Social Accountability and the Social Construction of 'You'

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What follows is the draft version of John Shotter's classic chapter, untouched by an editor's hand. Only accidental typos have been addressed. The final, edited paper appeared as a chapter in the book, "Texts of Identity", edited by John Shotter and Kenneth J. Gergen published in 1989 by Sage Publications in the Inquiries in Social Construction series.

It is thirty years on from the original publication. At the end of this paper is a collection of responses from some of John's closest friends and colleagues (Ann Cunliffe, Sheila McNamee, Andy Lock, Justine van Lawick, Mary Gergen, Jim Wilson, Ken Gergen and John Burnham).

Finally, you will find links to videos and photos of John Shotter with colleagues, friends and family from the celebration, "Performing John Shotter" at the University of Bedfordshire, 8th October 2016.

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The thou is older than the I.

Friedrich Nietzsche.

Central to all that follows below is a certain vision of the world and of our knowledge of it: that both consist in *activities* of various kinds (Shotter, 1984; Wertsch, 1981). And also, a certain stance towards the conduct of research into such activity: that of investigating its nature from a position of active involvement in it, rather than contemplative withdrawal from it. Such a stance immediately raises questions about how the nature of the involvements in which one finds oneself placed should be best characterized. I shall claim that they are best characterized, not by reference to one's own characteristics, those of first-person actors, of 'I's', but by reference to the nature of 'you's', the second-person recipients or addressees of actor's or speaker's activities. And that a central feature of any such characterization must articulate the nature of the moral proprieties, the 'ethical logistics' of the exchanges between 'I's' and 'you's' - to do with who has responsibility for what activity in the social construction of the meanings of any communications between them.

Person and Voice

Ordinary language marks a number of important distinctions, to do with articulating the character of the situation in which an actual utterance is produced, in both the voice and the person of verbs. In the simple active voice, the subject of the verb, the agent, does something to someone or something other than or separate from themselves. In the passive voice, the agent is de-emphasized and often goes unmentioned, so that an outcome can be described without it being necessary to indicate explicitly *who* or what was responsible for it. In other words, to talk in a different voice, is not merely to say the same thing in a different manner or style; it is to represent in one's way of speaking, the way in which the subject of the verb [end 133] in one's utterance (which might of course be oneself), is actually involved in the process depicted by that verb - for instance, to do with whether the subject is morally *committed* (or not) by their actions to those to whom their actions or statements are addressed. For it may be that later, those others will appeal to the character and situation of the utterance in justifying their sanctions against the subject for failures to honour such commitments. Thus, quite different practical-moral consequences flow from one's speaking in different voices.

The device of voice, and that of person, functions both to 'locate' the subject in relation to a process, and to define what might be called the positional field of the subject (Benveniste, 1971, p.150), i.e., whether the subject is involved in a personal or a non-personal relationship, and the character of that involvement. And this notion of voice may be extended to encompass more than just the voice in which a verb is uttered, but to characterize the whole style of an utterance upon a much more large scale, in which one speaks in, or 'through', a particular "speech genre" (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Volosninov, 1973) - where to speak in a different voice is to posit a certain form of life in which, among other things, there is a certain apportionment of the 'managerial' and 'administrative' tasks and responsibilities amongst the communicative participants in constructing the meaning of utterances, i.e., the different rights and duties as to who must do what in constituting communicative activity as effective. Wertsch (in press), for example, mentions the different expectations engendered in the addressee, about how the speaker's utterances should be related to one another, by questions asked in (or through) a voice of knowledgeable authority, compared with those asked in a voice of genuine ignorance (see also Gergen, this volume, as well as Gilligan, 1982). Most importantly, the voice in which one speaks influences where authority is to be located when matters of definition are involved.

But let me turn now to the person of the verb. In situations of ordinary language use at least, to address a person in a particular person grammatically, is straightaway to say something about what you take their status to be - and to address them wrongly has serious practical consequences. Grammatically, at least, to be related as a second-person rather than as a third-person to a first-person, is both to be situated quite differently and to be assigned a quite different set of privileges and obligations (Lyons, 1968). Indeed, as Harré (this volume) points out, a whole set of subtly different statuses are marked out in pronoun systems more complex than our present Indo-European forms. First- and second-persons (plural or singular) are, even if in fact non-personal or inanimate always personified (with all that that implies for the 'personal' nature of their relation), [end 134] and are thus, so to speak, 'present' to one another, in a 'situation'. By contrast, third-persons need not be personified (they can be 'its'); nor are they present as such to other beings or entities; nor are they necessarily 'in a situation'. Indeed, the category is so non-specific that it may be used to refer to absolutely anything, so long as it is outside of, or external to, the immediate situation jointly created in the communicative activities between first- and second-persons. While second-persons have a duty to attend only to what in their activities first-person performers intend them to attend to - and to be continually responding to a speaker's hesitations, uncertainties, and failures rather than to their intended meaning, is not only to be thought rude, but to run the risk of their sanction - third-persons,

however, have no such responsibilities. Hence one's unease, as a first-person, in attempting a tricky interpersonal encounter, to notice oneself observed by a third-person, 'outside' observer (Goffman, 1959; Sartre, 1958).

The Inattention to the Second-person

Thus the use in a behaviouristic and/or positivistic social science of third-person, passive voice talk means, not only the failure to capture the character of important relations between those whom one studies (and hence, the misrepresentation of their social life), but it also hides the nature of the ethical (and political) relations between them and the science studying them. As a corrective to the concern with only third-persons, with what in fact are grammatical non-persons, the recent history of social and developmental psychology has been marked by an increasing concern with personhood, with persons, agency, and action (rather than with causes, behaviour, and objects) (Harré and Secord, 1972; Harré, 1979, 1983; Shotter, 1975; Gergen, 1982). That concern, however, has been directed mostly towards the analysis of grammatical first-persons, towards what it is to be an active agent, an 'I', a subject doing something to something or someone else. Little attention has been paid to people's existence as the persons "addressed" by first-persons, to whom or what it is one is embedded in when one is rooted or embedded in communicative activity. And thus the nature of the grammatical second-person has been ignored.

In what follows, I want to redress that balance: I want both to render the 'I' problematic, and to show how little of substance can be said about it; but also, perhaps surprisingly, to show how much of importance can be said about 'you', about the 'medium' in which one is embedded as an 'I' and how its nature and workings make us what we are. Thus, rather than attempting to account for ourselves [end 135] and our world in terms of how we at present experience them, I shall be much more concerned to account for *why*, seemingly, we experience them as we do, for why at this moment in history, we experience ourselves - or at least, why we *account* for our experience of ourselves - in such an individualistic way: as if we all existed from birth as separate, isolated individuals *already* containing 'minds' or 'mentalities' wholly within ourselves, set over against a material world itself devoid of any mental processes.

The repudiation of "Possessive Individualism" and the Cartesian Starting-point

Indeed, I want to say that we *talk* in this way about ourselves because we are entrapped within what can be thought of as a 'text', a culturally developed textual resource - the text of "possessive individualism" - to which we seemingly must (morally) turn, when faced with the task of describing the nature of our experiences of our relations to each other and to ourselves. In that 'text', the individual is seen as

> "essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual [is seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a much larger social whole, but as the owner of himself. The relation of ownership, having become for more and more men the critically important relation determining their actual freedom and actual prospect of realizing their full potentialities, was read back into the nature of the individual. The individual, it was thought, is free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities" (Macpherson, 1962, p.3).

Indeed, Macpherson's account could very well figure as one of the major texts of identity explored in this book, for he shows how the notion of "possession", although clearly not the source of other important concepts - such as freedom, rights, obligations, justice, etc. - has none the less powerfully shaped their interpretations, and hence our notions of how we are (or should be) related to one another, and hence what and who are.

However, it is not my purpose here to explore the extent to which we have been (and of course, in these Thatcher/Reagan years, *still* are) entrapped within the image of society as a market, and of individuals as all living in psychological isolation from one another, engaging only in commercial relations with one another. My purpose is merely to explore the general point that different ways of accounting (still a commercial metaphor?) for ourselves to ourselves cannot be assessed as being simply true or false. They are constitutive of our actual relations to one another, and to the extent that we constitute our selves in our relations to others, constitutive [end 136] of ourselves, and must be studied as such. And below, I want, to account for our entrapment in this text. Not so much by examining the particular nature and historical background of possessive individualism itself, as by examining the general nature of what it is for us, in our social and psychological being, to be 'shaped' by the textual nature of our involvements with one another. I want to do this, essentially, by the formulation of what might be called a counter-text (i.e., counter to possessive individualism), a text which tells a quite different story about the nature of our individuality and psychological capacities, and about the nature of our relations to the others around us. A story in which it is 'you' rather than 'I', which assumes the leading role - which entails a shift from an individualistic to a communitarian perspective.

In other words, I want to repudiate the traditional Cartesian starting point for psychological research located in the 'I' of the individual - which assumes that all psychological problems are to do solely with the acquisition and utilization of objective knowledge - and to replace it by taking, not the inner subjectivity of the individual as basic, but the practical social processes going on 'between' people. In other words, I want to replace a starting point in a supposed 'thing', geometrically or geographically located within individuals, with one located (if 'located' is now at all the right word) within the general communicative commotion of everyday life at large - the stance I mentioned above.

The Disappearance of the 'I'

The Cartesian starting point is deeply entrenched; it is implicit in many of the practices of current psychological research (as well as in the philosophical discourses concerned with their justification). Central to it is the apparently self-evident *experience* that one's own *self* (one's 'I' or ego, *or* whatever else it may be called) exists somewhere 'inside' one, as something unique and distinct from all else that there is - and it is *that*, its substantial existence, which guarantees one's personal identity (rather than it being a social or discursive construction, as I would like to argue). In this Cartesian sense, it is '*the self*' as a 'thing' which becomes the ultimate, unconditioned source of thought, meaning and strangely, of language and speech also. It appears on the philosophical scene as the epistemological *subject*, as the knower distinct from what there is to be known, able to gain knowledge from the world (said to be *objective* and 'external' to the subject) in a wholly individual and autonomous way - that is, such a subject is said to be able to gain knowledge without, in principle at least, needing to learn anything from other people. Thus the fact [end 137] that one comes into the world as a *child* and develops only slowly to adulthood - which in any case is a morally tenuous status in which one is continually corrigible by others - is neglected as immaterial in this individualistic image of personhood. Indeed, in this view, what took humankind many thousands of years to understand

and to develop, i.e., how to be self-conscious agent distinct from the activities in which one is rooted, is treated, either (1) as something one learns as an individual in one's early years, mostly, merely by opening one's eyes to what is around in one's external world for one to *observe*, or (2) as something one is born already knowing *innately* - a third possibility, that one *ontologically* learns how *to be* this or that kind of person, how *to be* a self-determining thinker, perceiver, rememberer, imaginer, listener, spectator, speaker, actor etc., is not even considered.

This is because, I think, the Cartesian starting point seems to accord so well with what many of us now regard as 'our experience' - at least, those of us who, after the appropriate schooling or instruction, know how to respond intelligibly to the request to explain our sense of personal identity. Witness, for instance, Nick Humphrey (1983, p.33) who, in expounding his theory that we understand others on analogy with ourselves, writes:

> "When I reflect on my own behaviour I become aware not only of external facts about my actions but of a conscious presence, 'I', which 'wills' those actions. This 'I' has reasons for the things it wills. The reasons are various kinds of 'feeling' - 'sensations', 'memories', 'desires'. "'I' want to eat because 'I' am hungry," "'I' intend to go to bed because 'I' am tired," "'I' refuse to move because 'I' am in pain"."

And he goes on to claim (p.33) that we only understand another because as 'I's' because: "I naturally assume that he (or she) operates on the same principles as I do".

But here, is the 'I' which refuses to move in the same logical category as the 'I' which finds itself in pain? Is there any *thing* as such at all to which the word 'I' refers, or for which it stands - an entity, substance, or principle of unity? Consider, for instance, the claim that "I think my thoughts." Rather than implying that 'I' can exist separately from my thoughts, and that I possess them as I possess other objects external to myself - as indeed cognitive psychologists do seem to imply - the implication of such a statement must be, as William James (1890, p.401) put it, that the "thought is the thinker." For, as he argued, if my thinking is confused, *I* am confused, if my thought is blocked, *I* am blocked, and so on. While my 'me' - an empirical identity, a "loosely construed thing" which *I* construct for myself - may consist in an aggregate of things objectively known, but "the *I* which knows them cannot be an aggregate..." (pp.400-401). But [end 138] if we are to accept James's claims here, another *image* of our relation to our own mental capacities is required, other than that of the proprietorial or possessive self, to guide us in making sense of his claims. We must imagine ourselves to be, not an object-like thing as such, but a mobile *region* of continually self-reproducing activity. Then it might seem sensible to say of ourselves that "the kind of activity that I am at the moment is thinking activity". But currently, this way of talking about ourselves lacks currency. Whether we can recognize our experience of ourselves in James's kind of description or not, like Nicholas Humphrey, most of us feel that there *must be* something, some 'thing', within us which functions as the causal centre of all our activities, the 'I' which wills our actions. But must there be?

In his analysis of his own experience, James refused in formulating his description of it, to talk in this way, to say that what he *must be* experiencing is the experience of a central 'I', the transcendental thinker. Indeed, for James, the 'I' as any kind of substantial entity disappears. And his very final conclusion to his chapter on "the consciousness of self" he says:

> "The only pathway that I can discover for bringing in a more transcendental thinker would be to *deny* that we have any direct knowledge of the thought as such. The latter's existence would then be reduced to a postulate, an assertion that there *must* be *a knower* correlative to all this *known*: and the problem *who that*

> *knower is* would have become a metaphysical problem ... [and that carries us beyond the psychological or naturalistic point of view" (p.401).

Hence, as James sees it, it is not our experience as such which forces the conclusion upon us that we possess an inner, central 'I', a unitary self; indeed, as a result of the particular forms of 'deconstructive' investigations he conducted, his *experience* denied it.

And indeed, such a conclusion accords well with Benveniste's (1971, p.219) claim: that *I* is a sign that is nonreferential with respect to reality; that it does not denominate any lexical entry; that it is, as he puts it, an 'empty' sign which becomes 'full' in different ways according to its use by speakers in their utterances. And it refers then, each time, only to the instance of discourse in which it is used. While, as he says, each instance of the use of a noun may be referred to a fixed an 'objective' notion, capable of remaining potential or of being actualized in a particular object and always identical with the mental image it awakens. Instances of the use of 'I' do not constitute a class of reference since, like James, he claims that there is no 'object' definable as *I* to which these instances can refer in identical fashion. Each *I* has its own reference and corresponds each time to a unique being who is set up as such. [end 139]

> "What then is the reality to which *I* and *you* refer? It is solely a 'reality of discourse', and this is a strange thing. *I* cannot be defined except in terms of 'locution', not in terms of objects as a nominal sign is... *I* can only be identified by the instance of discourse in which it is produced. But in the same way it is also as an instance of form that *I* must be taken... There is thus a combined double instance in this process: the instance of *I* as referent and the instance of discourse containing *I* as the referee. The definition [of *I*] can now be stated precisely as: *I* is 'the individual who utters the present instance of the discourse containing the linguistic instance *I*.' Consequently, by introducing the situation of 'address', we obtain a symmetrical definition for *you* as 'the individual spoken to in the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *you*' (Benveniste, 1971, p.218)."

Thus, in Benveniste's account, pronominal forms do not work by referring to an extra-discursive reality, nor to an already existing set of objective statuses or places in space or time, but function within an intralinguistically constructed 'positional field', a field which is constructed and reconstructed, moment by moment, in and through one's utterances.

By their use, we can distinguish between, not only whose activity is whose, distinguish, for instance, what I am saying from what you are saying, and what was said by others, or, that you did this, while I did that, and so on, but we can do more. Because they function to provide in their use what Benveniste calls a "combined double instance," or, to put it another way, because they possess what others have called "duality of structure" (Bhaskar, 1979; Giddens, 1979; Shotter, 1983) and appear both as structuring and as a structure, they can function to indicate not only *who* one is but also *what* one is at the same time. Thus, problem of representing both the relative 'location' of different 'places' *and* their changing character, in a shifting and developing discursive 'space', is solved by the use of these 'mobile' signs which each speaker can *appropriate* to themselves and relate to their person. So, although we may say, "I feel this," and "I desire that," and claim that in so saying I experience a certain conscious presence, my 'I', which accompanies such claims, if Benveniste and James are right (and I think they are), then those different uses of *I* do not in any unitary or total way refer to what we *are*. So why do we *feel* so strongly that there *must be* somewhere such an entity?

Social Accountability and Rational Visibility

We feel so strongly, I want to claim, because of what elsewhere (Shotter, 1984), I have called "social accountability:" the fact that we *must* only talk in certain already established ways, in order to [end 140] meet the demands placed upon us by our need to sustain our status as responsible members of our society - where the *must* involved is a moral must. For even as adults, our status is a morally tenuous one, and if we fail to perform in both an intelligible and legitimate manner, we will be sanctioned by those around us. I suggest that it is because of this - the moral (or perhaps better, the moralistic) requirement that we express ourselves only in ways approved by others - that we *feel* that our reality *must be* of a certain kind. It is not our actual experience which demands it, but our ways of talking which make themselves felt when we attempt to reflect upon our experience, and to account for it. In other words, what we talk of *as* our experience of our reality, is constituted for us very largely by the *already established* ways in which we *must* talk in our attempts to *account* for ourselves - and for it - to the others around us. In other words, what we think of and talk of as our 'intuitions' about ourselves, are 'forced' upon us by the ways of talking which we must use in justifying our conduct to others (and in criticizing theirs). And only certain ways of talking are deemed legitimate. Why?

Even more than Wittgenstein (1953, 1980), it was C. Wright Mills (1940) who much earlier emphasized that the main function of language is not the representation of things in the world, nor the giving of 'outer' expression to already well-formed 'inner' thoughts, but consists in its use in creating and sustaining social orders. It is not so much how 'I' can use language in itself that matters, as the way in which I *must* take 'you' into account in my use of it. "We must approach linguistic behaviour", Mills (1940, p.904) says, to quote him, "... by observing its social function of co-ordinating diverse actions. Rather than expressing something which is prior and in the person, language is taken *by other persons* as an indicator of future actions" (my emphasis). Although events and states of affairs in the world are always open to further specification linguistically, and may be further specified this way and that within a particular medium of communication, we cannot just talk as we please. We must talk in accord not only with what the facts will permit, but also in accord with the requirements of the medium of communication used - which often, in the case of our everyday public communications, is the reproduction of a certain dominant social ordering. But it follows from this, that if our ways of talking are constrained in any way - if, for instance, only certain ways of talking are considered legitimate and not others - then our understanding and apparently our experience of ourselves, *will be constrained also*.

To reverse a phrase of Garfinkel's (1967), aspects of our experience will be rendered "rationally-invisible" to us; we will not only be incapable of accounting for them, but incapable of perceiving and registering [end 141] them *as intelligible*, i.e., as being one or another kind of commonplace event. And this, I maintain, *is* our position at the present time: We are all embedded within a *dominant* social order which we must, to some extent at least, continually reproduce in all of the mundane activities we perform from our place, 'position', or status within it - and it is an order which is at the moment both *individualistic* and *scientistic.* This induces in us, not only a feeling of necessity - that we must account for all our experiences in terms which are intelligible and legitimate within this order - but also, paradoxically, a kind of rational blindness to the fact of our involvement in such an activity, i.e., we fail to register the fact of our involvement with others, and that in taking them into account in all we do, we continually reproduce a certain way of structuring *all* the social relations in which we are involved.

What I now want to argue is that such communally shared ways of, or means for making-sense, are constitutive of people's social and psychological being in quite a deep way. Among other things,

they *enable* the members of a social order, not only to account for themselves to themselves and others when required to do so, but also to act *routinely* in an *accountable* manner - their actions informed in the course of their performance by such procedures. In other words, they enable the performance of activities for which individual persons can be held responsible, which can be related to their 'selves', i.e., to their appreciation of how they are placed in relation to the others around them (Shotter, 1984). Besides *enabling* accountable action, however, such methods or ways also work to *constrain* it, to limit members in what they feel they can say or do - for people, as mentioned above, if they are to avoid sanctions by powerful others, must talk and act only in ways appropriate to their momentary 'position', or status in relation to the others around them. In other words, in developing within a particular region of one's society, from a child to an adult, one learns from the other adults there, how to be the kind of person required in that region of one's social order, in order to reproduce it; one learns how to act taking 'one's relations to others' into account in the performance of one's actions. That is, one learns the nature of other people as 'you's', as certain kinds of 'you', who afford one different kinds of opportunities for one's action - who 'motivate' or 'invite' one to act in some ways rather than others.

But the paradoxical result of all this for us, is that our established modes of discourse 'invite' us to treat people as the 'text' of possessive individualism suggests, as possessing all their psychological characteristics within themselves, owing nothing to society for them. And thus, in our researches, we have concentrated all our attention [end 142] upon what is supposed to occur 'inside' isolated individuals studied 'externally', from the point of view of third-person observers, socially uninvolved with them. We have failed to study what goes on 'between' people as first- and second-persons, the *sense-making practices*, procedures or methods made available to us as *resources* within the social orders into which we have been socialized - procedures which have their provenance, neither in people's experience, nor their genes, but in *the history* of our culture. We have also completely ignored the nature and importance of second-persons.

Addressivity: The Constructing and the Construction of 'You'

This is yet another aspect of the rational blindness our current modes of accountability have induced in us: not only have we ignored the *resources* made available to us by our social context, but we have also ignored the standpoint, available only within discourse, from which people's meanings (not their movements) are perceived and understood as such. To compensate for this neglect, the remainder of my paper will concentrate upon 'you', upon what it is to for someone to *address* their communications to 'you' specifically as their proper recipient - or to observe you as someone to whom later they might properly address a communication, perhaps in criticism or correction of what has seemingly been said or done by one in one's actions or utterances. And indeed, the notion of 'addressivity' will be one of my central concerns below (see Clark and Holquist's (1984) account of Bakhtin's views on this most important issue). From our beginning as children, and continuing on into our lives as adults, we are dependent upon being addressed by others for whatever form of autonomy we may achieve; thus in this sense, we can say that as persons, we are always 'you's', always essentially second-persons. The 'thou' is older than the 'I' in the sense that the capacity to be addressed as a 'you' by others, is a preliminary to the ultimate capacity of being able to say 'I' of oneself, of being able to understand the uniqueness of one's own 'position' in relation to others, and to take responsibility for one's own actions.

In other words, in this view, people are not eternal, unchanging entities in themselves (like isolated, indistinguishable atoms), but owe what stability and constancy, and uniqueness, they may appear to

have - their identity - to the stability and constancy of certain aspects of the activities, practices, and procedures in which they can make their differences from those around them known and accountable. Where the aspects in question are those in which, like the authoring of a text, we shape, pattern and develop, in moment by moment changes, as new contingencies arise, the differing relations between [end 143] our own 'position' or 'place' (who we are), and the positions of those around us. But the title of this chapter is purposely ambiguous: in allowing, as well as for this passive concern with "addressivity," and with the way in which we are created as the individuals we are by the others around us, it allows for a rather more active interpretation also: a concern with the way in which an *audience*(either a singular or a plural 'you') affords, permits, motivates, allows, or invites *only a limited* performance upon the part of first-persons. I do not just simply act 'out of' my own plans and desires, unrestricted by the social circumstances of my performances, but in some sense 'in to' the opportunities offered me to act, or else my attempts to communicate will fail, or be sanctioned in some way. And my action in being thus 'situated' takes on an ethical or moral quality; I cannot just relate myself to the others around me as I myself please: the relationship is ours, not just mine, and in performing within it, I must proceed with the expectation that you will intervene in some way if I go 'wrong' - only with a highly developed skill at anticipating and pre-empting such interventions, can I proceed as I please.

The Second-person: 'You'

There are thus a number of reasons why the second-person role is important: 1) Most obviously - but perhaps not the most important reason - is that, to put the matter quite personally, I need if not your actual presence then an imagined surrogate now (at each moment in my writing), as an audience to evaluate my attempts to write. And if this writing were talk: then I would need 'you' as a context 'into' which to address my remarks, and into which I feel I must fit what I say (if I am to avoid at least embarrassment) - without your attention, without your smiles and occasional nods of approval, I would find it very difficult to continue my speech. It is necessary continuously to coordinate the management of our sense-making practices as our communicative activities proceed. But more than the avoidance of embarrassment is at stake. 'You' constitute for me (or the surrogate I constitute in place of you) - someone who is like myself, able to be a member of the (dominant?) social order - someone to whom it makes sense to *address* my remarks here, and whom I can reasonably expect to be moved by them in some way, i.e., you provide the motivation for my remarks. For genuine human communication is not (as depicted in the "information theory" model of it), a simple matter of transferring information from point A to point B. 'I's' in addressing themselves to second-person 'you's' (either actual or implied), rather than to third-person 'it's', or even to 'him's', 'she's' or 'they's', always speak or act with an understanding of what a [end 144] 'you's' anticipated response might be. It is a part of what it is for someone to attempt to mean something to someone else: they are addressed as beings capable of responding to such an address in some way. And an understanding of *how they might respond* is a part of our understanding of *who* they are for us; and clearly, we compose ourselves differently according to whether we must address a child, a superior or inferior, an equal, a loved one, an academic critic, an enemy, or so on. Indeed, "the anticipated response" - the way in which what one does or says indicates future action (Mills), whether one's own or of others - is a crucial part of what is for a person to be self-consciousness: they must understand what socially they are trying to achieve, in what individually they actually do.

This leads me to my next, slightly more important point: 2) That you might respond, not to what I am saying or doing, but to what I might have said or done but didn't. In other words, you are expecting

me to perform (to write) with certain standards 'in mind' (to use a figure of speech), to answer to certain responsibilities in my conduct, and if I do not, you have a right to correct me. You are not just a source or sink of information but a *judge* of it too (and thus there is a degree of apprehension in me addressing you). I treat you as operating according to standards - as being able to evaluate my performance critically and to sanction it if it should fall short in any way (particularly in its intelligibility less so, perhaps, for its legitimacy - though that is, as I see it, the major hurdle work of this kind has to overcome if it is to gain acceptance).

Neither of these two points, however, seem to me to be so important as the third one that I now want to mention: 3) That when small children are addressed as 'you', rather than merely having information reported to them upon which to base (or not) their individual actions, they are being "in-structed" in how *to be* - this is another sense in which human communication cannot be seen simply as a matter of information transfer from one location to another. It must be seen as ontologically *formative*, as a process by which people can, in communication with one another, literally, in-form one another's being, i.e., help to make each other, persons of this or that kind. For instance, one is addressed in discourse as 'you' and in such discourse in-formed as to the use of all the other pronouns. Hence the child, who can understand its mother's admonition, "Stop making so much noise, *you*'re shouting", and can respond by saying (as they usually do) "No *I* wasn't," knows, among other things, that just as he or she is annoyed or distracted by noise, and have a right to object to it, so have others - that they try to deny that right to others is, of course, all a part of the microsocial power politics of growing up. In responding thus the child knows that the 'you' spoken by others [end 145] addressing it, refers to itself, yet also, it refers to those others when the child addresses them. And in learning the 'architecture' of address, children learn not only a set of ideal, reciprocal rights and duties to do with an equality of access to communicative opportunities, but also the *actual* distribution of such opportunities in the region of their development, and hence the nature of the social structure there - that some people are more difficult of access than others.

This suggests a fourth point: 4) To the extent that people are essentially beings produced by other such beings - and especially by their predecessors, who form and care for them until such time as we can be *accounted* independent - there are certain *developmental* facts about us which are essential to us being persons at all. I mean the fact that we grow up; that we go through recognizable phases from, for example, infancy to maturity, from dependency to relative independency, from ignorance to wisdom; that we find life a task, and that whatever achievements of our predecessors we inherit, we have to reject (or rebel against) a portion of their learning - as history moves on; that the media of communication we live in are suffused with claims to authority which are not easily contested. Indeed, people not only have a *life history*, they are expected to be knowledgeable about it in some way, and for that knowledge to be influential in their actions - that they have had (and are still susceptible to) traumas and triumphs, joys and regrets, delights and disasters, and what has happened to them in the past makes a difference to how they act now. They cannot just exist as ahistorical, atemporal beings. So, although Dennett (1979, p.267), to mention one of the many who ignore these 'developmental' conditions on the attribution of personhood, may be right in saying that one's dignity as a person "does not depend upon one's parentage," he is wrong to claim (with computers in mind), that it does not depend upon "having been born of woman or born at all," it clearly does. A human life devoid of any relations of dependency upon, and responsibilities for, as well as tensions with those around one, both older and younger, and with those from different regions of social life than one's own, would (although conceivable) would not qualify as a (ordinary) human life at all. The possession of a developmentally susceptible identity - in other words, the possibility of living of a life susceptible to a biographical account - is an essential part of what it is to be an ordinary person, and to play one's part in the history of ordinary persons.

Putting the matter of one's identity in this way suggests a fifth and final point: 5) The fact that individual development is not a matter (as I must admit, I myself once thought - Shotter, 1973) [end 146] of children being merely helped by adults around them to bring the "natural powers" innately in them in virtue of their birth as human beings, under their own control, thus to transform them into "personal powers." In my earlier views I was clearly still in the thrall of the classic 'text' of identity, possessive individualism, enshrined in our more everyday forms of talk. The activity between first- and second-persons - elsewhere I have called it "joint action" (Shotter, 1984) - is, however, activity of a very special kind, for at least the following two reasons: i) That as human activity it has an *intentional* quality to it; it 'points to', or 'indicates', or ' makes a relation to' something other than or beyond itself. In other words, it works to relate 'things' (whether objects, events, states of affairs, procedures, methods, or other activities) in some way to the *situation* between the participants; as 'things', they are given an intelligible 'place' within it and thus made available as resources, as means. And it is in this way that the continual activity constituting the general commotion of everyday social life at large, makes available a body of cultural resources for general use - at least, to the extent that one can gain access to the communicative activities in which they have their being. ii) But not only are otherwise alien entities transformed in joint action between different individuals into resources for general use, they are also transformed into 'shared' resources, in the following sense: that whether the joint activity producing them is a matter of agreements or disagreements, when one person acts 'into' a jointly constructed setting rather than 'out of' their own plans or desires, an outcome is produced which is independent of any of the individuals involved and 'belongs' only to the collectivity they constitute. An argumentative exchange involving justifications produced in response to criticism is just as productive of joint, and hence individual-independent outcomes, an activity involving only agreements - the disagreements we have are just as much 'ours' as the love we find ourselves in.

So it is in this sense that the even among quite different people, who may maintain their differences in their involvements with one another, that shared 'entities' held in common can be formed. Indeed, certain of these, whatever their origins in conflicts, coercions, negotiations, or agreements, must serve as stable and basic standards in terms of which all our other communications have their sense and significance: I mean the rights and powers, the duties and enablements, the basic communicative ethics which regulate our ways of making sense. While not incorrigible or indubitable (in a Cartesian sense), such (ethical) standards cannot in any practical sense be rationally denied. For, rationally, in any context, one should [end 147] not deny the 'foundations' in terms of which one's actions have their force in that context.

In conclusion

What then is involved in the social constructing and construction of 'you'? Well: Not the construction of a certain kind of object or entity - that's for sure. There ain't no such 'things' as 'I's' or 'you's'; at least, not with anything more than a fleeting existence, changing moment by moment. However, in being addressed as a particular 'you', in certain particular settings, by certain particular people, you come to know yourself as a particular kind of person among other such persons; as someone whom you can (in both a naturalistic and an ethical sense) address as they address you. In Hegel's phrase: people must live as "mutually recognizing themselves as mutually recognizing each other." And such a knowledge shows itself in the ability to use *all* the pronouns appropriately, for none of them have sense except in relation to one another. For that is their function: to indicate the momentary and changing relations between the 'places' or 'positions' constructed in a discursive reality, to locate the

source and the address of communications, the rights and duties of the communicants in managing meaning, and the rights of access they might have to one another.

This implies an approach to language which perhaps should now be stated explicitly: that the primary function of language is formative or rhetorical, and only secondarily and in a derived way referential and representational. It works by people materially moving one another by its use to behave in certain ways (Silverman and Torode, 1980), it can 'instruct' them in their practical activities (Vygotsky, 1962) - where among such activities and practices, along with many others, is the socially negotiated fashioning and use of modes of representation and ways of reference (see Lee, 1985). The formative nature of language seems to be such that primarily vague and only partially structured events and states of affairs in the world, can be *specified further* within a medium of communication, i.e., people can be 'moved' linguistically into treating their circumstances in certain socially recognized and recognizable ways (see Shotter, 1984, for an account of this 'specificatory' approach to the functioning of language). This enables the crafting, the social construction of certain devices, particular *ways* of speaking, for use by people in managing the nature of their social relations, i.e., people can construct within the activity of speaking itself (and once having done so, continually reproduce in their speaking), devices or procedures for use in coordinating and sequentially [end 148] ordering, complex and intricate activities (and their outcomes) amongst large numbers of people over large distances and long times. Such devices help in administrating and coordinating the logistical problems involved in managing different ways of meaning - who has responsibility for what.

Such devices or procedures, although of course structured (at least partially), are used not primarily as pictures, as copies or representations of one's surroundings to which to refer in one's actions *instead* of to one's actual circumstances - as if *all* of one's activity had to take place in relation to surroundings not actually present - but as a structured *means* through which to act or to communicate with one's actual surroundings, where its *structured* nature allows one to discriminate, in the relation between the outflow of activity from oneself and the resultant inflow of activity from one's surroundings, the active nature of one's surroundings. In other words, by acting *through* differently structured means, one discovers different aspects of one's surroundings in relation to one's 'Self - art approach to the acquisition of knowledge first put forward by Plato in *Theaetetus* (see Pred and Pred, 1985), but articulated recently by quite a number of writers (e.g. Bohm, 1965; Heidegger, 1967; Polanyi, 1958; Shotter, 1982; Vygotsky, 1962; Wertsch, 1985). In such a view of language as a means through which to act, the different ways in which it functions as such a means are just as important as the different meanings to which it gives rise; what one does linguistically determines the character of the results produced by one's utterances.

For us as social scientists, this means that our ways of talking (when used both as a means through which to co-ordinate our activities among ourselves as investigators, and as a means for relating ourselves to those whom we investigate) arc not neutral in how we present our world and its problems to ourselves: as I have argued above, our different ways of talking work to 'propose' different forms of social relationship, different statuses, different ways of 'positioning' ourselves in relation to others, different patterns of rights and privileges, duties and obligations. And it is now possible to see how the claim - not just in psychology, but in the rest of science - that the 'scientific' one must speak in a particular way, making use of only third-person, passive voice talk, is more than merely a matter of producing a self-effacing representation of oneself, as lacking interests, opinions and desires of one's own. It is also more than a matter of producing an account which (supposedly) allows states of affairs, as it were, to 'speak for themselves'. It also works to construct a particular ethical (and political) relation between oneself and the audience [end 149] one addresses in one's communications. The ignoring of 'you, the failure to provide a place or a function for the grammatical second-person, in the

idioms or 'speech genres' (Bakhtin, 1986) we use in our scientific communications, thus has a number of serious consequences, and it has been my purpose here to explore some of those consequences - especially, how the shaping and crafting of the relations between ourselves and those around us is done linguistically, and the special part 'you' might play in such crafting.

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Thirty years on. Some reflections from colleagues on John Shotter's paper, "Social Accountability and the Social Construction of 'You'"

Words on the Wing

Kenneth J. Gergen

There are special times in intellectual life during which the ground begins to shake. John Shotter's essay was a child of those times, a period in which the very grounds of knowledge, and all we had assumed about the world, were placed in question. There are many terms for this watershed --post-foundational, post-modern, and post-structural among them. In the social sciences much of the ferment could be termed social constructionist. And it is within this context that John and I began a mutually catalytic relationship that continued until his death. During the fledgling period of this relationship, we also felt it essential to give shape to the fermenting dialogues. The result was our editing a Sage series, *Inquiries in Social Construction*, terminated after 16 volumes and the emerging sense that the shape was now evident.

It is with this context present at hand that I have now re-visited Shotter's rich and significant essay on the social construction of "you." The essay was especially important at the time, as much had been done to undermine the atomistic vision of society as composed of individual selves. As Shotter's essay explores, the individualist "I" cannot be separated from the "you" to which it is related. However, what especially struck me about the essay was how deeply it was embedded in the dialogues of the times and prescient of what was to follow. The critical threads woven throughout the essay, the concern with moral order, the prominent place of discourse in shaping society, the relational interdependence of social action, the emphasis on process over substance - all were present in the scholarly murmuration of the times. Shotter's particular eloquence gave them flight. But these themes continue to live on within multiple movements throughout the social sciences. Listen now to the myriad wings in motion, and there you will detect echoes of Shotter's words on the wing.

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"I" is a Very Big Word

Jim Wilson

In this chapter John Shotter makes the claim that, "best characterized, not by reference to one's own characteristics, those of first-person actors, of 'I's', but by reference to the nature of 'you's'". The following commentary considers the impact and implications of this orientation for my practice as a systemic psychotherapist.

John Shotter, who died in December 2016, was a very significant influence on my practice and teaching through our collegiate collaboration and friendship over ten years. His writings continue to bolster my

thinking about what I try to do as a family therapist. In placing 'you' before 'I' he challenges the idea of the "atomised" individual as separate, being divorced from the formative influence of relational contexts. He places in the foreground the significance of relational complexity in opposition to an essentialist view of the individual as a separate self-contained (id)entity. For Shotter, the complex manner of meeting another person is a multi-sensorial inter-action and intra-action, beyond our capacity to put fully into words in any explicit way. He later referred to the distinction between "withness" talk and "aboutness" talk as different positions in the ways we try to connect with one another. "Withness" talk places me firstly as a responder who focuses on the invitation offered to me by the ones we meet in our practice and daily life, in effect saying, "After you!".

To illustrate this distinction here is an example from my current practice:

I recently offered a consultation to a social worker who had a very complex matter to discuss: a case in which she felt frightened and intimidated by a client. The consultation focused on her stated concern about feeling voiceless and intimidated in her dealings with her client. The consultation helped her to find new ways of addressing her fears, and she said she was now clearer about how to go on. Other workshop participants were then invited to offer reflections on *their* learning from listening to the conversation. Alas, one participant decided to provide a mini lecture to the consultee (and all of us) on the importance of policy and procedure regarding certain features about how to deal with intimidating clients. This response in "aboutness" fashion may have been useful at a later point but I could see the consultee's face fall, and her expression turn to exasperation as the "lecture" was being "delivered". I eventually had to intervene to stem the flow of words of advice. Good ideas - wrong context.

Attending sensitively to the responses, requests and affective language of the other is crucial. Only when advice is *relationally* relevant (the client trusts your opinion) will it be absorbed and, only when the context is safe enough will it be further explored (the client takes courage to open new directions with you). In addition to the significance of these important moments of meeting, Shotter also places all communicative behaviour within a political sphere of influence and this emphasis grew in profile in his later writings though also mentioned in this chapter. We are not free of the constraints of linguistic constructions, or how political and social realities act as forces that push us from behind our backs.

> "if our ways of talking are constrained in any way - if, for instance, only certain ways of talking are considered legitimate and not others - then our understanding and apparently our experience of ourselves, *will be constrained also*."

> Shotter p.72

> "This possibility of change is rooted in man's [sic] capacity for becoming aware of the forces which move him from behind his back so to speak --- and thus enabling him to regain his freedom".

> Fromm 1964, p.124

Dialogue can only be generative when creativity is expressed in debate, disagreement, and consensus characterised by openness to the other's point of view; without this, dialogue cannot exist. When dialogue is lost, we encounter dogma, fundamentalist ideologies, power abuses and cruelty that debase and dehumanise. Shotter makes the argument for a social relational construction of our lives,

not separated from our moral obligations as human beings. He points us towards the importance of a relationally responsible society not just a relationally responsible therapy - one that honours the co-creative possibilities we try to develop as therapists or teachers, and in our lives in general.

This chapter and John's other inspirational writings provide stimulation to the field of relational therapies that push us to place our practice squarely within socially, relationally and politically aware contexts. In so doing, we enhance our thinking both within and outside the therapy room. John's sensitive and provocative writings continue to help us to see ourselves as others see us.

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Is there a relational "youme"?

Justine van Lawick

I ask my two and a half year old grandson, Luc, to get me the little bottle for his sister, Saar, of six months. He laughs at me, runs in the direction of the bottle, starts to bring his hand to the bottle and then suddenly changes his actions / plan / and does "as if" he cannot find the bottle. With sparkling eyes he tries to find out how I will respond to his spontaneous, a bit frustrating, joke. He took a risk.

My relational joy won; when I started to laugh, we could laugh together.

Where is the "you", where the "I", or is there a relational "youme"?

Another example…

The red old cat Dikkie of my stepdaughter Geertje is a lazy cat at home. His garden is his territory where he can lie down and sleep. He is a regular guest in our house and garden. When he arrives he becomes very active and chases all the other cats from our garden. Geertje didn't believe he could behave that way till she saw it with her own eyes. I love Dikkie doing that because we have too many cats from neighbours in our garden that use our garden as a public toilet and spoil our fresh air and plants.

Where is the "you", where the "I", or is there a relational "youme"?

Reading John's chapter, I felt so relieved that I could have different voices and actions in different contexts and didn't have to bother about the "true me" apart from a "true you". Before then, I could be worried about my different behaviour with family, friends, partner or neighbours. Also, because I felt a norm to be a true me and that meant to be the same everywhere.

John asks, "why at this moment in history, we experience ourselves - or at least, why we *account* for our experience of ourselves - in such an individualistic way: as if we all existed from birth as separate,

isolated individuals *already* containing 'minds' or 'mentalities' wholly within ourselves, set over against a material world itself devoid of any mental processes." (p.68)

And "We must imagine ourselves to be, not an object-like thing as such, but a mobile *region* of continually self-reproducing activity." (p.70)

This sentence touched me and emancipated me: what a space for being relational and mobile, moving, not fixed, responsive. I felt at home and supported to be creative and multi-voiced.

He continues on this issue "From our beginning as children, and continuing on into our lives as adults, we are dependent upon being addressed by others for whatever form of autonomy we may achieve; thus in this sense, we can say that as persons, we are always 'you's, always essentially second-persons. The 'thou' is older than the 'I' in the sense that the capacity to be addressed as a 'you' by others, is a preliminary to the ultimate capacity of being able to say 'I' of oneself, of being able to understand the uniqueness of one's own 'position' in relation to others, and to take responsibility for one's own actions." (p.73)

In his conclusion he continues, "There ain't no such 'things' as 'I's or 'you's; at least, not with anything more than a fleeting existence, changing moment by moment." (p.76)

Reading John Shotter, I often had the experience that he told me what I already know, because his words related so much to my intimate experience of living, he helped me to re-member what was forgotten because of many dominant discourses in psychology based on individualistic premises.

I remembered that we start to know ourselves in relation to others and this process continues all our lives.

It is sad, and my inner voice says **unjust,** that John had the experience that many others in the scientific University domain didn't value his original thinking and writing and responded dismissive to him. It made him angry and sad.

John talks referring to this context about a *moral must* (p.72) that frustrates this freedom of movement: "we *must* only talk in certain already established ways, in order to meet the demands placed upon us by our need to sustain our status as responsible members of our society" (p.72). I know how he suffered himself from this *moral must* and not being listened to because he refused to talk and write in already established ways. He sometimes felt isolated in the scientific world. He writes, "if our ways of talking are constrained in any way - if, for instance, only certain ways of talking are considered legitimate and not others - then our understanding and apparently our experience of ourselves, *will be constrained also*." (p.72)

At the celebration of John Shotter and his work, "Performing John Shotter" on 8th October 2016 at the University Bedfordshire in Luton, I was moved when a central sentence from this paper was spoken in different languages by ("I") and to ("you") several students on the Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice: "It is not so much how 'I' can use language in itself that matters, as the way in which I *must* take 'you' into account in my use of it." (p.73)

John's publications, talks and conversations always were and are a resource of wisdom that helps me to stretch my mind. I sometimes didn't understand him. He sometimes didn't understand me. These differences were helpful in staying on the move, this will never stop.

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The "scent" of the words and gestures: Going beyond the human

Mary Gergen

> "I want to repudiate the traditional Cartesian starting point for psychological research located in the 'I' of the individual - which assumes that all psychological problems are to do solely with the acquisition and utilization of objective knowledge - and to replace it by taking, not the inner subjectivity of the individual as basic, but the practical social processes going on 'between' people." (Shotter p.69)

This sentence is a clarion call to rejecting the commonplace view that individuals should be the source for psychological study. Shotter also rejects the notion of one's internal qualities as the subject of psychological research. These are daring ideas that attempt to undermine traditional psychology. Instead he offers another source for studying how life goes on. This is the notion that the actual activities of people with one another form the basis for understanding human beings. He takes a relational position in terms of understanding how it is we come to engage with one another, either as one person with another or with several people together in a group. It is fascinating to me that we become encouraged, through this vision of psychology, to focus on the invisible space between us, to the actions that infiltrate the "air" around us, and the "scent" of the words and gestures that take place within the playing field of our actions. What a tremendous difference in how we would study "psychology" if we took this relational position. We would be challenged to create whole new vocabularies of psychology, based on relational action. What novel impressions might occur if we were to look and listen within this framework.

This relational approach, as intimated by Shotter's comment, places an emphasis on the social action between people. But I wonder, why only consider people relating together? Why not make a small step to include animals and things. I might make a specific case, using our big kitten, Charlie, who visits our bed each morning. Charlie jumps up and nestles for a time, with his paws around my neck. I hear his purring, as I stroke his back. Then we commence a ritual relational process with his kneading my body; his little claws emerge a tiny bit, and I move them to the blanket. Then, as our relational process continues, a turning point comes. He offers another form of relating. Suddenly he begins to lightly bite me, and he rolls over on his back, and strikes out with a paw at Ken's invitation to play; the game begins to change. Here Ken takes over, wearing a heavy glove, to engage in a new, but familiar ritual. Between them, a new form of meaning making begins. I slip away. It is not a game I want to join.

Other animals and other stories of relating can easily come to mind. And beyond animals, one can imagine relational activities among people and plants and furniture, and books and all the elements of the Earth itself…

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Social Accountability and the Construction of 'You': Thirty Years Later

Sheila McNamee

Texts of Identity (Shotter & Gergen 1989), the volume within which John Shotter's, "Social Accountability and the Construction of 'You,'" is published, fell into my hands less than a year before my colleagues and I were able to lure John to join our faculty at the University of New Hampshire. John stayed in New Hampshire for thirteen years – years marked by stimulating conversations and daily exchanges of manuscripts. I recall those days with great nostalgia; the excitement and ever-flowing energy was palpable, as was the shared desire to humanize our study, our teaching, and our writing about the social world. John's chapter in *Texts* captures the revolutionary conversations of that time.

His argument that, ". . . the primary function of language is formative or rhetorical . . ." (p. 77) echoed the growing chorus of constructionist voices. John acknowledges that, "what one does linguistically determines the character of the results produced by one's utterances . . . our ways of talking . . . are not neutral . . . our different ways of talking work to 'propose' different forms of social relationship, different statuses, different ways of 'positioning' ourselves in relation to others, different patterns of rights and privileges, duties and obligations" (p.77). As I reflect on these words, I recognize how far we have come in transforming the terrain of research and writing about the social world (cf, Holstein & Gubrium 2008; Simon & Chard 2014; McNamee & Hosking 2012, as just a few of the many examples).

I first began playing with alternative ways of conceptualizing research in the mid-1980's, having been influenced by my own interest in family therapy. I began envisioning research, like therapy, as a process of change (McNamee 1988; McNamee and Tomm 1986; McNamee 1992). John's articulation of second person relations, as applied to our understandings of and interactions with social interaction offered support to those ideas but, more than support, John's chapter in *Texts* served as a rich resource for acknowledging how a focus on language allows us to recognize how the pillars of science – objectivity, prediction, and control – are linguistic achievements borne out of rhetorically crafted discourses. The proliferation of works (as identified above) that have now emerged, guiding researchers and practitioners whose desire is to create more collaborative and dialogic understandings of social interaction, rest on the shoulders of John's wise words.

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Some reflections

Andy Lock

Texts of Identities was published in 1989. That year marked the beginning of a major change in my own identity. I left the UK for the birth of my daughter in Australia; spent 6 months based at the University of Murcia in Spain; returned to the UK to teach one term at Lancaster University – where I had until then spent my professional academic life studying infancy as a process of social construction, with Gavin Bremner, Charles Antaki, and Susan Condor as colleagues in adjacent offices – and found myself in New Zealand as Professor of Psychology at Massey University at the start of 1991. The Department of Psychology was, as were all New Zealand departments, a bastion of behavioural science, boasting a pigeon colony in the top floor whose inmates, sadly, had never figured in a single publication. I was not the sort of psychologist they were expecting. Freud's words to Jung as he disembarked at Boston in 1909 to deliver lectures at Clark University – "We are importing the plague"[reported in Bjorklund (2000, p.90)] – rattled in my head. As did ideas that rattled around in John's chapter, ideas which are brought sharply into focus when one's professional and personal life suffers such a major dislocation and relocation: you don't know anyone; they don't know you; you don't share a common understanding of such basic grounds as to what psychology is about; and in consequence one's "our status is a morally tenuous one, and if we fail to perform in both an intelligible and legitimate manner, we will be sanctioned by those around us." (Shotter p.72)

And, of course, this failure is true for 'you' as well as 'me', and 'we' constitute a very different sort of 'we' from the ones you and I have been previously, to a degree at least, been able to sleepwalk through because "we *feel* that our reality *must be* of a certain kind" (ibid): the new 'we' are linguistically "alien entities" (p.76) to each other, divided by a common language. The upshot is that when "only certain ways of talking are considered legitimate and not others – then our understanding, and apparently our experience of ourselves, *will be constrained also*" (p.72). There are clear mottoes in this analysis for anyone coming into an environment from the outside. University departments, as with any institutional orders, are embedded in multi-levels of discourse. In many of these, the different levels of what or who they are, are formed and re-formed in the course of everyday life and talk. Academics can talk as being in opposition to "The University – that is, the management and administration – as opposed to being part of it, thus excluding themselves from the institution that their roles constitute

(see below on the notion of "duality of structure"). Students can be valued, but after the summer 'vacation', "the bloody students are coming back." As one colleague pinned to his door, "students bring joy to this room: some when they enter and some when they leave." Colleagues can also be mortal enemies, depending on circumstance, and all these different positions can be occupied and experienced in a single day. Add to this some additional factors: a new Professor arriving from the outside as a Head of Department occupies a position of power that is only legitimised by its linguistic title. Can they actually get anything done?

John was concerned to not write theory, but to promote practice: so let me turn to some practical outcomes of the ideas John put forward in this chapter with respect to the situation I have been describing. The first instance of change has been noted by my former colleagues Kerry Chamberlain, Antonia Lyons, and Chris Stephens (2018) who put the view that:

> A ... thread, important for the future critical [re-]orientation at Massey University, was the appointment of Andy Lock as Professor of Psychology and Head of Department in 1991. Lock was a critical scholar who had studied with John Shotter; he had eclectic interests and through various academic staffing appointments facilitated the development of critical and qualitative research within the Department. One key appointment was Mandy Morgan in 1992, who nurtured and encouraged a feminist critical approach to psychology. Several current academic staff members and students were also starting to develop qualitative research projects and were keen to develop their skills and expertise in this area. Keith Tuffin [and I] developed a critical discourse postgraduate course around this time, which facilitated student engagement with critical approaches. Morgan set up a discourse group, which met regularly to discuss discursive research and completed several research projects (e.g. Morgan et al. 1994, 1997). Many more theses and projects began to utilise qualitative research approaches (2018, p. 457)

And today, the School of Psychology at Massey has this very strong, practically-oriented critical streak in addition to the more traditional brand of applied psychology, approaches which together have marked it out as unique in the New Zealand tradition. So, yes, you can get things done, even if by seeming serendipity.

This reorientation was a major practical change directly following from John's influence. There is also an irony to it. The School of Psychology at Massey is the most under-rated in the research assessment exercises carried out by the NZ Tertiary Education Commission that evaluates the quality of research in New Zealand universities. You may think I am biased, but if you knew my history in this institution you would be surprised I have any positive views of it or its components. The critical perspectives the School now brings to many areas of concern for psychologists is world class, but if you are in the classical psychological paradigm - and if you are, you will most likely be on the assessment teams - then this excellence is likely impossible to recognise. And in many ways, this is true of John's career in psychology: somebody, in his view, was always out to get him, and he was never given his due.

A second practical outcome was a personal one that capitalises on the point above that "only certain ways of talking are deemed legitimate" and thereby constrain our identities. David Epston is as voracious a reader as John was, and he found his ideas of narratives and counter-narratives resonating with much of what John had written in his 1984 *Social accountability and selfhood* book. David's work with anorexics had him turning the sufferer into an actor. There were, for David, few braver people

than those who exercised such strong control over their appetites. To starve in a famine is one thing; to do so in a culture surrounded by plentiful food is another. David's approach to anorexia was to turn the language that medicalised the condition as one a patient has into one that talked of the sufferer as besieged by Anorexia, and to mobilise their strengths against this persuasive voice that was taking them over. David has plotted the conversational tactics of many of the problems that sustain themselves by tapping into a person's strengths and energy (e.g., Maisel, Epston & Borden 2004). What narrative therapists do is separate the person from the problem, and so reconstruct the person's notions of their selves, by developing a form of talking that pits the person and the problem in a dialogue in a similar way to how 'I' and 'you' find themselves structured into being through everyday language in John's approach. It was this impetus from John that led to my being able to work with David (e.g., Lock, Epston & Maisel 2004) in developing the notion of problems as 'discursive parasites' that co-opt discourses for their own sustenance, and thrive when the dominant discourse provides them with the cover they need to remain unseen.

This second practical application of John's work seeded a third one. The advent of the internet in the mid-1990s allowed me to begin exploring how to use this medium for the purpose of distance education – which is one of Massey's traditional roles in New Zealand. But the more interesting and challenging idea was pushing the possibility one step further: if you could have students at a distance, you could also have your faculty there. Tom Strong and I 'met' on one of the early list-servs that facilitated the discursive, constructionist and postmodern interests of many practitioners in those early days. We concocted 'the virtual faculty' - which still crops up when the phrase is Googled – and taught a postgraduate programme including John, Rom Harré, Ken and Mary Gergen, Susanna Chamberlain, the Houston-Galveston Institute, Charles Waldegrave and his colleagues at the Family Centre in Wellington, Lois Shawver in San Francisco, among others (see Lock and Strong 2012, for an overview). This was all a bit before its time, and was taught in a period when any thought of universities acting in a *pro bono* role as opposed to full cost mode was unthinkable. We couldn't make money for the centre when we were splitting course fees out amongst the global contributors, and we couldn't attract enough students when the course was over-priced at full cost-recovery, so we limped along for almost a decade before being axed in a periodic budget cutting exercise. The idea is now continued in the Taos Institute's programmes and those of the Houston-Galveston Institute.

Finally, I'll note one central idea that arises in John's text that I take as of crucial importance to his work as it subsequently developed. As usual with John, it is not something original to him at the outset – he likely got it from Anthony Giddens (e.g., 1979) - but something that he made his own as he worried away at it and juxtaposed it to other insights, as was his *modus operandi*. The idea is 'duality of structure', which means, in Giddens' original formulation, that 'structure is both the medium and outcome of the practices which constitute social systems' (Giddens, 1981, p. 27). Put another way, when you do something you construct yourself. Your performance is you, and you only exist in your performance until somebody draws that performance into the discourse of the community. There is no 'you' behind the performance; you are available in front of the performance for others to talk about, thus reflecting you back to yourself as the 'you' you are taken to be, but you weren't there all along. Weird, but that's how 'things' are. And this is really important; because the problem with social constructionism is that it can appear to be an 'anything goes' stance: and obviously it isn't the case that anything goes. Some things have to be the case; don't they?

This concern with what is right, really right, has been brought into the discourse of all New Zealanders through the atrocities that have occurred in Christchurch in recent days. The immediate response from the New Zealand Prime Minister on the evening of the events was largely factual. Her conclusion was political, ethical, and in the end, also absolutely factual. Now I don't want to suggest that the New

Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, reads theoretical texts on social constructionism, but I do want to suggest that John's work plays a part in catching and commenting on, as well as constructing - having that reflexive duality of structure he noted in the 1989 article in focus here (see above) - the zeitgeist that informs what she said on this awful day. Anyone who knew John conversationally would note two things: that he ventriloquated his textual friends continually; and that he had a remarkable ability to catch the currents of contemporary thought while reflecting them back, restructured, to the milieu in which they arose. Which is what our present Prime Minister has the ability to do, her concluding comments being:

> We, New Zealand, we were not a target because we are a safe harbour for those who hate.
>
> We were not chosen for this act of violence because we condone racism, because we are an enclave for extremism.
>
> We were chosen for the very fact that we are none of those things.
>
> Because we represent diversity, kindness, compassion. A home for those who share our values. Refuge for those who need it. And those values will not and cannot be shaken by this attack.
>
> We are a proud nation of more than 200 ethnicities, 160 languages. And amongst that diversity we share common values. And the one that we place the currency on right now is our compassion and support for the community of those directly affected by this tragedy.
>
> And secondly, the strongest possible condemnation of the ideology of the people who did this.
>
> You may have chosen us – we utterly reject and condemn you.

Ardern (2019)

Yet we, and she, can only do this because we are implicitly acting with a tacit grasp of how components we inject into our conversations work to construct themselves - I, you, we, them, him, her - on the fly, as it were - in that duality of structuring that discourses are comprised of, and which John reveals in his 1989 chapter.

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Against "Possessive Individualism"

Ann L Cunliffe

I have to admit (as I've written elsewhere) that *Conversational Realities* was the book that had the most influence on me. I only came to "Social Accountability" in 2001 when I was teaching in California and used it as a reference in a course I taught in public administration. The chapter helped students think about what it meant to be a person who believes in social constructionism. My first response in re-reading "Social Accountability" after a number of years was the depressing thought that little has changed in relation to "possessive individualism", except that the "I" is even more visible in every sphere of life. And I wondered if at the time he wrote the chapter, whether John had any inkling that "I" would be entrapped and located "within the general communicative commotion of everyday life at large" (p.69) in quite the way we are now. The textual "I" is now the social media "I". It brought to mind a meeting a number of years ago with a University Marketing Director, who asked me if I was on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, how many "friends" I had, etc. When I said I was on none, he asked, rather exasperatedly, "what *do you* do then?" My reply of "talk *with* people" was obviously unsatisfactory because he never contacted me again.

As John observes, if "only certain ways of talking are considered legitimate […] then our understanding, and apparently our experience of ourselves, *will be constrained also*" (p.72). I realize my view might be equally constrained, but what I understand from my many conversations with John is that conversations and dialogue are important: for it's in our moment-to-moment relationally-responsive ways of talking, feeling, gesturing, interacting that "I" make life sensible with "you" and learn to anticipate and respect you. The idea that "I" am not merely a third person "thing" identified by social or academic categorizations, nor an individual ego-acting subject, but an intersubjective living person understanding who to be when I realize I am always in relation with you, underpins my writing and teaching. For this is how we learn moral accountability, not by deleting a tweet, but by

realizing we are relationally, temporally, biographically, and embedded persons constructing our world with others. As John says, a relationship is not just mine – it is ours, ideas he went on to explore in more depth in *Conversational Realities*.

While organization and management research and education are still replete with "possessive individualism", causal efficacy, rational action and accountability, what John's body of work urges us to do is to explore alternatives. To think more reflexively about who we are at home and work, what it means to teach, research, write, lead and manage organizations in ethical and responsible ways from intersubjective, relational, and dialogic perspectives. And his legacy is that interest is growing in academic and practitioner circles in developing his vision of the world through many ways of talking!

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I tell "You", there's more to this (chapter) than meets the "I"

John Burnham

Relationship between theorists and practitioners

When professionals talk of the relationship between theory and practice, this can create an image of "theory" as a set of disembodied ideas which practitioners attempt to put into "practice". The relationship between theorists and practitioners speaks to the people who propose theory and those who are influenced by, and potentially enact that theory. The word relationship suggests that the influence could be reciprocal, and that theorists could reconstruct their theories in response to the feedback from practitioners.

Practising a Theory and Theorising a Practice

 Speaking to this relationship, Barnett Pearce once said that, in his experience, it seemed like "theorists were the therapists for therapists". He continued that when theorists come up with new concepts and theories, therapists often respond with puzzlement and an excited curiosity. Therapists then engage in *practising a theory*, that is they set about seeing how many different ways they can *do* this theory and its constituent concepts. After a while this becomes so routine that "originality becomes orthodoxy" (Burnham 2018) and potentially become less effective. Then the theorists come up with a new set of ideas and so the process begins again... Alternatively, practitioners may reverse this complementarity by *theorising practice*, that is using theory to understand a practice that was created out of some kind of practical necessity, as most practitioners need to do from time to time in situations when they and the people they work with meet an issue that is not responding to usually reliable practices. It is this second option that I will illustrate using ideas form John Shotter's chapter. I am doing this with the proviso that after a while the way that practitioners remember what theorists have said, and therefore interpret/use the concepts in ways that the theorists did not necessarily intend.

What I remember and quote many times is the idea as *Before any one of us utters the words "I am...", we are addressed as "You are…" many, many, many times. When we eventually utter the words "I am…" then we may be selecting from what might be called a repertoire of "You's"*. Some people may

have a wide repertoire of "You's", to choose from, others have a narrow repertoire to select from. This repertoire may be resourceful or restraining to the person using "I".

I revisited and was pleased to find that I had remained fairly close to John's ideas:

> "The 'thou' is older than the 'I' in the sense that the capacity to be addressed as a 'you' by others is a preliminary to the ultimate capacity of being able to say 'I' of oneself, of being able to understand the uniqueness of one's own 'position' in relation to others, and to take responsibility for one's own actions." (p.73).

And furthermore, John regarded the most important point in his argument as being:

> "… that when small children are addressed as 'you', rather than merely having information reported to them upon which to base (or not) their individual actions, they are being 'in-structed' in how to be…. and as such is 'ontologically *formative*'" (p.75).

> "… in being addressed as a particular 'you', in certain particular settings, by certain particular people, you come to know yourself as a particular kind of person among other such persons" (p.76).

So far so good. I recall that the ideas were initially liberating and then I experienced the emphasis on linguistic communication restrained me in using these ideas when working with people for whom talking was not so easy. One evening session I was working with a family of four. The father said he found it difficult to put what he felt into words. Both of the children giggled and shifted awkwardly in their seats when posed questions in a linguistic format. In the session I created an exercise with paper, which I began to use regularly. It can be used in the first session or indeed at any time during the therapy, for different purposes. Feedback from families has been very positive. It goes something like this:

1. I give each person in the family a piece of paper (usually a quarter of A4/letter).
2. Please write down the name they wish to use today (write it big/small, plain or fancy).
3. Say what that name is (this is starting with what Shotter calls the "'I' am …" position).
4. Each person passes the paper to the person next to them.
5. That person writes down what they call that person. (This moves to the 'You' position. That is how the person is addressed by others).
6. Pass the papers round to the next person (repeat) until each person receives their original piece of paper. By the time a person receives their original piece of paper back it may have a range of different names (different ways in which they are addressed).
7. Each person reads out what is written on their piece of paper. The family members are often more engaged and "chatty" by now.
8. I then ask a series of questions such as:
   a. Are there any nick names that you call each other now or previously?
   b. Are there any names that you used to have but don't use now?
   c. Are there any names you would like to be called?
   d. Are there any names that you would like people to stop calling you?
9. The conversations are often interesting (sometimes amusing) and aspects of identity are discussed that have been dominant or dormant, wanted or unwanted.
10. The papers may then be used in a variety of ways including:
    a. Use the papers to sculpt relationships.

    b.   Ask people to speak from different "You's" aspects of the identity on the paper (e.g. "Dad", "Barry", "Mr Grumpy", "Little Miss Nosy"; "Big sister" etc.

    c.   Which "You's" do they use as an "I" and how do they make that decision in relation to the themes of therapy.

I think about this exercise as a practical manifestation of the social construction of identity.

Shotter summarises his paper thus:

> "the shaping and crafting of the relations between ourselves and those around us is done linguistically, and the special part 'you' might play in such crafting." (p.78)

I might add that by extending this to include non-linguistic techniques, such as the paper exercise described above, we can be more inclusive and enrich communication.

The practice example skims across what this exercise can do, and neither a verbal rendition, nor a written account can fully convey the experiences of the participants (including therapists) during or following the exercise. Sometimes people recall "You's" from the past that they have quite forgotten about and would like to become reacquainted with, others realise that of all the "You's" they have been using, some are more helpful than others. The arrangement of the pieces of paper allow expressions of experience that go beyond words, and yet also facilitate conversations that had not been possible up to now. I sometimes refer to this kind of exercise as thinking outside your head.

Summary

I hope that I have given a glimpse of how, as a systemic practitioner I have been faithful to the ideas in the chapter (the significance of "you" in the formation of the "I"), yet creative in the application, going beyond the confines of the linguistic domain. And that I have shown how the ideas have both inspired me into different practices as well as offering me an explanation for some of my existing practices. This is what might be called a real "sweet spot" in the relationship between theory and practice and between practitioner and theorists.

Theoretical ideas that mean something personally to a practitioner may affect how a practitioner uses those ideas in their practice, and the ways that clients experience those ideas as relevant, refreshing and hopefully re-visionary in their lives. I first read this chapter when the book was published in 1989, and I have been regularly quoting it and using it since then (even re-membering its central message with reasonable accuracy!). When I come across an idea that is new to me, sometimes I find myself thinking about clients that it might be useful for. Over time, I found myself considering how this message applied to me both in terms of how the "You's" with which I was addressed shaped the "I's" chosen to live, and how the "You's" that I addressed to others may have influenced their repertoire of "I's". Indeed, "You" may think that there is more to this than meets the "I".

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"Performing John Shotter"

8th October 2016, University of Bedfordshire

Photos - **Performing John Shotter: A Celebration of John Shotter and His Work**

https://youtu.be/b-3MzPGndE8

Sheila McNamee - **A Responsive Reading: a Love Letter.** https://youtu.be/7FKNNUrzphg

Jim Wilson - **The Practitioner & the Philosopher.** https://youtu.be/PhIVVDg9ty4

Peter Rober – **A Wise Man.** https://youtu.be/QjQuR8Oksg4

John Shotter - **Taking care with the words.** https://youtu.be/wyF0LlaJiZU

Ann Cunliffe (read by Gail Simon) - **Why the hell isn't he wearing socks?!**
https://youtu.be/qL5mBy-PHJU

Justine Van Lawick - **Waiting for...Beckett, Shotter, and being poised to become.**

https://youtu.be/uoMrDaSiBGU

Harlene Anderson - **Celebrating the Gifts of John Shotter.** https://youtu.be/DC7tEkyJr40

Mary and Ken Gergen - **Arresting Moments.** https://youtu.be/c2e4UY4PXck

Jaakko Seikkula - **Embodied dialogues in the stream of life.** https://youtu.be/qcSGlbXoE4g

John Shotter - **"A big word for me is noticing" reading from 'Bakhtin' " own mouth".**
https://youtu.be/RdT4FQ8WWd4

Sarah Helps - **We need to talk about John Shotter.** https://youtu.be/2nJ42sgHBk0

Leah Salter - **We come in to the world moving.** https://youtu.be/3-kgbj91qAU

Sheila McNamee and John Shotter - **One More Thing.** https://youtu.be/FPh6F0Abaz4

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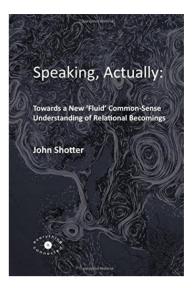**Honouring John Shotter. International Journal of Collaborative-Dialogic Practices**

Collection of writings by colleagues. https://collaborative-practices.com/2017/01/

John's last book was published in October 2016

Speaking, Actually: Towards a New 'Fluid' Common-Sense Understanding of Relational Becomings

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Speaking-Actually-Common-Sense-Understanding-Relational/dp/0993072348

Published by Everything is Connected Press.

Also, see

T. Corcoran & J. Crombie (Eds.) (2016). *Joint Action: Essays in Honour of John Shotter.* **London: Routledge.**

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