

il Approach. New York:  
ods," in R. Valle and S.  
Psychology. New York:  
ogy: Beyond Attitudes and  
ic experience." *Journal of*  
of intimacy." *Journal of*  
n.  
Metaphor. Milton Keynes:  
ff.  
s of consciousness." *British*  
to the study of conscious  
Velmans (eds) *Methodolo-*  
mazoo: Fetzer Institute.  
g perspectives in psychol-  
psychology. London: Sage.  
nce of anger." In A. Giorgi,  
udies in *Phenomenological*  
till (eds), *Theory and Social*  
y artery bypass surgery: *A*  
*ternational*, 54, 1115B.  
ew York, Image.  
ie. Leipzig: Engelmann.  
omenological study of the  
*rational*, 50, 5341B.

## CHAPTER 6

# The Gesture of Awareness

An account of its structural dynamics<sup>1</sup>

Natalie Depraz

*Collegè Internationale de Philosophie*

Francisco J. Varela and Pierre Vermersch

*CNRS*

This article proposes a description of the structural dynamics of the act of becoming aware based on the phenomenological method of *epochè* (or reduction), but also incorporating observations from psychological and contemplative sources. We propose as the core of this specific act an initial phase of *suspension* of habitual thought and judgement, followed by a phase of *conversion* of attention from "the exterior" to "the interior", ending with a phase of *letting-go* or of receptivity towards the experience.

### Introduction

*A new phenomenological approach*

We wish to present here a structural description of the basic gesture of becoming aware. Such a description does not come from nowhere: our work is rooted in a renewed, contemporary phenomenology. The phenomenology we advance is characterized by the way it works: its operational, procedural or

performative dimension. In a word, its *praxis*, its center is the practice of the so-called phenomenological reduction or *epochè*. It is characterized far more by its enaction than by its internal theoretical structure or an a priori justification of knowledge. Which amounts to saying that what is important to us is to actually *engage* directly in the description of phenomena. Only this allows moving forward in refining past work, and to confirm or invalidate past descriptions. That, rather than the discussion of the descriptions of other phenomenologists, past or contemporary, is our project. Nor are we interested in calling into question those of their doctrinal arguments that remain speculative, thus perpetuating the endless logic of commentaries upon commentaries. Our immediate purpose, we repeat, is to renew the very heart of the phenomenological approach as a method of categorical description and exploration of conscious life.

This stance towards phenomenology immediately implies a shift of philosophical paradigm, which leads takes us from hermeneutics to the pragmatic.<sup>2</sup> So it is from the philosophical horizon of pragmatism that the aptness and innovative nature of the following approach is best appreciated.

*Epochè: The heart of the structural dynamics of bringing into consciousness*

The description of the practice of *epochè* presented here is embedded within a larger project (cf. footnote 1) which aims to recapture the different steps in a process whereby something comes into my clear consciousness, something which inhabited me in a way which was confused, opaque, affective, immanent; something that is pre-reflective, and eventually becomes part of shared, intersubjective knowledge. According to the demands of the disciplines called upon, essentially: philosophy, psychology, cognitive sciences, and spiritual traditions (mostly Buddhism), we have variously called this gesture "phenomenological reduction", "a reflective act", "becoming aware", or "mindfulness".

The scope of the broad project just evoked cannot be discussed here in its entirety. It needs to be broken down into several component dimensions that can be roughly sketched as follows:

1. A *basic cycle* of dynamic components: the *epochè* itself and intuitive evidence as truth criteria;
2. Two optional steps, *expression* and *validation*, which allow for communication and shared knowledge of the act;
3. The multilayered *temporality* of the act of becoming aware, that lends its

necessary dyn

Thus although *épe*  
here, it is but an i  
the starting impul  
becoming aware i  
for such an explor

### Practicing *epochè*

#### *The three compon*

The present attempt  
not presented as a  
characterization of  
ally and subjected  
gesture is always  
corresponding und  
*epochè* and intuiti  
natural accomplish  
ness, antecedent to  
characteristic prop

Let us now el  
the unfolding of *éj*

- A. A phase of *su*  
precondition  
subject gives  
"natural" or n
- B. A phase of *c*  
"the interior".
- C. A phase of *lei*

We call *epochè*  
the simple reason t  
phase A. Note in  
movement which t  
around, at each ste

s *praxis*, its center is the practice of the *epochè*. It is characterized far more by a theoretical structure or an a priori justification, saying that what is important to us is the description of phenomena. Only this allows us to work, and to confirm or invalidate past discussion of the descriptions of other work, is our project. Nor are we interested in doctrinal arguments that remain speculative or commentaries upon commentaries. We seek to renew the very heart of the phenomenological description and exploration of

which immediately implies a shift of philosophy from hermeneutics to the pragmatic.<sup>2</sup> The notion of pragmatism that the aptness and the approach is best appreciated.

#### *Dynamics of bringing into consciousness*

The *epochè* presented here is embedded within a process that aims to recapture the different steps in a process into my clear consciousness, something that was confused, opaque, affective, immature, and eventually becomes part of shared consciousness, responding to the demands of the disciplines called phenomenology, cognitive sciences, and spirituality. We have variously called this gesture "phenomenological act", "becoming aware", or "mindfulness". The act evoked cannot be discussed here in its entirety into several component dimensions that

comprise: the *epochè* itself and intuitive reflection, and validation, which allow for communication of the act; the act of becoming aware, that lends its

necessary dynamic to the description.

Thus although *epochè* constitutes the real heart of the gesture that concerns us here, it is but an initial step, it primes the dynamic of the ensemble and gives the starting impulse. It is also a movement carrying across the other steps of becoming aware in the sense that it maintains the required quality of presence for such an exploration of experience.

#### **Practicing *epochè*: between exercise and training**

##### *The three components of epochè*

The present attempt at description follows a logic of *priming*, meaning that it is not presented as a finalized result. Rather, it is a first attempt at a thematic characterization of an individual experience, activated or reactivated individually and subjected to a progressive and intersubjective control. *Epochè* as a gesture is always complemented by a resulting intuitive evidence and its corresponding understanding in a minimal self-sufficient cycle. In other words, *epochè* and intuitive evidence call to each other, so to speak. *Epochè* finds its natural accomplishment in the intuitive evidence of a strong internal obviousness, antecedent to and qualified by a gradual process of filling-in which is a characteristic property of suspension, at the heart of *epochè*.

Let us now elaborate three principal phases we are proposing to describe the unfolding of *epochè* (Figure 1):

- A. A phase of *suspension* of habitual thought and judgement. This is a basic precondition for any possibility of change in the attention which the subject gives to his own experience and which represents a break with a "natural" or non-examined attitude.
- B. A phase of *conversion* or *redirection* of attention from "the exterior" to "the interior".
- C. A phase of *letting-go* or of receptivity towards the experience

We call *epochè* the *ensemble* of these three organically linked phases, for the simple reason that phases B and C are always reactivated by and reactivate phase A. Note in passing that in this recursive movement, the suspending movement which begins the process, has a quality which is different each time around, at each step of the structuring of the reflective act.

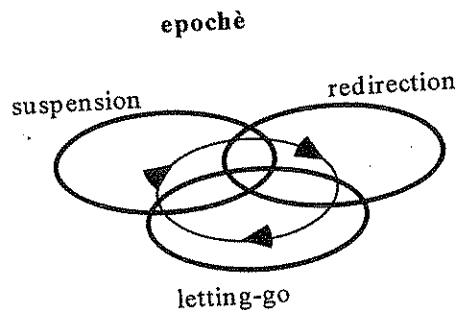


Figure 1. *Épochè*

### *Suspension and its immediate sequels*

The initial suspension phase can be rooted or be started in at least three distinct ways:

- an external or existential event may trigger the suspending attitude. For example, confronting the death of others, or aesthetic surprise.
- the mediation of others can also be a decisive, for example a direct injunction to accomplish the act, or a rather less directive attitude, as is the case when someone plays the role of a model.
- exercises initiated by the individual, presupposing a self-imposed discipline including long phases of training and learning until the newly acquired habits are stabilized.

These three possibilities of priming are not exclusive, but come into play together, the one in relation to another. They amount to motivations that may develop from living in the world, and from intersubjective and individual life. All three motivations are not of equal importance, depending on the unique characteristics of the individual and his/her stage of development. But all converge in making possible and then maintaining phases B and C.

To speak of the "initial" phase, as if there was a supposed "starting point" regarding suspension, requires an immediate qualification. In some sense there cannot be of "starting point", since suspension has already taken place in one's life. Yet at the same time, it seems to unfold anew each time it is mobilized. What is needed for the reflective act to be set in motion? — a suspending move. So we seem to land into a paradox where we must already

have in action question in thi the products c tive act, its p possible to de that is, unless ourselves in t putting it into process is obs someone who here.

This prag character mu know-how, tr of such ongoi with such tec must be over the unusual c

The two we have said spond to two emerges as a worldly shov what is invol turning from perceiving. T away from t the exterior direction of from B to C itself". The j empty time, which are av

Here, t cognitive fu second cann - A turning;

redirection



be started in at least three distinct

gger the suspending attitude." For  
or aesthetic surprise.

t decisive, for example a direct  
ner less directive attitude, as is the  
model.

esupposing a self-imposed disci-  
and learning until the newly ac-

ot exclusive, but come into play  
y amount to motivations that may  
intersubjective and individual life.  
ortance, depending on the unique  
er stage of development. But all  
ntaining phases B and C.

ere was a supposed "starting point"  
iate qualification. In some sense  
sension has already taken place in  
is to unfold anew each time it is  
ive act to be set in motion? — a  
a paradox where we must already

have in action that we are trying to trigger. Thus the very fact of posing this question in this manner shows that there is a problem. Considered in terms of the products of its activity, the precise moment of the initiation of the reflective act, its priming, is perhaps not relevant. But at the same time it is not possible to describe the reflective act other than in having put it into action, that is, unless we already know how to trigger its initiation. Thus we find ourselves in the provisional circle of having to describe an act in its very putting it into play, as in a bootstrap. The central nature of the starting up process is obscured by the fact that this beginning has already taken place for someone who uses it to describe this very same transition, as we are doing here.

This pragmatic Gordian knot cannot be resolved theoretically. Its circular character must be addressed by means of different *techniques* (methods, know-how, training) which permit a person to internalize or become masterful of such ongoing re-instantiation at every moment. Only an actual engagement with such techniques will also enable the evaluation of the difficulties which must be overcome in order that suspension be a stable capacity, accentuating the unusual character of becoming aware.

The two subsequent phases B-C are complementary and presuppose, as we have said, the initial phase as well as its sustained recycling. They correspond to two fundamental changes in the orientation of cognitive activity. B emerges as a change of *direction* of attention, which, distancing itself from a worldly show, takes an inward turn. In other words, instead of perception, what is invoked is largely what in philosophy is termed an *apperceptive act*: turning from the content of the world to the mental act which carries that perceiving. There is a massive obstacle to this change: the necessity of turning away from the habitual form of cognitive activity, usually oriented towards the exterior world. Change C consists in passing from the voluntary inward direction of attention to simple receptivity or an attitude of listening. That is, from B to C we pass from a "looking for" to a "letting come", a letting "reveal itself". The principal obstacle to this third phase resides in the traverse of an *empty time*, a time of silence, of the lack of take-up of the immediate givens which are available and already assimilated to consciousness.

Here, then, we are dealing with two reversals of the most habitual cognitive functioning, of which the first is the condition for the second; the second cannot happen if the first has not already taken place.

— A turning of the *direction* of attention from the exterior to the interior (B).

- A change in the *quality* of attention, which passes from the looking-for to the letting-come (C).

Whereas the first reversal remains governed by the traditional distinction between interior and exterior, that is to say, driven by a sort of an enhanced duality, and involves a portion of undeniably voluntary activity, the second is characterized by a passive, receptive waiting, which moves exactly in the opposite direction of the previous duality, a transient erasing of the inside/outside distinction.

From the point of view of phenomenological philosophy, these two reversals match quite well the Husserlian version of reduction as reflexive conversion and the Heideggerian notion of pre-comprehension which lets the event happen.<sup>3</sup> In a similar way, in the Buddhist tradition of mindfulness, a principled distinction is made between the base-level *shamatha* as a voluntary movement where the attention is settled and its natural expansion via the coupling with a more panoramic consciousness (*awareness-vispasnya*), which is characterized by the letting go of voluntary searching, and the embracing of a mode of receptivity that is typically lived as openness (cf. Trungpa 1974; Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991).

The non-habitual, unnatural character of these two reversals is manifest as the noticing of resistance, of difficulties in operating them, and typically require indirect strategies which allow them to be brought into effect (while avoiding the paradox of "be spontaneous!").

#### *The difficulties in the conversion of gaze*

Habitually engaged in the perception of others, in the grasping of worldly content, in the pursuit of goals or of interests linked in an immanent way with our everyday activities, attention is naturally interested in the world. It hardly ever turns away from the world spontaneously. Fink (1997) speaks here of a *Weltbefangenheit* (which can be translated as "imprisonment in the world"), and the Buddhist tradition of the snare of *samsara*. The inward direction of attention, turned away from the world, dis-interested, turned towards representations, towards thoughts, mental acts, and emotional tonality, is for many nonhabitual, to the extent that there is relatively little occasion to exercise it spontaneously or in response to a training demand.

Husserl approaches this reversal from the angle of a change of attitude in the relationship I maintain with the world. Under the heading of "change of

attitude" (modificat  
conversio  
direction  
very core  
passage fi  
the found  
analysis,  
account o  
of such a  
The only  
discusses  
bootstrap  
discussed

From  
aware al  
attention  
tion of th  
pregnant

His  
perimete  
the atten  
(center),  
mental a  
shows at  
pregnant  
Piaget h  
tion whi  
which is  
to be ex  
organize

Pragma

But ther  
which n  
for som

on, which passes from the looking-for to

governed by the traditional distinction  
s to say, driven by a sort of an enhanced  
deniably voluntary activity, the second is  
ve waiting, which moves exactly in the  
duality, a transient erasing of the inside/

phenomenological philosophy, these two  
Husserlian version of reduction as reflexive  
tion of pre-comprehension which lets the  
the Buddhist tradition of mindfulness, a  
then the base-level *shamatha* as a voluntary  
settled and its natural expansion via the  
consciousness (*awareness-vispasnya*), which  
voluntary searching, and the embracing of  
fully lived as openness (cf. Trungpa 1974;  
).

character of these two reversals is manifest  
difficulties in operating them, and typically  
allow them to be brought into effect (while  
neous!").

of gaze

ion of others, in the grasping of worldly  
f interests linked in an immanent way with  
naturally interested in the world. It hardly  
ontaneously. Fink (1997) speaks here of a  
anslated as "imprisonment in the world"),  
snare of *samsara*. The inward direction of  
world, dis-interested, turned towards repre-  
al acts, and emotional tonality, is for many  
re is relatively little occasion to exercise it  
aining demand.

sal from the angle of a change of attitude in  
the world. Under the heading of "change of

attitude" (*Umkehrung der Einstellung*), it is clear that he doesn't mean just a  
modification of my existential state relative to the world, but indeed the  
conversion of the natural interest from an object, whatever it is, to the  
direction of the *act* which allows me access to it. Strictly speaking, it is the  
very core of reduction as the shift from the object to the act, or again, as  
passage from the *quod* to the *quomodo*, which is at play here. But it is true that  
the founder of phenomenology describes this "passing to the act" as a result of  
analysis, rather than something that is explicitly brought about by an explicit  
account of examples. Whence the paucity of references made to the difficulty  
of such a turn; the Husserlian description is hardly procedural or operational.  
The only indication of difficulty lies in the several places where Husserl  
discusses the ambivalence of this phenomenological conversion, given the  
bootstrap nature of the motivation to initiate suspension, as we have already  
discussed (Depraz 1999).

From a psychological perspective, Piaget's (1968) account of becoming  
aware allows for a precise evaluation of the difficulties of diverting the  
attention from the external world, from aiming at a goal, or from the percep-  
tion of the effects of action; these attention attractors are more spontaneously  
pregnant than are mental acts or representation.

His principle of "making-conscious", which mobilizes attention from the  
perimeter towards the center, underlines the dynamics of that which mobilizes  
the attention in the natural attitude, that is, from the perception of a content  
(center), towards the means by which such an action is performed, i.e. the  
mental act which organizes and regulates the perceiving. This dynamic also  
shows at what point the taking of interest in that which is *not* the most directly  
pregnant is something secondary in the spontaneous motivation of the subject.  
Piaget has also shown the primacy of what may be called "positive" informa-  
tion which exists in a directly perceptible way over "negative" information  
which is only manifest because it is not present directly. In this light then, it is  
to be expected that to turn one's attention towards the mental acts which  
organize acting on the world, can only come as an acquired learning.

#### *Pragmatic difficulties*

But there are other equally pressing obstacles to this redirection of attention,  
which most practices acknowledge. Turning attention towards the interior is  
for some synonymous with turning it towards their intimacy, at the risk of

becoming conscious of things which are in the domain of the peripheral, or even the repressed. So rejection is based on the refusal of full contact with one's own intimacy.

In a situation where I am in the presence of other people (interviewer, small groups), this reversal of attention presupposes the acceptance of relaxing the social control which I exercise over others by my gaze or talk. So it presupposes a confidence which enables me to authorize myself to turn my attention more towards my interior world than the social one. Assuredly, a change in the direction of attention towards the interior world is not necessarily an act of becoming aware. This reversal of attention is common to many practices, such as those involving making explicit cognitive knowledge, mindfulness meditation, or psychoanalysis. Psychotherapeutic practice in particular has emphasized how this condition could meet solid refusal.

The fact remains that it is difficult, in the framework of a description of this change of direction of attention, to grasp what it is that makes for so much difficulty in its enactment. Only knowledge of the techniques developed with the intention of aiding people to *produce* this change of attention (the outstanding example being the Buddhist tradition of mindfulness) give the measure of the wrenching which can constitute this reversal for some. The most obvious symptom of the magnitude of this difficulty seems to lie in the fact that these techniques *aim only to produce* this change of direction of attention, a little as if, once this change is induced, the rest (its exploratory reflective use) would go ahead automatically. These techniques commonly make use of the fact that this direction of attention towards apperception partly coincides with attention directed at kinesthetic and proprioceptive sensations, its organic support. In bringing attention to breathing, or to what is tense and what is not, we are brought to center ourselves to the *lived body* as focal center, which can then be described as psychic or spiritual, and to leave the world as an extension beyond the bounds of the body.

So this turning back of the direction of attention presupposes becoming familiar with skilful *practices*. We can distinguish several types of pre-requisites for progress in such practices: methodological, theoretical, and pragmatic.

The methodological pre-requisite concerns the suspension mentioned earlier, now with that singular quality that it is imbued with a real investment. In effect, the conversion of gaze is for the beginner incompatible with the simultaneous engagement in ordinary action. It implies a form of non-action

which is at t  
position, or  
Engagement  
tion and a ce  
ceptive turni  
which it pres  
level of a be  
pletely natu  
coexistence  
Throughout  
tional steps.  
meditation i

So the  
point of vie  
my relator  
techniques  
the sense w  
an attitude!  
This prima  
language w

*Letting-go*

With the t  
from a cor  
for the int  
reception,  
the name.

*Epoc*  
reflection  
attention,  
because v  
tacit, of th  
a tension  
The imm  
patience,  
of what



the domain of the peripheral, or the refusal of full contact with

ce of other people (interviewer, opposes the acceptance of relaxation by my gaze or talk. So it is to authorize myself to turn my attention from the social one. Assuredly, a fluid interior world is not necessarily of attention is common to many therapeutic practices in particular meet solid refusal.

the framework of a description of what it is that makes for so much of the techniques developed with his change of attention (the outcome of mindfulness) give the measure of this reversal for some. The most difficulty seems to lie in the fact of a change of direction of attention, rest (its exploratory reflective use) techniques commonly make use of the perception partly coincides with receptive sensations, its organic relation to what is tense and what is not, the *ed body* as focal center, which can be, and to leave the world as an

of attention presupposes becoming distinguish several types of pre-methodological, theoretical, and

concerns the suspension mentioned it is imbued with a real investment. The beginner incompatible with the method. It implies a form of non-action

which is at the outset, *per force*, completely literal: to remain in a sitting position, or in an attitude of attentive listening, or reclined on a couch. Engagement without action is generally very pregnant and creates a motivation and a centering of attention stronger and more immediate than an apprehensive turning back (from content to mental act) and the inhibition of action which it presupposes. However, to the extent that the practice passes from the level of a beginner to a greater mastery, suspension can co-exist in a completely natural way with action in a fully worldly situation. In fact, a fluid coexistence of this sort is precisely the measure of a form of *mastery*. Throughout the intermediate stages, most practices explicitly include transitional steps. A simple example is the alternation between sitting and walking meditation in *shamatha* training.

So the change in direction of attention corresponds to a *doing* from the point of view of cognition: it involves (or is caused by) a change of attitude in my relation to the world. Analyzed from the point of view of enabling techniques for enactment, it is essentially perceived as a lifting of control, in the sense where we could almost accuse the "natural" attitude (can we accuse an attitude!) of having a hypnotic influence which is very difficult to interrupt. This primacy conferred on the very idea of lifting control leads to the use of a language which is that of release, abandonment, letting-go.

#### *Letting-go and the quality of attention*

With the third phase, it is the *quality* of attention which changes tone: we pass from a conquering activity ruled by intentionality, which makes us *search out for* the interior to the detriment of the exterior, to a passive disposition of reception, to a *letting-come*, about which there is nothing passive other than the name. In fact, it eminently involves action.

*Epochè* also, in this phase of its accomplishment, aims at letting the reflection of the lived operate. In other words, it is an active movement of attention, which can be deliberative but, at the same time, presupposes *waiting* because what there is to reflect upon belongs by definition to the domain of the tacit, of the pre-reflective and/or the pre-conscious. So it involves maintaining a tension between a supported act of attention and an immediate non-filling. The immobile hunter knows at least what he awaits with vigilance and patience, even though here there is waiting without knowledge of the content of what is going to reveal itself. In varying degrees, the reflectable is not

immediately available. It doesn't exist other than as a potential and will not come as revelation other than through a cognitive act borne by a particular intention. And so the gesture of letting-go presupposes a waiting, but is focused and open and so eventually void of content for a time, without any immediate discrimination other than "there is nothing", "it's foggy", "it's blurred", "it's confused", "nothing's happening".

This time of relative emptiness can be very brief or last several minutes, if not more. It is the time in which something first takes form, but can also be the time which the subject devotes to that which can create the object of this reflection. To the extent that he cannot "grasp" the object in a voluntary sense, this adjustment cannot take place other than structurally, without being able to immediately adjust itself to the detail of a content which is still not revealed.

It is a duration which is easily noticeable in the perception of stereoscopic images. Even when we have an expert ability at accessing this perception, there is a period when nothing is yet distinct, although we are already aware that we are no longer seeing in the normal way (the "natural attitude"). During that period, we sense the emerging of the form emerging up until the moment of brutally clear perception. We also see this type of phenomenon in psychotherapy, when the patient knows that something is in the process of coming back from his past, that he has the impression that "it is on the way to coming into consciousness". Sometimes he can even make out that that something comes from afar, from very far, without at all knowing the content of the scene from the past, or the words which are going to come back to him.

But even when it is objectively very brief, this empty period has the subjective duration of a radio blackout, where a silence of a few seconds appears eternal. In fact, it is subjectively very long, in contrast with the subjective rapidity of our more habitual conscious cognitive functioning. In the practice of letting-go, this slowing of the rhythm of expression and the period of arrested reflectivity is often a reliable criterion for the emergence of *époque*.

To recapitulate: the difficulty of putting into action the gesture of becoming aware seems to have two inseparable aspects: (1) abandoning the habitual or "natural attitude", and (2) being able to become receptive, (which includes learning to know how to deal with the paradox of aiming at something which is involuntary!).

*The pre-*  
This per-  
to be th  
action of  
to the fe  
This peri  
permane  
this dime  
that I do  
reflective  
troubling  
revelation  
find I hav

It is  
direction  
in order  
underlyin  
abandone  
and identi  
form; it fa

With  
Husserliar  
of the abs  
*Investigati*  
foundatio  
sion which

In mc  
psychother  
and gives l  
reception  
personal co  
tioner take  
posture, of  
mimicry, n  
linguistic st  
nent in the  
intonation).

in as a potential and will not  
ive act borne by a particular  
esupposes a waiting, but is  
ntent for a time, without any  
nothing", "it's foggy", "it's

rief or last several minutes, if  
akes form, but can also be the  
can create the object of this  
he object in a voluntary sense,  
cturally, without being able to  
nt which is still not revealed.  
the perception of stereoscopic  
at accessing this perception,  
lthough we are already aware  
the "natural attitude"). During  
emerging up until the moment  
pe of phenomenon in psycho-  
g is in the process of coming  
at "it is on the way to coming  
make out that that something  
owing the content of the scene  
come back to him.

ef, this empty period has the  
e a silence of a few seconds  
ry long, in contrast with the  
ious cognitive functioning. In  
rhythm of expression and the  
riterion for the emergence of

to action the gesture of becom-  
ts: (1) abandoning the habitual  
ome receptive, (which includes  
of aiming at something which

### *The pre-reflective dimension*

This period which is at the same time empty and subjectively long seems to us to be the major obstacle to discovery and to the spontaneous putting into action of the act of becoming aware. It is difficult not to immediately succumb to the fear or worry that can be induced by that stance of receptive attention. This period is troubling for anyone with the naive belief in an instantaneous, permanent and mechanical mastery of cognition over its functioning. In fact this dimension of pre-reflective access implies that I can become conscious that I do things which are efficient and effective, without knowing (in a reflective sense) how I have arrived at that consciousness. What can also be troubling is to discover a new form of cognition which opens me to the revelation of novel properties and extraordinary aspects of the real to which I find I have been insensitive.

It is clear that in the initial gesture of redirection which modifies the direction of attention, it was necessary to inhibit or abandon immediate action in order to make way for the shift between content and the mental act underlying that content. In the second receptive stage that which needs to be abandoned is an immediate filling-in by projection of categories, expectations, and identifications. Here again, the quality of suspension re-appears in a new form; it fact it permeates every step of the act of becoming conscious.

With this idea of a suspension of judgement, we are very close to the Husserlian intuition of *epochès* interpreted in the widest sense as the principle of the absence of presupposition formulated as early as 1901 in the *Logical Investigations* (§7). But it remains the case that the Husserlian presentation is foundational and does not deal with these differentiated qualities of suspension which we repeatedly come up against in practice.

In more practical terms, we are also close to the attitude which guides psychotherapeutic practice: the professional opens his presence to the other and gives him his attention whilst being vigilant not to interfere with the open reception of that which the other brings to light, by the therapist's own personal commentaries and his counter-transference to the patient. The practitioner takes simultaneously note of the verbal, the non-verbal (changes of posture, of gesture, of breathing — in rhythm, amplitude and localization — mimicry, micro-movements), the epi-verbal (what is said by means of the linguistic structures used and the categories of description of the world immanent in the patient's semantic choices), and the para-verbal (the variations of intonation). In psychoanalysis all this is not possible other than by a listening

and an observation based on an open or "floating" attention, without grasping for something.

Perhaps we could apply the same analysis to the work of the painter:

It is interesting to notice here that the phenomenological reduction [...] has a double action. It must make us forget at the same time that it makes appear. The reduction is at bottom in philosophy the equivalent of a technique of seeing in painting. We must forget what appear to be things when we look at them superficially and make appear in the thing itself that which it is in reality. And so the practice of phenomenological reduction is less a matter of seeing than of learning to see (Piguet 1975).<sup>4</sup>

In the tradition of mindfulness, the movement of letting-go is the very heart of what is described as the most "advanced" methods, the Mahamudra-Dzogchen schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The repeated practice of letting-go becomes non-paradoxical as soon as a pre-discursive component is introduced. In Rinzai Zen, the repetitive work with koans provides a classical framework; in the Tibetan schools, the emotional association with the manifest qualities of a living master ("devotion") is considered essential, so much so that the student is coached into a pre-discursive attitude (Namgyal 1987).

We may say, then, that "phenomenological reduction", "reflective act", "becoming aware", or "mindfulness" all stem from what is not available in normal reflection, they are rooted in the non-verbal, the pre-reflective, the ante-predicative. But this amounts to proposing that becoming aware stems from "nothing", in the sense that the lived experience which could be reflected upon is not immediately available. For, if it were, it would already have been brought under the spotlight of the reflexive attention; what we reflected upon can only modulate becoming awareness, but the fact remains that it is set into action, not the choice of content. So the reflective act stems from a "silent" or "empty" relation with experience. It is more at the contemplative level of reception, of listening or of impregnation than of the looking-for in a pre-determined way. It seems to arise from a modality which is more passive than cognition, even if we are well aware that that relative passivity is woven into the background by our categorical filters, whose permanent activity is hard to suspend. In this sense, our description of the reflective act is not about forcing a passive, mechanical reflection. The mirror which represents the person who operates the reflectivity is anything other than neutral. What is in play is to give oneself the possibility of not immediately in-forming reality by a form of thought through a language which is already available, thereby establishing a relative and provisional zone of silence from which to set off with a new

relation to  
which es-  
point of  
which is  
other than  
letting-go

This  
tion" can  
cognitive  
mention  
can delib-  
thing then  
I am cap-

Face  
the diffic-  
dark pict-  
continue:  
of revers-  
does not  
accessibl-  
it is perh-  
relation  
availabil

## Conclus

Let us n-  
ments of

floating" attention, without grasping

analysis to the work of the painter:

phenomenological reduction [...] has a  
at the same time that it makes appear.  
why the equivalent of a technique of  
at appear to be things when we look at  
in the thing itself that which it is in  
phenomenological reduction is less a matter of  
(1975).<sup>4</sup>

ment of letting-go is the very heart of  
methods, the Mahamudra-Dzogchen  
and practice of letting-go becomes non-  
component is introduced. In Rinzai Zen,  
a classical framework; in the Tibetan  
e manifest qualities of a living master  
such so that the student is coached into  
)

phenomenological reduction", "reflective act",  
I stem from what is not available in  
the non-verbal, the pre-reflective, the  
proposing that becoming aware stems  
and experience which could be reflected  
if it were, it would already have been  
diverted attention; what we reflected upon  
, but the fact remains that it is set into  
the reflective act stems from a "silent" or  
more at the contemplative level of  
attention than of the looking-for in a pre-  
a modality which is more passive than  
it that relative passivity is woven into  
s, whose permanent activity is hard to  
of the reflective act is not about forcing  
error which represents the person who  
rather than neutral. What is in play is to  
deliberately in-forming reality by a form of  
already available, thereby establishing a  
base from which to set off with a new

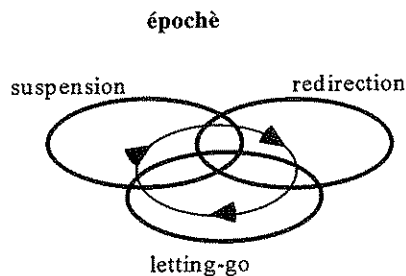
relation to the reality of the lived. There is a fertile dimension of emptiness which escapes the parameters of a "natural" world or a language, from the point of view of experience. It enables penetration at an ontological level which is openness to more basic form, a penetration which cannot appear other than as *chiaro-oscuro* (subtle contrasts) supplied by the suspension in letting-go.

This cessation of the spontaneous movement that searches for "information" can only be relative. It involves a braking, an inhibition of habitual cognitive processes whose activity can completely eclipse the receptive dimension and make the reflective act impossible. It is the paradox whereby I can deliberately turn my attention towards the interior, not to look for something there, but to receive that which manifests itself there, or rather that which I am capable of letting manifest itself there.

Faced with this description of a reversal of the movement of attention and the difficulties it can meet in its realization, it might be that we are painting a dark picture. It could be thought that this gesture involves a reversal which continues *always* to be a great difficulty, if not a great mystery. But the period of reversal can be quick enough to pass unnoticed in the mind of someone who does not give it deliberate attention; the reflected content is sometimes easily accessible. The difficulty comes not just from the practice of the reductive act: it is perhaps also linked to the nature of that which is aimed at, or even with the relation which I maintain with that which is aimed at which can make the availability to reflection more difficult.

### Conclusion

Let us now consider again the diagram (Figure 1) which shows the components of the basic cycle:



We can make out, at the heart of the process of becoming-aware which is the reflective act or the phenomenological reduction in action, the two sides of *epochè* which are the reflexive/redirection and the reception/letting-go, a correlated double movement. We can also describe its components as moments of emergence, as the unfolding of the process. The first unfolding, which leads to reflection (and on to expression) is characterized by a turning in on oneself; the second unfolding, which leads to a letting-go (and ends in a tacit intuition) is characterized by an openness to oneself.

In the first case, the described movement corresponds to a loop which leads back to itself without, however, closing in on itself, since from this loop the second movement sets out, that of receptivity towards oneself and the world. These two movements can be expressed by the metaphor of the braided axis, like diastole and systole, of contraction and dilation. The first axis is rooted in pre-reflective consciousness (pre-discursive, pre-noetic, ante-predicative, tacit, pre-verbal, pre-logical or non-conceptual; take your pick),<sup>5</sup> whose reflective capacity partially deploys the structure of pre-reflectedness, an intentional content. This is the *cognitive* axis of becoming-aware. The second axis is equally rooted in pre-reflective consciousness, but whose manifestations are not due to its reflective capacity, but to the parallel and indissociable gesture of letting go, intrinsically related to the affective and involuntary dimension of experience.<sup>6</sup> When the gesture of letting go intervenes, it becomes a moment of revelation, a receptive availability. Such is the *affective* axis of becoming aware.

These two axes are braided in single thread, as the unity of cognitive reflection and its inseparable affect, overlapping each other in a dynamic way in bringing each other about. This dynamic structure of metonymy between the core of what we have called *epochè* and the act of becoming aware in its totality is, indeed, remarkable.

### Notes

1. This text is adapted from a forthcoming book: *On Becoming Aware: The pragmatics of experiencing* by N. Depraz, F. Varela and P. Vermersch. As in the present paper, the order of the authors is strictly alphabetical and authorship a shared collective. A German version will appear in: R. Kühn und Michael Staudigl (Hg.), *Epoché und Reduktion*, Karl Alber Verlag (in press). For more on our views on the question of methodology the reader should consult Varela and Shear (1999).

2. In  
er  
of  
or  
m  
ha  
W  
(I
3. C  
(I
4. J.  
H  
re  
I'
5. F  
re  
ar
6. R  
N  
Y

### Referenc

- Bermud  
Bernet,  
Courtin  
onto  
Depraz,  
(Eds  
Tho:  
Fink, E  
Kluv  
Gallagh  
Gendlin  
logi  
west  
Henry,  
Mor  
Husserl  
Marion,  
Marion,  
Mazis,  
Uni'

ness of becoming-aware which is the reduction in action, the two sides of on and the reception/letting-go, a so describe its components as motion of the process. The first unfolding (reduction) is characterized by a turning in leads to a letting-go (and ends in a mess to oneself.

ment corresponds to a loop which ring in on itself, since from this loop receptivity towards oneself and the essed by the metaphor of the braided motion and dilation. The first axis is re-discursive, pre-noetic, ante-prednon-conceptual; take your pick),<sup>5</sup> ys the structure of pre-reflectedness, itive axis of becoming-aware. The eflexive consciousness, but whose ive capacity, but to the parallel and nsically related to the affective and When the gesture of letting go inter-1, a receptive availability. Such is the

ple thread, as the unity of cognitive lapping each other in a dynamic way mic structure of metonymy between and the act of becoming aware in its

ook: *On Becoming Aware: The pragmatics of* .Vermersch. As in the present paper, the order d authorship a shared collective. A German el Staudigl (Hg.), *Epoché und Reduktion*, Karl ews on the question of methodology the reader

2. In Anglo-Saxon literature, the closest antecedents to our attempt at a pragmatic phenomenology are the early efforts of Spiegelberg (1970), and more recently the pioneer work of Eugene Gendlin (1962). In the phenomenological tradition, Paul Ricouer (1950) is the only writer — so far as we know — to have tackled this question in his description of multiple “practical acts of consciousness” (attention, emotion, effort, habit), before having decided to abandon this project and turn to hermeneutics. In the German domain, Waldenfels (1993) has clearly formulated this need. Finally, the recent book by Marion (1998) should be noted in this context.
3. Cf. Bernet (1994), Introduction, as well as Courtine (1990), Marion (1989), and Henry (1991).
4. J.-Cl. Pignet (1963), op.cit. p.154. See also the much earlier letter from Husserl to Hofmannsthal of 1907 where Husserl makes use of a strict equivalence between the reductive and aesthetic attitudes (Cf. *Art et phénoménologie*, n°7, Bruxelles, 1991, p. 13–19).
5. For more details about this key distinction between pre-reflective/pre-reflexive and reflexive consciousness see the recent discussions in Gallagher (1998), Zahavi (1999), and Bermudes (1998).
6. Regarding these notions see *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis, Hua XI*, Den Haag, M. Nijhoff, 1966; Ricœur (1950), Montavont (1994), Mazis (1993), and more recently, Yamaguchi (1997).

### References

- Bermudes, J. L. 1998. *The Paradox of Self-Awareness*, Cambridge, MIT.
- Bernet, R. 1994. *La vie du sujet*, Paris: PUF.
- Courtine, J. F. 1990. “Réduction phénoménologique-transcendantale et différence ontico-ontologique.” In *Heidegger et la phénoménologie*, Paris: Vrin, pp 207–247.
- Depraz, N. 1999. “The Phenomenological Reduction as Praxis”, in F. Varela and J. Shear (Eds) *The View from Within: First Person Methodologies in the Study of Consciousness*, Thorverton: Imprint Academic.
- Fink, E. 1988. *VI. Cartesianische Meditation* (hrsg. G. Van Kerckhoven). Dordrecht: Kluwer. English translation by R. Bruzina, Indiana University Press: Indiana, 1997.
- Gallagher, S. 1998. *The Inordinance of Time*. Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press.
- Gendlin, E. 1962. *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning: A philosophical and psychological approach to the subjective*. Glencoe: Free Press; reprinted by Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997.
- Henry, M. 1991. “Quatre principes de la phénoménologie”, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 1, 3–26.
- Husserl, E., 1966. *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis, Hua XI*, Den Haag, M. Nijhoff.
- Marion, J.L. 1998. *Etant Donné*, Paris: PUF.
- Marion, J.L. 1989. *Réduction et donation*, Paris: PUF.
- Mazis, G. 1993. *Emotion and Embodiment: A fragile ontology*, Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press.

- Montavont, A. 1994. "Le phénomène de l'affection dans les *Analyses sur la synthèse passive*", *Alter: Revue de Phénoménologie* No. 2, Paris, Ed. Alter.
- Namgyal, T. 1987. *Mahamudra: The Quintessence of Mind and Meditation*, Boston: Shambala.
- Piaget, J. 1968. *Sagesse et illusion de la philosophie*. Paris: PUF.
- Piguet, J. -C. 1975. *La connaissance de l'individuel et la logique du réalisme*, Neuchâtel: La Baconnière.
- Ricœur, P. 1950. *Philosophie de la volonté I. Le volontaire et l'involontaire*, Paris: Aubier, 1950, reprinted 1988.
- Spiegelberg, H. 1970. *Doing Phenomenology*. Den Haag: M. Nijhoff.
- Trungpa, Ch. 1974. *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Boston: Shambala.
- Varela, F and Shear, J. eds. 1999. *The View from Within: First-person methods in the study of Consciousness*. Thorverton: Imprint Academic.
- Varela, F. Thompson E., and Rosch, E. 1991. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and human experience*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Waldenfels, B. 1993. *Edmund Husserl, Arbeit an den Phänomenen*, Frankfurt: Fischer.
- Yamaguchi, Y. 1997. *Ki als leibhaftige Vernunft. Beitrag zur interkulturellen Phänomenologie der Leiblichkeit*. München: W. Fink Verlag.
- Zahavi, D. 1999. *Self-Awareness and Alterity*. Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press.