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Teaching Phenomenology by Way of "Second-Person Perspectivity" (From My Thirty Years at the University of Dallas)

by **Scott D. Churchill**

Abstract

Phenomenology has remained a sheltering place for those who would seek to understand not only their own "first person" experiences but also the first person experiences of others. Recent publications by renowned scholars within the field have clarified and extended our possibilities of access to "first person" experience by means of perception (Lingis, 2007) and reflection (Zahavi, 2005). Teaching phenomenology remains a challenge, however, because one must find ways of communicating to the student how to embody it as a process rather than simply to learn about it as a content area. Another challenge issues from the fact that most writings on applied phenomenology emphasize individual subjectivity as the central focus, while offering only indirect access to the subjectivity of others (for example, by way of analyzing written descriptions provided by the individual under study). While one finds in the literature of psychotherapy plentiful elucidations of the "we-experience" within which therapists form impressions of their clients' experience, there is still need for a more thoughtful clarification of our rather special personal modes of access to the experience of others in everyday life. This paper will present "second person perspectivity" as a mode of resonating with the expressions of others and will describe class activities that can bring students closer to a lived understanding of what it means to be doing phenomenology in the face of the other.

Among the challenges for phenomenology is the crucial question: how do we break from the "first person singular experience" in order to encounter other sentient beings in the world? I call this a challenge, because phenomenology is generally "done" in the first person singular, even if it always presupposes the first person plural, which is to say that we "find ourselves" living in a world with others. If today's phenomenologists are not yet at home dwelling reflectively in second person perspectivity, it is nonetheless the case that there is a necessary shift from first person singular to second person awareness the moment we embark on the task of an ethics. Even before we engage in our ontological and ethical reflections, there is an *ethos* of the social world itself, which serves as backdrop for all our actions. Within this *ethos*, we encounter what Levinas (1961/1969) called "the face of the other". Even prior to Levinas, Husserl (1910-11/2006) pointed us in the direction of what has been called an "intersubjective reduction". It is precisely the possibility (and the positing) of this *intersubjective dimension* of the "transcendental reduction" that inspires us here in the move toward second person perspectivity.

Psychology seems to have begun as a discipline whose target was first person experience, but it quickly degenerated into what are, strictly speaking,

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third person approaches[1] to the individual. Eventually, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1964c, p. 52) would (ambiguously) offer the perspective of a "witness" of behaviour as a fruitful alternative to introspection as a mode of access to the meaning of lived experience. I say that he was "ambiguous" because he did not clarify for us the distinction I would like to make here between "second person" and "third person" modes of bearing witness. What I wish to do in this paper is to elaborate the meaning of taking up one's role as a "witness" of behaviour in the mode of second person perspectivity. The paper will proceed from a brief definition of this mode of witnessing, to a sketch of my history in teaching phenomenology, and then to a presentation of some exercises that I use to teach this very special mode of observing both human and non-human expression. Following this, I will revisit the philosophical literature and discuss further implications for pedagogy.

Second Person Perspectivity

One might say that the "second person perspective" itself emerges when we first engage the other person as a "you" – which usually occurs at the moment that we first address the other, whether as a speaking or a non-speaking subject. At this point, I have not differentiated the other as a human being from the more general world of sentient beings. Indeed, my own reflective forays into the world of second-person experiences began when I first began thinking about my encounters with primates – and, more specifically, with my first "conversations with a bonobo" (Churchill 2000-2001, 2001, 2003). Since then, I have had to sharpen my thoughts regarding the "second person"[2] if only because of the ambiguity of who is the "first" and who is the "second" person at any moment within the "I-thou" encounter (Churchill, 2006a, 2007, 2010b; Churchill, 2010).

In an earlier contribution to this journal (Churchill, 2006a), I focused upon the "up-close" exchange between myself and a bonobo as a point of departure for considering the power of second-person perspectivity for entering into the world of other sentient beings. In the current paper, I would like to elaborate this concept of the second person while also offering a reflection on the pedagogical exercises that I have used in my classes as a way of attuning my students to this dimension of their own experience. In my earlier treatment, I started out with the usual linguistic distinctions: with "first person" referring to *my* stance as thinking subject, "second person" referring to *your* position as the one I am addressing, and "third person" referring to the person "over there" whose behaviour I may be observing at a distance. I then reversed the usual (linguistic) use of "persons" in order to reflect the psychologist's interest, which is not his or her own experience but rather that of the patient, the client, the research participant. In this formulation, my interest or target would be the first person experience of the other. If I were to adopt a "third person" perspective, such as the behaviourist does, then the other's "first person" experience would remain opaque to me. If I were to attempt to "adopt" the other's first person perspective via Schutz's (1970, pp. 183-184) notion of an "interchangeability of standpoints", I would end up trying to *imagine* the other's experience, but would remain ultimately within *my* own framework. These unsatisfactory alternatives of dispassionate third person and imaginative first person perspectives can, however, be transcended when I allow myself to *resonate with* the other: where I become the "second person" whom the other addresses.

What I am acknowledging in the current formulation is that "second person perspectivity" is a special mode of access to the other that occurs *within* the first person plural: in *experiencing the other within the we*[3], we are open to the other as a "thou", another "myself" – and, in this same moment, I become an intimate "Other" to the one with whom I find myself in an "exchange". Thus, the trick to understanding second person perspectivity is realizing that it works *in both directions at the same time*. "What matters is our willingness and ability to acknowledge and be open to the *presence of the other as a locus of experience that can reciprocate that acknowledge-ment"* (Quincey, 2000, p. 152). Merleau-Ponty (1960/1964b) wrote in "The Philosopher and His Shadow": "Others and my body are born together from the original ecstasy" (p. 174). This ecstasy refers to that special moment within "first person plural" experience when we experience the call to ourselves to enjoin the other in that communicative dance, that exhilarating exchange, in which we come to know both ourselves and others.

[1] It is also an unfortunate fact that "phenomenological" qualitative research is increasingly being conducted from a third person perspective, in which the researcher merely summarizes the statements made by research participants, accepting at face value the first-person formulations of participants presented from within their "natural attitude", and thus remaining within the participant's natural attitude rather than transcending it by means of a "psychological phenomenological reduction" (Giorgi, 2009; Husserl, 1925/1977).

[2] Evan Thompson's (2001) illuminating collection of essays from a rich array of sources provided me with the inspiration to continue my reflections in the direction of clarifying my own "second person" experiences both in the classroom and in my subsequent writings.

[3] I would like to express thanks to Lester Embree for suggesting this phrase to me in reference to my work.

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I have been working on developing the idea behind this second person perspectivity in a series of reflections focusing in on one or another application (conversations with a bonobo, observing emotional expressions, qualitative research interviewing, open-hearted caregiving[4]) – and now I have been asked to talk about teaching phenomenology. So I will turn here to a discussion of some of the exercises that I use in *cultivating an empathic presence to the world* with my students. One of the things that I really enjoy in "teaching" second-person perspectivity is that it is really a matter of making students more aware of a capacity for experiencing and understanding others' expressions of life that they have always already "possessed" (much like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, who is shown by the Wizard that she has always possessed the means of returning home by simply clicking her red shoes). In carrying out these exercises, the students become enthralled to discover that they can tap into their own experience to open themselves to new worlds.

New Worlds

My first introduction to the phenomenon of other "worlds" was through my reading of von Uexküll (1909) as a freshman biology major at Bucknell. It was von Uexküll's (1934) exploration of the "bubbles of perception" found within the animal world that later led Heidegger (1929-30/1995), Binswanger (1946/1958), and Merleau-Ponty (1956-57/2003) to acknowledge him as a pioneer in laying the groundwork for clarifying how it is that we have access to other worlds, other beings. I began creating pedagogical exercises for my freshmen students when I was a graduate assistant at Duquesne in the mid-1970s, where I would have them attempt, via von Uexküll's method of "participatory observation" (see T. von Uexküll, 1992, pp. 280-281), to imagine their way into the *lifeworlds* (or *Umwelten*) of animal species other than their own. I will be referring back to this in a moment, when I discuss the phenomenological exercises that I currently use with my students.

My work over the years has focused, in one way or another, on a study of "alterity". I have been interested, as a phenomenologist, in the personal means of access to that which is not originally my own experience, but which belongs to the Other – and which nonetheless comes within the purview of my own experience. I took my cue from Merleau-Ponty (1952/1973) who, in *The Prose of the World*, wrote: "Whether speaking or listening, I project myself into the other person, I introduce him into my own self" (p. 19). In my dissertation, I took up the phenomenon of how, as a clinical psychologist, one could phenomenologically have access to the meaning of a patient's experience – and thus how one could approach the study of the other "person" or "personality" (Churchill, 1984, 1998). Later, I delved into the experience of gendered alterity, undertaking an analysis of the experiences of "projective identification" with another person as revealed during moments of intimate play (Churchill, 1995, 1997). In that project, I was investigating empathic moments of connecting with another person, where "empathy" referred to a moment when one is so absorbed in the perception – the living/perceiving – of another's pleasure that one feels as though one were there "on the other side" of the encounter. Eventually I would incorporate what I had learned in these special contexts to understanding empathy as an investigatory posture within qualitative research (Churchill, 1988; 1993; 2006b; Churchill, Lowery, McNally, & Rao, 1998).

Psychology Goes to the Cinema

It was in search of new ways of bringing my students to cultivate their sense of empathy in accessing others' experiences that I began teaching courses in the psychology of film. Currently, for example, I am running a film series in conjunction with my Fundamentals of Clinical Psychology class, which we are calling "Cinematic Representations of the Asylum". Having students watch *The Snake Pit, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, I Never Promised you a Rose Garden, Frances, Sling Blade, King of Hearts*, and *Girl, Interrupted* has brought them face to face with personal worlds of fictional as well as nonfictional characters. In viewing these films, students bear witness, time and time again, to an existence that is not their own. Over the past couple of decades, I have added a series of one-credit film classes to my regular teaching schedule – *Contemporary French Cinema, Women in Film, Cutting Edge Films of the Late 1960s and 1970s, Woody Allen Films, Fellini Films, Cinematic Explorations of Inner Worlds and Character, Film Fantasy and Dreams*. Each of these classes became a way of exploring the worlds of fictional characters and, ultimately, the worlds of the directors themselves. But, most of all, it was the *phenomenology* of the film experience that I was trying to convey. In these film classes, I try to get the students to reflect on "where they are" psychologically when they are viewing the film in a theatre – totally immersed in its world, almost as though you are there "on the other side" of the screen. (Such an experience is all but lost when viewing a film on one's cell phone, or even in one's living room. Thus, it is so disheartening to see a new

[4] I wish to thank Karin Dahlberg, Kate Galvin and Les Todres for their elucidations of "openheartedness" (Dahlberg & Drew, 1997; Galvin & Todres, 2009) which inspired me to adopt this term in my own reflections.

generation that almost has to be forced into the communal experience of viewing films together in a darkened theatre.)

In turning to watching films together as a way of accessing other worlds, I realized that I had struck gold! Movies, like other moments of intimate perception, give one a glimpse of what it is like to be "on the other side". To get my students more "into" their bodies, however, we would have to take field trips to local zoos and museums.

Trips to the Zoo

Around the mid 1990s, I began teaching university classes at the Dallas Zoo with an aim toward the description of the behaviours of gorillas and chimpanzees. Actually, I started teaching Jane Goodall's (1971/1988) work in my first Foundations of Psychology classes in the mid-1980s, but it was not until the late 1990s that I began to realize that I could begin to engender a different kind of learning experience than ever before. We had conducted a baseline study of the chimpanzees' social behaviour before they were moved into a new "Chimpanzoo" exhibit that was, like the existing gorilla exhibit, a natural habitat. During this time, we were made to realize that, without an intuitive grasp of the situation being observed, one would not be able to communicate, by means of codes, the *meaning* of the social behaviours unfolding before one's eyes.[5] That was when I began visiting other zoos, and found myself imitating the behaviour of a bonobo that I encountered at the Fort Worth Zoo. It was here that I discovered both my own capacity and that of my students to really get into a dance with the animal on the other side of the looking glass.

It was, ironically, at the zoo – where I had no speaking subjects from which to collect descriptions – that I was forced to provide the raw data in the form of my *own* experience of the animal other. I had always enjoyed interacting with animals, and now I found myself standing vis-à-vis a little bonobo who had been standing by himself in the rain, perhaps feeling ostracized by the other two males (who were blissfully engaged in an *Ineinander* that need not be detailed here). It may have been that the goitre bulging from his neck made the others wary of him; but, whatever the case, I found myself the object of his inquisitive interest, as though he were the primatologist and I his research subject. (It may have also been this reversal of roles that first suggested to me the more fundamental reversibility that was at play in such experiences. See Churchill, 2001 & 2003.)

The encounter became a series of gestural exchanges in which he *appeared* to be engaging in motor movements *in order to* provoke a response from me. The only thing I could think to do was to respond in kind, to mimic his gestures, and soon I found myself engaged in a kind of dance with the bonobo, which eventually attracted a swarm of visitors who formed an audience behind my students, who were watching and taking copious notes (no doubt delighted that their professor was "making a monkey of himself"). I say "found myself" because I truly did not think of myself as "directing" my own behaviour, but rather reacting quite "automatically" or "naturally" to the gestures of the bonobo.

Given my own success in encountering the bonobos at the zoo, I thought to integrate this into my phenomenology classes, as a way of getting students "out of their heads" and "into their bodies" in developing a personal aptitude for understanding the expressive life of others. So I would take my students to one of the local zoos, and ask them each to reflect on the "world" of a particular animal (what von Uexküll had called the *Umwelt*) and compare this to their own personal *Umwelt*. Taking our cue from Wolfgang Köhler (1921/1971), we realized that we had to find a way of cultivating our abilities to form what he called *gestalts* or "total impressions". In his essay on "Methods of Psychological Research with Apes", Wolfgang Köhler wrote:

> The farther we push the analysis in striving for [a particular] kind of objectivity, the less we are inclined to call the description one of the "behaviour" of apes, and the more it dissolves into purely physiological statements. But this is scarcely the intention of objective psychology [the aim of which would be fidelity to the "object" of description!] … . If the subject matter of objective psychological observations disappears as soon as one tries to describe it analytically beyond a certain point, then *there are realities in the animals investigated which are perceptible to us only in those total impressions*. (p. 206)

And then Köhler asks: "How is that possible?" Indeed, how is it possible that the traditional scientific third person point of view results in our losing sight of the subject matter of objective psychology? What is it that the third person perspective fails to give us, time and time again, when we go to the encounter with our animal subjects?

Köhler continues:

[5] One of my students eventually wrote her senior thesis on this topic that had emerged from our Spring/Summer 1997 Ape Ethography classes; the thesis was later published in *Methods: A Journal for Human Science* (Maril, 2002).

> … it will be assumed that something objective in the animal – the very subject matter of descriptive psychology – eludes observation if this is directed to those part processes. But here another problem arises and remains, in the end, to be solved: In what manner do the total *processes* in and on the body of the ape produce total *impressions* in our perception? What are the nature and the degree of the correspondence between them? (p. 206)

Already in 1921 a psychologist was pointing us in the direction of seeing a *relationship of unity* between the givenness of behaviour in our perceptual field, and our experience of that behaviour in its meaningfulness.

We found inspiration not only in Köhler, but in the writings of Karl Jaspers (1913/1963) who, in his massive *General Psychopathology*, presents the reader with two fundamental modes of access to the objective expressions of psychological life: the empirical and the empathic[6]. The former would correspond to what animal psychologists are typically doing when observing animal behaviour as seen through the filter of an "ethogram" (a codified list of observable behaviours, operationally defined); the latter would correspond to what we eventually incorporated into our observations, which can only be described as descriptions of the behaviour's meaning as revealed to us in our own experience. Merleau-Ponty observed:

> *Within my own situation* that of the [other] whom I am questioning makes its appearance and, *in this bipolar phenomenon,* I learn to know both myself and others. (1945/1962, p. 338; emphasis added)

In the unfolding of this article, I have been trying to illustrate my theme of second person perspectivity by adumbrating it through different examples: an intimate encounter, watching a movie, and now we have added the experience of the world of another species into the mix. We shall now turn to the final example of lifeworld contexts for learning phenomenology, namely, the experience of works of art.

[6] These correspond to Dilthey's earlier distinction between "explanation" and "understanding" as referred to in his famous statement: "*Die Natur erklaeren wir; das Seelenleben verstehen wir*" [We explain nature, but we understand the life of the soul] (1894/1977, p. 27). For excellent discussions of the phenomenology of understanding as a mode of access to the meaningful worlds of others, see Jaspers, 1913/1963, pp. 301-313; also see pp. 55, 254-256, 274-275, 280-282, 293-297.

Resonating with Art

At the same time that I was taking psychology students to the zoo, I found myself challenged in the classes I was teaching on phenomenology to find ways of bringing Merleau-Ponty's (1961/1964a) essay "Eye and Mind" to life. I thought of taking my students to a museum to gaze upon impressionist paintings (and eventually to experience sculpture, video installations, and architectural spaces). Entering a sculpture garden one day proved to be for my students the best introduction imaginable to Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) chapters in his *Phenomenology of Perception* on "the motility of the body" and "sense perception", not to mention "the body in its sexual being". In our field trips to museums, we encounter paintings, sculptures, and architectural spaces, and the students are asked each to spend time in silent contemplation of one artwork (or art space) that "strikes a chord" in his or her own experience, or simply "resonates" with him or her. This appears to have been the "magic word", for it seemed that, after my first use of this term in the foyer of a museum, an entire class of students (including both graduate and undergraduate students from different majors) were all able to produce vivid descriptions, some of them exclaiming that never before had anyone suggested to them that they might have something to say about a painting hanging on a wall in a museum. Indeed, for some students, the word "resonate" stuck with them and seemed to facilitate *by suggestion* that they would in fact "have" such an experience.

To help set the stage, I tell them that I find that my experience with art is transformed when I think of an artwork as a "gesture" to me from the artist. I also tell them that, when you find yourself peculiarly drawn to something, it is because it strikes some kind of chord in you. It is one thing to have mental associations to a painting, and it is quite another thing to experience the upsurge of an unfamiliar feeling, but one that is welcome nonetheless. I tell them,

> Just let the artwork select you, rather than the other way around. Trust the fact that you were compelled to do a double-take when you first walked past it, and try to notice the kind of dance you do with it, finding just the right vantage point from which to observe it. When you find that point, try to notice how you feel, how you are affected in that very place.

After a period of silent contemplation, I instruct them to sit down on one of those nice padded benches that one finds in Art Museums and write a few spontaneous impressions. Two weeks later, after an adequate period of incubation, they submit an essay that communicates their experience.

Further Reflections on Second Person Perspectivity

Together with watching films and mirroring the behaviour of apes at the zoo, we were now beginning to resonate with the expression we found in works of art. The idea in all of these exercises was for the students to experience both sides of the dialectic of perception and expression. Together, these situations constituted for us "ways of experiencing" that were grounded in the lifeworld and thus provided an "existential phenomenological" starting point for our reflections: fascinating glimpses into cinematic worlds, intimate encounters with other species, and embodied relationships with works of art. In each of these experiences, we are bearing witness to the worlds of others. The medium for this "witnessing" is our lived body (which we already understand as "a node in the woof" of intercorporeal Being).

Thus, just as one can be "there on the other side" of the intimate encounter, or there "on the other side" of the movie screen, or there "on the other side" of the looking glass at the zoo, we also found that we could be there "on the other side" of the painting hanging on the wall of the museum. Admittedly, there are differing "degrees of separation" between ourselves and a research interviewee sitting across from us in the same room, a captive bonobo appearing through a looking glass at the zoo, a work of art mounted on a museum wall, and a character in a film projected onto a screen in a theatre. Being addressed by a speaking subject is different from the experience of "being addressed" (or simply looked at?) by an animal at the zoo. When we gaze upon a painting or sculpture in a museum, there is a sense in which we are being addressed by the artist; this is what led Merleau-Ponty (1952/1973, pp. 44-46) to call the work of art a *gesture* (and thus accessible to second person perspectivity). Finally, in the world of the cinema experience, we are being addressed (indirectly) by the director (although not truly by the character). Still, however, it is arguable that one can enter into an empathic experience with a character in a film (see Plantinga, 1999).

When we invoke Merleau-Ponty's notion of the reversibilities of the flesh, we are able to appreciate the "both/and" nature of our reciprocal roles as first and second persons within the "we experience", rather than slipping ambivalently into the "either/or" dichotomy that one finds in Sartre (1943/1956). We all know Sartre's heart-stopping example of the experience of being "caught in the act" when he describes the voyeur who, looking through the peephole, suddenly freezes when hearing footsteps coming down the hall. Or his description of the "fixed sliding of the universe" that occurs when the other drifts into the clearing in the park where I am sitting on the park bench as the centre of my own universe, as the "for-itself" for whom the world exists, and as the one who must relinquish this sovereignty at the very moment I become an object in the other's field. The question is, can we ever escape from this dialectical oscillation between the status of subject and object, master and slave, self and other – and can we thereby find a way of bridging the gap between the *observer* and the *observed*?

It was to address this dilemma that I directed an undergraduate thesis that was originally titled *The Experience of Being Perceived as Beautiful: A Phenomenological Study Informed by Sartre's Ontology*" (Rao, 1992), which was published later in *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (Rao & Churchill, 2004). (In many respects, this was a more sublimated version of my own research into intimate encounters, which I was conducting concomitantly with Rao's study.) Although I allowed a degree of simplification in that paper with respect to our very brief and cursory characterizations of Sartre's three ontological modes of the body (which we called the *body-for-itself*, the *body-in-itself-for-others*, and the *body-for-itself-for-others*), I do believe that the data of this qualitative study not only lent itself well to phenomenological analysis, but required that there be a third alternative to the traditional dichotomy of the body as "subject-for-me" and as "object-for-the-other". That is, while bracketing the Sartrean formulations at the outset of the analysis, the data of this empirical-phenomenological study clearly presented an experience of each research participant coming alive *as a subject* (and not as an object) *under the other's gaze*.[7] The profound implication of this qualitative research finding is that it illustrates an ontological principle heretofore unexplored: namely, the bodily experience of feeling the awakening of (and sustaining of) one's subjectivity under the other's gaze (something only alluded to with Husserl's *Ineinander*).[8] Studying experiences of being

[7] The contemporary philosopher Tzvetan Todorov (2001, p. 54) observed: "Man *lives* perhaps first of all in his skin, but he does not begin to *exist* except through the gaze of others" (quoted in Reel, 2010, p. 163).

[8] Hazel Barnes would later write this to Rao: "Yesterday I was given a copy of … your article … . I am delighted with it! Your endeavour to study the interaction of people's looks and judgments is an extremely interesting and original research project. You have accomplished well the objective analysis of subjective, intertwined reactions. I am especially pleased to see you bring in the notion of 'exchange' in the dimension of the look. I have emphasized this in my own work, but almost nobody ever considers it. When I spoke one time with Simone de Beauvoir about my reading of the three dimensions of the look in Sartre's theory, she confirmed this as something really there." Barnes wrote that note on the evening of the last day of a symposium on *Phenomenology and*

perceived as beautiful revealed something more than the research participants' experiences of being *objectified* by "third person" stares; it revealed, to the contrary, the experience of being *"subjectified"* by second person adoration.[9]

Teaching the "What" and the "How" of Phenomenology

My approach to teaching is to try to communicate difficult concepts by way of illustration; and, preferably, through the utilization of several examples of the same theme. So, for example, when I wish to teach my students the distinction between the "what" and the "how" of perception – between what Husserl called "noema" and "noesis" – I will often give the example of the Rorschach cards used by psychologists to "get to" the person's *way of perceiving* the world *through* his or her descriptions of it: the *what* leads us back to the *how*. The "content" of the percept leads us back to the perceptual style of the patient; this is the very meaning of "percept analysis" (as opposed to simply a "content analysis" where one "analyzes" the verbalization itself).

Similar to this first example is a second that I draw from the field of ethnobotany. (The further away from the first example that I can go, the better I believe that I can bring the student to the general insight towards which I am aiming.) Cultural anthropologists, when confronted with the challenge of studying indigenous populations in places like Hawaii, were trying to think of a way of discovering the "ethos" of the people in such a way as to be comparing different tribes or ethnic groups on a kind of "level playing field" – one where they would be "comparing apples with apples" rather than "apples with oranges". To accomplish this, they came up with a kind of cultural Rorschach test: they asked themselves, "What might be a common point of reference that the ethnographer can find in the field, to which to compare the perceptions and practices of the various cultural groups?" What they realized was that they were surrounded by vegetation that provided an objective point of reference for them to ask members of different tribes inhabiting the same general terrain, "What do you call this plant?" and "How do you use this plant in your daily lives?" With this approach, a new discipline was born: ethnobotany – in which one studies various ethnic groups by interrogating their perceptions, descriptions, nomenclature and practices (medical, religious, nutritional) with respect to the common flora that surround them (Castaneda, 1972; Davis, 1988).

These two examples each teach the student about the phenomenological turning from *facts* to *meanings* – which is often one of the most difficult things to get across to the student unacquainted with phenomenology. And, beyond this, these same two examples can be used to teach the student the difference between *noesis* and *noema*: between *how I am present* to the world, and how this presence co-constitutes *"what" it is that I see and experience* in my world.

One of the "things" (perhaps it would be better to use the German "*Sachen*" or "matters") that I most struggle with in my work as a teacher is how to bring the student to a deeper understanding – and a personal understanding – of the complicated concepts that comprise the field of phenomenology. And among the most elusive notions that we find in the works of the phenomenologists are those that pertain to *our presence to meaning* and *our presence to other people*. This is what I mean by the term "perspectivity" throughout this paper. Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have all written extensively about what is happening when we encounter the other, and how it is that we have access to the meaning of the other's experience. Husserl (1952/1989, p. 177) tells us that it is a matter of "trading places", where we engage in an "empathizing perception" by means of which what is given to us in our experience is not only our own ego and its positings, but also the other ego and *its* positings. He tells us that this comes about by means of an *Ineinander* in which there is a "pairing" of our bodies. Heidegger (1927/1972), in turn, spoke of *Mitbefindlichkeit* – an ontological condition in which the very meaning of the other's experience, as well as an understanding of our being together, is given to me in our *Miteinandersein* (our Being with one another). *Mitbefindlichkeit* has been unfortunately translated into English as a "co-state-of-mind" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 205) – which really confuses the matter, since Heidegger almost nowhere is ever found

Feminism, in which she had presented her own views on Sartre's three ontological modes of the body, which both supported my own interpretation and emboldened me to try to take it all a step further. It would be in my revisiting of Merleau-Ponty's works that I would find the inspiration I needed to begin to enter myself into the "chiasm" or "original ecstasy" of our being with others, and then to reflect on it while searching for the proper language with which to express this experience of genuine inter-subjectivity (Churchill, 2000-2001, 2003, 2006a, 2010).

[9] Mutual adoration within the first person plural experience is what brings to life the reversibility of first and second person perspectivity in moments of ecstatic perception, as beautifully described here by Merleau-Ponty: "Vision ceases to be solipsist only up close, when the other turns back on me the luminous rays in which I had caught him, renders precise that corporeal adhesion of which I had a presentiment in the agile movements of his eyes, enlarges beyond measure that blind spot I divined at the centre of my sovereign vision, and, invading my field through all its frontiers, attracts me into the prison I had prepared for him and, as long as he is there, makes me incapable of solitude" (1964/1968, p. 78).

to even talk about the "mind" per se, and certainly would never talk about human experience as something static! So how then do we communicate to the student the meaning of this rich term, which points us in the direction of a "shared attunement" with the other? What examples do we use to communicate what we are doing when we enter phenomenologically into the "universe of meaning" of another (human) being? This is where trips to the cinema, the zoo, and the museum enter the picture as ways of facilitating the students' *dehiscence* to a world of meaning.

Merleau-Ponty takes us a step further in his own rendition of Husserl's language in his more fluid French formulations: where *die Verflechtung* and *Ineinander* become "the intertwining" and "the chiasm"; and Husserl's phenomenon of *die Paarung* becomes the French "*accouplement*" – a "coupling" of two body subjects in which the other's intentions play across my body while my own intentions play across his. The other's gestures furnish my own intentions with a visible realization, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty (1948/1964d, p. 93). We seem to be getting closer to something that might resemble something comprehensible to the first-time student of phenomenology, but we are still far from the mark, because so far we are using only words, signifiers, to express a signified that has still not come clearly into view.

Thus it is that I take my students to the zoo, and to the museum and sculpture garden, and to the cinema – not in order to get lost in the various "what"s that one finds there, but rather to bring to life the very possibilities of doing phenomenology by providing them with a rich nexus of experiences to draw upon in connecting the difficult jargon of phenomenology to their own experience. I find it more meaningful and quite rewarding to give these kinds of assignments, for when they come in it's like reaping a harvest! And it is more fun because it is clear that the students really had a chance to think, to apply their own intelligence to a challenge (rather than juggling others' ideas and definitions, or trying to tell the teacher something he seems to want to hear). What is interesting is that, when students are left to describe their own experiences, equipped only with some examples of descriptive writing from Merleau-Ponty[10] – along with the prompt "walk around until you find something that resonates with you" – each student is bound to have a good experience, whether at a zoo or a museum. (Even those who have admittedly gone into the exercise with a "bad attitude" will write about this in their reports, because they are now "converted" by the experience.)

In these class exercises, I have attempted to "adumbrate" the theme of "reversibilities of the flesh" via our trips to the zoo, to art museums and sculpture gardens, and to the cinema, with the aim of demonstrating that the same "approach" can yield results in so many different terrains – all based upon an application of the right attitude. The challenge for me has been to present to students a variety of opportunities for learning that would enable each student to appropriate and cultivate a mode of seeing that we might call *ecstatic perception*.

My interest in taking my students through these exercises has been to help them develop an appreciation of, and an aptitude for, empathy as a mode of access to the meaningfulness of expression. Sartre (1971) wrote in his existential psychoanalysis of Flaubert, "… *empathie, seule attitude requise pour comprendre*" [empathy is the only attitude required for understanding] (p. 8). To the extent that the original concept of empathy referred to a "motor mimicry" (Lipps, 1903), it is appropriate, perhaps even paradigmatic, to develop a psychological methodology based on empathy out of a consideration of the phenomenon of imitation. For Merleau-Ponty, conduct is always revealed as a lived-structure, and "to experience a structure ... is to live it, to take it up, assume it and discover its immanent significance" (1945/1962, p. 258). Wilhelm Reich observed, "The patient's expressive movements involuntarily bring about *an imitation* in our own organism" (Reich, 1933/1972, p. 362). We sense in and through our own bodies the intentions and affects that animate the other, and simultaneously understand our tacit experience as significative of the other's expression. One psychologist went so far as to say that "when we cannot imitate an individual's behaviour we are at a loss to understand it" (Kempf, quoted in Allport, 1937, p. 530). Finally, David Katz (1937) observed: "the fact that we can inwardly imitate and understand our fellow-men is in itself astonishing enough, but our capacity to understand directly other living beings through their expressive movements includes even animals" (p. 51). The verb *nacherleben* as used by Dilthey (1927/1977, pp. 132-133) meant, quite literally, to make "live again" in oneself what one has perceived in the other. If an act of imitation is truly a "re-enactment" (*Nacherleben*) of an already perceived ensemble of gestures, then imitation is the expression of a *latent impression* – of a tacit knowledge that belongs to the body. The point of this digression is to indicate that second person perspectivity takes us into our "lived" or *embodied* encounters with others, and asks us to pay close attention to what is revealed to us when we "face" the other.

[10]Along with others like David Abram (1996), Marc Bekoff (2002), Elizabeth Behnke (1999), Jane Goodall (1971/ 1988, 1990), and Alphonso Lingis (1994, 2000, 2007).

Closing Remarks

I have come to recognize that the difference between first person and second person perspectives reflects the fact that, in the former, one remains enveloped within one's own position, looking over "at" the other – while, in the "second person" experience, one notices a subtle shift in one's consciousness, away from one's own body, one's own comportment, towards a centring on the communicative and otherwise intentional gestures coming towards oneself from one's "partner". In this *thinking from* rather than *thinking at*,[11] one is drawn deeper into the encounter. This is as true for the perception of another as it is for the perception of art. What we referred to earlier as a *fidelity* to the object of perception comes down to this very notion of how we are present to it. Our presence to a captive animal in a zoo (or even to a captive animal in our own home) is radically transformed when we step up real close, closer than others do, putting our faces and our bodies right up to the glass, standing on the animal's level – on the same fake boulder that holds the glass wall, our feet and arms only an inch apart, our hands open and placed up against the glass, "touching" each other while looking into each other's eyes.

There is a feeling of mutual respect that humbles one in such moments. A sense of fidelity to the animal other's nature as soul-brother calls one to consider one's own ethics in one's dealings with all animals (See Acampora, 2006; Churchill, 2010). What I learned from this and many subsequent visits to the zoo has been documented elsewhere, but I make reference to this set of experiences in order to enable the reader to have a concrete sense of "where I'm coming from" in my approach to what I am calling here the second person perspective. Part of the point is that this experience not only transcends the human level toward animal life in general; it also provides us with the concrete experience within which we hear the ethical call that summons us to respond with compassion.

Genuine phenomenology is itself a *practice* – and never just an intellectual pursuit – by which one discovers and celebrates one's own immersion in a flux of experience that is the true source of all that we come to know and believe regarding the world. It consists in the realization that it is precisely one's own *presence to* the world that is the illuminating source and matrix of all that we come to understand about life. It draws us back – or at least, it points us in this direction – to the ways in which the world *resonates with our experiencing*. And it is this resonance *with* the world that we learn to trust as informing our reflections on whatever it is that surrounds us, and how it is that we are challenged to comport ourselves vis-à-vis our surroundings. This phenomenology of experience is our starting point for our encounter with others (and hence the deep and abiding value of phenomenology for the practising psychotherapist); it is our starting point for our encounters with works of art, for our encounters with other cultures, for our encounters with all symbolic universes of meaning.

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[11] I wish to thank my first philosophy teacher, F. David Martin (Professor Emeritus of Bucknell University), for his inspiring way of capturing these two fundamentally different modes of approaching the world.

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About the Author

Scott D. Churchill earned his PhD in clinical phenomenological psychology at Duquesne University with an empirical-phenomenological dissertation on psycho-diagnostic seeing. He is currently Professor and Graduate Programme Director in the Psychology Department at the University of Dallas, where he has been teaching for three decades. Professionally focused on the understanding of various forms of expression, both human and non-human, he is interested in the development of phenomenological and hermeneutic methodologies, and has taught a wide variety of courses ranging from primatology and projective techniques to film studies, existential phenomenology and Daseinsanalysis. In addition to developing the notion of "second person perspectivity" in relation to qualitative research, ethology, and health care, Professor Churchill is currently engaged in an ongoing experiential study of interspecies communication with the bonobos at the Fort Worth Zoo, and is a local co-ordinator for Jane Goodall's *Roots & Shoots* programme.

Professor Churchill's publications include entries in the APA's *Encyclopedia of Psychology*; chapters in the *Handbook of Humanistic Psychology* and in Ron Valle's *Phenomenological Inquiry: Existential and Transpersonal Dimensions*, as well as articles in *The Humanistic Psychologist, Constructivism in the Human Sciences*, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology, The Psychotherapy Patient,* and *Somatics.* In 2006 he assumed the position of Editor-in-Chief for *The Humanistic Psychologist* after having served from 1989–2003 as Editor of *Methods: A Journal for Human Science*. He is also a Consulting Editor for the *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *Encyclopaideia: Journal of Phenomenology and Education*, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *Human Studies*, *The Janus Head*, and *The Psychotherapy Patient*.

Professor Churchill is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, a liaison to its Science Directorate, Past President of the Division of Humanistic Psychology, and an active member of the executive board of the Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology. He has also served as a visiting professor at Duquesne University, Saybrook Graduate School, Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, and Macquarrie University in Sydney, as well as at Johannes Guttenberg University in Mainz, the University of Konstanz, and the University of Bari. In addition to his contribution in the professional sphere, he has served in Dallas as a film critic for local television, and been an invited juror at Dallas film and video festivals, for over 25 years.

E-mail Address: bonobo@udallas.edu

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