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Chapter 14

Scullery's Question: multiplicity, felt experience and continuity

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SUMMARY

In many areas of theoretical psychology and social science, the bounded, rational, coherent Cartesian subject is no longer seen as underpinning or authoring activity. A series of challenges have led this self-identical subject to be replaced by accounts of experience that emphasise multiplicity, fluidity, diversity and mobility. However, this has inevitably meant that attention has been diverted away from the experiences of continuity, stability and coherence from which our lives are also constituted. There are both epistemic and ethical reasons why we might need accounts of continuity, stability and coherence to sit alongside, and be consonant with, those that emphasise fluidity, multiplicity and mobility. In this chapter I suggest that a focus on the felt dimensions of experience allows these superficially contradictory elements to be brought together in a way that both speaks to the complex vagaries of our being-in-the-world and affords the kind of ethically-sensitive analysis that is necessary.

INTRODUCTION

"It's a fucking LONG life, isn't it?" The opening line of Jim Cartwright's play "Road" (Cartwright, 1990), is a question spat directly at the audience by Scullery, a homeless man from England's industrial north. The question shocks with its profanity, with its bluntness, but perhaps most of all with its despair, and both its content and tone speak directly to a constellation of issues relevant to contemporary psychological analyses. These issues relate to experience, and how it is lived, constituted and regulated: how on the one hand it may be nurtured, fed, or cared for; how on the other it may be poisoned, bent, twisted or broken: and in either case, how it gets constructed, positioned, excluded or marginalised in psychological theory and practice. In the context of a focus on experience, Scullery's question is not merely the expression of a cognitive state, an attribution, an attitude or schema; and nor is it simply a discursive move, narrative device, metaphor or performative repetition. Whilst for different purposes it might usefully be figured as pertaining to any or all of these elements, in their own way each of these analytics somewhat fragment and obscure the moments of experience they circle around. Both the content and the vehemence of Scullery's question starkly remind us that experience is always lived in a feelingful manner, it is lived only once, and that the feelings with which it is suffused can be far from pleasant.

"It's a fucking LONG life, isn't it?" Cartwright's play was written and first performed in the mid-1980's, at a time when the rapacious version of 'free' market capitalism we now call neoliberalism was in its first wave of ascendancy: in the USA under Ronald Reagan, and in the UK under Margaret Thatcher.

Even before Scullery posed his question, the play's situation in a nameless (and so potentially universal) small town in England's economically-ravaged north already spoke to the audience of Cartwright's political intent. The brutalising effects of the asset stripping, accelerated exploitation and widespread unemployment that characterised this period of economic 'development' were most visible, most profound, in those areas where concentrations of manufacturing industry had, for many decades, provided basic levels of income: Charlesworth (1999) provides a searing, conceptually sophisticated analysis of how the lives of people living in one such region of England were blighted by these social and material circumstances. Today, as the world suffers the consequences of capitalism's most recent failures, the political concerns that Cartwright animated through the impoverished everyday lives of his characters are once again coming to the fore.

"Its a fucking LONG life, isn't it?" In contemporary academic and cultural contexts, the inadequacy of the Cartesian subject of mainstream psychology has been convincingly established: its mythical status has been demonstrated, its conceptual problems identified, and its ideological aspects revealed (Benson, 2001; Burkitt, 1991; Foucault, 1988; Gergen, 1991; Martin, 1988; Shotter, 1984). In this work, the fluidity and multiplicity of experience are frequently emphasised as a necessary corrective to the homogenised unity of the bounded Cartesian subject. Consequently, in theoretical psychology, recent work on experience by Middleton & Brown (2005) and by Stephenson & Papadopoulos (2007) proceeds without invoking foundational notions of subjects or subjectivities. Bradley's (2005) book on experience comes closer to relying upon a subject, but Bradley's subject is a fluid, psychoanalytic one already divided against itself, already lacking the clear boundaries and thorough insight presumed by the Cartesian myth.

In this striving to overturn Cartesianism, an understandable tendency to downplay experiences of stability, continuity and coherence has developed. This tendency is perhaps exacerbated by the social and material conditions of contemporary academic life, the very life within which formalised understandings of the dominance of multiplicity and fluidity are produced and promulgated. For our class locations and employment situations make of us relentless, multiple demands: teacher, researcher, administrator, manager, writer, entrepreneur, counsellor, orator; today lectures and a meeting, tomorrow three meetings, next week a conference, next month a research visit. And, in between, reading and writing – always, always reading; always, always writing: in such ways, the pace and variety of our work themselves reinforce notions of the solely fluid, flexible, contingent multiplicity of experience. But lest this sound like unwarranted special pleading for the rigours of academic life (and notwithstanding that, at least in the UK, academics currently have many reasons to be unhappy) it should be noted that elsewhere in the contemporary economy, too, the rise in precarity, the accelerated rate of exploitation and the expansion of immaterial and affective labour (Hardt, 1999) may all combine to further reinforce this impression of singularity. Some have recently argued that the dominance of immaterial and affective labour is not so thorough and exclusive as it is sometimes claimed to be (Dowling, Nunes & Trott, 2007), but in any case it is clear that exploitation has changed its superficial appearance and not it's fundamental economic relation. Now that the panoptical, precarious call centre has replaced the dark satanic mill as the archetypal site of

(Western) capitalist exploitation, so the requirement to be fluid and multiple structures many forms of contemporary employment. In this context, Scullery's question alerts us to aspects of experience that currently prominent academic proclivities and contemporary material and economic conditions may obscure. Not only Cartesian subjects experience themselves as having degrees of stability and coherence, and the relentless demand to be fluid, flexible and multiple is *itself* a continuity, specific to these economic and cultural conditions and productive of particular modes of experience and being.

Although recent writing on experience avoids returning to Cartesianism, it nevertheless breaks with this tendency to give singular prominence to multiplicity and fluidity. Middleton & Brown (2005) do so by engaging directly with memory, treating the past as a virtual realm, always 'gnawing into the present', and constantly getting actualised in concrete social settings where it co-constitutes the lived moments of experience. Stephenson & Papadopoulos (2007) recognise the force of Foucauldian disciplinary practices and their power to produce enduring, regimented, disciplined subjectivities, whilst also identifying contingent eruptions of experience that subvert these bounds. And Bradley's (2005) invocation of a psychoanalytic subject necessarily brings the possibility of chains of prior influence feeding through to pattern present moments, albeit in somewhat occult ways. So in all three writings the lived moments of experience are already co-constituted by the social and material histories they enrol, and in all three experience necessarily contains continuities as well as contingencies.

In what follows I want to develop this understanding by observing that the affective vigour of Scullery's question starkly illustrates that experience is actualised, in part, through the body, reminding us that experience is *always* embodied experience. Psychology has a poor track record with the body, for the most part tending either to ignore it (cognitive and social psychologies) or to falsely treat it as exclusively foundational (biological psychology). This is unfortunate since beyond the "sexless hull of the robomind" (Stam 1988, p.4), and before the reductionist fantasy of the meat machine, there is a lived, fleshy body that is social, socialised, and an absolutely integral part of every single moment of our experience. Indeed, the body is the place where social forces can become intransitive, intransigent and enduring (Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulos, & Walkerdine, 2008), where they can get lived out with exquisite sensitivity as felt experiences of violence, deprivation, marginalisation, oppression and inequality. The vehemence of Scullery's question enacts the visceral anguish interpellated by the social and material continuities that provoke it, inviting us to recognise something of his embodied misery for ourselves.

"Its a fucking LONG life, isn't it?" Scullery's question, then, leads us to tensions within contemporary theorising between multiplicity, fluidity and diversity on the one hand, and between coherence, stability and continuity on the other. Whilst language can easily supply multiplicity, fluidity and diversity, it seems less able to provide coherence, stability and continuity. Empirical studies of discourse (e.g. Edwards, 1997, 1999; Potter, 1996; Potter & Edwards, 2005) consistently demonstrate variability in the ways that people describe themselves and their experiences. These studies echo earlier social psychological work on the situational determination of behaviour, albeit with a focus on meaning-making rather than mechanical responding, in showing how accounts of experience are thoroughly bound up with both the situation of

their production and the occasion of their telling. Multiplicity, fluidity and variability are core to this body of empirical work, which demonstrates thoroughly the mutability of language in relation to the contingencies of interaction, occasion and situation. Moreover, although personal narratives might be seen to offset this fluidity with some degree of relative stability and coherence, even their construction is always retrospective and contingent (Freeman, 1993); additionally, from some Panglossian psychotherapeutic perspectives (e.g. White, 2001), even the most entrenched personal narratives are sometimes proclaimed to be as mutable, as playfully interchangeable and open to 'free' choice, as any other psychological phenomena that bears a linguistic aspect.

In order both to negotiate these various tensions (between multiplicity and coherence, fluidity and stability, diversity and continuity), and also to include the bodily aspects of experience, I will argue that alongside language we should also consider experiences of feeling: that feelings can supply some of this sense of continuity and coherence whilst simultaneously opening us up to the multiplicity and diversity of the world. First I'll describe briefly what I mean by feelings; then I'll describe some ways in which they both disperse experience within social relations and, simultaneously, locate us in the social and material world.

A PSYCHOLOGY OF FEELING

The terms 'feeling', 'affect' and 'emotion' are sometimes used as though they are all-but equivalent, sometimes used in ways that index theoretical or disciplinary allegiances, and sometimes less clearly defined. All have gained prominence in the humanities and social sciences in the recent 'affective turn': an interest in emotion, affect and feeling conceptualised as elements of experience neither wholly reducible to biology nor simply capable of being captured by language (Athanasiou, Hantzaroula, & Yannakopoulos, 2008; Brennan, 2004; Clough & Halley, 2007; Massumi, 2002). Rather than treating affect, emotion and feeling as separable, biological preconditions for action, scholars are exploring how these phenomena are already enactive of the social order. In this work, efforts are sometimes made to distinguish affect from emotion, and both from feeling: for example, Blackman & Cromby (2007) proposed that affects be seen as bodily needs, intensities or impulses that originate outside of awareness but nevertheless structure activity and may be experienced phenomenologically as feelings. Emotions, then, are normative configurations of affect and feeling, enacted body-brain responses tied to local moral orders and situated activities. However, Greco & Stenner (2008) observe that such clear distinctions between emotion and affect cannot be so easily sustained, and that when analysts invoke affects it is almost always emotions to which they refer. Similarly, the separation out of 'feelings' as purely phenomenological can be difficult to sustain - particularly in psychology, which frequently names feeling states that function just like emotions, despite not appearing in recognised taxonomies. Here, feelings are defined as the phenomenological experience of momentary states of the body-brain system as it situates and enables the relational flow of our being-in-the-world (Cromby, 2007). Understood in this way, feelings contribute to every experience we ever have. Most feelings are relatively subtle and, with the exception of acute states, merge and blend smoothly one into another. They nevertheless constantly suffuse our experience with intensities, valences, affordances and textures reflective of our embodied situation in the world.

Feelings are enabled by the human body and brain, a dynamically self-organising system of systems thoroughly open to social and material influence. Consequently, feelings too are both socialised and bound up with our place in the material world. Analytically we can separate them into three classes. First, emotional feelings: the somatic or corporeal component of the complexes of discourse, intention and action we call emotions. Second, extra-emotional feelings: the feelings associated with urges such as hunger and thirst and with responses such as pain or ticklishness. These feelings are usually dismissed in Cartesianism as ‘sensations’ and rendered subordinate to ‘higher’ processes of perception and cognition. Here, their full import, diversity and motivational force is recognised, and they are described as ‘extra-emotional’ only because typically they also have emotions bound up with them. Third, there are feelings of knowing: feelings whose somatic characteristics (location, intensity, duration, character) are typically vague, but which serve to situate us within the social relations we currently occupy, and which contribute to processes of reasoning, choosing and deliberating. In everyday talk English people call these ‘gut feelings’ or intuition. Shotter (1993a, 1993b) theorises them as ‘knowing of the third kind’ and strongly emphasises their relational aspects. First discussed in psychology by William James, these feelings have also figured recently in Damasio’s (1994) neuroscience and in accounts by Ruthrof (1997) and Johnson (2007) of how the body contributes to meaning.

All of these feelings are socialised. Feelings of knowing are intrinsically social, thoroughly bound up with the ongoing flow of social interaction. Emotional feelings are also social: even where emotion is defined biologistically, as in Ekman’s notion of hardwired basic emotions, it is acknowledged that there are culture-specific display rules that regulate how and when the emotion should be produced. To be effective such display rules must become an integral, unthinking part of how the emotion gets enacted: experiencing the emotion then reflecting upon the appropriate display rule before applying it is simply too slow. So, by the time we are able to reflect upon it, the spontaneous production of an emotion must already include the appropriate culture-specific display rule. But how an emotion feels is inseparable from how it is performed or displayed, and this means that, even on Ekman’s account, emotional feelings are socialised. Finally, extra-emotional feelings, too, are socialised, sometimes explicitly and intentionally, sometimes implicitly and contingently: consider feelings of guilt in Catholicism; feelings of pain in different parenting regimes, in military or combat training, or alternatively in sado-masochism; and feelings of hunger in eating disorders or – through the practice of fasting at Ramadan – in Islam.

Although we can separate feelings analytically into these three kinds, in our lived experience they typically blend, flow, merge and shift relatively seamlessly from one to another. Experience is always felt experience, always co-constituted within a flow of embodied sensations, always textured by somatic, corporeal feedback that constantly provides part of its character. Feelings help to constitute what is (barring neurological trauma) a continuous, readily-available, pre-reflective sense of our place in the world: Ruthrof (1997) shows how feelings can be understood as meaningful somatic signs, albeit signs whose meaning is fundamentally a-representational. Their meaning is derived more from their bodily textures and intensities than from cultural conventions, and because of their somatic character it is always somewhat ineffable, resisting absolute symbolisation and representation, and so always requiring some degree of interpretation. Feelings, understood as somatic signs, typically co-occur with other signs that are, for example, symbolic, discursive or linguistic in character. They continuously inhabit these other signs, giving them valence, intensity and direction ("it's a fucking LONG life, isn't it?"): at the same time, these conventionalised signs enable us to 'fix' and quite literally re-present feelings to ourselves and to others. So the meanings that feelings co-create continuously interpenetrate, and are constantly interpenetrated by, the meanings carried in language; nevertheless, the meanings of feelings differ from the meanings of discursive or linguistic signs in at least four respects.

First, their meaning is a-representational, lived immediately through the flesh, borne and known in and of the lived moments of experience: consequently, it is not asocial, but its sociality is not a simple matter of social convention. Second, because they merge, blend and flow the meanings of feelings are less clearly delineated than those of words: sometimes they run together to sustain or amplify each other, and sometimes they become contradictory, vacillating or confused. Third, feelings operate at different speeds and rates of acceleration to the signs of language: frequently slower to depart, they are sometimes slower to arise, although, conversely, they are sometimes all-but instantaneous: both tendencies giving them the constant potential to be somewhat out of synchronisation with other aspects of experience. And fourth, feelings defy willed effort in ways that the symbols of language don't: we can speak much as we wish (discourse shaping the meanings it is legitimate to articulate rather than dictating the precise words that must carry them), but we can't anywhere near so readily change how we feel. These four differences between feelings and language have implications for how we understand experiences both of multiplicity and of continuity. I will now unravel some of these implications, focusing first upon social relations and then upon material influence.

With respect to social relations, both the socialisation of feelings and the ways they continuously locate us within the world, help to enable experiences of fluidity and change. Feelings mirror, amplify, and enact through the flesh the shifting relational dynamics through which we move, suffusing our experience with a constant lived sense of our relations with others (Shotter, 1993a). Experiences of extreme multiplicity, the failure to mark any enduring or consistent boundaries between self, others and world, are often understood as defining features of psychosis, and there is a sense in which recognising this yields an immanent critique of any unbridled celebration of multiplicity and fluidity (Glass, 1993). Taking a slightly different perspective, however, Dave Harper and I (Cromby & Harper, 2009) describe how socially-generated mixtures of feelings might be constitutive in experiences of clinical paranoia, experiences which are common amongst people described as psychotic. So-called florid states, we propose, occur when socialised mixtures of feelings reach such a pitch that they temporarily dominate perceptions. These mixtures of feeling are constituted relationally and materially as feeling traps (Scheff, 2003), and function in a broadly Vygotskian fashion to inculcate modes, habits and tendencies to feel in particular ways. Although most of us will not be so unfortunate as to experience these terrifying states, we have all had occasional glimpses of the potency and strangeness that characterise those moments where the world itself, albeit only fleetingly, takes on the very character of our most precious desires, hopes and fears. Feelings, in short, open us up to the social world just as they open us out *onto* the social world: like the signs of language, the embodied signs of feeling work with and through the multiplicity and fluidity of our social relations.

At the same time, the feelings derived from our social relations simultaneously provide experiences of continuity and stability. One way of understanding this is through the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Iris Marion Young, who described how enculturated modes of embodiment locate us with respect to distinctions of class and gender. Bourdieu (1977) describes how dispositions, habitual states or tendencies of the body, get organised into a structured, structuring system called the “habitus”. The habitus consists of patterns of facial expression, gesture and posture, ways of using the head and arms, all of these “always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech and (how could it be otherwise?) a certain subjective experience.” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.87). Because these systems of dispositions are specific to particular class locations, ideologies are much more than mere discursive constructions: they are also “political mythology realised, *em-bodied*, turned into .. a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of *feeling* and *thinking*” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.93-4). Similarly, Young (1990) argues that socialisation includes the generation of modal ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ body styles because gendered parenting encourages specific ways of relating to and using the body. The organisation of practices of leisure and sport; the promotion of normative ways of walking, sitting, and dressing; and the promulgation of emotional norms which attach greater anxiety and danger to girls’ activity in a variety of spheres, together constitute a modally extant ‘feminine’ body style. The converse ‘masculine’ style, by contrast, is more expansive, less hesitant, more likely to treat the body as a vehicle for action than as an obstacle or burden. Importantly, neither style is associated exclusively with either men or women (so we have ‘masculine’ women and ‘feminine’ men) but the gendering arrangement of normative socialisation practices nevertheless encourages a conventionalised modal mapping of each style onto each gender.

Cross-cutting these broad patterns of socialisation of the body are more specific, local influences, for example associated with specific occupations. Whether understood as emotion work (Hochschild, 1979) or affective labour (Hardt, 1999), patterns of micro-socialisation function similarly to inculcate persistent regimes of socialised feeling that endow experience with enduring felt characteristics. All these regimes of socialised feeling locate our experience across longer durations, yielding degrees of phenomenological coherence and consistency. Recall that feelings move and flow in ways that defy willed effort, operate at speeds and within timescales that are sometimes disjunctive to other aspects of experience, and convey somewhat ineffable a-representational meanings. These characteristics mean that those socially normative experiences of stability and consistency lived through the flesh are likely to be more fundamental than those carried in words. In Bourdieu’s words: “The principles em-bodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, can't even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and, therefore, more precious, than the values given body, *made* body by the transformation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as "stand up straight" or "don't hold your knife in your left hand" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 94)

Alongside the feelings arising from our social engagements, we also have another continuous source of feeling, because the embodied systems that enable the lived presence of others to register sensuously in the intimacy of our own flesh simultaneously enable a flux of feelings prompted by our *material* circumstances. Many of these feelings, too, are multiple, fluid, called out more-or-less fleetingly and temporarily, and reflecting – for example – the comfort of our chair, the temperature, the humidity, how hungry or thirsty we are, and so on. However, there are also more profound material influences, operating at different speeds and giving rise to regimes of feeling that locate our experience much more primordially within the local material ecology. Many of these more profound material influences are regulated by processes of entrainment: the mechanism by which the biological cycles that govern activity – circadian clocks, or biorhythms – synchronise with the diurnal, solar cycles specific to our location (Roenneberg et al., 2007). Local ecological features such as light intensity, temperature and resource availability act as 'zeitgebers', time signals, which enable our bodies to make these sychnronisations. We have multiple circadian clocks: there is a central mechanism located in the brain, just above the optical chiasm, but there are also others – the liver, for example, has its own circadian rhythm. These circadian clocks broadly align levels of alertness, feelings of hunger, sleepiness, attentiveness and acuity, with local cycles of day and night and with typical patterns of activity and sleep. We only tend to remark upon these feelings when they become asynchronous with the environment – as when the enforced dys-entrainment of jet lag makes them unpleasantly prominent components of experience. But whether or not we attend to them, these feelings continuously inhabit our experience, most often with the effect of creating elements of stability, consistency and predictability.

CONCLUSION

Embodied feelings open us up to the world as they simultaneously disclose our place within it. In so doing they give us experiences of continuity and of fluidity, of multiplicity and of coherence, and because of their particular characteristics they do so pre-reflectively, a-representationally, in ways that defy easy categorisation. Far from rescuing the Cartesian subject, recognising this demonstrates again the inadequacy of Cartesianism because it show how even the most intimate, felt aspects of bodily experience are pre-reflectively both social and material, at the same time as they are lived individually.

Scullery's question, then, points toward a psychology that takes seriously the realm of feeling, one which recognises the thorough interpenetration of feelings by social and material influence. It illustrates how felt experiences of continuity and coherence can enact toxic material situations created by exploitative social relations, showing how there are both ethical and epistemic reasons to engage with these relatively neglected dimensions.

In this context it is relevant that the ‘affective turn’ is opening up new research agendas that may quite literally in-corporate (versions of) the oft-marginalised lived body and its relations to (its inescapable, ineluctable, consistent yet consistently elusive place *within*) the social and material world. Recent work on affect in social science frequently invokes either Deleuze or versions of psychoanalysis, in engagement with topics, tropes and concepts from (for example) postcolonial theory (Venn, 2009), biomedicine and technology (Adams, Murphy & Clarke, 2009) and politics (Clough, Goldberg, Schiff, Weeks & Willse, 2007). Simultaneously, and more squarely within psychology, discussions of the relevance of process philosophies (e.g. Brown & Stenner, 2009; Stenner, 2008) are providing sophisticated conceptual frameworks within which to locate and interpret affective and other phenomena. Recent discussions of feeling in social science (often inflected by Deleuze, but also by other philosophers – and indeed even psychologists, including Tompkins and James) can be found in Sedgewick (2003) and Thrift (2008). At the level of methods, too, there is change: qualitative research methods in psychology are expanding so as to better include the embodied and affective aspects of experience (Cromby, in press): visual methods, which have particular potential to capture embodied meaning, (Reavey & Johnson, 2008), are being increasingly used; as are (to a lesser extent, so far) both mixed methods (Stenner & Stainton-Rogers, 2004) and the combination of qualitative analyses with indices of psychophysiological activity (Lyons & Cromby, 2010; Lyons, Spicer, Tuffin, & Chamberlain, 2000). Perhaps more strikingly, even within psychology’s (predominantly cognitive) mainstream there is now growing interest in what is variously described as embodied, enactive or situated cognition (Anderson, 2003; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1992), and interesting philosophical work is appearing that explores the interface between the body and cognitive psychology (Johnson, 2007).

We are now at a moment in history when it is again becoming more obvious just how thoroughly the impoverished majority are expected to subsidise the opulent lives of the few. And, perhaps not entirely coincidentally, we are at a moment in the history of psychology and social science when a movement called ‘positive psychology’ is urging us to imagine that happiness can be simply disconnected from material and economic circumstances, and that a focus on ‘wellbeing’ is a better indicator of equality than a focus on wealth (Layard, 2006; New Economics Foundation, 2010; Seligman, 2003). At such a moment we might do well to recall Scullery’s question, and to recognise how thoroughly its affective charge is inseparable from the social and material conditions of its speaking.

It’s a long life – isn’t it?

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