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## First/Second Person Science, Somatics, and Transpersonal Psychology

### The Crisis

As Europe was moving towards its apocalypse in the early part of the last century, Husserl prophesized the doom ahead in his prescient “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man.”<sup>1</sup> The Crisis in his description is the disproportion between successes in understanding the world of objects and how to manipulate them, and failures to understand human ills, particularly the cycles of self-destructive violence, with the kind of understanding that can issue in actual change of behaviors. That this disjunction still operates is painfully obvious. There are, for example, the stunning successes of the lunar and martian explorations, the CERN studies of elementary particles, and the genome projects, all funded by billions of dollars and garnering enormous public attention. By sharp contrast, small communities of highly skilled experts in the arena of subjectivity—psychotherapists, teachers of meditation, facilitators of effective discourse—make important strides in understanding how to navigate the often dark complexities of subjectivity, but with meagre funds and little public notice. In fact, the scale of the successes the empirical sciences and technologies buttresses the growing belief that the realm of subjectivity is increasingly transformed into the realm of objects, where soon the empirical sciences will solve the age-old problems that have so far eluded us. Husserl’s analysis of the Crisis, and the great body of his life’s work, offer a powerful tool to build a more effective understanding of the irreducible nature of subjectivity, and how to articulate its intricate dynamics in such a way as to cultivate strategies of change that are not based on hard-to-grasp assumptions.

Husserl argues that two factors impede a successful study of subjects as subjects:

- (1) Forgetfulness of the inquiring self that creates the object world, and
- (2) a commonplace assumption that the self is *geist*, some sort of spiritual entity, not subject to public discourse grounded not on dogma but on operational definitions.

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Husserl, “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man,” in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*,” trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 149-192.

Forgetfulness of the inquiring self. The brilliance of 3<sup>rd</sup> person science deliberately obscures the underlying life worlds of its creators. In their justifiably exciting rushes towards exploration scientists lose a sense of the impact of their own subjectivity on the results of their investigations—their passionate interests and courage in pursuing their inquiries about the object-world while suffering through relationships, dealing with depression and anxiety, hostility towards their peers, competing for grants, etc. The physicist Evelyn Fox Keller argues that there is a strange paradox in the long history of attempts—largely by male thinkers of a certain rung with societies—to craft a reliable science:

...the ideology of modern science, along with its undeniable success, carries within it its own form of projection: the projection of disinterest, of autonomy, of alienation. My argument is not simply that the dream of a completely objective science is in principle unrealizable, but that it contains precisely what it rejects: the vivid traces of a reflected self-image. The objectivist illusion reflects back an image of self as autonomous and objectified: an image of individuals unto themselves, severed from the outside world of other objects (animate as well as inanimate) and simultaneously from their own subjectivity. It is the investment in impersonality, the claim to have escaped the influence of desires, wishes, and beliefs—perhaps even more than the sense of actual accomplishment—that constitutes the special arrogance, even bravura, of modern man, and at the same time reveals his peculiar subjectivity.<sup>2</sup>

Husserl argues that a second block to a successful science of subjectivity is a commonplace assumption that the self is *geist*, some sort of spiritual entity, not subject to public inspection and operational definitions as are the worldly manifestations of self that can be objectified for public verification. In the century since Husserl wrote this critique, there have been some drastic changes that would suggest a revision in his wording. No longer do the human sciences believe they are pursuing a *geistlich* or ‘immaterial’ reality. The situation is even more difficult to sort out because the human sciences have moved ever closer to the physical sciences, with widespread assumptions that the old questions of meaning, life and death, cosmic consciousness, psychic phenomena, love, . . . , are in principle rapidly moving into the purview of the neurosciences and genomics. “Mind” “Self” “Soul” “Yearnings”: all await ever-more precise operational definitions so they can be examined quantitatively and mathematized. The realm for a truly human science which honors the irreducible reality of subjectivity is becoming as small as the room set aside on the earth for wild creatures. And yet, these amazing advances in understanding the human organism have paid back little on our investments in hoping for discoveries about how to change the vast self-destructive tendencies of individuals, communities, and nations.

### Husserl’s Solution

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<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gener and Science* (New Haven: Yale, 1985), p. 70.

Husserl envisioned a new model of science which would incorporate grounded studies of subjectivity into the realm of publicly accessible knowledge: subjectivity *as* subjectivity, not reduced to its objective manifestations. In his late writings he refers to a *somatology* that would integrate a rigorous first person science with studies of human beings as objects.<sup>3</sup>

How to do that? How would this be different from already established qualitative research methods? Or can we only have a science of those aspects of subjectivity that can be objectified? Many social scientists have unwittingly bought into the Cartesian/Galilean dualism that assumes two worlds of discourse: the empirical world of tangible public evidence and the “spiritual” realm belonging to poetry, religion, and the arts—a realm of private tastes and unquestionable beliefs.

Husserl’s answer to that question lies in his return to the original questions that gave rise to 3d person sciences: how is it possible to gain a communal knowledge of reality that is based on widely accessible evidence given these two basic hurdles:

- the radical individuality of perspective, and
- the inevitable tendency of humans towards self-deception out of fear, greed, and other dark forces.

Those questions are ancient. There is a curious difference in which they have been addressed in Asia and Europe.

For many centuries, the practitioners of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism have produced countless texts that chronicle the careful sorting through of experiential illusions by means of highly sophisticated practices of investigating the inner lifeworld. Spiritual teachers have spent lifetimes noticing the infinite ways that barriers between the self and the real arise in the dulling of the senses, the turning away of attention, the hardening of intricate regions of the body. The spiritual seeker is taught to recognize the radical individuality of his or her here-and-now, and learn not to mistake current ideas for there-or-then. At the same time, the practitioner learns how to track the arising of fears or clings that would hamper noticing what is in fact right here now.

By radical contrast, the Western paradigm, crafted by Descartes, Galileo, Harvey, Newton and others, turned towards mathematics and measuring devices to transcend individual bias. If there is a group of people in a room and each estimates how tall everyone else is, and how much they weigh, the answers are likely to vary from small increments to larger. It’s simple to resolve the disjunctions by way of scales. But if any one of the group is to assess the moods of others of the members, we are lost in a jungle of confusion.

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<sup>3</sup>*Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. Third Book. *Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences*. Trans. Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), ppar. 2, 3.

When one turns to these primal sources of what we now call “science”, it is obvious that both traditions are necessary for a full encounter with the real. And yet, until recently they have remained far apart in an often uneasy *détente*. At the stereotypical poles, empiricists dismiss the entire body of ancient wisdom traditions as anachronistic superstitions; and spiritual teachers dismiss the empiricists as mired in the merely ephemeral.

The entire corpus of Husserl’s life work can be read as attempts to develop a method which bridges the seemingly vast gaps between these two old worlds, crafting a method for articulating how to arrive at an unbiased contact with the real, but from the side of human subjects as subjects in such a way that the conclusions can be demonstrated to augment what is known by studies of humans as objects.

### 1. Individuality of Perspective

Husserl developed the technical notions of *attitude* and *constitution* to address the fundamental problem of how to arrive at shared knowledge when each of us inhabits a radically individual point of view.

*Attitude* in Husserl does not have the primarily mental definition in common usage, but more its street usage: “He’s got an attitude!” Like others of Husserl’s strategic notions, it has to be read as an embodied concept: the angle one has on the real, the peculiar stance one takes in approaching a particular reality, the peculiar characteristics of a particular place in time from which a person views the world as it appears from this completely unique situation. A careful delineation of the angles from which one actually experiences the world through sensing, moving, feeling, and touching opens the possibility for appreciating that many views are necessary in the communal movement towards an ever more complete understanding of the real. It is the careful detail of great novels and poetry about specific people and their idiosyncratic lives that enable countless readers, who are themselves so different, grasp a shared reality. We often discuss our friends and loved ones with others and find as we share our very individual experience of them that our understanding widens as we hear another very different description.

‘Constitution’ is Husserl’s technical term for a very specific process whereby we take on—either unconsciously or deliberately—a certain kind of attitude that in its adoption makes available a certain kind of reality, say a submolecular particle, an asteroid, the structure of the heart, or the meaning of grief. Without going through that process, the reality in question remains vague and obscure. This is a very muscular concept in the sense that it involves fitting oneself to peculiar kinds of angles on the real. To become a bench scientist, I have to shape my capacities for sensing into the patient attitudes that reveal what is under the microscope or the slides or the viewing planes of a massive telescope situated in some remote region of the world. This is not so easy. It takes crafting the organism over time, habituating it to the requirements of the laboratory just as much as what is required of a watchmaker or a computer programmer. It is the shaping of our characteristic adult bodies, with their unique shapes, preferences for

gesturing, patterns of excitation, capacities for noticing very special regions in the jungle of data.

In the decades since Husserl proposed this model of sorting out the foundations of a particular kind of research, there has been a blossoming of studies of how we are shaped in various ways—by culture, religion, work, economic class—within sensual and emotional matrices that underlie great systems of meaning.<sup>4</sup> Medicine is one area where it has been particularly crucial to utilize this model of investigation. For example, Shigehisa Kuriyama has illuminated the differences between classical models of medicine in Europe and China in ways that transcend the usual biases by looking at the experiential roots of each:

These studies of how the body was perceived from without, as an object, however, soon compel us to consider as well the problem of how the body was subjectively experienced, as it were, from within. . . .how differing ways of touching and seeing the body were bound up with different ways of *being* bodies.<sup>5</sup>

Unfolding, recounting in careful detail how the diagnostic practices of a Western physician differ from those of a classical Chinese physician show how what are created are shaped sensibilities of medical practitioners whose radical differences ground different notions of therapy and pathology. Their therapeutic models grow out of the soil of the bodies of their creators engaging with the very tangible, visible, auditory worlds.

This is a generous model, a polytheistic philosophy: in the case above, instead of carrying on the tiresome debate between ancient methods of healing and supposedly more sophisticated scientific modes, the model provides a way of understanding of how each enriches the other. The generosity flowers in the development of what Husserl calls the phenomenological attitude itself which is the sensibility that comes from long cultivation of one or another attitude to the point where a person realizes both that he or she can makes experiential adjustments to shift sensibilities to gain a new perspective on the reality at hand, with the implication that the more individual perspectives we can have on a particular *x* the better are our chances for reaching the really real.

A companion in the process of constitution is what Husserl calls *reduction*—the deliberate, sometimes long and arduous, process of threading through the irrelevant details of the experience to the point where the reality in question comes to the foreground in ever clearer details. To contrast reduction with its radically different usage in empirical science, it is helpful to think of this usage as a culinary metaphor. Juices from cooked meat or fruit are heated until all of the components unrelated to the exact juices one desires evaporate and we are left with the purified pleasure of only this utterly clear aroma. In the actual practice of phenomenology, the researcher is working to get at

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<sup>4</sup> Two important examples: Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1970. Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Trans. R. Nice. Boston: Harvard, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Shigehisa Kuriyama. *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*. New York: Zone, 1999. p. 13.

the luminous details of the reality in question: the pathology, the transcendental ecstasy, the difference between speaking English and Japanese. . .

## 2. Self-Deception and Bias

Even with the best will, it is necessary to pursue the craft of *constitution* and *reduction* in the pursuit of any reality. But darker forces are constantly intruding, obscuring the luminosity of the world to our searches: fear, clinging to comfortable ideas, greed, laziness. Judging from some of the weak-kneed textbooks on research methods, one might think that dealing with these forces were a matter of simple rationality, paying attention and listing all the preconceptions one might have about a particular topic and then putting them aside, as if one were just changing one's shirt. The problem is that the most distorting factors in pursuit of the real are not accessible to rational articulation, being entwined with feelings, emotions, muscular tensions, physiological hardenings: they manifest in a narrowing of the eyes, tightening of the jaw, squinching of the forehead, shortening the cycle of breathing as one is confronted with something unfamiliar, at odds with one's values, challenging the already formulated. Not surprising that seekers after non-dogmatic truth in every culture have turned to instruments of mathematics as the only way out of the overwhelming forces of self-deception.

Husserl's answer lies in his notion of bracketing. In his early career he articulated it more as a mental or literary device, putting "brackets" around an ineluctable drive to attach truth value to assumptions or theories about the subjects under investigation, leaving the description to stand out more clearly. But he came to understand that bracketing is an intense body process. It is not primarily mental but somatic, learning to inhibit the rush to comment, speculate, theorize; catching oneself defending one's opinion; finding oneself dazed by waves of emotional resistance. Long practice is required based on an increasing familiarity with the various regions of oneself where troubles arise. Getting to the phenomenological attitude is an intense process of transformation not simply of one's intellectual notions but of one's whole being, demanding sustained cultivation of attention, embodied flexibility, and courage. It is a buddhist-like transformation demanding a constant pulling of oneself back from drifting in an ethereal world of distraction and dissociation to a direct confrontation with the real, a fecund silence from which fresh and more effective theoretical notions might emerge.<sup>6</sup>

### One Example

The burgeoning field of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person studies in meditation practice clarifies the significance of 1<sup>st</sup> person research and its difference from qualitative research. Two outstanding examples are the studies of advanced practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism

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<sup>6</sup> Professor Haruhiko Murakawa's [research on Chi Gong](#) is an excellent example of encountering shortcomings in the standard approaches to 'bracketing' as a mental exercise followed by his figuring out how to accomplish it in practice.

conducted by Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin, and by the team in Paris inspired by the late Francisco Varela. In both cases, it is instructive to note that the extensive studies of these many adepts is a project of equals: both the scientists and the meditators are accomplished experts in their own fields; they are each example of different attitudes, highly cultivated. In the case of the scientists, the naturalistic attitude; in that of the meditators, the ‘meditation’ attitude, both representative of highly cultivated organisms oriented towards different realms of reality.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> person research is of little if any value to the meditators’ core interests because they themselves are the experts in what they wish to accomplish. It is for the sake of the goals of 3<sup>rd</sup> person researchers that the work goes forward. In this instance, we have two groups of highly sophisticated investigators of reality, but using radically different methods to arrive at their stores of knowledge. On the side of the meditators: lifetimes of following specific and ancient protocols of experiential self-clarification under the guidance of elder teachers. On the side of the empirical scientists: lifetimes of learning how to use instruments and exotic mathematical formulas to sort out the observable changes in the organism.

The very large body of meditation research is one of the few successful instances of what Michael Murphy in his *The Future of the Body* calls “Synoptic Empiricism,” where neither side can claim the single authoritative view.<sup>7</sup> In Murphy’s case, he amassed a monumental archive of 1<sup>st</sup> person accounts of out-of-ordinary states of consciousness by top-rated athletes, who, like the Tibetan Buddhists, were the most skilled practitioners of the phenomena being studied.

These examples suggest a slightly different way of formulating the original question: how can we expand a science of expertise, where the experiences in question are accessed through those who have spent a lifetime cultivating the attitudes which are essential to find those experiences in their uncluttered, publicly communicable forms?

### Somatics and Phenomenology

There has been a major problem with the implementation of Husserl’s visionary agenda: those who study it are largely scholars educated in a very specialized attitude towards mental development at a remove from bodily experiences within the world. The weight of Husserlian studies are more discussions about what he said or meant rather than taking up his challenge to return to the things themselves. The applications of phenomenology in various textbooks of research in the human sciences are often abstract and subjectivistic, squeezing Husserl’s intricate explorations into the tight model of Reason characteristic of Western intellectual thought.

Simultaneously with Husserl’s life work, there was a vast movement emerging in Europe outside the university and laboratory worlds running parallel with Husserl’s studies, but with little interconnection. Its leaders, most of whom never published any significant

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<sup>7</sup> *The Future of the Body* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1992), Chapter 2, 7ff.

writings, were teachers of expressive body movements, sensory awareness processes, methods of sensitive touch, and practices of breathing awareness. Some were among the founders of modern dance. Others worked under the aegis of physical therapy. What they shared was a resistance to the dominant Western notion of the body as an impersonal thing, an object like any other object in the world, a notion that was embedded in the institutions of medicine, education, psychology, and dance itself. Some of us began to gather together fragments of those various “body technologies” into a shared discourse under the umbrella of Somatics, inspired by Husserl’s notion of Somatology, attempting to bridge these brilliant works and the equally brilliant but dissociated theoretical fields of discourse in mainstream thought.

The publication in English of Professor Yuasa’s book *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* made it clear that the European model of mind as separate from body has pathological consequences for the Crisis described by Husserl. In that book, he argues that there is a radical distinction between Asian-centered and Euro-Centered approaches to the nature of Mind and its evolution. In Asia, intelligence develops out of the cultivation of emergent possibilities of the body of birth in the various transformative practices of meditation, martial arts, *ikebana*, calligraphy, music, and chanting. A person is not thought fit to discourse about the larger issues of life until he or she has done the foundational work of developing the refined sensibility that can ground more ethereal states of thought and consciousness. In the West, intelligence is thought to develop primarily through the disembodied practices of reading, writing, and talking.

What might we discover to be the philosophical uniqueness of Eastern thought? One revealing characteristic is that personal “cultivation” (*shugyō*) is presupposed in the philosophical foundation of the Eastern theories. To put it simply, true knowledge cannot be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking, but only through “bodily recognition or realization” (*tainin* or *taikoku*), that is, through the utilization of one’s total mind and body.. .Cultivation is a practice that attempts, so to speak, to achieve true knowledge by means of one’s total mind and body.”<sup>8</sup>

The stark implication of his argument is that Western systems of meaning are grounded on a raw sensibilities, whose capacities to distort the quest for useful ideas are not systematically accounted for within discourse on scientific method. By accident of having engaged in transformative practices “on the side” of one’s academic studies—martial arts, meditation, psychotherapy—a particular scholar may have found him or herself in a place where intellectual work emerges from a nuanced field of perception and feeling. But more commonly, completion of postgraduate studies leaves one with an underdeveloped adolescent, even childish, sensorium. This is, of course, a different way of saying what Husserl argued in the *Crisis* that scientists construct their brilliant theoretical worlds in forgetfulness of themselves as questing suffering humans. And that forgetfulness places us in jeopardy.

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<sup>8</sup>Yasuo, Yuasa. (1987). *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*. Albany: SUNY p. 26



The world of body practices, which some of us have gathered under the umbrella term of “Somatics” has illuminated the full power of Husserl’s method.<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Behnke was central in bringing the two fields together. In what she named “The Study Project in the Phenomenology of the Body,” she created a newsletter which encouraged an influential dialogue between practicing phenomenologists and practitioners of various body works. She herself has written a number of essays exploring the crossovers between Husserlian phenomenology and Somatics. In light of these various explorations, the seemingly abstract architectonics of Husserl’s writings were drawn into the moving questing urging bodies of scholars.

Out of the vast loosely connected network of integrative body practices gathered under the generative concept of Somatics, I am going to give just a few examples of how particular ones actually make it possible to implement the strategies designed by Husserl to accomplish a 1<sup>st</sup> person science.

### Bracketing and Inhibition

F. Matthias Alexander, was a Tasmanian vaudeville actor who went on to create the Alexander Technique out of his own experiments in correcting a series of miniscule errors in bodily comportment that endangered his means of making a living. In that process, he realized the many subtle ways in which our immediate experience is interpreted erroneously, not necessarily in an explicit or theoretical way, but in the way we actually move ourselves through everyday life in what we feel is a ‘normal’ or ‘correct’ manner—walking, sitting, breathing, lifting, speaking—sometimes to the point of severe dysfunction and pain. To resolve this problem, he developed a body practice which he called “inhibition,” parallel to Husserl’s bracketing. It consists in slight interruptions of the mechanical flow of accustomed bodily reactions just long enough to allow something new, hopefully fresh and more useful, to occur in the empty interval. For example, as one gets up out of a chair, the Alexander teacher, by the use of verbal instructions or a very light touch, suspends the automatic habit of standing up. In that brief gap, something minutely different is allowed to happen, the moment of grace when there comes just the slightest opportunity to find what is fresh.

In his essay “Inhibition as a Good Word,” he details a case in which he applied this notion to an author-client whose stress is so severe that he cannot carry on his work. Alexander suggests that during his working day he should deliberately *stop* and make a break at the end of each half-hour’s writing, and should then either do fifteen minutes of breathing exercises, or take a walk outside before resuming writing. At first, the author did not follow this advice, continuing to work for hours at a stretch without a break, stressed, depressed, and unproductive. As they discussed the situation, with Alexander detailing the deleterious effects of such patterns of work, the author argued, “But surely, it must be a mistake to break a train of thought?” Alexander replied, “it should be as easy

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<sup>9</sup> For a definition of this field from the point of view of a phenomenologists, cf. Elizabeth Behnke, “Somatics,” in Lester Embree et al., editors, *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), pp 663-667.

to break off a piece of work requiring thought, and take it up again, as it is to carry on a train of thought while taking a walk with all its attendant interruptions, and that this should be possible not only without loss of connection, but with accruing benefit to the individual concerned.”<sup>10</sup>

The relevance to Husserl’s description of bracketing becomes even clearer when he expands on these benefits in a following essay which he entitles “Mind-Wandering and Thought-Grooves.” It is precisely these thought-grooves that keep coaxing one down the familiar ruts that keep leading to frustration and failure:

These habits of reaction which hold him in slavery are the inevitable accompaniments of his out-of-date beliefs and the associated judgments which are too often unsound and frustrating. He will therefore find it difficult to take the long-view outlook of his activities which is inseparable from the ability to STOP when faced with the need for changing habits of thought and action.<sup>11</sup>

“Thought-Groove” is only a metaphor in the sense of its many levels of meaning; but it is a very much like a track in the mud that willy-nilly sweeps a bike in its direction. It’s not some abstract idea that can neatly be written on a paper about one’s preconceptions; it is tenacious, often barely recognized, requiring wrestling with one’s organism to change directions.

### Attitude and Constitution

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen like Alexander is primarily known as a brilliant teacher of a wide range of strategies of moving, directing sensory awareness, and touch. And yet I have described her as a phenomenologist<sup>12</sup> because nearly half a century ago she was inspired to take on the life work of what she calls embodying the mind of each cell of her body. By that she means that when she spends weeks, even months, exploring though experimental exercises how she might situate her attention in one specific organization of cells—her bones, for example—she finds images, ways of thinking, insights, etc., which are predictably different from when she does the necessary experiential maneuvers to habituate herself to experiences of another organization of cells; for example, her lungs. She also experiments with ‘minds’ of running, walking, sitting, moving fast, moving slow. By the ‘mind’ she means all of those changing images, ideas, insights that vary in patterned ways from region to region of direct experience cultivated over time.<sup>13</sup> A densely intricately embodied version of Husserl’s constitution, the manners in which the various dimensions of world reveal themselves to us.

From the viewpoint of her work, Husserl’s notions of the various attitudes become transparent. The everyday natural attitude, as in the inquiries of Pierre Bourdieu and others inspired by Husserl, is the embodied habituated sensibility formed over time by the

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<sup>10</sup> F. M. Alexander. (1986) *The Resurrection of the Body*. Boston: Shambhala, 60.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> *Body, Spirit and Democracy*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1994, p. 208.

<sup>13</sup> Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2008. p. 64

kinds of activities a person pursues again and again in his or her life. What Marcel Mauss called *les techniques du corps*.<sup>14</sup> A person who takes on the naturalistic attitude of the scientist needs to develop a highly refined sensibility habituated to the use of complicated instruments, highly restricted modes of looking, often long days of quiet isolated work at a lab bench, and many others of the wide variety of bodily activities which constitute any scientific life. The cultivated attitude of the microbiologist reveals realities not experienced by us who are not so habituated. At the same time, that habituation, if not recognized as one of many ways to constitute a world, misleads the person with that attitude to identify that particular region with Reality itself.

The polymorphous method of experiential inquiry developed by Ms. Cohen both highlights the rigorous challenge of taking on a study of the natural and phenomenological attitude, and also give it sparkling new life, ripping it out of the dull textbooks that drone on about peripheral details while the *'thing itself'* continues to elude our grasp.

### Reductions

As in the case of the natural scientists observing the intricate details of the lives of ants or bonobos, or the peculiar outcroppings of granite in various terrains, the 1<sup>st</sup> person scientist has to develop a similar intricacy in his or her own capacities to track the micro details of inner experience. In radical contrast to reduction in empirical science which aims for the most abstract and general, phenomenological reduction aims at the most concrete and particular. The process demands that the phenomenologists discipline the polymorphous field of ordinary perception and proprioception to the point that he or she has access to what is in question, and only that. The sensory awareness work of Elsa Gindler taught in Berlin during the early part of the last century, proliferated throughout Europe, the Americas, and Asia through a cadre of Gindler's heirs, is a direct method for cultivating the kind of skill needed to perform the phenomenological reductions.<sup>15</sup> The late Charlotte Selver is the best known of her teachers.<sup>16</sup>

Participants in Selver's workshops are invited to stand up and sit down, for example, but with awareness and time for reflection on the details of what happens in that simple repetitive act that shapes our being in the world. For an hour, a participant may do only this, several times, being invited to be ever more careful of noticing the many changes as one goes from one posture to another, and learning how to articulate those changes in

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<sup>14</sup> Marcel Mauss, "The Techniques of the Body," trans. B. Brewer, *Economy and Society* 2 (1973), pp. 70-88.

<sup>15</sup> Most of her writings were lost when her studio was firebombed during WWII. One of her only extant essays, "Gymnastik for People Whose Lives are Full of Activity," is available in Johnson, DH, editor, *Bone, Breath, and Gesture: Practices of Embodiment* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), pp 5-14,

<sup>16</sup> *Reclaiming Vitality and Presence: Sensory Awareness as a Practice for Life*, Charlotte Selver, and Charles V.W. Brooks, edited by Richard Lowe and Stefan Laeng-Gilliatt (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2007).

words that are as close to the experience as possible. One places one hands on a partner's shoulders, working towards the situation where one is *only* touching, not trying to change the person, not trying to make them feel good or to admire what one is doing, just allowing the contours of the hand to be ever more shaping in connection with the contours of the movements of the shoulders, a very long-in-experience journey from distraction to being here now. Over time, Sensory Awareness practice explores the discipline of learning how to be present in a variety of different situations: tasting an orange, listening to the reading of a tragic and violent event in the world, hearing the sounds of a bird, reacting to an unwelcome comment from another person, etc. Slowly over time, with regular practice, one gains a facility with turning one's sensual attentions to what is at hand, giving less energy to the endless distractions that barrage us. And with this skill, one can learn to accomplish the reduction of a global experience to that region of the experience which holds for the promise of revealing ever more of the reality in question.

The work is so simple that its implications for a radical revision of how we construct our social institutions has escaped wide notice. It is deceptively simple. Charles Brooks accurately describes this radical aspect of the work:

During my life, I have often rejected one authority only to accept another. Underneath, I was afraid at the thought of living in a world where there was not Someone, somewhat like myself, who knew. But I have now come to feel that to know what one is doing with life, it is no use to consult authorities. It is precisely through the veils which authorities have spun for us that our own ears and eyes and nerves must begin to penetrate if our hands are to grasp the world and our hearts to feel it. We must recover our own capacity to taste for ourselves. Then we shall be able to judge also.<sup>17</sup>

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Person Science

Second-Person science was not addressed by Husserl, although it looms as an enormous problem in the social sciences where researchers are always seeking information from others. Once one has experienced directly how difficult and demanding it is to apply the above strategies to gain a revelatory experience of a region of the real, it is easy to see that getting someone else to contribute to that search in the manner of standard interviews is a very complicated task. Many attempts to do this are so trivial they are not worth acknowledging. The most successful articulation of how to gain a true second person science have been developed by the heirs of the late Francisco Varela, inspired by his bringing together Cognitive Science, Phenomenology, Body Practices, Meditation, and Psychoanalysis. Claire Petitmengin has described how one can transform Husserl's method from the sorting through of one's own experiences to investigating the experience of others.<sup>18</sup> What she proposes is virtually to educate one's interviewees to be themselves

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Brooks, *Sensory Awareness: Rediscovery of Experiencing Through the Workshops of Charlotte Selver* (Great Neck, NY: Felix Morrow, 1986), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> ["Describing one's subjective experience in the second person: An interview method for the science of consciousness,"](#) *Phenom Gogn Sci* (2006) 5:229-269.

phenomenologists, so that one begins to develop a collaborative phenomenology. These are the steps she elaborates in her version of applying the notions of constitution, reduction, and bracketing:

1. Converting attention from the ‘what’ to the ‘how’ of the reality in question.
2. Moving from general representations and general beliefs about the experience to description of a singular experience.
3. Stabilizing attention on the experience.
4. Directing attention towards the different dimensions of the experience.
5. Moving towards more precision.

### What Faces Us?

It is the case that these approaches to the development of a 1<sup>st</sup> person science are useful in constructing actual research projects of particular relevance to transpersonal psychology, since the field’s focus is on the rich intricacy of subjectivity in states of consciousness not typically addressed in more ordinary kinds of research such as those derived from transformative practices, meditation, entheogens, martial arts, long-term depth psychotherapies, etc.

But there is a deeper way of articulating Husserl’s characterization of the Crisis, as well as the crises that face us now. It is certainly true that the human sciences have not succeeded to the degree that is true of the physical sciences. But there is something more fundamental than a failure of designing the right approach to scientific research. We need to recover a more sane communal thoughtfulness. Our collective discourses about personal and social violence, about the rapid destruction of our environment carry on as if we were debating about the outcome of a football game, not about flesh ripped apart in the middle of the night, or of villages being swept away by floods and droughts. Husserl’s project that you can feel pushing at him throughout the many corrections and refinements he made to his texts over his long life, is to situate thinking within the matrix of life as it is, not as it is theorized. It is as if Mind had become a kite off on a very long string whipped about by winds and doldrums and Husserl kept looking for ways to reel it back in back down to the ground.

Two specific crises illustrate what I mean about the existential import of 1<sup>st</sup> person science:

1. Creating a harmonious society based on diversity; and
2. Dealing effectively with the environmental crises.

The phenomenological attitude—the habituation of my sensibility so that I feel deeply that my experiences, though sharing some features in common with some others, are irreducibly mine—create the realization that the more viewpoints with which I can have contact, the richer will be my grasp of reality. Instead of the increasing diversity of our communities being felt as a problem, it is appreciated as a gift to be embraced and nourished. In this sense, the strategies of bracketing, attitude development, and reduction are strategies of community development, ways of changing attitudes that are self-

defeating. When I begin to find myself seeing the other's face as the face of the enemy, it is some form of bracketing that will open my eyes to the other's face as it is.

As for the earth. A major problem in mobilizing enough popular support to effect public policies that would alter the rushing increase of temperatures and their attendant disasters is that there is little shared feeling that we are of the earth, that our high-flying consciousness is enmeshed with wind, trees, rodents, and tides. Any destruction of these realities diminishes ourselves. Eugene Gendlin says it most clearly in his pithy phrase: "The body is not in interaction with the environment; it *is* interaction with the environment."<sup>19</sup> Merleau-Ponty speaks of the intertwining, the webs of interdependence and interaction that make up reality. The consciousness that emerges from this cultivated sensibility, which takes patient and serious practice, produces a passion for caring for this world we have and the beings who are nourished by it.

1<sup>st</sup> person science is in one respect a return to older and more tribal, indigenous models of knowing that view wisdom as an emergent quality of adults who have taken seriously the life in which they exist, learning from it, serving it. But with an awareness of the many false turns in the road that led us to where we are now.

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