"Nothing but sounds, ink-marks"—Is nothing hidden? Must everything be transparent?

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Abstract

Is there something that lies beneath the surface of our ordinary ways of speaking? Philosophy sometimes encourages the all-too-human thought that reality lies just outside our ordinary grasp, hidden beneath the surface of our experience and language. The present discussion concentrates initially on a few connected paragraphs of Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations (particularly ##431-435). Wittgenstein leads the reader to the view that meaning is there in the surface of the expression. Yet how adequate is Wittgenstein's treatment of the sounds and ink-marks, the materiality of the sign? With some reference to Emerson, Stanley Cavell, and Jacques Derrida, my discussion explores how far a more adequate account of the sign can coincide with the claim that nothing is hidden. It exposes phony obsessions with transparency, which in a culture of accountability have had a distorting effect on education and the wider social field. It endorses confidence in the reality of ordinary words.

Keywords

Language, reality, expression, Wittgenstein, Emerson, Cavell, Derrida

I want to pursue the alleged error of thinking that there must be something that lies beneath the surface of our ordinary ways of speaking about our reactions and responses to the world. A popular form of this is found when you are talking to someone and they say in response: "Just wait a minute while I process what you have said." They are not, as their language more or less makes clear, quite reasonably telling you that they want to think over what you have said: they are informing you of a mental operation, a brain process that needs to be carried out before they can answer.[1] There are

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[1] Such a response is familiar enough. Here is an example chanced upon in the week of writing. In the "Weathering Heights" episode of *Modern Family* (Series 8), Mitchell Pritchett is confronted by Lily, who has found an empty vodka bottle under Dwight's bed. Cameron, in dismay, says "Mitchell?" (as in "Deal with this!"), and Mitch responds, running his hand over his brow, "I just need to process what I just heard." Typically, the speaker is adopting what they take to be a sophisticated and more accurate way of speaking: in order to respond, they will have to carry out a brain process. That this is at odds with Wittgenstein's thinking scarcely needs explaining in the present context, but the prevalence of such a way of speaking perhaps warrants some further comment, for this may be manifested more in English than in some other languages. English vocabulary has a broad division between

various ways in which Wittgenstein considers the relation between our language and our thought, including the relation of expression to various psychological states. The caption paraphrased in my subtitle, "nothing is hidden", is to be found in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and it is also, of course, the title of a late book by Wittgenstein's friend and interpreter Norman Malcolm (1986). I propose to concentrate in Part I of this paper on just a few connected paragraphs of Wittgenstein's text, intercalating these with my own comments, without which they will, I think, remain somewhat enigmatic.

PART I

Wittgenstein is concerned in the paragraphs in question with the relation between sentences and gestures, on the one hand, and something beyond them, on the other, where this something beyond may be "an act of understanding" or a thing portrayed or a representation. The preoccupation with representation throughout much of the modern period has tended to lead to explanation of meaning in terms of an underlying logic, to the neglect of the variety of things we do with words and in blindness to the subtle differences realised in natural language (or, to be more precise, languages). In the first of the paragraphs the interlocutor speaks assertively, imploring the reader to hear the apparently obvious truth of what is claimed, and Wittgenstein initially withholds his response:

> #431. "There is a gulf between an order and its execution. It has to be filled by the act of understanding."
> "Only in the act of understanding is it meant that we are to do THIS. The *order*—why, that is nothing but sounds, ink-marks.—"

The inverted commas signal that a thought is being expressed that is not exactly Wittgenstein's own but one by which we are typically tempted: this is the thought that the words that are used must be accompanied by a mental process—here an "act" of understanding. The emphatic "THIS" is intended to convey the speaker's sense that an intense mental concentration has captured the nature of the action that has been specified: mere words could not do this—hence, the imploring tone.

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words of northern European origin and those from Latin and Greek. On the whole the latter words are more technical in kind, while the former belong more to the everyday. "Processing" and "thinking" are respectively obvious cases in point. The person who prefers the Latinate expression may have done a little too much psychology—or, perhaps, not enough! A further example of the contrast in question arises in the difference between "She is good at handling people" and "She is good at manipulating people", where the former suggests a virtuous sensitivity and care for others, and the latter a calculative and instrumental approach.

In the next paragraph, however, Wittgenstein offers a response, and this is marked by an entirely different, quieter tone:

>   #432. Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life?—In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there?—Or is the *use* its life?

In much of the *Investigations* Wittgenstein is, as it were, applying a kind of therapy to the thinking that had once held him captive, where, in his early work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the assumption of representation found expression in the *picture theory of meaning*. What is emphasised here, by contrast, is the doctrine of *meaning as use*. While the former tended to foreground statements that purported to show a mirroring relation or correspondence between thought and world, here we find meaning illustrated in multifarious, dynamic mini-dramas of human practice. The sign by itself, without context, seems dead. And Wittgenstein is drawn for a moment, so it seems, by the animistic phrasing that use "breathes" life into it. But in the end he settles for the less spiritually charged thought that the use *is* its life—though still expressed as a rhetorical question.

In the longer paragraph that follows this one, the example of the giving of orders leads into a consideration of the nature of gesture. Wittgenstein appears to be thinking first of the kind of gesture of the hand that might accompany the speaker's emphatic (and artificial and forced) utterance of "THIS". But an implicit question lies in the background here of how gesture figures in ordinary life, of what importance it does assume:

>   #434. The gesture—we should like to say—*tries* to portray, but cannot do it.

The negative thought here, which seems to afflict Wittgenstein's interlocutor, is that gestures and words alike are doomed to a kind of inadequacy, existing only in a precarious relation to the achieving of understanding, the grasp of inner meaning. The trace of a more positive thought is to be found, by contrast, in the idea that it is not exactly the purpose of words or gestures to "portray", as if there must be some other mental operation with which they correspond, for the meaning is already there in their use.

Let me digress for a moment to allow the thought that the sense is already there in the surface of the signs. In Part II of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein gives us the aphorism: "The human body is the best picture of the human soul." He continues:

>   And how about such an expression as: "In my heart I understood when you said that", pointing to one's heart? Does one perhaps not *mean* this gesture? Of course one means it. Or is one conscious of using a *mere* figure? Indeed not.—It is not a figure that we choose, not a simile, yet it is a figurative expression (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 178).

Not only does this passage try to show something about the understanding: it also says something about the human heart. Unlike the metaphysical aspirations of the gesture that accompanies the utterance of "THIS" (in

#431), here is a natural, unforced expression. The reference and gesture to one's heart is a figurative expression, but it is not a *mere* figure and not self-consciously adopted. It is not a fancy, metaphorical elaboration that codes our literal meaning: a literal expression would not be more real (and what in any case would a literal expression of this thought be?). This is to say that such figures are woven into our natural forms of expression and constitute part of the fabric of our lives. What, in any case, is a heart? It is true that it is an organ of the body, but such a statement is only adequate when one thinks in terms of biology, and biology has developed as an abstraction from our ordinary ways of being in the world. Ordinarily the heart is rightly connected with a particular, powerful range of emotion, and hence with trust and sincerity. This is part of the natural life of human beings, and it is a mistake to think of the account that biology provides as somehow more basic, as coming closer to what is most real—richly valuable though biology undoubtedly is. I say "in my heart" or gesture to my heart. The meaning is there in the surface of the expression. I risk the thought here that this is evident in Japanese culture in ways that tend to escape the West, in such everyday practices as introducing oneself to a stranger or serving food or wrapping a gift; and perhaps it is also there especially in the highly refined gestural range of the Noh play, where the point will be to attend to that surface of signs rather than to imagine that it is a coding of something hidden or "deep".

In the next paragraph in the sequence we are considering, it is our obsession with representation that is raised:

> #435. If it is asked: "How do sentences manage to represent?"—the answer might be: "Don't you know? You certainly see it, when you use them." For nothing is concealed.
>
> How do sentences do it?—Don't you know? For nothing is hidden.
>
> But given this answer: "But you know how sentences do it, for nothing is concealed" one would like to retort "Yes, but it all goes by so quick, and I should like to see it as it were laid open to view."

Wittgenstein is, I take it, leading us away from the question ("How do sentences manage to represent?"), easing the anxiety that leads us to pose and address it in a particular way. For to abstract and isolate, say, the "general form of the proposition", as Wittgenstein had attempted to do in his earlier work, would be to adopt a methodology that will become the source of our problems. And to imagine that there must be something concealed, something hidden below the surface, will be the source of metaphysical confusion.

Wittgenstein is not only exorcising the ghostly aspects of his earlier vision, for the problems he exposes are endemic in the Western philosophical tradition, with their trail-effects in popular consciousness—as my opening example, referring to your companion's processing of what you have said, was intended to show. Wittgenstein tells us more:

> #436. Here it is easy to get into that dead-end in philosophy, where one believes that the difficulty of the task consists in our having to describe

phenomena that are hard to get hold of, the present experience that slips quickly by, or something of the kind. Where we find ordinary language too crude, and it looks as if we were having to do, not with the phenomena of every-day, but with ones that [as Augustine puts this] "easily elude us, and, in their coming to be and passing away, produce others as an average effect".

Philosophy in some of its phases then encourages the all-too-human thought that reality lies, as it were, just outside our ordinary grasp, that something lies hidden beneath the surface of our experience and language. It is difficult to read these words without recalling Ralph Waldo Emerson's remark around a century earlier, in his essay "Experience": "I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest to be the most unhandsome part of our condition" (Emerson, 1983, p. 473). Emerson's "clutch" and "slips through our fingers" anticipate Wittgenstein's "hard to get hold of" and "slips quickly by". And Emerson's wilfully inelegant use of "unhandsome" would suggest, first, "un-beautiful" but this in the manner of being clumsy, implying that we do not handle things well or lose touch with the world. Moreover, the appeal in "condition" is not an anticipation of philosophy's more recent preoccupation with "necessary" and "sufficient" conditions, but rather to a sense of how we are founded or even perhaps word our world together.[2] Heidegger, writing around the same time as Wittgenstein, will speak of thinking as a handicraft (Heidegger, 1968, pp. 16-17). It is, in these lines from Emerson and Wittgenstein, as though we were dissatisfied with, or sceptical of, our accustomed interaction with the world and longed for something that exceeded the ordinary purchase of our language. But this is a scepticism that, however much it may be natural to the human condition, threatens to anaesthetise our relation to the world and to deaden the way the world is.

   One of Stanley Cavell's figures for the deadening effects of this better-than-ordinary knowledge that we clutch after is that it is tainted with the Midas touch, where the touch that succeeds in turning everything to gold kills the world before our eyes (Cavell, 1979, p. 455). We are dissatisfied with the ordinary currency of our common practices and, avariciously like Midas, seek the harder coinage of a Gold Standard—only to lose sight of the fact that standards can be maintained only on the basis of continuities of human interaction and trust. These are continuities upon which learning and enquiry depend. By contrast, the ordinary economy of our lives turns into a flexible "knowledge economy", where knowledge is rendered

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[2] The etymology here is pertinently and rather delightfully ambiguous. Modern dictionaries tend to suggest that "condition" derives from *con-dicere* (to say together), but older sources identify the connection with *condire* (to prepare, preserve, oil, season). I am extremely grateful to Anne-Marie Eggert Olsen for her scholarly and witty clarification of the twists and turns of possible connection here (private correspondence).

exchangeable and commodified. If we can, for a moment, entertain this thought alongside Karl Marx's analysis of commodities, and of the fetish value of commodities, the dangers being considered here are only too apparent, and this is especially so in conditions of globalisation.

Now, on the face of it, it may seem that transparency is an avoidance of those occult elements, those mysterious, hidden things that have been under suspicion throughout my discussion, but in fact it is their accomplice. For once again we find the same pattern: our ordinary confidence in, say, teaching and learning is devalued in favour of some more technical language, which is thought to be closer to the reality of things. Ironically again, one casualty of this approach is the word "criteria" itself. Amongst teachers and amongst students, the word now has a special, technical sense: it typically connotes lists of numbered points, each referring to a behavioural outcome that can be identified with minimal interpretation or judgement on the part of the teacher, often as a binary value. This, it is supposed, is objectivity! This reinforces the sense that teachers' judgements are merely "subjective" and so must be avoided where possible. The teacher becomes more like a flexible, replaceable technical operative, and the kinds of communities of practice that have sustained standards in the past are progressively eroded.

Obsession with transparency in this way is certainly not confined to education but pervades public service institutions. It stands in the way of confidence and trust, and hence it distorts conceptions of professional practice and expertise. It almost totally misses the critical role that must be played by judgement if these activities are not to be reduced to caricatures of themselves. And it places emphasis on technical and managerial innovation to the detriment of those continuities of practice on which such professions and such expert judgement depend.

I want to be able to see Wittgenstein's assertion that nothing is hidden as militating against phony obsessions with transparency and as endorsing a confidence in the reality of our ordinary words. This must involve prising apart the idea of nothing being hidden from that of transparency. But is this asking too much? I am left with a doubt in any case: how adequate is Wittgenstein's treatment of the sounds and ink-marks, the materiality of the sign, a topic to which he gives passing, non-systematic attention? It is in this respect that he speaks, for example, of physiognomy. So how far could a more adequate account of the sign coincide with the claim that nothing is hidden? In what follows, in Part 2, and following a brief interlude, I shall consider two accounts that go some way further in addressing these problems, before returning briefly to Emerson. In conclusion I shall consider Wittgenstein again.

Interlude

The obsession with transparency has become evident in pervasive regimes of performativity and within a culture of accountability, and this by now is familiar enough (see Blake *et al.*, 2000; Lyotard, 1984; O'Neill, 2003, Standish, 1991, 2012a). That culture has effects on education at all levels, not only in terms of the commodification of the content of what is studied

but in terms of the imparting of a drastically reduced idea of what education amounts to. This is not a matter of pedagogical interest alone for such an idea feeds the growing nihilism that Nietzsche long ago diagnosed and the kind of adulation of science that Wittgenstein lamented. It safeguards the continuing dominance of technical reason and the displacement of judgement.

Now of course, in a "post-truth" world, there is every reason to value transparency—to resist the multiple forms of distortion, from political spin to downright lies, and to the orchestrated concealment of the truth that beset our public (not to mention our personal)—lives. But a reasonable desire for transparency has turned into something vulgar, and surreptitiously it colludes with its opposite. The preoccupation with evidence-based policy and practice, with sometimes spurious regimes of quality control, can reasonably be seen as trail effects of verificationism, with the hardening of the fact-value divide and the effective suppression of the exercise of ethical judgement that it endorsed (Standish, 2012b, 2016).

Hence, there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between what is transparent and what is hidden. Part II will take us further into the examination of meaning itself and, in order the better to understand these matters, further into Wittgenstein's later thought.

Let me pause, however, in order to clarify what is at stake here. It is common ground amongst interpreters of Wittgenstein that his later writings work to dispel the idea that there are inner processes of the mind that somehow correlate with or lay the way for outer performance (the false idea that there is an inner process of mental waving, and an outer process of movement of the arm, with the former hidden from view). In this sense, nothing is hidden, and this much is not in question. On the face of it, this contrasts with a different sense of the hidden, where what is hidden is within structure of signs themselves, a thought towards which, in the aphorisms and equivocations of his phrasing and in the tensions between some of the passages cited above, Wittgenstein continues to be drawn. It is, however, easy to be so dazzled by the light cast by the former insight that one fails to see the ways that Wittgenstein's concern with the latter renders his philosophy more subtle and more far-reaching. It is easy to miss the extent to which he is no longer so preoccupied with exorcising the ghost of his former self but is turning rather to further implications of his later thought.

A way forward here, as I shall try to show, is to relate his treatment of the sounds and ink-marks to ideas he was broaching more directly in the last years of his life. I have referred to this in terms of the materiality of the sign. It will not do, as in a recent book Toril Moi tends to do, to be dismissive of this and similar expressions, though she is right that this phrasing has sometimes been associated with ways of thinking mired in ideology (Moi, 2017, esp. Chapter 5). My own approach will be indirect. Greater clarity can be achieved, and the problem better focused, by way of a series of related ideas, in Cavell, Derrida, and again Emerson. The unevenness of this sequence is consistent with the way that Cavell's developing response to Wittgenstein has been shaped by his coming (back) to Emerson after

Wittgenstein, as the subtitle of his Carus Lectures clearly signals: *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (1989). The acknowledgment of the strands of thought considered here, in their varying degrees of proximity, and in their varied lines of connection and provenance, provide steps on the way towards thoughts that are—albeit sometimes only recessively—there in Wittgenstein's work.

PART II

Stanley Cavell and the projection of words

In the first paragraph of Part Four of *The Claim of Reason*, Stanley Cavell characterises his own project in relation to Wittgenstein as follows:

> I have suggested that [Wittgenstein's] teaching is in service of a vision that false views of the inner and the outer produce and sustain one another, and I would be glad to have suggested that the correct relation between inner and outer, between the soul and its society, is the theme of the *Investigations* as a whole (Cavell, 1979, p. 329).

It is not difficult to see the critique of inner mental processes as the exposure of false views. Yet Wittgenstein does not want to proscribe all reference to the inner-outer contrast, and towards the close of my discussion I shall consider further what he says about this. But first, and in order to broach more directly my problem over the materiality of the sign, it will be worth considering Cavell's "Excursus on Wittgenstein's Vision of Language", in Part Two of *The Claim.* Cavell sees himself as saying something about what Wittgenstein has discovered regarding "the entire body and spirit of human conduct and feeling which goes into the capacity for speech" (p. 168). In respect of the familiar idea that we learn words in certain contexts and after a while are able to project those words appropriately in further contexts, he asks, first, what it is to learn a word and, second, what makes a projection appropriate or correct.

Following a rule in a number series does not rule out new departures from that rule. What is true of the number series is true in a different way of words themselves, for their use can never be fully circumscribed in advance. To use a word is to project it, sometimes reinforcing its received, perhaps clichéd sense but often opening new connections, projecting it into new contexts. But so far, it might be said, there is nothing surprising here. So we need to attend to Cavell's manner of illustrating this. Suppose that we say "pumpkin" and point to a pumpkin. Is this an example of telling the child what a word means? Well, of course it could be, with a child initiated into language but unfamiliar with this particular fruit. But we can think also of the young child coming into language, a child so far unaware what "telling", "word", and "mean" mean. Wittgenstein's illustration of the difficulty is the starting point of the *Investigations.* Cavell remembers his own daughter, maybe just under two, coming to know the word "kitty" (baby cat) and then saying the word whenever she saw or touched anything with fur. But, when she said this, did it mean: "Look at the kitty" or "This is like a kitty" or

"Aren't soft things nice?" Does it even make sense to suppose that such alternatives were available to her? In each case her word was produced about a soft, warm, furry object. "What did she learn," Cavell asks, "in order to do that?":

> *What had she learned having done it?* If she had never made such leaps, she would never have walked into speech. Having made it, meadows of communication can grow for us. Where you leap to depends on where you stand. When, later, she picks up a gas bill and says "Here's a letter", or when, hearing a piece of music we've listened to together many times, she asks "Who's Beethoven?", or when she points to the television coverage of the Democratic National Convention and asks "What are you watching?", I may realize we are not ready to walk certain places together (p. 172).

The world the young child is in does not yet have kittens in quite the sense that the adult's world does, but she is—encouraged by smiles, encouraged by gestures—making steps into that commonality, which one day *will* include political conventions. A slightly older child, used to the naming-game, may still wonder, on hearing the word "pumpkin", whether this must be connected with pumping (say, pumping up a ball) or pumps (the kind you wear) or perhaps with Mr Popkin, who lives next door. Later, and more conventionally, there are, to take an example, phrases drawing on the everyday word "feed", where "feed the cat" connects with "feed the meter", with "feed in the film", and with "feed his pride" (Cavell, 1979, p. 181); also, and less conventionally, Cavell fantasises a grammatical elaboration where one "fods the dog" and "fads the cat" and "firds the bird". The routes of association are never closed. These are associations that depart from the word's apparently immediate use, indeed that extend beyond immediacy itself, opening the way most crucially for imagination. The child riffs on the words she acquires, sometimes meaningfully, sometimes aimlessly, and hits upon new associations and possibilities for the word. Even small children learning to speak *play* with words, contemporaneously with their coming to "use" words to "refer" to "things"? They test possibilities of sound and sense, finding their way to what sense is. And this in several senses: in what words mean; in how they sound and look, and how they run together with their neighbours; and in a certain direction in which they lead—a *sens unique* from which, in a sense, there will be no turning back. In fact, if we can accept that this generally *is* how words *are*, then the way we use them acquires a sharper edge of responsibility, for this will shape possibilities, not only for ourselves but for our community. It is a responsibility, let's say, for thought itself. There continues to be this endless possibility to the signs we use (so much more than the mechanical push-and-pull of the signs that animals use), and this we might think of as the engine of culture itself.

Cavell draws attention to what it is that words do, to their availability to new associations in ways that go some way further towards addressing what I have called the materiality of the sign. In this he accentuates the lives of human beings as talkers and what it is to come into speech, and he explores this through the fine-grained examples of human interaction and conversation that literature and, especially, film provide. In

emphasising speech, he sees himself as taking a line quite different from his near contemporary, Jacques Derrida, who famously emphasises the priority of writing to speech, subverting the hierarchy within which Western philosophy installs itself, with its ancient quarrel with literature. But Cavell's contrasting of these stances involves, I think, a degree of mischievousness on his part, for it should be clear, as I shall try to show, that Derrida is motivated in this claim by different concerns and that these are by no means at odds with Cavell.

Jacques Derrida and the nature of the sign

One reason for that aversion is Cavell's annoyance at Derrida's acquiescence in the flattering attention he received from American literature departments, while another is Derrida's reading of J.L. Austin, Cavell's former teacher and someone whose influence they share. Rather than elaborating here on the extent of these contiguities and differences, it will be appropriate, for present purposes, to consider aspects of Derrida's account of language and meaning, and this can be explained in two stages.

First, and following de Saussure, Derrida draws attention to the way that words have meaning not simply through their correlation with an object ("red" with a red colour patch) but through systems of difference (red, as opposed to green, yellow, pink . . .). In fact, and to press this to a stronger point, such differences in reality emerge for us through the distinctions that language makes. Second, however, Derrida departs from Saussure's structuralism in that he draws attention to the way that such systems of difference—in other words, the words we use—are themselves in movement. In fact, with this lack of fixity, our words (and what we mean, what we think!) always operate in a way that is beyond our full control. This is so in two respects: in the first place our words come to us with histories of usage that extend beyond anything we can know; and, in the second, whatever words we use are necessarily available to interpretation and reiteration in ways that we cannot possibly foresee. This negativity—in a sense, this hiddenness—is at the heart of meaning and of ourselves, and it is dynamic and transformative. At the least it should modify our expectations of transparency, both at the personal level and on the larger social scale. It should modify and deepen our idea of what knowledge, learning, and the pursuit of truth entail. Far from being something to lament, this is the very condition of meaning. Far from being a "tool for communication", language comes to seem more like the crucial means to our coming to have thoughts at all. And far from this being a further iteration of epistemological scepticism, we find here the articulation of sense in which doubt and certainty are possible at all.

In developing this account, Derrida draws attention to the way that the sign must have some material form (sounds, ink-marks, gestures, and so on). But then there is this strange fact that the nature of the sign is determined in structural terms. Thus, in writing words and using an alphabet, we depend upon the inscription of letters, whether made of ink or pixels or lines in the sand, and whether large or small. They do not even require a standard shape. Thus,

_{kitty}, kitty, _{kitty}, kitty, **kitty**, **kitty**, **kitty**, **kitty**, *kitty*, kitty, _{kitty}

Such materialisation is flexible and held in place structurally, through systems of difference. This is true also of the spoken word in that variations in the pitch of the human voice or in accent do not normally stand in the way of understanding.

To be a sign, such a mark (etc.) must also be iterable—that is, available to further and unforeseen uses, open to new contexts and new chains of association, and to further interpretation. This can also be conceived by way of the idea that the sign is never saturated with meaning, but *necessarily* open to new connection and association, as normally goes on, in the most ordinary conversation. As Derrida puts it, signs are, by nature, always "delayed" or "deferred"—the very nature of the sign "is not to be proximate to itself" (Derrida, 1976, p. 50). Signs are thus, we might say, constituted via an absence. In the reception of the sign, this is happening all the time, so that a sign never works simply like a mechanical lever but always opens unforeseeable possibilities—in a process of dissemination. Derrida describes this also with the biological term "dehiscence", which refers to the bursting of the seed-pod. Once again, this extends back, as it were, into the very nature of thought itself, in the speaker or writer, as well as in the addressee. This begins to explain the way that ideas come to us—already in words and, typically, in ways that we cannot quite fathom.

What I have called the negativity in this thought, its insistence on a necessary absence, is at odds with a dominant knowing-as-grasping, along the lines that Emerson identifies and laments, as we saw, when he speaks of our unhandsome condition. It is worth elaborating a little on his characterisation of the vice.

Emerson against impudent knowingness

Reacting to the fad for phrenology in his day, Emerson writes: "The grossest ignorance does not disgust like this impudent knowingness." "Impudent" is a term once favoured by school-teachers anxious to scold students and impart in them a sense of shame at what they had done. It derives from *pudendum* (the genital area of the body, and especially that of a woman's body), and it might be understood to involve a lack of modesty, including sexual modesty. It is one of a strange class of words in English that are used only with a negative prefix or suffix, such as "unkempt", "feckless", "inept", and "gormless". French, by contrast, retains the positive term, *pudeur,* which, in English, is inadequately translated as "modesty": *pudeur* carries a rich sense of the importance of something the essence of which depends upon its remaining at least partly hidden.

Richard Poirier explains Emerson's particular preoccupations here well:

> "Impudent knowingness" is knowingness that, resentful of anything it cannot explain, presumes to expose the mysterious sources of creation, whether of human offspring like Waldo or human offspring like literature;

it exposes the genitalia, as if, by pointing to this or that or any other single organ, it could explain desire or the productivity of mind. That Emerson fully intends this sense of "impudent" becomes evident several pages further on when he remarks that "the art of life has a pudency that will not be exposed" (Poirier, 1992, p. 53).[3]

Waldo, Emerson's son, had died at the age of six, less than a year before the writing of this essay, and while the loss is never laboured in the essay, the absence plays its part. Emerson's literary-archaic usage of "pudency" is, I take it, a pointed resistance to the upfront explicitness of the then fashionable "science" of phrenology, which would explain everything, whose practitioners he condemns as "theoretic kidnappers and slave-drivers" (Emerson, 1983, p. 475). The kidnappers are stealing, we can imagine, the possibility of responsible thought under the guise of spurious theorisations; they are slave-drivers in the sense that they force the operation of the intelligence into scientistic templates and protocols of procedure. The somewhat awkward word "knowingness" refers, for example, to that familiar response of "the expert" who is immediately ready on hearing a new thought to arrest it within his already-worked-out conceptual armoury and theoretical taxonomy. He knows exactly where you are coming from, and before you have finished your paper or your sentence, he has "placed" your words: "So you are just saying that. . . What you are saying amounts to this. . . You are saying the same thing as. . ." For him it all comes down to this, and reductively so.[4] And the consequence of this is that, now that he has your ideas taped, his own position is buttressed and effectively secured against further thought. The baby, as we know, gradually discovers that the world is not just an extension of her own body, not immediately within her grasp, and this may be the beginning of that continual lesson that the human condition is *unheimlich*[5]: to understand the world is to understand it

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[3] Emerson writes as follows: "The most attractive class of people are those who are powerful obliquely, and not by the direct stroke: men of genius, but not yet accredited: one gets the cheer of their light, without paying too great a tax. . . In the thought of genius there is always a surprise; and the moral sentiment is well called 'the newness,' for it is never other; as new to the oldest intelligence as to the young child—'the kingdom that cometh without observation.' In like manner, for practical success, there must not be too much design. . . The art of life has a pudency, and will not be exposed" (Emerson, "Experience").

[4] Knowingness of this kind has contributed to gross distortions in the reading of poststructuralist thought. In educational research, as an example, the terms of poststructuralism were grafted onto the well-established growth of neo-marxist new sociology of knowledge and of identity politics, in the name of something that came to be known as "postmodernist educational research".

[5] See Heidegger, 1978.

as a place where she cannot be fully at home. And sometimes the adult has *not* discovered, or has declined to learn, that the objects of her understanding are *not* to be grasped and gripped, or clutched and controlled, not to be contained in concepts.[6] Then she is impudent, and a threat to our lives and world and education. Painful lessons, but they had better be learned!

The appeal to a kind of receptivity or reticence here is not just an endorsement of passivity. Emerson's work is suggestive throughout of a superfluity of energy, and this is evident in the functioning of language itself. We find ourselves on a stair. Around every circle another can be drawn. Our finding is a founding, and at every step, every word, every thought, there is the possibility of finding or founding something new. It is in phrases and thoughts such as these, drawn from his essays, that this excess energy surfaces. But this is an energy that will be dissipated if it is discharged without measure or engaged with blunt instrumentality. It depends upon a certain indirectness or sublimation, which will refine it and intensify its charge. It requires not impudence but *pudeur*.

We have, I hope, travelled some way towards a better sense of the sounds and marks that are essentially part of human lives; and implicit in this is an ethics to do with how we might better take responsibility for our language and thought. Where does this leave us in relation to Wittgenstein?

Wittgenstein: inner/outer; hidden/unhidden

In spite of his assertion that nothing is hidden, Wittgenstein would have little truck with the vulgarity of making everything explicit, open to the gaze or to examination: the very nature of his writing tells as much. But how are we to explain this *pudeur*? Certainly the quality referred to relates to a valuing of humility shared by all the philosophers I have mentioned. Can I say that the *pudeur* is there in the surface of the sign, that it is internal to the range of signs, words, gestures, depending as they do upon a necessary absence? The metaphysical inner is rejected, but attention is turned, by contrast, to the sign itself, for it contains all the possibilities of nuance and veiling, desirable and undesirable as these may be.

Wittgenstein is less direct or thorough in his attention to the materiality of the sign, but his patient tracing of the contours of expression continually moves the reader in this direction: attention is focused, especially in his late writings on the philosophy of psychology, on what notions of the inner and the outer can convey. What he has to say in this work identifies, if I am right, an internal relation between four elements: first, a necessary indeterminacy of expression in relation to mental states; second, a subtly gradated shading of expression (verbal and gestural in relation to those states); third, the necessary possibility of pretence; and fourth, the exercise of the imagination.

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[6] Note the etymological embedding of such ideas of containment and gripping in "concept" and *Begriff*, the philosopher's stock-in-trade.

As a start, consider the way that the tenor of Wittgenstein's thoughts is displayed in consecutive but contrasting paragraphs from Volume II of the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*. In the first, he writes:

> 702. Imagine that people could observe the functioning of the nervous system in others. In that case they would have a sure way of distinguishing genuine and simulated feeling.—Or, might they after all doubt in turn whether someone feels anything when these signs are present?—What they see there could at any rate readily be imagined to determine their reaction without their having any qualms about it.
> And now this can be translated to outward behaviour.

Wittgenstein's remarks here effectively anticipate the false hopes currently placed on neuroscience's role in the study of the mind, which is not to discount the genuine possibilities such science opens. His real purpose, however, is to steer the reader towards better reflection on the nature of mind, specifically in respect of the notions of the inner and the outer in such states of mind as gladness or anger, or perhaps contrition, as the paragraph that follows indicates:

> 703. There is indeed the case where someone later reveals his inmost heart to me by a confession: but that this is so cannot offer me any explanation of outer and inner, for I have to give credence to the confession.
> For confession is of course something exterior (Wittgenstein, 1980).

The possibility of revealing one's inmost heart is tied to the possibility of hiding it, and both revealing and hiding are played out within the range of expression. Someone can become transparent to us through a change in facial or linguistic expression. Hence, the change that is needed will need to be understood *at the level of expression*. And "There is," he asserts, "no such thing as outer mediated and inner unmediated evidence for the inner" (p. 67).

Pretence plays a crucial role in Wittgenstein's approach to the problem. In fact, pretence is not merely a matter of imitation, for it depends also upon intention (cf. you can imitate the behaviour of pain without *pretending* to be in pain, Wittgenstein, 1992, p. 56); and it depends on practising, trying out, essaying. If there were beings to whom pretence was unknown and to whom lying was not just morally wrong but incomprehensible, where perhaps nothing was hidden, their form of life would be of a kind totally different from our own: they would not be human at all. That there is, furthermore and necessarily, a degree of indeterminacy and unforeseeability to what people intend indicates something of what "mental" means (p. 63); and Wittgenstein connects this with the "endless multiplicity of expression" (p. 65). Uncertainty does not at all refer to "what goes on in the inner: even if it does refer to the mental, the mental finds its expression in the bodily" (p. 68). The direction here is not from the inner-mental to the outer-bodily. It is from exploring and testing our performative, behavioural range that the nuances of our powers of expression derive. derive. It is within this range

that they have their sense. And it is the presence of ambiguity in that behavioural range that drives the inclination to speak of the inner and the outer. Thus, "When mien, gesture, and circumstances are unambiguous, then the inner seems to me to be the outer; it is only when we cannot read the outer that the inner process seems to be hidden behind it" (p. 63). The presence of ambiguity is a condition of the human, and ambiguity is a property not of brains but of signs. In the absence of this subtly gradated behaviour, and if we were not inclined to speak of inner and outer, the human body would become like a machine (p. 66). That we are inclined to speak of inner and outer depends upon this ambiguity of behaviour, without which human being would be something other than it is. To see the human being is to see this expressive possibility. "If I ask someone on the street for directions, I prefer a friendly answer to an unfriendly one," Wittgenstein writes. "I react immediately to someone else's behaviour. I presuppose the inner in so far as I presuppose a *human being*" (p. 84).

In elaborating on these matters, Wittgenstein has recourse to ideas of playing a role and to being an actor on a stage, and he comments: "That an actor can represent grief shows the uncertainty of evidence, but that he can represent *grief* also shows the reality of evidence" (p. 67). This sentence, shifting its emphasis from "actor" to "grief", and conjoining the uncertainty of evidence (of what we see in the one who acts) with the reality of evidence, is a far cry from verificationism. What can count as evidence here is not to be settled in crude binary terms but is semantically dependent upon this nuanced expressive range. It is not insignificant, therefore, that in a later remark Wittgenstein draws upon a theatrical motif again. He writes: "The 'inner' [understood as the metaphysical notion of the inner, as discussed at the start of this article] is a delusion. That is: the whole complex of ideas alluded to by this word is like a painted curtain drawn in front of the scene of the actual word use" (p. 84, parenthesis added). The imagery here in effect reverses that accustomed philosophical prejudice, according to which it is words that veil the veracity of mental operations; and it reverses in the process that related prejudice that disparages art in favour of the real. "The uncertainty about the inner [understood correctly]," Wittgenstein goes on to say, "is an uncertainty about something outer" (p. 88, parenthesis added).

I want to see the actor's experimenting with forms of expression, the performance by which they are judged, as on a continuum with the range of experimentation—the testing of expression and response—that constitutes the fabric of our ordinary lives and experience. This is not, objectionably, to turn our lives into a contrived performance, but it is to recognise the performative in what we say and do, and to acknowledge the fact that we must feel our way in this—that is, find our way but also find what our way feels like. It is through this that we may learn to avoid the multiple ways in which we habitually fail to find the right words (where our words fall short or are bombastic or somehow hollow) and instead achieve something closer to what Foucault refers to as *parrhesia* or *franc parler*. If, however, there is the taint of earnestness in Foucault's expression of these matters, this is finessed in Cavell's appeal to the notion of voice, sometimes expressed as a seeking after perfect pitch—a commitment that extends in varying degrees of

specificity through his discussions of theatre and film, perhaps most tellingly in his exemplary explorations of the comedy of remarriage.[7]

If this is right, the four elements identified above—of indeterminacy of expression, subtly gradated shading of expression, the necessary possibility of pretence, and the exercise of the imagination—tell us something about the manner in which children come into the human world. In fact, when one deals with a young child, the possibility of pretence is there almost as soon as language gets going, before they are able themselves to speak. This is the exercise of the imagination, and without it the child's "language" is not our own. It is through this polychromatic shading of expression that she must gradually find her own words, that she must give form and substance to herself. It is through this that her relation to what she knows will avoid the knowing vices that Emerson attacks.

Wittgenstein despaired at the priority given to science, and he condemned scientism in all its forms. There seems little doubt that he would have recoiled at the aberrations of the culture of accountability, not least the obsession with transparency. The nature and variety of human expression and its interpretation, which become such prominent themes in Wittgenstein's later work, and which are accentuated in the reception of that work by Cavell, can be broached by science in only the most limited ways, but they are defining features of the humanities. Thus, the humanities have a peculiar importance in education. Attention to the embodied lives of human beings as talkers and to what it is to come into speech can be celebrated and sustained in education across its range. Yet acknowledgement of this can also easily become formulaic, understood in overly intellectualised and institutionalised terms: it is then perhaps assumed that its requirements are satisfied by an initiation into different academic subjects leading to progressive command of their distinct ways of speaking and reasoning.[8] The importance, by contrast, of attention to the wider range of expression inherent in the human—to the nuances of speech, to the subtleties of gesture—has been the increasing focus of the present discussion. And this is manifested better in practices that are too easily dismissed by the gruff practicality of policy and practice as marginal to

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[7] The "comedy of remarriage" is the name Cavell gives to a genre he identifies, comprising principally the following Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s: *The Lady Eve, It Happened One Night, Bringing Up Baby, The Philadephia Story, His Girl Friday, Adam's Rib,* and *The Awful Truth* (Cavell, 1981). Perfect pitch is an idea developed more in his later work, *A Pitch of Philosophy* (1994). This draws on the obvious musical sense of the phrase but develops it in relation to notions of mutual attunement and perfectionism. "Pitch" is multiply allusive, relating not only to musical pitch but to the pitching of an argument or the pitching of a tent, to the marking out of land as a pitch for sport, and to the action of the pitcher in baseball.

[8] A classic example of such an approach to a liberal education is Paul Hirst's highly influential forms of knowledge thesis (Hirst, 1965). The scope of Hirst's account embraces the humanities and the sciences.

education, perhaps as merely decorative and non-serious. The fine-grained examples of human interaction and conversation that the dramatic arts and, especially, film provide open possibilities not only of critical assessment and appreciation but also, in more obviously creative ways, of improvisation and acting, and of play-production and film-making. This is by no means to deny the value of the wider range of the arts (and especially the importance of writing), throughout which there abound opportunities for experimentation with expression. It is to draw attention to aspects of the arts where embodied expression is of the essence. Such practices are extensions of the kinds of pretending that little children naturally enter into. They are further steps in that experimentation with expression—our progressive understanding of ourselves through expression—that must be part of our lives as human beings, our lives with one another. Expressions are not the externalisations of internal mental states: they are the refined, materialised vocabulary—of words, gesture, mien—through which such states come to be.

Yet these tendencies are too often schooled out of children. The supposedly more serious responsibilities and concerns of adult life and work shoulder them out still further. The child's capacity for playful expression, which derives from the nature of language itself, lays the way for something of profound importance throughout life. Later frustration of this makes the learner vulnerable to the drab literalness of transparency and the monological mechanisms of performativity. By contrast, an education pursued in the light of the ideas developed here might provide further entry into registers of play and seriousness, in which the learner is sensitised to what it is to mean something, what it is to imitate or to pretend. It would endorse confidence in the reality of our ordinary words, and ultimately a readiness to speak and act.[9]

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