

THE BODY: AN ANTHROPO-PHENOMENOLOGICAL VIEWPOINT

AN INTERVIEW WITH MAXINE SHEETS-JOHNSTONE December 14th, 1996¹

Gertrudis Van de Vijver

Gertrudis Van de Vijver (GVdV): Dear Maxine, one of the reasons I asked for this interview is that I was surprised to see that someone who deals with the body from an evolutionary perspective, as you did in your lecture yesterday, at the same time deals with Lacan and with phenomenology. You told me that you first studied phenomenology, and later came to evolutionary biology. Why did you start with phenomenology, and how and why did you find it necessary to deal with evolutionary theory?

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (MSJ): Originally, my interest in evolutionary biology stemmed from studies in phenomenology and philosophy, because I felt Sartre and Heidegger especially were treating humans as if they descended out of the blue. Where did human freedom come from? Where did *Dasein* come from? There is no relationship to anything at all in a natural sense. First I thought of doing a biology of the lived body. That was the first topic. I thought I was going to do a book on the biology of the lived body. This was many years ago. I began reading in evolutionary biology at that time, because I felt that there had to be some roots to "humanness". All of these descriptions about humanness, for example human freedom, it just seemed to me necessary to ground it in something solid. So, I began reading in biological sciences and evolution – I had never read anything in evolution, I had never taken any courses in biology at all, although I had taken a course in physiology, but really nothing in

1. This interview was held at the International Conference "On the Origins of Cognition", San Sebastian, December 13-14, 1996.

biological sciences. And I was actually teaching dance at the time. I was a professor of dance.

GVdV: Classic dance, jazz dance?

MSJ: Modern dance. In the States, you had the tradition of Martha Graham.

GVdV: You were a professional dancer?

MSJ: Yes, but I was also a professor of dance and my dissertation was actually in the area of aesthetics. My dissertation was titled "The phenomenology of dance".

GVdV: With whom did you do it?

MSJ: Eugene Kaelin, at the University of Wisconsin. The dissertation was published; it is a book (Sheets-Johnstone, 1966). I became very concerned through my phenomenological studies of dance with concepts, with all the concepts that were generated in the process of moving and dancing, and I always wanted to understand what I had done. I did an awful lot of choreography and I was regarded, when I was in graduate school, as a very fine choreographer, but nobody understood what I was doing theoretically, at all. Actually I had such great difficulty with my advisers in the dance department that they refused to work with me anymore, and only people in philosophy followed what I was doing.

GVdV: Really? Does that mean you were particularly difficult to work with, because of your philosophical interest?

MSJ: No. Well, it was because there was a certain way of looking at dance, and a phenomenological approach demanded a different kind of analysis, a different kind of analysis of movement.

GVdV: Can you give us a more precise idea?

MSJ: I wanted to look at dance as both a formed and a performing art. That meant looking at it from a phenomenological point of view, which meant giving a descriptive analysis of movement first of all, of movement with respect to dance, and that meant forcing myself to think about how to

"language" experience. That is always a problem in phenomenology: How to language experience? Experience and language don't automatically coincide, at all. So, first of all, I was very dissatisfied with this stock definition of movement as a force in time and space, because that was not the experience. It didn't match the experience at all, neither in terms of my movement as a dancer nor when I was part of an audience, watching dance. I mean, an airplane is also a force in time and space and an ant is a force in time and space. So, it was not saying anything.

GVdV: You were looking for a definition of movement inspired by the phenomenological approach?

MSJ: Yes, trying really to formulate what is there, inquiring into what is actually there in the experience. I ended up describing dance as a "form-in-the-making" – this was hyphenated, very usual in phenomenology, sometimes people in phenomenology and existential philosophy laugh about this, because everything is hyphenated, like "being-in-the-world". I analyzed movement in a very different way; I analyzed it in terms of qualities, because that was what was present. There is a qualitative aspect, spatially, temporally, and energetically with respect to movement. So, the analysis that I did had to do with the qualities of movement, with what I came to call, for example, the *tensional quality* of movement, the actual effort that is there, not the muscular contraction, but the effort – the weakness or strongness. In other words, it was an analysis of what is there in the movement itself, but not from a quantitative point of view at all. It had to do with what I call the linear quality of movement, the quality having to do with both the linear contour of the body, whether it is vertical or diagonal, or whether it is curved or straight. In other words, the linear character of the body itself, but then also what I call the linear design of the body. There is also a linear pattern to movement itself, because I can trace a path, which is a zigzag, or I can trace a circle in my movement spatially. Do you want me to go on with this specification of the qualities of movement?

GVdV: No, but I do have some additional questions with regard to this. The first one is, I wonder who were the teachers you had with regard to Heidegger and Sartre. And secondly, I'd like to know what your dance teachers' reaction was to that phenomenological analysis you just gave.

MSJ: I studied mainly with Eugene Kaelin and I did readings on my own.

GVdV: At the University of Wisconsin?

MSJ: Yes. And the reaction of the teachers in dance ..., for example, I remember that at the time, the person refused to work with me any longer. I was trying to get to a more precise sense of line in dance. I won't go into all of the details, but she insisted that a line was simply some kind of mathematical phenomenon. Like: This is a line, it is drawn. It is this thing. And I was trying to say: Well, that's not a line in terms of movement.

GVdV: What you were trying to say, apparently, was that it was not about line, but about form.

MSJ: Yes, it had to do with a qualitative something in movement, not some kind of mathematical or scientific formulation at all.

GVdV: Would you say that the qualitative thing is form?

MSJ: Oh yes, yes. It's definitely a formal aspect of movement.

GVdV: That's what topology is all about, about form. It's qualitative. What you said yesterday about the topology of movement was very interesting.

MSJ: Yes: "You change as you move, and you move as you change". We're all topological entities.

GVdV: Did you encounter that idea of topology in phenomenology?

MSJ: No. That was something I developed myself. I came to it through doing phenomenological analyses of movement; I didn't get it from reading phenomenological studies.

GVdV: I see. I can't imagine you'd find something like that by reading Heidegger.

MSJ: I didn't read a lot of Heidegger, but I read enough to feel uncomfortable with that kind of view of humanness. There's a good deal

more in Husserl in terms of really grounding understandings in actual experience and in the body.

GVdV: So, you started with Heidegger and then came to Husserl.

MSJ: Well, I really started with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger I read on the side, as well as Husserl.

GVdV: You know that Merleau-Ponty and Lacan knew each other and talked quite a lot with each other. At the end of his life, in *Le visible et l'invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (1964) describes, abstractly, the relation between subject and object in interactionist terms, I mean interactionist in the sense of being defined mutually. He also describes them in the terms of layers. Then, starting from that, Lacan said something like: "Well, it goes in the good direction, but you will never arrive at something that has *une prise*, a grasp, on clinical practice".

MSJ: Merleau-Ponty refers to Lacan in a child's relation with others, too, and seems to regard him as an authority.

GVdV: Yes, that's true. I suggest we come back to psychoanalysis a bit later. I'd like to hear some more about evolutionary biology. Were you interested in the morphological studies in biology? There was a line of thought in biology that was focusing on form, not so much on structure, but on form.

MSJ: I subsequently discovered Adolf Portmann's work on form and found it enormously significant and very exciting, and I refer to him in books that I have written (Sheets-Johnstone, 1990, 1994). I found his notion of form values, built-in form values, of great significance. I think they are also animate values – kinetic values – and I go on to talk about animate values. He talks about form values in terms of having semantic significance in an interanimate, intersubjective sense, one animal to another. Obviously humans are included, also included are expressions in all kinds of ways ... what he called inwardness. His writings are very interesting, most especially his *Animal Forms and Patterns* (Portmann, 1967). I found his analyses just very fresh and exciting in pointing out things that other biologists had ignored, or had certainly not valued, certainly not in any way in the US.

GVdV: I have no precise idea about the history of biology in the US – or about the reception of Heidegger. I suppose not many people were studying it at that time.

MSJ: No, when I went back for the second doctorate in biology, I was taking courses with medical students. It was pretty heavy stuff for me. Some of it was really very challenging. I was mostly interested – my writings show this – in the genealogy, in all of these continuities, all of these ways of being and behaving that we share with other creatures. Tracing out those commonalities seemed to be really of great significance.

GVdV: So, you first did a doctorate in philosophy and afterwards one in biology?

MSJ: But I didn't write a dissertation in biology.

GVdV: You had the intention to do so?

MSJ: I had the intention to do so, but it was not financially feasible to continue studying, so I returned to teaching.

GVdV: Dance?

MSJ: Yes. And then finally, I kept teaching but I had a summer research grant, and I spent that time doing evolutionary studies. I actually did a paper called "Evolutionary Residues and Uniquenesses of the Human Movement". In other words, trying to trace out certain kinds of commonalities of humans with primates and other animals. And that paper was actually published in a biology journal called *Evolutionary Theory* (Sheets-Johnstone, 1983).

GVdV: Were there any reactions from biologists?

MSJ: No (laughing). When I was a graduate student there in biology also, I wrote a paper that was published in the *Journal of the History of Biology* (Sheets-Johnstone, 1982). It had to do with natural selection in Lamarck and Darwin. And that's a prestigious journal. I was very pleased about having such a publication, especially being just a graduate student, but nobody paid very much attention to anything like that, especially when I went back to dance. Nobody was interested at all.

GVdV: And things changed? I saw in the program that you're now an independent scholar.

MSJ: Well, I am an independent scholar. That's partly by choice and partly by design, in terms of the fact that I fall through academic cracks very easily. People in dance regarded me as a philosopher in spite of everything I'd done choreographically or in performing, because I wrote about dance and I was also very active in a dance research organization. I was, in fact, president of it for a couple of years.

GVdV: My question was also: What was your relationship as a dancer to the university? Did it make any difference? Was it difficult, as a professional dancer, to be at the university?

MSJ: No, no, not teaching dance, but people in dance regarded me as a philosopher, and people in philosophy regarded me as a dancer, and people in biology certainly didn't know what to do with me. Let me just give you an example: When I was a graduate student there, I applied for a grant at the university itself to do a study on what I called paleoanthropological hermeneutics. And people in philosophy ... Auw!

GVdV: Of course.

MSJ: And people in biology ...! But I did end up writing a paper on paleoanthropological hermeneutics, and gave it at a university holding a conference on hermeneutics. That was really in many ways the beginning for me of just going ahead and doing what I wanted to do. But I wasn't comfortable in dance any more and became an independent scholar, in part because I needed to earn a living. So I earn my living by giving lectures or being a visiting professor. Last year, I had a very nice position in an endowed chair in the humanities for half a year, and I taught a course on "Models of the Mind" in which I introduced evolutionary notions and phenomenology. So, I'm an independent scholar and I teach periodically at the University of Oregon in the Department of Philosophy.

GVdV: Do you have the impression that something has changed as regards the relation between evolutionary biology and hermeneutics, or evolutionary biology and semiotics? Those links, are they established more easily today, do you think?

MSJ: Not in the States. I think a lot of that is because of retrenchment, that is, drawing back in financial limitations of the university, which are really extreme in the States, as I think today they are probably all over. Where departments would have formerly opened doors to new ideas or new ways of thinking, or to interdisciplinary appointments and that kind of thing, there's just not the kind of room for that, although there is a lot of lip service paid into interdisciplinary studies. In actual fact, everything's quite separate.

GVdV: I know some people in biology, who are rather marginal though, who are interested in semiotics.

MSJ: Oh, really?

GVdV: In Denmark, for instance, Jesper Hoffmeyer and Claus Emmeche. Have you met them?

MSJ: No, no, but I was in Denmark recently and I was excited by the people I met there. It was the first time I was in Scandinavia. Steen Wackerhausen, who is a professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Aarhus, invited me. It was wonderfully refreshing. These people were interested in new ways of understanding learning, what they call apprenticeship or non-scholastic learning, which is a distinct way of learning because it is not pumping out or sopping up information. In the US, I told Steen, the emphasis is on having large classrooms and getting all the information out. I just found a lot of the ideas about teaching very, very interesting. Oddly enough, when I was at Trondheim University in Norway, there was a person there in linguistics. Just to give you an idea, this was very interesting. At Trondheim, I gave guest lectures in the department of anthropology, the department of applied linguistics, the department of psychology, and the department of philosophy. It was wonderful to have that kind of open interaction. This person in linguistics was also interested in innovating pedagogy, in new ways of teaching. I find that very interesting, in part because of my movement background. Let me give you an example. In the course I taught on Merleau-Ponty this last spring quarter at the University of Oregon, there were students from a number of departments. Merleau-Ponty is of course regarded as a philosopher of the body. But I found him very ungrounded. He writes of a very generalized and visual body, and a pathological body, and that's not

getting down to basics. So, one day I decided to do a movement improvisation session with the students coincident with a certain claim made by Merleau-Ponty. The intent was to find out if the claim was born out in experience. What was interesting to me about the experience was that after moving – we moved for about twenty minutes; it was a three-hour class – the students stood in the same place, in a circle, just standing talking and discussing the experience for forty-five minutes afterward. There was so much to talk about in terms of elucidating the claim. It was really remarkable. Moving together in very simple ways, where you just sense – it's so difficult to describe because it sounds simplistic. In the beginning we hold hands, one person picks up another's movement, just very naturally, there's no verbal communication at all. If I just very gently start shifting my weight from side to side, pretty soon the person on my right begins shifting weight to the right, very, very slowly. There's a movement which happens in the room that is very spontaneous, you can liken it perhaps to jazz, but it is much less evenly structured than jazz. And there's no individual performance, at least in the way that we were doing it then. Nobody takes off and does something separately, although I have done things where that happened, too, but that is where people are more experienced in moving together and feel really comfortable. In this case, there was an incredible sense of community. People are amazed that they can relate to one another in this way without words and that it is so meaningful, and that it just comes, it is there.

GVdV: Is that one of the reasons you criticize psychoanalysis, because it generally deals with the body in a too abstract way?

MSJ: I think Freud's first observation about the body – how does he put it? – that our life begins in a bodily way, just never got developed, and then Lacan washed it out of the picture completely.

GVdV: So, would you say that Freud was more attentive to the body than Lacan?

MSJ: In the beginning, yes. I was so very interested in that quote that you gave from Freud, because what Freud was describing there recalled what Husserl described as analogical apperception.² In other words, we

2. The quote was part of the lecture "What are five minutes compared to eternity?" which dealt with the case of the little Herbert (Sterba, 1933). It comes from *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (Freud, 1915c: 119): "Let us imagine ourselves in the situation of an almost entirely helpless living
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apperceive what others are feeling or thinking on the basis of our own body. There is just a remarkable similarity there.

GVdV: When you said "Freud in the beginning", until when do you mean?

MSJ: I know that he said that in the beginning the ego is a bodily ego. That was the quote I was thinking of. I think that is an unexplored domain of psychoanalysis.

GVdV: My impression is a little different. For instance, the quote I gave this morning in my lecture, shows that the distinction Freud makes between a predicate and a thing – i.e., that which one can understand in as far as it is related to our bodily impressions (movements!), and that which remains intact as an entity and escapes bodily understanding – returns throughout Freud's work.³ This distinction clearly has to do with our bodily understanding and with what escapes such an understanding. Freud will later take it up in his metapsychology. For instance, in his article on "The Unconscious" (1915*e*), he writes that the mechanism of repression implies that what is repressed is representation, and what becomes "free-floating" is the affect, the cathexis.

MSJ: Yes.

GVdV: That notion of cathexis is very present in the "Project" also. I think Freud keeps struggling with the body, mainly in terms of the relation between representation and cathexis.

MSJ: I haven't read Freud as thoroughly as you have. My feeling is that what gets in the way – my and perhaps other people's – is the doctrinality of infantile sexuality. That is where I follow along Jungian lines much more sympathetically, because I don't think that sexuality is the whole of infant life. I think that to view infants in those terms is to do an injustice to

organism, as yet unoriented in the world, which is receiving stimuli in its nervous substance. This organism will very soon be in a position to make a first distinction and a first orientation. On the one hand, it will be aware of stimuli which can be avoided by muscular action (flight): these it ascribes to an external world. On the other hand, it will also be aware of stimuli against which such action is of no avail and whose character of constant pressure persists in spite of it; these stimuli are the signs of an internal world, the evidence of instinctual needs. The perceptual substance of the living organism will thus have found in the efficacy of its muscular activity a basis for distinguishing between an 'outside' and an 'inside'".

3. See Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1950*a*: 330-332).

things like their natural curiosity about the world. There are all kinds of dimensions of our lives as infants that are just not sexual.

GVdV: Lacan as well as Freud interpreted sexuality in terms of psychosexuality. Doesn't that change something for you?

MSJ: No. Take what you said this morning about Herbert, about intrusions and orifices. Lacan, I think, carried that notion of orifices to an extreme. I think that orifices are of seminal importance in infancy.

GVdV: That's what sexuality is about, according to Freud. Don't you think so?

MSJ: Yes, but it's too narrow a focus, because there's play, and there's curiosity, and there's exploration, and there are things going on in infants other than sexual ones. I guess that to regard the body in strictly sexual terms is too compressive a mould and is therefore ill suited. That's not to ignore sexuality, but to say that there's more.

GVdV: Perhaps it depends on how you interpret sexuality. In that regard, I find it striking that in your book *The Roots of Power*, the notion of gender is so important.

MSJ: Oh yes.

GVdV: That's one of the things that are important to Freud, too. For instance, the simple fact of observing a difference is quite essential in a child's life. Don't you think so?

MSJ: Yes, I think it is. I think I could say that in my own life it was very critical, also this notion of lack. But I'm not sure where the dividing point is between our cultural emphases and what's there in our own discovery apart from those kinds of cultural groomings and those kinds of cultural values. I took up the notion of lack in *The Roots of Power*, because Sartre's notion of sex as a hole, or femaleness as a hole, is lamentable (laughing).

GVdV: But Sartre is neither Freud nor Lacan. We agree on that.

MSJ: No, but Sartre was going in the direction of a psychoanalytic, and Lacan took so much from Sartre.

GVdV: Well, he took some. He took from everyone, Lacan, without mentioning it mostly. I think he took much more from Heidegger.

MSJ: I think psychoanalytically, he took an enormous lot from Sartre.

GVdV: All I've read are a couple of pages of *The Roots of Power*, where you write about Lacan. You criticize, for instance, the function of the phallus. Can you say something about this?

MSJ: Well, I call it a linguistic totem. It's true (laughing).

GVdV: What exactly does that mean?

MSJ: What comes from my phenomenological background is a concern with languaging experience. It's really important to make the experience very precise. Lacan has a great deal of difficulty differentiating between a penis and a phallus. Commentators on Lacan, both proponents of Lacan as well as people who criticize him negatively, point out that he has great difficulty distinguishing between the penis and the phallus, and I think it is very, very true. In that book, you really need to have the whole context and I'm sure I cannot create all of that now, but I ask at one point why a phallus and not a pickle.

GVdV: Yes, I read that (laughter). For Lacan, it's a function.

MSJ: But why, why the phallus? That is to suggest that males have a perpetual erection.

GVdV: I wouldn't say that. It goes along the same lines as what Freud said, that a third term is necessary between the infant and the mother. The third term is the one that installs the law, and the phallus stands for the law. It's the incarnation, in a certain sense, of the law. I agree with you that what Lacan has written about it is frequently unclear. But what I said this morning for instance, about how a child comes into language, how it comes to assume to say something about itself, deals with the same issue. It frequently appears in clinical observations that the child does not arrive at forming an image of itself, at saying something about itself, precisely

because it stays encapsulated in the relation with the mother. Recently, I had a discussion with anthropologists about Malinowski. Malinowski quite clearly demonstrated that the castration complex, the Oedipus complex in fact, could well be generalized if we shift from the idea of the biological father to the one who takes that function, such as the mother or the brother-in-law, who can in fact incarnate the law for a child. I'm not so sure that Lacan is unclear about that difference.

MSJ: From my point of view, it is really important to understand the infant as an infant, apart from any kind of sexual labeling at all. That is also important, because I think there is a long period of time when an infant is non-verbal, before language, when a good deal is happening. I find myself more in accord with Daniel Sterns' picturing of the infant, because it seems to me a more veridical, truer picture of what is there. He makes a very good case, for example, for thinking that an infant does in fact differentiate between itself and its mother. One of the best examples he gives of this is actually something which to my mind was really dramatic: a case of Siamese twins that were ventrally joined at the chest. Before the operation – I think they were something like three or four months old – Stern and some colleagues – he's an infant psychiatrist and a clinical psychologist – did an experiment. They had one of the twins suck its own thumb, and then they tried to take the thumb out of its mouth. When that happened, when its own thumb was being taken out of its mouth, there was a resistance movement of the arm to keep it there, to keep the thumb in the mouth. When its twin's thumb was put in its mouth and when they tried to take out its twin's thumb, it followed the thumb with a straining movement of its head and neck. It knows who it is. It differentiates. It doesn't differentiate in linguistic terms, certainly, but it has a sense of its own body. And I think that is an important aspect of the whole development of the psyche in the psychoanalytic sense.

GVdV: I agree with that. It is in a sense true that psychoanalysis has more focused on the way in which human beings come into language and that language has been considered as the main access to any form of embodiment. What is important in this regard – you mention it somewhere in your book – is that Lacan started from psychotic people. It is a very specific starting point, I think.

MSJ: Well, I find Jung of great interest.

GVdV: Yes, tell me something about that.

MSJ: One aspect of infancy that I'd never thought of before I read Jung, is his notion of all of us being a unity of opposites. That is a central theme in Jung. If you think about it – I never thought of this, and it's so obvious – that each infant is a unity of opposites in terms of a mother and a father. It is a composite of what both have put into it. So, the male/female aspect that Jung talks about makes much more sense to me than some aspects of Freud, and certainly of Lacan. As I wrote in *The Roots of Power*, there are aspects of Jung that are reprehensible in terms of some things that he says about women or females, but the idea that there are masculine and feminine, if you want to call them that, aspects of us, I find that much more real and much truer to the way things are than these other more theoretical notions of Freud. But I am much more sympathetic generally to Freud than I am to Lacan.

GVdV: I can understand that. Freud is clearly more accessible than Lacan. It takes time to grasp Lacan's concepts.

MSJ: Yes, but he's also saying that all of us are sick, and unless we undergo a Lacanian analysis we will always remain sick, that the cure is there and is the same for all of us, the question is to get on the couch, become psychotic and then ...

GVdV: I don't agree with you on that point. I think Lacan's theory and praxis contain valuable ideas and insights. Stories like these are frequently told about Lacanian analysts; I'm not convinced that it's important.

MSJ: I describe him in *The Roots of Power* as both erudite and fleeting. He is very hard to catch, very hard to catch.

GVdV: Yes, that's true. Meanwhile, I know many analysts who have passed through a "Jungian stage", have read many texts of Jung, and find it very hard to find in it valuable things for the cure.

Tell me something about your story as a woman at the university. What do you find important in the gender studies? Do you think women have a different attitude toward knowledge in general?

MSJ: I wrote a paper that's going to be published in a book called *Phenomenology and Feminism*, and I gave a version of that paper at

Trondheim University. It's called "Binary Opposition as an Ordering Principle of (Male?) Human Thought". In that essay, I addressed feminist concerns with male ways of thinking, one of those ways being binary. At least in the States, dominant philosophers have accused males of the culture-nature, mind-body, reason-emotion dichotomy; those kinds of divisions are looked upon as male ways of thinking. And my thought was, if they were to make this claim stick, they would have to really ground it in something specific, not just point the finger. Actually, in that essay (Sheets-Johnstone, 2000), I use a little known essay of Freud called "The Acquisition and Control of Fire" (Freud, 1932a).

GVdV: I don't know that article.

MSJ: I've had a very difficult time in academia as a woman. For example, in Canada: The dance department was in the department of human genetics and leisure studies. All the people in that department were males, and very jock kinds of males. There were three people teaching dance, they were all women, but I felt – I was the only one who had a doctorate – that in terms of salary, in terms of intellectual recognition, all those kinds of things – I certainly find them in philosophy in the States too –, just trivialized.

GVdV: The differences?

MSJ: Yes, I almost, in terms of *The Roots of Thinking*, I toyed with the idea of using a pseudonym (laughing).

GVdV: What were the reactions to that book?

MSJ: *The Roots of Thinking* became well known especially through the review in *Psychology*, the electronic journal connected with the *Brain and Behavioral Sciences*. It was recognized before that by some people. Ashley Montagu, for example, was very pleased with the book. Also, some people in anthropology thought very highly of it. Except for just a very few people, it has not really caught on in philosophy, except in the last, I would say, maybe year. Steen Wackerhousen, for example, at the University of Aarhus found out about it through Hubert Dreyfus. You know Hubert Dreyfus? At Berkeley. He found out about it through some people in the States who used it as a text book in philosophy, for instance, the phenomenologist Ronald Bruzina at the University of Kentucky, and

Susan Bordo. Anyway, it has been very slow to catch on in philosophy. People in linguistics have been interested in it, too. *The Roots of Power* has been very interesting, because Margaret Miles who held an endowed chair in Historical Theology at Harvard wrote a recommendation about the book. She was very taken with the book. She told me at one point that the book is really difficult because it goes against the grain. She used it in a class and found a lot of resistance to it, because postmodernism and critical theory are very strong in the States. That book takes a completely different path. It criticizes postmodernism very strongly. It takes evolutionary viewpoints, showing how there is an evolutionary genealogy with respect to power and behaviors that are expressive of power. And at the same time that it takes a very critical stance towards postmodernism, it takes a critical stance towards sociobiology. While postmodernists refuse to recognize anything stemming from nature, people in sociobiology refuse to recognize ..., you know, they say that it is all in our genes. So, feminists have not taken up the book there. It has been used by some people in courses but much less than *The Roots of Thinking*.

GVdV: Does it mean that most feminists are postmodernists, in the States?

MSJ: In the States, yes. Oh, very definitely. Take, for instance, the whole question of essence. It's an interminable question. And it is only lately that there has been some kind of little opening of the door. But any kind of essentialism, well, feminists or postmodernists just don't want to look at that at all. And I think it doesn't make sense. We are different. I mean, women are different from men.

GVdV: How would you explore that idea? What makes women different?

MSJ: That is difficult, because in *The Roots of Power* I talk, for example, about this question that Lacan calls *jouissance*. This odd female capacity to have one orgasm after the next, which is quite different from males. I offered an explanation of the dynamics between males and females with respect to this inequity, with respect to the way in which females are looked upon as a hole, sex is a hole. That a hole could have this kind of capacity to it! I don't think I can explicate it in short form. I don't think there is any essentialism in the sense that all women should

have children or else they are not women, or else they are not females. But they have certain capacities ...

GVdV: The potentiality to bear children is essential to women.

MSJ: Yes, it is what I would say an "I can" – that is Husserlian language. But it is an "I can" that is peculiar to women, not that you have to choose to have children, but it is a possibility. And I think that females have possibilities that males don't have, and males have possibilities that females don't have.

GVdV: And what do you think the implications of this idea are for cognition?

MSJ: I'm not sure. You see, in one sense I don't think, coming from phenomenology, that there is a female knowledge and a male knowledge. I'm not convinced of that.

GVdV: A lot of feminists are saying such a thing.

MSJ: Oh yes, and I'm not convinced of that. I think there are dimensions to all of us. This is closer to Jungian ideas. I think there are certain capacities that we all have, and we cultivate certain ones of those that we find comfortable. To cultivate other ones maybe uncomfortable for us in one way or another. But that does not mean we couldn't do so, because we may be living at a radical extreme. For example, if in Jungian terms there is thinking and feeling and intuition and sensation, I can be all feeling and I can have a very diminished cultivation of myself in terms of thinking. I can be just the opposite. So, it's what we make of ourselves in terms of our capacities that seems to me to be important. I think there are basic differences between males and females, but I'm not sure that that traces out into a different epistemology. I'm not certain of that.

GVdV: I remember that today, during the conference, we both found it striking that the "attitude" of choosing for the "one by one" is quite frequently chosen by women, and not so frequently by men.

MSJ: Yes, that's one thing I would want to explore. It is really interesting, because actually I was going to write two volumes on the roots of power, because what I don't discuss in there is – and that needs

discussing – is motherhood. Because the "one to one" natural, what there is naturally, evolutionarily given, the capacity to have children and to nurse them is something that is very, very different. And that what you are calling is "one by one" is related to that, very definitely.

GVdV: What will be your next book?

MSJ: May I give you two books?

GVdV: Yes, sure. I begin to dream of becoming an independent scholar when I hear you talk like this!

MSJ: You have to save your money very carefully to do this. You have to be very careful! (laughing) *The Primacy of Movement* attempts to show the centrality of movement to our lives. It opens with a chapter on Neanderthals in a section titled "Foundations", and there follows a section on "Methodology". There are two chapters on consciousness. The paper I gave here is a shortened version of the first of those chapters. The second chapter on consciousness has to do with Aristotle, actually. One of the chapters on methodology has to do with Merleau-Ponty. That is written in a very different way. In a section titled Applications, there is another chapter titled "Why a mind is not a brain, and a brain is not a body". That's one book.⁴

GVdV: Sounds interesting. Where and when will it come out?

MSJ: I hope to finish it by April. And then I was planning on doing *The Roots of Morality*, which is what I had started to work on after *The Roots of Power*, because it was a natural progression. I started work on that, but I was side-tracked into the *Primacy of Movement*. So, I do want to do *The Roots of Morality*, but I also had wanted to do a book on binary opposition – I've written two articles now on binary opposition because I find these oppositions provocative. One of the articles is this one on "Phenomenology and Feminism" that I already mentioned (Sheets-Johnstone, 2000) and the other one is an article that has to do with human/non-human opposition, and that's published in the journal called *Between Species*.⁵

4. Meanwhile, the book has been published: Sheets-Johnstone (1999).

5. The other one was already published, see Sheets-Johnstone (1996).

GVdV: Well, thank you very much. It was a pleasure to meet you and to talk with you. I hope to be able to read very soon some of your books, and in particular *The Primacy of Movement*.

MSJ: Well, I hope that we meet again, because it's been a tremendous pleasure to meet you, too.

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