work are a second step involving the reflective reaching-out *from within* that form of life (Shotter, 1996, pp. 299-300).

Unfortunately, such an approach is not without its drawbacks. As a translator of understandings between two very different forms of life – academia and aboriginal communities – I often find myself attempting to paddle with my 'feet in two canoes'. Or, perhaps as Shotter puts it, rooting "one's speech or thought in the 'topics' of 'themes' of a living tradition is a *necessity* if one is to be a proper participant in it" (Shotter, 1993, p. 171). While this position is often precarious, it brings with it possibilities for new discussion and new ideas previously unlooked-for in both indigenous and academic thought. Thus, the question is not of the kind, 'What can modern social psychological research bring to aboriginal people?' but instead, 'How might dialogues, broadly conceived, between aboriginal and academic forms of life bring new understandings; new possibilities for both?' Thus the general character of this work involves acting as a cultural translator that mediates meaning between two living traditions, and consequently provides us with new options for living differently in both.

Shotter: Theories and Practices

One particular criticism that can be levied against theoretical psychology is that while the theories that are produced grow from *everyday* social practices, academicians only seem to produce new *academic* practices. That is, theoretical psychology has produced new ways of thinking about human conduct, yet only within the social confines of academia. Shotter's concern with the everyday is more pervasive, in that he believes not only are academics responsible for producing novel ideas for other academics, but that they are also responsible for producing new everyday social practices. The complementary relationship that exists between theory and practice is one that Shotter has taken seriously, and such concerns suffuse his research methods. The "everyday" for Shotter is not a scene that must be adequately pictured from afar, but is instead a rich social environment that we live within and he believes that our research practices must gain their existence in our everyday social practices. Such an approach, in my experience, proved to be an invaluable asset for understanding social practices in the fieldwork.

A second related feature of Shotter's work that informs my research is that his investigations are driven by what I call 'mundane methods'; social practices that we already take for granted in our engagements with others. These 'mundane' social practices include reflection, instructional talk, practical hermeneutics and other notions put forward by Shotter that are discussed later in this paper. A concern with making the world of the academic psychology grow from *within* the world of the mundane is what makes Shotter unique; not only is his concern with the everyday, but his methods are sown in the same soil. Thus, it is an important point to establish early

on that Shotter's "methods" are not akin to methods such as conversation analysis, statistical analysis, or any other kind of systematic modes of investigation that particularize our behaviours into rigid structures. As such, it may be tempting for those who misunderstand Shotter to charge his methods as being ambiguous, overly interpretive, or as being kinds of ascientific artistry. Such a criticisms are a mistake, I believe, as Shotter's interest is *not* in systemizing our behaviour; he instead wishes to provide accounts of our actions that are *open* to interpretation, where these accounts might 'move' us to perceiving a world we already take for granted differently and thus extend our possibilities for living within that world.

Structure of Arguments

The paper is organized into two chapters; the first chapter focuses on detailing concepts from Shotter's studies that lead to their use as conceptual tools in the second chapter. I begin the first chapter by discussing (1) Shotter's orientation to theory, (2) how his notion of a 'moral science of action' is an alternative to a natural science of behaviour, (3) the relationship between *sensus communis* and 'practical-moral knowledge', (4) how 'accounts' are a viable alternative to 'theories', and (5) how 'joint action' provides us with rich insights into everyday discourse. These concepts are brought together in a "social poetics" of everyday life, where Shotter & Katz (1996) provide a demonstration of how understandings are possible in culture-dependent situations.

The second chapter extends the use of the aforementioned concepts through an interpretation of the social poetics approach, used in understanding the life narratives of residential school survivors. The chapter begins with a discussion of the normative conditions under which I was trained in the community, and the value of such training in gaining practical-moral knowledge. The chapter continues into a discussion of the development of personal relationships in the community, and how those developing relationships formed the basis for opportunities for 'understanding' later. I then explore the differences between "story-reporting" and "story-telling" in practical circumstances, using examples from my conversations in the community to highlight the understandings of meaning I came to in doing so. I show how "identities of concept" can be distinguished from "identities of feeling", and how these two notions can provide us with tools for identifying instances of authentic understandings between interlocutors.

The paper concludes with a summary of the understandings I reached while interpreting the stories of residential school survivors, limitations in the research practices of this study, and a discussion of how future investigations into social poetics might be used towards the development of 'cultural understanding projects'.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Shotter's Forms of Inquiry

In this chapter I have drawn out several concepts from Shotter's work that, when taken together, can be used to draw out methods for psychological investigation. The concepts that I point out in Shotter's writing are not exhaustive of his entire work, and much congruent with his style of writing, are used as 'tools' to draw out my own distinctions. Therefore this chapter should not be considered a comprehensive summary of Shotter, but rather as a foundation for articulating some of the practices involving in the social poetics approach. While I have attempted to present these concepts in a cogent fashion, many of them rely upon other concepts for their identity and thus should not be considered independent of one another.

This chapter considers Shotter's work in search of answers to the question, "How might I appropriately understand the residential school narratives of these people?" Through a series of conceptual and practical demonstrations, I argue that the "social poetics" orientation to psychological interviews provides the best opportunities for understanding the meaning of the residential school narratives and my experiences in the community. In order to best represent 'social poetics' as an investigative orientation in the paper, in this chapter I select several concepts that led me to my own understanding of the term. I begin by considering Shotter's theoretical-

conceptual orientation that provides a convenient starting point from which I can move to more practical-methodological matters later in the chapter.[1]

Often, Shotter begins his writing by presenting his views in opposition to other forms of modern psychological investigation. He criticizes modern psychology for becoming obsessed with producing academic theoretical constructs, while leaving experiential and everyday practical matters at the wayside. As such, in the following section I have attempted to expose some of Shotter's views on "theory" in psychology, and its uses and abuses. His discussion of theory in psychology provides us with a starting point for addressing some of the fundamental problems that a modern social and cultural psychology faces, and provides us with possibilities for addressing those issues.

Towards New Forms of Inquiry

Order and the Way of Theory

Shotter, as an author who often sits at the fringes of psychology, problematizes what he calls "the way of theory", in an ironic contrast to our usual concerns with a "way of life" in cultural psychology (Shotter, 1996 and 1997). The way of theory, for Shotter, is a paradigm or belief system through which we make intellectual abstractions of behaviour. For Shotter, theorizing imposes a paradigmatic structure upon experience and action that is not inherent to human actions, but is rather a

---

[1] It is important to qualify that Shotter himself does not consider his work to be 'theoretical' in the traditional sense. I only use this word here to draw attention to conceptual matters that I will address early in the chapter, that naturally lead to practical matters later in the chapter.

product of an academic tradition disconnected from everyday life. Much like a puzzle with missing pieces, such theorizing attempts to "complete" a picture[2] by fitting in new pieces, or re-arranging the puzzle entirely, based on a pre-existing belief structure. Thus, theorizing has the possibility of placing a singular order upon the 'hurly-burly' or 'bustle' of social life that to Shotter has "no one single, complete order" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 144). Yet, the temptation to theorize is there, for it is possible to engage in a form of post hoc 'storytelling' that formulates a coherent yet constraining theoretical explanation of a phenomenon. This kind of causal 'storytelling' is later contrasted with Shotter's notion of 'accounts', which stress the interpretive and relative natures of descriptions.

Before continuing, it should be made clear that Shotter is not atheoretical in his orientation; instead he sees a theory as an *instrument* (such as a ladder[3]) and not a *product* of our investigations. As will be discussed later, the product of our investigations is something else entirely – it is a change in our *being*, our way of grasping the world.

Like Popper (Magee, 1973), Shotter believes that a theory is a means to an end; theories are "tools to be taken up, modified, or put down as

---

[2] Shotter considers the notion of coming to a 'picture' or 'metaphor' of reality in Wittgenstein, "It is as if one saw a screen with scattered colour-patches, and said: the way they are here, they are unintelligible; they only make sense when one completes them into a shape. – Whereas I want to say: Here *is* the whole. (If you complete it, you falsify it.)" (Wittgenstein, 1980, I: no. 257).

[3] "He who understands me, finally recognizes [my propositions] as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it) . . . . then he sees the world rightly" (Wittgenstein, 1922, no. 6.54)

appropriate" (Shotter, 1975, p. 104). In that sense, Shotter does not argue against the *use* of theory per se, but argues against theoretical constructions as becoming anything more than tools that are used to reveal distinctions that were otherwise unlooked-for in the everyday. This point obliges re-emphasis: theories are not ends in themselves, as we might typically seek in a computational 'representation' of cognitive structures, 'narrative model' of talk, or a 'cultural model' of gender. Theories, for Shotter, are tools for lifting out new contrasts in the course of everyday life; they 'move' us to perceive our world differently. Yet, while theories enable us to make such distinctions, they correspondingly limit our view of other distinctions we might have made.

Shotter (1984, p. 213) says that while microscopes "work to *reveal* features invisible to the naked eye, they do so at the cost of restricting both one's field of view and one's movement within it." He implies that by practicing "the way of theory" we restrict ourselves to the theoretical tools that we produce and as a consequence entrap ourselves in paradigmatic perceptions of social life, much like the well-known analogy of the man searching for his keys under a lamppost. Subsequently, Shotter maintains that rather than coming to theories that adequately represent our behaviour, we should instead produce a "number of perspicuous representations... appropriate to their understanding – where, the kind of understanding provided is in the 'seeing of connections' between otherwise seemingly unconnected aspects of our lives" (Shotter,

1993a, p. 59)[4]. Just as viewing a solid object from different angles may conceal and reveal different features, no singular perspective is any more a complete picture of 'the whole' than any other. In that vein, one of the goals in a moral science of action is to produce as many of such perspectives as possible, as Shotter believes that accounting for our taken-for-granted actions provides us with the ability to imagine other ways in which we might live; an argument that is articulated later in this chapter.

A second way in which Shotter believes that contemporary psychology has limited its opportunity for illuminating the unseen is through a desire for "systematicity" in its theories. Rather than providing connections that invite interpretation and further extension, he suggests that systematic theorizing attempts to produce a "single *correct* narrative" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 132) that precludes the articulation of other possible accounts. Shotter warns that believing that we can capture our "essentially unknown and unknowable human nature" through "circumscribed and well-defined, systematic discourse; is to mistake the imaginary entities, that *subsist* only in our stories about ourselves, as actually being who we are" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 84). Consequently, our daily experiences and actions are stretched and quartered upon a theoretical Procrustean bed that subsequently restricts the ways in which we might understand ourselves. Doing so therefore is to mistake a model or representation for what it describes and consequently to prioritize an

---

[4] Making unseen connections visible is a notion that is later explored in chapter two, where I show how storytellers can make new connections between 'seemingly' unrelated events in their personal histories through metaphors in storytelling.

abstraction over its phenomenal subject. In this way of theorizing, it is clear how personal experiential reality can be systematically disfigured to fit a pre-existing framework of belief.

Put in more philosophical terms, Shotter refers to the aforementioned as the "*ex post facto* fact fallacy" (Ossorio, 1981, in Shotter, 1993a, p. 85). The premise of this fallacy is that we come to a situation amenable to many interpretations, and accept a *single* particular description of the situation as the correct one. This description then "affords or permits the making of further statements, now of a better articulated nature", against which the "initial interpretation (already accepted as true, of course) comes to be perceived, *retrospectively*, as owing its now quite definite character to its place within the now well-specified framework produced by the later statements" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 85). He says that in the social sciences, our systematization of discourse typically works in this way, and allows such discourses to become "detached from their origins in people's social activities" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 85). Hence, it will be no surprise when I demonstrate that Shotter's form of conceptual investigation is markedly different from this form of observational theorizing, and instead dwells within the everyday.

Yet theorizing is not limited to only academicians. I believe that Shotter's deepest concern is that everyday people often become the practitioners of restrictive theoretical frameworks. For example, it is understandable that self-esteem theories can be said to have a "have a degree of real existence due to their 'subsistence' in people's social practices, and to that extent are able ... to exert a *real* influence" upon

us (Shotter, 1993a, p. 80).[5] Yet, for Shotter, this entraps us in a paradigm that limits precisely what we might say of ourselves, for self-esteem maintains its existence through our talk about it (Stolzenberg, 1978, in Shotter, 1993a, p. 80). Worse, Shotter implies, we can even come to limit our actions and experiences *to* the theory in question, thus denuding ourselves of a rich experiential life. Just as academics become 'caught up' within a tradition of argumentation, other everyday cultural communities can become 'caught up' in their own discursive realities that deny the existence of other possible 'realities'[6].

Summarily, Shotter claims that the way of theory concerns itself with an epistemological project that seeks to provide a representation of what we 'really' are, by making daily social life "intelligible" (Shotter, 1996, p. 300-301). Conversely, he makes the claim, through Ryle (1949: pp. 30-31, quoted in Shotter, 1975), that theoretical impositions upon our circumstances always come *after* the "efficient practice" of our ways of life (Shotter, 1999, p. 31). Thus, those who practice the way of theory tend to ignore the fact that as *already competent* social practitioners we already have taken-for-granted, tacit, or *sensuous*[7] understandings of our social circumstances which are precisely what should be understood (Shotter, 1993a, p. 58). By ignoring our taken for granted practices, theorists often produce explanations of

---

[5] Shotter does not use "self-esteem theories" as an example in his writing, and are provided only as a concrete example of how his work might be imagined in current social psychological research.

[6] The notion of construction that I use here will be covered later in the chapter, where I elucidate Shotter's notion of "joint action".

[7] The "sensuous" for Shotter is a theme that will be covered in more detail when I talk about *sensus communis* (common sense) of people.

behaviour that are imposed externally and intellectually; Shotter contends that "to understand and argue for a concept intellectually is not equivalent to our "dwelling in" (Polanyi, 1967), or "living out", the differences and distinctions involved in its practical application" (Shotter, 1997, pp. 4-5). Or, as Jacobs (2004, p. 5) puts it, "As recipients of culture... people attend to countless nuances that are assimilated only through experience", and their knowledge is therefore grounded in sensuous or tacit knowledge according to Shotter.

In my view, Shotter calls for a different mode of investigation; one in which psychological understandings grow as a product of lived circumstances, rather than as a theoretical framework foisted upon social life. Thus, we should not attempt to postulate 'theories about' our forms of life, but instead we should attempt to 'reach out from within' our forms of life (Shotter, 1997, p. 5). By using the metaphor of 'reaching out', Shotter attempts to convey a sense outward growth from within – a reflexive form of understanding that *begins* with our tacit or sensuous knowledge of the social world. Thus, we might begin that project by articulating, "the general character of our (normative) relations – a grasp of their logical grammar" (Shotter, 1996, pp. 299-300). That is, we can begin to understand ourselves first by describing our daily circumstances – the communal sense-making practices that allow us to navigate the world without a need to academically theorize of it.

Yet, for Shotter, our sensuous knowledge alone does not provide us with insights into the unseen connections of social life, for our taken for granted sense-making practices both reveal *and* conceal the nature of our circumstances. He implies

that what is needed is a method of articulation that is everyday in its natural social usage, yet goes beyond the everyday in its insightfulness. Put differently, Shotter wishes to avoid constructing theories of everyday life that are *not* everyday themselves, theories that only live within a tightly confined domain of "intralinguistic references" (Shotter, 1989, pp. 65-66) and gain legitimacy from (and institutionally reproduce) an academic literature abstracted from everyday life. Consequently, he believes that our accounts of everyday social life must remain understandable and therefore *accountable* through everyday people, without the need for a specialized training in psychological speech genres.

Shotter's wish, I would argue, is for us to produce many *accounts* of everyday life that subsequently become a *part* of everyday life. Thus, there is a circularity in Shotter's notion of accounts that attempts to re-integrate social psychology into daily social life, for in his view accounts must ultimately return to the soil from which they were sown. As such, the ideal account is morally *accountable* to our common experiential knowledge, and even can become part of our everyday *accounting* practices. In other words, Shotter has produced a method of investigation that not only seeks to understand our human nature, but also can actually change our nature by re-integrating itself as a part of our everyday social practices. Jacobs (2004, p. 5) argues that this kind of approach is common in many other disciplines such as drama, literature, photography, poetry, and architecture, which seek to change the ways in which we live in and perceive of our world by drawing our attention "to subtle, everyday differences in conduct rooted in experience." The ontological nature of

Shotter's "social poetics" approach is discussed later in the chapter and shares many features with Jacobs's account.

Thus, Shotter's concern with the 'way of theory', I believe, is that it fundamentally limits the insights we can have into our conditions of humanity by constraining our vision and imaginings to a pre-existing framework of "beliefs" (Shotter, 1999, p. 27). The way of theory removes itself from the everyday by producing theories of behaviour that ultimately remain morally unaccountable, ultimately circumscribing our moral possibilities for the future and ensuring that the status quo is operationally maintained. Thus, Shotter leads us to a *moral science of action* – the practice of a psychology that attempts to relieve us of this kind of cultural, paradigmatic, and discursive entrapment.

A Moral Science of Action

In order to liberate ourselves from the dire straits of entrapped discourses, Shotter believes that psychology must undertake a new program of study. Rather than attempting to see deeply "into the inner workings of things and discovering their rock bottom, ultimate causes", he suggests that we might attempt to articulate "our options as to how to live" (Shotter, 1975, p. 32). That is, Shotter believes that a new psychology of humanity must concern itself with the production of ideas, theories[8],

[8] It is important to note that for Shotter, "theory" has a specific connotation that he wishes to dispose of, and therefore this statement should *not* be interpreted as 'theoretical constructs that are tested against empirical observations for their validity.'

and practices that provide us with choices for the future of our societies and personhood.

As I noted earlier, Shotter states that we must first begin the task of articulating how we currently live, and subsequently come to an understanding of our conditions of existence (Shotter, 1975, p. 83). While such a project is a behemoth of its own, Shotter believes that description alone is insufficient. Not only must we discover the nature of our humanity, but we must use this understanding to come to new understandings of how we might live differently and modify our human natures to suit new moral trajectories. As such, Shotter's task for psychology less involves answering the Socratic question, 'How *should I* live?' but rather the less-often asked, 'How *might we* live?' (Shotter, 1975, p. 83; Shotter, 1984, p. 48).

Previously, I revealed several criticisms that Shotter has of contemporary psychological investigation such as: theoretical abstraction and a lack of accountability, systematicity established through phenomenal reductionism, and the use of theories as ends rather than means. In this section I consider just how conducting a psychology as a moral science of action attempts to alleviate some of these concerns.

As a consequence of Shotter's earlier charge that we must discover the ways in which we conduct ourselves normatively, one of his first tasks is to establish how we conduct our moral relations in everyday society. Basic to our moral world, for Shotter, is how we ourselves establish differences between *events* that happen "irrespective of our agency", and *actions* for which we can be responsibly called upon

by ourselves or others (Shotter, 1975, p. 85, also see Shotter, 1984, p. 37). For Shotter, this marks the difference between investigating individualistic "behaviour" without a shared sense of responsibility, practical engagements and commitments, as opposed to "actions" that conform to "standards or criteria shared by all those within one's own community" (Shotter, 1975, p. 90; Shotter, 1984, p. 49).

The purpose of this contrast is to understand how we distinguish between *actions* that are morally accountable, and *events* that we are personally unaccountable for. Accordingly, Shotter hopes that we might reconsider what were previously considered 'behaviours' and reclaim them as being 'actions'; therefore moving them from the realm of the irresponsible to the responsible. This starting point for a moral science of action is crucial, because it enables us to extend our responsibilities in the world; thus allowing us to confront the world in terms of possibilities rather than static and paradigmatic beliefs. In other terms, I would infer from Shotter that people who find themselves at the mercy of their unreflective actions are unable to imagine living differently, and thus become entrapped in a limiting existence. Accordingly, he believes that we might free ourselves from this moral "down-and-outs" (Shotter, 1994a, p. 84), and reach out to new forms of life through psychology as a moral science of action.

Earlier in this chapter, I considered Shotter's notion that theories both *hide* and *reveal* properties of phenomena. He borrows this visual metaphor of phenomena from Garfinkel (1967) who says that in our daily activities we often render our actions "rationally-*in*visible" (Garfinkel, 1967; Shotter, 1984, p. 29). That is, many of

our actions pass over us as simply being taken for granted, and bear no need for reflection nor re-consideration. Shotter believes that one of the key methods in a moral science of action involving turning our attention to the unlooked-for connections within our actions, and rendering "rationally-visible" connections what were previously invisible to us (Shotter, 1993a). Shotter denies that our psychologies are concealed in our "inner" selves, and consequently borrows from Wittgenstein the perspective that "nothing is hidden" in our social meanings (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. no. 435).[9] Rather, he argues that we must begin articulating what is already "in plain view" – our ways of life.[10]

As such we must not only provide new accounts of our actions, but we must provide *new ways of accounting*, because it is in these new "forms of talk or ways of sense-making" that we can indicate, "what the intelligible connections between things are" (Shotter, 1984, p. 218). These new ways of sense-making, says Shotter, are accomplished socially, for they are established through orienting one another's attention to the formerly unnoticed. Thus, we are led to the last way that I highlight how Shotter distinguishes his particular form of psychological inquiry from traditional empirical psychology.

---

[9] While Shotter discusses in detail arguments against treating psychological phenomena as being 'inside' or 'hidden' behind appearances in the classical natural science model of psychology, these philosophical arguments are beyond the scope of this paper; for a thorough discussion of his views see Shotter, 1975, 1997, and 2000.

[10] In order to study what is in 'plain view', Shotter argues for particular modes of investigation that stress 'mundane' methods; these are covered in more depth in the "mundane methods" section of this chapter.

In apposition to an epistemological project, Shotter claims that a moral science of action must be an ontological enterprise; one that changes "us in our being, in our sensibilities, in the things we notice and are sensitive to..." (Shotter, 1997). Thus it is not enough to simply articulate our insights into the conditions of our humanity; but rather we must "move" or re-orient each other by changing the ways in which we "relate ourselves to our surroundings" (Shotter, 1999, p. 111). In order words, a moral science of action involves changing our *sens-abilities* towards others and ourselves; "by being different in ourselves we can live in different kinds of worlds" (Shotter, 1999, p. 11). In later sections, I will return to the spatial-interpersonal metaphors of 'moving each other', 'orienting one another' and 'turning our attention', for they all reveal *social poetics* as foundational to psychology as a moral science of action. For the time being however, it is sufficient to understand that Shotter's concern is more with changing our *being* – our practices, and less with coming to a theoretical description of the world.

In sum, Shotter's overall ambitions in a moral science of action is best summarized when he interprets Vico as expressing that,

> A viconian social psychology would not be concerned with discovering theoretical principles, but with the practical task of moving on to new forms of human being; with people actually discovering within themselves how to exercise new powers of mind – and how to avoid being bewitched by linguistic and theoretical constructs of their own making. (Shotter, 1984, p. 135)

Accordingly, Shotter believes that we might escape such bewitchment through a relativizing of our psychological discourses. By producing *many* perspectives or "perspicuous representations" of our current ways of life, Shotter hopes that we might avoid becoming trapped within a paradigm. This move to a more relativistic psychology is heralded by a move from *theories of behaviour* to *accounts of action*, for he is opposed to producing a complete and finalized representation (i.e. a causal theory) of our activities.[11]

Consequently, we can begin to develop methods of inquiry that allow us to change our being in the world, that is, come to new accounts and accounting practices. Shotter himself identifies a method implicit in Wittgenstein's style of writing that shows us how we might learn to *move others* to perceive the world differently by illuminating our taken-for-granted social practices through special *poetic* means. Thus, in the following section I will turn my attention toward 'mundane' forms of investigation that may provide newfound connections implicit in our practices. I have aptly titled the section "mundane methods" to highlight Shotter's idea that our methods of psychological inquiry are found in the everyday, and not in abstract and domain-specific speech genres.

Mundane Methods in Psychological Inquiry

---

[11] See Shotter's conception of "accounts" later in this chapter for a lengthier discussion of how accounts should be distinguished from theories in psychological research.

Throughout this chapter, I have alluded to Shotter's concern that traditional psychological investigation has divorced itself from everyday experience and social life. In response he has developed what I have termed "mundane methods" or forms of psychological inquiry that are rooted in common social practices. As I offered earlier however, our taken-for-granted social practices are not *alone* sufficient to provide us with psychological insights, and Shotter's methods thus seek to establish a relation between "conceptual matters and the structure of everyday life" (Shotter, 1975, p. 35). As such, Shotter spells out a form of psychological inquiry that makes use of taken-for-granted practices, yet goes beyond their common uses.

Yet, before we can spell out just what these methods are we must ask ourselves, 'Just what is *common* about our social practices? How does Shotter conceive of our shared sense of reality in practical terms?' The answer to these two questions lie, I believe, in what he refers to as the *sensus communis*; a concept interpreted directly from the 18th century Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico.

Sensus Communis and Practical-Moral Knowledge

The *sensus communis* or 'common sense' of a society, Shotter says, gains its form from the "identities of feeling" that people co-produce in their interweaved social engagements. He illustrates this with an example of people running for cover in fear as a thunderstorm booms overhead, thus establishing a shared *sense* (fear) to an *already shared* circumstance (the thunderstorm). Consequently, Shotter claims that people are able to lend a "shared *significance* to those shared *feelings*" (Shotter,

1993b, p. 135-136) and give rise to what Vico calls "sensory topics", "commonplaces" or *topoi* [spaces, topics]. Put differently, there are foundational ways in which people can establish a shared tradition of symbols and meanings through their basic, embodied feelings. While these meanings are not assumed to be objectively the 'same' for everyone involved, in practice we often socially coordinate with each other *as if* meanings are 'shared'. In this view, our embodied feelings relate us to a circumstance in ways that make it possible for us to coordinate with each other. In other words, I believe that Shotter understands identities of feeling as the background against which our communal social practices are made possible. Thus, if we are to understand our social psychologies, we must understand the nature of sensory topics and identities of feeling.

If we accept that a society's *sensus communis* gives structure to the notion of 'shared' feelings and circumstances, we can begin to understand Shotter's particular interpretation of "rhetoric" in social life. While sharing some notions with Billig (1987) who stresses the positional, dilemmatic and argumentative natures of conversation, a related yet different image of rhetoric can be found in some of Shotter's work. He attempts to de-emphasize the negative connotation that has traditionally been associated with ("mere") rhetoric by turning our attention to the "persuasive function of language, the capacity of speech bodily to 'move' people, its power to affect their behaviour and perceptions" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 122). That is, rhetorical talk is not only a linguistic form expressing one's position 'about' a topic of conversation, but also a communal linguistic form that changes the way in which the

speaker and listener perceive an action. Shotter claims that we must reclaim a particular understanding of *rhetoric* that emphasizes the notion of 'moving' others in their bodily understanding of the world, by using kinds of spatial-interpersonal metaphors that I have referred to earlier. In other words, my rhetorical talk can *move us* to perceive the world in ways that were previously hidden from our view (Vico, 1988, p. 178, in Shotter, 1994a). These rhetorical forms are expressed, says Shotter (1993a, pp. 56-57), in what Grassi (1980, p. 20) calls "true rhetorical speech"; the figurative, imaginative and metaphorical forms we make use of that orient others to perceive the world differently for themselves.

It is unsurprising then, when Shotter ties together rhetoric with *sensus communis*; he claims that true rhetorical speech is in fact rooted in the *sensus communis* of our society. It is from a *sensus communis* that we can draw upon shared common sense feelings of the world, expressed through metaphorical talk, that give a poetic "first form" to our "vaguely or partially ordered feelings" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 122). Such talk then, "In Wittgenstein's terms... does not so much 'say' anything as 'show' us (or 'remind' us of) something about ourselves" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 123). In my view, these kinds of metaphors lend a picture to the unpicturable – our embodied feelings. Furthermore, it is possible to think of metaphorical linguistic forms as not simply ways of getting another person to picture your feelings, but instead as expressions that touch upon *sensuous* personal understandings through the *sensus communis* of a society.

Closely linked to *sensus communis* is sensuous or practical-moral knowledge, which are grounded in the taken for granted normativity of a community. Shotter claims that this form of knowledge is one "embodied in the conversational background to our lives... to do with how *to be* a person of this or that particular kind according to the culture into which one develops..." (Shotter, 1975, p. 19). In attempting to capture the nature of this knowledge, he refers to it by many names, "knowledge-in-practice", "knowledge-held-in-common with others", "sensuous knowledge", "embodied knowledge" and finally "practical-moral knowledge" – each picturing different facets of this form of knowledge (Shotter, 1975, 1993a, 1994, 2000).[12]

In that way, we can understand Shotter's claim that personal responsibility arises from training in the "moral practices" of a community (Shotter, 1984, p. 158). Such training bestows us with the social rights and responsibilities afforded to a "person" (Shotter, 1984, p. 214). Hence, while a child is introduced to the world of responsibilities by being treated as a responsible individual upon occasion, s/he is rarely afforded having her/his "voice taken seriously, i.e., responded to practically" (Shotter, 1997b). Just as learning drivers are afforded leeway in their driving *behaviour* by more experienced drivers, their passage into 'driver-hood' is marked when they are held responsible in practical ways, ensuring that they can be held accountable for their *actions* – for example by driving without instructors,

---

[12] Until now I have referred to this as *sensuous* knowledge. In following sections I will refer to this as "practical-moral knowledge", thus prioritizing organizational, interpersonal and normative relations.

passing driving exams, and becoming insured. For my purposes, what should be highlighted in this account of personhood is that it is only by virtue of becoming interweaved into the practical engagements of a community of practices that we are afforded personal agency, responsibility, and practical-moral knowledge. This distinctly developmental notion has implications for the cultural investigative methods that are covered later in this paper.

The nature of practical-moral knowledge, Shotter claims, is concerned with knowing how to *live appropriately* in a community, in apposition to technical knowledge (the application of a technique) or theoretical knowledge (the knowledge of structure). Practical-moral knowledge, according to Shotter, does not exist outside of our relationships with others and must be understood from within the context of our moral relations. Furthermore this knowledge is concerned with our embodied feelings of expectation, appropriateness, repulsion, adoration, etc. While Shotter goes into some amount of detail with his Vygotskyan approach to just how our embodied feelings are structured by a *sensus communis*, the purpose of this paper is not to introduce the entirety of Shotter's concepts, and this developmental thesis must be articulated elsewhere. However, the following excerpt may sufficiently capture the bulk of Shotter's (2000) approach to the development of practical-moral knowledge,

> Most of what we do is not done by us deliberately and intellectually, by reference to an already existing framework of rules, external to our current circumstances, but in spontaneous response to 'calls' upon us

> both from within our immediate circumstances and from the larger surroundings within which they are embedded. In growing up among a crowd of others already reacting and responding to each other in their practical, everyday affairs in characteristic ways, like a professional tennis player condemned to practice 24 hours a day, I too become practiced in anticipating their responses to my expressions. And what I first do spontaneously in response to their 'calls' upon me, I later come to do deliberately, in response to my own 'commands' or 'instructions.' (Wittgenstein, 1953, no.243; Vygotsky, 1986)

A couple of key claims should be stressed in this approach. First, Shotter shows that our actions are often spontaneous, and always as a *response* to another's actions. Thus, our training as persons arises from *within* a fully developed world of people already engaged in their practical-moral relations. Second, our spontaneous *behaviours* can become responsible *actions* (responses) only when we participate with others in a fully normative and moral world. It is only after such engagements in a normative world that this form of knowledge can both become taken-for-granted (i.e. as a tennis player might 'know' how to hit the ball so it stays within the boundaries of the court), and deliberate (i.e. as a tennis player might engage in a debate with her opponent over the application of the rules of the game). The relevance of practical-moral knowledge to storytelling is uncovered in chapter two, where I

argue that it is the starting point for psychological questions involving meaning and understanding.

At this point we have revealed enough structure in Shotter's moral science of action that we now can discuss his notions of "accounts" and "accounting". Drawing again from our everyday taken-for-granted practices, Shotter develops the notion of "accounting" as a way in which we can specify a method of inquiry that stays true to our social engagements. Accounts, for Shotter, are linguistic practices that can be envisioned in three important ways: (1) Accounts are necessarily partial descriptions of a situation, for no single account can completely reveal the structure of what a phenomenon 'is', (2) while accounts render some aspects of our actions visible to us, they simultaneously render other aspects invisible, and (3) accounts allow us to 'instruct' or orient one another, "in how to 'see' an otherwise indeterminate flow of activity as having this, rather than that, kind of form to it" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 102). I introduce these properties of accounting practices and their implications in the following section, which discusses one of the major "mundane methods" in Shotter's form of inquiry.

Accounts and Accounting

In contradistinction to causal scientific theory, Shotter presents accounts as an alternative way of conceiving of our reflections upon phenomena. Accounts, of course, are a more relativistic form of understanding phenomena, for he prioritizes the role of the observer as one who can observe 'from-within' a situation and account for

his/her role in it. This section explores accounts and how they contribute to a moral science of action – in opposition to a natural science of behaviour.

First, it is necessary to understand that in reaction to a causal science – Shotter wishes to present a more flexible way of 'talking about' or 'describing' phenomena. In that vein, Shotter says that phenomena "do not have *a* structure to them" but instead, "an order amenable to multiple explications" (Shotter, 1984, pp. 140-141). Thus, our accounts of a phenomenon are necessarily partial, for they are always a view *from somewhere*[13]. This is of course in reaction to natural scientific approaches that often attempt to present singular 'correct' theories of phenomena. For Shotter, an account of a phenomenon can only be considered appropriate or inappropriate – for the quality of an account depends upon the tradition from which it is being considered. Therefore, it is important to note that an account always presupposes a speaker and a listener (whether myself or someone else), for accounts are always made through a tradition or what I will refer to later as the 'common sense' of a community.

A temptation, when reflecting upon Shotter's modes of investigation, is to criticize his notion of 'accounts' as representing a precarious form of relativism. The claim might be made that since no single account can provide an exhaustive description of an event, no account can be shown to be better than any other. Yet, Shotter argues strongly against this point; rather he shows that accounts themselves only "make sense from within a shared form of life, a tradition... that all claims to

---

[13] See Thomas Nagel's (1989) "*The View From Nowhere*" for a discussion of objectivism in science.

knowledge are 'rooted' or 'grounded' in such traditions" (Shotter, 1997b). Furthermore, he claims that "being unable to root our claims in any foundational principles, does not absolve us from taking responsibility for our claims"; conversely it is the fact that we *do not have* unambiguous and uncontested principles against which we can justify ourselves that we must "give good ethical reasons for why we have conducted ourselves as we have" (Shotter, 1997b). Thus, while we may treat societal ideals as being 'real' foundational principles – such as cultural taboos against murder or childhood sexuality – these principles are relative to our traditions *that we commit ourselves to* in our daily practices. And, to emphasize Shotter's final point, it is crucial to recognize that we continue to account for ourselves without privileged access to foundational principles as it is precisely our shared accounting practices that make us accountable and responsible to one another, and remain personally undetermined by the mechanical, biological or supernatural!

A second way in which we can understand accounts is through the notion that accounts, per their perspectival nature, both conceal and reveal features of an action. Using a clichéd example, we can account for a situation through passive and active linguistic forms such as, "The window was broken…", and, "I broke the window…", respectively. The passive form ('The window was broken'), tends to conceal the moral responsibilities of a broken window – for it places no responsibility upon any person and simply treats this as an event. The active form ('I broke the window') shows that I take responsibility for breaking the window, and therefore account for the breaking as a participant and not a bystander. In both linguistic forms, our account

serves to conceal and reveal certain features of the circumstances; no account provides an exhaustive description of every contingency that would fully capture the phenomenon. In that way, just as we use accounts in our daily lives to make sense of broken windows, Shotter hopes to put this daily social practice to work in a social psychology for it may reveal new psychological structures in phenomena that were hidden from us previously.

In order to reveal what was once taken-for-granted and rationally-invisible (Garfinkel, 1967), Shotter suggests that we must turn to producing new ways of accounting for our actions. One of the ways in which he suggests this is possible is through what I call "metaphorical redescription"; that is, the description of phenomena in terms of metaphors that bring forth new distinctions not captured in the usual ostensive or referential linguistic forms. In general terms the word "metaphor" describes linguistic relations that can be made between seemingly unconnected phenomena. For example, thinkers like Bateson (1979) and Maturana (1978), among many others, have used 'dance' metaphors to draw out notions of structural relatedness, recursion, and durativity in biological phenomena that were not possible within the linguistic space of the traditional mechanistic discourses of human biology. Metaphorical redescription, therefore, involves the re-telling of a phenomenon in terms of another phenomenon; drawing out particular meanings that were not obvious without the metaphor.

In contradistinction to Lakoff & Johnson (1980) who discuss *structural metaphors* (such as "time is money" – the ways in which time might be understood in

terms of money), I wish to highlight a different sense of metaphor that Shotter seems to desire in accounts of action. I wish to impress the notion that we do **not** wish to provide *analogies* that describe systematic similarities of *form* between phenomena, for we risk reducing the quality of our descriptions of one phenomenon to fit another as I have previously commented. As such, our metaphorical comparisons made of phenomena are not made of their *form* (such as, 'An apple is structurally similar to an orange in terms of its shape'), but are made instead on the basis of our embodied understandings or "*sense*" (such as, 'my depression feels like being run over by a truck') (Shotter, 1993a, p. 139). Put differently, the metaphors that Shotter wishes to discuss are grounded in their *experiential* similarities rather than their *objective* similarities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 154).[14]

Shotter claims that Wittgenstein's uses of metaphors in his writing provides us with methods of seeing "things in the same way as each other" by methods that touch upon our embodied *feelings* or "sensory topics" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 141) that are shared as part of a *sensus communis*. Similar to Shotter, Perloff (1996, pp. xiv-xv) articulates poetic methods for interpreting Wittgenstein's work through the metaphors he uses. For example, Wittgenstein (1922, no. 6.54) says, "He who understands me, finally recognizes [my propositions] as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it) . . . . then he sees the world rightly." As I discussed earlier, Shotter

---

[14] I only add this as a further elaboration of the *sense* of 'metaphorical' that I will be considering. This is not intended to be a discussion of the epistemological bases of metaphors.

interprets the image of the ladder through mundane terms; a tool for getting to previously unreachable places. Shotter metaphorically redescribes theories in terms of the ladder metaphor – an instrument for a purpose and meaningless in itself. In that way, the metaphors that an author uses can bring a reader into the author's domain of thought through a process of evoking feeling through metaphor. Bachelard (1964, p. xix) says that metaphors give us not only "the impression [feeling] that we could have created it" ourselves, but "that we should have created it".

A third way of understanding accounts is in their co-attentive interpersonal nature, for we can use accounts to call upon others to view a situation as we do. Using the previous example, passive and active linguistic forms afford us the ability to direct each other (and ourselves) to understanding a situation in one way instead of another. Therefore, a crucial part of understanding accounts is in understanding how we use accounts to direct each other's attention. According to Shotter, our metaphorical comparisons and contrasts often take the form of "gestural", "educative" or "instructive forms of talk"; we do not 'say' it, we 'show' it (Shotter, 1996, p. 301). Such forms of talk, Shotter claims, are often articulations of vague and embodied *feelings* of a certain kind, and therefore often assume the form of metaphorical linguistic expressions. Returning to a previous example, if I were to say 'I feel like I've been hit by a truck', this expression can be treated as an account of sorts – of giving a form to a *feeling* through linguistic conventions that are grounded in our *sensus communis*. For if my friend were to say, 'Ah, well, what kind of truck? Like a half-ton?' I might dryly reply, 'No, like a semi-truck.' Thus, my friend and I

must establish ways of talking with each other that indicate when we are speaking 'literally' or 'figuratively'; stressing that metaphorical talk belongs to a dialogue between people and therefore must be understood within that situation.[15]

With that in mind, Shotter shows that metaphorical talk often takes the form of distinctions between "*this,* and *not this*" (Wittgenstein, P.I., 1953, no. 144, in Shotter, 1996, p. 302). Returning to the example of expression, I metaphorically distinguished between two kinds of trucks. The metaphor revealed a feeling between us something to do with the 'weight', 'size', or 'power' of depression. I would argue that it was through these distinctions that we were able to 'triangulate' a meaning that was *just* 'out of reach' or beyond ostensive description for us. In that way, metaphorical redescriptions never belong to *me* – they require a listener to authenticate the quality of that feeling.

It is in this way that we find "new ways of pointing beyond our immediate circumstances to bright to light new connections and relations" (Shotter, 1996, p. 303; also see Shotter, 1997). Shotter argues that such utterances are *poetic* for they 'move' or reorient us to perceive the world differently. Metaphorical linguistic expressions therefore belong in the realm of interpretation, for the 'truths' of such metaphors are grounded entirely in the *sensus communis* of the speaker and listener. In that way, our accounts do come to an end and hit 'rock bottom', for what is *felt to be right* by actors determines the truth and propriety of the account (Shotter, 1994a, p. 36; Shotter, 1993a, pp. 55-56).

---

[15] Examples of people understanding talk as 'figurative' or 'literal' in concrete dialogues are discussed in chapter two.

Yet, how would we know if the metaphorical redescriptions in our accounts are adequate? That is, if I were to provide an account of residential school experiences that is appropriate to the people who expressed them, how would we determine that my description is in fact 'true' to their lives? If third-person *theorizing* often loses its grounding due to the relative nature of accounting (any event might be described in many different ways), we must develop new forms understanding (Menzl, 1979; Shotter, 1993a, p. 170). Shotter suggests that a way out of this trap is to find out how people "*themselves* make sense of their actions" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 170). What is required then, is to begin from an embodied form of life – the ways in which "the person has been socialized" (Shotter, 1984; Shotter, 1993a, p. 170). Furthermore, these new phenomenal distinctions, by virtue of becoming rationally-visible, are now available to us as "publicly discussable and debatable" notions (Shotter, 1993a, p. 81). Thus, metaphorical redescriptions are not *theories*, but *accounts* of phenomena; they provide us with new linguistic forms for picturing the taken-for-granted in new ways. I will discuss this notion of determining the correctness or propriety of an account in the second chapter.

However, if we accept Shotter's claim that theories are 'means' rather than 'ends', metaphors are not ends in themselves for they are 'tools' used in the uncovering of new distinctions (Magee, 1973; Shotter, 1975, p. 104; Wittgenstein, 1922, no. 6.54). Shotter believes that once we recognize new distinctions in phenomena and thus illuminate what was hidden from us in our "ordinary forms of language" (Wittgenstein, 1953, no. 132), we must look elsewhere for new metaphors

that bring to light new distinctions. In this way, Shotter's notion of accounts can steer us away from becoming entrapped in theoretical modeling because he prioritizes the phenomenon over the metaphors used to describe it.

To summarize the preceding arguments, Shotter claims that accounts have the following properties: they (1) already exist as a part of our everyday social practices and are not simply academic theoretical constructions, (2) make connections *from within* our way of life, rather than *from without*, (3) they are "open to interpretation", (4) work "by the use of examples" as opposed to models, (5) they avoid systematic theories, for action is not rule-driven, (6) are necessarily incomplete by virtue of their developmental and perspectival nature, and (7) though they shape our expectations, are "not predictive in any precise way" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 113).

Shotter has specified a pattern of work that allows us to understand our linguistic practices through a few key ideas. First, he claims that our practical-moral knowledge of the world is grounded in our affective engagements with others – our knowledge is an instantiation of the *sensus communis* of our society. Second, he claims that it is through a *sensus communis* that we can make truth-claims through "true rhetorical speech" that are understandable and accountable by others in our community. Third, he claims that these truth-claims are achieved through metaphorical expressions that both give a form to our vaguely-ordered feelings, and instruct others to view a situation in particular ways.

In terms of accounts, Shotter shows that our accounts only can make *sense* in terms of a shared feeling from within a community of practices; external sense-

making of a person's actions is a kind of theorizing that is not 'true' to the circumstances that people find themselves in. Second, I argued through Shotter that accounts must be understood as *necessarily* partial descriptions of actions, for they make use of metaphors that are *not* literal descriptions of what 'is', but are instead redescriptions of what it 'might' be like. Thus, where the claim, "my depression was like being hit by a truck" reveals some aspects of depression (i.e. the immediate forceful impact of it), it hides other aspects (i.e. the gradual spiraling into a depressive episode). Therefore, my metaphorical language *must be* understood as a partial yet illuminating account of the experience of depression. Third, I showed Shotter's argument of the *rhetorical* or 'moving' nature of accounts, and how they can be understood as perspective-turning devices. Finally, I showed that metaphorical description, as a practice of rhetorical truth-making, is a way in which we can draw new accounts of an action while still staying 'true' to the *sensus communis* of a community.

Joint Action

It is now necessary to discuss the ways in which Shotter views conversational practices, for conversation was the primary method through which I was socialized into the community during my fieldwork. Furthermore, these views will also assist us in navigating the practical community-based work that Katz and Shotter (1996) conducted which I will discuss later, by clarifying exactly why joint authorship is crucial for Shotter.

"Joint action" is one of the central notions of sociality that Shotter articulates in his work. The point that I wish to capture in the concept is that Shotter wishes to rescue the notion that our basic personal relations, often through talk, are established consensually and consequently create microcosms of existence between us that we both *sense* as being real.

Joint action can be understood, I believe, through two key ideas:

1. When interlocked in joint action, people can produce "*unintended* and unpredictable outcomes" for the situation moves beyond the desires, intentions, and actions of individuals (Shotter, 1994a, p. 39). The power of such a situation, claims Shotter, gives us a sense that the situation is 'externally caused' or beyond our imagination.

2. While the circumstances that we find ourselves in when we engage in joint action are unintended by any one person, it still has an "*intentional* quality to it: it seems both to have a 'content', as well as to... be 'related to something other than or beyond itself'," for our joint acting gives us a practical-moral space within which respond (Shotter, 1994a, p. 39).

Shotter says that what makes people competent members of a society is that people are taken seriously in their "avowals", and that

> in a moral world, no one but the persons in question have... [the ability] to decide what their experience means to them. Thus to be autonomous… is to be accorded the right of expressing oneself, of telling others one's thoughts, feelings and intentions, and the right to be accorded their author, to be taken as responsible for them (Shotter, 1984, p. 147).

Thus, we cannot jointly act with another if we do not take her/him seriously; therefore to take a person seriously is to *respond* to them in kind. Thus, joint action contains, "an ethics: only if you respond in a way sensitive to the *relations* between "mine" and "your" movements can "we" act together as a "collective we": in dancing, say…" (Shotter, 1999, p. 33). He continues, saying that, "If I sense that you are not interrelating your activities with mine – if another person is looking at their own reflection in my eyes, rather than looking at "me", we not only can sense it immediately, but we feel offended." (Shotter, 1999, p. 33) In that way, we can understand that not all conversations are jointly-produced – formalized talk does not feature mutually responsive talk because it produces circumstances where one person is a designated questioner and the other is a designated answerer for example. Structured interviews often pre-suppose a language game that require the interviewer to present questions to the interviewee in such a way that do not invite the interviewer to *respond* to the interviewee; the interviewer simply asks questions that must be followed up by the interviewee as a matter of convention. These "one-way conversations" are the kind that Shotter finds offensive, for they lack a joint nature;

they exist only in specific conventionalized language games. This paper is more concerned with the second kind of conversation, the kind that Shotter likens to a dance, where the world being actively produced by two people has unintended consequences for both.

Shotter says that by understanding joint action in terms of accounting practices, we can understand how action is given a meaning in practices. He says that there are two ways of practically responding to an action. When we provide descriptive *accounts* of our actions, we step outside "of the flow of social action" by providing personal reflections upon what it is that just happened; a view that I discussed earlier in the chapter. Yet, this is not the only way in which we can come to understand a situation.

The second way that we lend form to action is through *practically accounting* "from within the flow [of action] by producing further action which clarifies our previous action in some way" (Shotter, 1984, p. 152). Thus, *practical accounting* stresses the how people caught up within situations as first-person participants respond in ways that lend meanings to their actions.

In relation to joint action, Shotter's interest is clearly in practical accounting – the ways in which we account for the meaning of our previous action through successive action. He elaborates by saying that, "the aspect of accounting which interests me here is how, when the indications in people's actions are insufficiently clear as to the uses they intend them to serve, those indications are 'explained' or made clear. I am interested in what I shall call 'practical accounting'..." (Shotter, 1984, p. 159). Thus

it is in accounting for ourselves through future action that we 'lend a shape to' or intentionalize our actions.

To put it concretely, imagine for example that in the middle of a conversation I painfully slap you on the side of your head. At this moment the situation is loaded with possibilities for there are a multitude of ways in which the situation might unfold. You might jerk away in fear, you might cradle your head in pain, or grimace harshly and back away from me. Each of those responses will provoke me to respond – I might widen my eyes in surprise, caringly reach for your head, or grin uncomfortably and stammer an apology. After the slap, the situation unfolds through a process of *practical accounting* – a pattern of responses that allows us to co-operatively make sense of or ascribe meaning to my initial act. In that way, we *jointly* assign intentionality to my slap; the situation becomes a moral microcosm within which we can come to accounts of what our actions mean.

Thus, joint action is both a nexus of people's cultural traditions, and the smaller, more local, language games that we participate in and give expressions to those worlds within. If for instance, I responded to your cry with, 'I had to kill a wasp that was about to sting you!' while on a nature walk, the situation might resolve quickly, for wasp-stings are something both you and I *sense* as being reasonable justifications for a slap. Yet if I had responded by saying, 'I thought you were making non-sense', during a business meeting, my actions might be treated as excessive or mal-intentive. However this imaginary situation plays out, it should show that we clearly depend upon each other to lend a shape to or make meaning of our actions, for there is no

external causal theory that systematically predicts the outcome. In order to 'move on' with each other, we must practically account for our actions through successive actions that give shape to what we mean.

To summarize, I believe that Shotter sees joint action as a way of highlighting the dialogical, con-sensual, and mutually responsive aspects of conversation. Furthermore, joint action is also a way of bringing together the cultural traditions of meaning that we are socialized into, and the personal immediate circumstances that we are caught up in together without giving priority to either one exclusively – for our *meanings* in conversation are a product of both. As such, joint action has implications for practical psychological investigations into "meaning" and "understanding" – for the concept specifies that our inquiries must turn to the dialogical, cultural and mutually responsive nature of talk if we are to understand the meanings people express.

In the final section of this chapter I bring together many of Shotter's concepts and methods in practical circumstances. I give a more practical exposition of the "social poetics" approach through concrete studies that Katz and Shotter (1996) conducted. This section, while summative of earlier sections, also provides us with the basis for understanding the investigative practices and methods described in the second chapter.

The Social Poetics of Understanding Persons

While previous sections focus upon Shotter's views of psychology from an academic tradition, this final section is intended to highlight the more everyday, practical facets of his forms of psychological inquiry. In many ways, this section can be understood as a convergence of his notions of accounting, metaphorical expression, joint action, and *sensus communis* in practical discursive settings.

In what might be considered a demonstration and validation of "social poetics" in practice, Shotter co-wrote a handful of articles with Katz, a researcher often focused on health care issues in the United States. Their articles maintain a balance between Shotter's practical-philosophical academic tradition, and Katz's tradition in qualitative medical research – thus providing an excellent showcase of how his "social poetics" approach might be practiced in everyday circumstances. Furthermore, consistent with my earlier comments on Shotter's investigative methods, social poetics as a method is completely ordinary in usage; it does not require a special set of skills only valid within a confined academic domain. Katz and Shotter (1996, p. 930) claim that this form of understanding is generic to our daily lives, for "people use words everyday to draw each other's attention to aspects of their circumstances they might not otherwise notice"; a notion that I introduced earlier in this chapter.

In the paper that best highlights their work in social poetics, Katz and Shotter (1996) address the communicative difficulties that health practitioners and patients have in medical diagnostic interviews at a local health center. Katz and Shotter argue that medical diagnostic interviews are often fraught with misunderstanding, as

patients and doctors are often trapped within their own culture-bound ways of speaking. Katz and Shotter (1996, p. 920) best summarize their general approach to "social poetics" when they say that,

> ... those involved in a dialogue with each other can reveal both themselves and their 'worlds' to each other: patients can reveal, not only their 'worlds of pain' to their doctors, but also their own relations, their own moral stance or attitude as persons; they can reveal the ways in which they are still healthy and vital beings; persons worthy of human dignity and respect, able to play a part in their own healing...

In an attempt to alleviate difficulties of cultural misinterpretation, Katz and Shotter (1996, p. 920) appoint a "cultural go-between" (CGB) who attends to the "'local cultures' in which each participant has something at risk [or at stake]". That is, a cultural go-between acts like a conversational mediator or "as a kind of 'cultural broker' between the patient's cultural world and the doctor's [cultural world]" by opening up "a new space between patient and doctor, between the world of medicine and the larger cultural context" (Katz & Shotter, p. 920). They liken the situation as one of "boundary crossing", where the patient and doctor might be introduced to each other's worlds through specific dialogical practices. In that way, the situation might be understood in two ways, "(1) as a medical diagnostic interview" that seeks to determine the nature of a patient's physical or mental illness, and "(2) as a relational

process – attending to inter-cultural relations that… shift moment by moment to invite new possibilities of meaning and experience" for both the doctor and the patient (Katz & Shotter, 1996, p. 920). In terms of understanding, they hope to discover in those conversations the way a patient expresses "their 'world', and what it is like for them, trying in the face of their illness, to live in it" (Katz & Shotter, 1996, p. 921).

Katz and Shotter (1996) show that by paying strict attention to a person's expressive performance - voice attenuation, changes in pitch, and changes in posture for example - the CGB can come closer to understanding the world that the patient is expressing. That is, instead of focusing only upon what the patient is ostensively *reporting* to the doctor (i.e. 'I have a pain right here'), the CGB focuses upon what the patient is *telling* the doctor through emotional actions (i.e. the patient gazing at the floor uncomfortably while the doctor inquires about her/his sexual history). Thus, while a patient might *report* the fact that she/he has physical discomfort, she/he might also *tell* the doctor of other mitigating cultural circumstances that make her/his pain meaningful.

Concretely, Katz and Shotter (1996) give the example of a Haitian woman interviewed by a medical doctor and the CGB. When the doctor inquires about her sexual activity, she responds, "Oh no, I am not married…" and becomes uncommunicative for the rest of the interview (Katz & Shotter, 1996, p. 922). In a later interview, the doctor invites the patient to describe her life in Haiti before she emigrated to the United States; the Haitian woman's presentational style changes and

expressively tells the CGB and doctor of her comfort with the medical practices in Haiti. When the doctor returns to the issue of her sexual activity and mentions that a pelvic examination may be necessary, the woman responds, "In my country it is important to be a virgin; you cannot marry well without it. And here, I am told, you are 33, you must have this [exam]" (Katz & Shotter, 1996, p. 924). While the patient initially *reported* that she was unmarried and became uncommunicative afterwards, she was able to later *tell* the doctor of her culture-bound discomfort with genital examinations and conversation regarding sexuality. In order to provide the patient with the conditions for expressing her discomfort with the clinical-medical approach, the CGB must determine "what is at stake for her in this emerging local moral world, in this 'conversation' about diagnosis" (Katz & Shotter, 1996, p. 923). In that way, the interviewer takes on the role of understanding a patient's meanings, for there is obviously more at stake in this situation than simply a physical ailment for the patient. Katz and Shotter (1996, p. 923) say that throughout the interview, the CGB sensed that there was a "universal quality of distress" to the Haitian woman's stories about moving to the United States that were beyond mere medical symptomatology. Therefore, if patients are doing more than simply *reporting* their illnesses, the authors imply that we must begin to understand their poetics of *telling*, showing and expressing their pains.

So, to re-iterate, the purpose of the CGB is to provide the doctor and patient with the right questions or responses that "invite" the patient to *tell* the doctor of her/ his particular *meanings* rather than simply *report* their symptoms in medical

terminology. With those goals in mind, how might we provide situations that invite the patient to express themselves in their own words instead of having their words "translated into the already accepted, traditional world of medicine"? (Katz & Shotter, 1996, p. 923).

To begin with, the authors argue that we must return to the notion of "sensory topics" explored earlier in the chapter. As I discussed earlier, such 'sensory topics' give us, "possible 'topics' or 'common places'", where we can, "create a 'common ground' between us, to create a 'sensed' or 'sensible' space full of 'things' about which" we can speak" (Katz & Shotter, 1996, p. 923). Through the identification and development of a sensory topic the CGB can assist in developing a conversation in which the doctor and patient can *feel* together a consensual world.

To promote these kinds of dialogical conditions Shotter (2004) says that, "We can only do this... if we adopt a certain style of talk with them, a style that allows the occurrence of such mutual expressive-responsiveness: we must adopt a dialogical rather than a monological attitude or stance toward them". Monological attitudes are often characterized in diagnostic interviews as patients responding to doctor's questions in terms of fixed systems of aseptic meanings, such as medical phraseology. Yet, when invited to clarify her/his *meanings* through appropriate responses, Katz and Shotter (1996, p. 930) argue that a patient can become "a narrator, a guide as to the meaning of the narrative created in conversation." Thus, this particular approach of social poetics avoids impressing an external system of intelligibility (i.e. diagnosing the patient as having clinical depression) by allowing the patient to make sense of (or

practically account for) their own meanings; thus providing the doctor with a "rich invitation to the world of the patient" (Katz & Shotter, 1996, p. 925). Returning to the previous example, the Haitian woman's account of her discomfort and suffering can be more appropriately accounted for in light of her stories of her previous life in Haiti, thus showing that we can understand her situation 'from-within' the conditions of her life without the need for an external clinical-medical account.

Through dialogical and cooperative responses, health practitioners and patients can jointly discover sensory topics. For example, in Katz and Shotter's study the CGB found herself "arrested" by some of the Haitian woman's expressions about her old life in Haiti. At those points of arrest, Katz and Shotter (1996) argue that the CGB must become reflectively aware of her/his own feelings, for these occurrences are opportunities for the CGB to make her/his own responsive contribution to the dialogue. For example, if the CGB was struck by the way that the Haitian woman expressed her feelings of yearning and sorrow at the loss of her old life in Haiti, the CGB might reflect upon why he/she was struck by the expression. In the case that the CGB finds her/himself similarly moved by feelings of yearning or sorrow for 'life back home', she/he might respond by expressing similar feelings. In that way, the conversation can become open to "genuinely shared understandings" through the joint development of a sensory topic.

It is crucial to note, however, that the kind of understanding that Katz and Shotter (1996) describe is not the idea that the CGB has experienced life in Haiti and can put her/himself directly in the patient's shoes. Rather, the CGB has been *moved*

by this woman to appreciate her/his own life in terms of this sensory topic and gains an empathetic understanding through her/his own experiences through which she/he is moved to respond in kind. Furthermore, CGB does not take an external frame of reference of this patient's ailments, but can develop co-operative or *consensual* understandings with the patient through sensory topics that both people can come to share in dialogue. Moments of consensual understanding, especially in situations of personal and cultural difference, only can be reached by understanding talk as being expressive rather than informational.

Shotter argues that since moments of *arrest* are rare and fleeting we can only come to share in understandings "with a great deal of special interpersonal work to do with... formulation, testing, judging, and criticizing" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 121). To be moved by a person's expressions, Katz and Shotter (1996, pp. 929-930) offer that we first must assume a position, as practitioners, of "poetic sensibility". That is, we must become sensitive to the personal stakes and culture-bound meanings that the patient expresses. Therefore, we should not simply treat their utterances as referential *reports* 'about' their worlds, but instead attempt to understand what they are *telling* us in their expressions.

Not only must we be receptive and sensitive to a patient's utterances, we must also provide responses that "invite" the patient to continue to express her/himself. Katz and Shotter (1996) offer their own suggestions, such as requests for clarification of meaning. Using the example from the their interview with the Haitian woman, the statement, "It's not like it is back home" was expressed so arrestingly that it provided

an "intersection of meaning" to the CGB. It is at these critical moments – these moments where we have a vaguely-ordered *feeling* that the person is *telling* us something beyond a mere report, I wish to offer, that the CGB has the opportunity to respond in a way that invites further clarification or specification of that feeling. In the woman's interview, the doctor asked the woman what she meant by things being "different" back home, subsequently inviting the woman to respond in her own first-person perspective of her own life. In the next chapter I argue that requests for clarification can offer an invitation for personal expression if the CGB expresses a genuine interest in the world of the person.

To conclude, I believe that Shotter, and Katz and Shotter, provide viable methods through which understandings of culture-bound meanings can be established through special forms of dialogue. I showed that in order to understand the cultural worlds that people live within, the researcher must become sensitive to moments of expressivity and subsequently provide responses that encourage richer articulations of feelings. I argued that through a series of joint responses, there exist opportunities for the CGB and patient to develop "sensory topics" that can bridge cultural gaps through shared feelings.

In the next chapter I return to the possibility of developing "genuinely shared understandings" of aboriginal peoples' residential school experiences through the concepts and mundane methods articulated in chapter one. I argue that the social poetics approach can improve its opportunities for meaningful understanding through participatory methods borrowed from cultural anthropology, and mundane social

practices such as personal relationships with the people we are interested in understanding. I argue that the social poetics approach can then offer viable opportunities for understanding through the joint development of "sensory topics" in dialogue, grounded in both the practical-moral knowledge of the community and quality of the personal relationships established.

Chapter 2

Introduction

In the previous chapter I revealed relations between specific concepts in Shotter's approach to social and cultural psychology, such as his orientation to theory, his interpretation of Vico's *sensus communis*, the moral nature of our personal relations, and the relationship between rhetoric and metaphor. I argued that the relations between these concepts gesture towards a practice of social poetics as a mode of psychological inquiry deeply sensitive to social and cultural ecologies. In this chapter, I reflect upon my research practices during fieldwork conducted in a northern Canadian community of predominantly aboriginal residents, and how concepts from Shotter's approach inform the work. I demonstrate how these practices and concepts provide a basis for understanding the experiences of people who told me their stories about living through the Canadian aboriginal residential school system.

The first section of this chapter describes the conditions under which I conducted research in the community. While Shotter dwelled in and was 'moved' by authors such as Wittgenstein and Vico, I chose to dwell within a completely different social community that gave a sense of contrast to my daily activities in urban academia. Thus, developing ways of 'reaching out from-within' began from my developmental participation within a living social community. I argue that I can add rigor to Shotter's approach to social psychological investigation by specifying the conditions under which I was socialized into the community through participatory exercises. I argue that the conditions of socialization into the practical-moral

knowledge of the community provide an insight into how we become sensitive to 'invisible' social acts, and lose our sensitivity to the already 'visible'. Again, it must be stressed that Shotter's use of mundane psychological tools do not themselves amount to an empirical 'method', but rather amount to a generalized approach to psychological investigations. This chapter seeks to extend the use of these tools to other social psychological domains, such as storytelling, rather than systematize Shotter's entire approach.

The second section of this chapter consists of a series of interpretive demonstrations that show how 'mundane methods' can be used to reveal psychological insights into the social nature of storytelling, as well as how such methods can help us understand residential school stories from within the cultural tradition they are told. Thus, while my reflexive articulation of these methods comes from academic traditions in psychology, my knowledge-in-practice of the mundane practices come from an active participation in the northern community. Consistent with the overall spirit of this thesis, the section should be considered a bridging of everyday storytelling practices with post hoc academic reflections, with the goal of allowing for a richer conception of both worlds. The first method that I contribute involves the specification of story-*telling* (as opposed to story-*reporting*) as a way in which people can 'move' or evoke feelings in listeners through specific metaphorical and figurative techniques. To demonstrate the distinction, I show how a storyteller uses metaphorical talk to distinguish between two forms of life, thus conveying a sense of 'realism' in her story. The second method that I contribute in this section

involves joint-storytelling and its relation to authenticity. As I discussed earlier, Shotter (1994a, p. 121) notes that sensuous understandings between people are rarely encountered, and only in specific instances with dialogical exchange do we come close to achieving "genuine" understandings between us through joint action. In this section, I suggest that one of the ways in which we establish "identities of feeling" (Shotter, 1993b, p. 135) with each other is through what I term 'authentication practices'. That is, through a mutually responsive sequence of talk we can establish that our feelings relative to some idea or event are of the similar sensuous kind, thus authenticating the realness of a world we share in.

In the final section of this chapter, I reveal possible extensions and uses of my interpretation of the social poetics approach. Borrowing from Katz and Shotter (1996) who demonstrate that the social poetics approach in a healthcare facility can function as a viable tool for making cultural understandings possible, I argue that the social poetics approach can be a viable tool for establishing understandings between aboriginal people and other cultural groups. I conclude that the dialogues I had with residential school survivors showed possibilities for genuine understandings through meaningful dialogue; furthermore that 'cultural understanding projects' made possible through social poetics approaches might provide the conditions for richer understandings between aboriginal Canadians and mainstream Canadian cultures.

Participatory Research

In the previous chapter, I presented Katz and Shotter's (1996) approach to social poetics in a healthcare setting, as a practical demonstration of culture-sensitive investigation. Since the authors chose to restrict most of their investigations to the interactions between the Haitian patient and her doctor, they subsequently did not explore much of the social-cultural history of the "cultural go-between" (CGB). While it can be surmised that the CGB has a history of involvement with primary healthcare, it is unclear just how she establishes herself as a cultural translator of medical and Haitian life. In order to overcome such limitations, this section will explore the role of a CGB and highlight the work necessary to become a competent CGB or cultural translator. These explorations also serve to articulate some of my investigative methods and can be seen as an extension of the social poetics approach. In that way, these participatory practices lay the foundation for how we can appropriately interpret and understand storytelling later in the chapter.

Rational-Visibility, Practical-Moral Knowledge, and Linguistic Ecology

Earlier in this paper I exposed Shotter's notion that we can render practices 'rationally-visible' through changing the languages we use to describe action. In this section, I wish to further develop the concept of rational-visibility through the practical engagements I had in and out-side of the fieldwork I did. Specifically, I explore the ways in which I *practically* illuminated social-cultural psychological concepts that were once invisible to me, through 'mundane' methods. Where Shotter does a considerable job exploring the conceptual facets of Garfinkel's notion of

rational-visibility, I wish to consider the more practical details of rational-visibility and how they can act as mundane methods in psychological investigation.

To begin showing how visibility and invisibility relate to daily social practices, I demonstrate the concepts through one of the difficulties I had during the fieldwork. While living in the community, it became increasingly difficult to take critical, reflective, and analytical approaches to the stories, social practices, and general *ethos*[16] of the place. It was as if my theoretical academic background was becoming silenced as I continued my participation in the community. In the months prior to the fieldwork I had been fully capable of taking traditional academic approaches to conversation through analytical techniques and philosophical theorizing. Yet, while living within the community these skills quickly grew mute and unsophisticated. It was as if I had become "bewitched"[17] by the way of life in the community; no longer willing to reflect upon daily social action from an academic psychological perspective.

When the fieldwork was concluded and I returned to my academic work, I again found it difficult to approach the work from an analytical perspective. The field notes, conversations, and stories told to me appeared completely uninteresting from an

---

[16] I borrow the notion of *ethos* from Geertz (1973: 127) who says that, "A people's ethos is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects." The quote is meant to highlight the cultural atmosphere of the community, rather than represent a choice in academic tradition.

[17] In reference to Shotter (1984: 135), who says that people often become entrapped in ways of thought through becoming "bewitched by linguistic and theoretical constructs of their own making."

academic psychological perspective; they were completely mundane to me. After spending a few months re-acquainting myself with urban-academia was I able to, almost magically, uncover details previously 'hidden' from me in the conversations I had with the people of the community. Thus, I realized that what made such insights become perceptible was inextricably linked to the social-cultural circumstances which I lived within. Put in more conceptual terms, I discovered how action can be rendered rationally-visible and *in*visible through the communities of language we live within.

The move from urban-academia to this northern community entailed changes in my community of language, or what I call a change in 'linguistic ecologies'.[18] In my academic environment I have the opportunity to converse with others on cultural, social and philosophical issues. However, in this northern community the opportunity for such talk is restricted not only by the limited number of people with advanced educational training, but more importantly by the view that people take of reflective or philosophical talk. In this northern community, academic language is considered inappropriate for most daily circumstances. Thus, reflective and analytical talk was circumscribed to small communities of people often with advanced degrees; as such these micro-communities were socially alienated from the rest of the community. Since the focus of this study was in mundane social life within the community, I became adjusted to speaking unreflectively and non-analytically in my conversations

---

[18] "Linguistic ecologies" are used in conjunction with Shotter's notion that languages are sets of enabling-constraints or *affordances* using Gibson's (1979) notion, for speakers.

with everyday people. As a result, my dwelling in the culture of the community was restricted to more 'mundane' conversation, such as daily events or community gossip.

Throughout the process of becoming skilled in mundane conversation, my knowledge of the community moved from an external analytical account of the community to an inner taken-for-granted understanding or a *practical-moral knowledge* of the proper ways to act in the community. As I came to take for granted what used to be surprising, for example the predominance of gossip surrounding family violence in the community, my ability to reflect upon these phenomena atrophied and the community's social practices soon became rationally-invisible to me. Thus, becoming a competent social practitioner in the mores of a community, in my case, resulted in a kind of 'cultural blindness'. Shotter (1984, p. 218) puts the entire ordeal in conceptual terms, saying,

> Such forms of talk or ways of sense-making can be said to provide in a society a set of enabling-constraints, working both to put limitations upon acceptable ways of talking, perceiving, acting, etc., while at the same time indicating what can follow from what, i.e. what the intelligible connections between things are.

Becoming sensitive to and gaining practical knowledge of the moralities of a community involved a gradual process of socialization. For example, alcohol is not

considered an appropriate drink for invited guests; instead tea is offered and served to visitors at any time of the day. After a month of visits over tea, I found the return to my urban home morally troubling, for alcoholic drinks such as beer or wine are typically offered to visitors in the afternoon or evening. I found even the idea of drinking alcohol at all perverse, for I still carried with me the moral proprieties of the northern community. Thus, even in situations as seemingly innocuous as beverage choice, conflicts in moral orders are played out when a person finds himself/herself negotiating between two disparate cultural worlds. Practical-moral knowledge, therefore, is not only a conceptual claim (i.e. 'I think drinking alcohol is wrong'), but can become a sensuous-embodied morality (i.e. 'The idea of drinking alcohol makes me feel sick to my stomach') through processes of enculturation.

Up to this point, we have covered familiar ground, for Shotter has already specified that our understandings of psychological phenomena must come 'from-within' the particular social circumstances of a community. While I gained a sense of *how* to act while training in the practical-moral orders of the community, I did not gain any new academic insights into the community's psychology. Just as when we might ask a pianist to describe her/his playing technique, he/she might not have immediate answers for us for her/his playing style is a *tacit* knowledge not easily articulable outside of the act of playing itself. What was missing was that I needed to re-integrate myself back into the academic world in order to provide myself with a *different* practical-moral background (and linguistic ecology) from which I could interpret my fieldwork experiences. Thus, one of the details absent in Shotter's

approach is how we manage to *practically* make phenomena rationally-visible through processes of socialization. I argue then that rational-visibility not only involves reflecting upon a phenomenon, but also requires a change in perspective, a change in the traditions and moral orders that inform our bodily perception. In order to distinguish something from our flow of perception as a 'phenomenon' at all we first must be arrested by it. In order to perceive 'phenomena', I argue, we must ground ourselves in a different moral tradition that finds another way of life surprising in some way. In that way, the re-adjustment to urban ways of living can be understood as a moral re-grounding – where alcoholic drinks and a frenzied pace become normative. Shotter chose to ground himself in a philosophical tradition outside of the natural scientific psychological tradition that he was forced to live along with. Thus, what gives Shotter the ability to make insightful judgments about the natural scientific tradition in psychology, is *both* his training within that discipline and his study from outside of it. I chose to move from one physical community to another; thus training me in the moralities of both communities.

Returning to the examples I gave earlier, one of the general processes by which we can uncover what were previously rationally-invisible aspects of an action can be described in the following way:

1. We are immersed within a social community that we have practical-moral, tacit, or sensuous knowledge of. The way of life in the community is taken-for-granted, and often passes by us unreflected upon.

2. We move to a community that has different normativities, which we find surprising or phenomenal.
3. While dwelling within this new community, 'their' proper ways of living can become 'our' way of life through processes of participatory socialization; the practical-moral knowledge of the community becomes embodied.
4. It is now possible to reflect upon the moral conduct of one community through another community by virtue of our normative training in both communities.

Put more simply, I gain the ability to make *sensuous* judgments of 'Community A' only from within 'Community B' and *lose* my ability to make judgments of 'Community B' from within 'Community B' as I gain practical-moral knowledge within it. Thus, in order to come to psychological reflections upon the normative circumstances of this northern community, I necessarily had to return to urban academia. Revealing the 'invisible' is therefore not a simple case of assuming a different conceptual position and academically arguing from it, but instead requires active participation within a different tradition in order to gain a *sensuous* understanding of 'otherness' (Shotter, 1997, pp. 4-5). Or, using Shotter's concepts, phenomena become rationally-*in*visible to us through our practical-moral training in a community's way of life, while rational-visibility becomes possible through a change in linguistic ecologies that inform what we are morally sensitive to.

What is most rewarding in this approach is that the 'feeling body' becomes a research tool, arrested by the changes in normativities in both communities. These moments of arrest, I argue later, are starting points for interpretive reflections that can reveal how we might understand communities of meaningful practice 'from-within'.

In the following section I return to Shotter's notion of *sensus communis* and how we can come to understand the meanings that people express from within a community as being *truthful* rather than *factual*. The distinctions between truthful and factual accounts of speech are crucial, for they establish the basis for understanding distinctions between story-*telling* and story-*reporting* later in the chapter.

Truth-telling and Sensus Communis

In the previous chapter I introduced Shotter's idea that, contrary to a traditional empirical approach, our utterances are not only referential reports about the world that can be tested for their factual content. Rather, utterances can be understood as meaningful personal expressions understandable from within a tradition and the particular circumstances in which they were uttered. Katz and Shotter (1996) offer that these expressions therefore properly belong to the social-cultural psychological realm; thus paving the way for a social poetics approach to understanding personal meaning. In this section, I wish to continue in Shotter's tradition by re-introducing the idea that *truth* must be reclaimed in a social-cultural psychology. Just as Shotter has argued against treating utterances as referential representations, I argue that the practice of a more poetic social-cultural psychology

requires us to become proficient at establishing *truthful* accounts of phenomena. That is, rather than attempting to empirically describe the norms of a community, we must provide social poetic accounts of the psychological truths that are 'hidden' from people as they go about their everyday practices in their social communities. Put differently, as Herzog (1999) has claimed in relation to his own tradition, *facts* are "merely superficial", for they are the "truth of accountants" and "thus only plow stones". Similar to Shotter, he claims that there is a "deeper strata" of *truth* concerned with the study of human affairs; a "poetic, ecstatic truth" that we can become attuned to through specific methods of illumination. This paper is concerned with those "deeper strata" of truth, and how we might uncover it by providing opportunities for 'truth-telling' through personal relationships.

One of the ways I attempted to avoid such 'surface' observations in the fieldwork was by choosing specific interview methods. Just as in Katz and Shotter's (1996) medical diagnostic interviews, I tried to avoid a traditional structured interview style as much as possible. I recognized that formal interviews typically foster a conventionalized structure in which an interviewer asks empirical questions, and an interviewee answers them in factual, informational, and referential terms. The more personal approach I took closely follows Shotter, who conceives that we must acknowledge the right of people to make first-person "avowals" that allow them to "decide what their experience means to them" for they have the right to "be accorded [the] author" of their own stories (Shotter, 1984, p. 147). From this view it can be argued that structured and semi-structured interviews often lack a respect for the

authority of the person being interviewed, for their utterances are treated as informational tidbits to be analyzed later, rather than expressions meaningful in the circumstances in which they were uttered. Consistent with Shotter, I chose to take a more mundane approach to interviews. Rather than quizzing people on their personal facts, I attempted to produce opportunities that gave us a chance to 'get to know each other' through personal interaction. In most cases, I was introduced through friends and family to their friends with the implicit sense that 'I could be trusted' by virtue of my trouble-free participation in the community.

In order to establish the conditions under which I could appropriately understand a person's meanings and subsequently produce opportunities for 'truth-telling', I had to develop "personal relationships" in the community (Shotter, 1993, pp. 167-185). In the most illuminating example of this more personal approach, a friend introduced me to a woman needing help with her computer. As I was the community's only resident computer technician for the summer, I agreed to help. While I worked on her laptop, we had a short conversation where I introduced myself as a graduate student doing work in aboriginal cultural studies. As it happened, "Judith" was an educator interested in aboriginal languages and offered to do an interview with me if I was willing to do more computer work for her. I spent the remainder of the day repairing her laptop, and we casually discussed current events in town and our personal interests. Throughout these mundane conversations we continually returned to a mutual interest in wild berry picking, as it seemed to hold distinct personal meanings for each of us. At the end of the day I promised her that I

would interview her at a later date. As I was leaving she asked me if I was interested in accompanying her and her friend on a cranberry-picking trip the next morning, with the pretense that as a young man I would be able to "protect them from the black bears". The next morning I came prepared with Spam, cheese and mustard sandwiches, considered appropriate fare for a day-trip into 'the bush'. During the half-hour drive to the outskirts of town I remained silent and listened to Judith and her friend discuss their daily affairs and became attuned to their particular ways of speaking with each other. While we unpacked the vehicle, in preparation for the hike into the bush, Judith pointed us to the autumn forest and said, "This always made me sad. When I saw the leaves turning yellow I'd remember that I had to go back to [residential] school." I was immediately struck by her mournful tone, but I restrained myself from asking any questions about it until later that day. After a long morning of foraging for cranberries we returned to a moss-covered rock outcropping and unpacked our lunches. We sat together quietly and spoke in whispered awe of our mutual enjoyment of the bush, eating sandwiches and drinking black coffee. After the trip, I noted in my field journal that I had felt a "dreamlike" sense of return to the days in my childhood spent gathering berries and cutting firewood in the bush with my family in the Northwest Territories. Later that day, I promised Judith that I would visit her on another day, with the implicit understanding that she would extend an invitation to me, for I knew it might be considered rude to directly request an interview of her. As I suspected, she invited me to visit her at her home the same day.

The previous narrative is meant to highlight precisely how we can provide the conditions for personal understanding or 'truth-telling' in mundane ways through a process of becoming friends. By participating in this woman's daily social world, I was introduced to her particular style of sense-making, values, and commitments through our many conversations and shared experiences. It became possible to share in her personal world through discovering memories and experiences that we had a mutual attachment to, for instance our affection for 'the bush'. In those often-brief moments, there was a sense of *feeling together* our love for bush-activities, like picking cranberries.[19] Those moments in conversation where we seemed to share in feelings of wonderment, longing and joy of experiencing 'the bush' are what we can characterize as being rooted in a *sensus communis*. In that way, the cranberry-picking trip became a process of establishing mutual trust and respect, the beginnings of a friendship, through the joint development of a "sensory topic". The identities of feeling that we established together made 'the bush' a *topoi* or sensory topic through which much of our future talk was understood through. 'The bush' provided a "commonplace" for us to begin our later conversations from. In other words, just as would-be couples engage in dating rituals such as conversations over coffee and movie outings that provide them with a sense of mutual enjoyment and subsequent talk about it, 'the bush' offered us the opportunity for new conversations surrounding our experiences of it with the hope that it would lead to new and unforeseen sensory topics.

---

[19] As I will reveal later in this chapter, 'the bush' became an important shared experience around which many of our later conversations revolved.

As Shotter demonstrated earlier in this paper, sensory topics can also provide us with a method of understanding particular utterances as kinds of "true rhetorical speech" (Grassi, 1980, p.20). When I was 'moved' by Judith's expression of sadness at the changing fall colours during our daytrip, I was oriented to an understanding of her experience of residential school *through my own* particular experiences of 'the bush'. When we talk about Judith's experiences of residential school, therefore, we should understand them through the relations between her and I. While it would take many future conversations to reveal more of her experiential world, our trip into 'the bush' shows a crucial way in which Judith expresses her experiences of residential school. Instead of simply *reporting* information about residential school through representational talk, Judith *tells* a sense of sadness as she expresses a comment on the autumn colours. The kind of metaphor talk that Judith uses here is therefore not conceptual (such as formal ways in which autumn leaves relate to residential school), but is more properly understood as being sensuous. In our later conversations, she explains that since the residential school was in operation ten months of the year (September through June), she was allowed to return to her family's home in the bush for the two-month summer break. In this particular region, the change in fall colours typically arrive in late August just before the school semester begins – and thus the change in autumn colours marks her departure from the bush and return to the residential school. What Judith gestures towards, through metaphorical talk, are feelings of sadness, regret and longing for a way of life taken away from her. 'The bush' and 'residential school' are not conceptually compared with each other; the

relations between these memories are in fact grounded in Judith's felt-remembrance of them. Her expression is arresting, for Judith recognizes both the beauty of the autumn colours and its implications: the end of a warm summer, and the reminder of a coming winter. It is not difficult to imagine that the approaching autumn reminds her (both in the past, and now) that the good times spent with her family is quickly coming to an end; she must leave the bush and the return to residential school. The meanings of these relations are described in more detail in the following section.

Already we have made gains in understanding Judith's meanings through the specific personal, cultural and historical circumstances *through which she means* are becoming visible. Or, as Sutton-Smith (1986, p. 68) claims, "if we are to understand the meaning of stories to those who use them, rather than some truth they tell us about the chronology of child plot development or child memory schema, we must study them in their contexts of use." In essence, this first arresting utterance provided me with an indication that some of her later talk might be better understood as poetic rather than as factual or informational.

In the following section, I explore the ways in which people use metaphorical talk in expressing their residential school experiences. In contrast to aforementioned referential account of talk, my treatment of these conversations focuses upon some utterances as kinds of "true rhetorical speech" (Grassi, 1980, p. 20) that can 'move' us. I interpret these conversational extracts from a poetic standpoint focusing upon the use of metaphorical talk and figurative language; showing how this approach gets us closer to more personal understandings of residential school experiences.

Social Poesis: Story-telling and Story-reporting

In this section, I use Katz and Shotter's notions of "reporting" and "telling" as mundane interpretive tools in the social poetics approach. I reconsider excerpts of conversations I had with Judith in an attempt to understand her in a way sensitive to her lived experiences and the "'local cultures' in which [she] has something" at stake (Katz & Shotter, 1996). I argue that understanding her as *telling* us a story provide us with an account of how Judith is able to present an "otherwise disconnected, fragmentary set of events into an intelligible and 'instructive' whole", and subsequently show "the role our storytelling might play in the stories we tell [each other] about ourselves" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 119).

Consistent with the social poetics approach that Katz and Shotter (1996) take in understanding the Haitian woman, I begin at a point in the conversation I found particularly arresting. What I find most striking in the following excerpt from my conversation with Judith are the contrasts she draws between her life in residential school and her life in 'the bush'. While her talk can be analyzed as referential claims to previous historical events, it can also be understood in terms of the contrasts she makes between her experiences in residential school and her experiences in 'the bush'.

This excerpt begins at a point in our conversation when Judith's entire presentational style changes, transitioning from an informational *report* of the

conditions of residential school to a moving *telling* of her story that is the focus of my investigation.

Prior to the excerpt, Judith explains that instead of using their names, the Catholic Grey Nuns (who conducted many of the daily tasks of running the school) would often call the children by number. She continues the story in the following passage:

[Judith] You woke up with either the nuns slap.. clapping… the noise of her… nothing like uh.. That's one of the things I missed at home. You'd just get up any old time – go and warm up if there's a fire.. porridge.. your mom would have porridge.. anything .. could be moose meat, could be fish. Winter-time, it would mostly be moose meat I guess, y'know? And it was always *love* y'know .. you never.. there was no fear.

[Chris] So you felt pretty loved at home?

[Judith] Mmmhmm! We had *tons* of love at home – we even had love with our extended… like my grandmother was our favorite, she liked all the rest of her grandchildren. My uncle – my dad's brother - never got married, never had children but we were all like his… he was like our 'little father'. But when we got here [residential school] – totally totally foreign. Slept alone, which we never did [at home]. Little single bed. You always had to sleep 'like this' {gestures with her palms together aside her head}.

[Chris] Why? Like a pillow?

[Judith] No, they wanted us to sleep like little angels. It was always on the right hand side, because the devil's on your left. And then, the minute then she'd be putting those blinds and telling you. {Slaps her hands together several times}. *Get up! Get up!* Everybody had to jump out of bed. That's when the [family name removed] family kids would wet their bed. And then nuns were there – they'd hit them across the back, send them to the bathroom and make them have a bath in cold water would you believe?

[Chris] In front of everybody?

[Judith] Well, she'd *say* that in front of everybody. '*Peed your bed again!*' Then she'd pull her, yank her sheets out and send her to the bathroom, '*Get and have a bath over there! Cold water!*' It was horrible. So right away it disrupted your life, you know, like, gee whiz!

If we take a social poetics approach to this piece of dialogue, we might begin by pointing out some of the metaphorical relations that Judith uses in her talk. I am struck by the way Judith begins describing her experience of residential school *not* in terms of a representational description (i.e. "It was a bad place"), but rather in comparison to her life in the bush with her family. By juxtaposing the experience of waking up in the school with her family's home in the bush, she figuratively conveys a sense of abruptness, regimentation, and coldness in the school. Conversely, this portrays her home in the bush as being one filled with warmth, relaxation and love.

She continues by contrasting the family-filled atmosphere of her home with the vacant, fearful, and unloving atmosphere at the school.

While Judith's voice remains even and unintonated in earlier parts of the interview – as if simply *reporting* her past, her tone becomes lively and accentuated while she relates these comparisons. In those short minutes, her presentational manner oscillates from a smiling and pensive posture gesturing to the ease and grace of the bush, to furious, piercing imitations of the nuns in the school. Such a presentation becomes dramatic or poetic, as her whole body gives form to her experience in a way that I can understand con-sensually. Indeed, as Shotter puts it, her poetic story*telling* style lends a "*first form* to what otherwise are in fact only vaguely or partially ordered feelings" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 122). Furthermore, the way that she tells her story brings together a set of individual moments into a coherent narrative that 'paints' a picture of the circumstances in which she lived. Through this interpretation of Judith's expressive storytelling, I am invited to share in a bifurcated world of cultural disruption and personal turmoil, made possible by the joint situation that Judith and I are becoming a part of.

What is crucial in this section is the understanding that the figurative relations between residential school and 'the bush' are not theoretical judgments placed upon the text, but rather belong to the situation that unfolds between Judith and I. Judith practically shows that the meanings of residential school and 'the bush' are inextricably linked with each other by presenting her experience of them through figurative contrasts. What Judith has *told* us in juxtaposing these two ways of life is

not a *report* of how these ways of life are might be conceptually related to each other, but instead *tells* us story that can move us to picture the cultural worlds of residential school and bush life as being deeply entwined. Without this metaphorical or poetic account of Judith's stories, we are left with unmoving referential facts that do not paint or show Judith's world to us. The social poetics approach to her stories thus identifies a crucial relationship between her feelings associated with residential school and 'the bush' – a relation not immediately obvious if her words are only taken in the objective, representational or referential sense. In the following excerpt, I show how storytelling can be considered a form of "true rhetorical speech" (Grassi, 1980, p. 20) that moves us to respond to the storyteller in practical ways from within the situation, rather than from post hoc interpretations.

The following illustration of true rhetorical speech begins a few days after Judith and I conclude the preceding conversation. She has invited me to her friend Ron's home for supper with the understanding that I will "interview" him afterwards. While Ron has agreed to trust me in principle due to my relationship with Judith, the private conversation that he and I have after supper is devoid of the expressive storytelling that Judith and I tend to establish in our conversations. The interview is, using Shotter's term, much more story-*reporting* than story-*telling* of his life. When our private conversation concludes, Ron, Judith and I sit together at the dinner table to relax. At this point, Ron and Judith begin telling stories to each other.[20]

---

[20] The following passage is a summary taken from field notes taken after our conversation; an audio recording of the conversation was not possible.

I listen quietly as the spontaneous conversation between Ron and Judith transforms towards their memories of growing up in 'the bush'. Ron tells of his childhood, when the fur trappers would hold annual New Year's Eve dances in the bush. Each year a different trapper would host the dance and prepare months ahead of time, gathering enough food to feed the sled dogs of the other trappers who would attend. On New Year's Eve, the visiting trappers would herald their arrival by firing their rifles into the air in sight of the cabin's lights, and the guests at the cabin would fire their rifles into the air, giving them warm welcome into a home filled with other trappers jigging and square-dancing to the fiddlers. Ron smiles as he vividly recalls to us the sound of jingling bells as the sleighs approach the cabin, with the sled dogs intricately decorated with beaded cloth saddles called "tuppies" [pronounced *tuhp-pees*], steel bells across their backs, and foxtails protruding from their foreheads. I find myself moved deeply by Ron's story, as if I were transported through time to a simpler more communal subsistence lifestyle, and revel in a fantasy of shuffling off to live such a life in 'the bush'. Judith appears similarly lost in thought, and eventually responds saying that she can remember the sound of sled dogs in town until the 1970's. I tell both of them that "we need to bring things like that back" and revitalize those traditions for current generations; Judith and Ron both smile in agreement.

While such stories are often taken for granted in their ability to provoke powerful imagery, the ability to 'move' or arrest us in our thoughts and speech through storytelling is precisely what Shotter (1993a, pp. 56-57) means by rhetorical expression. The figurative, imaginative and metaphorical forms used in stories such as Ron's lend his storytelling style what Grassi (1980, p. 20) calls "true rhetorical speech". What Ron evokes in his story is therefore less a representation or photograph of the exact events, but involves more the senses of warmth, joy, excitement and communality among the community of trappers in the past, accomplished through arresting poetic imagery. Therefore, it is Ron's expressive performance that provides both Judith and I with the means to respond at all. In this case, the expression of wonder and longing that I show provides Ron with the means to tell a new story afterwards. It is at these arresting moments that the cultural go-between in Katz and Shotter's (1996) study has the opportunity to reflect upon her/his own feelings and make a contribution to the situation that invites further development and enrichment of the sensory topic. That is, we have the opportunity to assist in the articulation of their worlds by responding practically. In the next section, I focus upon how my practical responses can both shape the relations between both Judith and I, and serve to discuss conditions under which her world can be revealed in richer detail.

Identities of Feeling and Identities of Concept

In the previous section I outlined the notion that if we focus upon the ways in which we are arrested by a person's expressions, we can gain a more personal and cultural understanding of a person's meaning. However, if the previous post-hoc account of conversation is taken alone we risk introducing external frames of reference that make such conversations simply "intelligible" to academics, rather than showing how they were understood from-within the situation practically. Hence, I did not focus upon how I *practically* responded to these people within the conversation, but rather interpreted the conversations both 'from-within' and 'from-without'. Returning to the CGB in Katz and Shotter (1996, p. 923) who identifies in the Haitian woman a "universal quality of distress", I wish to go further by showing *in practice* how such "distressful" identities of feeling can be established jointly in practical dialogue.[21]

To that end, I re-introduce Shotter's notion of *identities of feeling* as crucial in a more person-sensitive approach to social poetics. I argue that using Shotter's notion of identities of feeling we can avail ourselves of a mundane practical 'tool' that we can use in our psychological inquiries to understand how shared realities can be established in conversation. I argue that when persons find themselves expressing

---

[21] Similar to Shotter, I choose to focus upon conversation as the primary way through which identities of feeling are established through "authentication practices", which are discussed later in the chapter. However, this does not preclude the existence of other ways in which identities of feeling can be established con-sensually, such as when we watch a film in a theatre or view an art exhibition together and jointly experience it. In those kinds of situations, the film or art provides the basis for feeling more than our conversational responses to each other. I do not claim that this situation is inherently different than a conversation, but I do wish to stress that linguistic conversation is not the primary mode of 'sharing' in these cases.

feelings of anger, sadness, joy, or amusement surrounding a sensory topic with each other, they can together authenticate the 'truth' of a story. Thus, when a story is told that evokes expressed feelings that authenticate the story as being true in the shared feelings that it evokes (i.e. 'sad' or 'terrifying'), people can be said to sharing in an experiential world felt as real to them. The kind of truth being spoken of here is not one grounded in logic, coherence or correspondence to an objective reality, but is a kind of mundane truth having to do with con-sensus.[22] Or, as Shotter (1984, p. 139) identifies in Vico, "one can only speak of *certum*, not logical truths but truths of ordinary understanding and perception, the *certainties* in terms of which we live our daily lives." In that way, to perceive something as feeling the same in our practical relations with each other is to establish an identity of feeling between each other.

In the previous chapter, I showed that Shotter's interest is primarily in the way that we use "experiential" metaphors, as opposed to "objective" or conceptual metaphors, as ways of moving each other in social action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 154). Furthermore, I showed that treating talk as poetic brings out different qualities of meaning than treating the talk as being conceptual or referential. I showed that social poetics is more concerned with how speakers can establish *sensuous* relations with each other through kinds of talk that evoke shared *feelings* in people that defy ostensive, referential, or conceptual articulation. Using this distinction between sensuous-metaphorical and formal-conceptual talk I can distinguish between two

---

[22] While a discussion of the different philosophies of truth is implied in this statement, these must be described elsewhere (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980 for examples). For the purposes of my argument, I only wish to convey that the kind of truth being spoken of in this paper is a *sensuous* kind related to Shotter's "identities of feeling".

modes of articulation used in conversation. The first way of speaking involves sensuous-metaphorical articulations that tend to establish "identities of feeling" between people that lend authenticity to a world that both people share in. The second way of speaking involves formal-conceptual articulations that can establish "identities of concept" between formal **ideas** and not **people**. In a social poetics approach, I argue that "identities of feeling" can provide us with richer personal understandings than "identities of concept" can, although the opportunities for establishing identities of feeling are often rare and fleeting (Shotter, 1993b, p. 135).

Throughout the fieldwork, I often found myself struggling to understand the experiential worlds of the people I was talking with. As a young researcher who spent half of his life living outside of the north, I had limited personal experiences with the kinds of struggles that elderly and middle-aged residential school ex-attendees grew up with. As such, I often strained to identify with the people I was conversing with on personal topics such as residential school, alcohol and drug abuse, and summers spent 'living off the land' in bush-cabins, for most of my life was spent in towns, cities and farms. Put simply, we did not share in a common world of experiences. Consistent with the approach that I outlined earlier, my failures to identify with these people often resulted in the problem that I did not *personally* understand the feelings that the people were expressing in their stories. Rather, as an intellectual crutch, I tried to *conceptually* understand the feelings that these stories were 'supposed' to evoke. In other words, when I failed to establish a strong sensuous understanding of their experiential worlds, I tried to establish a weaker form of understanding that I term

'conceptual' understanding. This difficulty was exemplified in many conversations where I attempted to make conceptual relations between their stories and stories of my own, rather than responding with personal and authentic expressions of distress or pain.

The typical way in which I would try to identify with these people would be by responding with a story of my own that I thought had the same conceptual form to their story. This approach was met with limited success in practice, and demonstrates the importance of contrasting 'identities of feeling' with 'identities of concept' as kinds of understanding. In the following excerpts, I contrast identities of feeling with identities of concept in how they are accomplished practically in conversation. I begin with an excerpt from the aforementioned conversation with Judith where she is spontaneously reminded of the funeral ceremonies held in the Church beside the residential school:

[Judith] One of the things I never liked about the residential school is because I never saw any people that died... in my whole lifetime when I was raised in the bush.
[Chris] Yeah?
[Judith] So when they... when we'd go to this Mass, somebody... they brought a body in. It was a big black coffin. The songs they sang in Latin were horrible, you know, like really *dreary*. And I always used to have nightmares.
[Chris] You'd get scared, eh?

[Judith] Yeah, because uh… I never liked, I was never exposed to funerals. And now, funerals are so much nicer. Y'know, nice caskets, but back then… black! Oh, it was ugly long-ago! I hated it. They even had one day set aside, November 2nd, they called it 'All Souls Day', so they'd make a pretend-coffin, y'know and big candles there … six candles, and they'd do the whole service in … 'A Requiem Mass' they'd call it.

[Chris] With no one in the coffin?

[Judith] Nobody was in there. *Ewww…* that's one of the things *I* used to be afraid of.

[Chris] See, I never even been [*sic*] to a funeral 'til I was fifteen?

[Judith] Oh, okay.

[Chris] And I was scared.. it was also open-casket, and I wouldn't go look.

[Judith] Yeah…

[Chris] I was too scared. Even now, it still bugs me a bit.

(I pause for a moment, waiting for a response from Judith.)

[Chris] So, did they have wakes in the bush?

[Judith] No… no… nope. If somebody passed away, they either brought people into town, to be buried here. And of course, we couldn't come because we were out in the bush. So, we never had any wakes.

In this excerpt, Judith again begins with a shift in her presentational manner from *reporting* to *telling*. She expresses a strong distaste with the Catholic funeral ceremonies of the past, pitching her voice in grave tones as she paints an ominous image of the occasions. This image is further filled in as she contrasts the dark and

gloomy funerals of the past, with the brighter caskets of the present. Her presentational style evokes the sense that the Catholic Requiem Mass is an alien world of fear and darkness for her. However, my post hoc account of Judith's expressions lies in sharp contrast to the actual response that I give to her during the conversation.

Rather than understanding Judith's story as one that unfolds into a child's world of cultural turmoil, I attempt to understand her story through the only means of identification I have – what I believe to be a related story of my own limited experience with funerals. In response, I provide a story that shows a sense of mere unpleasantness when viewing a dead person in a casket. Unsurprisingly, Judith makes no attempt to authenticate my experience as being a part of the same world that she has told me of, for I have missed her point completely. This also means that by conceptualizing Judith's complicated cultural world as being one of mere unpleasantness, Judith is denied the opportunity to continue articulating her world in its unfolding richness; I have denied her the agency of deciding what her experience means to her by interpreting it for her (Shotter, 1984, pp. 147-148). By attempting to identify a conceptual relation between Judith's story and mine I reveal the immense experiential gap that lies between us, and fail to provide a response that shows the personal interest and value that I take in her world. This severance, in my view, is accounted for by my failure to "respond in a way sensitive to the *relations* between [my] and [her] movements"; by conceptualizing her story I take the role of a curious academic rather than caring friend (Shotter, 1999, p. 33). Indeed, rather than

understanding her story, I have merely given it conceptual *intelligibility* and thus claim a form of authorship over it. From a social poetics standpoint, my initial response denies the "invitation" of further expression (Katz & Shotter, 1996) that limits our future opportunities for understanding. Luckily, the discomfort of this gap is soon filled when I return to the common ground that Judith and I established much earlier in our relationship and ask her about wake ceremonies in 'the bush'. By showing a renewed care for the relationship that Judith and I are developing, the conversation soon resumes its previously easy-going pace.

Returning to the conceptual matters I introduced earlier, we gain a similar appreciation of the importance of harmony or 'agreement' in conversation through Wittgenstein. Reconsidering the previous example, when the flow of our conversation is disrupted we quickly return to the common ground that Judith and I share. By re-establishing some form of common ground, Judith and I can "go on" in our conversation without the need for qualifications or identifications. As Williams (1999) quotes Wittgenstein (1956), "It is of the greatest importance that a dispute hardly ever arises between people about whether the colour of this object is the same as the colour of that ..., etc. This peaceful agreement is the characteristic surrounding the use of the word 'same'." In the situation between Judith and I, what is at stake is the "sameness" of the world that we live in. Therefore, the "agreement" that Williams speaks of here is "not agreement in opinions but in form of life" (Wittgenstein, 1953, no. 241). To "go on" with each other then, is to allow for the possibility of expressing our worlds, with the implicit hope that new and unforeseen areas of common ground

might be established along the way (Wittgenstein, 1953, nos. 146-155, quoted in Shotter, 1994b). In the next section, I show through Shotter's notion of "joint action" how a positive example of conversational harmony can lend stories a sense of authenticity.

Joint Action and Authentication

In order to highlight the harmonic nature of truth through storytelling, I return to Shotter. For Shotter (1980, 1984, 1993), to converse in a pattern of recursive-responding where the conversation does not belong to any individual, yet belongs to 'us', is what he calls "joint action". In the following situation, I show how Ron and Judith jointly converse with each other and co-produce what becomes an authentic and moving story[23]. The conversation begins at the moment that Ron, Judith and I have sat together for tea and bannock at the dinner table. Within moments of sitting, Judith and Ron spontaneously engage in a dialogue that begins to assume something closer to the kind of joint dialogue that Shotter effuses. Despite the fact that Judith and Ron's experiences of residential school are more than twenty years apart, the common ground that they jointly accomplish is spontaneous and expressive. The stories that Ron and Judith tell to each other evoke the telling of even more stories that paint an increasingly complex yet fuller view of the residential school world.

For example, early in the conversation Judith asks Ron what number he was given by the Catholic Nuns. Ron recalls that the French-speaking residential school

---

[23] The conversation between Ron, Judith and I was not audio recorded, and I rely upon field notes throughout.

nuns called him number "vingt-cinq", remembering the times he was lined up against the wall in ordinal fashion with other boys in the school. Judith recalls her own number in English, but mentions that she "got to switch her numbers" several times during her stay at the residential school. Ron appears genuinely surprised, and says that he remained "vingt-cinq" throughout his entire stay. Judith then recalls the experience of hanging laundered handkerchiefs on the clothesline outdoors; Ron does not recall ever having to hang laundry and suspects that this was a girl's job because the boys never had to clean their own laundry. He instead remembers long days spent splitting wood that was used in heating the residential school; a job that only boys were allowed to do. For two hours, the conversation continues in this way; Ron and Judith jointly paint a picture of their residential school experiences through responsively interweaving their stories into a shared world. Despite that their experiences of residential schools were twenty years apart, that the gender roles for children were qualitatively different, and that Ron experienced the school in French while Judith experienced it in English, their jointly-told stories provide us with the feeling that there is a con-sensual experience of residential school being expressed that exceeds the potential of either of their individual stories.

Returning to the conceptual matters introduced earlier in this section, I argue that what is being played out in this scene is a practical joint understanding established through an identity of feeling between Ron and Judith. Just as Wittgenstein (1953, no. 146) makes the argument that understanding is not a mental state, the kind of understanding being established between Ron and Judith is the kind

that allows them to "go on" with their conversation (Wittgenstein, 1953 nos. 146, 154 and Wittgenstein, 1980, I, no. 875, last two quoted in Shotter, 1994b). Or, using Shotter's language, they 'practically account' with each other the meanings intended in their conversation, without ever needing to explicitly specify the 'rules' of the 'game' they are playing out (Shotter, 1984, p. 159). Yet, it is not enough to simply say that Ron and Judith are 'going-on' in any random way (such as exchanging individual facts about their histories), for the quality of the relationship being established between them is precisely what enables the further unfolding of their pasts into a shared space. We can now understand how Ron and Judith recursively authenticate each other by recognizing that the worlds that they live in are not experienced individually but are instead part of a shared story that they jointly articulate. That is, while their accounts of residential school show different perspectives (such as through gender roles), they practically account for their experiences around a common topical 'center'. Authentication then is not simply a case of saying "me too" in response to a person's expression, but instead involves affording the further enrichment of a shared story or tradition as we are inspired and moved by each other. In that way, we do not authenticate a *person* (i.e. 'I can see how this might feel for you'), but rather we authenticate the genuineness of a person's *world* and show that we both live in a world of pain, excitement, distress or joy. In other words, one of the central issues at stake in situations where people authenticate each other is the con-sensual realness of their world.

Concluding Ideas

In the previous sections, I introduced several important practices and concepts in a social poetics approach to 'understanding' in social and cultural psychology. In order to illustrate several of these concepts, I demonstrated their practical use in social situations that I participated in during my fieldwork in a Northern aboriginal community. The examples that I drew from were chosen specifically to highlight the successes and failures in my attempts to 'understand' the stories told to me by many ex-attendees of the aboriginal residential school system. While there were several instances in which understandings appeared to be within reach, these were far outnumbered by the instances in which it was clear that I did not personally understand their worlds.

However, I do not claim that these conversations were fruitless. In Judith's case, a reinterpretation of our conversation led to the insight that her experiences of residential school are meaningfully linked with her life in 'the bush'. As the focus of this paper is on the psychological, we are provided with a new perspective on residential school experiences beyond the already known historical facts. For survivors such as Judith, the residential school marks a time of personal upheaval that corresponds with deeply cultural disruptions in family structure, language and parenting.

Furthermore, my experiences in the community provide the sense that despite the cultural gaps between the residential school survivors and myself, opportunities for genuinely shared understandings are in fact possible. In Judith's case, sharing our

interests in berry-picking provided the kind of shared exercise that opened us up to the possibility of understanding each other in other ways. Ron demonstrated that through specific imaginative and figurative storytelling techniques, I could be moved to come to an understanding of his world through the feelings that he evoked in me. I subsequently show that these evoked feelings can express themselves into responses that give further shape to the conversation, and sometimes even 'authenticate' the very world that the speaker began his/her expression of. In that way, I showed how people come to 'share' in con-sensed worlds through their expressive joint activities.

Conclusion

Limitations in this Study

While I was able to demonstrate a few instances where I believed that genuinely shared understandings became possible, these were extremely rare. Despite my efforts to become well acquainted with the people before having recorded conversations with them, at many times I was forced to hold 'interviews' with them much earlier than would have been ideal. It is obvious to me when reviewing the qualities of the conversations between Judith and myself, compared Judith and Ron, that more authentic joint understandings can only become possible through years of friendship and conversation. Furthermore, the possibility for those shared understandings are brought about by the expressivity of the speaker and the ability of the CGB to provide the storyteller with responses that encourage further articulation. In my case, I was fortunate to have discovered those who were already fairly articulate storytellers. Unfortunately, it became clear throughout the interviews that as a CGB I lacked much of the experiential background and "poetic sensibilities" necessary to become moved by their stories in a personal way and subsequently failed to provide the kinds of responses that encouraged them to tell their stories in an expressive manner (Katz & Shotter, 1996, pp. 929-930).

Furthermore, as all of the people that I interviewed were considered successful members of the community – uninvolved in drugs, alcohol, family violence – the study tends to focus upon those who have *survived* the residential school experience. As an approach to understanding meaning, social poetics relies heavily upon both the

expressivity of the storyteller and the listening-responsive skills of the CGB to provide opportunities for understanding. In situations where people are unable or unwilling to articulate their experiences in terms of an expressive story, the chances for understanding their world decrease greatly. However, I believe that training a CGB in therapeutic or counseling skills that potentially enable people to articulate their feelings through sophisticated yet mundane skills such as storytelling can counteract this limitation, which is discussed in the following section.

Finally, it should be clear that as an exercise in coming to understand personal meaning, the people I interviewed have not had the opportunity to authenticate some of the ideas expressed in this study. As a long-term project, the intention is to return with some of the findings in this paper to the community and have more conversations with the people who contributed their stories in the study. The study can be seen as a kind of ongoing conversation between modern social-cultural psychology and an aboriginal community, each offering significantly different perspectives that have the implicit possibility of enacting change in one another.

Future Steps in the Social Poetics Approach

The previous study shed light upon the mundane use of social poetics as a viable tool in coming to meaningful understandings in psychological investigations that moves beyond abstractive theorizing and conceptualizing. Yet, as I have described, the opportunities for such understandings were limited. This study can be

understood as a first step towards the realization of meaningfully understanding the worlds of residential school survivors.

One of the explicit goals that this study shares with Katz & Shotter (1996) is the providing the possibility for future development of conversations of meaningful understanding. In this case, dialogues between aboriginal Canadians affected by residential schools and the vast majority of people unfamiliar with their stories might be established. The study has provided some of the tools or methods that make it possible for a CGB to establish such conversations by bridging cultural gaps in meaning, making genuinely shared understandings a distinct possibility.

In order to continue making such advances, the social poetics orientation must develop increasingly sophisticated techniques of "poetic sensibility" borrowed from the psychotherapeutic tradition and from mundane life. This study demonstrates that while such sensibilities are to some degree mundane in their existence, they also require specific training to ensure that the CGB remains a vigilant listener-responder throughout a conversation. In situations where people find themselves unable or unwilling to express themselves, and mundane listening-responding skills are ineffective, I am persuaded to believe that psychotherapeutic training holds the possibility of extending the CGB's effectiveness. According to Shotter (1993a, p. 118), we might be afforded such sensibilities by drawing upon methods in psychotherapy, that include helping "another to reshape, to re-author, what they *have been* in the past, to enable them to face what they *might be* in the future with hope rather than fear, dread or despair..." Such an approach is highlighted in the work of

Anderson and Goolishan (1992, quoted in Shotter, 1993a), who allow "the client to 'make' a to-an-extent-new biographical narrative", that, "involves the adoption by the therapist of both a way of method of listening to what clients say, and also, a special way of responding to it, a sustained attitude which 'invites' clients to try to say what their world is like to them..." (Shotter, 1993a, p. 120). Just as Cezanne says of his own work, that "the landscape thinks itself in me, and I am its consciousness", psychotherapeutic methods may provide those unable or unwilling to express their worlds the ability to 'think themselves' through a skilful CGB (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

With this in mind, I believe that a social poetics approach provides the basis for the initiation of 'cultural understanding projects' in situations of cultural misunderstanding. Similar to the way I am able to convey the culture-bound meanings that Judith expresses to an academic audience, stories like hers can be translated to a more general Canadian audience. Thus, cultural understanding projects can provide isolated people or cultural groups opportunities for expressing themselves through a cultural translator or CGB, whose task it is to lend their stories a universal quality that moves mainstream cultures to understanding their worlds of pain and healing. Or, as Shotter might put it, a successful cultural understanding project would provide sensory topics through which different moral traditions might find that they share in a common world; thus inviting opportunities for meaningful joint dialogues upon the nature of that world and what it should become in the future.

References

Anderson, H., & Goolishan, H.A. (1992). The client is the expert: A not knowing approach to therapy. In McNamee, S. & Gergen, K.J. (eds). 1992. *Therapy as social construction:* 30-38. London: Sage.

Bachelard, G. (1964). *The poetics of space.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Baker, W.J., Hyland, M.E., van Hezewijk, R., & Terwee, S. (Eds.). (1990). *Recent trends in theoretical psychology.* Vol. II. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Bateson, G. (1979). *Mind and nature: A necessary unity.* Hampton Press.

Billig, M. (1987). *Arguing and thinking: A rhetorical approach to social psychology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of culture: Selected essays.* New York: Basic Books.

Gergen, K. & Gergen, M. (1986). *Narrative form and construction of psychological science.* In T.R. Sarbin (Ed.) *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct.* New York: Praeger Special Studies, 1986, pp. 22-44.

Gibson, J. (1979). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grassi, E. (1980). *Rhetoric as philosophy.* University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Herzog, W. (1999). *Lessons of darkness*. Retrieved January 22, 2007, from http://www.wernerherzog.com/main/de/html/news/Minnesota_Declaration.htm

Jacobs, J. (2004). *Dark age ahead.* Toronto: Random House.

Katz, A., & Shotter, J. (1996). Hearing the patient's 'voice': Toward a social poetics in diagnostic interviews. *Social science and medicine, 43(13),* pp. 919-931.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Landau, M. (1986). Trespassing in scientific narrative: Grafton Elliot Smith and the temple of doom. In T.R. Sarbin (Ed.) *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct*. New York: Praeger Special Studies, 1986, pp. 45-64.

Magee, B. (1973). *Popper*. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins.

Maturana, H. (1978). Biology of language: The epistemology of reality. In Miller, George A., and Elizabeth Lenneberg (Eds.) *Psychology and biology of language and thought: Essays in honor of Eric Lenneberg*. New York: Academic Press, 1978, pp. 27-63.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945). Cezanne's doubt. In G.A. Johnson (Ed.) *The Merleau-Ponty aesthetics reader*, Northwestern UP, 1994.

Nagel, T. (1989). *The view from nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ossorio, P.G. (1981). *Ex post facto: the source of intractable origin problems and their resolution.* Boulder, Colarado: Linguistic Research Institute report No. 28.

Perloff, M. (1996). *Wittgenstein's ladder: Poetic language and the strangeness of the ordinary.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Polanyi, M. (1967). *The tacit dimension.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ryle, G. (1949). *The concept of mind.* London: Hutchinson.

Shotter, J. (1984). *Social accountability and selfhood.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Shotter, J. (1989). The myth of mind and the mistake of psychology. In Baker, W.J., Hyland, M.E., van Hezewijk, R., & Terwee, S. (Eds.). *Recent trends in theoretical psychology.* Vol. II. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Shotter, J. (1993a). *Conversational realities: Constructing life through language.* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Shotter, J. (1993b). *Cultural politics of everyday life: Social constructionism, rhetoric, and knowing of the third kind.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Shotter, J. (1994a). Conversational realities: From within persons to within relationships. Paper given for the Discursive Construction of Knowledge Conference, University of Adelaide, Feb. 21st – 25th, 1994.

Shotter, J. (1994b). 'Now I can go on': Wittgenstein and communication. Paper given at University of Calgary, Department of Communication, September 30, 1994.

Shotter, J. (1996). Living in a Wittgensteinian world: beyond theory to a poetics of practices. *Journal for the theory of social behavior, 26,* pp.293-311.

Shotter, J. (1997). Wittgenstein in practice: From 'The way of theory' to a 'Social poetics'. In C.W. Tolman, F. Cherry, R. van Hezewijk, and I. Lubek (Eds.) *Problems of theoretical psychology*. York, Ontario: Captus Press, 1997.

Shotter, J. (1997b). The social construction of our 'inner' lives. *Journal of constructivist psychology, 10*, pp. 7-24.

Shotter, J. (1999). Problems with the 'way of theory'. In W. Maiers, B. Bayer, B. Duarte Esgalhado, R. Jorna and E. Schraube (Eds.) *Challenges to theoretical psychology*. North York, CA: Captus Press.

Shotter, J. (2000). Wittgenstein and the everyday: From radical hiddenness to "nothing is hidden"; from representation to participation. *Journal of mundane behavior, 1(2)*, pp. 116-134.

Stolzenberg, G. (1978). Can an inquiry into the foundations of mathematics tell us anything interesting about mind? In G.A. Miller and E. Lenneberg (Eds.) *Psychology and biology of language and thought: Essays in honour of Eric Lenneberg*. London and New York: Academic Press.

Teilhard de Chardin, P. (1975). *The phenomenon of man*. Harper Colophon: New York.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples.* University of Otago Press: Dunedin, New Zealand.

Vico, G. (1988). *On the most ancient wisdom of the italians*, trans. Lucina Palmer. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1986). *Thought and language*. Trans. Kozulin, Alex. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Williams, M. (1999). *Wittgenstein, mind, and meaning: toward a social conception of mind.* New York: Routledge.

Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Wittgenstein, L. (1956). *Remarks on the foundations of mathematics*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Wittgenstein, L. (1980). *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vols. 1 and 2. Oxford: Blackwell.