



## Donata Schoeller and Vera Saller (eds.): **Thinking Thinking: Practicing Radical Reflection** (Karl Alber Verlag, Freiburg, 2016)

*Theresa D'Oliveira (Zürich)*

This book is an eclectic collection of nine essays on the elusive act of thinking by authors from Europe and the United States, including the editors Donata Schoeller and Vera Saller. Their fulminate introduction is a gem in itself highlighting their aims, the path chosen and its challenges. In addition they provide important background information on every contributor; in fact they brilliantly unpick and illuminate each article, emphasising its relevance and significance for this book. Their special interest lies in the intersection of psychotherapy and philosophy including the sensitive interface of theory and practice and “how the consequences of theories of mind, feeling and language have the power to impact on such fields as communication, conflict resolution, education and therapy” (Introduction). The title of the book refers to Maurice Merleau-Ponty 1948, “An inquiry into thinking that accounts for the act of thinking can be termed radical-reflection ... it is radical by facing the challenge of not discounting its own activity... including the *experience* of thinking” (p. 10).

The editors have chosen contributors who “cover a wide spectrum of interdisciplinary areas of study such as anthropology, cognitive science, evolutionary biology, philosophy, psychoanalysis as well as therapy and neurophenomenology” (p. 18). This selection sparkles with insight and innovative approaches, requiring new methodologies, creating new vocabulary and language concepts – indeed challenging the very source of our thinking process. Each chapter reveals a different answer to the key question relevant to the whole book: “How can one possibly approach this subject matter, if every reflective move one does is already a result, a manifestation, of what one is trying to reflect?” (p. 9)

Diversity of perspectives is a pivotal factor clearly reflected in all the contributions. In the first: *The scientist's body at the source of meaning*, Claire Petitmengin describes her research into “a deeply pre-reflected, gestural and transmodal dimension of experience that seems to be the very source of meaning.” (p. 28) It is followed by Eugene Gendlin's innovative approach to cognition and thinking in which he coins the term *implicit precision* which “can enable new logical con-

cepts to come” (p. 50) although we are not aware of their formation. Even more thought-provoking is *Enkinaesthesia and Thomas Reid's kind of magic* by Susan Stuart, revealing how the fundamental awareness of our relationships and environment creates the first-order natural language and underpins the invention and acquisition of the second-order cultural constructs. Schoeller's *Somatic-Semantic-Shifting: Articulating across the Mind-Body split* provides a fascinating insight into the mind/body dichotomy, underlining their interrelatedness. Another challenging perspective is elucidated by Terence Deacon who poses the fundamental question “What is the form of a thought before it is put into words?” (p. 139) He continues with the observation “that most of our mental life is lived in this not-quite-articulated not-quite-formulated state” (p. 139) explored by his research. In chapter 6, Vincent Colapietro most impressively “demonstrates how Peirce's pragmatist semiotics is significant for the study of human thinking” (p. 22) and further compares the Peircean understanding of the self with Freud's. In his revealing article, *Human Language and Subjective Experience*, Stuart Hayes announces his core analytic unit as an “ongoing act in context” and points out that each individual needs to be considered as a social being, extending across “the cognitive relations of time, place and person” (Introduction). The final two chapters *The detective metaphor in abduction studies and psychoanalysis* by the editor Saller and Patricia Giampieri-Deutsch's *Towards living subjective experience* thoroughly examine the period before a thought emerges, researching and bringing their individual “take” of this elusive, undefined time with its ephemeral quality. Giampieri-Deutsch feels that “[t]his experience offered by patients in the analytic session may even be the instantiation in vivo of their very early preverbal past experience.” (p. 233) These last two contributions also elucidate the first and third person perspectives in the theory and practice of present-day psychotherapy as well as the philosophical aspects.

Up until recently, the psychoanalyst's interest has highlighted the deeper meaning or the psychic dynamic processes these reflections stand for but not *how* they emerge. This is precisely where the editors of this book are looking for ways to change and extend the focus by using an interdisciplinary approach to encourage fruitful dialogue.

Above all, Schoeller and Saller have succeeded in gathering a diverse collection of articles which consider the very act of thinking and re-examine “conceptions of language that have led to some of the richest discoveries about human understanding, language as the house of being, language as what opens up the very mystery of the human being” (Taylor 1997, 15).

Altogether the nine chapters unfold a rich field for discussion, pointing the way for psychotherapy and philosophy to enrich each other's territory.

### **References**

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1948). *Sense et non-sense*. Paris: Nagel.

Taylor, Ch. (1997). Self-exploration and modernity. In: F. Varela (ed.): *Sleeping, dreaming and dying* (p. 14–21). Boston: Wisdom Publications.