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Describing the Practice of Introspection

Abstract: *The main objective of this article is to capitalise on many years of research, and of practice, relating to the use of introspection in a research context, and thus to provide an initial outline description of introspection, while developing an introspection of introspection. After a description of the context of this research, I define the institutional conditions which would enable the renewal of introspection as a research methodology. Then I describe three aspects of introspective practice: 1) introspection as a process of becoming aware, theorized through Husserl's model of consciousness modes; 2) introspection as recollection, through the model of retention and awakening in Husserl's theory of memory; 3) the use of universal descriptive categories for the description of all lived experiences, as a guide for skilled practice of introspection in research. Finally I examine the question of the validation of introspective data, suggesting a strong distinction between the ethical criterion and the epistemic criterion of truth.*

Keywords

Consciousness, descriptive categories, explication interview, Husserl, introspection, lived experience, phenomenology, pre-reflective.

Initial Questions, Primary Motivations

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Let us take as a preliminary supposition that you have reached the conclusion that there is no point in carrying out research into consciousness, or into any other subject of study based on consciousness, without trying to gather information about what the subject is conscious of, in his own view. Because if not, we could find ourselves in the absurd situation of trying to say what someone else is conscious of! Why not ask him? If he is conscious, then he is conscious! And if he is, why could he not tell us about it? So is he conscious or not? To answer this question, it is necessary to be able to gather information about this matter. I can of course say, for the other person, in his stead, what affects him, that is what has an effect on him, whether he is conscious of this or not, by means of recordings of physiological indicators, but on the one hand I will not have the corresponding semantics, and on the other hand I will not know if the subject is reflectively conscious of this. That in fact is the question, and he is the only one who can enable us to establish this point. Sooner or later, the complement of all research on the living subject must also be able to say what he is living, what he is experiencing, in short everything of which he is already or can become reflectively conscious.

Let us suppose however that *you*, the person reading this article, have reached this conclusion, namely that you need to gather information about the experience of the subject (according to him), and thus about what he can be conscious of, or become conscious of. You have a new and meaningful research aim: to document the subjective dimension, to gather information from the subject about what he has experienced. You know that you must abandon the idea of *only* using indirect information, such as behavioural, physiological and neurophysiological traces, or video recordings, as this would inevitably mean you would have to use an interpretation strategy in your discourse about what the subject is conscious of, about what happened for him, in your view.

To achieve this new objective, you must practice — and thus know, and become competent and indeed expert in — a new data gathering methodology. Fundamentally, you have no other choice than to practice, and to have others practice, a form of *introspection*, that is to obtain descriptive verbalisations based on acts of introspection relating to a past lived experience (in the recent or more distant past).¹ Attempting to consider the resulting verbalisations alone, without taking into account the acts which give rise to them is a puerile strategy,

[1] In this introduction I have left out the question of current introspection and/or simultaneous verbalisation (Vermersch, 2008b) in order to consider only retrospective introspection.

which involves hiding from oneself the fact that one is requesting an act of introspection by asking questions to the other person (Fraisie & Piaget, 1963), and the damaging consequence is that you do nothing to guide the act of introspection as you did not know (or recognise) it. You harbour, as many others have done before, the illusion that you merely elicit verbalisations, and nothing more. You place yourself in the situation of not knowing how you obtain your data, how you informer generates them. You obtain answers and you go off to process them. If you do not obtain the answers, or if the spontaneous verbalisations are too poor in content, or non-existent, you immediately reach one of the following conclusions: (1) That the subject is unconscious and thus has nothing to say (see for example the work on implicit knowledge [Reber, 1993; Reder, 1996; Underwood, 1996]); (2) That he does not remember and thus will not remember, exit; (3) That in any case he has no access to the information, because there is no introspection, that it is a myth (see for example Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; (Nisbett & Bellows, 1977; Smith & Miller, 1978; White, 1980); (4) That there is in fact no experiential content, and thus nothing whatever to say (Lyons, 1986)! Whereas our interpretation of what these authors say suggests: (1) That the subject should first become conscious, i.e. reflectively conscious of what he may say, and that we know how to help the subject to carry out this transition; (2) That it is possible the subject may say that he does not remember, but that he can be helped to transcend this first impression and guided into mobilising a specific autobiographic memory; (3) That if the questions of the researcher relate to the causality of the situation ('Why did you do such and such a thing? Why have you changed criteria?'), it is understandable that the subject: (a) should not describe, but comment, or justify, as that is what he is asked to do, and that this is not introspection, but reasoning; (b) should express his spontaneous, or even naïve, theories, as he is not asked to describe what happened, and that as a result it is quite understandable that another subject, who has been introduced by the researcher in the position of a hidden observer, expresses the same thing as the subject who is directly involved in the experiment; (4) And finally that when there is apparently nothing to describe, it is perhaps necessary to consider the lack of introspective competence of the person making this affirmation, and the necessity of taking into account the technical nature of introspection and the obligation of being trained in these practices, so that they can be used intelligently and effectively.

Taking a radically first-person viewpoint (Vermersch, 2000), it is the researcher who for a time takes up the position of informer, with

regard to his lived experience, and himself produces an introspection by a work of reiterated written expression, by taking advantage of his expertise as a researcher in the field he wishes to study. Taking a second-person viewpoint, the researcher invites one other person (or several other people) to act as informer(s), and must then guide the introspection process of the person (or persons) without thereby inducing the content of the description. This is usually termed ‘conducting a research interview’, and I have developed a specific interview technique: the explicitation interview (Vermersch, 1994; 2008) (see also the article by Maryse Maurel in this issue). In what I write, I thus assimilate the explicitation interview to retrospective introspection (Vermersch, 2008b), more exactly the explicitation interview is a form of guided retrospective introspection. The descriptive expertise which is the heart of introspection is not innate in any way, it is provided by the interviewer in the form of non-inductive guidance of the formulation of the experience. Auto-explicitation is a guided self-introspection (Vermersch, 2007b). The person who practices this is the one who has the introspective expertise.

Whatever the case considered, we therefore conclude that it is necessary to use introspection as a method for gathering research data about subjectivity.

The posture of my discourse: from introspective practice to its theorisation.

To explain what I am going to develop in this article, I think it is necessary to specify the type of research approach from which this information has been drawn, by briefly retracing the genesis of the explicitation interview technique. My approach is a little unusual in that it was not originally based on a research programme established on the basis of a theoretical framework and hypotheses which would determine specific means of collecting data. After initially focusing on the use of traces and observables, and particularly of video recordings, it became clear that what I used to call ‘normal unconscious cognitive functioning’, could not be documented solely by a viewpoint external to the subject, even though the use of experimental situations which are spontaneously rich in observables made it possible to go quite a long way by inference. I thus transcended the prejudices of the period, which had been inculcated into me at university, which suggested that verbalisation data were unreliable, uninteresting, reconstructed after the fact, and only reflected naïve prejudices and theories about people. The use of an interview technique had the practical

purpose of transcending the limitations of behavioural data, and the gathering of verbalisation was only a means to an end. I thus obtained information that I did not think I would be able to obtain using the theoretical knowledge I had mastered. Not only did the conventional limitations of recollection memory seem to be easily transcended, but also if one had experience of the ‘fragmentation of the description’ and of looking for the ‘useful level of detail’, as was the case in the psychology of work, we thus obtained an abundance of precise details which the subject himself was amazed to discover in his past experience. Recognising his experience, accepting that it is his, and at the same time discovering with surprise that it is contained in his lived experience! There was here the prefiguration of a theoretical reflection on the nature of consciousness (direct or pre-reflective consciousness) and on the type of recollection memory which made it possible to allow this kind of autobiographical information to emerge. The description of the practice, and then the systematisation of the techniques used to question, to guide towards embodied memory, to fragment the description, etc., gave rise to an original interview technique which I have termed the ‘Explicitation interview’ (Vermersch, 1994; 2008). The education of researchers, students, human relations professionals, and philosophers, led quite naturally to the methodical construction of this interview and of the modes of its transmission in the form of one-week seminars. But, despite its effectiveness in research and in intervention modes such as the analysis of errors in education, or the analysis of practice of professionals, it was difficult for me to understand why this approach worked. What were the theoretical bases which could have introduced intelligibility, a modelling of what was at work?

What I will set out in this article, after having published it in stages over the last fifteen years or so, mainly in France in the review *Expliciter* (www.expliciter.fr), describes this modelling. It has involved looking back at the history of introspection, to understand why there were so many criticisms, and so many rejections and taboos, about the first-person viewpoint. This is what I had outlined in my article in *JCS* ten years ago (Vermersch, 1999) and in the book written jointly with N. Depraz and F. Varela (Depraz *et al.*, 2003), showing that there were serious questions amongst all these criticisms, and others which were purely ideological and specific to a cultural and historic setting, but none of them represented an insurmountable criticism. Furthermore, the few authors who have taken a second look at introspection — (Burloud, 1927b; Humphrey,

1951; Mandler & Mandler, 1964) — have not understood why it was so virulently attacked on such an ill-founded basis.

This article thus consists of theorisations which are mainly inspired by the phenomenology of Husserl,² proposing a model of intelligibility of what we know how to do in practice. And I will outline³ in a complementary way the various techniques used to apply these theories. Initially I will present the conditions which must be met to enable introspection to become a subject of research, both from the viewpoint of the authorisation a researcher or institution can give himself or itself to transcend the taboos attached to introspection, and which have gone through the 20th century completely unchanged, and from the viewpoint of the technical conditions to be met so as to enable the documentation of the introspection of introspection. I will then turn to the main theoretical points enabling an understanding of the possibility of introspection, and of how it can be related to practices assisting introspection.

Part One: Conditions Enabling the Study of Introspection

1. Social conditions for taking an interest in introspection

Why begin by looking again at data which are more social and more contingent, because they are historic, rather than phenomenological? We now know that sociological, institutional, ideological and sectarian conditions play an important role in the genesis, disappearance and refusal of research programmes. It would be easy to show this in

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- [2] Depending on viewpoints, one may designate the same act of seizing lived experiences ‘into view’, introspection (which is of course not the case of Husserl), ‘immanent perception’ by opposition to acts based on the mobilisation of the perceptive organs, ‘apperception’ to make use of the same opposition, and finally ‘reflection’, if we follow the translators of Husserl, to designate not an act of reflection in the sense of reflecting about an object of understanding, of reasoning, but an act mobilising a ‘reflective activity’, of carrying out the reflection, or if we take the term of Piaget of carrying out the ‘réfléchissement’ of the lived experience (Piaget & Coll, 1977). I must here clear up a possible misunderstanding about the relationship between phenomenology and introspection. The concept of introspection is radically rejected by Husserl, in that this involves for him a form of naturalisation, or an absence of the Husserlian founding gesture: ‘the transcendental reduction’. But if one suspends this viewpoint, it may be observed that the act of Husserlian ‘reflection’, the cognitive movement by which I turn towards what is appearing, is nothing but an introspection carried out under a horizon of specific presuppositions about the status of what is focused on. In this sense, as far as the actual practice of gathering information about one’s own experience is concerned, there are no major differences in acts between phenomenological ‘reflection’ and psycho-phenomenological introspection.
- [3] Just a brief outline, in that these techniques have been thoroughly described elsewhere in my publications. The article by M. Maurel in this issue provides some examples with a commentary.

terms of the fate of each programme which focused on introspection at the start of the 20th century. But this would be the subject of another article. My intention here is to set out some institutional conditions which mean that an interest for introspection and, even more, interest for a description of introspection, have been combined.

1.1 Overcoming the first difficulties

The entire history of scientific introspection, since the start of the 20th century, has been littered with passionate and sectarian reactions, and by absolute prohibitions which although ill-founded prevented the practice of introspection. Initially, the idea of mobilising introspection as one of the essential methods for constructing scientific psychology was presented as obvious, from James onwards (James, 1901; 1890), up to the enthusiasm shown for the ‘systematic experimental introspection’ of Binet (Binet, 1922), the researchers of the Würzburg school (see Mandler & Mandler, 1964) and Titchener (Titchener, 1912; 1913). So the first obstacle to be overcome when one takes an interest in introspection is these taboos, to stop believing such absurd ideas as ‘one cannot at once be in the street and on the balcony’. Or quite simply it is a matter of finding a research director, a laboratory or a university which agrees to take on board a research programme which includes the word ‘introspection’. Taking an interest in introspection means that taboos which are still powerful must be overcome.

But if this is to be done, there must first be a clear epistemic motivation. I began my article with a similar argument. The strongest support for paying attention to what the subject may be reflectively conscious of currently comes — paradoxically — from the neurosciences. Because as neurological data have become increasingly precise, the question has arisen as to how they can be given a semantic, and how can they be clearly linked to subjective experience. And how could this be done other than by the expression of the subject himself, which can only be based on an introspective act.

However, even once we have gone this far, a final difficulty has to be overcome, i.e. the failure of the first attempts. This was the result of a failure to understand that the ordered practice of introspection is no easy matter; it is rather like considering that one can draw a portrait simply because one has eyes with which to see. As F. Varela stressed, introspection is technical, and calls for a learning process and expert guidance. Having cognition, and having a capacity for reflective activity do not make you into a researcher who is competent in the use

of introspection. I hope that my article will throw light on to these points, by setting out the places in which the expertise is applied, bearing in mind that its acquisition will necessarily require practice.

1.2 Institutional conditions: the importance of the social and historic context.

To go beyond a naïve and uneducated use of introspection, and thus to enable it to become a research methodology, it seems to me that the minimum condition is first that it should be *effectively practised* by a community of researchers. This should take place over at least ten years or so, so that two or three successive research cycles (theses, publications, books) can begin to have cumulative effects, with each researcher having his own experience of introspection, and of guiding in an interview the introspection of other people. It must form part of research programmes, which must necessarily be accompanied by theoretical, methodological and epistemological courses about introspection, and also practical courses to acquire and perfect knowhow. All my arguments are in favour of the necessity of developing a genuine familiarity of use, so that progressively its function as a tool becomes a source of questioning, and can be detached until it becomes a subject of research. I do not believe that a single researcher on his own is capable of creating the conditions required for the development of this methodology, unless a research team is created. Historically, one might think that the great period of the conception of introspection as a means of research at the start of the 20th century should have provided an example of what I am suggesting. In fact, the three early 20th century research teams (the school of Würzburg in Germany, the Titchener laboratory in the United States, and Binet and his students in France), who set up a research programme founded on introspection, did not have the time before the disappearance of their programme, and before the effects of the First World War (1914–18) on academic life, to go far enough in the constitution of an expert community to develop a research programme on the introspection of introspection. All that emerged around the end of this period (1911) were remarks about the practice of guiding introspection. Several conditions were combined: researchers who were becoming expert practitioners, a widened international research community, several cycles of research realised (theses and publications), successively raising new questions, variations in practice, reflections on failures, etc. At this point in time, history intervened, and the two world wars consigned all this preparatory work to oblivion. Furthermore there

was the debate on ‘thought with or without images’, which was raised before researchers had the means to answer this question. The data gathered were too powerful for the period in question. I have surveyed the few survivors who published a little, between the two wars or much later in the 1950s, manuscripts which were prepared in the 1930s. But these were only isolated individuals, the social fabric of research needed to be entirely reconstructed, and introspection had a bad press at the time, to say the least! The Grex (Groupe de recherche sur l’explicitation) was probably one of the few places⁴ in Europe in which an expert community has been built up since 1988 (Maurel, 2008), and which after around 15 years of practice has turned towards the explicitation of explicitation. But it has only been able to do this, and overcome the taboos, by financing itself, in a sort of academic marginality, by accepting and valorising exploratory postures, even though several theses have been defended in their own specific university disciplinary framework (see also the article by M. Maurel in this issue).

2. Preliminary: how to gather information about introspection: V1, V2, V3.

To study introspection, it is necessary to first carry it out in practice, but also to practice it sufficiently to overcome the initial naïve mistakes, the first failures, and gradually to acquire expertise. Why should it be any different than for any profession, any activity in games, sport, music, etc. When this is the case, we therefore have a basic structure: a lived experience V1 which is taken as a reference and will form the subject of an introspective description after the fact. This time of introspection is therefore another lived experience, distinct from the first one, and which we will denote as V2. This is not a current introspection, but an introspection based on evocation, or the ‘secondary remembrance’⁵ of V1. These two initial phases enable the description and study of V1. This is the purpose of the use of an

- [4] Mention may also be made of the work in France of De La Garanderie — a student of Burloud, familiar with Binet — but who has above all developed teaching applications, and who has not carried out or supervised research work. See De la Garanderie (1989) for example.
- [5] Husserl uses the term ‘secondary remembrance’ to designate a clear intuitive donation of past lived experience. Intuitive is the opposite of signitive, and designates a donation as almost-relived, which I have referred to myself as ‘evocation’. Husserl clearly distinguished between a ‘signitive’ mode (conceptual, based on knowledge and on discourse) and an ‘intuitive’ mode based on a perceptive donation, a donation of something relived for the memory, of imagination, in short all the modes of accessing an object as direct immediacy. I can ‘know’ the route which I took to come to the office, this is the signitive mode of recollection; or I can ‘relive’ or rediscover the sensoriality of the route of the

introspective method, to bring about the description of a reference lived experience which has been invoked or provoked, and which is the research subject.

For example, I want to study the memorisation of scores by professional pianists. I ask a pianist to evoke a moment when he was involved in the activity of memorisation. The reference lived experience V1 is the moment when he learns a score by heart. In a second stage, V2, I carry out an explicitation interview, and I question him about how he went about memorising his score. I therefore propose that he should describe this past lived experience, that is introspect himself.

There are thus two separate stages: V1 the reference lived experience which is the experience studied, and V2, a lived experience whose main activity is to carry out a 'secondary remembrance' of V1 and its introspective description. If we only have these two stages, the introspection implemented in V2 has the status of an instrument. The researcher's attention is not concentrated on the instrument, but on what the instrument focused on and produces. As this is done, over the years, we gradually accumulate information about the difficulties in implementing the 'introspection' instrument. The researcher is also a practitioner; he becomes expert in his practices, and like any practitioner, he gathers information from his practice. This is something one can note in the methodological remarks of the successive research projects of the Würzburg school, which multiply as the research programme is developed; the same is true in the successive publications of Titchener and its PhD students. By effective practice, we thus begin to create sediments of observations, remarks about the use of introspection, the variety of types of introspection, facilities, difficulties encountered by different subjects, the favourable or unfavourable effects of the various formats of questions. As time goes by, we obtain an 'enlightened practice', researchers who become expert practitioners of research interviews, all of which feeds into the conception of the teaching courses for students, and the guidance of their data collections for theses and papers.

The following stage took simple commitment to this expert practice further, to detach introspection from its use, and make it into a subject of reflection, and then a subject of research in its own right. One may have various research strategies, but one which seems essential is to gather information in first and second person about the practice of introspection, and thus to practice an *introspection of introspection*, a

morning, it is then a recollection based on the 'intuitive' mode. Intuitive does not therefore mean fuzzy, inspired, approximate, without explanation, but rather immediate, sensorially founded, alive.

description of acts of introspection. This theoretical possibility was clearly seen by Husserl (Husserl, 1989) (see §77, 78), but he did not consider the difficulties of implementing it. If one wishes to take as a research subject acts of introspection — how the subject experiences introspection when he practices it — thanks to introspection, it is necessary to study a new reference lived experience characterised by the fact that the practice of introspection is mobilised in it, as this is the subject of study. This is the case with lived experience V2. V2 thus becomes the reference lived experience of a new time of introspection, and thus of a new lived experience which we will denote as V3. V3 is a new lived experience, which is dedicated to the practice of introspection on the previous introspective lived experience V2.

To study introspection, we therefore have an initial level of research complication. It is necessary to first create a situation in which introspection is used, and then with the same subject create a second situation, a second stage distinct from the first one, in which the previous situation is focused on. The differences between V1, V2, and V3 are shown in the table below.

Table 1.

The different lived experiences V1, V2, V3. The first column describes the meaning of each of these lived experiences, the second the dominant activity of each of these lived experiences, and the third the type of purpose associated with them.

<i>The different lived experiences</i>	<i>The dominant activity of each person in these lived experiences</i>	<i>Purposes associated with these lived experiences</i>
V1, reference lived experience	The subject works on a piece of piano music on a particular occasion.	Purpose of musical education. No psycho-phenomenological research purposes.
V2 explicitation lived experience, in the context of an interview situation or self-explicitation situation.	Descriptive introspection of reference lived experience V1.	<i>Research purpose</i> on musical education (it is the content of V1 which is the subject of study).
V3 explicitation lived experience of <i>acts</i> mobilised in V2 (the content of V2, which is V1, is not longer what is focused on).	Introspection of mental acts implemented in the practice of introspection during V2.	<i>Research purpose</i> on introspective acts (it is the V2 acts which are the subjects of study). Psycho-phenomenological purposes.

The principle is apparently simple, and it would seem that it just needed to be put into practice. But great difficulties then arise, which we had not anticipated, and which typically produce pragmatic knowledge derived from actual practice. In our first ‘introspection of introspection’ attempts (for example, we tried to describe the act of evocation by which we access the past using a specific recollection mode), we were simply unable to achieve our aim. It took several attempts, with varying degrees of success, to enable an understanding of the difficulties encountered and define ways of overcoming them. It is in fact quite delicate for several reasons. The first and most immediate is continuing to question V1. This is because the introspective activity developed in V2 is based on a strong presentification by evocation of V1, and so as soon as we draw the attention of the subject to the time V2 when he was introspecting, what is given first in the remembrance of V2 and is imposed with force, is the *content* of his activity: and thus the remembrance of V1. As a result, immediately the subject starts to re-describe V1, rather than the lived experience V2 and particularly *the acts* which he has used to focus on V1, to seize it, to hold it in place, to describe it. These acts do not belong to lived experience V1; they are acts of lived experience V2 which characterise the practice of introspection (Vermersch, 2006c). This leads to the second difficulty: it is necessary to discriminate in the focusing and in the descriptive expression the content of the reference lived experience V1 and the mobilised acts. We come up here against the fundamental distinction made by Husserl between noemata (phenomena) and noesis (act of consciousness). It is a matter of describing the noeses, the acts, and this is only accessible via the phenomenological reduction of the noematic content. Once a clear distinction has been drawn between these two aspects, it is also necessary in practice that the questions should skilfully lead towards a description of the noeses and towards stage V2; it is very easy to slide towards V1 and the content. But I will not go into detail here about the questioning techniques.

Numerous aspects of introspection can then be studied; there is an immense research programme to be devised and implemented in the framework of a research community. In the following, I will focus on a certain number of points which are in my view essential for an understanding of the implementation of retrospective introspection for research purposes.

Part Two: Theoretical and Methodological Elements Characterising Introspection

This part of my article is intended to set out in detail the theoretical and methodological bases which have emerged from all our observations resulting from the practice of introspection in the context of the explicitation interview, and more recently of self-explicitation. This overview presentation has been devised a posteriori in order to give it conceptual legibility.⁶ The description of introspective access to the past lived experience has been conceived gradually not as a memory performance, but first of all as a question of becoming conscious and of perceptive activity. I intend to deal with this second part from three different and complementary viewpoints: based on Husserl, the phenomenological theories of modes of consciousness (1) and passive memory (2), which are intended to account for behaviour which is deliberately solicited in the mobilisation of introspection for research; the systematisation of universal categories of description of all lived experience (3) to enable an understanding of how one can deliberately organise perception activities in secondary remembrance.

I will now provide a brief description of these three points, before looking at them again in detail.

- The first viewpoint is based on a theory of modes of consciousness inspired by Husserl's phenomenology and characterises introspection first of all as a question of becoming conscious, i.e. as based on the necessity of a transition from a pre-reflective consciousness of the lived experience to a reflective consciousness of the same lived experience. This transition is an operation of 'reflection'. This reflection is both a conscientisation and a recollection. Taking into account the necessity of prior reflection provides many practical indications about the techniques it is necessary to mobilise in order to *facilitate* the act of introspection as well as *not to prevent it*, as many techniques aim to stop the subject from performing acts which effectively block authentic introspection or divert him away from authentic introspection.
- The second viewpoint is also based on a phenomenological theoretical framework, that of the specific memory of the lived

[6] I would specify at this point that it is not written in the order of the genesis, but in the order of intelligibility, which turns out to be quite different, if only because I was completely unaware of Husserl, at the same time as I was producing a systematisation of the explicitation interview technique.

experience as a field of information which is normally partly available *unbeknownst to the subject*. I am borrowing from Husserl his conception of ‘passive memory’ (Husserl, 1925/2001), which is based on the fact that unbeknownst to me and continuously many items of information are memorised inside me, which he terms ‘retention’. And that in a complementary way — in line with theories of involuntary memory or concrete memory (Gusdorf, 1951) — these retentions do not disappear, and can be awakened, either involuntarily by an associative shock, or deliberately by an ‘awakening intention’. The hypothesis of passive memory and its awakening opens up the possibility of obtaining an extraordinary quantity of details in recollections, particularly when the person is skilfully interviewed.

- The third is based on a methodology of description of lived experience, and with this aim amplifies introspection as a perceptive activity (or ‘shifting of ones’ view inside the past lived experience’ as Husserl writes) stressing the practical importance of mastering descriptive categories which are generic for all lived experience, and the knowledge of technical aspects of the description of lived experience.

For the purposes of this article I will leave aside the very precise techniques developed for conducting an interview, which are essential if it is to be successful, such as: (1) taking into account the various facets of creating, maintaining and ensuring vigilance about the ethical and relational dimension (cf. the concept of ‘communication contract’ in the sense specific to the explicitation interview) (Vermersch, 1994; 2008, chap 6), and (2) mastering the prompts by clarifying the perlocutory effects sought by the interviewer — concerning which some indications are provided in this issue in the articles by Maryse Maurel for the explicitation interview, and by Jane Mathison and Paul Tosey for NLP.⁷

1. Introspection as becoming aware of prereflective lived experience.

If introspection was only a question of memory, just the fact of remembering what one experienced which was conscious, there would be no research question. Spontaneous practice shows that it

[7] In addition to the book ‘L’entretien d’explicitation’, the following may also be consulted: (Vermersch, 2006a; Vermersch, 2007a; Vermersch et al., 2003).

does not function so simply, and that the immediate recollection of one's own lived experience is poor, anecdotal, and soon exhausted. What I am aiming for first of all is to show that there is a fundamental gap between what the subject believes he knows about his lived experience and what he could in fact produce, particularly when he is guided by introspection/explicitation aid techniques. Phenomenologically, this question comes from the basic empirical observation, repeated in all reasonably thorough explicitation interviews, that often the informer finds more past information than he expects, and that he is often amazed to discover things (acts, taking of information, states, details) that he recognises having experienced, but surprise him because they only come back to him after the fact. It is as though, at the moment when he was experiencing them, he did not know them, and that at the moment he was about to talk about them, he did not know in advance that he would have something to say about these particular points, and that as a result he seems to be discovering it as he names it, while recognising it without hesitation as his own lived experience!

To make this empirical constatation intelligible, the theory of modes of consciousness developed by Husserl struck me as very useful. Instead of the dichotomy — which is habitual in cognitive psychology — of one conscious mode and one unconscious mode, if one follows Husserl one must take a trichotomy into account. A distinction is thus drawn between the following three modes:

- (a) An active unconscious mode (predonation field or phenomenological unconscious), whose existence does not presuppose a censorship mechanism, which could be termed the 'normal' or 'usual' unconscious, and which can only be studied by inference through a third-person viewpoint;
- (b) A lived consciousness mode, which could be termed direct consciousness, consciousness in action, or to mark its difference with the following level, pre-reflective, irreflective or non-reflective consciousness;⁸

[8] The terms of 'consciousness in action' or 'direct consciousness' come primarily from the work of Piaget (Piaget, 1974). He showed in the study of the ontogenesis of intelligence, a stage when the child takes into account a property in his actions, but does not know how to name it; there is thus consciousness in action, which will change at the next stage. I have also used the concept of 'direct consciousness' as an equivalent. The terms: unreflective, pre-reflective and non-reflective come from phenomenology; they are all characterised by a private denomination focusing on the fact that this consciousness is not, or is not yet reflected. I will treat them as synonymous.

- (c) A reflective consciousness mode — see the detailed presentation of Husserl's texts in Vermersch (2000 #2686}.

Table 2.

Modes of consciousness and transition between modes based on the work of Husserl.

(1) <i>Phenomenological unconscious</i>	Predonation field. Before any intentional seizing, a place of sedimentation of retentions.
Transition I	<i>Intentional seizing</i> , transition to direct consciousness. Donation.
(2) <i>Consciousness in action</i>	Direct, pre-reflective consciousness.
Transition II	<i>Reflection</i> , first reflective seizing, transition to reflective consciousness.
(3) <i>Reflective consciousness</i>	Product of 'reflection' in the Husserlian sense: 'to take into view'
Transition(s) III	'Phenomenological' seizing of consciousness.

In this article I will not attempt to repeat the detailed analysis made by Husserl, which can be found clearly set out for example in (Husserl, 1989, § 77 and 78). I would like to draw conclusions for the concept of pre-reflective consciousness. There is the simple and very enlightening idea that lived experiences are largely simply lived, without at the same time being 'viewed'. Husserl establishes this for current lived experiences, i.e. while I am thinking of something, I can direct my 'view' (pay attention, apprehend, perceive) for example towards my internal state and become aware of the fact that I am happy. I become aware that I am currently happy, but also, that I *was happy before* I turned towards my emotional state, and this is true for many things which happen in my lived experience. He also establishes it for lived experiences which are just over, seized in the primary recollection or retention, and also for lived experiences which are given later in the recollection memory which he calls 'secondary remembrance'. This constitutes one of the foundations of the phenomenological method, and indeed is a prerequisite for its possibility, that 'reflection' (which I may just as well term introspection) enables the perception of lived experiences, and particularly of lived experiences which were not 'viewed', and which can be viewed after the fact. In other words, there normally exists a large proportion of aspects of our lived experience which are lived in the mode of non-reflective consciousness. In fact this does not mean that I am 'unconscious' of what I am doing or

perceiving, but that I am fully conscious of it without at the same time being conscious of the way in which I do it. I perceive or I do x, without necessarily keeping in the view of my consciousness the way in which I organise my perceptive activity. Husserl establishes this point by simply inviting the reader to experience for himself, and to discover the lived evidence of the fact that I am not reflectively conscious of everything which happened in my lived experiences, and that I can by modifying my attitude turn towards a particular aspect of my lived experience and discover that it is present, that it was already there. This is proof that previously I was not present in it, I did not have reflective consciousness of it. As far as the practice of introspection is concerned, there are here many difficulties which must be clarified and overcome in practice. The first is that what relates to pre-reflective lived experience is normally invisible to me, and the second is that what is invisible to me (of which I am not reflectively conscious) I think I cannot recall and therefore that I am unable to recall (cf. the example of 'Claire and her keys' in the article by M. Maurel in this issue).

The absence of spontaneous phenomenality in the pre-reflective mode of consciousness and its consequences.

Pre-reflective consciousness by definition is normally invisible in the present moment, as if it were visible it would not be pre-reflective; being visible, being 'taken into view' as Husserl writes repeatedly and metaphorically, is a matter of reflective consciousness. Reflective consciousness appears through the modification which takes place when I take now into my view something which was not yet in my view, but was already in my lived experience. Husserl clearly makes a difference between 'living x' (consciousness in action, pre-reflective consciousness) and 'viewing x' (reflective consciousness). Pre-reflective lived experience can only be seized a posteriori in a form of memory, either just afterwards, or in a form of recollection which Husserl calls 'secondary remembrance', which is a contact with the past lived experience, in other words a form of relived experience emphasising an intuitive donation (a matter of immanent perception and not of knowledge) and which I for my part have termed 'evocation'. This is the most serious problem with the practice of introspection: practising introspection is going into myself to find information which is largely invisible until I have brought it into reflective consciousness. The pre-reflective dimension of lived experiences *only appears*, as Husserl stresses, *by contrast with the modification of*

consciousness which consists of directing one's view towards the lived experience itself, and thus to 'become conscious' of it or bring it into 'reflective consciousness'. In this transition the unreflective character of lived experience clearly emerges, and by contrast the modification which consists of the transition into the reflective consciousness mode. This seizing into view already supposes a learning process, an exit from the natural attitude, it requires the construction of a new attitude: that of the phenomenological witness.

Reflection and recollection in secondary remembrance.

Another difficulty of retrospective introspection stems from a risk of misinterpretation. Not only is the pre-reflected dimension not spontaneously apparent, but moreover its non-appearance *may be wrongly attributed* to a memory problem. This confusion will be interpreted as the fact that the memory is defective, since what first appears to me is the fact that I cannot remember or can remember only a little about my lived experience. For when I am in recollection mode, what is given back most easily and immediately is mainly that which in the past lived experience was already reflectively conscious. But if pre-reflective consciousness does exist, its characteristic for me is that I do not know that it was existing, since it was pre-reflective, and as a consequence I do not know what I was directly conscious of in the pre-reflective mode. In other words, 'I do not know what I do however know'. But everything suggests to me that what I cannot remember, I do not remember and that it is lost. There is a discouraging confusion for the informer (even if he is trained) between the lack of an immediate recollection, 'I can no longer remember' and the lack of 'reflection'. For there to be recollection, it is necessary to carry out the reflection of the lived experience which has not yet been reflected. But this can be thought just as well in reverse: for there to be a transition to reflective consciousness, one of the ways is to 'view' the past lived experience. Intuitive seizing, authentic contact with the lived experience - whether it is in the immediate or later past - then becomes the privileged act producing the transition to reflective consciousness, it is by this means that is carried out the reflection of what has been lived in the mode of consciousness in action. And this is what makes the quality of authenticity of this contact so important for the production of faithful introspection. Of course, globally we remain in the setting of a recollection. Wherever a fundamental differentiation is to be made, it is in the recollection mode which is sought, i.e. a form of recollection which brings back the lived experience in its sensitive,

intuitive dimension, in other words the affective or concrete memory as it was called at the start of the 20th century (Gusdorf, 1951). It is essential to re-establish contact with the lived experience, not as knowledge of the lived experience, but as an intuitive donation of the lived experience, in which reflection can then be carried out in a way which is commensurate with what has been memorised.

Two confusions are therefore possible: to believe that a lived experience was unconscious when in fact it was only pre-reflective, and to believe that there are no recollections when in fact there is only a temporary absence of reflection.

It is useful to point out some practical consequences about ways of questioning, so that we achieve coherence with the pre-reflective consciousness model and with accessing it through secondary remembrance. What is important is to elicit secondary remembrance to produce a transition to reflective consciousness and thus the possibility of a verbalisation. Each prompt has perlocutory effects (Vermersch, 2007; 2008a; Vermersch *et al.*, 2003) which modify the cognitive acts of the subject and his directions of attention. Thus all the questions in which the subject is asked to *explain* what he has done, or to give the *reasons* for it, will have the effect of preventing him from contacting his lived experience intuitively, while making him seize his lived experience as past *knowledge*, as an object for reasoning. *In fact reflection and reasoning are two mutually incompatible acts, in that it is very difficult to mobilise them both at the same time!* The practice of retrospective introspection is not so much a question of memory as primarily a question of presence to the past, a stance which gives primacy to the process of becoming aware of the pre-reflective dimension of the past. It is the authenticity of the intuitive contact with the past lived experience which will enable the ‘letting come’ of the information contained in this past, which I do not have the reflective consciousness to possess. This model thus gives primacy to a mode of relation to the past which I have named ‘evocation’ in the context of the explicitation interview, and to a mode of describing which sets out from this quality of relationship to the past, which I have termed ‘an embodied discourse position’.

To sum up the first point, the consequences of the model of consciousness modes throw light on the mine of potential information opened up by accessing the pre-reflective dimension of lived experience. In the practice of introspection, this means giving special importance to the act of secondary remembrance as the way which enables reflection. Secondary remembrance does not consist in an effort of memory, but in letting something emerge during the evocation of a

singular past lived experience. As a result, one of the major difficulties is created by the fact that the subject makes 'efforts' to remember, while one of the technical bases is to solicit an effortless memory, a letting come. What is at stake is authenticity, clarity, and fidelity to the intuitive donation of the past lived experience.

Epistemic coherence: the only lived experience is in one lived moment.

To access a lived experience, even a past one, and thus to create the fundamental condition for an authentic introspection of an intuitive donation of the lived experience, it is essential to focus on a specified situation and moment, as no lived experience exists in general. Relating to a 'lived experience in general' is not having a lived experience but having a thought about a class of lived experiences. It is undeniable that one can easily identify classes of lived experiences, which are the repetitions of the same action in the same circumstances, such as making coffee in the morning, taking the same route, carrying out the same professional gestures, etc. But relating to a class of lived experiences, to a generality, or to a time period which is too large and exceeds the unfolding of an action, does not mean giving oneself intuitively a lived experience, but having a thought relating to this class of lived experiences. Instead of a contact, we have an overview of a generality. Without an intuitive donation it becomes impossible to access the pre-reflective content inscribed in each lived moment; without this donation the subject will produce a 'signitive' discourse about generalities, invariants common to these actions. This opens the door for the expression of his naïve theories, i.e. what the subject believes he must do. It is more of a position consisting of giving a lesson or a lecture, and thus enunciating what one knows (or thinks one knows) already about what one does. This will not produce introspective information about what the informer does really when he is in action, and particularly what he does in the pre-reflective consciousness mode, which is always more than what he thinks he knows about what he does! This requirement is thus based on epistemic coherence; describing one's lived experience is describing a lived moment, a singular moment which is circumscribed and real (which I have in fact lived), because if not it is not a description of a lived experience. If the informer is not in authentic contact with a lived moment, he can say things, and even things which will interest all the disciplines which focus on the study of representations for example, but he does not inform us and does not

inform himself about what he has experienced and of which he is not reflectively conscious.

The epistemic coherence of the practice of guided introspection is to lead the informer into the mode in which he can apprehend his lived experience, and describe it as a lived moment, with what was already reflected in the moment, and what comes to 'reflection' in secondary remembrance.

2. Theory of 'passivity'

In my view the idea of pre-reflective consciousness is in itself revolutionary for the cognitive sciences; taking account of pre-reflective lived experience greatly broadens the field of information available for research, and clarifies the format of prompts appropriate for introspective explicitation. It emphasizes a specific act: intuitive donation, the fact of taking into view that which had only been experienced, for the past lived experience it is then a matter of evocation or recollection. This is a theory which couples together consciousness and memory from the viewpoint of the transition to reflective consciousness. But the theories of memory of Husserl (Husserl, 1925/2001) and Vermersch (Vermersch, 2004; 2006b) offer on the one hand another extension in what it is possible to recollect through his theory of permanent 'passive memory' or retention, and on the other hand hypotheses relating to the possibility of deliberately awakening these retentions by 'awakening intentions'.

Passive memorisation or retention

Another apparently simple phenomenological idea is that of permanent passive memorisation of the lived experience: what Husserl calls 'retention' or 'primary recollection'. The psychology of memory has lately come to study implicit memory or incidental learning, or in another paradigm autobiographical memory, but it has taken little interest in the obvious fact that at each moment of our lives we 'memorise' many elements of our lived experience without having any intention of doing so. Alzheimer's disease shows us what happens when this is not the case.

Tomorrow I will still remember the place in which I sat down in the room, people who were next to me or opposite me, what I was wearing, or what the weather was like, without me at any moment getting down to the task consisting of learning about the place where I sat down, etc. However, this is information which will remain available, without me knowing that I have it inside me, that it has been memorised inside me.

The whole of our life is surrounded by information which is acquired continuously in an involuntary, passive way. This information remains available depending on its usefulness, or if not it disappears from consciousness, but not from memory. We have here several ideas: the first is that of retention, as a permanent passive memorisation of elements of my lived experience; the second is that as the content of my lived experience is to some extent pre-reflective, and this is of course the case of retentions which are continuously acquired, I will only know it when I recognise it by its reflection. Its memorisation, if it has taken place, is in a way doubly unknown to me! I do not know it in the sense of not having reflective consciousness of it, but furthermore I do not know what has been memorised inside me. One can thus understand one of the main difficulties of retrospective introspection, which is quite discouraging for anyone attempting it alone: not only do I have the impression that I do not remember, but in any case, it appears to me with near-certainty (a false near-certainty) that nothing is available to be recollected. The resulting conclusion is that it does not work, and that it is impossible to carry out research by this method! When in fact one has 'simply' to create the conditions which enable the reflection of the lived experience.

What we have here is a powerful theory about the fact that what is available to recollection is far more important than what the subject believes he knows, because of passive memorisation and its pre-reflective nature. A second complementary hypothesis is that all these retentions are linked, interwoven and connected by resonances over distances, and associations of all kinds. And that each moment recalled in the evocation mode takes into view everything that is linked to it and can be seized provided that the view is shifted inside what is given. For this intuitive donation elicited by evocation will open up possibilities provided by the continuous interweaving of all the components of the lived experience. This means that each recollected lived element can give rise to and/or be the object of the placing into relationships with everything which is linked to it, by simply contiguity or by remote resonance. These possibilities of attachment are based on all the relational modes between elements belonging to the same lived moment, and they are innumerable; furthermore, they do not need to be memorised separately to open up the possibility of 'looking at them' in secondary remembrance. The practical question is then no longer recollecting, but discerning in what has already been recollected everything which is attached to it, and whose description may be relevant.

The field of what can come back into the memory is infinitely larger and more detailed than has been shown by the paradigms of memory study since Ebbinghaus. Wanting to check what is recognised or recollected out of a defined mnemonic material is ignoring everything that the subject can remember of the lived experience of having been exposed to this material. Of course in doing so, one cannot control in advance the span of what can be recalled, as what could form the object of a recollection can only be determined a posteriori. (Ancillotti & Morel, 1994).

Technically, this leads to questions which modify the direction of attention of the subject on the basis of what he has already grasped in the evocation, for example by prompts such as: ‘and what happens just before’ and ‘what else are you paying attention to at this moment’, etc.

Awakening of retentions: Empty focusing. Awakening intention.

In his theory of retention, Husserl conceives that retention ‘gradually subsides’, i.e. that it becomes less and less active, until it reaches the ‘degree zero of activity’. This degree zero *is not a disappearance*, but a ‘non-activity’, just as immobility is not death, but the degree zero of movement. What is important is that their non-disappearance is accompanied by the possibility of being reawakened, and thus gaining access to reflective consciousness, and thus to the possibility of being verbalised. We know that these retentions will come back involuntarily through sensorial association, or resonance, as in the effect of Proust’s famous ‘madeleine dipped in tea’. The drawback is that in this case, they will only be awakened by chance and are thus not available at will. But the sensorial association effect may be deliberately sought, as well shown by the techniques of the Actor’s studio (Strasberg, 1969) based on concrete memory. Husserl calls the medium of awakening ‘a bridge to the past’, an impression which awakens retention and gives back intuitive contact with the corresponding lived experience.

There then arises the technical question of possible aid, deliberate solicitation of the awakening of retentions linked to a singular lived moment. At least three techniques can be used to elicit this awakening of retentions which are relevant to the scope of the introspection:

- The first consists of simply guiding the person towards focusing on a singular lived experience rather than remaining on a general discourse, which is a necessary condition for evoking lived experience, as we saw earlier;

- The second deliberately uses an indirect perlocutory effect by inducing the evocation act thanks to a request which cannot be answered without relating intuitively to the past lived experience.
- The third mobilises an ‘empty focusing’ supported by an awakening intention, and thus an act projected towards something one is certain exists (I have experienced it), but which is not apparent to me, as though I did not remember it.

The first technique consists of guiding the informer towards a thematic focusing circumscribed by a singular moment of his lived experience. This means hearing in his discourse whether he is talking in a general way, and after a reformulation of what he has expressed, proposing to him, with his agreement, to let come back a moment in which what he wants to talk about actually took place. And if there are several, he should be tactfully encouraged to choose one of the lived experiences, and even more specifically ‘one moment’ in this singular lived experience, for example: ‘by what he began with’, ‘the moment which particularly interests him’, ‘an important moment for him’, etc. It should be understood that, in response to a generalising discourse, the mere fact of requesting ‘an example’, ‘an occasion when that happened’, or ‘the last time it happened’, already has the effect of channelling the attentional theme towards a focused field, and thus encouraging intuitive contact with the past lived experience. At the same time, the researcher observes the verbal and non-verbal apparition of the signs demonstrating the presence of an intuitive contact and thus the mobilisation of the act of secondary remembrance. If he does not identify them, he intervenes by using other techniques.

In fact, the second technique is a response to the fact that the researcher detects that the informer is not performing the act of secondary remembrance. Can one intervene? Can one help him perform the act thanks to appropriate prompts? The difficulty is that mobilising secondary remembrance is basically involuntary until one has become well practised, it cannot therefore be simply directly ‘ordered’ as such. On the other hand, it is possible to induce it by formulating questions that the subject can only answer by moving into the evocation position, and thus secondary remembrance. This can be done relatively easily if one asks a question such that 1/ the subject does not immediately know the answer, and 2/ to provide the answer, if he agrees to, he cannot base his answer on acquired conceptual knowledge, but must inform himself at the source, i.e. in his own lived

experience. Thus if you ask him: 'How were you dressed on that day?', or 'At what point in the room were you at that moment?', this information has never been learned, but has probably been memorised. If the informer agrees to reply, he will spontaneously carry out the interior gesture of coming back into contact with the corresponding lived experience, where the possible answer is situated. He will carry out involuntarily and effectively the interior gesture of evoking and placing himself back in the situation in which he can discover elements of answers by apprehending them in secondary remembrance. But this technique assumes that one has already been focused on a singular situation in the course of the interview. If this is not the case, and if the person has difficulty in putting himself back in the situation, it is then possible to mobilise the awakening properties of retentions by 'empty focusing'.

The third technique is based on the possibility of awakening retentions which are relevant to the introspection targeted. It is based on a phenomenological idea: the possibility of 'empty focusing'. I can ask an informer to 'let come back the last time when he did x'. When I give this prompt, I propose to the subject to focus on something which is not yet appearing, but which we are sure exists because he must have experienced 'the last time he did x'. The attention is thus provisionally guided towards a target, which is supposed to exist, but which is not appearing, which leads to the idea of a provisional 'vacuum'. If we now concentrate on the idea of 'focusing', we enter the associative model of passive memory, and of the dynamic of the transition from the predonation field (phenomenological unconscious) to intentional seizing (transition to consciousness, at least pre-reflective) (Husserl, 1975). The hypothesis is that all this retention-related material can be mobilised by resonances and similarities, in short that these retentions and their interrelations have a form of sensitivity to everything which corresponds to them. Thus in the example of Proust, the taste of the present 'madeleine' awakens the same taste in the past, and brings with it the lived experiences which were attached to it, or in other words produces secondary remembrance. This example shows the classical case studied by the psychologists of the time (Gusdorf, 1951), in which the trigger occurs by chance. On the other hand it is possible to try to trigger such an awakening, by launching an intention. We have here a type of act to which early 20th century psychologists were attentive, 'the intellectual sentiment' (Vermersch, 1998) of which good descriptions may be found in Burloud (Burloud, 1927a). This act is characterised by the fact that I can launch it, intend it, and it unfolds without me having any grip or control on its execution, while

obtaining a result which is relevant to the intention. Here, what one is trying to mobilise in the informer, is an intention whose purpose is to awaken retentions linked to a particular past lived experience. This may be used to focus on a situation or a specific moment in a situation, but also absent information. For example, I may ask myself ‘What happened just before?’ when what was just before was not being given.

The contributions of Husserl’s phenomenology of memory are manifold; the idea of retention considerably widens the potential field of what can be recalled from my lived experience. But as retention is always retention of lived experience, this also strongly emphasises the very specific nature of lived experience as an object of recall, as a subjective anchoring. Finally, the contribution of Husserl suggests and founds practical ways of working on retrospective introspection, of making it possible, of overcoming subjective difficulties relating to inadequate prompts or efforts. There are indeed as many things to do to help the subject stop from preventing himself from producing introspective data as there are things to do to elicit from him an amplification of the data.

One final point we must consider is not directly related to phenomenology, although the work done over a ten year period with Natalie Depraz and a group of researchers about the descriptive practice of Husserl has shown us technically admirable examples. If introspection is indeed a perception in the evocation of a past lived experience, then like any perception its fecundity and effectiveness will be commensurate with the categories which guide this perceptive activity.

3. Methodological conditions for to the description of all lived experiences

Schematically, it will be agreed that one can only describe what one knows how to recognise, what one has descriptive categories for. But if we were satisfied by this assertion, this would limit us for ever to what is ‘already known’. We also need to be able to conceive of the appearance of something ‘new’. In fact every description as well as every speech act may be inventive and creative in so far as the emergence of new sense is not a process which is under control. In the practice of the explicitation interview, the one who masters categories

for the description of lived experience (and thus in structure⁹) is the researcher, for his informer usually only has naïve categories, which have in most cases not been subjected to in-depth conceptualisation, or expert categories which are strictly linked to the content of his activity. However, the interviewee remains the informer, and it is from him that the researcher will learn and discover things which he did not know, which he could not imagine. However the fact of guiding him in structure will also make the informer discover descriptive spaces which he would not spontaneously have ventured into.

I propose to draw a distinction between two sets of descriptive categories: categories which are specific to a subject of research, and generic categories which are appropriate for all descriptions of lived experience.

Categories which are specific to a subject of study

These categories constitute the specific theoretical expertise of the researcher, and the purpose of his research. For each new subject of research, they must be invented and discerned; the first descriptions, the first questionings, are a matter of trial and error. It may be the aim of an initial research, beginning a new programme, to discover what are the stages, properties, and variants of the realisation of a material or intellectual task, of the consciousness of an internal state, of an egoic property.

Practice shows that — after a first gathering of data based on the presuppositions which initiated the research — the first stage of analysis of verbalisations reveals descriptive traits of the lived experience which had not been imagined at the outset. This results in the need to start again the interview and the description, and also to invent new concepts, and modify theoretical needs. It is the aftermath of the first gatherings which is the time for the descriptive and theoretical invention. These are the moments which best demonstrate the role of the expertise of a professional researcher, through his experience in analysing the data, in allowing himself to be overwhelmed by the unexpected, as well as through the potential field of theoretical knowledge that he masters, and which enables him to subsume verbalisations into abstract categories. It is here also — if the object of study is not related

[9] Guiding ‘in structure’ signifies privately, not inducing content in the formulation of the question; positively, designating a possible place for new information, naming a possible container. For example, by asking questions without content, such as ‘and there, what were you paying attention to?’, or ‘and just before that, what were you doing?’. This is inductive of a moment or a theme, but does not contain any suggestion about what it contains. ‘What were you paying attention to?’ opens up to the whole realm of possibilities in terms of sensorial channels and contents.

to an excessively specialised experience, as may be the case of leisure or professional ‘micro-worlds’ (for example learning scores by heart in the case of professional pianists, or practising movement play in rugby) — that self-explicitation is invaluable in that it can combine in the same subject an expert informer and an expert analyst, while in the second-person it would be necessary to find again the informer and question him again.

As far as these ‘specific categories’ are concerned, being an expert in introspection and introspective guidance is not enough if they are not mastered. I mean that expertise in the practice of introspection is a necessary but not sufficient condition for producing research. For example, Francisco Varela was a trained biologist and was expert in the experience of Buddhist meditation (which requires a specific form of introspection). When he began to describe how he would get his bearings in analysing a geometrical figure (a pretext task) or in describing an experience of listening to a sound, he was relatively ill-equipped¹⁰. I am not saying this as a criticism of Francisco, but for the value of this example, as because of his meditative experience, I could suspect that even without being trained in the explicitation interview, he had a good degree of introspective expertise. And clearly he did. But this expertise, developed in connection with a particular type of experience, Buddhist meditation, was not preparatory to its immediate application to another type of experience. If he had been a trained psychologist, he would probably have been familiar with the description of problem-solving behaviour. On the other hand, for Francisco, it was clear that his introspective skills enabled him to adapt very rapidly, depending on the thematic indications suggested. This is not an isolated example, I relate it both as a friendly sign and as something exemplary because it is so unexpected. I have had the same experience of being ill-equipped, and others have been like me, in the context of the Grex, each time we have approached experiences which we had never yet studied (evocation, attention, modes of addressing, prompts effects, empty focusing, etc.). Although we were a group of co-researchers who were expert in interviews and in introspection, to acquire this expertise on a new specific subject, it was necessary first to discover, create, and invent the descriptive thematisation specific to this new subject of study.

Introspective expertise, or the expertise of an interviewer, does not give someone universal thematic expertise. To be effective with ‘new’

[10] I am referring to ‘Ateliers de pratique phénoménologique’ (‘Practical phenomenology workshops’) which were organised by three of us — Natalie Depraz, Francisco Varela and myself — over a period of 5 years in Paris.

subjects of research, it is essential to construct the interaction between the generic competence specific to mastering the explicitation instrument and the specialised competence given by the study of a new subject. On the other hand, upstream of expert knowledge of a field, there is a generic introspective expertise which enables one to easily get one's bearings; it is based on universal descriptive categories of the description of a 'lived experience'. This may seem a little contradictory, but I will explain further under the next heading.

Universal descriptive categories for the description of all lived experiences

Unlike perception which is related to objects whose appearance varies indefinitely, introspection is always fundamentally related to the same object: lived experience. Whatever the type of lived experience, its originality, its particularity, its character (rare or common), in all cases it is a 'lived experience'. In fact all lived experience has *the same basic structure*, a knowledge of which can provide guidance, and into which are inserted the more specific categories which we have just indicated.

What are these universal categories? I would suggest that there are mainly two which are specific to the object 'lived experience', and a third which is specific to the expert intent by which all descriptions are organised.

- The first is based on the fact that all lived experience is inscribed in temporality, all lived experience is a process, and describing a process can (or must) always consist of the description of all the stages of the process. This makes it possible in real time, and at a later stage in the analysis, to recognize what is not said, what is lacking (in the structure).
- The second takes into account the general components of the description of all lived experience, on the basis of the fact that all subjectivity will have cognitive, sensorial, thymic, corporeal and egoic aspects, in whatever way you wish to make this division as a matter of principle in order to remain coherent with your theoretical research framework.
- Finally, the third takes into account that (1) there exists an indefinite number of descriptive viewpoints relating to the same lived experience, and (2) all descriptions can be carried out according to various degrees of 'granularity', each one indicating properties which are invisible at other levels of fragmentation. Every

description must be carried out at a degree of detail which is useful, relevant and elucidatory.

Let us reconsider these three points:

The descriptive basis of the structure of all lived experience: temporality.

All lived experience can/must be described in accordance with its temporal structure, as its basis. All lived experience is a process whose primary universal property is that it unfolds over time and whose seizing must be related to temporality. Several cases are possible: serial structures, i.e. one moment after the previous moment, one act after the previous act; but also synchronous structures, i.e. acts or states which unfold over the same time in a more or less complex way like overlapping tiles (one act started before another and continues at the same time as another, or ends after another which was taking place at the same time), and in some cases also durations, envelopes (like curves of sound, variations of intensity, expressive nuances), and tempos.

This does not mean that we will be shut inside a linear representation of time as a model for the intelligibility for all lived experience; this would be far too rigid and restrictive, and indeed false. Temporal, serial linearity is the basis of descriptive structure, and there is no other such basis, but it is not the basis of the structure of the analysis and interpretation of what is described. Cycles, repetitions, transpositions, and hidden non-linear correspondences will appear commensurate with the competence of the researcher. To better understand the meaning of this 'non-linearity', let us consider an analogy in the field of writing music, which is also intended to represent in a temporarily linear way the unfolding of a piece of music.

A musical score describes in a strictly linear way what must be played, note after note, and part by part for synchronous scores¹¹. But musical analysis will know how to distinguish all sorts of non-linear events, transposed themes, quotations, canons, tonal correspondences, rhythmic shifts, etc. The linearity of the temporal dimension is a guide to knowing whether the score (for us the description of a lived experience) is complete, coherent, consistent, with a start, an end and an intelligible process which links them at the level of events. In the same way as a score could not be written in a non-linear way, to be used as a guide to its reproduction by a musician who discovers it for the first time.

[11] This example based on a musical score is developed in Vermersch (2007b), pp 28–29.

Reciprocally, in the course of the interview or self-explicitation, everything which is described must be able to be marked in the succession of stages of the process, so as the researcher perceives its relative situation, but also the degree of completeness of the description, as well as its lacunae, contradictions and impossibilities. Listening to the other person in an interview with the use of these markers enables the identification of many items of implicit information in real time and in structure (i.e. without knowing the answer to the question which one considers necessary to reveal what is implicit).

For example, one person describes what comes after a change of state for which he tries to understand how it was set up, insisting on the affective and reactional dimension of the new state. Through listening, it emerges immediately that what is to be questioned and described is situated both before the change, in order to hope to access what caused it, and at the very moment of the change, to better apprehend what the interior transformation consists of.

This does not mean either than in the course of an interview or self-explicitation the description must be accomplished while strictly following the time scale, for example from the start to the finish, but that the verbatim must make it possible to *reconstitute* the 'time line', as the police say in referring to a crime. And the guiding of the questioning must be carried out with the consciousness of the completeness or non-completeness of the stages of the process, of the lived experience.

The possible descriptive layers of all lived experience.

Any description can always be carried out from different perspectives, there is never a single description, and this means that the same moment of lived experience can form the subject of a multiplicity of complementary and successive descriptions (cf. the concept of 'layers of lived experiences' (Vermersch, 2006c). This is similar in a way to a map, which relates to the same region or country, but which may be a road map, an economic map, a geological map, a hydrological map, a botanical map, and so on. In the same way, a description of lived experience may choose different viewpoints: following acts which may be either cognitive or material; taking into account the body in its postures, tensions and gestures; taking an interest in thymic values, and valences; looking for the egoic dimensions related to beliefs, values and identity. And even if one only chooses one of these layers which are always present in all lived experience, for example the cognition layer, there is a multiplicity of possible co-occurring activities; as I

perceive visually, at the same time I hear, I feel corporally, I smell or I taste something else. These large categories which designate layers of lived experience are intended only to make the interviewer or describer become aware of which layer of lived experience he is giving precedence to, and to question the legitimacy of not taking into account the other layers with regard to the purpose in mind. Technically, each viewpoint requires a further description of the same moment of lived experience. It turns out to be very difficult, or impossible, to carry out a description simultaneously on several layers at once.

Granularity of the description and fragmentation/expansion

Not only must the change of viewpoint be taken into account depending on the layers focused on, but also the change in the granularity of the description. Any description can be repeated by fragmenting the temporal stages into finer elements. Then at a moment when temporality is stopped, the description of each element may be expanded through a description of its qualities. Anything described — whether it is acts, perceptions, affects, corporality - inside a stage can always be fragmented, i.e. in terms of descriptive verbalisation can always be subjected to a descriptive expansion, as when the scale is changed with a geographical map. Each parcel of land, each property of that parcel, may or may not be represented, depending on whether the map is large scale or small scale. There is not *one* description of an object, but as many possible descriptions as there are points of view and scales or granularities that one decides to adopt.

But furthermore, it is the place to show that what we are concerned with is not only recollecting the past, but also questioning it according to the information which is sought. Mastery of descriptive categories is as important in successful introspection as having a memory in a good condition. Mastering generic categories for the description of lived experience makes it possible, from the same mnemonic base, to go much further in the description, for the single reason that the information is sought; if not, it would not be ‘forgotten’, unknown, but simply not processed. It is not a matter of describing an extraordinarily precise and complete memory, but of taking into account an ability to *retrieve* pre-reflective information.

Part Three: Conclusions

1. questions of validation and limits of subjective seizing.

In seminars and colloquia doubts and critical questions about introspective verbalisation data, whether or not they are taken from explicitation interviews, are always concerned with the same issues: Can one trust what the subject says? Is what he says true? Can it be proven? How can we be sure that what he says is true? That he is accurately describing what really happened? Is he not making it up? Can we validate what he says? The questions are essentially sceptical.¹² In this conclusion I would like to show that most of these general questions are based on erroneous presuppositions.

But beforehand, it is first necessary to reconnoitre the terrain from which we are starting out when we study subjectivity, i.e. the viewpoint of the subject, what he can describe according to him. Subjectivity is radically and constitutively 'imperfect' in relation to a determination for objectification, a project to grasp a scientifically based truth. There is no point in dreaming that subjectivity could one day become 'perfect' and prove directly useful for research. I am not stating this in order to draw sceptical conclusions which would lead to an a priori denial of the possibility of research taking subjectivity into account, but to consider in a realistic way the difficulties which must be borne in mind. We have to begin from this native imperfection and learn to work with it, because it is, specifically, what makes it 'subjectivity'. Subjectivity is what is specific to the subject, and relativises everything he may say, because it is 'according to him' that he is describing. So, subjectivity is often not very sensitive, in the sense of not very discriminating, because the quality of attention is fluctuating, and may be very mechanical; conversely, it may be far too sensitive and thus be so invaded that it overestimates or ignores many aspects. It is not very faithful, it mixes the lived moments, presents them in a confused way, and bundles them together. We know that memory may be defective in many ways (Schacter, 1997): it may have gaps, it may be infiltrated by presuppositions, indeed we know that the subject may project his naïve theories and filter what he has lived,

[12] I term a 'sceptical' viewpoint, a viewpoint which is based on a negative a priori prejudice, based on a belief (I don't believe it). Husserl had clearly pointed out that such a view destroys itself, i.e. easily leads to a performative contradiction. In other words, can one trust memory? If I suppose that a priori it cannot be trusted, I cannot even understand how I remember the question I have just formulated or heard! Or all the forms of the statement 'The subject is not reliable'. Yes, what about the value of what you say? Is it reliable? In which case, the subject is reliable. Or is it not reliable? In which case the question you raise has no value.

reconstructing according to what he understands, and producing a retrodiction (Piaget & Inhelder, 1968); the subject's recollection is limited because he cannot describe (recognise) what he does not know or does not understand, etc. There are no mechanical processes to resolve this problem from the outset: the subject will never be a tape recorder or a video recorder which records everything accessible to them. The picture is bleak, and may lead to the temptation to do without what the subject says, *but in no science has one ever abandoned studying a field on the grounds that it was difficult to grasp!* For more than a century, the reaction of rejecting introspection in favour of behavioural data has merely avoided the question of understanding the experience of the subject as he lives it, and the work of methodological improvement enabling the taking into account of these native imperfections.

But the analysis of these imperfections, and the importance attached to them, are based first of all on the presupposition that it is the informer who provides us with the truth, immediately, simply because it is he who is speaking. But truth, in the sense of adequation to reality¹³, can only be established indirectly, after the time of the event, by an expert third party (researcher, judge, historian). There is a confusion between an everyday, conversational meaning of the criterion of truth, and the use of the term in connection with scientific research. In the latter context, it is not the informer who establishes the truth, but the expert third party, and he is subject to the same requirements in finding evidence which supports his conclusions as any other researcher. These are the requirements of reason, based on the critical analysis of the data gathered. I thus place the establishment of truth in a second stage.

I therefore propose to draw a distinction between two approaches to the truth:

The first is to wait for it, or to ask for it; this is what I would call the ethical dimension of truth. It is an injunction on the enunciator (witness, informer) to express himself while attempting to tell the truth, whether in relation to external factual data or states and thoughts. This is explicitly what justice does when it asks the witness to tell 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'.

The second dimension of the truth is epistemic. It is not a request made to the person who is bearing witness, but a request made to an

[13] This idea of 'adequation to what is real' to characterise the criterion of epistemic truth does not presuppose in my mind the postulation of a 'reality' of which one must discover the properties, but rather that all knowledge founded in reason gives a hold on the world through its pragmatic adequation.

expert third party to establish the truth, on the basis of what the witness or the informer has said. 'Telling the truth' in this epistemic sense means producing an utterance of which one can ensure in a more or less gradual way that it is adequate to what it is referring to. But this epistemic value is never in the order of immediacy, it is in justice, as it is in history or in scientific research, the indirect product of applying a method of providing evidence whose requirements with regard to reason are the same for everyone.

I am fully aware that by drawing a distinction between the ethical dimension of the requirement of truth and the epistemic dimension of the necessarily indirect establishment of truth, I am shaking up our representations. It is like emerging from a comfortable cocoon of certainties about what or what is not the truth, and the naïve legitimacy of expecting it immediately. The conflicts between enunciation and the establishment of the truth only appear clearly when one explores the criteria of acceptability of a testimony; in everyday life, expecting someone to be truthful, having confidence that what he says is the truth, seems to be a minimum requirement, and can fortunately often be ensured. But in research, in justice, in history, this cannot be the case.

However, in the gathering stage, the researcher may take a critical view of the quality of verbalisations (see also the article by M. Hendricks in this issue). He may both judge them because he has criteria which enable him to do so, and act to improve the quality of verbalisation produced. In this appraisal, what will dominate will relate to the authenticity of the verbalisations, i.e. 1/ the degree of clarity of the intuitive filling-in of the recollection, 2/ the accuracy of the verbal expression, and 3/ the fidelity of verbalisation to what appears in recollection. The more introspective verbalisations appear to be authentic, the more we will be able to establish the existence of what the subject is describing according to him. Existence is not truth, it is only 'his truth' i.e. 'subjective truth', but for research it is an important basis as it informs us about what appears to the subject, according to him. In these different research frameworks which take into account the first person viewpoint, authenticity is the criterion which enables the attribution of information value to the descriptions produced. Authenticity is not ersatz truth, but it is the criterion which establishes the descriptive value of the verbalisations produced. It should not be confused with sincerity. The criterion of authenticity forms the basis of the value of the data. If it is not recognised and mastered, the subsequent analysis will have little meaning in so far as it is founded on information which is not faithful to what appears to the subject. The

analysis must be able to base itself on this certainty of a translation which is as accurate and faithful as possible to what the subject effectively experienced according to him. It must be stressed that the criterion of authenticity is not a criterion related to the exactitude of what is described being adequate to what was experienced, but that it is related to the aperceptive act when it is related to a past lived experience; it relates to the accuracy with which what appears is put into words.

Obtaining this result only produces raw data, and from a research viewpoint a large proportion of the work remains to be done: constructing the temporal unfolding, understanding each of the events forming the lived experience, inventing new categories to precisely indicate the meaning of what is expressed, etc., i.e. conducting the whole analysis of the results right up to the conclusions and to their discussion.

2. In conclusion: introspection considered primarily as a perceptive act

For a long time, I considered retrospective introspection primarily as a question of recollection, related to the field of memory precisely because it is always a matter of relating to the past. But by working on the implications of the authenticity criterion and the importance of mastering descriptive categories, I have come to realise that introspection is a perceptive act, and that authenticity is primarily the appreciation of the quality of the perceptive act. Even if it is a perceptive act in the past lived experience. Once the condition has been met that access to this past lived experience is indeed lived experience, and thus a singular moment, and that the intuitive donation is sufficient in the evocation (first part of the authenticity criterion), the other theoretical elements can be considered as means to be taken into account to enlarge possible perceptions, and to deploy the perceptive possible. Accordingly:

The whole of the unreflected field¹⁴ is a kind of invitation to grasp that which is not yet in the reflected consciousness mode. This leads to the perception of an immense deposit of data, available in the subject

[14] I propose to use the term 'pre-reflective' only for consciousness in action, and to use the term 'unreflected' only to designate everything which is not reflected, i.e. not only that which has already been subjected to an intentional seizing and has become pre-reflective, but also that which falls under the heading of phenomenological unconscious, which Husserl calls the predonation field, and which has not yet been subjected to an intentional seizing although it is already active in 'passivity'.

unbeknownst to him, and whose access is merely subordinated to a mutation of consciousness, a hold towards reflective consciousness.

The theory of passive memory, retention, and its possible awakening, opens up another field of possibility, that of extending the types of data potentially available when we bring the process of becoming aware into play. So many pieces of information have been deposited in us at each moment in our lives!

Finally, the taking into account — which is just as operative and fundamental — of the generic descriptive categories of all lived experience gives rise to many elements to be described, provided that one is informed of the fact that they exist as sources of information, and that one directs one's view in the right direction. The expansion of the description of something which is already described is largely based on this possible abundance of categories, if it is mastered.

These points open up an immense range of possibilities which can be questioned, and described, and which of course will be revealed in an act of memory, but above all will be the product of a shift in view inside the secondary remembrance, based on the evocation.

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