Anchoring in Lived Experience as an Act of Resistance

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> Context • The pandemic we are going through is an unprecedented situation from which tragic consequences loom. Disturbing and painful though it is, we should, however, remember that it is but a symptom of a profound ecological crisis that is already generating tremendous suffering, and threatens with extinction most living species and perhaps all humankind. This ecological crisis is due to our way of life based on frantic consumption, which exhausts the earth's resources. **> Problem** • Where does this insatiable desire for consumption come from? This article explores the hypothesis that our way of life and the ecological disaster it is bringing about originates in our blindness to what is nevertheless closest to us: our own lived experience. Our awareness of it is not only partial, but mistaken, which leads to dramatic consequences. **> Method** • To check the accuracy of this hypothesis, I collected fine-grained "micro-phenomenological" descriptions of experiences essential to our human lives, such as the emergence of ideas, of perceptions, the process of verbal expression and the experience of intersubjective encounters. I also relied upon the work of researchers who explored them. **> Results** • These investigations highlight, at the heart of these processes, a dimension of experience that we usually do not recognize: the "felt" dimension of experience, where the separation that we usually think we perceive between "inner" and "outer" space becomes permeable and even vanishes. At the cost of considerable tension and without our knowledge, we try to maintain the separation between these two spaces, which has the effect of depriving them both of life, of dis-animating them. Outside space, the non-human "environment" is perceived as an indifferent and inert space, filled with objects intended to be possessed and exploited. We ourselves lose contact with the felt dimension that is the very stuff of experience and the source of meaning. **> Implications** • Most of our activities – education, medicine, architecture, agriculture – are based on this rigid separation and on the concealment and stifling of the felt dimension, which has the effect of exhausting us. The weaker we become, the more we try to satisfy ourselves with frantic consumption, and the more we exhaust the earth. This rupture with the living heart of our experience is therefore an essential condition for the survival of our current economic system, which strives to maintain it. Liberation from this enslavement requires recognizing and loosening the tensions that cut us off from this source. Retrieving contact with our experience is thus an essential condition for us to find the strength to stop transforming any aspect of our life into an object of consumption, and to regain enough lucidity, dignity, and courage to change our model of society. **> Keywords** • **Ecology, ecopsychology, felt meaning, lived experience, micro-phenomenology, political ecology.**

Introduction

« 1 » The pandemic we are going through is an unprecedented situation from which tragic consequences loom. Disturbing and painful though it is, we should, however, remember that it is but a symptom of a profound ecological crisis[1] that is already generating tremendous suffering, and threatens with extinction most living species and perhaps all humankind. This ecological crisis is due to our way of life, which exhausts the earth's resources. The purpose of this article is to show that this way of life and the ecological disaster it is bringing about are intimately linked to our blindness to that which is nevertheless closest to us: our own lived experience. Most of the time, we are cut off from ourselves, from what vibrates and lives within us, and this disconnection has catastrophic consequences in all areas of human existence. Retrieving contact with our experience is the precondition that would allow us to regain our lucidity, our dignity, and the courage to change our model of society.

1| Numerous scientific publications now establish a link between the loss of biodiversity and the destruction of natural environments with the increase in zoonoses, sources of epidemics and even pandemics, e.g., "The link between Covid-19 and biodiversity: A report commissioned by the French public authorities," May 2020, https://www.fondationbiodiversite.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FRB-Covid19-English-version.pdf

Lifting the ban on lived experience

« 2 » This loss of contact is not a simple hypothesis ventured to try to explain the discomfort that undermines our lives, but a discovery from the most recent research in cognitive sciences, which studies the functioning of the mind. At the end of the last century, Francisco Varela, a pioneering biologist in this field, sounded the alarm (Varela 1996): to progress in understanding the human mind, research cannot be based only on "objective" data that can be recorded from the outside, but must acquire a rigorous method for studying human experience, mostly excluded from the field of scientific investigation. How can we claim to study

inner processes such as emotion, decision making or reading when relying only on the recording of brain activity, heart rate and eye movements, and disregarding what the subject is *experiencing*?

« 3 » It was while trying to collect descriptions of such experiences that researchers made an astonishing and shocking discovery: a large part of what we feel, imagine and think from moment to moment eludes us (Nisbett & Wilson 1977; Petitmengin et al. 2013). An especially striking study shows that we spend more than half of our time escaping the situation that we are presently living to replay scenes from the past or to project ourselves into the future, without even being aware of it (Killingsworth & Gilbert 2010). Yet this "attentional drift" is only the most superficial and easily recognizable form of our absence to ourselves. Whatever our activity, the main reason for our unawareness seems to be the straining towards the objective or the content of the activity (the "what"), which, by creating a narrow attentional tunnel, conceals the activity itself (the "how"). For example, if I walk to an appointment, preoccupied with the concern of arriving on time and with the anticipation of the exchange, I am not aware of the bodily sensations induced by my walking. Engaged in a discussion with a friend, the absorption of my attention in the content of the ideas conceals the awareness of the emotions aroused by the exchange, and even the bodily gestures that accompany it, whether mine or those of my interlocutor (Rimé 1984: 441). While writing this text (at least in the moments when my attention is not drifting), I am absorbed by the content of the ideas that I am trying to express. Meanwhile, I am not aware of the contractions in my back, of the contact of my fingers with the keys of the computer, of the rapid succession of inner images, light emotions, comments, appreciations and comparisons that accompany my activity of writing, nor of the preverbal "thread of thought" on which I rely to find the right words. Moreover, I am not even aware that I am unaware of something. All our activities are included, from the most concrete to the most abstract: not only do we not know (how we go about doing them), but we are not aware that we do not know (Vermersch 2000; Petitmengin 2006).

« 4 » On the contrary, we believe that we do know, that is to say that beliefs and preconceptions are superimposed on our experience, sustained in particular by our language and the concepts they convey, contributing to our disconnection from it. For example, how does an idea come to us? Although this is (luckily) a very common experience, we know little about it. Indeed, when an idea appears – even a scientific idea that has important implications in our daily life – all the interest usually focuses on its *content* and the exploration of its consequences, very little attention is paid to the *experience* of its emergence, to the process that made its discovery possible. The reduction of the idea to its content expressed in verbal form, and the lack of awareness of its genesis, has the effect of reducing our understanding of it to a disembodied cognitive mechanism. We represent our ideas as thought processes taking place in a "mind" endowed with two main characteristics: on the one hand it is localized *in the head* and separated from the body, on the other hand it is localized "*inside*" and separated from outside.

Where mind and body meet

« 5 » The collection of meticulous descriptions of the emergence of ideas, made possible today by suitable methods, paints a completely different picture (Petitmengin 2007, 2016). First of all, this exploration shows that in the experience of ideation, the distinction that we believe we perceive between our mind and lived body dissolves. From the peripatetic philosophers until today, many thinkers have noticed that movement, in particular walking, is propitious or even essential to thinking. Darwin, for example, used to find the inspiration that led him to write his two major works, *The Origin of Species* and *The Evolution of Man*, by walking along a small path around his house which he called his "path of thought." In his journal entry of 19 August 1851, Henry Thoreau (2012) wrote, "Methinks that the moment my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow." Closer to our time, the mathematician Laurent Schwartz relates:

> "Personally, I would say that my best working method is to be outdoors, in the countryside, in the open air, with books around me […] and to go for a walk. I am unable to think of mathematics while sitting – this is why I have always found written exams difficult while oral examinations always worked for me." (Schwartz 1987: 329, my translation)

Walking seems conducive to thinking not only because it allows one to relax the focus on the question to be resolved, but because it makes it possible to find the rhythm, the gesture, which constitutes the very germ of the idea. Before an idea is expressed in verbal, mathematical, pictorial or musical form, it appears in the form of a direction of thought, a "line of force," of which Einstein gives us an overview:

> "During all these years there was a feeling of direction, of going straight towards something concrete. It is, of course, very hard to express that feeling in words […] But I have it in a kind of survey, in a way visually." (Holton 1973: 369)

An idea is first of all a movement, a rhythm, not pertaining to any particular sensory modality, but nevertheless subtly felt. This rhythm unfolds in a moving "landscape," endowed with a texture, contrasts of densities and intensities, which are completely specific to it. Even when the idea has been expressed, this gestural and quivering dimension remains; beneath concepts, it constitutes the very dimension of *meaning* (Gendlin 1962). It is anchoring in this felt dimension that makes a thought or spoken word embodied and alive.

"The inner space of the world"

« 6 » The careful exploration of this dimension of experience where the border between mind and body dissolves shows that it is not located in ourselves, in an individual and private inner space, separated from the exterior space by a rigid border. Ordinarily, we perceive ourselves as individuals, subjects clearly separated from the external objects that surround us and constitute our "environment." Suppose, for example, that during a walk in the countryside, a bend in the path reveals a new landscape. Immediately, I recognize its elements: "birch trees, a stream,"

which I locate over there, at a distance from myself whose "point of view" is located here, at eye level. However, there is another way of looking: a less tensed, less focused attention allows me to recognize contrasts of light and shadow in the leaves, or shades of green and pink in the reflections on the water, that my focus on the elements of the landscape prevented me from discerning. By adopting an even more open, diffuse, receptive mode of attention, I can also let the landscape come to me, let myself be "touched" by it. Instead of looking for objects over there, I let colors, shapes, movements, sounds come to me. I let the atmosphere, the particular rhythms that emanate from the landscape permeate me, a little like a perfume, or music. The landscape is no longer an expanse that presents itself to me as a beautiful spectacle, a photograph of which would capture the experience in its entirety (Jullien 2014). It is no longer looked at, but felt, and this feeling dissolves the boundary between it and me.[2] Here are descriptions of this experience:

"I can sense very well *inside myself*, in my trunk, the river flowing, or the poplar standing up straight towards the sky, or the poplar swaying, on the banks of the Sarthe, when the wind is blowing hard […] To tell the truth, I cannot *see* the poplar soaring. I cannot *see* the river flowing. I feel the river flowing in me. I feel the poplar standing up straight."[3]

"In such moments, there are no longer any barriers between me and things. It is as though I no longer had a skin. For example, that poplar over there, it is as though something was radiating from it, a quivering, a diffuse light, a very quiet and very fine sound, which comes right up to me and touches me in an indescribable way. Everything becomes incredibly touching. It is as though the space between things became denser, more luminous, more vibrant, and as though there was nothing else except this space." (Excerpt from an interview in Petitmengin 2007: 68)

« 7 » In this type of experience, the vibrations of light, the ebb and flow of water, the texture of trees and stones, the breath of the wind … do not break at the border of the skin, but unite inside and outside into one uninterrupted space.[4] The landscape pervades me. We are made of the same stuff, of the same tender, sensitive, alive and shivering "matter," for which our language has no word, but which the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1984: notably 116, 189, 192) called "la chair du monde" [the flesh of the world], and which we can also call the "felt dimension" of experience (Petitmengin 2007).

« 8 » In summary, when, loosening the tensions that cut us off from it, we come into contact with our experience, we do not find a "mind," a "body," and its "environment." These words are abstractions, concepts that veil what we live. The song of the bird is not over there in the throat of the bird, it is not here in me either, it resonates in a space where the boundary between here and there does not exist, where the world and I meet, which Rilke called "der Weltinnenraum" [the inner space of the world]. What applies to the song of the bird also applies to the reflections of the light, to the roughness of the rock and the freshness of the water. It is this experience, "*à la source impalpable des sensations*" [at the impalpable source of sensations] (Gasquet 2002: 242), that some poets, some painters try to arouse. For this, they do not seek to describe or reproduce exactly the object, the landscape that gives itself to their gaze, in order to make us see it. But as Joachim Gasquet points out, referring to Cézanne's work, through the image, the artist tries…

"to make us *see* how it *touches* us. […] The painter reworks and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances that is the cradle of things." (Gasquet 2002: 33, my translation)

The gestural source of thoughts

« 9 » It is from this sensitive and fluid matter where the distinction between mind and body dissolves that our ideas seem to be made: beneath the words, our ideas are rhythms that have their source in the movements of the world. These movements are of infinite diversity, as shown by some languages that have dozens of words to designate a living being, according to its multiple attitudes and possible actions. For example, they might not say, "the bird flies away," but "the seagull flies up, in the unique way that the seagull does so, when this particular wind, or this particular breeze, coming from the sea or coming from the land, starts blowing with this particular strength." Sometimes barely perceptible, like the particular quality of the wind blowing in the foliage just before thunderstorm rain, or "the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the Sunset,"[5] these subtle movements resonate and imprint themselves in us at all times, [6] without our knowledge, particularly in children, who are much more receptive than adults. Our thoughts, even those that seem the most abstract, are then the replay of these rhythms in microscopic and invisible form, [7] they are "the adumbrate gesture

2| As Rainer Maria Rilke wrote: "When we hold still we are scarcely to be distinguished from all that surrounds us" (quoted in Fischer 2013: 134).

3| Marcel Jousse "Le jeu manuel de l'enfant" [The manual play of the child], Cours à l'Ecole d'Anthropologie, Paris, 24 January 1938. Jousse's courses are available from http://www.marcel-jousse.com/en/les-cours-de-marcel-jousse-disponibles-en-telechargement. All translations in this article are mine.

4| As Rilke wrote in a letter of 17 December 1912 to Marie de Tour et Taxis: "[…] for me the world collapses completely every moment, inside in my blood" (Bannard & Herter Norton 1947: 526). The following description of poet Christian Bobin is very similar: "Le paysage afflue dans le corps. Le vent s'engouffre dans le sang. Le ciel remonte au cœur" [The landscape flows into the body. The wind rushes into the blood. The sky rises to the heart] (Bobin 1990: 22, my translation).

5| Warrior from the Crowfoot Indian tribe, quoted in McLuhan (1971: 12).

6| As they depend on the particularities of each type of landscape, these imprints may foster different forms of sensitivity and ways of thinking: in oral cultures, "each place has its own dynamism, its own patterns of movement, and these patterns engage the senses and relate them in particular ways, instilling particular moods and modes of awareness" (Abram 1996: 182).

7| The rhythms of the world therefore form the subtle texture of our thoughts: "The invisible

of the thing itself."[8] The more gestures we let resonate within us during childhood, the more we become able to think in a personal and original way. This is why it is essential to let the little child "watch everything, touch everything, break everything, replay everything, everywhere."[9] Movements of spurting out, deployment, swinging, separation or merger of planes, acceleration, growth, fall, stopping… the gestures that accompany any discourse, often without our knowledge, seem to be the direct expression of this invisible gestural dimension, [10] in which speech takes its source and meaning (McNeill 1992; Goldin-Meadow 2003). Most of the time, the spontaneity and rapidity of verbalization conceal this dimension. However, as careful descriptions of this process confirm, notably those provided by Eugene Gendlin in his seminal book (1962) and in the context of his "Thinking at the Edge" method (2004), speaking in a lively, embodied way consists in making contact with a nonverbal "felt meaning," in letting words emerge spontaneously from it, and in evaluating their appropriacy by confronting them with it. Such words are not intended to transmit discursive contents of knowledge but to elicit in the listener or the reader the invisible gestures that give them consistency and meaning.

« 10 » In summary, the sensitive "matter" of which our thoughts are made and where words take on meaning is not enclosed within us, it is the very stuff of which the world is made. It is contact with this matter that gives us the feeling of existing, that makes us alive.

Intersubjective attunement

« 11 » It is in this subtle gestural dimension where thought is played out that encounters between humans also seems to unfold. As careful observation of the interactions between mother and infant shows (Stern 1985), the baby's world is not a world of images, sounds and tactile sensations, but of "dynamics of vitality" (Stern 2010). The baby does not perceive acts as such (taking the baby's bottle, unfolding the diaper) but the dynamics of vitality bound to these acts (*how* her mother holds her, takes the bottle, unfolds the diaper, combs her baby's hair or her own hair), i.e., the rhythms of her gestures, the "tone" that emerges from them. These rhythms have the particularity of being "transmodal,"[11] that is to say, transposable from one sensory modality to the other. This transmodality enables a subtle mode of communication between mother and child that Daniel Stern calls "affect attunement": moment by moment, in a pre-reflective way, mother and child attune their internal rhythms. For example, (after about 6 seconds) the mother will respond to the babbling of her baby with a caress of the same intensity and rhythm.

« 12 » Stern's research led him to the conclusion that the dynamic and transmodal world that small children experience does not correspond to a stage of their development, which is then abandoned to make way for other modes of functioning. On the contrary, in adulthood, it remains the one in which human relationships are played out. Beneath the verbal and visual interactions that grab the attention, the particular "atmosphere" that emerges from the other person, more perceptible during a first meeting, or after a long separation, her distinctive way of approaching you, of moving, the variations in intensity of her gaze, the rhythm and melody of her voice, to which you attune without your knowledge … form the very texture of the encounter. Stern's investigations led him to the conclusion that beyond human encounter, this silent stratum is always with us, it is the very stuff of feelings, thoughts, acts and of any creative experience:

> "This global subjective world of emerging organization is and remains the fundamental domain of human subjectivity. It operates out of awareness as the experiential matrix from which thoughts and perceived forms and identifiable acts and verbalized feelings will later arise. It also acts at the source for ongoing affective appraisals of events. Finally, it is the ultimate reservoir that can be dipped into for all creative experience." (Stern 1985: 67)

« 13 » In summary, the activities essential to our lives – thinking, speaking, meeting the world and other humans – seem to unfold in a felt dimension of experience, where the separation between the five senses, between body and mind, and importantly for the question that interests us in this text, between interior and exterior space, is permeable or absent. Why do we hold on to these separations, and why do we not recognize the felt dimension, to the point that we do not even have a word to name it? This obliteration may be due to the exclusion of experience from the field of scientific investigation, as suggested at the beginning of this text. It may also originate from a more fundamental process.

Duality as an act

« 14 » The drama that we live as a human born in our Western civilization is that we are most of the time cut off from the felt dimension, the living heart of our experience. It would be more accurate to say that we cut ourselves off from it, by a process of rigidification that it is possible to recognize and describe.[12] From moment to mo-

shapes of smells, rhythms of cricketsong, and the movement of shadows all, in a sense, provide the subtle body of our thoughts […]" (Abram 1996: 262), as well as of our words: "Language is the voice of things, waters and woods" (Merleau-Ponty 1984: 204).

8| Jousse, "La mimologie ou langage des gestes" [Mimology or the language of gestures], Cours à l'Ecole d'Anthropologie, Paris, 20 February 1933.

9| Jousse, "Le besoin anthropologique du jeu" [The anthropological need for playing], Cours à l'Ecole d'Anthropologie, Paris, 6 December 1937.

10| "Forms of growth and of attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm, subtle activation and dreamy lapses." This is how Suzanne Langer (1953: 27) described this subtle gestural dimension, the very stuff of our experience (that she named "felt life"), not accessible according to her by means of introspection, but through artworks, which reflect them directly.

11| While temperature and texture are specific to touch, color specific to vision, intensity, direction and rhythm are transmodal because they may characterize an image, a sound, as well as a tactile sensation.

12| Petitmengin (2017, 2021) are attempts in this direction.

ment, we spend considerable energy trying to identify fixed forms in the fluidity of the world, objects of which we can say "this," because it is only upon this condition that we can think of ourselves as individuals and say "I." For example, when a sound occurs, in a fraction of a second it is recognized as the song of a blackbird over there in the plum tree: in the same fraction of a second, "I" come into the world. From moment to moment, micro-tensions create "external" objects separated from an "inner" space by a rigid border, which give me a feeling of existence, dependent on the existence of these objects. The more rigid this border becomes, the more solid the objects become, and the more my existence as "I" is confirmed. This mutual confirmation, which arises in perceptual events, continues tirelessly in all strata of experience. This process is a matter of survival. All our attention is taken up by the objects whose solidity we strive to preserve, to try to maintain our own feeling of existence. Because when we lose something, someone, it is our own identity that we lose. It is an exhausting effort. Impossible to let go, we have to "hold" the world.[13] This incessant straining to control, in an attempt to maintain our borders, divides, rigidifies, and leads to constriction and pain. We are so busy protecting ourselves from death that we protect ourselves from life itself.[14]

The dis-animation of the world

« 15 » Indeed, the split between an "interior" and "exterior" space has the effect of depriving them both of life, of dis-animating them. In Western society, outside space, the non-human "environment" is imagined as a uniform, indifferent and inert geometric space. "Nature" is perceived as a system of objects distinct and distant from us, intended to be possessed and exploited, in the best of cases as a place for sports, recreation or gently bucolic walks whose benefits scientific studies are trying today to quantify. Separated from the forests that feed it, measured in terms of area and yields, the earth is becoming depleted. When walking through a desolate field, where insects and birds are silent, we can feel within us the fading of its vitality dynamics.

« 16 » We ourselves have lost contact with the flesh of the world, the source of life and meaning. Cut off from its subtle rhythms, we are drained of our vital energy. Modern cities and the technological environment offer us only impoverished vitality dynamics, which cannot nourish us, or bring us unwholesome food. Dominated by the sense of vision that distances, scrutinizes and freezes, modern architecture privileges perspectives, distances, shapes, lines and surfaces, creating cold spaces (Pallasmaa 2005). These spaces, which favor the adoption of a focused and taut gaze that scrutinizes and grabs, are unsuitable for offering the contrasts of texture, density, depth, luminosity and resonance likely to awaken the vibrant and felt dimension of experience.

« 17 » The dis-animation of space seems to go hand in hand with an increasingly abstract use of language, which has been cut from its gestural source. This gap seems to have been served by the appearance of alphabetic writing. According to David Abram (1996), in languages that are only spoken, place is not a passive and inert framework, it has its own dynamics, rhythms and forms that are inseparable from the lived event. The appearance of the alphabet, a writing system whose elements make no reference to the things of the world, prompted the development of abstract, general concepts, disconnected from the concretely lived situations and gestures from which they derive their meaning (e.g., Abram 1996: 110). Lived experience has progressively been abstracted, literally "pulled out of" the place; it became a "general" experience having lost its sensible qualities. Progressively, we forgot the gestural and deep meaning of words: "the gesture having disappeared, the verb and its meaning remained up in the air."[15]

« 18 » The harmful impact of disconnection from the source of experience can be seen in education. Today education is essentially conceived of as the transmission of vast quantities of intellectual knowledge, not as connecting to their living source. To do this, it imposes immobility on the child as well as on the adult, limiting their gestures to the movements of their eyes to read and their fingers to write. Development of the capacity to invent new ideas, to think independently, would on the contrary require familiarization with the non-verbal and gestural dimension where ideas take their source and meaning, currently almost completely obscured. "The magic teacher" who knows how to capture the attention of children and make their eyes shine because they come into contact, beneath isolated objects of knowledge in their compartmentalized disciplines, with vitality dynamics that give them meaning and life, almost does it by stealth. For many children, schooling is a long path of self-denial and disembodiment. It is the painful learning of tension and constriction meant to erect and maintain a rigid boundary between "mind" and "body," which therefore progressively lose their sensitivity, weaken and die.[16] This is unless the child refuses, and finds herself excluded from the school system.

« 19 » Disconnected from the felt dimension of our experience, losing the ability to think independently and creatively, we lose our very dignity. Our life is often reduced to the exhausting and compulsive

13| In the language of Hartmut Rosa (2020) all our efforts are aimed at mastering the world, at making it "available," while moments when we resonate with it occur unpredictably, are "unavailable."

14| The philosopher Olivier Rey (2020) provides striking confirmation of this thesis by noting that today in the context of the epidemic, in an attempt to control any risk of falling ill, we consent to sacrifice our freedoms, our human relationships and what makes our lives worthwhile to be lived. In other words, "in the name of life" and to protect ourselves from death, we prevent ourselves from living.

15| Jousse "L'abstraction confondue avec l'algébrisation" [Abstraction mistaken for algebrization], Cours à l'Ecole d'Anthropologie, Paris, 14 January 1940.

16| As Ivan Illich says in his book *Deschooling Society* (1995), "We have learned most of what we know outside school. Pupils do most of their learning without, and often despite, their teachers. […] We learn to speak, to think, to love, to feel, to play, to curse, to politick, and to work without interference from a teacher." In this book, Illich makes a remarkable analysis of how teaching, supposed to form critical judgment, is most of the time reduced to ready-to-consume programs, thus serving as an (endless) initiation ritual upon entry into the consumer society.

quest for confirmation of our existence by the acquisition of objects, which leads to the dead end and the ecological ravage that we know. This is because the weaker we become, the more we try to satisfy ourselves with frantic and desperate consumption, and the more we exhaust the earth.[17] Yet maintaining the "experiential starvation" (Fischer 2013: 172) from which we suffer is an essential condition for the functioning of the current economic system.

> "By organizing society such that we can find little real nutrition for our deepest organismic hungers, our economic system *creates* the insatiability that economists then interpret as the essential human condition." (Fischer 2013: 168)

In other words, this rupture with the living heart of our experience is also the very condition for the survival of our current economic system, which strives to maintain it.[18] Experiential destitution and ecological ravage are two inseparable faces.

Reanimating our lives[19]

« 20 » If the common root of our depletion and that of the earth lies in the tensions that cut us off from the source of our lived experience, where our most intimate space is not distinguished from the space of the world, the essential condition to solve the inextricable ecological problems that we meet today, and which risk leading inexorably to the extinction of humanity, is to regain contact with this source. This contact is a pre-requirement for us to find the strength to stop consuming frantically in order to give ourselves the feeling of existing. The hypothesis I advocate is that we cannot directly target the drastic reduction in consumption that is needed today, because our very mode of being deprives us of the resources that would allow us to do so. The most overwhelming statistics, the most convincing demonstrations of the harmful effects of our way of life on the earth, will remain powerless until we give ourselves the means to recognize this source within us, and to think and act from there. The stake is not to recognize interrelationships, to re-establish connections, to repair or to weave links between "humans" and "nature" conceived of as separate, but to recognize their unity at the heart of our experience.

Insofar as the (economic, social, scientific…) current system is based on the extinction of experience, the call to come back to it is an act of resistance, both personal and political. On the personal level, it is a question of recognizing and untying the tensions that separate us from what vibrates and lives within us, and the suffering that they cause. This loosening, which some meditative paths have no other purpose than to elicit and stabilize, can also occur unpredictably. One day, there is a book, an encounter, a song, or a certain light through the foliage, and suddenly you surrender. Sometimes this letting go occurs in the face of suffering, illness, or the loss of a loved one. At the end of fatigue or pain, you stop fighting, you accept to abandon your reference points. Then something releases, breaks in you and delivers you. It is possible that you may then feel awaken, quiver in you a space difficult to locate, at the very heart of your flesh. You may have the feeling that this area was numb, that you had forgotten its existence. However, regaining contact with it gives you the feeling of gathering yourself together, of retrieving your unity, your integrity. Life comes back.

« 21 » When our tireless quest for solidity is exhausted, a great relief occurs. In this state of exhaustion, of vulnerability, instead of narrowing space opens wide. It is as if the loosening of our grip on the world allowed it to unfold in all its depth and richness.[20] Having no more borders to protect, less on the defensive, we become more curious about others, more daring, and capable of acting in a genuinely generous way, without expecting anything in return. In this relaxation of tension and opening space, a kind of softness, tenderness arises. Plants, trees, earth and water are recognized as living beings, different from us but *beings*, to whom we are grateful and whom we want to take care of.[21] Animated by "a spirit of woods and sources,"[22] we become much more sensitive to their presence, to their contact, to the resonance of their vitality dynamics, we recognize them as made of the same texture as us, which opens vast unexplored spaces.[23] This receptive disposition is also propitious to the emergence of new, creative ideas. Unsuspected solutions appear spontaneously, without our having to extract them from our mind with much effort[24] (Petitmengin 1999,

17| Our world is "a world in which living things die to make a dead thing grow" (Ray Rogers quoted in Fischer 2013: 84).

18| Rosa (2019, 2020) makes the same type of analysis: because the acquired objects cannot keep their promise of "resonance," the magical "sleight of hand" of capitalism is to ensure that we are continually disappointed with acquired objects, but not to the point of stopping coveting and acquiring others, so that we are insatiable and, in an endless spiral of disappointment and hope, we always desire other things (without ever finding what we are looking for).

19| Or "*Enlivening* our lives," to use the beautiful word used by Andreas Weber (2020).

20| As François Roustang wrote: "When you can't do anything anymore, when you don't know anything anymore, when you don't want anything anymore, because everything has collapsed, then you suspect what life is" (Roustang 2004: 170, my translation).

21| Beekeeping is a paradigmatic example of this transition, when the beekeeper removes her white coveralls and the veil which covers her face, drops the smoker spitting thick smoke, to take care of the bees with bare hands, attentive to the changes in rhythm of their dance and to the variations in the tone of their song. See Chapter 3 "Vers l'apiculture permaculturelle?" in "Mémoire de permaculture," by Marc Zischka, http://www.semisauvages.net/memoire-dpa-marc-zischka-semisauvages.html

22| Chinese landscape painter Guo Xi of the 11th century, quoted by Jullien (2014: 135, my translation).

23| As Bruno Latour notes in a chapter called "The thaw of the landscape" [Le dégel du paysage]: "There are 'links that liberate': the more *individuals* are dependent, the less they are free; the more *persons* are dependent, the greater their margins of action. When they try to shake themselves, individuals who constantly come up against on their limits, moan and complain, invaded by sad emotions, are left with only indignation and resentment; when persons stretch out, become repopulated, move away, they scatter, literally, they spread, diffuse, and gradually recover powers of action that they did not imagine." (Latour 2021: 114, my translation and emphasis)

24| Careful descriptions of the emergence of new ideas (Petitmengin 2007) show that they arise

2001). Released from the compulsive need to acquire objects, whether tangible or intangible, to confirm our own existence, we become able to live in a more sober, dignified way. The economic system loses its grasp over us, we become less and less dependent on it. Regaining contact with the felt dimension of experience gives us the lucidity and determination necessary, on the one hand, to identify what obstructs, freezes and exhausts life and to relinquish it, and on the other hand, to recognize what nourishes life, gives it meaning, for which we would be ready to give ours… and to choose to prioritize that. It could be that the pandemic that we are currently experiencing creates a rupture conducive to such choices.[25]

Reanimating the city, school, research…

« 22 » Calling to return to experience is also an act of *political* resistance, requiring a profound transformation in the structure and functioning of society, and in the first place, abandoning the reifying and predatory attitude that transforms any activity into an object of consumption: health into medical treatments, education into the consumption of knowledge, entertainment into ready-made shows and games. Let us imagine a school that instead of feeding children with ready-to-consume contents of knowledge, allows them, in touch with movements of the world, to come into contact with the living source of ideas and meaning.[26] Such an anchoring would give them the inventiveness and the daring to imagine a life other than tensed towards the production and acquisition of increasingly sophisticated material and immaterial goods, a life that makes room for the uncontrollable, the unmeasurable, and the surprising. Such a mode of education[27] would require giving back initiative and responsibility to the learners and those who help them learn, instead of delegating them to an all-powerful institution – a re-appropriation of responsibility that is necessary in any domain of human activity (Illich 1995, 2001). Let us imagine a medicine that, instead of dispossessing patients of their body by considering it as a measurable object, takes care of the lived, sensitive body. The non-pharmacological therapy for epilepsy, which consists in encouraging patients to recognize the subtle bodily clues announcing a seizure, in order to be able to protect themselves and to adopt countermeasures to stop the seizure, is a striking example of such a therapeutic approach, which could be extended to many other diseases (Petitmengin, Navarro & Baulac 2006; Petitmengin, Navarro & Le Van Quyen 2007). Let us imagine cities, houses which envelop us in their vitality dynamics and elicit in us enough receptivity and confidence to let ourselves be permeated by them.[28] Let us imagine a respectful, attentive, patient agriculture, based on the careful observation of landscapes, of which permaculture is an example (Holmgren 2002). Let us imagine a science both precise and rigorous, but slow and gentle, integrating a meticulous study of lived experience, and therefore giving researchers time to get in touch with theirs…[29]

> “This is not a betrayal of science: it is a necessary extension and complement. […] It requires us to leave behind a certain image of how science is done, and to question a style of training in science which is part of the very fabric of our cultural identity.” (Varela 1996: 347)

« 23 » These mutations imply switching from a conceptual and abstract representation of the processes of creation, understanding and transmission of meaning, of illness, healing and dying, of caring for trees, birds, bees and rivers… to an understanding that is anchored in lived experience. The challenge for Western society today is thus to develop approaches that give us access, in all the activities essential to our lives, behind the veils of what we think or believe we live, to what we are living. Among the interview methods that have been developed recently, such as Focusing (Gendlin 1982), Descriptive Phenomenological Method (Giorgi 2009), Descriptive Experience Sampling (Hurlburt & Akhter 2006), or Phenomenology of Practice (Van Manen 2014), which all have their own specificities, micro-phenomenology (Petitmengin 2006; Petitmengin, Remillieux & Valenzuela-Moguillansky 2019)[30] is a “psychological microscope” particularly well suited to becoming aware of the micro-dynamics of any type of human activity and to describing it with precision and rigor: writing, teaching, playing music, creating clothes, cooking, building a house, deciding, praying… At the heart of these activities, this discipline allows us to access the felt dimension and to identify the inner attitudes, practices and contexts that cut ourselves off from it or root ourselves in it. This exploration can start with the most common activities. For example, micro-phenomenological descriptions

spontaneously from contact with the felt dimension, in the absence of any feeling of agentivity (*I created* the idea), and even of any feeling of ownership (this idea is *my idea*).

25| A beneficial questionnaire is offered in “What protective measures can you think of so we don’t go back to the pre-crisis production model?” by Bruno Latour, *AOC Media*, 29 March 2020, http://www.bruno-latour.fr/fr/node/851.html.

26| In this spirit, Katrin Heimann and Andreas Roepstorff (2018), on the basis of a micro-phenomenological exploration of the mechanisms of becoming playful in the realization of a task, show that this attitude, described as an attitude of throwing off constraints, allows for an increase in the autonomy, intrinsic motivation, positive emotions and feeling of competence of the participants.

27| The newly created training in Embodied Critical Thinking (https://www.trainingect.com/) is an attempt in this direction.

28| Weisen (2021) is an attempt to understand such elusive dimensions of architectural encounter, which resist wording and are to a high extent non-conscious: what happens, for example, when I enter a hospitable building? This article has been written in the context of a PhD thesis (in preparation) on “Fleeting and Non-Conscious Dimensions of Architectural Encounter – a dialogue between the phenomenology of architectural experience and empirical micro-phenomenology.”

29| In his paper “Deep adaptation: A map for navigating climate tragedy,” https://jembendell.com/2019/05/15/deep-adaptation-versions, Jem Bendell initiates a reflection on the “radical adaptation” of scientific research, which is necessary to face the dire ecological and societal issues we are meeting today.

30| See also https://www.microphenomenology.com

show that understanding words requires a specific activity consisting in retrieving, beyond the words, the living gestures that the author has laid there, and allowing them to mature.[31] Which teaching methods, which writing processes, which types of media can foster this deep understanding?

« 24 » Micro-phenomenological descriptions are carried out in the context of interviews[32] where the interviewee is helped to enter into close contact with a singular situation situated in space and time.[33] This contact, which is recognizable thanks to precise objective and subjective clues, guarantees an "embodied speech position," as opposed to an "abstract speech position" (Vermersch 2019, my translation). This work of embodied description shows that the vocabulary at our disposal to describe our experience, deeply imbued with the representation of the body/mind and interior/exterior separation, is very insufficient to describe the felt dimension, and even constitutes a screen that prevents us from becoming aware of it. Attempts to describe this dimension show that it is nevertheless possible to create words to describe it. Words are not doomed to separate and dissect. Indeed, as such, they do not display experience, they do not express it, they only indicate it.[34] Words play the role of pointers or "handles" that enable us to discriminate in the flow of experience subtle aspects that would remain unnoticed or evanescent without their help (Petitmengin & Bitbol 2009). James gives a striking example of this process:

> "The snow that had just fallen had a very strange aspect, different from the usual appearance of snow. I decided to call it 'micacé,' and it seemed to me, as I chose this name, that this difference became more distinct and more fixed than it was before." (James 1983: 484)

« 25 » In the same way, we can invent new words to point to all the nuances of the felt dimension and its subtle dynamics, and create an intersubjective agreement on these words. Like all words, they will only become meaningful through the gesture by which we will relate them to experience. Daring to create this new shared vocabulary anchored in lived experience would help us considerably to get out of the conceptual and existential ruts in which we are stuck.

Conclusion

« 26 » Whether it concerns caring for others or cultivating the land, doing research or building houses, entering into intimate contact with one's own experience is an act of liberation and resistance. Within all human activities, it is urgent to create, between the stitches of the tightly-woven fabric of rules, constraints and strained schedules that inhibit this contact, joyful spaces of resistance: spaces where, together, we allow ourselves to slow down, to breathe, to listen to the felt dimension that animates our lives, to let new visions and new stories emerge from it, to imagine new ways of doing things, demonstrating here and now that they are possible. It is time to regain our life forces, to give meaning to our lives, and in doing so, give up the hope of controlling everything, of knowing everything, not even knowing if one day the multiplication of these spaces will burst the fabric.

31| For Jousse, this mode of reading supposes that we retrieve these gestures in us. We must fill the book with our childhood experiences, because "it was during our childhood that we imprinted into ourselves the truly living and life-giving elements that allow us today to infuse a constantly young life into dead texts" (Jousse 1935: 24, my translation).

32| Or more rarely of "self-interviews" (French "*auto-explicitation*," Vermersch 2007).

33| "An experience which is not a singular moment of the life of a specific person, is not an experience" (Vermersch 1997: 8). This approach is not, however, condemned to remain trapped in the singularity of particular situations: the analysis of numerous descriptions of experiences shows that beyond the infinite diversity of their contents, these experiences conceal generic structures, results likely to be reproduced, verified or falsified, which therefore meet the very criteria of scientific results (Petitmengin, Remillieux & Valenzuela-Moguillansky 2019).

34| "Phenomenological concepts cannot communicate their full content, but only indicate it" (Heidegger quoted in Zahavi 2003: 173).

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Open Peer Commentaries

on Claire Petitmengin's "Anchoring in Lived Experience as an Act of Resistance"

The Lived Body in the Age of Advanced Technology

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> Abstract • In her target article, Petitmengin calls for us to return to our own lived experience as an "act of resistance." In my commentary, I suggest that this call comes too late: in the age of advanced technologies, what Petitmengin defines as the lived experience has become technological, leaving us with nowhere to return to. As sad as it may be, in the current age, the lived experience is no longer a remedy but, rather, part of the disease.

Redefining the problem – technology

« 1 » Although mentioned only once – and even then, indirectly (through Dan Zahavi) – it is hard to think of a philosopher more relevant to the problems that Claire Petitmengin raises in her target article than Martin Heidegger. To begin, let us see what Heidegger has to say about consumption, which, according to Petitmengin, is to "blame" for the current crisis:

> "The consumption of all materials, including the raw material 'man,' for the unconditioned possibility of the production of everything is determined in a concealed way by the complete emptiness in which beings, the materials of what is real, are suspended […] Viewed in this way, technology is the organization of a lack, since it is related to the emptiness of Being contrary to its knowledge. […] This circularity of consumption for the sake of consumption is the sole procedure which distinctively characterizes the history of a world which has become an unworld." (Heidegger 1973: 106f)

« 2 » Evidently, Heidegger locates what Petitmengin defines as our "insatiable desire for consumption" in a much wider context – nihilism and technology:

> "The name 'technology' is understood here in such an essential way that its meaning coincides with the term 'completed metaphysics.' It contains the recollection of techne, which is a fundamental condition of the essential development of metaphysics in general." (Heidegger 1973: 93)

« 3 » While Petitmengin calls for an "act of resistance," in order to resist, we must