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3. EXPERIENTIAL EVIDENCE: I, WE, YOU

INTRODUCTION

If hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of the meanings of lived experiences, how exactly do we come to *know about* experience and its meanings? In this chapter, I address this question by considering four positions or perspectives evident in common language, and also often implicit in the language of phenomenological research. These are:

– The first-person perspective of the "I," which corresponds to *subjective* knowledge;
– The second-person perspective of "you," which corresponds to *ethical* concerns;
– The third-person perspective of "it" or "one," corresponding to *objective* knowledge;
– The first-person plural perspective of "we," corresponding to *inter*subjective knowledge.[1]

I explore each of these perspectives and corresponding forms of knowledge in turn, focusing first on the subjective and objective (I and it), and then looking at the phenomenologically-significant intersubjective (we) and finally, the ethical (you). In doing so, I sketch out a way in which experience can be studied, and its meanings can be interpreted, employing as my examples experiences and language associated with the use of technology.

To begin, consider this description of student experience in an online context:

> Imagine my surprise when I checked my blog the next day, and saw a comment from someone named Ari in Germany: "Nice story, Janet! I really like the fact that you got some help from others to get your project page done. I think this is very important in wikis." In the days that followed, Ari's comments boosted my confidence and motivated me to complete my first contribution to Wikipedia. (Adapted from Friesen & Hopkins 2008, n.p.)

This passage has many characteristics that make it potentially interesting and effective as an experiential description. One of the most important of these is the *perspective* from which it is told: Grammatically speaking, this is the perspective of the first person singular, of the "I": "Imagine *my* surprise when *I* checked *my* blog …." First person pronouns appear no less than seven times in this short passage. This description, then, is told from the position of the subject or "active participant," from what has been called the "inner-perspective" (Irrgang, 2007, pp. 23, 27). This is the perspective of subjective knowledge and personal impression. This is a position, for example, from which a person can say that he or she "really

liked" something, or in which he or she can talk about having (or lacking) confidence and motivation to complete a difficult task. The position of the "I" has traditionally been taken as *the* starting point for certainty and knowledge overall. Descartes's famous phrase "I think; therefore I am" suggests that the thoughts I experience serve directly as the basis for the very existence of that "I." From this understanding, according to Descartes, should follow other certainties about myself and the world around me. However, this way of arriving at knowledge and certainty presents significant problems and challenges. Above all, this first-person knowledge is plagued by its potential to be "just" personal, idiosyncratic or arbitrary. That which is known in such a personal way may be private, or be kept as a kind of secret that is inaccessible to others. The relative "inaccessibility" of this subjective knowledge has led it to be derided as "merely" subjective, as capricious, biased, or idiosyncratic. Of course, this internal, subjective knowledge of the first person is in many ways the direct opposite of *objective* knowledge. Objective knowledge is thought to be independent from the subject or the "I," and is exemplified in the third-person perspective corresponding to the words "he/she/they," "it" or "one"). It is a position of the "onlooker" rather than of the active participant. It is the position, as Irrgang explains, of the "instrumentally-oriented…measuring observer," and is taken for granted as the objective or "natural" stance in the context of quantitative and scientific research (2007, p. 18). In its idealised form, this third-person knowledge is cleansed of any taint of the personal or subjective bias. Objective, independent knowledge of this kind is the operative mode in experimental research that attempts to establish generalizable or universal causal laws and interrelationships. It is gained not through subjective caprice, but by following rules and procedures that are unambiguous and unchanging. These rules and procedures are exemplified in scientific methods and measures that are meant to prove open, repeatable, and verifiable. They serve as a kind of ideal or paradigm for the type of research mentioned earlier that would measure the "statistically significant" difference caused by the introduction of technology in educational contexts. Unlike subjective, first-person knowledge, which is internal and even hidden, third-person objective knowledge is there for all to see. "Objective" realities and conditions persist or change independently, in apparent indifference to one's inner thoughts and feelings.

The perspectives of the subjective "I" and the objective "it" initially appear as mutually exclusive. Each is relatively independent of the other, and one cannot be reduced to the terms of the other. Feelings, impressions, or intimate secrets that may be constitutive of the "I" or self cannot simultaneously be explained away in objective terms. Feelings of pain (or pleasure) do not simply disappear by being accounted for in terms of nerve simulation and the brain's sensory receptors. Merleau-Ponty gives eloquent expression to the irreconcilability of these two ways of knowing in the preface to his *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002):

> I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without

which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced … we must [therefore] begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. (2002, p. ix)

The "I" appears intrinsically and irreconcilably opposed to the "it": The world of objectivity and science cannot shut subjectivity up within itself. The only way to understand "the precise meaning and scope" of science, Merleau-Ponty says, is "by reawakening the basic experience of the world" (p. viii). However, then the question is: Exactly how can this "reawakening" be achieved? Moreover, how can "the basic experience of the world" be brought to life without a retreat into the privacy of the "I"?

MOVING FROM I TO WE

One way to achieve this reawakening of experience is to recall that in addition to the "I" or "it" of the first- and third-person singular, it is also possible to say "we." Whereas "I" corresponds to the world of the subject and "it" (or he/she) to the world of the object, saying "we" opens up a way of knowing that is *inter*subjective. "We," as the first person plural, represents a kind of expansion of the subjectivity of the "I" across a plurality of first-person perspectives. Instead of designating a world of private, personal impressions and subjective knowledge, it refers to impressions and thoughts that can be shared and held in common by multiple subjectivities. This is the world of culture, both in the elevated sense of the arts, and in the everyday sense of social and cultural norms for speech and behavior.

The intersubjective "we" suggests that instead of being caught in an irreconcilable opposition between the objective and the subjective realm, there is a shared reality that is neither predominantly objective *nor* subjective. One way that the intersubjective realm is brought to life and to light is not through introspection exemplified in the "I" or through the objectivity of scientific investigation, but through *phenomenology* as both a methodology and a practice.[2] Writing again in the preface quoted above, Merleau-Ponty describes, in effect, how "I" becomes "we" in what he calls the intersubjective "phenomenological world":

The phenomenological world is … the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears … It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own. …We witness every minute the miracle of related experiences, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships. (2002, p. xxii)

Intersubjectivity, as Merleau-Ponty indicates, designates the intersection, "blending," or mutual conformity of plural subjectivities (2002, p. xii): "perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges" (2002, p. xxii). The world that is experienced in this mutually engaged or convergent subjectivity is neither the private or inaccessible world of "inner-perspective," nor

the immutable, indifferent world of the third-person objectivity. To express its unique experiential status, the phenomenological world of the "we" is called the "life-world": a place where "extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism" are overcome or "united" (2002, p. xxii). This phenomenological world is one that is available through a shared language, through collaborative action, and in common concerns.

This understanding is again illustrated in the brief descriptive passage quoted above. This passage makes use of the "I" perspective of personal feelings and impressions (rather than explicitly saying "we"), it also illustrates how such personal perspectives intersect or, as Merleau-Ponty (2002) says, constitute a "closely woven fabric" (p. xi). Janet and Ari's interactions show how different "people's [experiences] intersect and engage each other like gears" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. xxii): Ari from Germany tells Janet how much he likes the fact that she got help from others. In fact, these comments boost Janet's confidence, motivating her to complete her first article on *Wikipedia*. In this way, this description shows how the shared life-world is one where it is certainly possible to say "I," and to have feelings and impressions of one's own. Further, it also reflects a context in which the first-person pronoun is constituted through its relation with others. Using the "we" or the intersubjective first-person plural perspective himself, Merleau-Ponty puts it this way:

> *We* witness every minute the miracle of related experiences, and yet nobody knows better than *we* do how this miracle is worked, for *we* are ourselves this network of relationships. The world and reason are not problematical. We may say, if we wish, that they are mysterious, but their mystery defines them: there can be no question of dispelling it by some "solution" (2002, p. xxiii, emphases added)

The *we* represents more than one *I*; *we* connects multiple subjectivities through common concerns and feelings, impressions and meanings that are shared in common.

At the same time, though, the word "we" presents challenges: it has been described by some as a "dangerous pronoun" that is sometimes associated with the suppression of difference and even with acts of hate (e.g., Moss, 2003). Peppers (2006) explains that *we* "is a dangerous pronoun when it hides histories of internal conflict under false or superficial commonality." Leaving little or no opportunity for confirmation or qualification, saying "we" in a text often simply assumes that the reader is a part of the superficial agreement. It tacitly but unmistakably asks the reader to align himself or herself with the "I" of the author. In doing so tacitly or implicitly – rather than forthrightly or explicitly – it does not readily allow for conflict and disagreement. By using "we" in this chapter, I am aware of this dilemma. However, I also believe that it can be addressed, not always fully or completely, but in the ethical terms that are proper to it, through the use of the second-person pronoun, "you." I, therefore, return to this issue in the last section of this chapter, where I consider the ethical implications of saying "you."

DIMENSIONS OF LIFE-WORLD EXPERIENCE

Any study of lived experience or research motivated by a phenomenological question is, in effect, an exploration of a small part of the shared life-world. Exploring this intersubjective realm involves particular techniques that combine elements of inner and outer subjectivity and objectivity. One of these techniques is to understand life-world experience as extending or unfolding along four axes, dimensions or "existentials." These life-world dimensions have wide applicability (without being simply "objective") and are also closely connected to the expression of feelings and impressions (without being reduced to "mere" subjectivity). Working in complex intermixture, these dimensions are a part of the way that life-world experience is organized, or inherent in the way we "live in" or inhabit the life-world. Consequently, they are designated as "lived space," "lived time," "lived body" and "lived relation."

Lived space, of course, is *not* the objective area measured by the square feet in a room or kilometers of distance to be travelled; it is instead the way that a room or a distance is lived in or experienced: as warm and inviting, as conveniently nearby or unreachably distant. Max van Manen (2002) characterizes this life-world dimension as follows:

> this space is … difficult to put into words since the experience of lived space (like that of lived time or body) is largely pre-verbal; we do not ordinarily reflect on it. And yet we know that the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel. The huge spaces of a modern bank building may make us feel small, the wide-open space of a landscape may make us feel exposed but also possibly free. And we may feel just the opposite when we get in a crowded elevator. (n.p.)

"In general," van Manen concludes, "we may say that we *become* the space we are in" (2002; emphasis added).

Lived time is similar to the existential dimension of lived space: it is not "objective" time measured through the indifferent units presented on a clock or calendar, but it is the experience of time as something colored by our own lives. It can "speed up when we enjoy ourselves," or slow down "when we feel bored … or when we… sit anxiously in the dentist's chair" (van Manen, 2002). Significantly, it becomes inextricably intertwined with the experience of space in a monotonously long journey or in a pleasant stroll.

Lived body correspondingly refers to the experience of our own bodies and those of others. Of course, this experience can be sexual or erotic in character, but more often than not, it is banal or at least ambiguous. The body can be the object of another's scrutinizing gaze, in which case it also often becomes an object of awkward self-awareness. It can be comfortable or uncomfortable, but it often disappears from awareness altogether when engaged in an absorbing task. It communicates and connects with others in powerful but elusive ways. We may be particularly aware of this power when we are trying to create a favorable impression on someone: folding one's hands behind one's back (instead of crossing them on one's chest) to communicate openness, or inching backwards as an expression of discomfort or unease. As van Manen notes, "in our physical or bodily

presence we both reveal something about ourselves and we conceal something at the same time-not necessarily consciously or deliberately, but rather in spite of ourselves" (1997, p. 103).

Lived relation refers to the everyday experience of other people, or more abstractly, of the "other." Just as we experience time, space and the body in forms that are colored by emotion and impression, so too do we "live" our relations with others in terms that are charged with feeling, texture, and even flavor. This scenario is illustrated in the language we use to describe our relationships and encounters: "She's a prickly person," "he gives me the creeps," "she's always very sweet," or "that certainly leaves a bitter taste in my mouth!" These kinds of expressions show that we experience relation deeply and even sensuously (in terms of taste and tactility), rather than in more objective, intellectual terms.

EXPERIENCE AS INFORMATION OR EVENT

Speaking specifically of *experience* in terms of the dimensions of lived time, space, relation, and embodiment implies a perhaps uncommon way of understanding the term. Experience is often seen as being grounded in sense data, in "information" that is first received through the five senses, and then given "sense" by being "processed," organized, and analyzed in the mind. This particular understanding of experience is sometimes associated with *empiricism*. Empiricism refers to the belief that knowledge arises primarily or exclusively through the senses and, ultimately, that

> experience is only a matter of data, sense data to be sure but data nonetheless. Considered this way experience is nothing more than a basic component of knowledge that completes itself only through an act of reason, that is, in the establishing of patterns, of generalizations … it is something [that] stands within the framework of calculation and repeatability. (Risser, 2010, n. p.)

In the context of phenomenology, however, experience is seen very differently: It is not about the accumulation and synthesis of sensory data, but it is understood in terms of an event. It is not a picture we design, gather, or piece together, but it is a phenomenon that occurs, takes place, or happens to us. "The crucial question" for phenomenology, in other words, is "not 'what do I experience?' but 'what *is my* experience?'" (Jay, 2006, p. 94). Experience, accordingly, is not an occurrence that happens outside of us, as something separate from us that is made to impinge upon us as so much sensory information. As Heidegger says, "Experience doesn't pass before me as thing that I set there as an object" (as quoted in Jay, 2006, p. 98). Experience instead is a part of the inseparable connections between the self and the world. It arises through engagement with the world of concerns, actions, and meanings that constitute the life-world. Experience, conceived in this way, is a part of the life-world that we inhabit "naturally" and it partakes in all of the characteristics of this life-world. As Gadamer (2004) explains,

> the world in which we are immersed in the natural attitude … never becomes an object as such for us, but that represents the pregiven basis of all experience. … It is

clear that the life-world is always at the same time a communal world that involves being with other people as well. It is a world of persons, and in the natural attitude the validity of this personal world is always assumed. (p. 239)

To put it another way, experience is embedded in the life-world, and because this world, as Gadamer points out, is a "communal world of persons," experience is always much more than a question of unidirectional manipulation and calculation.

Taking this idea even further, one could say that we do not possess our experience, our experience possesses us. Heidegger expresses this concept by saying that

To undergo an experience with something … means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms us, and transforms us. When we talk of "undergoing" an experience we mean specifically that the experience is not of our making. To undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us, and submit to it. (1971, p. 57)

Heidegger's conclusion that "experience is not of our making" – taken together with the notion that we submit to it, rather than it submitting to us – is precisely how experience is understood here. Far from being subject to design and measurement, experience is seen as an event that is always embedded in a life-world of other persons.

WRITING AND READING THE LIFE-WORLD

The four life-world dimensions, time, body, space (and/or place,) and relation are bound together by and reflected in everyday language. Indeed, whether it is used in careful description or casual conversation, language is the most common means through which, as Merleau-Ponty says, "perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges" (p. xix). Language provides the most powerful evidence for the existence of a shared life-world; correspondingly, it also forms the most effective tool for exploring it. The simple fact that we can understand one another when speaking of different aspects of experience, feeling, and meaning, is a clear illustration of a shared, intersubjective world.

This dynamic gives language a particular power or potential in hermeneutic phenomenological research. This aspect is the potential of the "evocation" or even the "simulation" of experience. Writing, for example, "Ari's comments boosted my confidence" show the potential of descriptive and everyday writing to present an experiential moment to the reader. Longer and more detailed passages have the potential to extend this power and to draw the reader into an experience, to evoke an experience for the reader, or even to enable the reader to "experience" it vicariously. Realizing this potential involves the use of linguistic or descriptive techniques that are closer to fictional writing than they are to the objective "third-person" forms of description. It involves writing, in other words, that draws from the shared subjective and personal experiential characteristics that constitute the common world of the "we" rather than the objective world of factual or academic texts. These techniques, in turn, are intended to give the reader the opportunity to

"participate" in the experience described, to become part of the plurality that is implied in the word "we."

There are other similarities linking this type of description to fictional writing: A novel and its characters and events, for example, can lie dormant on the shelf, to be given semblance of life when the novel is picked up and read. Descriptions used in hermeneutic phenomenological research are similarly dependent on the reader. The reader is asked to help "breathe life" into these descriptions, to encounter these passages with the expectation and sensibility of someone reading fiction, from an orientation of involved receptivity rather than analytic detachment. Of course, this request is by no means an appeal for the reader to abandon all possibility of independent disagreement or critique. What these kinds of descriptions instead ask for is a similar kind of reading to that of engaging in a work of fiction or viewing a motion picture.

The word "I" is accordingly used in this description in a manner similar to the way it would be used in fictional passages written in the first person. It is not meant to emphasize the inward-looking or introspective possibilities of selfhood, but rather, is an attempt to make the descriptions as direct, recognizable, and compelling as possible, and to encourage the overlapping of different first-person perspectives. Like Merleau-Ponty (above) and Husserl (just below), phenomenological texts also uses the word "we" in a similar manner, to invoke the intersubjective position of the third-person plural. Any hermeneutic phenomenological study, then, is an exploration of the shared life-world that is invoked or simulated through descriptive, evocative language. However, while this "sharing" of a common life-world is an important goal, the ultimate aim of this type of research is even more ambitious: To bring these shared experiences and meanings to explicit and reflective attention. In doing so, this study aims to more than just describe, it also aims to reflect upon and interpret these descriptions. Phenomenological writing, such as is provided in the chapters of this book, frequently alternates between descriptive passages (which are indented and italicized in this text) and text that is reflective and interpretive in character.

Despite its unconventional ambiguity and informality, this type of inquiry can be both valuable and accessible: As I have already indicated, it can address familiar issues and questions in ways that are quite different from conventional research. This method can be particularly valuable in cases where conventional research has asked the same question again and again, only to repeatedly receive the same answers.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE UTRECHT SCHOOL

The quasi-fictional descriptive method explained above was initially conceived in the context of the Dutch Utrecht School and has been developed further and given explicit articulation by Max van Manen, a Canadian educational researcher. This section provides an overview of the way that evidence is collected and then presented and analyzed through writing, using the method of hermeneutic phenomenological description, as developed by van Manen. The Utrecht school,

which flourished only for a decade or so (from 1946 to 1957), represented a loose grouping of scholars who applied aspects of hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method to a wide range of disciplines. Writing together with Utrecht scholar Bas Levering, van Manen explains:

> The Utrecht School consisted of an assortment of phenomenologically oriented psychologists, educators, pedagogues, pediatricians, sociologists, criminologists, jurists, psychiatrists, and other medical doctors, who formed a more or less close association of like-minded academics. (Levering & van Manen, 2003, p. 278)

In recent years, as van Manen observes, the work of this group "… has inspired … variations of a practice-based phenomenology especially in psychology (e.g., Giorgi [2009] and Moustakas [1994]), in nursing (e.g., Benner [1994]) and in education (e.g., van Manen)" (2002).

One of the notable characteristics of the work of the Utrecht School is the way its members would "write up" their research in an informal, even conversational way. The research publications that are most characteristic of this school skillfully interweave informal descriptive writing with more formal reflection and analysis. This task was accomplished so successfully in some cases that the careful and painstaking research, writing and re-writing efforts of the authors are difficult for the reader to detect. In addition, these researchers did not produce any writings that explicated their methodology. Thus, despite the existence of some exemplary pieces associated with the Utrecht School (e.g., Langeveld, 1983; Buytendijk, 1988; Bleeker & Mulderij, 1992), the very accessibility of the writing of these texts effectively "closed the possibility for others to exercise these same practices" (Levering & van Manen, 2003, p. 278). The apparent simplicity of accomplished writing, in other words, all too easily hid the complexity of the research processes beneath it.

In this context, van Manen's work can be characterized as an attempt to "reopen" the possibility of exercising these same practices of research and writing for others. In *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (1997), van Manen explains in some detail how researchers can work toward the close and apparently effortless interweaving of analysis, reflection, and informal description that typifies the texts of the Utrecht School. In this same book, van Manen also explains how to collect, combine, and refine interview and other descriptive material to serve as experiential data in this kind of research. As the title of van Manen's book indicates, pedagogy is a subject particularly germane to this type of research.

"Phenomenology," as van Manen says, "is the active and reflective participation in meaning" (2002). The phenomenological researcher in this sense does not typically have a data gathering phase with an explicit beginning and ending set in advance but instead "dwells" with his or her question as it is being formulated, while he or she may be away from her desk and studies, during formal interviewing and analysis activities, and throughout the writing process. A film, a novel, or a radio program may suddenly speak to the researcher and the question with which she is dwelling, shedding light on one aspect or another of the phenomenon in

question. As a result, it is often not possible to give an exhaustive account of data sources or even a clear-cut enumeration of a single sample set or collection of interviews. It would be in some ways more in the spirit of the research method to describe the relevant contexts and experiences engaged in while dwelling with the problem.

The sources of potential meaning or relevant data are numerous. The researcher can develop and cultivate experiential meaning as it arises in a range of sources, including "historical, cultural, literary" and aesthetic materials (e.g., historical accounts, novels, and films), as well as a range of linguistic sources, including metaphors, sayings, and etymological and definitional distinctions both from everyday speech and formal writing (2002). For example, a popular movie such as *You've Got Mail* (1998) has been used in one hermeneutic phenomenological investigation of "keeping in touch by electronic mail" (Dobson, 2002).

These sources are used to create the types of first-person, written descriptions discussed above. When these descriptions are carefully developed and refined to constitute short, self-contained, quasi-fictional accounts, they are referred to by van Manen as "anecdotes." The anecdote as van Manen defines it is a brief, simple story, a vividly particular presentation of a single incident that is intended to stand out precisely through its incidental nature, in its compressed but concrete particularity. Again, the very short description provided above is a good, if somewhat brief, example of an anecdote: it are very particular and concrete, and it focuses, however briefly, on a specific incident. It presents an everyday kind of event and experience, highlighting one aspect that stands out for the person involved in it. The term *anecdote* has been deliberately chosen by van Manen for its colloquial overtones and its obvious distance from any validated and authoritative sense of "truth" or "evidence":

> Anecdotes have enjoyed low status in scholarly writings … Evidence that is "only anecdotal" is not permitted to furnish a proper argument. But empirical generalization is not the aim of phenomenological research. [In fact, anecdotes] … express a certain distain for the alienated and alienating discourse of scholars who have difficulty showing how life and theoretical propositions are connected. (p. 119)

It is useful also to characterize an anecdote can by what it is *not*: it does not present general principles, statistical patterns, or theoretical constructs. It is not used as evidence in the sense of an historical incident that "really happened" at a given point in time. Thus, an anecdote can be "adapted" from another text or description, as is the case with the second short anecdote provided at the outset of chapter one. Speaking specifically of technology use, the anecdote should also be differentiated from the vivid ethnographic accounts of computer use of the kind provided by Sherry Turkle in *The Second Self* (1984, 2005) or *The Life on the Screen* (1995), which Turkle (2005) characterizes as "portraits of what can [and does] happen when people enter into very close relationships" with the computer (p. 25). When employed as a means of studying engagement with computer technology, anecdotal accounts generally do not serve as evidence of what can happen with this technology. Instead, they attempt to provide the reader with recognizable

experiences of this kind of engagement. Anecdotes are not presented to the reader with the tacit claim, "This really happened"; they instead bring with them the tacit appeal: "Is this experientially recognizable or resonant?" More specifically then, the anecdote is told with the intention of raising the further question: "What is the experiential meaning of what happened?"

Despite the reach and variety of potential sources in writing anecdotes and in carrying out hermeneutic phenomenological research, the principle supply of meaning or of experiential data is often presented by open-ended, "qualitative" interviews. As a data-gathering technique generally, this type of interview is marked by its unstructured and unscripted nature. One of the most important challenges in such an interview is not for the interviewer to stick to a particular script, but for him or her to remain responsive, "flexible and attentive to the … meanings that may emerge as the interview progresses" (Warren, 2001 p. 87). Such an interview also tends to take the form of a kind of an "interpretive" or "guided conversation" that unfolds with very few pre-determined questions. It relies on the unscripted use of "probes to clarify answers or [to] request further examples, and follow-up questions that pursue implications of answers to main questions" (van Manen, 2002; Warren, 2001, pp. 85, 86–87).

Using the term *hermeneutic interview* (1997, pp. 98–99; 2002) van Manen describes the point of such an interview as follows:

> A hermeneutic interview is an interpretive conversation wherein both partners reflectively orient themselves to the interpersonal or collective ground that brings the significance of the phenomenological question into view. The art of the researcher in the hermeneutic interview is to keep the question (of the meaning of the phenomenon [under investigation]) open: to keep himself or herself and the interviewee oriented to the substance of the thing being questioned. (2002, n.p.)

In the course of such an interview, it is important for the researcher to be on the lookout for descriptive material having potentially anecdotal or "quasi-fictional" qualities. These brief descriptions take the form of a short account or a notable or unusual incident that captures or says something about the experience or phenomenon in question.

Interviewing in hermeneutic phenomenological research often presents a number of significant challenges. The first of these is that participants or interviewees generally do not see experiential categories as being relevant in research contexts; they do not describe their experience in terms of "incidents" or according to an experientially attuned vocabulary. To help both interviewee and interviewer to maintain a focus on the experiential, it can be useful to employ certain ways of asking questions or setting up "probes" that guide the conversation away from theory and explanation and keep it firmly anchored in the concrete. One of these ways is to explore the experience with the interviewee in terms of the four fundamental life-world themes or dimensions: lived space, lived time, lived relation, and lived body. A second way of addressing this difference is to ask questions that lead the interviewer to switch from a conventional vocabulary of intellection and thought to one of feeling and impression. Thus, asking a question

like "what did you *think* when that happened" would be replaced with the question: "how did you *feel* when that happened?" Allowing participants to speak in terms of thinking and of the intellect can provide responses that may, in effect, theorize colloquially the phenomenon in question. On the other hand, focusing the participant on his or her feelings and responses can help to orient and open the interview to questions of situated attunement and "dwelling."

In keeping with the implications of "dwelling" with a question and data, the data gathered from the participant or interviewee in hermeneutic phenomenological research is typically not seen as coming to an end with the conclusion of the initial interview session. Van Manen encourages researchers to include participants in the ongoing, cyclical, hermeneutic development of experiential meanings as these unfold in subsequent stages in the research. This dynamic includes discussing interview notes or interview transcripts with the interviewee and exploring together themes or important, common meanings that might emerge from these provisional documents. Involvement of the interviewee also extends to the review and discussion of more developed and refined descriptive material and drafts of the research text itself. According to van Manen, the question "Is this what the experience is really like?" should ground all such discussions (2002).

WONDER VERSUS THE "NATURAL ATTITUDE"

Gathering, compiling, writing and re-writing descriptions in order to make aspects of the life-world clearly available for reflection is not easy; for what is often most noteworthy about the world of shared human meanings is precisely the fact that it is *not usually regarded as worthy of note*. In this section, I introduce a few concepts that are indispensable to hermeneutic phenomenological research: the natural attitude, intentionality and wonder (the last of these is also known as "the reduction"). Our sharing of everyday meanings and the overlapping of common experiences is something that is readily forgotten, overlooked, or ignored. One could say that we are to the life-world as a fish is to water: The life-world is the environment that surrounds and sustains us, but because it is everywhere, it tends to be the last thing to receive our notice. Consequently, we are not often in a good position to explore it or even to acknowledge its reality. It disappears all too easily between the opposed domains of the objective and the subjective. Edmund Husserl explains:

> the lifeworld, for us who wakingly live in it, is always there, existing in advance for us, the 'ground' of all praxis, whether theoretical or extratheoretical. The world is pregiven to us, the waking, always somehow practically interested subjects, not occasionally but always and necessarily as the universal field of all actual and possible praxis, as horizon. To live is always to live-in-certainty-of-the-world. (1970, p. 142)

"Living-in-certainty-of-the-world" generally comes to explicit attention only when an extraordinary event occurs – when the figurative "gears" mentioned by Merleau-Ponty become disengaged. Such an event may occur when travelling in a

foreign country or entering for the first time into a situation that is very different or "other" from what is familiar: we are confronted by practices or conventions that may violate our "living-in-certainty-of-the-world" or our unarticulated "common sense."

An important constituent of this commonsensical "living in certainty" is called "intentionality." Intentionality refers to the meanings, plans, and purposes that constitute our connection with the world around us and give the world its familiarity. Extending from unconscious habits and actions (like turning a page or clicking a link) through to the most complex tasks of focused (self-) awareness, intentionality designates to a kind of "directionality" that links self to the world: "Intentionality" derives from the Latin verb "intendere," which means "to point to" or "to aim at," and … the intentionality of mental states and experiences … [are] accordingly characterized … [as] being "directed toward something" … i.e., a mental state of "aiming" toward a certain state of affairs. (McIntyre & Woodruff Smith, 1989, p. 147)

While phenomenological research begins with the recognition that self and world are connected through intentionality, it focuses particular attention on those moments when intentionality is disrupted. When the purposive powers of the mind are disrupted, miss their target, or are exposed to strangeness or otherness, the completion of intended actions comes to a halt. Merleau-Ponty speaks of phenomenology as working to encourage these moments. He describes it as an attempt to "slacke[n] the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus [bring] them to our notice…" (2002, p. xv). Slackening is deliberately cultivated as part of a particular methodology or technique, or more accurately, as an attitude or *disposition*. This technique or attitude is known as "the reduction." The reduction refers to the suspension of both commonsense and scientific understandings or explanations. Husserl describes it as "the bracketing" of the "natural attitude." Cultivating this disposition or sensitivity to that which is "out of the ordinary" is central to the research, writing, and re-writing that have occurred in putting together many of the studies collected in this book. However, it is crucial in reading such a study as well.

The highest goal of the writing and reflection undertaken here is to remove the reader as far as possible from what Husserl has called the "natural attitude." The ultimate aim of this type of writing in this sense is to bring the reader to a place where the phenomena being investigated are no longer simply taken for granted and accepted as ordinary. The goal is to take the reader to a place where the natural attitude is suspended; ultimately to a place of wonder. As van Manen (2002) explains, the goal of the type of hermeneutic phenomenological writing practiced here is to

> shatter the taken-for-grantedness of our everyday reality. Wonder [in this sense] is the unwilled willingness to meet what is utterly strange in what is most familiar. It is the willingness to step back and let things speak to us, a passive receptivity to let the things of the world present themselves in their own terms. When we are struck with wonder, our minds are suddenly cleared of the clutter of everyday concerns that

> otherwise constantly occupy us. We are confronted by the thing, the phenomenon in all of its strangeness and uniqueness. The wonder of that thing takes us in … (n.p.)

To respond to a text with wonder, to meet the "utterly strange" in a phenomenon that may be otherwise thoroughly "known" and familiar, however, is to ask a great deal of both the researcher/writer and the reader. Reacting in this fashion is not automatic, and, of course, it cannot be forced. As a result the intention or hope of the phenomenological researcher and writer therefore to invite, rather than in any way to compel, the reader into a suspension of the mundane. To extend this invitation to the reader is to ask him or her to enter into a different personal perspective, that of the "you," of the relational and the ethical. Only in this way is it ultimately possible to share the world of the "we."

SAYING "YOU" AND THE ETHICS OF ADDRESS

The relational, ethical aspects of the first-person plural perspective become important, even unavoidable, when we address someone as "you." In saying "you," the person speaking offers, establishes, or elaborates a relation to the person addressed. "You" implies relation; it is a word spoken by an "I" to another. When Ari says to Janet, "I really like the fact that you got some help from others to get your project page done. I think this is very important in wikis," he is engaged in relational action that has clearly ethical implications: his figurative path intersects (to use Merleau-Ponty's terms) with Janet's in a way that affects her noticeably and meaningfully. As a result, Ari's address or relational action can also be interpreted in terms of what is good or bad, right or wrong: The effect of Ari's words on Janet might lead readers to conclude that it was the *right* thing to say or do. A different response or a different end result – for example, appearing to be too enthusiastic, leading Janet to question Ari's seriousness – might result in a different ethical judgement.

The "you" perspective is relevant to hermeneutic phenomenology because the descriptive and interpretive passages in the various chapters of this book have been written with the intention of addressing the reader individually, as an "I" would address a "you." In writing hermeneutic phenomenological text, I am consequently aiming, ideally, to bring the reader to the text in a "you" relation with me. Together the two, the you and the I, *may* form an intersubjective "we." This dynamic implies that "I" as author has an ethical responsibility in relation to "you" as the reader.

This responsibility can be best understood in linguistic terms because language not only has substantial power to suggest, evoke, and simulate; it also presents significant peril in that it can mislead and, above all, reinforce the "natural attitude" that does not see beyond received common sense. As indicated above, my aim in writing is not to use language and description to compel readers to arrive at certain experiential meanings and understandings; my aim instead is to invite readers to share a range of experiential possibilities. Such an invitation is intended when I use the sometimes dangerous first-person pronoun "we": I do not do so without acknowledging the suppositions that this word brings with it, and the power it has to cover over conflict and disagreement with a superficial sense of commonality.

Thus, I simultaneously invite the reader to disagree with what is suggested when I use the term *we* and to approach the text and the author behind it in a manner that is active and engaged.

NOTES

[1] I owe this particular account of personal perspectives and knowledge forms to Bernhard Irrgang; it is articulated briefly in the first chapter of *Gehirn und leiblicher Geist*, and was also discussed in the context of a series of seminars held at the Technical University Dresden in November of 2008. Related discussions of personal perspectives can be found, most notably, in Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (1958).

[2] Phenomenology here designates what would be more accurately but more awkwardly termed "hermeneutic phenomenology." Referring to the art and science of interpretation, hermeneutics has been combined with phenomenology to constitute an interpretation or investigation of the *meaning* of lived experience. Exemplary treatments of hermeneutic phenomenology can be found in the writings of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

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