

Movements of Feeling and Moments of Judgement: Towards an Ontological Social Constructionism *

John Shotter

What is involved, in practice, coming to a judgement? The Norwegian family therapist, Tom Andersen, characterized himself as “a wanderer and worrier,” he was constantly reflecting on his ways of ‘going on’, on his own practice, to further develop and refine them. Each new way came to him, he said, on reaching a ‘crossroads’, a point when he felt unable to continue any longer in the same way. But once he stopped doing what he had come to see as ethically wrong, he found, he said, that the “alternatives popped up almost by themselves” (Anderson/Jensen, 2007: 159). What I want to discuss is the fact that, while we can say that we can quite self-consciously and deliberately decide not to do something (perhaps never again) at a particular moment, in a new and particular situation we cannot be said to decide at any particular instant in time, positively what to do. New ways of acting cannot be planned; they have to emerge. As Lehrer (2009) suggests, coming to act in a way that seems to be for the best in a particular situation is not something we can decide upon simply within ourselves – judgmental work, in which we go out bodily, to relate ourselves imaginatively and feelingfully to various aspects of our current circumstances, aspect-by-aspect, sequentially, over time, seems to be required. It is what the nature of this imaginative judgmental work feels like, looks like, and sounds like that I want to discuss in this paper.

Key words: feelings, judgement, orientation, resourcefulness, ontological social constructionism

* Based on a paper presented at *Constructing Worlds* conference, Taos Institute and MacMann Berg, 20th - 23rd August, Denmark, 2009.