Living Moments with John Shotter
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We have had the great fortune of a close friendship with John Shotter for almost 40 years. We have been intellectual supporters, interlocutors, critics, compatriots, and creative collaborators. We have laughed, cried, jousted, and hugged. In the following, we wish to illustrate some of the important ways that we have known John, and share some of the similarities and differences.

An early memory: Thanksgiving, 1979

It was a gorgeous November day when we gathered to play sports before our Thanksgiving dinner. John had driven up to join us from North Carolina, where he was on sabbatical. He was a great enthusiast for our family games, and a fun participant. Everyone loved his presence.
John as social constructionist? John joined in the Taos Institute festivities, and later became an Honorary Associate. He often spoke at Taos conferences, and made an enormous contribution to the dialogues around social construction. Yet, he always harbored some reservations about calling himself a social constructionist. His powerful writings on relational process relied far too much on embodiment and experience to give way to the possibility of these being constructions.
Memory: John and Ken in Discussion

We were never together for more than 10 minutes, maybe less, before John reverted to form, and began a discussion with Ken, usually, about some idea that was burning in his brain. Often his ideas were just enough at odds with Ken’s that they would begin a conversation that might ebb and flow over a series of days. Although their dialogues were intricate, complex, and serious, they were also always conducted with respect, good humor and a great deal of energy. John was often “hot” to convince Ken of his views, while Ken would try to hold John to the flames of coherence.
Memory: John and his Textual Friends

No matter where he was, John’s love of books was evident. In New Hampshire, like an orchestra conductor, he sat writing at his desk, surrounded by walls of books. He could pull one off the shelf without standing up. As we often said, these were his “textual friends.” His books were his favorite conversational partners, and they never failed him. He could quote long passages from them, and inside each of his favorites, (Vico, Wittgenstein, Volosinov, Vygotsky, among the best) were his underlines, comments, and expressions. Although he was able to cite endlessly from various sources, his own writings were never far away. He might say something like, “in 1976, I first wrote…” and then go on to verify a more recent passage from someone else’s work. That someone had not had the good fortune to read Shotter first!
Among John’s embodied companions, a favorite was Tom Andersen. Particularly in his later writings, the urge to see words in action was intense. The Cartesian dream of a perfect theoretical structure had been abandoned, and Wittgenstein’s emphasis on language as action was compelling. With Tom, John’s scholarly writings connected most powerfully with a world of practice. Tom brought him to the world of therapy that he knew and John added a rich articulation. Both Harlene Anderson and Jim Wilson added further to these catalytic conversations.
Memory: Joining up

In the same way that John teamed up with practitioners from the therapy world, he also immersed himself in the world of organizational practice. And like the therapeutic world, these experiences added rich dimension to his writings. Here he appears with Patricia Shaw, one of his most significant allies in the organizational world.
How proud John was when he brought Cherrie to visit us in 2008. She was a charming and energetic companion, who adored John and all his special qualities. Having been a student of his in the KCC program, she knew how he thought and what his favorite topics were. She was the best reward that John ever got from KCC!
Memory: Visiting in Cambridge
John’s home here was that of a country gentleman, complete with wife, garden, and dog. Nestled nearby the university, it also offered generous opportunities of many kinds. However, while the university was not easy to penetrate in terms of its intellectual life, John’s home was ever vibrant. An enormous outpouring of scholarship issued from these quarters.
Memory: Sharing a beer at the Taos-Attractor Conference in Copenhagen

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