

# Phenomenology in Its Original Sense

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## Abstract

In this article, I try to think through the question, “What distinguishes phenomenology in its original sense?” My intent is to focus on the project and methodology of phenomenology in a manner that is not overly technical and that may help others to further elaborate on or question the singular features that make phenomenology into a unique qualitative form of inquiry. I pay special attention to the notion of “lived” in the phenomenological term “lived experience” to demonstrate its critical role and significance for understanding phenomenological reflection, meaning, analysis, and insights. I also attend to the kind of experiential material that is needed to focus on a genuine phenomenological question that should guide any specific research project. Heidegger, van den Berg, and Marion provide some poignant exemplars of the use of narrative “examples” in phenomenological explorations of the phenomena of “boredom,” “conversation,” and “the meaningful look in eye-contact.” Only what is given or what gives itself in lived experience (or conscious awareness) are proper phenomenological “data” or “givens,” but these givens are not to be confused with data material that can be coded, sorted, abstracted, and accordingly analyzed in some “systematic” manner. The latter approach to experiential research may be appropriate and worthwhile for various types of qualitative inquiry but not for phenomenology in its original sense. Finally, I use the mythical figure of Kairos to show that the famous phenomenological couplet of the epoché-reduction aims for phenomenological insights that require experiential analysis and attentive (but serendipitous) methodical inquiry practices.

## Keywords

Canada, phenomenology; lived experience; human science; example; epoché; reduction; data; inceptuality; incept; originary; eidos; being bored; conversation; meaningful look; inseeing; ingrasping; problem insights; meaning insights; wonder; nonmethod; Chronos; Kairos; the now; qualitative

## The Methodological Focus of Phenomenology: Lived Experience

As I am starting to write this article, I am half-listening to a radio talk show about health care. The topic is excessive wait times in the Canadian health care system. The moderator is asking listeners to phone in with their experiences of having to wait for a diagnosis, especially serious diagnoses that deal with potentially life-threatening illnesses such as cancer. The host peaks my interest when she uses the word “lived experience.” She says that she wants “to hear people’s lived experiences of waiting times for a medical diagnosis.” Many people phone in and share how traumatic the waiting for a diagnosis has been, especially when the wait was many weeks or even several months long. People’s stories are filled with emotive adjectives describing the waiting experience as filled with anxiety, pain, and worry.

It occurs to me that the radio host’s pronounced interest to hear people’s “lived experiences” would make it an appropriate topic for phenomenological research. However,

the responses she receives from her listeners are largely reduced to emotional reactions. Most of the testimonials contain strong opinions, critiques, and include adjectives such as unbearable, nerve-racking, frightening—but they are not truly descriptions of lived experiences in the sense of narrative accounts—they lack experiential concreteness, vividness, and descriptive detail. As a listener, I am not presented with the opportunity to reflect on the experience itself of waiting for a diagnosis. Still, I appreciated the program, recognizing that it is important that the concerns of patients should be voiced to health practitioners, policy makers, and the public at large.

But here I want to take the opportunity to focus on the notion of “lived experience” to unfurl some basic tenets of phenomenology. For a phenomenological inquiry, it is

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especially imperative to understand what the concrete experience consists in. Wilhelm Dilthey (1987) had already explicated how lived experience (*Erlebnis*) is a nexus of lived relations to the world. An analysis of the structural nexus involves an exploration of the relation between experience, the ways the experience is expressed (in language, art, architecture, etc.), and the understandings these expressions make possible. However, Dilthey's explication of lived experience still lacks the primal sense of a Husserlian phenomenality of intentional consciousness. More simply put, phenomenological research and inquiry is commonly described as turning back *zu den Sachen*, to "what matters in lived or primal experience." What appears in consciousness is the phenomenon or event that gives itself in lived experience. And the significance of the idea of "lived experience" is that we can ask the basic phenomenological question, "What is this (primal) experience like?"

Of course, from a general qualitative research point of view, there would be many valid ways of exploring the topic of the experience of "diagnostic waiting" time. Different qualitative methodologies might explore a variety of issues, empirical questions, policy practices, perception, and opinion surveys related to the reasons and effects of waiting for a diagnosis. But phenomenology aims to attain the eidetic and originary meanings of a phenomenon. The famous dictum *zu den Sachen* means "turning to experience as lived through." And the methodological meaning and significance of the concept of lived through experience is that we can ask the basic phenomenological question, "What is it like?" "What is this experience like?"

Now, it is true, the phenomenological term "lived experience" has been quite widely adopted across the qualitative research methodologies. Yet these usages often have little or nothing to do with phenomenological method. Also, it is not unusual nowadays to hear the phrase "lived experience" used in the media such as in radio talks like the one I have been listening to. People seem to feel that the term "lived experience" is loaded with special significance—it seems to hint at certain profundities or deeper meanings. But ironically, the phenomenological term "lived experience" does not refer to any kind of deep experience, fundamental event, or hidden source of meaning—On the contrary, lived experience is just the name for ordinary life experience as it carries us on in its lived everyday current. That is why Heidegger can say that everyday lived experience is meaningful and yet superficial. There is nothing unusually "rich," "deep," "hidden," or "mysterious" about the living of lived experience—until we take up a phenomenological questioning—until we ask, "What is this (phenomenon) lived experience like?" Then we are challenged by the phenomenality of the phenomenon.

"What is the phenomenal meaning of this lived experience?" "How does the phenomenal meaning of this lived experience give itself to our consciousness, our (self-)awareness?" Dan Zahavi draws a methodological relation between consciousness, lived experience, and the basic phenomenological question, "What is it like?" He points out that to undergo an experience necessarily means that there is something "it is like" to have that experience, and in so far as there is something "it is like," there must be some awareness of these experiences themselves:

Most people are prepared to concede that there is necessarily something "it is like" for a subject to undergo an experience (to taste ice cream, to feel joy, to remember a walk in the Alps). However, insofar as there is something it is like for the subject to have the experience, the subject must in some way have access to and be acquainted with the experience. Moreover, although conscious experiences differ from one another—what it is like to smell crushed mint leaves is different from what it is like to see a sunset or to hear Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole*—they also share certain features. One commonality is the quality of mineness, the fact that the experiences are characterized by first-personal givenness. That is, the experience is given (at least tacitly) as my experience, as an experience I am undergoing or living through. (Zahavi, 2005, pp. 15, 16)

The point is that we do not think about, or phenomenologically reflect on our experiences while we "live" them. And yet, as Heidegger says, even though we are not explicitly conscious of our prereflective, atheoretic everyday experiences, they carry the meaningfulness-character of the concrete context of life. In his *Freiburg Lectures*, Heidegger provides (perhaps surprisingly) some telling portrayals of the ordinary and taken-for-granted meaningfulness of the lived experience of lived experiences:

Even if it is not explicitly conscious, I live in a context of anticipation. Unbroken, without having to surmount barriers, I slide from one encounter into another, and one sinks into the other, *and indeed in such a way that I do not bother about it*. I do not at all conceive of the idea that there is anything to notice [*beachten*] anyway. I swim along with the stream and let the water and the waves crash behind me. I do not look back, and living into the next one, I do not live in the encounter that has just been lived or know about it as having just been lived. I am engrossed in the temporally particular situation and in the unbroken succession of situations and to be sure in that which encounters me in the situations. I am engrossed in it, i.e. I do not view myself or bring myself to consciousness: now this comes along, now that. But *in that* which comes, I am *captured and arrested*, fully and actively living it. I live the context of meaningfulness, which is produced as such in and through my experiencing, insofar as I am just *swimming*

here and there in this direction of expectation. (Heidegger, 2013a, p. 92)

Of course, some of our experiences such as waiting for a medical diagnosis may be weighty, shocking, unbearable, dramatic, or tragic. Lived experiences may lead or involve us in difficult or serious reflections. Still, from a phenomenological perspective, these lived experiences, as we live through them, are raw: prereflective, nonreflective, or atheoretic as Heidegger suggests.

From the perspective of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, it does not help to speak gravely and emphatically of our "lived experiences" as if they are pregnant with meanings that will "emerge" or "spill out" as soon as we press the magic methodological phenomenological analytical button. And yet, it is true that the term "lived experience" (or "phenomenon") points to a central methodological feature of phenomenology: It announces the interest of phenomenology to turn to the epoché and the reduction to investigate the primal, eidetic, or inceptual meanings that are passed over in everyday life (see van Manen, 2014, pp. 215–239). The phenomenological gesture is to lift up and bring into focus with language any such raw moment of lived experience and orient to the living meanings that arise in the experience. Any and every possible human experience (event, happening, incident, occurrence, object, relation, situation, thought, feeling, etc.) may become a topic for phenomenological inquiry. Indeed, what makes phenomenology so fascinating is that any ordinary lived through experience tends to become quite extraordinary when we lift it up from our daily existence and hold it with our phenomenological gaze. Wondering about the meaning of a certain moment of our lived life may turn into the basic phenomenological question, "What is this experience like?"

Heidegger (1920/2013) gives a special twist to the primordiarity of lived meaning with the notion of "fading":

... *the fading of meaningfulness*. It is not a disappearing but a fading, i.e., a transition into the stage and into the mode of non-primordiality where the genuineness of the enactment and beforehand the renewal of the enactment are lacking, where even the relations wear themselves out and where merely the content that itself is no longer primordially had "is of interest." *Fading* has nothing to do with "losing something from memory," "forgetting" or with "no longer finding any interest in." The content of factual life experience *falls away* from the *existence relation* towards other contents: that which falls away remains *available*; the available itself can, however, for its part fade as sense character of the relation and pass into that of mere *usability*.

... i.e. they have fallen away from the primordial existence relation. (pp. 26, 27)

If there is no concealing, hiding, or fading of meaningfulness, then we would not need phenomenology because we would sense with perfect clarity the lived meanings of our everyday existence. So, this quote taken from the lecture of 1920 may give us a hint how Heidegger thought about the concealment and unconcealment of the meaning of lived experience. He uses the notion of fading of meaningfulness to describe the erosion of experience into taken-for-grantedness. Heidegger seems to suggest that when studying a certain phenomenon or event (lived experience) we have to try to question *what* has faded and *how* phenomena give themselves. Ultimately, this questioning is a matter of the reduction and the primordial source of meaningfulness. Our challenge is to see how any phenomenological description should become a "learning how to see" and "see into or through" the faded meaningfulness to the inceptuality (beginning) of the deeper or primal meaning of human existence and lived experience.

So, the phenomenological feature of "lived experience" aims to be a corrective: It guards against the common inclination to understand our experiences prematurely in a cliché, conceptual, predetermined, biographical, theoretical, polemical, or taken-for-granted manner. In other words, the adjective "lived" only becomes methodologically significant once we understand the import of the role it plays in phenomenological inquiry to investigate the primal or inceptual meaning aspects of experience as we "live" through them.

The term "lived" experience equates with living-through, prereflective, prepredicative, nonreflective, or atheoretic experience while realizing that we cannot simply access the living meaning of lived experiences through introspective reflection. As soon as we turn to reflect on an experience that we have in this very moment, we inevitably immediately have stepped away from or out of the living sphere or sensibility of the livedness of lived experience. The instant of the moment we reflect on a lived experience, the living moment is already gone, and the best we can do is retrospectively try to recover the experience and then reflect on the originary sensibility or primordiarity of what the experience was like in that elusive moment, and how it appeared or gave itself to our consciousness. So, the challenge of phenomenology is to recover the lived meanings of this moment without objectifying these faded meanings and without turning the lived meanings into positivistic themes, sanitized concepts, objectified descriptions, or abstract theories. Such is the method of phenomenology in its original or authentic sense as found in the writings of leading phenomenologists (see van Manen, 2014).

The German verb *erleben* literally means "living through something"—Lived experience (*Erlebnis*) is an active and passive living through of experience. Lived experience

names the ordinary and the extraordinary, the quotidian and the exotic, the routine and the surprising, the dull and the ecstatic moments and aspects of everyday experience as we live through them in our daily human existence. Therefore, in his early lectures of 1919 and 1920, Heidegger states that the manner and meaning of “lived experiences” is the primary question of phenomenology:

The question about the manner of the possible having of lived experiences precedes every other question containing subject matter. Only from there and within the method is the fundamental constitution of what is to be apprehended determined. (Heidegger, 1993/2010, p. 88).

Phenomenology is the study of “what gives itself” in lived or prepredicative experience. Or better, phenomenology is the study of what gives itself “as” lived experience. Any experience can be a subject for phenomenological inquiry: having a conversation, being bored, making eye contact with someone, having a coffee with a friend, and so forth. Yet, phenomenology is not the study of the meaning of concepts, words, or texts, but of experience as lived. The problem of phenomenology is not how to get from text to meaning but how to get from meaning to text. As I will show below, it is the lived meaning of how phenomena are given to us in consciousness and lived experience that is the focus of phenomenology, whether descriptive or interpretive (hermeneutic).

### **Phenomenology Aims to Capture the Instant Moment: The Now**

We do not normally name the lived experiences we go through: “greeting our friend,” “sitting down in a coffee shop,” “ordering a drink,” “taking a sip,” “making a joke,” and so forth. But the irony is that as soon as we name and reflect on certain experiential moments of living, we may already have lost touch with the living sensibility of these lived moments.

While we are alive, we always and inevitably live in the moment, in the instant of the “now.” How can we not? Even when remembering or anticipating an event, we always do so in this moment, the moment of the “now” (this second, minute, hour, day, year). But, as soon as we try to (re)capture this “now,” it is already gone, absent. And yet, the challenge of phenomenology is that it is precisely the experience as we live through it, this living moment that we must recover and investigate for its phenomenal meanings. Putting it more methodologically, what gives itself has to be determined through the method of the phenomenological epoché and reduction. These are the originary insights that are the basic purpose of phenomenological research and inquiry. But the originary or inceptual meaning of qualitative insight is elusive.

Someone who practices meditation to live more consciously in the present, is constantly aware how the present seems to slip away into distractions: thoughts, reminiscences, and anticipations. Even for the meditator, it is very hard to stay in the “now of the present” because the meditator tries to focus on the lived now while living in the now and that focal awareness is constantly slipping away into an absentminded (nonreflective) absence of the presence. Meditating is a constant erasing of the distractions that keep pressing themselves into the taken-for-granted consciousness of everyday lived experience.

Phenomenologists are highly aware of this elusiveness of the living meaning of lived experience. Indeed, those who claim to conduct phenomenological analysis through the use of methods or techniques of categorizing, abstracting, counting, and so forth completely misunderstand the basic idea of phenomenology. Phenomenological analysis does not involve coding, sorting, calculating, or searching for patterns, synchronicities, frequencies, resemblances, and/or repetitions in data. However fascinating such research may be in its own right, it cannot achieve what a phenomenological study wants to achieve: to let a phenomenon (lived experience) show itself in the way that it gives itself while living through it. Phenomenology in its original sense aims at *retrospectively* bringing to our awareness some experience we lived through to be able to reflect phenomenologically on the living meaning of this lived experience.

When the later Heidegger becomes critical of the concept of lived experience, he becomes critical not of the inceptual presumptions of lived meaning, but of the shallowness and meaninglessness of contemporary life. No doubt, his words can be read also pejoratively as an uncanny early critique of empirical analytical qualitative inquiry that has become obsessed with the jargon of (lived) experience, while, according to Heidegger, in these superficial contexts, the terms “lived” and “experience” have become popular and yet have lost all their phenomenological meaning and significance. Somewhat mockingly, Heidegger says,

Now for the first time everything is a matter of “lived experience,” and all undertakings and affairs drip with “lived experiences.” And this concern with “lived experience” proves that now even humans themselves, as beings, have incurred the loss of their beying and have fallen prey to their hunt for lived experiences. (Heidegger, 2012b, p. 98)

Modern existence has become a life of calculation and machination—With the term “machination,” Heidegger means that our lives and concerns now stand increasingly under the sign of producing, constructing, making, and what is makeable and consumable. This has especial significance for the contemporary conceptualizations of

qualitative methods that are ever more governed by systems and programs of “machination.”

## Lived Experiences Are the Data of Phenomenological Research

Present-day qualitative method uses the language of data collection, data coding, data analysis, data capture, and so forth. However, strictly speaking, phenomenology is ill-served with such usage of the term “data.” The Latin term *datum* or *data*, as a general concept, refers to the idea that certain kinds of information are represented in forms fitting for processing: decoding, interpreting, sequencing, sorting, counting, and so forth. The *Oxford Dictionary* refers to data as “items of (chiefly numerical) information considered collectively, typically obtained by scientific work and used for reference, analysis, or calculation” and “operations performed by computer programs” (Oxford English Dictionary [OED]). But such usage of the term *data* is incompatible with phenomenological inquiry.

No doubt, the words “data” and “data analysis” are terms of a discourse that may be attractive to the ear of those qualitative researchers who like to believe that their procedures ensure solid measured outcomes—Data analysis converts data into figures, visuals, graphs, concepts, or lists of objectivistic themes. However, it is actually somewhat bizarre to use the objectivifying term “data” for phenomenological inquiry as phenomenology is concerned with meaning and meaningfulness rather than “informational” content. Phenomenology deals with narratives, stories, poetry, anecdotes, sayings—not with codes or objectivistic data. Some phenomenologists such as Amedeo Giorgi (1970, 2009) use terms such as “meaning units” that are more appropriate than the nomenclature of “data” and “codes” as they still retain the sense of meaning and meaningfulness.

There is a certain irony in the fact that etymologically the term “data” refers to “givenness,” what is “given.” In this etymological sense, the term “data” should be well suited for qualitative phenomenological methodology. But it requires a cautious reconceptualization of the idea of data. Phenomenology is the study of what “gives itself” in human lived experience or consciousness (Marion, 2002a). And yet, methodologically speaking, phenomenology does not rely on (numerical, coded, or objectifying) data but rather on data as “phenomenological examples.”

## Phenomenology Is the Science of Examples

One central feature of the practice of phenomenology by leading scholars is the manner that lived experience is engaged by way of the phenomenology of “examples.”

Frederik Buytendijk called phenomenology the science of examples (van Manen, 1997). And Edward Casey (1976) refers to Husserl when he says that “it is on the basis of examples, and of examples alone, that the phenomenologist is able to attain eidetic insights” (pp. 23–37). Similarly, Giorgio Agamben (1993; 2002) examines with philosophical scrutiny how “example” (he also uses the term, *paradigm*) lies at the heart of phenomenology. “Examples” are the data of phenomenological research. Examples are experiential data that require study, investigation, probing, reflection, analysis, interrogation. Phenomenological examples are usually cast in the practical format of lived experience descriptions: anecdotes, stories, narratives, vignettes, or concrete accounts. Phenomenological examples are always carefully taken from experiences. But they should neither be treated as “illustrations” nor as empirical “samples” of factual data (van Manen, 2014, pp. 256–260).

In the natural and social sciences, an example is commonly used as a concrete or illustrative “case in point” to further clarify an abstract idea or theory. This commonly used form of example is meant to make the theoretical knowledge more accessible, concrete, or intelligible, even though the example itself may not contribute to the knowledge. As well, examples are often used as informative illustrations. But, an example as illustration does not add new knowledge—it can be left out of the text without harming the text. So, it is important to realize that “phenomenological examples” differ fundamentally from the common, case in point, explanatory, clarifying, or illustrative use of examples in other kinds of qualitative texts.

The phenomenological notion of “example” is methodologically a critical figure for phenomenological research. Strictly speaking, phenomenology does not reflect on the factualities of examples—facts or actualities. Phenomenology reflects on examples to discover what is phenomenal or singular about a phenomenon or event. Examples in phenomenological inquiry serve to examine and express the exemplary aspects of meaning of a phenomenon. Examples in phenomenology have evidential significance: The example is the example of something knowable or understandable that may not be directly sayable. An example is a singularity. If a singularity were to be expressed in ordinary prose, it would immediately vanish. Why? because language cannot really express a singularity by naming or describing it. A singularity cannot be grasped through concepts because concepts are already generalized bits of language. Language universalizes. But, the “phenomenological example” provides access to the phenomenon in its singularity. It makes the “singular” knowable and understandable.

It is crucial for a proper understanding of phenomenological method as to what is the status and meaning of the

example in phenomenological reflection and writing. To reiterate, it would be wrong to assume that the “example” in phenomenological inquiry is used as an illustration or nice story in an argument, or as a particular instance of a general idea, or as an empirical datum from which to develop a conceptual or theoretical understanding. Rather, the phenomenological example is a methodological device (a phenomenological datum) that holds in a certain tension the intelligibility of the singular. How can the example do this? It can do this because the example mediates our intuitive grasp of a singularity, which is exactly the aim of phenomenology. “The example lets the singular be seen,” says Giorgio Agamben (1993, p. 10). The following section aims to show how phenomenologists use the “method of examples” in pursuing phenomenological questions and insights: Heidegger on “What is it like to be bored?” van den Berg on “What is it like to have a conversation?” and Marion on “What it is like to exchange a meaningful look of eye-contact?”

### **A Phenomenological Question: What Is It Like to Be Bored? (Heidegger)**

People who have read a bit of Heidegger may have concluded that his writing is too “philosophical” and that it is too difficult to follow many of his famous texts. But Heidegger has also written phenomenological studies on topics that any of us could have chosen, though we might feel challenged to come up with the same kinds of insights as Heidegger was able to offer. But that should not deter us from learning from Heidegger how to pursue a phenomenological question—such as the question of the meaning of the experience of boredom or being bored. Heidegger’s (1995) exemplary phenomenological analysis of boredom is an apt focus for some reflections on phenomenological method. The phenomenology of boredom is explored insightfully and in great detail and depth in nearly 100 pages of *The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics*. The phenomenological question is, “What is it like to be bored?” By means of concrete experiential examples, Heidegger eventually distinguishes three forms (kinds of meaning) of boredom: (a) Becoming Bored by Something, (b) Being Bored With Something and the Passing of Time Belonging to It, and (c) Profound Boredom. When Heidegger engages in phenomenological explication or analysis, he “shows” or lets us see how these various kinds of boredom appear or show themselves in our lives.

First, we may become bored by a person giving a lecture, by a guide on a tour, by a poor movie, or by waiting for an airplane connection. When we experience this kind of boredom, then we are really conscious of time passing by slowly. For most of us, Heidegger’s description will resonate with our own personal experience of this kind of boredom.

Second, we may be bored with a visit, an event, or a social situation. For example, we come home from a party that seemed okay at the time. But when someone asks, “How was the party?” we answer, “It was rather boring.” Because now, in hindsight, we realize that it actually was mostly empty chatter. During the party, we may not have been very conscious of time passing, but now we realize that the party was really wasted time.

The third kind of boredom is more difficult to describe. It may involve the experience of coming to a new and existential realization of profound boredom. For example, having been on a meaningful trip to a different country where people live a more fulfilling life, we gradually realize that our own life has been boring for much of our existence. We realize that this new meaningful travel experience is not just the best time of our life, but that it gives us a deep understanding of life meaning: time is life, time is who we are.

In presenting the different modalities of boredom, Heidegger uses “examples” that we can readily grasp, and that prompt us to think of similar examples ourselves. Indeed, the experience of boredom is “shown” through examples and experiential descriptions that we may have experienced ourselves. It is also possible that we may never have experienced some aspects of boredom. Or perhaps, we happen to be living a very meaningful life already. Or we won’t come to the realization of how profoundly meaningless and boring our life has been until we reach an age where we can no longer change ourselves, such as the character in Leo Tolstoy’s novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. On his deathbed, Ivan Ilyich finally came to the realization of how meaningless and wasted his life had been. It is a ghastly realization, causing him to scream, first “oh! No!” and then simply a perpetual, hollow “O” (Tolstoy, 1981, p. 28)

After opening the question about the significance of the question of the meaning of boredom, Heidegger starts with an anecdotal “example”:

We are sitting, for example, in the tasteless station of some lonely minor railway. It is four hours until the next train arrives. The district is uninspiring. We do have a book in our backpack, though—shall we read? No. Or think through a problem, some question? We are unable to. We read the timetables or study the table giving the various distances from this station to other places we are not otherwise acquainted with at all. We look at the clock—only a quarter of an hour has gone by. Then we go out onto the local road. We walk up and down, just to have something to do. But it is no use. Then we count the trees along the road, look at our watch again—exactly five minutes since we last looked at it. Fed up with walking back and forth, we sit down on a stone, draw all kinds of figures in the sand, and in so doing catch ourselves looking at our watch yet again—half an hour—and so on. (Heidegger, 1995, p. 93)

This seems like a factual personal experiential description by Heidegger. But actually, the tone is fictive. The example describes a singular experience and yet it gives us an experiential sense of what boredom of such moment is like. Still, phenomenology is not psychology: It does not deal with your personal experience or my personal experience. Even if the experiential account seems personal, it should be approached and analyzed as merely plausible, as fictive. It does not matter whether Heidegger took the lived experience from a novel, whether it is imagined, or whether it really happened to Heidegger. In fact, often phenomenologists will start an experiential story with "Imagine that . . ." In his famous description of the objectifying look, Sartre uses an imagined instant of spying on a couple in another room by listening at the door and looking through a keyhole: "Let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole" (Sartre, 1956, p. 259).

Heidegger applies the eidetic reduction to study the phenomenological meaning of boredom. He uses the above experiential description of a lived experience of being bored while waiting as a phenomenological experiential "example." He then carefully explores (reflectively interprets) various meaning aspects of waiting, such as patience and impatient attunement. But in questioningly examining various (real and imagined) kinds of experiences of boredom, he concludes, for example, that there is no such thing as either patient or impatient boredom:

To what extent, however, is the *waiting* in our example *boring*? What constitutes its *boringness*? Perhaps it is because it is a *having to wait*, i.e., because we are forced, coerced into a particular situation. This is why we become impatient. Thus, what really oppresses us is more this impatience. We want to escape from our impatience. Is boredom then this impatience? Is boredom therefore not some waiting, but this being impatient, not wanting or being able to wait, and for this reason being ill-humored? Yet is boredom really an attunement of ill humor or even an impatience? Certainly, impatience can arise in connection with boredom. Nevertheless, it is neither identical with boredom, nor even a property of it. There is neither a patient nor an impatient boredom. (Heidegger, 1995, p. 94)

After pointing out that our experience of boredom should not be confused with impatience, or other psychological concepts, Heidegger elevates the search for meaning by instilling (in the reader of his text) a sense of wonder about the experience of boredom and our presumptions of its meaning and existence. So, what then is boredom? Now Heidegger's tone becomes more wondering:

Strange: in this way we experience many kinds of things, yet it is precisely boredom itself that we cannot manage to

grasp—almost as though we were looking for something that does not exist at all. It is *not* all the things we thought it was. It vanishes and flutters away from us. And yet—this impatient waiting, the walking up and down, counting trees, and all the other abandoned activities attest precisely to the fact that the boredom is there. We confirm and reinforce this evidence when we say that we are *almost dying of boredom*. (Heidegger, 1995, p. 96)

It is important to notice how Heidegger pursues the phenomenology of boredom by making us wonder about its meaning. Wonder deepens the question of the meaning of boredom. Phenomenological inquiry proceeds through wonder. For Heidegger, wonder is a basic "disposition" and this disposition of wondering about the meaning of boredom is the beginning of phenomenological inquiry into boredom. This wonder leads us to the pure acknowledgment of the unusualness of the usual. It is not the unusualness, but the usualness of everyday common experience that is unusual and that brings us to wonder and the desire to understand the meanings of our lived experiences (such as boredom). Heidegger's insights into the lived meaning of boredom serve to help us reflect on the realization that many of our lives are contaminated by profound boredom. Only by realizing how all forms of boredom ultimately lead to profound boredom can we hope to turn our lives in more meaningful directions.

I quote these opening paragraphs from Heidegger's study of boredom to show that even though Heidegger is primarily known for his fundamental philosophical explanations of the ontological conditions and possibilities of hermeneutic phenomenology, his studies of phenomena such as boredom, anxiety, and wonder (while pursued in the context of topics such as metaphysics) actually are surprisingly recognizable instances of contemporary human science methods and the use of empirical or experiential examples. It also shows that the traditional distinctions between philosophical phenomenology and human science based phenomenology are tenuous and difficult to sustain when it comes to these professional or life practice topics. Indeed, this study on boredom by Heidegger uncannily resembles the kinds of research studies that now often are published under the flag of empirical, or human science based phenomenology.

### *A Phenomenological Question: What Is It Like to Have a Conversation? (van den Berg)*

Van den Berg was a well-known phenomenologist and clinical psychiatrist who was interested in the nature of conversation as conversation may serve to provide access to and understanding of the inner world of a patient dealing with mental issues. But what is the meaning and value of a true conversation? Is it a psychological tool for diagnosing

and gathering information from one's interlocutor? Is it primarily a means for mutual expression? To show a fundamental and surprising feature of the meaning of having a conversation, van den Berg starts with an example: a brief anecdote of what he describes as a "remarkable" conversation.

There is a story about Tennyson visiting his good friend Carlyle. Both sit virtually the entire evening in total silence in their chairs near a fireplace. When it gets late, and Tennyson finally gets ready to leave, Carlyle says: "We had a grand evening, please do come back very soon." (van den Berg, 1953, p. 237)

Now, says van den Berg, nobody would want to defend that these two friends were involved in an animated conversation. Hardly a word was spoken! And yet, something must have happened during that evening that is closely related to a true conversation. Why would otherwise Carlyle have urged so sincerely for another evening like that? Van den Berg suggests that this remarkable anecdote needs to be interpreted in the following manner: When Tennyson and Carlyle sat together, the main condition for any true conversation was optimally fulfilled so that the spoken word became totally unnecessary and could be left out. What was this condition? It would be no mistake to observe that both experienced a togetherness. They experienced a being together that actually could have permitted any kind of conversational talk. But it was also a being together that did not really need words.

Van den Berg is fascinated with this anecdote and he wonders if this was not such perfectly shared togetherness that it was actually a perfect conversation: a conversation without words. In this example, words were not necessary. But is that not a bit bizarre? Can one have a conversation without words spoken? This is a typical eidetic phenomenological question. Van den Berg stirs us to wonder: What is really at the heart of a conversation? What is it that makes a conversation a unique and singular human experience? Common sense seems to say that a conversation consists of talk, words spoken, and no doubt this is superficially true. But, experientially, words do not have to be the essential feature of a conversational relation. So, van den Berg explores the phenomenological features of this conversational space. He suggests that we all know this kind of togetherness where we feel so understood that our words are given a true freedom. Have most of us not experienced this kind of conversational moments, with a dear friend or some other special person, when we feel so comfortably in our togetherness that we need not chatter?

More essentially, a conversation is a certain mode of togetherness, a certain way of sharing a world, of understanding and trusting the other, of experiencing a shared sphere, and each other's company. This special relational

sphere is what makes a conversation what it is. We can speak or we can be silent because we feel totally emerged in this shared conversational space. Understanding the phenomenal meaning of sharing a true conversation can indeed offer valuable insight for psychiatrists, psychologists, educators, nurses, physicians, or any professional for whom genuine conversations—the spoken words as well as the silences—constitute the main part of their professional practice. It is in moments like this that the deeper and the more fragile inner secrets may come to the surface and be shared in this trusted conversational space. Psychologists, nurses, physicians, and other professionals need to be able to create a conversational sphere if they want to reach the trust and inner lives of their patients. This kind of insightful knowledge has more to do with thoughtfulness and tact than with rules, techniques, and external competencies.

Now, what I find especially intriguing is the counterintuitive nature of van den Berg's example. It is the surprising insight embedded in this provocative questioning. Not only does he ask the eidetic phenomenological question, "Can a conversation without words still be a conversation?" He actually likes us to imaginatively entertain the suggestion that words are not really the essence of a true conversation. What we seek in a conversation is not necessarily what the words spoken may tell us, but rather what is experienced, communicated, and shared by the meaningfulness of the (conversational) sphere of togetherness that makes the conversation possible. Van den Berg has much more to say about the phenomenology of conversation, and, I suggest that his classic text, *A Different Existence: Principles of Phenomenological Psychopathology*, may be read as an illuminating phenomenological analysis of the conversations between the health science professional and the patient, and of the conversational relations they share in their worlds.

Of course, a qualitative researcher might prefer another qualitative methodology to study what a conversation is. To study the topic of conversation, one may want to start with a focus on words: discourse analysis, turn-taking, speech-coding, or language use. But when we analyze a conversation in terms of word usage, frequency, codes, or discourse, the conversation may actually lose its meaningful significance. Therefore, to take note immediately of a unique or essential quality of the lived experience of conversation, it is phenomenologically best to start with an experiential account such as an anecdotal example.

### ***A Phenomenological Question: What Is It Like to Experience a Meaningful Look? (Marion)***

A friend said to me, "You know something special happened this morning in the coffee shop: As I ordered my

coffee, the woman beside me gave me a real ‘look.’” I said, “You mean she was flirting?” But my friend said,

No, I just felt that the meeting of her look was a very pleasurable moment. People don’t do that very often. When someone gives you a real look, it sort of confirms that you are being seen, that you exist.

But he hastened to add, “this eye contact only took a second.” What is this special “look” like when our eyes cross and catch the eyes of another? What happens in this moment of real eye contact? To be sure, eyes often meet in common and contingent circumstances (see Casey, 2007). We glance the eye of the driver of the other car to check his or her traffic intention. We catch the eye of the sales person at the store, who greets us. We catch the eye of a person who walks by us. But those are fortuitous “glances,” incidental and accidental kinds of eye contact. Phenomenologically, it may not really be appropriate to speak of real “eye contact” in this common type of glancing of the eyes. No real encounter, meeting, or contact has been made in this contingent touching of the eyes. Or to say it differently, this was not a meaningful contact, not a meaningful touch of the look.

Soon after birth, newborn babies begin to show preference looking at the face of the mother, the one who holds and feeds them. This look is still more like a gaze that may wander from one object to another, fixing on this, then on that visual thing. The baby looks and stares at the face. But many mothers have noticed that between around 6 and 8 weeks, a newborn baby will “make” eye contact. This is a thrilling sensation of really meeting each other’s eye. It is the magic moment when the innerness of the infant seems to announce and reveal itself in the pupil of the eye. The pupils of the eyes “touch,” make contact. But at the same time, the pupil creates a distance between the self and the (m)other as the child may be regarded as (an-)other looking at the mother. Furthermore, Buytendijk describes how in this moment the smile may occur in the facial encounter between mother and the baby child—a first recognition or awareness of the innerness of the other. The smile is not just an expression, says Buytendijk, it is also a response to the person “toward whom our heart has affectionately opened” (Buytendijk, 1988, p. 4). Undoubtedly, the look where the pupils really “meet” is different from the look that merely sees the face. A different kind of consciousness or awareness is at stake—but this awareness or sense of experienced subjectivity is difficult to gauge.

Of course, when we talk with someone and when we make normal eye contact then we also see the general face in that field of vision and we may be aware of the visual surroundings and other visible things going on around us. Indeed, we may be struck by the beautiful blue, brown, or dark iris of the eyes of the person with

whom we make eye contact. But the true tact (touch) of eye contact consists in this: the pupil of the eye (touching) making contact with the pupil of the eye of the other. Without the pupil, the look of eye contact would be strange or even impossible. If we were to look someone in the eyes and there are no pupils, but just white eyeballs or only a colored iris, then there is no meeting of the look. In fact, the meeting of eyes that do not have pupils may be an unsettling experience, as if we are looking at the faces of zombies or the walking dead.

But what is the phenomenology of eye contact in the encounter with the face of the other person we meet? Do we “look” the person in the face? Although he does not mention the pupils of the eyes, Emmanuel Levinas suggests that we experience the face of the other more immediately:

I wonder if one can speak of a look turned toward the face, for the look is knowledge, perception. I think rather that access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of the eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other. The relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that. (Levinas, 1985, pp. 85, 86)

In a television commercial, we see a woman from the agency soliciting our support in financial donation, holding up a child of poverty in a caring embrace, and then she says to us, the television viewers, “Look into these eyes and do what you would do if you were face-to-face.” At the very moment that she utters these words, the child turns and stares directly into the camera. Now, no matter what we think of these kinds of commercials, if we really are captured by this child’s eyes and if we did not just look and click to another television channel, then we may have experienced an uncanny sensation. The pupils of the child’s eyes hold us so compellingly that, before we know what has happened, they burn us, as it were. In the pupils, we experience the demand of the child’s look.

But more specifically, what is the phenomenology of this contact of the pupils of the eyes? The philosopher phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion is interested in how we experience the look, as when we make eye contact with another person. He asks, “What gives itself in the look of the other?” Marion notes that, obviously, we cannot look at the look. The look is in a sense invisible. So, we must look where the look gives itself, in the face of the other. He gives a brief example:

Further still: what do we look at in the face of the other person? Not his or her mouth, nevertheless more expressive

of the intentions than other parts of the body, but the eyes—or more exactly the empty pupils of the person's eyes, their black holes open on the somber ocular hollow. In other words, in the face we fix on the sole place where precisely nothing can be seen. Thus, in the face of the other person we see precisely the point at which all visible spectacle happens to be impossible, where there is nothing to see, where intuition can give nothing [of the] visible. (Marion, 2002b, p. 115)

In real eye contact, we look the other in the empty black space of the pupil where nothing can be seen. What marvelous insight! Reading phenomenological texts often gives me great pleasure. I love the “meaningful insights” that phenomenological studies may offer. And, upon reading this paragraph, I could not help but think, where or how did Marion come up with this dramatic and delightful insight that when we look someone in the eye we tend to focus on the “ocular hollow” of the pupil? Did Marion have supper with his family and suddenly realize, when, while talking with his spouse and children, that we see the other by looking there where there is nothing to be seen? Did he then rush to write down this sensuous insight? Or did the insight come in the process of writing about the crossing of the eyes?

The phenomenology of looking someone in the eyes, eye contact, is not to see but to touch and meet. Literally, it is the touch of in-touchness, contact. Looking the other in the dark center, the pupils of the eyes is looking for the unseeing look of true eye contact. There is nothing to be seen or possessed in the pupils of the eyes. In this mutual touching of the eyes, this ephemeral moment when the pupils catch and momentarily lock each other in the look, we encounter the other's infinite otherness or secret. Only when the eyelid blinks may we suddenly be self-conscious of the pupil of the look in eye contact.

Indeed, ordinarily in a face-to-face relation, we make contact by looking at the eye, and yet, as Marion observes, the pupil is black, it actually is a hollow, so, unlike the surrounding iris of the eye, which may be colored and drawn, there is nothing to be seen in its center: the pupil. Isn't it fascinating that we make eye contact with others by looking at that part of their eyes where there is only invisibility? Marion might have noted as well, a further insight, that in eye contact we experience the eidetic difference between a certain kind of looking and seeing. Normally, when we look we see something. And in seeing we appropriate the world. The look claims what it sees. It possesses. But the look of eye contact has a unique essence (Spiegelberg, 1989). It does not claim. It does not see but touch—it touches the essence of the other. The phenomenology of eye contact is pure touch. That is why we feel as it were the eyes “catch” each other in the look.

## The Aim of Phenomenological Research Is Phenomenal Insights

I used the phenomenological questions of the meaning of boredom, the conversation, and the look, to focus on the notion of “example” and the ultimate fundamental methodological question of “meaningful insights” in the conduct of phenomenological research. Without meaningful insights, a phenomenological study is of little or no value. The entire endeavor of phenomenological inquiry, the point of phenomenology as qualitative research method, is to arrive at phenomenal understandings and insights—phenomenal in the sense of impressively unique and in the sense of primordially meaningful.

Now, I want to acknowledge that “phenomenal understanding and insights” may not necessarily (or even likely) come from procedural analysis of a sample of data. As such, phenomenological analysis is not conducted through sorting, counting, or even systematic coding efforts. Rather, phenomenological inquiry proceeds through an inceptual process of reflective wondering, deep questioning, attentive reminiscing, and sensitively interpreting of the primal meanings of human experiences. When using the term “inceptual insights,” Heidegger refers to the originary meaning of a phenomenon—this primal meaning that phenomenological reflection (through the epoché and the reduction) tries to retrieve, lies at the beginning of its beginning (Heidegger, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b).

The couplet of the epoché-reduction is the famous fundamental method of phenomenological research and inquiry. It is a method of reflection on the unique meaning of the phenomenon that one is studying to gain an eidetic grasp, fundamental understanding, or inceptual insight into the phenomenological meaning of a human experience (moment or event). Phenomenological reflection should refrain from theorizing, conceptualizing, abstracting, and objectifying; it is a nonobjectifying reflection. The reduction is practiced as a constant questioning: for example, in the above sections, we asked, “What really is the primal meaning of the experience of boredom, a conversation, a meaningful look?” The method of phenomenological reflection and analysis aims at the eidetic or inceptual meaning of a phenomenon or lived experience by subjecting the phenomenon to the eidetic method of “variation in imagination” (Is it like this? like that?) or by asking how the phenomenon gives itself in its self-givenness (How does it show itself?).

Phenomenological insights are inceptual—not merely semantic, interpretive, explanatory, or conceptual. The same is true for the themes that the phenomenological reflection of the epoché-reduction may reveal: these themes are incepts not concepts. The difference between a *concept* and an *incept* is this: A concept (in German, *Begriff*) abstracts from particulars of meaning: it

generalizes. An ordinary concept leaves out all but one aspect of a being: its precise conceptual meaning or usage in ordinary and scientific language. In contrast, an *incept* (in German, *Inbegriff*) evokes the concrete richness and originary uniqueness of particulars: It singularizes while doing justice to the fullness of its meaning. As Heidegger says, the significance of *inceptuality* “lies in the grasping of the turning itself” like a radical turn in our thought: an abrupt and unmediated grasping of “what is essential in the sense of the original-unique” (2012b, p. 52).

That which “is” one customarily takes as a particular being, for indeed the “is” is said of beings. But now everything has turned. Insight does not name our inspection of the being, insight as flashing entry is the appropriative event of the constellation of the turn in the essence of being itself. (Heidegger, 2012a, pp. 70, 71)

In contrast with the promises of systematic procedural analysis, the problem for phenomenological researchers is that such insight cannot necessarily be secured by means of a formulaic set of steps, or a recipe approach, and yet, phenomenological inquiry involves “method” but method and analysis understood in a nonmethodical sense (van Manen, 2014). The basic method of phenomenological analysis consists of the epoché and the reduction—finding the open space for phenomenological reflection—but the epoché and the reduction (no matter how the openness and reflection are understood), cannot be folded nicely into a qualitative program of determinable strategies, calculative schemes, codes and inventive analytic and synthesizing technicalities that will produce or conveniently deliver some original thoughts or creative insights. True insights are not “technically derived” or “methodically produced” but rather phenomenological insights are “encountered,” “discovered,” “given,” “found,” or sometimes even “stumbled upon.”

The method of phenomenological insight we might somewhat provocatively call a “nonmethodical method.” Let me give an example of a nonmethodical method from Buddhist philosophy. Ananda was Buddha’s most beloved and most learned disciple. Ananda was Buddha’s ever-present attendant. Many of Buddha’s disciples had become enlightened but ironically not Ananda. He had perfect memory and knew all the practices and techniques of meditative reflection that the aging Buddha over the course of his life had taught to his disciples. Yet, Ananda had been so busy that he had not had the time to find enlightenment in meditation himself.

But on the day when Buddha died, Ananda himself had to get ready to enter the council of enlightened leaders and become a member, an arhant. So, in frantic preparation, he sat and meditated for many days, all day and all night, in the hope of becoming enlightened—but the enlightened insights would not come. All these years, he had been so busy memorizing and teaching the prescribed

meditative method, he had never gained enlightenment himself. None of these stipulated methods would help him. Finally, Ananda became so desperate and so tired that he said to himself, “I just cannot do this. Obviously, I am not worthy of joining the council. I must just give up. I better lie down and go to sleep.” Ananda stopped trying to be something he wasn’t; and then . . . before his head hit the pillow, in an instant he was a liberated arhant—totally awake. He became enlightened finally by letting go, by simply stopping and seeing things just as they are. It was the end of the struggle. No more trying to become an arhant, and he became an arhant. The important insight was the nonmethodical method of meditative reflection.

Now the idea of nonmethodical method is related to the intriguing idea of the gateless gate. I am not referring to the ancient collection of Koans termed the “gateless gate,” but rather to the image of the key that is supposed to give access to the door behind which we would find the answers or insights for our search. The supposed key for understanding data for some qualitative research approaches involves data analysis, coding, synthesizing, or any other popularly announced program, technique, or qualitative method. However, a promise and fixation on “methods” may fool the researcher into thinking, “Okay, I have got this key. Now let’s find the door!” So, researchers look for the right door to which the key gives access. When they cannot find the door, they reject the method. However, the gateless gate teaches that the keyhole needs no key, because there is no door. It is a gateless gate. So, the problem is that some researchers are so consumed by the idea or promise of a “method” (such as a procedural scheme or program for doing “interpretive phenomenological analysis”) that will yield important qualitative understandings and insights that they don’t allow themselves to recognize an insight when they stumble over it in a “nonmethodical moment.”

### The Nonmethodical Moment of Kairos Insight

A phenomenological insight may be said to occur in a Kairos moment. I say “Kairos moment” because Kairos always shows himself in the fleeting instant of a moment. But this instant can be life-altering for the person who encounters Kairos and understands the importance of just this momentary instant.

From Greek mythology, we all know Chronos the father of Zeus, but the strange thing is that Kairos (the rebellious grandson of Chronos), is little known. Both Chronos and Kairos are gods of time and both are portrayed with wings. Chronos is the god of quantitative or cosmic time of the clock. Kairos is the god of qualitative time—but not just any kind of qualitative time: Kairos is

pregnant time, the time of possibility. Chronos is often depicted as an aged bearded man with lots of hair, holding an hourglass by which he measures time. Even though he is an old man, Chronos is a bit of a bully, dominating and authoritarian. Chronos time is plannable, measurable, reproducible, and predictable. Underlying the distinction between Chronos time and Kairos time slumbers a significant philosophical controversy: the question whether we experience time as a continuous flow of duration or as discontinuous ruptured moments and instants.

In *Intuition of the Instant*, Gaston Bachelard (2013) carefully examined in 1932 the generally accepted position of Henri Bergson (explicated in 1910) that we experience time as duration. He contrasts Bergson's (2001) sense of temporality as "the consciousness of pure duration" with his sense of streaming time as "multiplying conscious instants" (Bachelard, 2013, p. 50). Husserl also describes the streaming of time as a constant renewal of the "now" moment that constantly changes into the "just now." We have to pay attention to how the now gives itself, says Edmund Husserl (2014),

to the fact that a new now attaches itself to this now, and that a new and constantly new now attaches intrinsically to every now in a necessary continuity, and that, in unity with this, every current now changes into a "just now," while the "just now" changes in turn and continually into ever new instances of "just now" of the previous "just now" and so forth. The same holds for every now that has attached a new to a previous now. (p. 157)

Husserl's (1964) phrase for describing the lived presence of the "now" that lies at the basis of our everyday existence is "primal impressional consciousness." In his *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, he famously uses the example of musical sound to show how the tones of a piece of music present themselves in the instant of the now, and how the successive retention (just now) and anticipated protention (next now) gives us the experience of melody: of time past, present, and future. In Husserl's epistemological language, it is the primal impressional consciousness and its retentional and protentional aspects that make our lived experiences potentially available for our reflection.

The curious fact of life is that we always seem to be in the "now," in the instance of the moment or the moment that spreads out over time. How could we not be? As I am writing these words, I am in the now of this moment of writing (I have been doing so for a couple of hours). Even when we dwell in memories, daydreams, or in anticipations, we do so in the experiential "now." And yet, when we try to capture the "now" of our experience, we always seem to be too late.

This is where the figure of Kairos becomes important for our understanding of the instant of the now as the

source for phenomenological insights. Kairos offers us an understanding of time as the discontinuous instant of the now, the fleeting instant of the moment, or the experiential structure of time as momentary temporality. Kairos is indeed a very strange and complex figure of temporality. Since ancient biblical times, a Kairos moment has been described as *carpe diem*, a transformative moment of chance and change, depending on our ability and willingness to recognize this moment and to seize the opportunity that is offered in it. Kairos is the god of the ephemeral moment. He is whimsical, rebellious, and creative. In old paintings and sculptures, he holds a razor, or else scales balanced on the sharp edge of a knife—illustrating the evanescent instant of a moment when Kairos may appear and disappear. You also can see that he is double-winged, indicating that a Kairos moment is fleeting, propitious, instantaneous, and serendipitous. Kairos time is the presence of the now. The instant of the now. In such a Kairos moment, time seems to stand still. We are in timeless time.

Yet, if Kairos comes your direction, he'll race by on his wild wings. At that "eyewink" instant, you have the chance to grab him by the hair as he flies by, but the moment he has passed you, you are too late. You may reach out for his hair but your hands will slip off the back of his bald skull. This is a provocative image, but one that is striking and clarifying of the human predicament when something hangs in the balance: of needing to deal with a crisis that confronts us in the now, but that will be too late to face when the now has passed. Then all there is left is regret that Kairos leaves in his trail. The figure of Metanoia often appears as a veiled and sorrowful woman companion of Kairos. Metanoia is there to perhaps console or blame us when we fail in Kairos moments of opportunity.

Like so many mythological tales and legends, the figure of Kairos speaks to the enigma of our humanness. Heidegger has pointed out that in our age we are all under the spell of Chronos: continuity, order, and machination. While living in a time dominated by technology and production, there are aspects to our humanity that are hard to grasp, such as human innerness, the imaginal, and the incipital. And yet, however beyond comprehension this play of Kairos may sound, this is the sort of thing that seems to have happened to many of us. I trust it has happened to you the reader: I am trying to write some ideas, reflecting on the meaning of a certain question or phenomenon that interests me, but the insight won't come. Finally, when I seem to be hopelessly stuck with my writing I give up. To do what? Well, nothing: I do nothing—which means I may go for a walk, a bike-ride through the countryside, or spend half an hour mindlessly peddling on my exercise bike with music turned up really loudly.

Now, it is in mindless moments like this (doing essentially nothing) that our most striking insights may

happen. Afterward we say, “It occurred to me,” “It crossed my mind,” “It came to me,” “I stumbled upon,” “I suddenly had this idea,” “It hit me,” “I had a dream,” “I suddenly thought,” “I suddenly felt I was onto something,” “as if from a hazy distance,” “the words just came to mind.”

## Phenomenological Inseeing: Meaning Insights

The term “insight” literally means in-seeing. *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides a definition of “insight” that gets at the very phenomenology of its meaning: “The fact of penetrating with the eyes of the understanding into the inner character or hidden nature of things; a glimpse or view beneath the surface; the faculty or power of thus seeing.” So, insight is related to inseeing, ingrasping, and inception. Rilke (1987) provides a vocative description of this sudden moment of inseeing:

If I were to tell you where my greatest feeling, my universal feeling, the bliss of my earthly existence has been, I would have to confess: It has always, here and there, been in this kind of in-seeing, in the indescribably swift, deep, timeless moments of this divine seeing into the heart of things. (p. 77)

Rilke’s description of inseeing as that fleeting swift moment of seeing into the heart of things is a Kairos moment. Inseeing can be regarded a vocative poetic description of the phenomenological method of the epoché-reduction: glancing at the essence of something (a phenomenon or event). The insight of inseeing is grasping the primal structure of meaning of something. But the insight of phenomenological inseeing must be distinguished and not be confused with the more common definitions of insight as suddenly seeing the solution to a problem.

There exists quite an extensive literature on the philosophy and psychology of insight (e.g., Crowe & Doran, 1992; Kounios & Beeman, 2015; Sternberg & Davidson, 1995), yet almost all this literature is concerned with problem-solutions and cause-and-effect insights. Problem-solution insights tend to occur when experiencing an impasse in solving a previously puzzling or incomprehensible problem. Sometimes, a solution will suddenly occur as an “eureka” moment or an “aha” epiphany. A famous example of a problem insight is the eureka moment that occurred to Archimedes when he suddenly realized, while taking a bath, how to measure the volume of an irregular object or body. A cause-and-effect insight also is characterized by a sudden insight after a period of incubation. The cause and effect insight describes the moment of suddenly seeing the causal nexus of a physical, psychological, or an epidemiological situation. A

famous example of the cause-and-effect insight is given by the neuroscientist Otto Loewi. He tells how an insight occurred to him as a dream when he wondered how to determine whether the causal nexus for the transmission of nerve impulses is chemical or electrical. Usually “insights” are associated with research and technologies in the physical and medical sciences, nanotechnologies, and so forth. In Canada, there is a national radio program, *Quirks and Quarks*, that once a week features the latest scientific insights and discoveries. But these are problem-solution insights. Meaning insights are rarely or never addressed in this otherwise fascinating program about the progress of human insights into natural, physical, and cosmic phenomena.

Meaning insights are different from problem-solution and cause-effect insights. Problem-solutions and cause-effect insights may occur in a single instant, as when Archimedes reportedly jumped out of his bathtub and ran into the street yelling “eureka, I found it!” Meaning insights generally do not offer themselves in a single coup. Once revealed in an insightful moment, they have to be wrestled with to gain depth and clarity, and their complexity often requires further insights, as in Heidegger’s increasingly depthful insights into the phenomenon of boredom. Similarly, meaning insights do not so much require a period of incubation, as in the chicken that must be physically ready to lay the egg.

Rather, meaning insights depend on a “latency” that eventuates an experience of clarity. This clarity of a sudden meaningfulness may also be sudden but is more associated with a sense of opening oneself and a constant searching for understanding the meaning of something. Indeed, this opening and searching may be associated with the phenomenological epoché (opening up) and the reduction (closing down and focusing on something). A meaning insight may come to us as when suddenly remembering the name of someone or something. Other meanings are less like names but more like memories that present themselves like an eidetic anamnesis, reminiscences of essences of our fundamental humanness. These may come to us when most unexpected, and yet they require a charged preoccupation, being haunted by the need to understand or “see” something for what it is or for how it gives itself. Meaning insights must be written or they escape like Kairos moments. The sudden ingrasping of an inceptual insight is the writerly experience of the gaze of Orpheus who was haunted by the desire to see Eurydice in her essence: her perfect incarnation of the immortality of love itself.

Meaning insights tend to occur when we wonder about the sense or the significance of the originary meaning of an experiential phenomenon. Originary does not mean new or original. Originary means inceptual: originary insights reveal the primal meaning and significance of a

phenomenon (lived experience). For Heidegger, the notion of inceptuality assumes critical significance in his later work. The originary meaning of a phenomenon or event (lived experience) lies in its inceptuality, its primal meaning, that must be sought in the *epoché* (openness) of the beginning of its meaningful beginning. An incept is a grasping of the epitome, quintessence, or “what is essential in the sense of the original-unique,” says Heidegger (2012b, p. 52). According to Heidegger (1999), in-grasping [inceptuality] is a knowing awareness that comes out of in-abiding which is not a propositional knowing (p. 45). Inception connotes origination, birth, dawn, genesis, beginning, and opening. When Heidegger describes an inceptual insight, it tends to occur as a “flash of beying” (Heidegger, 2012a, pp. 70, 71), meaning a flash of inceptual meaning.

Insightfulness should not be confused with creativity. From a phenomenological perspective, the occurrence of a “flash of insight” is more intriguing than understanding it as a creative act. In a creative act the subject is the creator, the agent of the creation, the creative production. But inceptual insights do not necessarily depend on my creative agency, rather an inceptual thought may happen to me as a gift, a grace—an event that I could neither plan nor foresee. That is why Heidegger describes the inceptual experience in terms of an appropriative event or happening. In a manner, the inception may be regarded as the birth of meaning. The problem for phenomenological researchers is that a meaningful insight often cannot be secured by a planned systematic method. There are no technicalities, procedures, schemes, packages, or programs that will somehow produce or capture an insightful thought or creative insight.

## The Work and Wonder of Phenomenological Research

A serious student of phenomenology should study phenomenology in its original sense (Higgins & van der Riet, 2016), not by limiting oneself to secondary literature or by enlisting to a watered-down program that announces itself as “phenomenology” but that does not resemble any of the mainstream and primary phenomenological examples and literature. This means that one should be prepared to live with the uncertainty, frustration, and risk that the (re)search for genuine insights may require. In addition to the formulation of the phenomenological research question, the gathering of lived experience materials, consulting insight cultivators in the literature, applying the reflective *epoché* and reduction, phenomenological research is ultimately a practice of authoring an insightful text on a phenomenological topic. Researchers need to realize that the outcome of phenomenological research is inseparable from phenomenological reading, writing, and rewriting.

The more profound phenomenological insights may only come in the process of wrestling with writing and reflective rewriting—weighing every word for its cognitive weight and vocative meaning. A text that lacks originary insights into the lived meaning of a phenomenon or event is not a phenomenological text.

To reiterate, insights do not happen when we are busy with all kinds of things such as multitasking or distractedly looking at our mobile for messages every 10 minutes. But strangely, insights may occur when we truly do nothing. So, what is it like to do nothing? Well, merely experiencing an empty moment. Just listening to some music. Indulging in boredom. Submitting to a mood of openness. Withdrawing from others (the they). Letting go or letting be. Giving over to active passivity. Being caught in a Kairos timeless moment of the now. Or going for a lone walk. Socrates and Heidegger were the great philosophers who are famous for their liking to walk. Socrates used to walk around the squares and market place where he mused on the truth of things; and Heidegger used to hike along the wood paths of his cabin in the woods. He even describes the moments of coming upon a sunny clearing in the woods of the Black Forest as a metaphoric experience of *alethea*, truth, the bright clearing of an insight.

Only when we actively surrender to a mood of passivity and ready ourselves for a chance meeting with Kairos—while refusing to be distracted by everyday business around us—we may seize an insight by letting it seize us or by being seized by it. And yet, if we are not searching it will not find us. Insights will not come if we do not read and reflect, write and rewrite. Jacques Derrida pointed out that even before we sit down and write we were already writing—even when seemingly doing nothing (Derrida & Ferraris, 2001). So, we must always be attentive and prepared to write, even when we do not have a writing instrument at hand or when we are not sitting behind the keyboard. Insights may come to us in various surprising situations and contexts. This means that insights still may happen when we are in a state of active passivity. Sometimes, an insight comes when we are just about to fall asleep. If it happens then better write it down. Indeed, an insight may tend to occur as a fleeting evanescent Kairos moment. Or an insight may come to us serendipitously, as if by coincidence, luck, playful providence—not necessarily through straightforward systematic analysis—but as if through the backdoor.

In addressing the question, “What is phenomenology?” I ask, what is phenomenology in its original sense? Speaking of “phenomenology in its original sense,” defers arguments about methods or methodology to the primary scholarly phenomenological and human science literature. If we want to become familiar with phenomenology in its original sense, we need to be willing to read, engage the

writings of leading phenomenologists, such as Edmund Husserl (1936/1970), Edith Stein (1989), Martin Heidegger (2010), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012), and Emmanuel Levinas (2003); and more recently Alphonso Lingis (2001), Jean-Luc Nancy (1997), Bernard Stiegler (1998), and Jean-Luc Marion (2006); and more professional practice based phenomenologists such as Johan van den Berg (1972), Martinus Langeveld (1983), Kay Toombs (2001), Hayne (2002), Cathy Adams (2010) and Michael van Manen (2014, in this issue of *QHR*). Of course, there are numerous worthwhile scholarly phenomenological sources by gifted thinkers and authors.

## Conclusion

I have tried here to present some basic tenets of phenomenology. Elsewhere, I have referred to a variety of phenomenological traditions, such as transcendental, ontological, existential, hermeneutic, literary, oneiric-poetic, technogenetic, and radical phenomenologies (see van Manen, 2014). And I have also articulated how in professional fields such as nursing, medicine, clinical psychology, pedagogy, and education the experiential material may be sought through interview, observation, virtual, or literary sources. While it is possible to distinguish philosophical phenomenologists and professional practitioner based phenomenologists, the lines between philosophy, the humanities, and the various human sciences are sometimes difficult to draw—as exemplified above in the use of experiential material or “examples” in phenomenological reflections on boredom, conversation, and the look by such diverse phenomenological scholars as the founding philosopher Martin Heidegger, the clinical psychiatrist Johan van den Berg, and the contemporary philosopher phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion.

A phenomenology of practice may find its scholarly sources in any of the domains relevant to phenomenology. I should stress, however, that phenomenology in its original sense is a philosophically based form of inquiry that continues to evolve and that cannot be presented in a simplistic scheme or formula. In my view, it is not always helpful to distinguish strict philosophical phenomenology from human science based phenomenology. Those are increasingly confusing distinctions that unfortunately may give false license to inappropriate research labeling, claims, and practices. Phenomenology in its original sense requires of its practitioners a scholarly commitment to orient to past and present leading phenomenological literature and thinking in its various scholarly forms.

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