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Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy

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CHAPTER 5

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing

Attending to the Speaking of Language

In phenomenological human science, writing does not merely enter the research process as a final step or stage. As was indicated earlier, and as will be elaborated in this chapter, human science research *is* a form of writing. Creating a phenomenological text is the object of the research process. And, of course, this purpose stands in the service of the fundamental commitment that animates the research questions.

So, we always need to be mindful of the question: what does research and writing serve? In the case of the present project we want writing to serve pedagogy. Language is the only way by which we can bring pedagogic experience into a symbolic form that creates by its very discursive nature a conversational relation. Writing and reading are the ways in which we sustain a conversational relation: a discourse about our pedagogic lives with children. Much depends, therefore, on the quality of our language and writing (theorizing). One might even wonder whether the charge of pedagogy to address adequately its own nature is possibly too much to ask of ordinary conversational discourse. What form of writing is needed to do justice to the fullness of pedagogy and pedagogic experience?

The phenomenological method consists of the ability, or rather the art of being sensitive—sensitive to the subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak. This means that an authentic speaker must be a true listener, able to attune to the deep tonalities of language that normally fall out of our accustomed range of hearing, able to listen to the way the things of the world speak to us. The world is no conglomeration of mere

objects to be described in the language of physical science, says van den Berg (1972). The world is our home, our habitat, the materialization of our subjectivity. Whoever wants to become acquainted with the world of teachers, mothers, fathers, and children should listen to the language spoken by the things in their lifeworlds, to what things mean in this world.

Silence – the Limits and Power of Language

Phenomenologists like to say that nothing is so silent as that which is taken-for-granted or self-evident. Therefore, silence makes human science research and writing both possible and necessary. In everyday life we sense the power of silence when a person gives someone “the silent treatment”—as in the punishing silence of the parent, the defiant or revengeful silence of the child. There is the silence of withdrawal and secrecy as in a relation of insecurity or mistrust. And silence can also be experienced positively as in the trusting intimacy of friends or lovers who share an evening together in which few words are spoken.

Silence is not just the absence of speech or language. It is true that in our own groping for the right words we sense the limits of our personal language. And even in the most profound and eloquent poem it seems that the deep truth of the poem lies just beyond the words, on the other side of language. Speech rises out of silence and returns to silence, says Bollnow (1982). Not unlike the way that an architect must be constantly aware of the nature of space out of which and against which all building occurs, so the human scientist needs to be aware of the silence out of which and against which all text is constructed. There are various categories of silence operating in human science research generally and in hermeneutic phenomenology particularly.

First, there is *literal silence*, as in the absence of speaking. Sometimes it is better to remain silent than to speak or write. For example, in interview situations it is often more effective to remain silent when the conversation haltingly gropes forward. Out of this space of silence a more reflective response often may ensue than if we try to fill the awkwardness of the silence with comments or questions that amount to little more than chatter. Similarly, in writing, we often say that quality is more important than quantity. This means that in phenomenological human science the process of writing involves more than merely communicating information. The textual quality or form of our writing cannot quite be separated from the content of the text. Instead of

committing the sin of “overwriting” it is sometimes more important to leave things unsaid. The text as a whole aims at a certain effect, and thus the silence of spaces is as important (speaks as loudly) as the words that we use to speak.

Second, there is something we might call *epistemological silence*. This is the kind of silence we are confronted with when we face the unspeakable. Various philosophers have referred to this kind of silence. For example, Polanyi (1958, 1969) has explained how there is a tacit form of knowing as in the common case where we sense “that we know more than we can tell” (1969, pp. 159-207). Beyond the range of our ordinary speaking and writing there is the rich domain of the unspeakable that constantly beckons us. Polanyi gives the example of witnesses who are unable to describe a person they saw, and yet are able to assist a police artist in the drawing up of a portrait by identifying what does and what does not resemble the person. We may have knowledge on one level and yet this knowledge is not available to our linguistic competency.

For our purpose it may be helpful to make several distinctions here:

(a) When we experience the unspeakable or ineffable in life, it may be that what remains beyond one person’s linguistic competence may nevertheless be put into words by another person (Dienste, 1987)—perhaps by someone who has special skill in writing. Indeed we sometimes are surprised when someone is able to say what we wanted to say while we could not find the words. It is for this reason also that the research-writing process requires of us that we sometimes “borrow” the words of another since this other person is able, or has been able, to describe an experience in a manner (with a directness, a sensitivity, or an authenticity) that is beyond our ability. Sometimes this other person is a thoughtful poet, a philosopher, an author of fiction, or a person with a certain verbal talent. Sometimes this other person is a member of a group that has access to certain experiences which are unique for reasons that are cultural, generational, social, professional, or gender specific, such as children, the sick, the poor, prostitutes, athletes, women, gays, fathers, and so on.

(b) The experience of something that appears ineffable within the context of one type of discourse may be expressible by means of another form of discourse. For example, while behavioral science has great difficulty giving a satisfactory account of the experience of love, this subject is portrayed in a celebrated manner in the language of poetry,

music and the fine arts. Of course, we need to acknowledge that the epistemological objectives of the discourse of behavioral science differ from those of aesthetic discourse. In other words, the very notion of truth has different meanings in the different linguistic communities (Gadamer, 1975). It is important for human science to recognize that the truth-experience made possible through the language of poetry, novels, paintings, music, and cinematography may be reflected upon phenomenologically, and thus imported into phenomenological writing.

(c) What appears unspeakable or ineffable one moment may be captured, however incomplete, in language the next moment. Indeed, this is also the common experience. As we orient ourselves to a certain notion we sometimes amaze ourselves about what we are able to put into words. And we wonder: Did I say that? In conversations with a friend or late at night at our desk, or in the car on our way home, we catch ourselves saying, writing, or thinking something with an eloquence that comes as a surprise. Much of real writing occurs in this way. The poet Rilke described how lived experience, memory, time, and reflection are all involved in the writing of a good poem:

One must have memories . . . and still it is not yet enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the great patience to wait until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves — not till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them. (In Mood, 1975, p. 94)

Although it is obvious that human science discourse is not the same project as poetry, it is not entirely wrong to say that phenomenological research/writing also requires a high level of reflectivity, an attunement to lived experience, and a certain patience or time commitment.

Third, there is *ontological silence*, the silence of Being or Life itself. In ontological silence we meet the realization of our fundamental predicament of always returning to silence—even or perhaps especially after the most enlightening speech, reading, or conversation. It is indeed at those moments of greatest and most fulfilling insight or meaningful experience that we also experience the “dumb”-founding sense of a silence that fulfills and yet craves fulfillment. Bollnow (1982) describes this as the fulfilling silence of being in the presence of truth.

Anecdote as a Methodological Device

A common rhetorical device in phenomenological writing is the use of anecdote or story. “Story” means narrative, something depicted in narrative form. On the one hand, all human science has a narrative quality (rather than an abstracting quantitative character). And the story form has become a popular method for presenting aspects of qualitative or human science research. Here we wish to focus on a specific story form or narrative form: the anecdote. Anecdotes are a special kind of story. For example, when Langeveld (1984) wants to explain the significance of a thing in a child’s life, he tells a story about a little girl who offers her baby brother a tiny feather: “The four-year old comes to her mother, who is busy with the newborn baby, and has a ‘treasure’ in her hand. It is a tiny feather of a sparrow. This is for little brother, because he is still so small . . . Now that is a true gift!” says Langeveld (p. 218). And he uses the anecdote to make a distinction between a present and a gift. A present is something we give to someone as a wedding present or as fulfillment of an obligation or debt. The French have a saying that small presents maintain friendship. Langeveld shows that it is directly reversed with gifts: “A present can make friendship, but love and friendship make gifts, even the smallest ones, possible . . . So the little girl’s feather is small—so be it: Isn’t the little brother small too? But how delicate and soft the feather is! It almost makes the beholder delicate and soft too!” (p. 218). And so Langeveld continues, whoever gives a present to someone, gives something from the store, often merely just a suggestion from the salesperson. But whoever gives a gift (and not just a mere present) gives himself or herself. He or she is the thing.

Here is another example: In his introduction to *Person and World*, van den Berg tells an anecdote of a native of the Malayan jungles (van den Berg and Linschoten, 1953). In order to learn what impression a large and modern city would make on an inhabitant of the jungle, one had placed this man unexpectedly and without much ado in the middle of the large city of Singapore. One walked with him through the busy streets in order to provide the native with ample opportunity to observe whatever a metropolis could offer. When at the end of the trip one asked him what had struck him most, he did not, as one might have expected, talk about the paved streets, the brick houses, concrete buildings, cars, streetcars and trains. Instead, he mentioned how to his

amazement one person could carry so many bananas. What he appeared to have seen was a street vendor who transported his bunches of bananas on a push cart. "For the rest the native hardly had seen anything," says van den Berg (1953, p. 5). A person who lives in the jungle is engaged in a dialogue with the things of his world which allows him to see things in a manner which we could not possibly share. The native is engaged in a different conversation with things. Every new object he sees appears in front of his eyes in a modality that permits a certain role in that conversation. Any object that cannot adopt such modality therefore cannot meaningfully enter the conversational relation. It does not speak to him and therefore cannot be seen, says van den Berg. This is how van den Berg uses, among other things, the anecdote as a device for making comprehensible the phenomenon of *conversational relation* which every human being maintains with his or her world. What van den Berg wants to show by way of anecdote and phenomenological explication is that the human being not only stands in a certain conversational relation to the world—the human being really *is* this relation.

Anecdotes, in the sense that they occur in the phenomenological writings of, for example, Sartre, Marcel, Merleau-Ponty are not to be understood as *mere* illustrations to "butter up" or "make more easily digestible" a difficult or boring text. Anecdote can be understood as a methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us.

Webster's definition of anecdote is "a usually short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident." And the Oxford Dictionary defines anecdote as "secret, private, or hitherto unpublished narratives or details of history." It speaks of the narrative of an incident or event as "being in itself interesting or striking." The term derives from the Greek meaning "things unpublished," "something not given out." And indeed, Cicero (and later Renaissance scholars as well) used to describe some of his unpublished manuscripts as anecdotes, "things not given out." Anecdotes are social products. In everyday life the anecdote usually begins its course as part of an oral tradition. Often, it is originally a fragment of the biography of some famous or well-known person. Thus, Samuel Johnson described anecdote as "a biographical incident; a minute passage of private life." Biographers and historians value anecdotes for their power to reveal the true character of persons

or of times which are hard to capture in any other manner (Fadiman, 1985, p. xxi).

But often anecdote was information meant for insiders, stuff that for discretionary reasons did not make the written record. Sometimes the anecdote was used to characterize a way of thinking or a style or figure which was really too difficult to approach in a more direct manner. This is one epistemologically interesting feature of anecdote, that if we cannot quite grasp the point or essence of a subject and we keep looking at it from the outside, as it were, then we may be satisfied with an anecdotal story or fragment (Verhoeven, 1987).

There is an amusing anecdote about Edmund Husserl whose voluminous writings on phenomenology contain painstaking refutations of every conceivable objection to his philosophical system. As a boy Edmund wanted to sharpen his knife. And he persisted in making the knife sharper and sharper until finally he had nothing left (de Boer, 1980, p. 10). The anecdote aptly demonstrates the perfectionist qualities in Husserl's character. Husserl was accustomed to reflect with his pen and paper. His phenomenological research was truly a textual labor. He would revise, rewrite, and edit endlessly his fundamental writings. And after his death was discovered an astonishing collection of about 40,000 pages written in stenographic script.

An interesting case of the significance of anecdotes in human science thinking concerns the doctrine or philosophy of Diogenes Laertius, also called The Cynic or The Dogman, or "a Socrates gone mad" (Herakleitos and Diogenes, 1979, p. 35). There are no authentic texts left from this thinker, who at any rate considered living more important than writing. What is available are just anecdotes. Legend has it that the youthful Alexander the Great one day went to visit the philosopher Diogenes about whom he had heard such strange stories. He came upon the philosopher while the latter was relaxing in the beautiful sunshine.

Alexander: I am Alexander the Great.

Diogenes: I am Diogenes, the dog.

Alexander: The dog?

Diogenes: I nuzzle the kind, bark at the greedy, and bite louts.

Alexander: What can I do for you?

Diogenes: Stand out of my light. (p. 30)

While Alexander wanted to show his benevolence and generosity to the thinker, the latter showed that he knew only too well the nature of worldly temptations. But rather than to theorize and to get entrapped into the addictive sphere of philosophical abstraction, Diogenes "showed" his argument in verbal gesture: "get out of my sun." By means of this pantomimic demonstration Diogenes shows more effectively than theoretical discourse might do how the philosopher frees himself from the politician. He was the first person who was free enough to be able to put the mighty Alexander in his place. Diogenes' answer not only ignored the desire of power, but also the overwhelming power of desire (Sloterdijk, 1983, p. 265). And so, this humble and wretched philosopher showed himself more powerful and autonomous than the feared ruler Alexander who went all the way to the borders of India to satisfy his need for power. Did Alexander recognize the sense of superiority of the moral life of the cynic? History has it that Alexander once said: "If I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes" (Herakleitos and Diogenes, 1979, p. 36). Diogenes and Alexander the Great died on the same day, a fact to which people have attached superstitious significance.

So, Diogenes set out to teach his fellow citizens not by giving speeches or by writing books but by means of pantomimic exercise and by living example. A kind of street theatre, one might say. Sloterdijk (1983) has argued that the aureole of anecdotes that surrounds the figure of Diogenes are actually more clarifying of his teachings than any writings could have been. And yet the reason that Diogenes' philosophy has not been more influential may also find its cause in the fact that it is *only* anecdotes that have been preserved. Anecdotes have enjoyed low status in scholarly writings, since, in contrast to historical accounts or reports, they rest on dubious factual evidence. The shady reputation of anecdote may derive from the sixth-century Byzantine historian Procopius who called his posthumously published scandalous account of the Emperor Justinian *Anecdota* or *Historia Arcana* (Secret History).

In everyday life, too, anecdotes may get negative reactions. For example, we may hear someone say that a certain account should be distrusted since "it rests merely on anecdotal evidence." Evidence that is "only anecdotal" is not permitted to furnish a proper argument. Of course, it is entirely fallacious to generalize from a case on the basis of mere anecdotal evidence. But empirical generalization is not the aim of phenomenological research. The point that the critics of anecdotes

miss is that the anecdote is to be valued for other than factual-empirical or factual-historical reasons.

An historical account describes a thing that has happened in the past, but an anecdote is rather like a poetic narrative which describes a universal truth. What Aristotle says about the poetic epic of his time applies to the anecdotal narrative of our time:

the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e., what is possible as being probable or necessary . . . poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. (*Poetics*, 1451)

Anecdotes may have a variety of functions (see Verhoeven for some distinctions, 1987; also Fadiman, 1985), but the ones that are of significance to human science discourse may include the following characteristics:

(1) *Anecdotes form a concrete counterweight to abstract theoretical thought.* The object of phenomenological description is not to develop theoretical abstractions that remain severed from the concrete reality of lived experience. Rather phenomenology tries to penetrate the layers of meaning of the concrete by tilling and turning the soil of daily existence. Anecdote is one of the implements for laying bare the covered-over meanings.

(2) *Anecdotes express a certain disdain for the alienated and alienating discourse of scholars who have difficulty showing how life and theoretical propositions are connected.* Thus, anecdotes possess a certain pragmatic thrust. They force us to search out the relation between living and thinking, between situation and reflection. In this connection Fadiman (1985, p. xxi) notes how anecdote has acted as a levelling device, how it humanizes, democratizes, and acts as a counterweight to encomium.

(3) *Anecdotes may provide an account of certain teachings or doctrines which were never written down.* Socrates and Diogenes are examples of great thinkers about whom anecdotal life stories form both their biographies as well as the essence of their teachings. This historical phenomenon also shows the great potential and generally unacknowledged power of anecdote in human science discourse. Plato's *Dialogues* is a collection of anecdotes about Socrates, the philosopher. It differs markedly from the large body of philosophical writings that

have followed it down the ages. At the methodological level Plato's writings are round-about or indirect reflections about fundamental human experiences such as friendship (*Lysis*), love (*Phaedrus*, *Symposium*), teaching virtue (*Meno*), and so forth.

(4) *Anecdotes may be encountered as concrete demonstrations of wisdom, sensitive insight, and proverbial truth.* Classical figures considered their anecdotes as narrative condensations of generally acknowledged truths (Fadiman, 1985, p. xxi). For example, the anecdote of the cave in Plato's *Republic* is offered by Plato as allegory or possible story. Plato's accounts are offered not as factual truths in the empirical or historical sense but, in Plato's words, as "likely stories." By their anecdotal quality we come to see what is possible and what is not possible in the world in which we live (Cairns, 1971, p. xv).

(5) *Anecdotes of a certain event or incident may acquire the significance of exemplary character.* Because anecdote is concrete and taken from life (in a fictional or real sense) it may be offered as an example or as a recommendation for acting or seeing things in a certain way. In everyday life an anecdote may be told as a tactful response (a "message") to let the recipient of the anecdote sense or perceive a certain truth that is otherwise difficult to put into clear language.

What is often not seen is that anecdotal narrative as story form is an effective way of dealing with certain kinds of knowledge. "Narrative, to narrate," derives from the Latin *gnoscere, noscere* "to know." To narrate is to tell something in narrative or story form. The paradoxical thing about anecdotal narrative is that it tells something *particular* while really addressing the *general* or the *universal*. And vice versa, at the hand of anecdote fundamental insights or truths are tested for their value in the contingent world of everyday experience. And so one may say that the anecdote shares a fundamental epistemological or methodological feature with phenomenological human science which also operates in the tension between particularity and universality.

The Value of Anecdotal Narrative

D'Israeli termed anecdotes "minute notices of human nature and of human learning" (in Fadiman, 1985). Anecdotes can teach us. The use of story or of anecdotal material in phenomenological writing is not merely a literary embellishment. The stories themselves are examples or topics of practical theorizing. Anecdotal narratives (stories) are important for pedagogy in that they function as experiential case ma-

terial on which pedagogic reflection is possible. Methodologically speaking, story is important because it allows the human science text to acquire a narrative quality that is ordinarily characteristic of story. A hybrid textual form is created, combining the power of philosophic or systematic discourse with the power of literary or poetic language. Anecdote particularizes the abstracting tendency of theoretical discourse: it makes it possible to involve us pre-reflectively in the lived quality of concrete experience while paradoxically inviting us into a reflective stance vis-à-vis the meanings embedded in the experience. The important feature of anecdotal as well as phenomenological discourse is that it simultaneously pulls us in but then prompts us to reflect.

The significance of anecdotal narrative in phenomenological research and writing (cf. Rosen, 1986) is situated in its power:

- (1) *to compel*: a story recruits our willing attention;
- (2) *to lead us to reflect*: a story tends to invite us to a reflective search for significance;
- (3) *to involve us personally*: one tends to search actively for the story teller's meaning via one's own;
- (4) *to transform*: we may be touched, shaken, moved by story; it teaches us;
- (5) *to measure one's interpretive sense*: one's response to a story is a measure of one's deepened ability to make interpretive sense.

To conclude, the lacing of anecdotal narrative into more formal textual discourse, if done well, will create a tension between the pre-reflective and reflective pulls of language.

Varying the Examples

In his lectures, the Dutch phenomenologist Buytendijk once termed phenomenology "the science of examples." With this phrase he was referring to the iconic quality of phenomenological knowledge. A phenomenological study does not describe the nature of a phenomenon in the same sense that, for instance, an ethnographer describes a certain culture. When an ethnographer describes the culture of a teen-centre or a day-care environment, then the description is expected to exhibit a certain degree of reality validity for the way this particular youth culture or that particular day-care setting is experienced by these young people or children. In contrast, phenomenological research as it has been approached in this text aims at elucidating those phenomenologically structural features of a phenomenon that help to make visible, as

it were, that which constitutes the nature or essence of the phenomenon. In other words, every phenomenological description is in a sense only an example, an icon that points at the "thing" which we attempt to describe. A phenomenological description describes the original of which the description is only an example. To say it differently, a phenomenological description is an example composed of examples. If the description is phenomenologically powerful, then it acquires a certain transparency, so to speak; it permits us to "see" the deeper significance, or meaning structures, of the lived experience it describes. How is such transparency achieved? It is a function of the appropriateness of the themes that we have identified as well as a function of the thoughtfulness that we have managed to muster in creating exemplary descriptions by, for example, being sensitive to the evocative "tone" of language in which the descriptions are captured. A description is a powerful one if it reawakens our basic experience of the phenomenon it describes, and in such a manner that we experience the more foundational grounds of the experience. Varying the examples is the way in which we address the phenomenological themes of a phenomenon so that the "invariant" aspect(s) of the phenomenon itself comes into view.

Sometimes this method of varying the examples is used for showing how phenomena differ; for example, how pedagogic hope differs from other kinds of "hope." In this case we may vary the example by attending to the kind of meaning of "hope" that is implied in the language of teaching. In doing so, we may gain a momentary view of the phenomenological meaning of the experience of pedagogic hope. In the next few paragraphs let us illustrate these different aspects of hope by focusing for a moment on the modern "behavioral objectives" or "management by objectives" talk in terms of which educational theorists and administrators try to define teaching competence.

What are we to make of the language of teaching that is thus made available to teachers? Herein lies the irony of a profound contradiction: the language by way of which teachers are encouraged to interpret themselves and reflect on their living with children is thoroughly imbued by hope, and yet it is almost exclusively a language of doing—it lacks being. We do not know how to talk of our being with children as a being present with hope for these children. The language of objectives, aims, teacher expectations, intended learning outcomes, goals, or ends in view is a language of hope out of which hope itself has been systematically purged. The language of aims and objectives, therefore, is a language

of hopeless hope. It is an impatient language that neither bears nor truly awakens. How does "having measurable objectives" differ from "having hope"? Teacher expectations and anticipations associated with certain aims and objectives differ from having hope for our children in that expectations and anticipations easily degenerate into desires, wants, certainties, predictions. As teachers we tend to close ourselves off from possibilities that lie outside the direct or indirect field of vision of the expectations. To hope is to believe in possibilities. Therefore hope strengthens and builds. On the other hand, the phenomenology of specific educational objectives or broad goals is to be involved with the future of the children we teach in such a way that we always see the past as present and the present as past. And inherent in such living with children is the danger of always treating the present as burden, as something that must be overcome. There is little dwelling in such living.

The point is not that the curricular language of educational aims, objectives, or instructional intentions is wrong. Seen in proper perspective this language is an administrative convenience. Teachers have always planned what should go on in a particular course, class, or lesson. The problem is that in an age in which the administrative and technological influences have penetrated into the very blood of our life-world, teachers and even parents seem to have forgotten a certain kind of understanding: what it means to bear children, to hope for children entrusted to their care. Recalling what thus seems to be forgotten is a kind of recollecting of what belongs to the being of parenting and of what belongs to the being of teaching as *in loco parentis*.

The nihilistic forgetfulness of the essence of our being as teachers curiously turns loose a certain self-destructiveness. This is evident in the problem lately referred to as teacher burn-out. Teacher burn-out is the modern case of the enduring problem of nihilism: the higher values are losing their value. The ends are lacking, said Nietzsche; there is no answer to this question: "What's the use?" And actually the nihilistic "what's the use" is less a question than a sigh, a shrugging-off of any suggestion that there might be cause for hope. Teacher burn-out is not necessarily a symptom of excessive output of effort, of being overworked. It may be the condition that ensues when as teachers we no longer know why we are doing what we are doing. Teacher burn-out is hopeless in that nobody can make us believe there is an answer to the sigh, "What's the use?" The only way such teacher burn-out can be overcome is by recapturing in ourselves the knowledge that life is

bearable—not in the sense that we can bear it, as we bear a burden which weighs us down, but in the sense that we know that life is there to bear us—as in the living with hope. We can do this, once again, by seeing the child as child, by giving birth and bearing to children, rather than aborting the child in the middle of the abstracted rhetoric of our theorizing.

Writing Mediates Reflection and Action

In an oral culture, in a society dominated by orality, phenomenology would be quite impossible. Why? Not only because phenomenology is a certain mode of reflection done traditionally by scholars who write. But also because a certain form of consciousness is required, a consciousness that is created by the act of literacy: reading and writing. Ong (1982) has argued that the cultural and historical fact of literacy has led to a transformed consciousness that has created a certain distance and tension between understanding and experience, reflection and action. So when we speak of "action sensitive understanding" then we are orienting ourselves to this tension. One place where this tension is experienced in an acute form is in the act of human science research as writing. In other words, it is a certain kind of writing that we are concerned with here. It is the minded act of writing that orients itself pedagogically to a notion that is a feature of lived experience.

Writing is our method

What relation exists between research and writing? When we examine the earlier human science literature produced by the *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* (see Hintjes, 1981) and the more phenomenological pedagogical tradition in Germany and the Netherlands we notice a general neglect of discussion of the relationship between research and writing. The same is true for the contemporary literature of research in the social and human sciences; writing as a methodological concern is usually only discussed (if at all) for the purpose of research report writing and publication of scholarly articles. Educators have written about the formative value of reading for the development of literacy and critical consciousness (see, for example, Freire, 1987). But the connection between research and writing is surprisingly little understood. An exploration of both the epistemology and the pedagogy of writing shows the importance of this relation.

In all research, including in traditional (experimental or more positivistic) research, there comes a moment when the researcher needs to communicate in writing what he or she has been up to. One speaks here of the "research report" which suggests that a clear separation exists between the activity of research and the reporting activity in which the research is made public. Also in the work of various contemporary human science researchers, writing is conceived largely as reporting process. With them the aim is to make human science methodologically "rigorous," "systems based," and "hard." In such framework there is no place for thinking about research itself as a poetic textual (writing) practice. But there may be a price to be paid for the desire to be respectable in the traditional "scientific" sense. And that has to do with the quality of the insights generated by a preoccupation with epistemology and method. Barthes expressed this well with a warning:

Some people speak of method greedily, demanding; what they want in work is method; to them it never seems rigorous enough, formal enough. Method becomes a Law . . . the invariable fact is that a work which constantly proclaims its will-to-method is ultimately sterile: everything has been put into the method, nothing remains for the writing; the researcher insists that his text will be methodological, but this text never comes: no surer way to kill a piece of research and send it to join the great scrap heap of abandoned projects than Method. (Barthes, 1986, p. 318)

Other researchers have given more prominence to the textual nature of phenomenological inquiry but even these authors have not squarely addressed the relation between phenomenological reflection and the writing process. Yet for the human sciences, and specifically for hermeneutic phenomenological work, writing is closely fused into the research activity and reflection itself. We might argue that even for traditional social science research the cognitive stance required to do research is closely related to the cognitive style of writing.

Writing fixes thought on paper. It externalizes what in some sense is internal; it distances us from our immediate lived involvements with the things of our world. As we stare at the paper, and stare at what we have written, our objectified thinking now stares back at us. Thus, writing creates the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterizes the theoretic attitude in the social sciences. The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable

and intelligible. Researchers recognize this linguistic nature of research in the imperative reminder: "Write!" Human science research requires a commitment to write. But writing for a human science researcher is not just a supplementary activity. The imperative "Write", as Barthes put it, "is intended to recall 'research' to its epistemological condition: whatever it seeks, it must not forget its nature as language—and it is this which ultimately makes an encounter with writing inevitable" (Barthes, 1986, p. 316).

For Barthes, research does not merely *involve* writing: research is the work of writing—writing is its very essence (1986, p. 316). In the human sciences no research that has failed to write itself has understood its fundamental mandate. For scholars such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty the activities of researching and reflecting on the one hand, and reading and writing on the other hand, are indeed quite indistinguishable. When one visits the Husserl Archives at the University of Louvain this close connection between research and writing becomes evident in the symbolic value of Husserl's desk which occupies a prominent place in the archival room. It is at this desk where phenomenology received its fundamental impetus.

More so than Husserl, Sartre was a phenomenologist who stood and acted in the middle of the hustle and bustle of social and political life. But as writing became very difficult for the aging Sartre, thinking became difficult as well. "I still think," the seventy-year-old Sartre (1977) said once in an interview, "but because writing has become impossible for me the real activity of thought has in some way been repressed" (p. 5). Sartre was speaking about the difficulty that the loss of sight created for him as reader and author. It is obvious that for Sartre writing was not just a mere moment in the intellectual life of the thinker. Writing was somehow at the center of this life. "The only point to my life was writing," he said. "I would write out what I had been thinking about beforehand, but the essential moment was that of writing itself" (p. 5). With this line Sartre has given us his most succinct definition of his methodology. Writing is the method. And to ask what method is in human science is to ask for the nature of writing. What is writing? How is writing research (thinking, reflecting)? Certainly, writing is a producing activity. The writer produces text, and he or she produces more than text. The writer produces himself or herself. As Sartre might say: the writer is the product of his own product. Writing is a kind of self-making

or forming. To write is to measure the depth of things, as well to come to a sense of one's own depth.

To Write is to Measure Our Thoughtfulness

Writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know.

Writing teaches us what we know, and in what way we know what we know. As we commit ourselves to paper we see ourselves mirrored in this text. Now the text confronts us. We try to read it as someone else might, but that is actually quite impossible, since we cannot help but load the words with the intentions of our project. Yet, the text says less than we want, it does not seem to say what we want: we sigh: "Can't we do any better than this?" "This is no good!" "We are not coming to terms with it." "Why do we keep going when we are not getting anywhere?" "We need to scrap this." "Let's try it again that way." Writing gives appearance and body to thought. And as it does, we disembody what in another sense we already embody. However, not until we had written this down did we quite know what we knew. Writing separates the knower from the known (see Ong, 1982, for some distinctions in this section), but it also allows us to reclaim this knowledge and make it our own in a new and more intimate manner. Writing constantly seeks to make external what somehow is internal. We come to know what we know in this dialectic process of constructing a text (a body of knowledge) and thus learning what we are capable of saying (our knowing body). It is the dialectic of inside and outside, of embodiment and disembodiment, of separation and reconciliation.

Writing distances us from the lifeworld, yet it also draws us more closely to the lifeworld.

Writing distances us from lived experience but by doing so it allows us to discover the existential structures of experience. Writing creates a distance between ourselves and the world whereby the subjectivities of daily experience become the object of our reflective awareness. The writer's immediate domain is paper, pen or keyboard on the one hand and language or words on the other hand. Both preoccupations have an alienating effect. The author who writes about the experience of parenting must, temporarily at least, "slacken the threads" between himself or herself and the world. Every parent/author knows the ten-

sions between the demands made by the two roles even if the object of interest in both cases is the child. Whereas, on the one hand, writing gets me away from immediate involvement with my child, on the other hand it allows me to create a space for pedagogic reflecting on my parenting relation with this child so that I may return to this child with a deepened understanding of the significance of certain realities of the lifeworld.

Writing decontextualizes thought from practice and yet it returns thought to praxis.

Writing tends to orient us away from contextual particulars toward a more universal sphere. As we try to capture the meaning of some lived experience in written text, the text in turn assumes a life of its own. Thus writing places us at a distance from the practical immediacy of lived life by being forgetful of its context. Or rather, writing focuses our reflective awareness by disregarding the incidentals and contingencies that constitute the social, physical, and biographic context of a particular situation. But as we are able to gain in this manner a deeper sense of the meanings embedded in some isolated aspect of practice, we are also being prepared to become more discerning of the meaning of new life experiences. And thus reflectively writing about the practice of living makes it possible for the person to be engaged in a more reflective praxis. By praxis we mean thoughtful action: action full of thought and thought full of action.

Writing abstracts our experience of the world, yet it also concretizes our understanding of the world.

Because language is itself abstractive, writing tends to abstract from the experience we may be trying to describe. This abstractive tendency is a problem for human science research since its aim is precisely to return "to the things themselves," which means to return to the world as lived: "that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. ix). What is the great paradox of language? That it always abstracts from the concreteness of the world which it was responsible for creating in the first place. Writing intellectualizes. We recognize this intellectualizing in the image of Kien, Canetti's bookish person, who appears thoroughly alienated from real existence (Canetti, 1978). And yet,

writing, true writing can concretize the experience of the world more pithily it seems, more to the shaking core (however strange it may seem) than the world as experienced. The narrative power of story is that sometimes it can be more compelling, more moving, more physically and emotionally stirring than lived-life itself. Textual emotion, textual understanding can bring an otherwise sober-minded person (the reader but also the author) to tears and to a more deeply understood worldly engagement.

Writing objectifies thought into print and yet it subjectifies our understanding of something that truly engages us.

On the one hand, the inscribing, the writing of the text is the research. One writes to make public, to make conversationally available what the author lives with: an idea, a notion being questioned. On the other hand, the text once completed and in print-circulation is now a testimonial, a relic of embodied reflections. More so than long-hand writing, printed text is an object. We sense this in the greater ease with which we can take distance from our text once it has been converted into type-faced print. So there is an subjectifying and an objectifying moment in writing and in the way that the word allows us to understand the world. Research is writing in that it places consciousness in the position of the possibility of confronting itself, in a self-reflective relation. To write is to exercise self-consciousness. Writing plays the inner against the outer, the subjective self against the objective self, the ideal against the real.

Writing Exercises the Ability to See

Writing involves a textual reflection in the sense of separating and confronting ourselves with what we know, distancing ourselves from the lifeworld, decontextualizing our thoughtful preoccupations from immediate action, abstracting and objectifying our lived understandings from our concrete involvements (cf. Ong, 1982), and all this for the sake of now reuniting us with what we know, drawing us more closely to living relations and situations of the lifeworld, turning thought to a more tactful praxis, and concretizing and subjectifying our deepened understanding in practical action. Writing has been called a form of practical action. Writing is action in the sense of a corporeal practice. The writer practises his or her body in order to make, to "author" something. In one sense, the text is the product of the writer's practical action. But

writing exercises more than our mere redactive skills. Writing exercises and makes empirically demonstrable our ability to "see." Writing shows that we can now see something and at the same time it shows the limits or boundaries of our sightedness. In writing the author puts in symbolic form what he or she is capable of seeing. And so practice, in the lifeworld with children, can never be the same again. My writing as a practice *prepared* me for an insightful praxis in the lifeworld. (I can now see things I could not see before.) Although I may try to close my eyes, to ignore what I have seen, in some way my existence is now mediated by my knowledge. And because *we* are what we can "see" (know, feel, understand), seeing is already a form of praxis—seeing the significance in a situation places us in the event, makes us part of the event. Writing, true writing, is authoring, the exercise of authority: the power that authors and gives shape to our personal being. Writing exercises us in the sense that it empowers us with embodied knowledge which now can be brought to play or realized into action in the performance of the drama of everyday life.

To Write is to Show Something

Phenomenological text succeeds when it lets us see that which shines through, that which tends to hide itself. And how can research as writing "let us see?" Phenomenology is heedful of our propensity to mistake what we say (our words) for what we talk about (the *logos*). Phenomenological writing is not found in the colorful words of the story-teller, nor in the fanciful phrases of the person with a flair for writing. The words are not the thing. And yet, it is to our words, language, that we must apply all our phenomenological skill and talents, because it is in and through the words that the shining through (the invisible) becomes visible.

The language of human science writing discloses reflectively ("shows" us) how phenomenological knowledge is held and what it is like to know things pedagogically. In other words, pedagogical writing requires a responsive reading. One does not read poetry as if it were a mathematical treatise, or a logical argument, or even a story line. The person who reads poetry as if it were prosaic discourse misses a full understanding of the poem. Similarly, the person who cannot see how a phenomenological use of words is a function of the things being described in the words, will be unable to understand the description. The reader must be prepared to be attentive to what is said *in* and

through the words. While a text possesses literal content or lexical meaning, there is also meaning in the form or rhetorical structure of a text. Certain meaning is better expressed through *how* one writes than in *what* one writes. Content may be visible as form but for that reason concealed as content, says Rosen (1969). So that attentiveness to form is also attentiveness to content. Phenomenology is like poetry, in that it speaks partly through silence: it means more than it explicitly says.

Phenomenology, like poetry, intends to be silent as it speaks. It wants to be implicit as it explicates. So, to read or write phenomenologically requires that we be sensitively attentive to the silence around the words by means of which we attempt to disclose the deep meaning of our world. For this reason Brown (1966, p. 258) says:

Speech points beyond itself to the silence, to the word within the word, the language buried in language, the primordial language, from before the Flood or the Tower of Babel; lost yet ready at hand, perfect for all time; present in all our words, unspoken. To hear again the primordial language is to restore to words their full significance.

To Write is to Rewrite

Thus, in spite of the seemingly instrumental or step-wise character of the approach outlined in this text, the methodology of phenomenology is more a carefully cultivated thoughtfulness than a technique. Phenomenology has been called a method without techniques. The "procedures" of this methodology have been recognized as a project of various kinds of questioning, oriented to allow a rigorous interrogation of the phenomenon as identified at first and then cast in the reformulation of a question. The methodology of phenomenology requires a dialectical going back and forth among these various levels of questioning. To be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld, writing may turn into a complex process of rewriting (re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing). Sartre describes how writing and rewriting aims at creating depth: constructing successive or multiple layers of meaning, thus laying bare certain truths while retaining an essential sense of ambiguity. This depthful writing cannot be accomplished in one straightforward session. Rather, the process of writing and rewriting (including revising or editing) is more reminiscent of the artistic activity of creating an art object that has to be approached again and again, now here and then there, going back and forth between

the parts and the whole in order to arrive at a finely crafted piece that often reflects the personal "signature" of the author.

Sartre calls this crafted aspect of a text "style" (1977, pp. 5-9). Naturally, he alludes to something more complex than mere artistic idiosyncrasy or stylistic convention. One is reminded of Schleiermacher's use of the notion of "style" to refer both to the essential genius of a text and to the thoughtfulness of the author as the producer of the text (1977, pp. 166-173). To write, to work at style, is to exercise an interpretive tact, which in the sense of style produces the thinking/writing body of text. For Schleiermacher "style" was an expression of *Geist* (mind, culture, spirit), a *geistig* phenomenon. More modern phenomenological formulations see style as the outward appearance of the embodied being of the person. In writing, the author stylizes in textual form the truth that is given signification in his or her contact with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 59). "Style is what makes all signification possible," says Merleau-Ponty (p. 58). But we should not confuse style with mere technique or method, rather style shows and reflects what the author is capable of seeing and showing in the way that he or she is oriented to the world and to language. It is this blessed moment where style gathers language to "suddenly swell with a meaning which overflows into the other person when the act of speaking [or writing] binds them up into a single whole" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 235).

To write means to create signifying relations—and the pattern of meaningful relations condense into a discursive whole which we may call "theory." To write/theorize is to bring signifying relations to language, into text. Language is a central concern in phenomenological research because responsive-reflective writing is the very activity of doing phenomenology. Writing and rewriting is the thing. Phenomenologists have commented on the reflexive character of writing. Writing is a reflexive activity that involves the totality of our physical and mental being. To write means to write myself, not in a narcissistic sense but in a deep collective sense. To write phenomenologically is the untiring effort to author a sensitive grasp of being itself—of that which authors us, of that which makes it possible for us to be and speak as parents and teachers, etc., in the first place. As an aspect of the methodology of phenomenology, the experience of recalling has been described as a form of recollecting (Heidegger, 1968), a gathering of the kinds of understanding that belong to being. This is the search for the ontological difference; it is a search for the understanding of the *logos*

that lets us be mothers and fathers. And herein lies a responsibility for phenomenology. This recollective thinking needs to be brought to speech, rather like what happens in the poetizing writing of the poet who gives form to an authentic speaking. Rilke called this thinking a kind of "blood remembering" (in Mood, 1975, p. 94)—an appropriate term, since for us parents and teachers the blood remembering implies a recognition of the memory that children are indeed of our blood: a recognition that, like a vow, becomes full of an unconditional quality, a recognition that is a heeding of the sign of a presence. And we experience the incarnation of this presence in the "us" from which our hope in this child derives its meaning—that is to say, a togetherness of which we proclaim the indestructibility.