

Opening to the World through the Lived Body: Relating Theory and Practice in Organisation Consulting

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This paper inquires into the practice implications of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the embodied human being. I flesh out his theory of perceptual intelligibility by showing how it works in practice, and distinguishing it from conceptual intelligibility. In showing how the two modes of intelligibility relate, I follow Merleau-Ponty in drawing on the rich symbolism of Gestalt form. I relate theory to practice through describing, an indirect, affect laden way of working with clients. The practice descriptions explore in particular how the body may reveal the cultural background, and organisational history, that lies behind the consulting situations; also how my way of practicing relates to the use of language.

Running through these reflections on theory and practice is a first person inquiry into how Merleau-Ponty's theory has helped me to foster an attitude of greater openness. In the spirit of this inquiry I conclude with a series of questions that encourage other practitioners to be receptive to how Merleau-Ponty's theory might support them in cultivating an attitude of openness to the world.

Key words: Merleau-Ponty, Gestalt, perceptual intelligibility, phenomenology, organisation consulting