



# ENRICO DAVID



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**Enrico David**

**Life Sentences**

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## The Leaping Bones of Enrico David

"It is more salutary for thinking to wander into the strange than to establish itself in the understandable."

Martin Heidegger, *Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)*

"Have you ever been hugged by Enrico? His chest feels huge so maybe you can imagine the size of his ribs. But if his ribs are big, his arms are even bigger in proportion. I have this image of his arms being able to wrap around someone twice, well at least my slender frame. That is how I think about him, wrapped around me twice."<sup>1</sup>

Sculpture is just that, the capacity to imagine what that "wrapped around twice" might look like and then give it congruent physical form. If the mind plays funny tricks with appearance then it is the potentiality of the art of sculpture to give shape to this reality in order that mind and matter might manifest new visibilities. This in turn implies not only a new process of considering form forming form but also the introduction of the grammar necessary to space it.

In the studio there are the scattered remains, like so many bones, that occasionally burst into life and become something else, shuffled again into a new state, whilst retaining that original patina of overlooked-ness. If they are like bones then they are bones that leap. Spirit requires materiality to exist and this is why Hegel claimed that "spirit is bone." Enrico extends this into: spirit is bone that leaps in order to add the dimension of surprise.<sup>2</sup> Sculpture is an extended material practice combined with either a flash or a leap. If there is no surprise in this event then there is no event of sculpture. Connected to the dimension of surprise is wandering "in the strange" or into the unmarked. Surprise is thus connected to being tested.

There are these moments when he muses on the relationship to this bone and then to that bone but this is without the curiosity of anatomy as a form of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Instead there is a different route that is closer to knowing things in-properly. I have this unformulated question; what is this knowing things in-properly? I have this feeling that his sculptural process is born out of this contradictory notion of knowing things in-properly. This is not an outcome of a fatigue of theory but rather as a condition of opening the figure beyond the confines of immobility or constancy of presence. Vision remains with its object, confirming the presence of what it sees and within this constancy can affirm a process of knowing. The root of the concept of epistemology is to stand before or over something. Thus seeing and knowing are intimately linked together. But art is a special form of seeing outside of presence, a seeing in advance of sight and with this, the awakening of a desire for a future and with this a re-occasioning of space or production of spacing.<sup>4</sup> This corresponds to the awakening of the eye to see what formerly has or could not see and implicit within this is a form of violence or danger. A state of friction is the outcome of this motion of the 'what is' and the 'to-come' because the object in question is not secured by knowledge but rather by rhythm. Rhythm is related to a form of generation, a running through and over that mixes



anticipation with the void of non-appearance. Being on an edge is this state of restless friction through which the artwork occasions itself when it striates time's continuity.<sup>5</sup> This can be understood as a prolongation of the power of the imagination.<sup>6</sup> To return to the work of Enrico David, the rhythmical intensification in and between works is a consistent feature of his whole enterprise. Much of the time the works in question do not have much by way of weight or stance because their labour is not related to the fields but from a process of tenderly grasping what lays outside their orbit of material contact.

Sometimes it is possible to play a game of recognising temporal references through locating stylistic or period features. As I start to look, a whirl of art historical references start to surface: Art Deco, archaic art, late modern and with half recognised traces related to other references that escape immediate processes of naming. This is like the attempt to place a garland of flowers around a structure, as it appears to prepare the way for its final passage into the world or into historical category. Is this the act of simply confirming presentation as such – implying that art lacks immediacy – or are we being drawn close to a thing that also wishes to impose distance? To chase after the conceptual armatures of art is to be drawn into the meeting point of concept and deception. Then there is a more abstract game which relates to assembling phrases: a congregation of gestures, a field of forces, a tumult of reserve, gradations of slow release, disavowal of congested time, the transportation of thought. This is not to set up a contest between art history and philosophical poetics but it is obvious that both approaches might congeal or become stale thus becoming an obstacle for thought.

"I read in *Gesture and the Nature of Language* that the different categories of language are created by intentional acts performed by the hands: verbs derive from the movement of the hands, nouns "grab" things by their name and adverbs and adjectives modify movements and objects through the use of tools.

Gestures allow for the transcription of oneself from one state to another. Somewhere on the wall of my studio I wrote the words: "In a panic-stricken application". I don't recall the occasion, maybe because of the pervasive nature of this feeling. I try to put it down to practical matters: perhaps it had to do with the way the armature of an object is assembled in order to provide a skeletal basis upon which the object itself can be formed, or how thick the layer of clay required can be supported by the wires underneath. In any case, accuracy and emergency are asked to stick together, and the marriage of application and panic seems to cause a tightening up of my groin muscles."<sup>7</sup>

This is an exhibition of mobility of all the different modes of registration. Thus material and temporality are yoked together in this circulation. Exposure is implied but a special type of exposure, an exposure to strangeness.<sup>8</sup> Something is in the air, likewise something is in the stuff and forms open in the in-between of action and withdrawal. The 'in the air' quality is the feeling of imminence. Can an object stage the before of time or the after of time?<sup>9</sup> Is there the other of time? What if the future has already been and the past is a continual state of yet to be? Questions weave in and out.

Theodor Adorno's idea that modernist art contained a "utopian blink" captured the sense of art's futural anticipation. The phrase (and what an enduring phrase) itself is in part based on ideas of temporality and art that originated in Jena Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century. It is based upon the premise that art functions outside of the actuality

of the present and thus contains the seed of difference to the principle of reality. The notion that art also functions by introducing a principle of rupture or shift keeps with this notion of Adorno's. What would happen, if instead of citing this phrase, we instead claimed the future yet to come merely opened out a 'grim disintegration' contained within the present? In effect this would remove the figure of hope from art's schematic reserve. It appears that art requires exception and with it carries a disavowal for what is ordinary, but in itself this cannot imply hope as an ethical consequence.

"The future 'is', if it is at all, that which shows itself insofar as it effaces the signs it permits. It presents itself only in the retraction of its signs."<sup>10</sup> This idea of the future implies displacement as opposed to continuity; a sense of time marked by something touched by absence rather than the logic of presence.

The setting (of the exhibition) both has spaces and intervals but also tenses. One moment it might appear as a staging, the next a descent in a nether region of the mind but also the sense of the comings and goings of figures collecting and dispensing all their different parts and attributes. In all of this it is an exhibition of exhibiting, a coming into light and exploration of recess, a channelling of drives and a presentation of what in everyday life is merely vapour on the edge of disappearance. Should we wish for more? Of course, disappointment is the uninvited guest.

To exhibit connects with a will to run ahead of oneself, appropriating what is past in order to seize the future. This is in accord to the sense that temporality should not be experienced simply as the registration of fate, but an active shaping of drives becoming manifest as temporality. Thus to exhibit is not to show oneself or something as it really is in the sense of present tense, but rather a process of temporalizing. Thus for Heidegger: "Temporality is the primordial 'outside-of-itself' in and for itself."<sup>11</sup> To exhibit is both to throw and an exposure to being thrown. This is why artists so often evoke the idea of being on the edge or exhibiting being a boundary-like experience. There is something at stake: a claim, an occupation of territory, a rolling of dice, a challenge or a setting free but, whatever the nuance, a necessary sense of risk in order to achieve the status of event.

Fiction: He was attempting to write a list of ten subjects for sculptural works. Magazines often ask artists to do such things. Perhaps it might constitute an investigation into the structure of the imagination, or even that artists might know little of the difference of memory and imagination. What was clear was that the exercise should risk with a dimension of impossibility and as such should not stand too readily in the clear light of day. Anyway, the first image was of a tongue with a flick knife inside of it, as if waiting to lacerate stale thoughts before they reached the world as utterance. The next was of a beautiful man who would only kiss his parrot because he feared infections from human mouths. Thirdly was naked buttocks pointed toward the full moon in the hope of expanding intuition. He then remembered a dream in which a man was looking down on his face in order to lick away all his tears both from the past and those to come, promising in turn sleep for a thousand years. The list continued like this and he realised that he was slowly working his way through the anatomy of the body, the splicing of body parts with instruments, all mixed with fragmentary narratives or broken images mutated or subjected in turn to imaginative re-codification. Anyway, he never completed the list because even if such lists might resonate with reality of the working process, they are better kept hidden. Sculpture is what is

delivered to the open whilst imaginative schemas remain locked away as if in the shadow realm. He wondered if he could sustain his practice with such an idea. He started to think of other times and periods which might open out the constellation of the organic and inorganic in curious ways. This drift of thought appeared to linger for many days in a process he might describe as figuring or the introduction of friction against the wall of completed formulation.

In his book *Genet*<sup>12</sup> Edmund White discusses how Giacometti posed Genet to reflect a sitting scribe figure from the Egyptian Old Empire. This is not simply a relationship of a look or style but a relationship of temporalities and understanding of time through which visibility is issued. More than a relationship to appearance, Giacometti is seeking a relationship to rhythm, a complex, unnameable sense of repose held within the figure that reveals such a relationship. Drawing a line across time in such a way is obscure and leads to a thought of what lays buried in such a gesture. In a text on Giacometti, Genet in turn proposes "...the work is not intended for future generations. It is offered to the innumerable people of the dead."<sup>13</sup> A question is in circulation here: what would it be like to live within a culture so explicitly fixated upon death? What Genet creates through a gestural link between Giacometti and an Egyptian culture is a relationship between art and death. One of the most striking things would relate to the idea of this relationship is that death belongs to no one because it exists as an 'empty form of time', so a culture of death would follow the logic of this. This dissolution of identity and empty time (de)composes this logic. Following from this point, the thought of the various gestural lines that are being drawn are of course being sought, but they do not offer themselves on the level of style, as much as trace or scent of the in between of an archaic lost sense of time and a time to come. It is not so much the other of modernist temporality but the realisation of striation within the model of continuity.

One work might contain the experience of trauma, sensuous immediacy, and the anticipation of yet another trace of time that is difficult to name but is marked by intensification. In effect that is all three registers of time but without a definite incline towards one in particular; even though temporality is invisible, the experience of time remains active throughout. What is always a constant factor is the working tension between the formation of form and the counter-rhythmical tendency towards dissolution. The struggle of discussing sculpture relates not only to the account of material-figure-form and space but the way mind-temporality-language-gesture inter-relate and mutate into the play of these indices. Following from the discussion of the temporality within Giacometti's art, it is tempting to seize upon an idea of a regressive modernity stripped of impulse to the yet to come, but the thesis that is developing in this seemingly regressive turn is the means of tightening a coiled spring capable of releasing the energetic discharge of a 'yet to come' outside of the predications of the present.

Fiction: "Depression is deep in my bones.' He would state this and in this stating, would confirm the idea that this condition emerged out of the lack of mutability. The linking of bones and depression had assumed a fact-like status within his life. Following from this idea of depression being linked to a lack of mutability, he also had this perception that he had neither top nor bottom to his being because his kernel had already descended into the deep of the earth leaving a mere empty shell in the wake of this descent and thus, without

proper substance, what remains is without dimension. He remembered that he had once attended a lecture about the idea of the one-dimensional man but he realised that this condition of total estrangement was not really his condition at all. Instead he conceived of himself as a kind of full stop. Part of the idea of being a full stop was the idea that sentences complete themselves or come to rest at such a point."

There is always something that arrives late. Is Giacometti the late supplement to the Egyptian scribe or is aesthetics the late supplement to art? Perhaps this is what is at stake: "Art enters into the aesthetic the day it is declared, if not dead, then at least a thing of the past, surpassed as regards the Absolute (philosophy), as though this baptism were also a death certificate."<sup>14</sup> If art had no future other than interminable death why not align with a true culture of death that knows itself as such. Did Giacometti plunge into the valley of death in the knowledge that modernity was consecrated on the miserable denial of such experience?

Dream (a late supplement): I was looking at a photograph of myself as a two-year-old boy and there I was sucking a brick that I was holding between both my hands. Perhaps I was traumatised by not being able to suck upon the breast anymore and the dream was staging or presenting this. Whatever the possible narratives it was nonetheless a compelling image and even when transposed into language, it remains vivid.

Fiction: I start to notice that I am not speaking very much. So I get on the phone to a friend and we start to discuss what is happening in Syria. For some strange reason I am looking at cloud formations and can recognise a face of what appears to be like a Greek god. I tell her about this and she laughs. I say to her that she shouldn't laugh because at a given moment in our life such a visage of a face manifests for a few moments and that several people on witnessing this have felt to be directly touched by either the gods or God. This is of course the unconscious basis of why humans have always looked upward to the skies to see if they might be witness to the gods or God's appearance. Anyway, imagine seeing your face in the sky. Of course it would be almost an automatic reflex to believe that you might be in some sense a chosen being. I know she thinks that I am teasing her but really I am serious.

Jean-François Lyotard states that: "Thoughts are not the fruits of the earth. They are not registered by areas, except out of human commodity. Thoughts are clouds."<sup>15</sup> If thoughts are like clouds, does that imply that they drift without a definite bounded condition. Following from this Deleuze claims that we rarely think and that thought has an affinity with the 'true', rather, thought issues a process of problematisation. Before trying to work out the thought and un-thought of any work it is sometimes necessary to work out a relationship to both. When the soft flesh of a cock becomes hard like bone, then thought disappears. One thing transforms into something else and added to this process is a subtraction. Is this a secret formula for understanding sculptural processes? Formula on the one side, and metaphor on the other; what a miserable conflict of forces in attempting to account for the play of thought and making but then such conflicts create the possibility of a passage through.

"There's a small standing figure that I modelled. The lower body had the legs bent at the knee, knees touching. It stands on the tip of the toes. The upper body looks like a deformed mass, not dissimilar from what might happen if you try to wear a jumper and you stretch the arms missing the arm holes. Eyes and mouth are placed in correspondence of



where there might be a shoulder, looking like the caricature of "an expression" melting away from a face and sliding down the body. If the monument to a weakened bladder were ever commissioned, I would have to submit this as an entry. It is in describing such physiological fragments that the making of the works seem to find an alibi. It is as if for sculpture to exist as sculpture, it has to look inwards."

Fiction: I had this image of her jumping from cloud to cloud. Usually this could only be a dream image but I swear that it was real. This is why I started to think of her as a sky dancer. If I painted this it would appear as perfectly feasible, but if I speak of such a thing, then I viewed as being touched by madness.

I am living in a really strange society. As you know I have lived for a very long time. At times I think that this is like a very special kind of suffering because it becomes hard to translate sense anymore. In these times I believe that people have lost all of their skills related to being on this earth. They are all told what they need to do, yet, they are not aware that this is the case. In a way they lack what I call the refinement to live properly. It is truly distressing to be a witness of this transformation. These people used to call themselves modern and then they revised this and called themselves post-modern but now they do not really know how to call themselves. For me they seem to be at some kind of end because they display so many signs of being lost. It is bizarre really because when I lived in the time when the earth was flat, or at least that was the belief, people had a greater sense of life. I know this is the case because they looked at the sky differently. Do not ask me to explain this; it is just the way it is.

The initial impulse of philosophy was in wonder, perhaps as a figure looking at the starry abode with the realisation that there is a pulsation beyond immediate finite limits. To be able to point outside of one's finite boundary is the very gesture of thought itself. "In keeping with this demand is the strenuous, almost over-zealous and frenzied effort to tear men away from their preoccupation with the sensuous, from their ordinary, private (einzelne) affairs, and to direct their gaze at the stars; as if they had forgotten all about the divine, and were ready like worms to content themselves with dirt and water. Formerly they had a heaven adorned with a vast wealth of thoughts and imagery."<sup>16</sup>

Enrico once described the moment he witnessed his father die when he was seventeen years old. Thirty of his friends and family stretched around the dinner table, his father was laughing aloud but this was replaced by a spluttering or coughing sound. Suddenly he was on the floor and the stillness of death had overtaken the excess of life. The narrative of this event has circulated again and again. Enrico likens it to an imaginary scene from a Pasolini film. A whole segment of his work involves poetic encounters with the spectres of history and almost all his films conclude with a death, suggesting a passage into either the meta-historical or mystical. It might be that this moment has not yet assumed a stable mode of characterisation yet so its circulation lacks stable identity. The visual moment of death thus becomes a blind spot.<sup>17</sup>

"Seeing bodies falling, as bodies do, at a relatively early age seems to have brought me into a place of trying to articulate a language that I would describe as failure. Firstly there is the fact of death, the physical sense of disappearance signifying an end to existence. I remember a phrase that went round my head: "Where on earth have you gone?" Then there is the image of single components of the falling body turned into verb and with this

the way that meanings transcend final use or employment. This implies a reassignment. So there is a chain that stretches out the relationship between material facts, the function of the imaginary, reiterative operation of language, and the naming of things. I am left sculpting a head that has to make sense of this chain but ultimately has to open out the gesture of failure. Physiology in sculpture is paired with language in ways that can be overwhelming. Rib cages exist in a matrix that is always open to re-arrangement, their content being recited like haikus or even scribbles of miraculous signs that evade clear translation. Bone is sculpture and sculpture is the place for bones to gather. The expanse of white stone shaped into human form over the ages... big bone-like effigies at the mercy of large mouths to pick up and gnaw over, emitting sounds that could be mistaken for a language outside of the strict formalities of language proper. All of this is brought together with the fact of death. The problem with sculpture is to locate a site of where to place it and then how to imagine a way for sculpture to swallow up the space around it or even for it to provide time and space with a suitable site."<sup>18</sup>

Death is the point at which spirit and bone are separated. A Picasso 'Self Portrait' (1972) depicts that moment of apprehension when the face transmutes into a skull. It is a face seized by the terror of death, so spirit and bone no longer cohere as face. The look of terror on a face is the consciousness of the potentiality of separation and is the anticipation of discontinuity at the other side of separation. Sculpture deals intimately with this issue of separation between spirit and bone. We condemn sculpture if it appears dead, but if it shines, it moves us (this is just in the language of the common place).

"I made a line drawing of a figure in profile, the head arched backwards so much that it creates a swelling of the upper thorax. Placed between the back of the head and the shoulder blades I have placed a lump of wax that looks like a slug or a head cushion like the ones used for long flights. I am not certain if that lump is a support for the head or if it is the opposite as in something that would cause extreme arching. Then another switch occurs and I relate it to a kidney. In the making process I mix some plaster and pigments together and the streaks of colour make it look like fossilized hair trapped in matter. The hair and facial features have been removed from the head and entered into the kidney. Such is the abject feeling of this image and cannot find a way of going forward. The palms of my hands become drenched in sweat just with the thought of such an image."<sup>19</sup>

We are talking about the way that philosophers write and the way artists write. Although he has little regard for his own writing I say that I like the way that Daido Moriyama writes. It might even be a product of his lack of regard that lends to the writing a special quality that I might perceive as a condition of purity that is a product of understanding, perception and feeling. The style might be even be impure and like his photographs, touched by a special kind of dirt which we might designate as being raw. "A human being is nothing more than a life spent attentively passing through an assemblage of countless scenes. You can say life is transitory and leave it at that, but when I wonder where on earth a certain scene from a certain time and a certain period disappeared to, for me that is not sentimentality but rather a feeling closer to irritation. All people lose their scenes one after another. Another way of expressing this is to call it an exasperation with time. Time is not something that comes pressing down on each of us. Recalling scenes that are being lost is, simultaneously, pressing scenes of the death that is to come."<sup>20</sup> I especially like the phrase "exasperation with

time" because it seems that we both continue to chew on it for some time before moving onto to other things.

Language that is stretched out between life and death either constitutes itself as literature or torment when it fails to reach the condition of form. One condition of form is of experience ascending, the other condition is counter to this in the form of descent, but both imply falling, if only in different directions. Literature, for it to be literature properly defies the logic of gravity and with this the logic of certainty.

"We are the children who have swallowed up our parents too soon, who frighten ourselves on that account and, to save ourselves, reject and throw up everything that is given to us – all gifts, all objects. Even before things for us are, we drive them out, dominated by drive as we are, and constitute our own territory, edged by abjection, misjudged shapes, grotesque prints on nylon, cheap grins that look like keyboards. Fear cements our compound, conjoined to another world, thrown up, driven out, forfeited. What we have swallowed up instead of maternal love is emptiness, or rather a maternal hatred without a word for the words of an absent father, existing but unsettled, living yet unsteady, merely an apparition, but an apparition that remains. That is what we try to cleanse ourselves off, tirelessly."<sup>21</sup>

"Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of 'world history', but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die. – One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature. There are eternities during which it did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened."<sup>22</sup>

Fiction: Over the later years of my life I was inclined to believe that death was like the earth calling, as if it occasioned a return to place, but in my earlier years the contrary thought was persistent, that is, the sky would make its call. Perhaps earth or sky is not such a great difference but it does appear to impact upon the orientation of gestures. Both air and earth could be understood as abysses, one dense, and the other empty. Both in turn secure different relationships to language because concentrated within their respective fields are the imaginary gravity or ascent of death.

I am not certain of why my thoughts drift across to the figure of Oedipus but it might experience shifts between the intended object and the knowing subject. It can be informed by ideas but equally by affective intensity without belonging to either realm. It is related to the very presence of being, whereas the work of art contests this by drawing upon the shapeless depth of non-being in order to present a mode of difference outside of representing the world. This is why art is related to interruption, caesura or aporia. The question is how to create a space that is not entirely subordinated to the reality principle. In discussing sublimation, Alenka Zupancic claims: "The creative act of sublimation is not only a creation of some new good, but also (and principally) the creation and maintenance of a certain space for objects that have no place in the given, extent reality, objects that are considered 'impossible'. Sublimation gives value to what the reality principle does not value."<sup>23</sup>

It is because great works of art appear both to reveal secrets whilst concealing others. So indirectly it might be because of this relationship to secrecy that the notion of how humans are not their own self-illumination emerges. It is also a drama about nothing being quite as it seems so it is presented as a riddle, translatable on one level but resistant to translation on another. As a drama it appears to startle the very space in which it is presented within.

Oedipus was a stranger who became king only to become a stranger again, but in a way he was always a stranger in different guises and in different ways. The stranger always comes from elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> thus he was never properly speaking in place.

The tragic drama of Oedipus relates to a cross roads in cultural history.<sup>25</sup> Oedipus emblemizes the passage not only of myth to reason but the transition to a subject that is self-conscious, auto-reflective and autonomous. For Hegel this is a passage from the unconscious symbolics of the Egyptians to the conscious symbolics of the Greeks. The stratification of the psyche reinstitutes the soul of the subject (as fissure) that implies that the discovery of the Oedipus complex and the unconscious was a simultaneous event. Thus the cultural inclination to fix and rationalise structures is coupled with wandering dispersals of unconscious flux. The question today is working out what question embedded in the drama haunts us today – because that it haunts is not in question. The figure<sup>26</sup> never ceases to be re-figured even though this might be closer to a dis-figuration.

It is uncanny to think of Oedipus as a figure at the crossroads because the name Oedipus (or in Greek Oidipous) derives from the root oid, "know" and pou, "where" or "somewhere" or pou meaning "foot." In the play an unnamed Corinthian arrives and offers an etymology of his name as "swollen foot" which switches the oid, "know" with oide, "swell". This shift in etymology resonates through the core of the play: Oedipus is both defined and ruined by his feet because he answered the riddle of the Sphinx in regard to the question of which creature goes first of four feet, then two feet and finally three feet.

Greek sculpture was expressive of the nobility and beauty of the body and yet Sophocles presents images<sup>27</sup> of corpses and lacerations that disturb such harmony. He dared to think on the other side of the project of rationalisation, so developed a stream of poetical invested images to be carried over as a corrective to the futurist optimism that was culturally becoming embedded. Rather than presenting schemas of reason, he presented the convulsive disordering born out of drives and the way these drives appear to cross over and fall into misrecognition. The cultural foundations of abjection are rooted in such confrontations of sense over two and a half thousand years ago. This in part also points to the persistence of commentaries upon Oedipus in recent theory because the aesthetic force it carries with it is still alive.

I remember listening to a presentation of a student whose work was predicated upon the idea of shame. She expressed the notion that shame was the foundational core of being a subject because we have the apprehension of becoming a corpse. This implies that we become a thing like substance or object. Yet even before this event of death occurs we live in a state of being thing-like and as such reveal a capacity of separation. The difference between shame as being foundational rather than provisional has a profound implication because it becomes difficult to penetrate. An image springs to mind in relationship to shame and that is of a character with head lowered to avert the look at the other. Invariably