

For a Phenomenological Psychology

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Research theme

Phenomenological consciousness, a methodology to help in clarifying the phenomenological psychiatry of cognitive acts, the history and methodology of introspection, the memorisation of scores with professional pianists.

Summary

Is it possible to reintroduce the first person point of view in psychology in a rigorous fashion? Can one lay out the two sides of psychology: the external, behavioural, public point of view and the subjective point of view - intimate, private but capable of being brought to consciousness and verbalised? I offer a few answers while emphasising that there has never been any decisive objections to introspection, that, with a view to the development of a global theory, in the last analysis, the phenomenological level imposes constraints upon the computational level. But in order to study the phenomenology of cognition, an epistemological break is needed, a break which allows us to discriminate between living one's experience and knowing it. In sum, I propose to develop phenomenological psychology both as an autonomous programme of research and as a domain which is complementary to existing programmes

Psychology has a two-sided research object: a behaviourist side which is public and which lends itself just as well to the constraints of the natural sciences and a private side which is subjective (to which the subject is the only one to have access in the experiential mode definitive of the first person point of view) a side which this discipline has for a century done everything possible to avoid addressing directly by trying to disqualify any direct approach of the introspective kind.

(Vermersch 1998). But this experiential dimension is coming back as a fundamental question in recent publications and to such an extent that it can be identified with the question of phenomenological consciousness. Moreover, this theme is presently undergoing a veritable editorial boom via innumerable colloquia and, more still, as the privileged point of contact for all those disciplines which make up the philosophy of mind: neurophysiology, philosophy, psychology, cognitive psychology, linguistics, psychiatry, artificial intelligence etc To the point where one might well ask whether what psychology rejected from its field is not going to make the fortune of other researchers less encumbered by fears about not being recognised as a true science, fears which have haunted psychology from its inception. In numerous recent publications on consciousness, authors stress the need for an examination of the area between the sub-personal or computational level and the phenomenological level (for example: Jackendoff 1987, Flanagan 1992, Mc Ginn 1991, Varela, Thompson, Rosch 1991, Chalmers 1996). They underline the importance of taking account of subjective experience and some of them emphasise the need to mobilise introspection (Pessoa 1998, Block 1995) and even ethics (Howes 1991, Varela 1996a). In short, a group of authors (with many differences) argues for a certain level of analysis to be taken into account, the level of what appears to the subject, therefore a phenomenological level and so oriented around a particular object of study arising typically at this level, namely, subjective experience and a methodology capable of gaining access to it, namely introspection, which designates globally both the reflecting gesture and the verbalised description of the reflected content (cf. Depraz, Varela, Vermersch). However, for the majority of authors, while their writing may carry a wealth of bibliographical material bearing on cognitive psychology, the neurosciences, clinical neuro physiology or the philosophy of mind, in connection with the phenomenological level, by contrast, one hardly finds any references at all and when introspection is appealed to one finds virtually nothing. All that is left is ready made thought. In addition, everything happens as if both the supporters and the opponents of the phenomenological level experienced no difficulty in citing an example drawn from their personal experience. At this time, and in connection with most of these publications, it is as if mobilising the phenomenological level of description posed no methodological problem.

Is phenomenological access so simple then? Is it so obvious that it stands in no need of any regulated procedure? No work of critical elaboration of the data? One might object that few references are cited because few have been published. This objection is fair, but could one not conclude therefrom that it has become a matter of urgency to develop an empirical, phenomenological psychology? (i.e., one based upon an amassing of data in contrast to philosophical phenomenology or philosophical psychology). Without spending time on objections of principle which set out to prove a priori that it is meaningless or impossible to even attempt to concretely develop a rigorous methodology with a view to producing new data and assessing, by scientific practise, what real limits one comes up against with regard to what pertains to consciousness and with regard to the possibility of validating it. Just such an attempt has been made, from 1995 on, in Paris, by a research group organised around a seminar devoted to practical phenomenology but a large part of the methodology had already been generated by

the development of the clarificatory interview *entretien d'explicitation* ??? (Vermersch 1994) and the founding of GREX (Groupe de recherche sur l'explicitation) in 1991.

The aim of this article is to determine what the discipline which I propose to call psychophenomenology might be like. As opposed to the dominant psychology of the day, psychophenomenology reintroduces the first and second person point of view as a resource which complements the exploitation of traces and of observable data characterising the third person point of view. But in so doing it immediately comes up against the rejection of this type of methodology centred on innumerable condemnations of introspection. Here I will quickly run through again (Vermersch 1998) the misunderstandings and false accusations which seemed to disqualify the first person approach. Then I will take up the critical question of the structural relation between the computational level (inaccessible to subjective experience) and the phenomenological level (which the subject can experience). Finally, I will try to show in what way the systematic/methodological taking into account of subjective experience presupposes an epistemological break, a need to break with the naive familiarity of the relation with our experience and the passage to a genuine reflecting activity.

The Rejection of Introspection and the First Person Point of View

Psychology got set up at the end of the 19th century with a conflict between, on the one hand, the evident possibility of introspection as a means of access to data (Wundt 1874, James 1890, Binet 1903) and, on the other, the requirements of experimental psychologists who, at the same time, tried to constitute a psychology on the model of the natural sciences. One attempt at a reconciliation assumed the form of inserting the methodology of introspection into the constraints of experimental programmes - the 'Würzburg school' in Germany under the direction of Külpe (Burloud 1927, Humphrey 1951, Mandler & Mandler 1964) the 'Cornell school' in the United States inspired by Titchener (Titchener 1909, 1912, 1913) and, preceding both of them by a few years, the 'Paris school' represented essentially by the work of Binet and his pupil Henry (Binet 1903). The greater part of the published work mentions the word 'experimental' in its title (for example: Binet 1903, Watt 1905, Ryle 1909, Titchener 1909, Okabe 1910) attesting thereby to their determination to situate their thinking both in the first person point of view and in that of a scientific psychology synonymous with an experimental set-up and with quantification. Elsewhere I have presented the details of this history (Vermersch 1998).

But this reconciliation was never accepted and criticism, taking as its target the very possibility of introspection, never ceased. Should one even bother to criticise the critique of introspection? Throughout the two centuries in which the list of critical objections never ceased to accumulate have there ever been any which carried conviction (cf. the assessment of opinions throughout the history of psychology: Dumas 1924, Bakan 1954, Guillaume 1942, Radford 1974, Howes 1991)? After all, had a single one of these proved well founded, the rest would not have been necessary!

In the first place this discussion is useless. Useless to mount justifications, to show the

irrelevance of these criticism, because in principle no one of them would ever carry conviction to the extent that the form of these criticisms is that of trying to establish a negative result: impossibility, uselessness, impracticability, suspicion directed toward the act, or the object. And trying to prove the absence or the impossibility of something is an ill-founded epistemological enterprise (except in the formal sciences). If one can show that a claim can be rejected with reference to a counter-example, it is, on the other hand, difficult, in the empirical domain, to establish with certainty that it would never be possible to find counter examples. Only the ability to master the totality of the available possibilities would make it possible to demonstrate the impossibility of a certain type of result. If one had to make a list of what each period claimed to be a priori impossible and which was realised in the following generation, one would be obliged to enumerate most of the technical inventions of our time. Beginning with the so-called 'absurdity' of making something 'heavier than air' fly. The strategy aimed at proving the impossibility of something is a waste of time. It seems that as a general rule it is much more productive to investigate 'under what conditions?', 'within what limits'? Unless the argument underlying the attempt at a proof of impossibility is, in the end, sponsored by motives which are not scientific.

However, from a second point of view, this review of the critical arguments allows us to bring to light the properties of the methodology which we need and towards which our efforts are aimed. In fact, even if the criticisms are not sufficiently conclusive to condemn introspection, they do point up questions which deserve thought. Let us sum up the main arguments. Introspection is impossible, in principle, since it presupposes a duplication of the subject - which is impossible (Compte 1830); introspection only produces contradictory results on which no one can reach agreement, so it should not be used because it is non-scientific (general reaction to the controversy on the theme of the relation between thought and mental image); introspection is based on descriptions, therefore on verbal results which can teach us nothing since they are the product of 'social training' (Pieron 1927); introspection is directed towards private, non observable objects with regard to which it is impossible to use a scientific method based upon the agreement of observers, so it has to be abandoned; introspection is, at best, only able to get at that which the subject can be conscious of, but numerous psychological investigations show that the subject is not, and can not be, conscious of basic psychological facts and laws, so it is useless appealing to it; introspection exists but it is completely mistaken regarding what it yields, so the claims it produces are of no scientific interest (Skinner 1974); introspection does not exist, what is taken for introspection being only the expression of naive theories of the subject regarding psychological causality, pointless getting interested in this, it isn't introspection (Nesbitt & Wilson 1977); the information generated by introspection is worthless, it has no fundamental utility, one can only disregard it (Boring 1953); the proof that there is no such thing as introspection - assuming that it is the world of an 'internal sense' - is that, in contrast to the other senses, this internal sense could yield no phenomenology (Lyons 1986)

Despite the diversity of their content, all these criticisms adopt the same approach of trying to prove the existence, or impossibility, of something. But in addition to these fully

worked out criticisms, there exists a 'ready-made thinking' which may be summed up in the declaration that: 'it is well known that it is not scientific' or even, at the hands of certain recent authors, 'introspection is notorious for being unscientific'. With certain psychologists the word 'introspection' releases phobic reactions, that is, compulsive and irrational reactions.

I won't attempt to take up these criticisms one by one in this article having already done this elsewhere (Vermersch 1998). What is important is that no one of them is decisive (Howes 1991) and that research can not proceed on the basis of ill founded prohibitions. Once all the criticism have been evoked it only remains to practise introspection, to integrate first person data in a global programme including also neuro-physiological and behavioural elements, no one of these elements being sufficient in itself. What is lamentable is that this prohibition has, above all, had the effect of slowing down the methodological improvement of the techniques of access to subjective experience (cf. Vermersch 1991, 1994, 1998 and Depraz, Varela, Vermersch 1998) as well as the techniques of verbalisation (clarificatory interviews), of descriptions and of analyses of material devoted to this type of protocol. But clearly, the largely multi-disciplinary culture which has accompanied the recent constitution of the 'cognitive sciences' is much less encumbered by taboos and prohibitions. After having been highly speculative, publications on consciousness are more and more frequently oriented in their conclusions towards the need for a methodology of first or second person access. For how could the phenomenological level be tackled without first gathering data at the level of that which the subject can be conscious of, and which he knows how to express.

So I conclude that, in principle, there are no longer any methodological objections to gathering and utilising first person data, which certainly still allows room for all kinds of critiques relative to the meaning, the interest and the validity of this type of data for each particular programme of research. But there is nothing new here. First person data enjoy no special apriori privilege, validity or truth - no more than other types of data.

Establishing Structural Relations Between the Sub-personal and the Phenomenological Level

Even if the methodological objections have been dismissed along these lines, there are those who would immediately object that the discussion is without interest. For, since what is important takes place at a non conscious level, this method yields nothing to be studied. This point can be more broadly formulated by posing the problem in terms of contemporary cognitive science (Jackendoff 1987, Varela et Al., 1993, Dennet 1991, Gallagher 1997) as the establishing of structural relations between the computational, or still sub-personal, level and the level of what can be brought to consciousness, or the phenomenological level.

I will tackle this matter in three points: 1/ The fact that there are laws at the computational level does not mean that the phenomenological level is without interest nor that it is non scientific; on the contrary, it defines a completely independent level of analysis; 2/ this level makes it possible to grasp our cognitive functioning from the point of view of the user and it is in

this sense especially congruent with the work of practitioners; 3/ in the context of a general theory of cognition, the phenomenological level constrains the computational level, which must also be able to account for the subjective aspects of cognition and so of phenomenological consciousness. This means that research at the phenomenological level is unavoidable.

The Pre-eminence of the Sub-personal: A Fallacious Argument

The leading argument is the following. It is useless taking into account the first person point of view of the subject because, in any case, the silly fool has no idea what is really going on. At the limit, one might conceive of, and accept, that a sub-discipline of scientific psychology take as its research object, naive theories, spontaneous beliefs about cognitive functioning. In which case we would be talking about research into the psychology of common sense, of folk psychology (after all, it is legitimate to describe anything that exists in the natural world).

The mistake in the reasoning is the following: since there are psychological laws which can only be established by experimenting with research objects which the subject can not be directly conscious of, it is useless working with what the subject is conscious of. But, from the fact that experimental psychology produces data and explanations which are not accessible from a first person point of view (which is true), one can not deduce the fact that the data derived from the first person point of view is false or without interest. All that this proves is that certain objects of research do not lend themselves to phenomenological methodology but it does not prove that only that of which the subject is not conscious can be the object of scientific study.

This fallacious reasoning is accompanied by the tendency to suppose that only that whose truth has been established from the standpoint of third person psychology has been established from a point of view which is valid. The ideology of the natural sciences leads us to believe that the more one goes in the direction of elementary (therefore sub-personal) mechanisms the more one engages in true science - which disqualifies a priori the descriptive levels. However, psychology has two sides, each inseparable from, and irreducible to, the other. If the human subject belongs to natural science to the extent that he has a body, a publicly observable behaviour and so offers the possibility of being analysed from the outside as an object, a point of view which justifies the third person approach, this same subject is also the user of his own cognition. He evaluates his experience, makes discriminations within his world, and this second point of view can only be adopted across what the subject knows or can say about it, which invokes a point of view which is irreducibly first or second person.

The Irreducibility of the Phenomenological Level and its Conformity to Practise

Up to now, one might have thought that I would be content to simply argue the case for not forgetting the phenomenological level. But the taking into account of this level goes much further, since one can regard this level as uncoupled from the sub-personal level. That is, this level exhibits its own proper efficacy which is not taken account of at the computational level, even if one is justified in thinking that everything phenomenological has to be consistent with the sub-personal level (Jackendoff 1987). To change examples, everything to do with a computer

programme is translatable in terms of electronic events and is necessarily compatible with this causal level which ensures its physical realisation. But the logical and functional coherence of the programme belongs to another level which the first does not take account of. This line of thinking can be displaced still further. What a user does at the key-board and with his mouse has its own coherence which is both consistent in its realisation with the programming tools and at the same time distinct from them. As a general rule, procedural knowledge is uncoupled from declarative knowledge of those laws which nevertheless make its correct execution possible (Vermersch 1971, 1972, 1994). As a result, it has to be the object of a descriptive analysis in its own right. This procedural level can easily appear secondary, in the sense of being minor with regard to the study of fundamental aspects, a little as if, by comparison with the 'fundamental' understanding of the functioning of the electronic tube on your television, the know-how corresponding to the correct use of the remote control was so secondary that it was not even worth talking about. And yet, this procedural knowledge exists and is indispensable to action. Inversely, declarative knowledge is insufficient for action, even totally inadequate, even if one can show (outside the time of action) that the declarative justifies and explains the efficacy of the action. Phenomenological knowledge, which is pre-reflective relative to cognitive functioning, might appear secondary or superficial by comparison with the fundamental laws of cognition; it is simply what we make use of to utilise our own cognition (and happily we don't have to wait for cognitive psychology to teach us what we have to do in order to know how to do it). In a certain sense the phenomenological level only touches the 'handle' of cognition. But try to use a tool without its handle! A subject who summons up a visual mental image puts into effect a practical competence as the user of his own cognition. This knowledge in act is generally pre-reflective, therefore, transparent to the one who puts it into practise. It is however possible to help the subject become conscious of it and to produce a descriptive verbalisation of it. The practical knowledge of what the subject 'does in his head' to summon up a mental image is not a computational theory belonging to this domain (nor its naive theory), but inversely this computational level says nothing about what has to be done to summon up a mental image nor what would have to be done to enable a subject who is unable to summon up visual imagery to attain this goal.

These remarks may help to understand why the level of phenomenological description is not only a programme of research but also exactly matches the level which is relevant for a number of practises. Whether we are talking about the field of education, of apprenticeship, of remedial training, of practical analysis, of coaching or of psycho-therapy, practitioners gather phenomenological information, think up exercises, techniques based on this type of data, because they make changes possible, in contrast to more fundamental data with regard to which it remains to be seen how they are to be integrated into the reality of behaviour. If experimental psychology has turned its back on the subjective dimension, in so doing it also turned its back on any applied psychology which uses this information and which invents techniques. The refusal to take into account the phenomenological level of analysis in research in psychology makes it possible to understand why, in spite of the undeniable abundance of scientifically rigorous results

there are so few which interest practitioners or even, which could be useful to them. To be sure, we know that research has the right and the duty to work at themes the utility of which is as yet unknown. But what is troubling is that what psychologists propose carries titles which look like fields of application: training themes, study of mental imagery, memory Consider M. Denis' first book (1979) which summed up all the research on mental imagery. A very well executed compilation covering some five hundred pages of true scientific research, totally or almost entirely useless from the standpoint of its interest for practitioners.

The Phenomenological Level Constrains the Sub-personal Level

I submit therefore that the phenomenological level is irreducible and that its relative autonomy justifies us in studying it. This is still a limited conclusion. What should by now be apparent is that the reversal of perspective needed for a global theory must also be capable of taking into account the phenomenological level.

Jackendoff (1987) seems to have been the first to have clearly posed the problem, a problem which was picked up again in detail by Varela et Al. (1987) in particular. If a distinction between the computational and the phenomenological level is introduced, over and beyond the duality of the relation mind-body, one finds a problem of the relation mind-mind. For if it has been established that cognitive functioning can only be grasped at the fundamentally non-conscious, computational level, it remains to be determined why our life as human subjects is led out in the mode of subjective experience. Either one sets this problems aside, and at the same time one sets aside everything that makes up the specificity of lived experience; but then this mildly schizoid 'solution' makes little sense save in the context of an experience of thought which helps to disclose what remains over when one has taken away what everyone finds evident. Or one tries to deal with the problem in question, which latter seems to me to be called for sooner or later; and then one finds: 1/ that the computational level has to be able to take account of every phenomenological distinction; 2/ so it becomes necessary to precisely define these distinctions and, at that point, not only does one have to take account of the phenomenological level but, in addition, it is both necessary and urgent to improve its methodology.

To sum up: up to now I have argued for the possibility and the necessity of working at the phenomenological level in three points: the sub-personal is not the only scientifically valid level of scientific investigation, the phenomenological level is irreducible and it also imposes constraints upon the computational level in the context of a global theory of cognitive functioning, one which includes phenomenological consciousness. It only remains to set up a regulated methodology capable of realising just such a programme of research. I won't attempt to present such a methodology in detail here (cf Varela et Al 1993, Vermersch 1994, Spraz, Varela Vermersch 1998) but will simply examine the major obstacle standing in its way

The Epistemological Break Between Living and Knowing One's Experience

It requires no special competence, no special effort from me, to live what derives from my

subjective experience. It is enough that I should be alive. But becoming conscious of it, providing a descriptive thematisation of it and, more fundamental still, thinking it through carefully, are neither spontaneous, nor immediate, nor direct, still less easy tasks! The contrast between the familiarity of the experience and the conditions of its investigation, which are no more familiar than theses directed toward any other object of research, readily induces confusion. As if the mere fact of having a body were sufficient to confer upon you the competence of a doctor! Take recent works in the philosophy of mind. The difficulty encountered in gaining access to subjective experience in a precise, refined and disciplined way is never taken into account. To conclude from this that most of them have not tried to, and do not actually, distinguish between living and knowing results in a confusion between the fact of thinking about experience and the fact of knowing it.

Many difficulties have to be overcome before one can gain access to one's experience and describe it.

Lived experience is not immediately accessible for it is largely implicit in the sense of pre-reflective

That is, it has not been made an object of consciousness and so still remains inaccessible to reflective consciousness. But one can only give verbal expression to what one is conscious of. Verbalisation requires in advance that one should be cognisant of what has been lived through. This state of affairs is often translated by replies of the kind: 'I don't know' or even by rationalisations deriving from the psychology of common sense.

The negative side of this state of affairs is that the phenomenological dimension is not so easy to know. It is not immediately available as a whole. The positive side is that there is a store of extraordinary data which has not been seen and therefore not exploited by research up to the present time. Most often, the spontaneous view of the psychologists is that either the information is available and therefore can be brought to consciousness. The subject can verbalise it if one asks him to do so with minimal instructions. Or else the information is not available. It is non-conscious or non-existent and the subject can not talk about it - in which case it is useless proceeding further. However, what makes its appearance with the notion of the pre-reflective is the domain of what can be rendered conscious: that is, information which is not actually conscious (through lack of awareness and not necessarily for reasons of censorship as in the Freudian model) but which can become so by means of a particular activity, and, as we shall see later on, of intersubjective mediation. This brings to light an important disequilibrium in the programme of research as between the study of non-conscious aspects (perception without awareness, learning techniques or implicit memory cf. Bornstein & Pittman 1992) and the absence of symmetrical programmes which would explore the limits of what a subject can bring to consciousness, as if this limit was already well known, unchangeable, the same for everyone!

What makes it possible to acquire knowledge of one's experience is a specifically 'reflecting' activity. This is often confused with a 'reflected' activity.

We know from all of Piaget's work (1937, 1974 a,b,c) on becoming conscious 'of' that it is

a valid and entirely independent compartment and that it is brought about essentially for reasons extrinsic to the subject, such as, for example, the failure of his action, gaps, momentary disequilibrium. If this compartment is to become deliberate (at least to the extent of creating sufficient conditions for it to become so) our understanding of the process of becoming conscious of something from a phenomenological standpoint, from the point of view of a cognitive activity which the subject can put into operation, has to be improved. In a certain sense, it is a question of applying psycho-phenomenological analysis to the realisation of the act that makes it possible (cf. Depraz, Varela, Vermersch in preparation). This procedure brings out the value of the distinction between reflected and reflecting activity. The first bears upon data which has already been brought to consciousness, it is a reflection 'upon' and is largely synonymous with the commonplace meaning of the term 'reflection': to take as object of thought other ideas (therefore already available as thoughts). The second, on the contrary, is a form of 'reflexivity', in Piaget's sense of that term (1977), that is, it implies a transition from the experience 'in act' to the alternative plane of a 'representation' of this experience. In advance of the possibility of experiencing it, it is a reflection 'upon'. Both activities are reflexive in the sense that they imply a change in the direction of attention, starting out from a 'natural' direction spontaneously oriented towards the external world and then turned towards the 'interior' world. However, the difference between them is founded in the fact that the reflecting activity is based upon a *gesture of accommodation* (Piaget 1975) which is relatively speaking more passive than that of the deliberate research proper to the reflective apprehension. Practising the reflecting activity is a delicate matter since it presupposes a form of suspension of the regime of habitual cognitive activity, an inhibition of the commitment towards others and the world, then a more or less extended delay, since the subject is envisaging something which still is not present and which is not given to him in the mode of access of an already reflected knowledge. So there is a first suspension (epoche) permitting the reflecting act to get started, then a second suspension, accompanied by an empty expectation in order that the fulfilment should function. And what makes its appearance may do so in accordance with a much slower temporalisation than that which presides over the cognitive task based on data which has already been brought to consciousness. In sum, this reflecting activity is relatively unfamiliar as a deliberate activity. Its practise demands either a long personal education (in the spirit of what the book by Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991 has clearly emphasised, cf. also Varela 1996) or an expert mediation in the sessions devoted to the work of clarification (Varela 1994). But this last solution, which offers the advantage of enabling us to work with whoever shows up whether or not they have been formed for the task, raises a new problem.

The reflecting activity requires a training and/or the help of an expert mediator.

One of the ways in which this reflecting activity can be developed is to make use of a mediator. But it has to be very well done if it is not to confer a specious priority upon the reflected activity, a priority which would stand in the way of the adoption of that interior posture proper to reflection. What creates the problem is that any naive mediation motivated by research

into intelligibility tries to be of help by invoking explanations which appeal precisely to reflection rather than to any reflecting activity. This is particularly so with all those forms of 'why' which are systematically employed to help in the process of verbalisation (cf. the negative examples which can be found in Nisbett & Wilson 1977). The clarificatory aids which I have developed are aimed at guiding the person towards this reflecting activity and, in order to do this, they are obliged to introduce a mediation which has to be learnt since it is counter intuitive. Mediation aims at letting the person evoke his own lived experience and in such a way that it can be expressed out of a language anchored in experience (Vermersch 1994).

Subjective experience is as complex as any other object of research.

But even when all these various obstacles have been taken care of there is one which still persists, and this because the very proximity of subjective experience militates against the possibility of *knowing it* through and through (cf Piaget 1950)! Bringing to conscious awareness presupposes strata of bringing to consciousness which have been well studied in Piaget's work and summed up in laws of bringing to conscious awareness. When an expert mediator induces the reflecting activity, what is accessible to subjective experience will be ordered, structured by the pre-eminence of certain aspects, at the cost of others which may remain invisible. For example, if one chooses to work at the subjective description of the practise of the act of evocation, what will appear to the subject in the first instance is the content of his evocation and not the act itself. In order that this latter should be envisaged and described, a reduction is needed. Which no subject is capable of performing alone. It is the same with other facets of subjective experience such as apperceptive postures (Andreas & Andreas 1991) or the sub-modalities (Bindler I Mac Donald 1988) and sensorial texture of the evocation (Vermersch 1993, Vermersch & Arbeau 1996). Just like any other reality, subjective experience includes an indefinite number of facets, following which one can specify innumerable, more or less directly evident properties. Access to these properties can only be obtained by an expert guidance which helps us to understand, in what appears to us, how this descriptive category is instantiated for us. Our subjective experience is as familiar to us as a landscape, but what a geologist, a geographer, a botanist etc. might be able to help us to recognise are all already there before our very eyes - and at the same time invisible to us. And the same holds for our intimate experience.

With regard to subjective experience, an epistemological break is needed.

Here it is also a matter of moving from a pre-scientific, naive realism to the development of scientific knowledge. This break passes by way of a counter-intuitive apprehension: access to, the description of, the analysis of subjective experience are the product of an expert procedure, a mediate, carefully developed procedure which can not be learnt easily and which has to be exercised and improved upon over several years.

I hope that this article will give rise to debate. In it, I try to go back over a number of received ideas. I also set off an alarm signal. What psychology sets aside will be studied by others, who will perhaps explain one day in what 'the structure of subjective experience' consists.

That would be a pity.

Alongside an autonomous programme of research designed to improve its methodology, phenomenological psychology will come into its own in association with programmes of research implying other data gathering domains, collaboration with research in neuro-physiology appearing particularly promising in this respect.

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