

The Intuitive Experience

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Throughout the history of human thought and in every field of knowledge intuition has played an essential role. It is therefore very surprising that so few studies have been consecrated to the study of the subjective experience which is associated with it.

For example, the history of the sciences from Archimedes to Ampère, Gauss, Kékulé, Pasteur, Poincaré, Hadamard, Heisenberg...² is full of testimonies of scientists telling about how a new idea came to them in a sudden, unexpected manner, without any discursive activity. A lot of attention has been paid to the content of these intuitions, and a considerable amount of energy spent on exploring their consequences. However, even though a discovery has had important repercussions in our daily lives, very little attention has been paid to the experience itself, what the scientist was living through at the very moment of the intuitive breakthrough: "the art of knowing has remained unspecifiable at the very heart of science"³. Astonishingly enough, this "forgetting" of the intuitive experience also affects philosophy. Yet there are very few philosophic systems that do not work with the notion of intuition. From Plato's intuition of Idea, to Descartes' intuition of simple natures, to Hegelian and Husserlian intuition, "intuition represents the ideal of all knowledge, the ideal of understanding of being in general"⁴. Nevertheless, compared to the volumes and volumes consecrated to the definition of the concept of intuition, to the description of the content of philosophic intuitions, and to the theoretical exploration of their consequences, how many pages have been written on the intuitive experience itself ? Far from being "our most intimate and our most personal experience"⁵, is not the philosopher's intuition just an intellectual act, an experience in thought, a project of an experience? Is not the philosopher's intuition nothing more than a certain familiarity with a play of language, as Wittgenstein⁶ suggested?

The intuitive experience is not studied for itself, neither in the field of artistic creation, nor in the field of psychotherapy, nor in that of managerial decision-making, not even in daily life, where intuition often appears although in a more discreet form. When these studies on intuition are not just limited to the recording of anecdotes, their objective is usually to prove the existence of the intuitive phenomenon, or to identify popular beliefs about intuition, or even to evaluate the intuitive capacities of a given population, but not to describe the actual subjective experience associated with the intuition.

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² We should add to this list, which is very long, the testimony of contemporary scientists, for example, mathematicians like Laurent Schwartz, Alain Connes...

³ Michaël Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 55

⁴ Heidegger, *Les problèmes fondamentaux de la Phénoménologie*, p. 167

⁵ Schelling, *Huitième Lettre sur le Dogmatisme et le Criticisme*, p. 108

⁶ Wittgenstein, *Investigations philosophiques*.

Why evade the subject? Can we explain this through the weight of rationalism, which, considering knowledge as an analytical, deductive process, can only ignore intuition, or bring it down to the level of an unconscious inference, which is the same as denying the phenomenon? Can it be explained through the weight of positivism, which, only considering objective phenomena as objects of science, rejects the study of the subjective experience? This attitude would partially explain why scientific research has not yet developed a method which would make this kind of study possible. Above and beyond positivist prejudices, we know that the largely "pre-thought" character of actual subjective experiences renders it extremely difficult to elaborate a method which would enable one to become aware of it and to describe it.

But it seems to us that a supplementary reason, specific to intuition, could explain the absence of studies of the intuitive experience: these studies have perhaps been discouraged by a confusion about the different meanings of the character of "immediacy" which defines intuitive knowledge.

"Immediate" knowledge is first of all direct knowledge, which cannot be reached through an intermediary reasoning process. It is not understood progressively, at the end of a deductive process consisting of the accumulation of middle terms. On the contrary, the appearance of an intuition contains a character of discontinuity: it surges forth with a leap, unexpectedly, out of our control. The testimonies generally focus on this moment of surging forth, which could explain the absence of descriptions of the intuitive experience: for, if it is possible to describe a process unfolding over time, how can you describe an unpredictable surging? Moreover, in the most famous accounts of intuitive experiences, this first dimension of immediacy (discontinuity in the intuitive experience) is often assimilated with a discontinuity of appearance¹: the content of the intuition appears all of a sudden, complete. There again, there is no room for a genetic description of the intuition.

Now it seems, on the one hand, that the assimilation of these two types of discontinuity is unjustified because instantaneity is not the most common mode of appearance of intuition: it appears most often in a progressive manner, in the form of a slow ripening; which renders a genetic description possible.

On the other hand, does the direct character of an intuition eliminate all possibility of description? For, if there is no method to produce the intuition, are there not "training", circumstances, that make it possible to prepare an interior disposition which allows the intuition to appear? Without being the direct result, the reward of the mediation, is not the unpredictable surging forth of the intuition encouraged by a propitious conditioning? And could not this preparation, this interior moving forward, become the object of a description?

Moreover the philosophers of intuition agree on the existence of a pre-intuitive gesture: platonic conversion, Cartesian doubt, phenomenological reduction..., are all such gestures making it possible to carry out an unlearning process, a break in our usual manner of looking at the world, thus liberating an interior space for intuition to spring forth. But once again, philosophers remain very discreet concerning the experiential characteristics of this gesture, which initiated their search for wisdom.

Our research² comes as the result of our surprise at the silence surrounding the intuitive experience, though it seems to be at the heart of the human experience. We wanted to go a little further into the description of the intuitive experience, to attempt the

¹ We take our formulation in these terms of this distinction from Judith Schlanger in *Les concepts scientifiques. Invention et pouvoir*, p. 67.

² This research is being carried out for a doctoral thesis, currently being written, at the CREA (Center for Research on Applied Epistemology), with Francisco Varela as thesis advisor.

adventure of the psycho-phenomenology of intuition. Specifically, we wanted to verify to what degree intuition is an experience which mobilizes our whole being, not only its intellectual dimension but also its sensorial, emotional dimension.

To do this, we carried out a group of interviews, adopting a special method of exploration which we will describe in the first section: how to have access to the pre-thought-out aspects of the intuitive experience, how to clarify them, how to analyze and compare the descriptions we have obtained.

To our surprise, we saw a generic structure of the intuitive experience emerge from this work of description and analysis. This structure is made up of an established succession of very precise interior gestures with a surprising regularity from one experience to another and from one subject to another. In our second section we will present the most significant aspects of this generic experiential structure.

In a third section we will bring up a number of considerations and questions resulting from this phenomenological description.

I Methodology

The method that we have employed to carry out a phenomenological description of the intuitive experience is broken down into three stages:

- gathering descriptions of intuitive experiences,
- analysis and modeling of the descriptions,
- comparing the established models.

1. Gathering descriptions

The difficulty of obtaining descriptions of the intuitive experience comes essentially from the fact that the gestures which prepare and follow the emergence of an intuition belong to that dimension of experience which is not a part of thought-out consciousness. According to Pierre Vermersch development of this idea in the interview of explicitation, supported by Piaget's theory of awareness, we do not need to know what we did to succeed in order to succeed in carrying out a physical or mental action. A successful action can even be accompanied by an erroneous representation of its unfolding. Our know-how, "remarkably efficient, though not knowing itself"¹, is, in large part, made up of "pre-thought".

This part of our knowledge, which is non-conscious - and which is not explainable as an unconscious repression in the Freudian sense - seems to be present even at the center of our most abstract activities, those most conceptualized, those most lacking in affectivity.

It is the depth of this "personal knowledge"² that makes the difference between the expert and the beginner, who is satisfied just in applying the rules, even if there is an element of pre-thought gesture at every degree of expertise.

For a person to be able to describe his experience, he must become conscious of this pre-thought knowledge. And this awareness necessitates a reversal, a break with his habitual attitude, which consists of acting without knowing how he does it, without

¹ Jean Piaget, *La prise de conscience*, p. 275

² Reference to Michaël Polanyi : *Personal Knowledge*.

knowing what he knows. This reversal is far from being trivial. It is sometimes triggered off under the pressure of an obstacle, of a failure. The interview of explicitation is a technique which enables us to provoke this awareness during an interview, through the intermediation of the interviewer.

1.1 The interview of explicitation

It is a matter of clarifying the pre-thought "lived" experience of an action, that is, of bringing the subject to the point where he describes what he really does, and not what he thinks or imagines he does. The process of explicitation unfolds in three stages:

- bringing the subject to the point of living, or reliving, the action or experience to be explored,
- helping him to operate a "thinking-through" of his experience, that is, to pass his know-how from the level of action to the level of representation,
- enabling him to put into words, to clarify, this represented experience.

- Accessing the experience

One of the strong ideas that supports the interview of explicitation is that the lived-out experience can only be singular. In other terms, access to pre-thought can be brought about only by exploring a precise experience, precisely situated in time and in space. One cannot live an experience "in general". What would then be described would not be an experience but rather the abstract impoverished representation of an experience, in which the implicit aspects would be lost. There are two possible processes of access to this singular experience:

1) Reliving a past experience

In this case, the interviewer guides the subject towards a position of "embodied"¹ speech in order to help him evoke a particular experience from the past, in such a way that the subject "relives" the past situation, with all the sensorial and emotional dimensions that it includes, and to the point that the past situation becomes more present for the subject than does the situation of being interviewed². This position of speech is in opposition to a position of "abstract" speech, in which a subject expresses himself more from his knowledge than from his experience.

To guide a subject towards the concrete evocation of his experience, different techniques are used; the main one consists of helping the subject to rediscover, in a very precise manner, the images, sensations, sounds ... that are associated with his experience, until he feels that he is reliving it³.

A certain number of indications enable the interviewer to verify if the subject is really reliving an experience : in particular, letting go of eye contact, unfocusing - that is, the fact that the subject drops eye contact with the interviewer and looks off into empty space, off into the horizon. Using the present tense instead of the past can also be an indication.

2) Living the experience "in the present"

¹ Used in the signification that F. Varela, E. Rosch and E. Thompson give this term in The Embodied Mind to describe the deep-rooting of thought in the corporeal experience.

² In the technique of the interview of explicitation, this particular state of consciousness is called "a state of evocation".

³ The theoretic model which supports the interview of explicitation on this point is the model of "affective memory", or "concrete memory", developed by G. Gusdorf in Mémoire et Personne.

In this case, the subject describes the experience as he is living it out. Access to this experience is therefore much easier because it is being lived out here and now. But even in this case access to the pre-thought is not trivial. For even while he is living the experience, the subject is rarely completely present in it. Whether the experience is being lived while being experienced or is "relived", the subject interviewed often escapes to a position of abstract language, that is, instead of precisely describing the singular experience that he is living through, he slides towards making comments, judgments about the experience or about the intuitive experience in general. The interviewer's intermediation will help him to stay within the limits of his own experience.

- Access to pre-thought

The procedure used to facilitate access to pre-thought aims at provoking a reversal of the subject's attention to his internal process, and a slowing down of the "film" of his experience. The slowing down can be obtained by directly asking the subject to slow down his rhythm of speech, to take his time.

When we are talking about a past experience, another procedure to bring about both a reversal of the attention and a slowing down consists of formulating questions which the subject cannot answer without recalling the past experience: for example questions concerning the context of the evocation.

An important slowing down of the rhythm of speech, often broken by moments of silence, is the sign that the subject is not reciting a ready-to-use knowledge but is becoming aware of aspects of his experience which until then were pre-thought.

- Putting into words

The form of questioning in explicitation encourages the description of the experience; this privileges the "hows" to the exclusion of the "whys", which would veer the subject off course towards a position of abstract speech. In order to avoid infiltrating his own pre-suppositions the interviewer uses a language "empty of content", also called "Ericksonian" language¹. Referring to the subject's experience without naming its content, this language allows him to clarify his own experience without inducing the content of the responses nor of influencing the choice of words.

The principle of this form of questioning is to get the subject started again each time indications of implicit information come up.

- non-verbal indications such as the direction of the gaze, which indicates the sensorial register of where the subject is, or gestures which accompany speech (or are substituted for) in a non-conscious manner and indicate a pre-thought corporeal knowledge. As intuition is a mode of knowledge deeply anchored in the body (and we will see this), we have often encountered this kind of gesture during the interviews.

- verbal indications as generalizations, nominalizations².

Here are a few typical extracts from the interviews we carried out, which illustrate both the directive (the interviewer guides the subject towards the exploration of certain aspects of his experience) and the neutral character of this form of questioning :

Explicitation of state:

"J: I feel that it's time to visualize my interior landscape.

¹ Referring to the American psychotherapist Milton Erickson whose technique Pierre Vermersch has adapted. You can refer to R. Bandler and J. Grinder : Patterns of the hypnotic techniques of Milton H. Erickson.

² This questioning of explicitation is inspired by the "Meta-model" of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, a tool which is presented, in particular, in J. Grinder and R. Bandler, The Structure of magic.

C: How do you know that it's time?
J: Because I have this sensation of calmness.
C: What's this sensation like, where do you feel it?
(...)"

Explicitation of act :

"J : I am concentrating.
C: How do you concentrate?
J: I am listening to what is happening inside me.
C: How do you listen? If you wanted to teach me how to do it, what would you tell me?
J: First, I'm going to place my consciousness much more towards the back of the skull.
C: How do you place your consciousness at the back of the skull?
(...)"

We noticed that it was difficult, if not impossible, for several of the subjects to live out (or to relive) an intuitive experience and simultaneously to put it into words. Thus the interview acts as a succession of periods of time in which the person silently relives an aspect of the experience, and of periods in which he/she describes the corresponding experience while he/she retains an interior "trace". Once this trace has weakened, he has to re-immerses into the experience in order to revive the memory of it and to continue putting it into words.

- Intuitive experiences described by using the interview of explicitation

Twenty-four interviews were carried out, all of which are about knowledge that came about without the intermediary either of a deductive mechanism nor through the habitual senses. This intuitive knowledge can be classified according to its object, which, depending on each case, is:

- the physical, emotional, or mental state of another person (11 intuitions),
- an event distanced in space or in the future (6)
- the behavior to follow in a given situation (3)
- the solution to a personal question or an abstract problem (4).

The described interviews can also be classified according to the setting in which they took place: therapeutic, scientific, artistic, or daily life. We interviewed:

- Eight psychotherapists belonging to different schools of therapy¹, either about intuitions concerning the interior state or the life of their patients, or about intuitions that came up in their private lives. Several of these intuitions were explored as they were being experienced.
- Two scientists: one doing research in the "Economic Studies" department of a big bank, about his intuitive strategy for detecting mistakes in a research report; the second one an astrophysicist, about the sudden intuition he had had on the "logical structure of quantum mechanics".
- Two artists: a photographer and a painter, about moments of creative intuition.
- Twelve interviews were carried out about intuitions occurring in "daily life" (for example: long distance perception of a fire, of the death of someone close, premonition of an accident, intuitive behavior adopted during a hopeless situation).

¹ Psychoanalysis, Bio-energy, Rebirth, S. Grof Holotropic Breathing, Orthobionomy, P.N.L, Vittoz Method...

1.2 Analysis of texts

To gather information for the description of the intuitive experience, we also turned to autobiographical testimonies of certain authors who went beyond the exploration of singular intuitive experiences to a stage of elaboration and transmission of knowledge on this mode of cognition and the means to access it. In this way we gathered and analyzed the meta-cognition of:

- the psychoanalyst Theodor Reik, in his work Listening with the third ear : the inner experience of a psychoanalyst.

Barbara McClintock, Nobel prize in biology, who devoted her life to the study of "jumping genes" in corn cells, in Evelyn Fox Keller's biography : A feeling for the organism : the life and work of Barbara McClintock.

Through an analysis of the writings of certain authors, notably philosophers (Aristotle, Descartes, Husserl), it was also possible for us to bring certain aspects of their intuitive experiences to light, even if they did not give explicit descriptions. The metaphors used, the choice of words, reveal, at the very limits of their language, something of the private experience (not necessarily conscious), underlining their theories.

2. Analysis and Modeling of the descriptions

The objective is to extract the structure of different experiences from a rather considerable volume of information, in a form that enables us to compare them in their smallest details.

The transcription of each interview, and of each text containing a meta-cognition, was analyzed and modeled in the following way.

2.1 Reduction of the text to the descriptive aspects of the experience

After having transcribed the interview, the first task consists of selecting the parts of the text which supply the effective description of the experience of an intuition, and of eliminating those which concern other levels of description¹ :

- description of the context, the circumstances of the intuition : useful in understanding the unfolding of the experience, this does not give information of the lived experience of the intuition ("at the moment I put my foot on the step of the bus, the idea came to me").
- commentaries, judgments, beliefs, about the experience in question or the intuitive experience "in general" for the subject ("the solution often appeared to me at the moment of sudden awakening").
- beliefs, opinions about intuition in general ("women are more intuitive than men").
- theoretical knowledge about intuition ("intuition is a function of the right side of the brain"), or explanations of the phenomenon ("intuition is an unconscious inference").

None of this information tells us about the experience itself, that is, about the possible actions that the subject carries out to encourage the appearance of an intuition, about their links in series, or the interior state which is associated with them.

¹ in the interview of explicitation, these levels correspond to the "system of information surrounding the action" (L'entretien d'explicitation, p. 43 and following).

For example, in the following extracts, commentaries and beliefs about intuition (in italics), are interspersed with the description of actions and states :

"I get comfortably into my feet, and when I exhale, I push the idea upwards, I push towards the middle, I push downwards, I create a bubble. I am in my arms which push, I am in my arms which rise up and create the bubble. I am completely in the feeling. I don't have any images. *Even though when I explain something I always give an image. Therefore I think that I am very visual, but actually, with Vittoz, I have learned a lot about how to just be in the sensation.*" (Monique, 195)

"I breathe, I try to find this axis which is destabilized, I say to myself "don't be afraid", I reassure myself. *Because I am often afraid of this somatization which often comes, I therefore need to reassure myself at that moment. It's funny because you always associate intuition with something serious, negative, painful, that happens or will happen, even when it can also be an intuition about something positive, pleasant, and wonderful to live, you see.*" (Vanessa, 58)

We also set aside the content of the intuition. The content, like the context, can be useful to understand what kind of experience it is, but contains no information on the subjective living out associated with this experience. That is why we were able to interview a scientist for two hours about his sudden intuition of "the logical structure of quantum mechanics", while ignoring almost everything about the content of this intuition, and concentrating only on the form of its appearance.

Only the description of the acts carried out by the subject and the description of his state during the experience are retained.

2.2 Elaboration of a model of the experience

From the description we have thus reduced to its experiential dimension, we now need to extract a "model" of the experience, that is, a structured and synthetic representation which enables us:

- to understand the unfolding of and the principal dimensions of the experience,
- to compare it with other experiences.

The construction of this model takes place in three steps (steps 2 and 3 can take place concurrently):

1. Identification of the interior gestures which make up the experience
2. Construction of a diachronic model of the experience
3. Construction of a synchronic model of the experience

2.2.1 Identification of the interior gestures that make up the experience

This step consists of identifying in the description of the experience, the principal gestures that it is made up of. Each gesture is defined by a unique pre-occupation which generally corresponds to the realization of an objective, for example: reaching a state of interior availability, entering into contact with another person...

When the gestures are not explicitly formulated, it is possible to identify them indirectly, by spotting in the description the actions which are carried out in order to trigger off their realization, or to verify that the objective has been reached. These actions of triggering off and of verifying constitute the main points of the hinging of the experience, and enable us to fragment the description¹. In the intuitive experience the

¹ This modeling was developed by George Miller, Eugene Galanter and Karl Pribram (Plans and the Structure of Behavior) with the name of Model TOTE, that is, Test-Operation-Test-Exit. It is based on

objective of a phase is often to obtain a particular interior state. The actions of triggering off and of verifying correspond to the gathering of interior information which make it possible to assure that the desired state has been reached. This taking of information corresponds to the most implicit aspects of the experience.

Let us take as an example one of the experiences described by Judee. In the transcription of the interview we spotted key sentences which describe some actions of triggering off and of verifying, on which hinge the description of this experience.

1. Beginning of the description : change of manner of breathing

"First I begin to breathe in a connected manner, there is no stopping between breathing in and breathing out, so that there is a sense of continuity in the breathing, and it's a breathing that is calming, and when I breathe like that..." (9)

Description of the procedures to reach "the intuitive state"

Verification that the intuitive state is reached:

"When I am in my intuitive state, I have images that correspond, and these images are a verification for me : am I sufficiently in my state or not, and if I feel that it is still loaded, at that moment I go a little further, I take my time to get more inside" (59)

"There, I've been ready to do something with my intuition, for the last few minutes." (67)

2. Decision to extend her interior vision :

"And there, I extend my interior vision, I come like with these kinds of threads..." (119)

Description of the procedures to extend her consciousness

3. Beginning of interior listening

"And at that moment I wait, I have nothing to do, I'm in a kind of availability, of expectation, and also a kind of curiosity, a lucidity... I am present.... It's a listening, but it's especially being free, available, in my interior seeing. " (129)

Description of interior listening

4. Appearance of the intuition

"Almost immediately, after a little waiting... there's an image which is distilled...and then I look at this image... The image that I get, it's..." (133)

Description of the intuitive "reading"

Verification that the story is finished:

"Up to a given moment, I arrive at the end of the story, I arrive at the end of .. images. And at that moment, I feel inside me that it's all right, that it's wrapped up , I have nothing more to say ... on my side, because I have done my job, I have done what I've been asked to do." (143)

5. Decision to disconnect :

" So I am going to consciously empty out my body, bring me to an empty state... interiorly, to find again this state where my intuition is there, but I don't do anything with it. Because there, I did something with it." (95)

Description of the procedures to return to the interior state

End of the description

These key sentences constitute the hinging points of the description of Judee. They enable us to reorganize this description around five preoccupations or objectives which correspond to certain distinctive interior gestures :

- 1) reaching the intuitive state,
- 2) extending one's consciousness towards another,
- 3) listening, waiting in a state of receptivity,
- 4) welcoming the images and sensations that come,

the hypothesis that physical or mental behavior aim at carrying out a certain objective with the help of defined procedures. However, we will see that the intuitive experience does not totally fit this model.

5) returning to the intuitive state.

We will now group together the parts of the text which describe each of the gestures, and which were sometimes overlapped.

2.2.2 Construction of a diachronic model of the experience

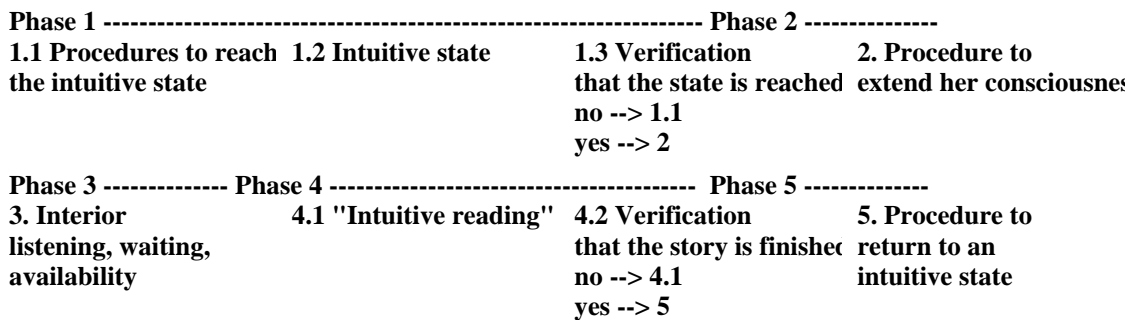
The diachronic model represents the temporal structure of the experience.

It is constructed at different levels of detail: the level of the phases, the level of the operations, and the level of the elementary actions.

- The level of the phases

At the level of the phases, the diachronic model displays the train of interior gestures (sequence, parallelism), located in the preceding step.

Let us take the example of Judee again: the five preoccupations which we have identified correspond to five successive phases of the experience; we represent their linking and hinge in the following diachronic model :



Re-scheduling of the description

In order to simplify this presentation, and to illustrate steps 1 and 2, we have chosen an interview in which the description follows quite closely the chronological order of the experience. But for most of the experiences, an additional step of re-scheduling is necessary.

Indeed, the awareness of the pre-thought of the experience rarely follows the chronological order of its unfolding. Several flashbacks – guided by the interviewer's questions - are generally necessary so that the most unconscious aspects can be brought to consciousness and be described. This implies therefore that the modeler carries out an additional operation of re-scheduling of the parts of the text which describe the different gestures, before constructing the diachronic model.

- The level of the operations

Each phase is then represented with more details in the form of a train of operations. For example, phase 1 of the preceding model is broken down in the following manner :

**1.1
Corporeal
procedures**

Postural alignment
Closing of the
eyelids
Connected
breathing from the
stomach
Displacement of
the consciousness
towards the back
of the skull

**1.2
Visualization of a
natural
landscape**

**1.3
Ascending
itinerary of
consciousness
in the body**

**1.4
Emptying out**

**1.5
Test of the
intuitive state**

Verification of the
emotional and
energetic state of
the body through
interior vision

**ok --> phase 2
not ok --> 1.3**

- The level of elementary actions

Each operation of the model can still be described at the level of a more refined aggregation, through a train of elementary actions, which are represented by :

- 1) the sensorial modalities that are associated to them,
- 2) possibly a short extract of the text, which we call a "descriptive trait".

Here, for example, is the detailed model of a psychoanalytical intuition of Reik, constructed from the following passage :

"(...) Without the slightest hesitation and with a nuance of reproach in my voice, I answered her : "Why didn't you tell me that you had had an miscarriage ?" I had said it without knowing what I was going to say, nor why I was going to say it. I had the impression that it wasn't me, but something inside me that was speaking. The patient jumped to her feet and stared at me as if I were a ghost.

(...) I come back to this session : what could have happened inside me ? At first, like the patient, I discovered only silence inside me. Then suspense, a kind of expectation, as if something was going to happen. Her words reverberated in me. A new suspense, a new echo of her words, and then complete emptiness, obscurity for a second, out of which came the idea, and even the certitude, that she had had an abortion, that she felt pain when thinking of the baby she had desired but which she had had to give up. Nothing to do with logic or with what I had learned in books. I didn't think about any psychoanalytic theory. I simply said what had spoken inside me against and contrary to all logic, and I was right." (p. 244)

1. -->

Ai

"At first, I
discovered only
silence inside me"

2. -->

Ae:Ki

"Then suspense, a
kind of
expectation... her
words reverberated
in me."

3. -->

Ae:Ki

"A new suspense, a
new echo of her
words"

4. -->

Vi+Ki+Ai+Di

"and then
complete
emptiness,
obscurity for a
second"

5. -->

Des

"Without the
slightest
hesitation... I said
to her..."

Notation used to represent the train of elementary actions ¹	Notation used to represent the sensorial modalities	e external i internal e/i ⁴
--> succession	V visual	
+ simultaneity	A auditory	+ pleasant
A/B comparison, test	K kinaesthetic	- unpleasant
A :B synesthesia ²	O olfactory	
<u>A</u> absence or stopping of A ³	G gustative	r remembered
(A) optional	D digital (words)	c constructed
>A decrease		s spontaneous ⁵
<A increase		

2.2.3 Construction of a synchronic model

Each gesture of the experience is not only described by a diachronic model, but also by a synchronic model, which represents the experience in other dimensions than its temporal dimension. While the diachronic model represents the "film" of the experience (the linking of the phases), the synchronic model corresponds, in a way, to an "image by image pause".

It is constructed through a succession of operations of abstraction, using the parts of the text describing the same gesture. It is made up of descriptive traits and of experiential categories, bound by relations of classification and of aggregation⁶ (see box).

A descriptive trait is a direct quotation from the text, which represents a unit of meaning.

An experiential category corresponds to:

- either a regrouping of descriptive traits of close meaning into a more abstract category, through an operation of classification/ instantiation,
- or a regrouping of experiential categories into a category which has a higher level of abstraction, through an operation of aggregation/ disaggregation.

¹ The notation comes from N.L.P. See Dilts, Strategies of Genius.

² Overlapping of two sensorial modalities, or the transformation of one modality into another. For example, Ae:Vi : to see the form of a sound, or Vi:Ki : image transforming into sensation.

³ For example Di : absence of interior dialog.

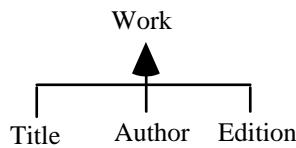
⁴ We introduced this notation to describe certain sensations, especially kinaesthetic, for which it is difficult to determine if it is an internal or an external sensation, for the subject's perception of the limits of his body are modified.

⁵ For example: Vr = memory, Vc = constructed image (a voluntary visualization of something : "imaginary"), Vs = spontaneously appeared image ("imaginal").

⁶ We adopt the definition and the formalism which are given of these relations of abstraction in semantic networks, a technique used in the fields of artificial intelligence and the design of information systems to model static or structural aspects of a system. You can refer to J.F. Sowa : Conceptual Structures, and to Smith and Smith : "Database abstractions : aggregation and generalisation".

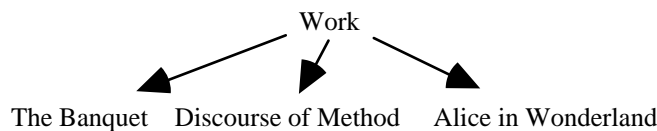
Aggregation is the mechanism of abstraction which makes it possible to consider a relation between objects as an object of a higher level, by neglecting certain details of the relation. The opposite mechanism is disaggregation.

Formalism :



Classification is the mechanism of abstraction which makes it possible to go from a set of events to the description of a class of objects, by neglecting the details which differentiate the events. The opposite mechanism is instantiation.

Formalism :



The construction of a model is ascending when we go from a text to progressively extract experiential categories, using operations of classification or of aggregation; descending when we go from already known categories to structure the description, using the opposite operations.

Let us take the example of the ascending construction of a synchronic model. After having identified a "listening gesture" in Amel's description of his intuitive experience, we take out the relevant descriptive traits:

"I go into the interior of myself". (114)

"I'm listening to what goes on inside of me." (122)

"Listen to yourself, listen to yourself on the inside. There's going to be a place in your body where something is going to be manifested." (124)

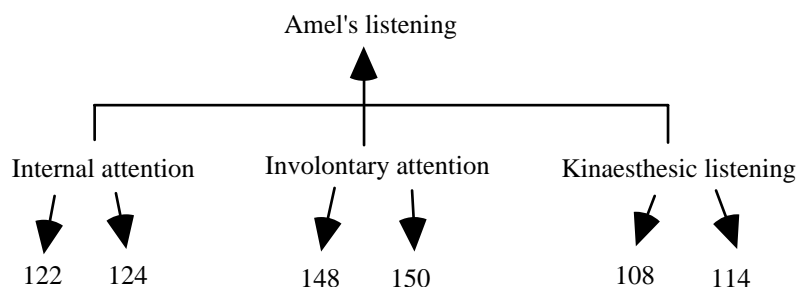
"I am there, I wait for it to come (the feeling), generally at the level of my hands." (108)

"When I go behind, it's not that (the hands) but that (the solar plexus) which feels. It's a part of me which feels." (114)

"I place my hands, and then it's as if it didn't depend on me." (148)

"It's going to come or it isn't going to come, but I can't do anything about it." (150)

We decided to regroup these descriptive traits into three experiential categories : "internal attention", "involuntary attention" and "kinaesthetic listening"; their aggregation represents Amel's structural listening gesture. The graphic representation of this structure follows :



The association of the diachronic model and the synchronic model constitute the specific model of a given experience.

3. Comparing the models

The comparison of the specific models is carried out through the construction of generic models; this corresponds to two different levels of genericity:

1) The generic model of the intuitive experience of a person, constructed by bringing together the different specific models carried out for this person.

This intermediary level of the model is not done for all of the people interviewed, because we were not able to explore more than one experience for some of them.

2) The model of the "intuitive experience", constructed by bringing together the generic models of different people.

At each level of genericity the construction of the generic model takes place in two steps:

1) Construction of a generic synchronic model

2) Construction of a generic diachronic model

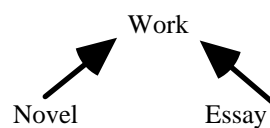
3.1 Construction of generic synchronic models

Each generic synchronic model represents the generic structure of one of the gestures which makes up the intuitive experience. It is made up of experiential categories that are more abstract than those of specific models.

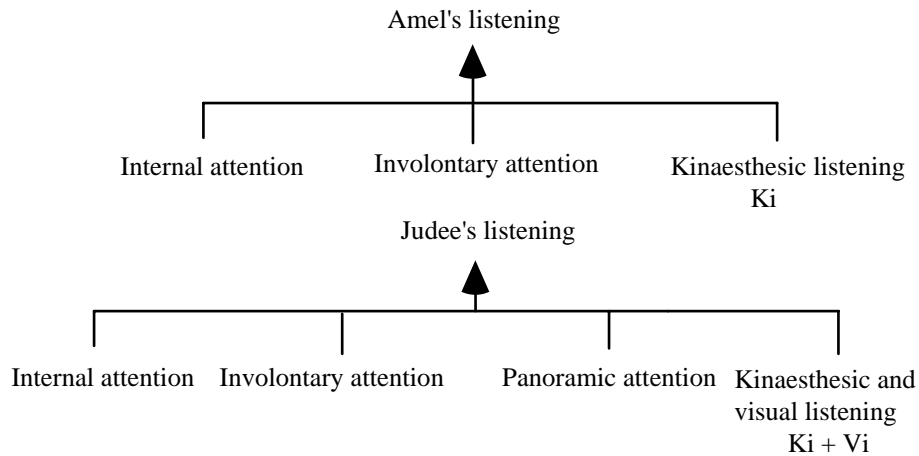
For each generic gesture, a generic synchronic model is constructed from specific synchronic models through the intermediary of two mechanisms of abstraction: aggregation (already used for the construction of specific models) and generalization (see box).

Generalization is the mechanism of abstraction which allows us to extract the description of a more general object, from the description of several objects of distinct classes, by making obvious the properties that are shared by the specialized objects and by neglecting the details which differentiate them. The opposite mechanism is specialization.

Formalism :

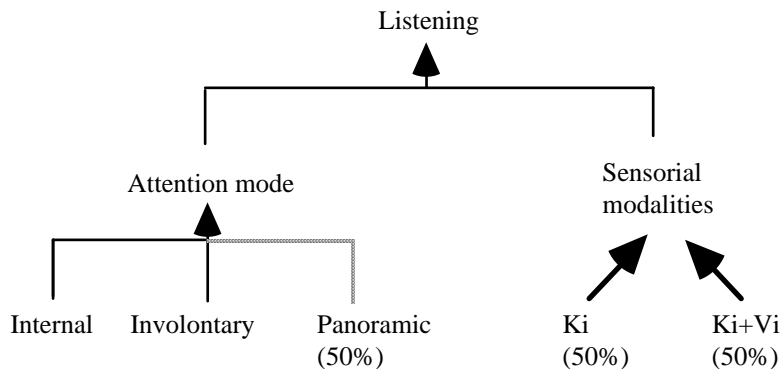


Here is an example of a generic synchronic model, made from two listening gestures in which we spotted proximity of objective and of structure :



We aggregate the descriptive categories of attention encountered in the specific models into a more abstract category : "attention mode".

We regroup the sensorial modalities encountered in the specific models into a more abstract category: "sensorial modalities of listening", by using a relation of generalization. The graphic representation of this generic structure of listening is the following¹ :



Each of the above specific model is a specialization of this generic model.

3.2 Construction of generic diachronic models

The generic diachronic models are constructed at different levels of detail (phase, operation, elementary action), by bringing about either the union or the intersection of specific diachronic models.

We used the construction by intersection of specific diachronic models to spot the diachronic structures shared by different people at each level of detail.

Let us take as an example the two following diachronic models (level of phases):

1) Judee

¹ The relation of aggregation is represented by a dotted line when the corresponding category (here the panoramic characteristic) does not appear in all the specific models. The percentages indicated in parentheses represent the frequency of appearance of the category.

Phase 1 ----- Phase 2 ----- Phase 3 ----- Phase 4 ----- Phase 5 -----
Procedures to reach the intuitive state **Procedures to extend consciousness** **Interior listening** **"Intuitive reading"** **Procedures to return to an intuitive state**

2) Reik

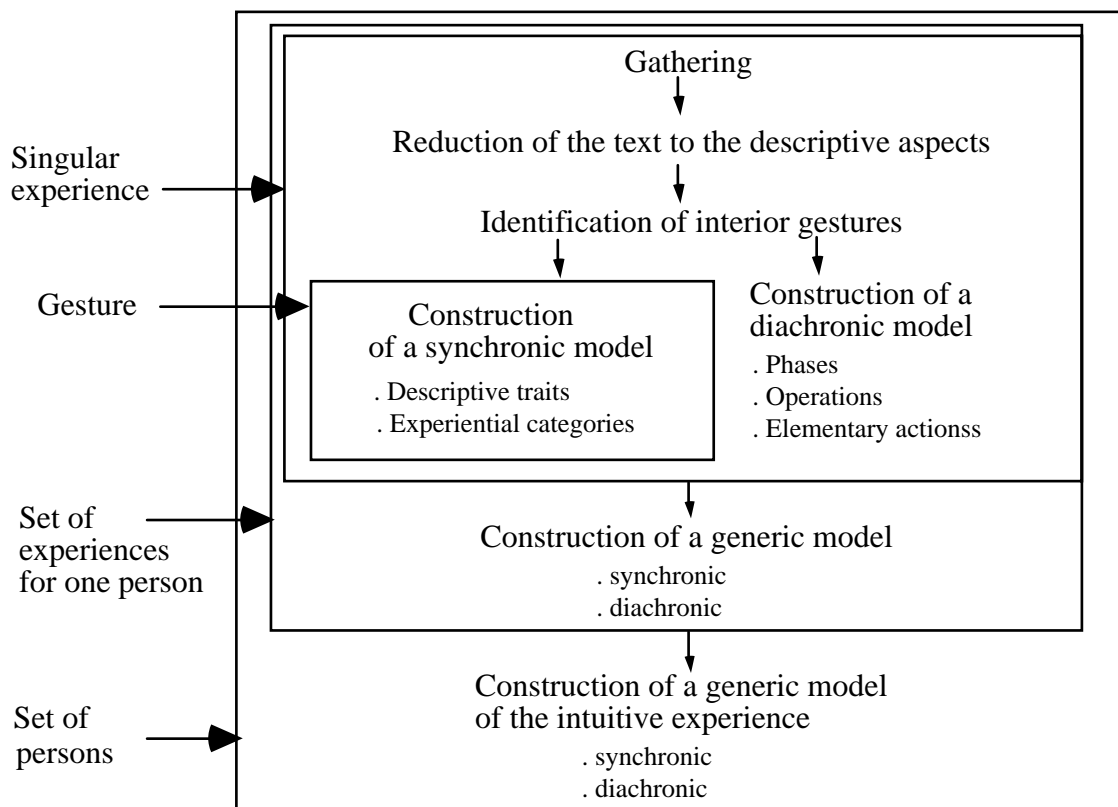
Phase 1 ----- Phase 2 ----- Phase 3 ----- Phase 4 ----- Phase 5 -----
Interruption of discursive thinking **Gesture of the introjection of the patient** **Listening to the patient + interior listening** **Psychoanalytic insight** **Interpretation**

The structuring of these gestures as carried out in the generic synchronic models allows us to recognize certain gestures of these two models as the specializations of the same generic gestures. For example, the listening gestures of Judee and of Reik are the specializations of the same generic gesture. Judee's procedures to extend consciousness and Reik's introjection are the specializations of the same generic gesture of "connection". Judee's "reading" and Reik's "insight" are the specializations of the same gesture of "intuition". Bringing these together allows us to obtain the dynamic structure below, by constructing the intersection of the two models. This generic structure is found in a large number of the interviews:

Gesture to reach the intuitive state --> Connection --> Listening --> Intuition

4. Synthesis of the method

The following diagram summarizes the method explained in this section.



Iterative characteristic of the process :

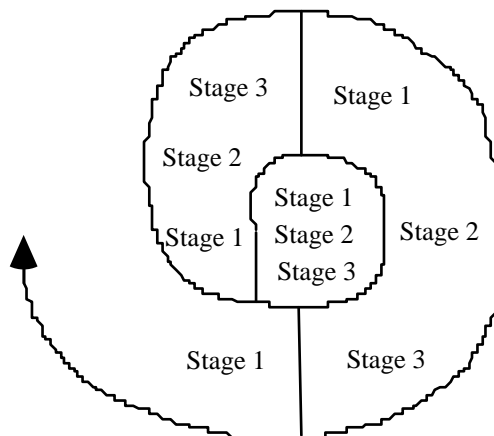
To construct the model of the first interviews we used an "ascending" technique, which consists of progressively abstracting experiential categories and generic gestures from texts. When generic structures began to emerge we used rather a "descending" technique, which consists of questioning these texts from structures that have already been identified: does the experience studied contain a listening gesture ? One of connection?

The fact that a generic structure allowed us to understand and to model an interview rapidly constituted for us, each time, a verification of the validity of this structure.

The appearance of generic structures not only influenced the modeling of the following interviews, but also enabled us to perfect the way we conducted these interviews. For example, the appearance of a generic gesture of "connexion" allowed us to guide the next subjects interviewed towards the exploration of this phase, which was perhaps also present in them, in a pre-thought stage.

Each new interview also enabled us to discover new structures, which did not correspond to any already identified structure, and which progressively enriched the generic model.

The method of modeling, which has been described as an ascendant sequential process to simplify it, is therefore in reality a successive iteration process, which can be represented in the following manner:



In following this iterative method, we have progressively constituted:

- a set of diachronic structures of the intuitive experience,
- a vast semantic network which links the concrete description of the singular experiences to a synchronic model of the intuitive experience.

In the following section, we will present certain particularly significant aspects of these results.

II Results

Out of this modeling and comparison of different descriptions emerged a generic structure of the intuitive experience, which is made up of a succession of very precise interior gestures.

Four of them can be found in a large number of the explored experiences:

-the gesture of letting go, of deep-rooting, of interior self-collecting, and of the slowing down of the mental activity, which makes it possible to reach a particular state of consciousness, the "intuitive state" (described in 22 interviews).

For several of the people interviewed, access to this calm state is made easier through some preliminary work of interior clarification, a work of deep transformation carried out thanks to daily practicing, which is integrated into a long term process.

-The gesture of connection, which makes it possible to enter into contact with the object of the intuitive knowledge (a human being, an abstract problem, a situation...) (described 14 times).

-The gesture of listening, with an attention that is at the same time panoramic and very discriminating, focused on the subtle signs announcing the intuition (described 13 times).

-The intuition itself, of which certain of the subjects have acquired (or acquire during the interview) a sufficiently discriminating consciousness to point out three distinct moments: the moment preceding the intuition, the intuition, the moment following the intuition.

The similarity of these interior gestures in different experiences is striking; they are often described with the same words even, independently of the kind of intuition.

Eight other gestures appear in only a few descriptions. Their absence in the other descriptions can be explained by the fact that either they were not the object of a clarification because they stayed at a pre-thought state, or the gestures in question effectively present no reason for existing in certain particular cases of intuition.

- The gesture of maintaining, which makes it possible to remain in the intuitive state (5 times)

- The gesture of anchoring, which makes it possible to rediscover the intuitive state more easily by associating a sensorial stimulus to it (once).

- The process of disconnecting (once).

- The process of getting out of the intuitive state, of getting back to the usual mode of functioning (4 times).

- The gesture of protection, found only in certain cases of intuition: when the object or the person one has come into contact with carries an energy that could be harmful (twice).

- The process of distinguishing intuition/projection, which makes it possible to distinguish a real intuition from a projected desire or fear thanks to subtle interior criteria (3 times).

- The process of interpreting the content of the intuition when it is not sufficiently explicit (1 time).

- The process of translating the content of the intuition into a communicable form: words, drawing, scientific hypothesis... (6 times).

In the following pages we will present the generic synchronic model of the first four phases of the intuitive experience, that is, the main experiential variables identified for these phases, illustrated by a few examples of descriptive traits.

Synchronic model of the intuitive experience

1. Phase of letting go

This is a phase of returning to the center, of meditation in the original meaning of the word. While keeping its unpredictable character as far as its content and moment of appearance are concerned, the intuition seems to have, as a condition, a particular interior state, which can be obtained thanks to specific interior gestures. First we will describe these gestures, then the characteristics of the interior state obtained.

1.1 Gestures of letting go

The purpose of these gestures is to introduce a break with the usual manner, "natural" manner, of relating to the world: they make it possible to shift the attention from the flood of representations of the past and of the future towards the singular concrete situation that is being lived through here and now.

On the one hand, these are procedures that can be used in a deliberate way starting from the modification of either the relation to the body or the relation to mental activity; on the other hand, they are gestures that do not seem to be able to be voluntarily provoked.

A. Modification of the relation to the body

The goal is to "go down" inside the body, to shift the interior gravity center from the head to the body. We have identified four main gestures most often carried out conjointly:

- 1) Change of posture: this means adopting a defined, vertical, tonic and stable posture.
- 2) Gesture of reunification, of an interior gathering and realignment, brought about thanks to a special attention being paid to the corporeal axis and to the movement of breathing.

"When I begin, I get into what I call the "one", I do the "one". I breathe in, and that makes like a kind of current that goes all through my body. That is doing the "one"." (Monique, 8)

This movement of reunification and thickening of the body can be encouraged by dancing to certain music, particularly repetitive rhythms and the base vibrations of drums.
- 3) Transformation of breathing: it goes down, way down, becomes abdominal. And it slows down, almost to the point of stopping. Muriel describes this sensation of "breathlessness" in precisely this way:

"When my breathing stops, it's as if there were something in my stomach which was swinging softly, a little swing, back and forth, back and forth, like that, in an empty space, without anything, and there at that moment... I think that I have a sensation that goes up along the spine, like that, which opens up a little bit like a flower here, and often I catch just another little breath in the bottom of my stomach just at that moment." (Muriel, 84)
- 4) Shifting consciousness to the back of the skull. Five of the people interviewed described an interior gesture designed to deepen the consciousness of corporeal sensations, and consisting of "going to the back". Judee describes this gesture as the sliding of consciousness towards the back of the skull, induced by adjusting the posture very subtly towards the back of the body.

"When I'm going to enter into my intuitive mode, I'm going to place my consciousness much more towards the back of the skull. It's linked to the posture, I have to be very straight, and it's linked too, to the way I fit into my hips. It's somehow linked to the spinal column, I bend a little bit to the back, there's a kind of spinal alignment that sets in. It's a way for the head and the back of the neck to be in relation to the shoulders and the back. I think it's a kind of sliding. I slide to the back. The whole body is involved with this adjustment. It's minute, very subtle." (Judee, 19)

B. Modification of mental activity

At the same time that these corporeal procedures are being employed, sometimes the subjects use processes that aim at inducing an interior state which is calm and spacious, by slowing down the mental activity.

- Visualizing

For example Judee visualizes a natural landscape to get back into herself, a "sanctuary" where she settles in to meditate.

Monique uses the following exercise to eliminate parasitic thoughts:

"You mentally write; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 on a black board. You see them, you write them, you feel them while writing. And you begin to erase them. You mentally say: " I erase the 5, the 1, 2, 3, 4 are left. I erase the 4, the 1, 2, 3, are left... I erase the 1 and there's only the board left." (Monique, 169)

- Prayer

Two of the people we interviewed also use prayer to have access to an interior intuitive state.

C. Non-voluntary gestures

- Renouncement

Three of the people described an interior movement of renouncement, of abandoning, that they cannot bring about, but which happens at the moment of an important psychological shock : moral suffering, illness or a serious accident, grief. When the person "hits bottom", in the deepest instance of pain or fear, there comes a moment when he stops fighting, accepts dying. And curiously enough at this moment there opens up inside a space of calm and trust which allows for a much more attentive listening of his own interior sensations, and of another way of connecting to life as it surges forth from instant to instant.

"I hit bottom. At that moment I stopped holding on to things; I accepted impermanence, death. It was a passage towards death. Then I was in an interior state where I was no longer fighting; I let myself be carried along with the flow." (Vanessa)

- Passage from wakefulness to sleep

For three people the intuition came when they were in an intermediate state between wakefulness and sleep. Access to this state requires a gesture of letting go which is both physical and mental. But it is not brought about deliberately in order to induce an intuitive state.

D. Absence of conscious gestures

In three cases we were not able to bring out a gesture leading to the intuitive state. As these people were not in the group of psychotherapists, they apparently could not get in

touch with their own interior movements as easily as the other group. For that reason it is not excluded to think that they did carry out a pre-intuitive gesture, that the interview could not bring to consciousness.

1.2 Internal state

The "intuitive" state induced by a movement of letting go is characterized by a transformation of the perception of the body and of the mental activity.

A. Perception of body and space

Most of the people interviewed described a feeling of profound well-being, where a feeling of unity and a feeling of opening up were indissolubly linked.

- Feeling of unity: it is the sensation of being unified, gathered together, whole. Two of the people interviewed perceived an interior "column". A very strong feeling of presence, of really being there, accompanied this sensation of unity. A sensation of being deeply-rooted, of strength and energy is felt in the hips and the legs.

- Sensation of opening up : it is a sensation of interior space and fluidity, associated with a sensation of expanding. Indeed, the perception of the limits between the interior space and the body become more indistinct, and even disappear:

"As if I were much bigger than my body, no longer certain of where the body stopped."(Henry)

"An absence of limits between the space and the body." (Annette)

This sensation of expansion is particularly present concerning the head:

"An open cone at the top of the head." (Alain, 30)

"A balloon where the head should be." (Francis, 48)

"The head swollen up;" (Chea Hoeng, 109)

"As if the skull were no longer there." (Judee, 59)

It is sometimes accompanied by a sensation of light in the head :

"A light that you cannot see but that you know is there." (Alain)

Simultaneously, the space is perceived as denser, more vibrant, full of a light "that you don't see", of a sound "that you don't hear".

"A kind of light that's in the space. A sound that you don't hear, a space that fills the ears which gives the impression of a sound." (Alain, 120)

B. Mental activity

In the intuitive state, the flow of thought and discursive activity calm down to give place to an interior silence:

"The mind begins functioning more slowly, and sometimes stops. There are segments of silence which last a certain period of time." (Alain, 90)

"Speaking, I don't even know if that exists. There is no language, there's nothing, in that state." (Sylvia, 83)

For some people, and especially for the two scientists that we interviewed, it was not a question of a stopping of the mental activity but of a transformation, which abandoned the abstract discursive mode for an imaged, kinaesthetic mode anchored in the corporeal experience:

"I see the results like a coating with holes and bumps in it. I am in the film. It's more a corporeal impression of being swung. I move in the coating. I feel myself go down, come up. And then I have the impression that the coating collapses." (Christophe, 5)

C. State between wakefulness and sleep

For three people, the explored intuition occurred during an intermediary state between wakefulness and sleep. It was either at the precise moment of falling asleep or in the moments preceding waking up, or in the first moments after waking up¹. These states of consciousness present certain characteristics common to the intuitive state, such as the absence of mental activity and the dissolution of the limits usually perceived between the body and the interior space.

1.3 Verification and maintenance in a state

Certain people possess interior criteria which allow them to verify if the intuitive state has been reached. Some also employ criteria to "test" the state (for example verify the corporeal alignment) in order to bring about the needed adjustments to maintain it (for example rectifying the posture and becoming conscious of breathing again).

2. Phase of connection

Once the intuitive state has been reached, fourteen of the people that we interviewed carry through an interior gesture of connection to enter into and to stay in contact with the object they propose to explore. The gesture of connection is defined by its object, its distance, its source, its sensorial modalities, and the process used.

A. Object

This can be:

- a physical object
- a person (even oneself). In this case the connection is made either at the level of the physical body or at the level of the emotional or mental state
- a personal question, a scientific problem, a literary or artistic project...

Several people interviewed use particular processes to connect with an abstract object of this kind.

In the following paragraphs we will describe the connection with a person, essentially through descriptions of psychotherapeutic intuitions.

B. Distance

This is a question of direct contact or getting nearer, consisting of laying one's hands on the person, or in approaching them, or of connection from a distance: in this case the person whom we connect with can be present or absent, sometimes even very far away.

C. Source

¹ Numerous famous scientific intuitions occurred during such states of consciousness, during a moment of exhaustion of rational thinking (Kékulé...). How can we not remember Descartes' dream?

The zone of the body which is the source of the connection can be the hand, the heart, the stomach, or the spinal column. For Judee, the connection is made at the level of the head in order to see, of the stomach in order to feel:

"I'm conscious only of these two places that I extend. It's either for seeing, and that's done by the head, or it's for feeling, and feeling - it's through the stomach. And that, that's interesting for me, because my heart, I stay here. I don't need to involve my heart, my chest, to be successful in this story." (Judee, 155)

D. Sensorial modalities

Even outside direct contact the connection seems to be essentially kinaesthetic in nature, even if the terms used to describe it are borrowed from different sensorial registers.

- visual register: beam, channel of light, network of rays, threads of energy...

"It's as if I were linked to the patient from center to center, it's a ray." (Alain, 112)

"It's a channel of light. And a channel of light with a force. Of energy. Of luminous energy." (Sylvie, 27)

- kinaesthetic register: "energetic hands" or vibration, breathing, gentle rocking :

"An unconscious vibration which exactly fits the instinctive rhythm of the other" (Reik p. 299)

- auditory register: echo, resonance, harmony

" I wait for something like a little -- an echo that would come to meet my whole body." (Alain, 52)

E. Processes

For most of the people interviewed the gesture of connection is brought about unconsciously and became conscious during the interview.

"This process has none of the characteristics of a conscious act. It is situated in zones that are inaccessible to our efforts of thought and it's almost un-thought." (Reik, p.254)

Some people however bring about this act consciously and deliberately:

"It's as if I had a layer of skin, of flesh, something that opens through my intention, my decision. It's like that - that I go into the experience of fusion consciously, that I go into the interior reality of the other and that I feel him." (Judee, 99)

Different processes of connection are used:

- Introjection

For five number of people interviewed, the connection consists of "welcoming" or bringing the other into oneself, into the interior space freed during the preceding phase :

"I have the impression that it is the other who comes into my space. Open yourself up and leave the space to the other." (Alain, 124)

"I open up my stomach and I go into the atmosphere of the other, I'm going to bring a part of this atmosphere into me so that I can feel it in my stomach." (Judee, 141)

For Reik, it is a question of a process of "introjection" of the patient by the psychoanalyst:

"We cannot reach a psychological understanding of another unconscious unless it is snatched up by ours, at least an instant, as if it was a part of us – it is a part of us." (Reik, p. 425)

- Extension, absorption

For three people interviewed the connection consists of extending oneself into the other until one is absorbed in the other:

"I open up, I open myself up, and it's as if hands... energetic, which are going to touch, which are going to feel all over." (Judee, 99)

- Getting into resonance

For three people, it is a question of harmonizing with the rhythm of the other, of synchronizing with the vibration, the "music" emitted by the other.

"The analyst vibrates unconsciously to the rhythm of the other." (Reik, p.429)

"It is as if all of a sudden we were breathing together. As if, for a given moment, rhythmically we were one and the same person." (Sylvia, 148)

Some of the interviewees use interior criteria which allow them to verify that the connection has been carried out:

"Just there I go into another register, another rhythmic level... inside. First, there's just me, and then all of a sudden, there are two of us inside. And when we reach this harmony, we've arrived." (Sylvia, 185)

Once the connection is established, it seems to become more real than the subjects that it links together, to be accompanied by the effacing of the limits of the internal world :

"What really exists, rather than the other person and me, is this channel." (Sylvie, 41)

"We're no longer anything except one shared breathing." (Sylvia, 169)

3. Listening phase

After this phase of letting go, the subject finds himself in a state of interior calm and presence which enables him to listen very closely to his own sensations. This interior gesture of listening is characterized by its sensorial modalities and the kind of attention that it puts into play.

A. Sensorial modalities

Most of the people that we interviewed seemed to privilege a particular listening mode. Some of them are more attentive to their interior images. One of them has an exceptionally refined ear for listening, capable of hearing vibrations emitted by animate and inanimate beings, normally inaccessible to the human ear. The majority of the people interviewed have more or less developed listening to their internal kinaesthetic sensations.

"I pick the vibrations with my hand." (Monique, 2)

For some people, intuitive listening seems to involve all the senses at the same time, or rather an indifferenciation of the senses. That seems to be the case with Reik's "third ear" which involves:

- the visual:

"Nuances and fleeing psychic shadows" (p. 289)

- the auditory:

"The murmuring of my own thoughts" (p. 209)

"Interior voices" (p. 249)

"Almost imperceptible half-tones" (p. 289)

- and the kinaesthetic:

"These unconscious antennae must not seize but touch." (p. 140)

"This story contained little incoherencies, slight irregularities that weren't visible but were perceptible to touch as when a hand slides carefully and softly over a fabric." (p. 183)

"Vague impressions" (p. 249)

"A seismograph reacting to tiny subterranean variations." (p. 438)

For some of the subjects interviewed the body zone which is perceived as the center of attention has moved from the head to another part of the body :

"It's as if my thought center... as if I no longer thought with the head, that I thought with my stomach. I listen with my stomach." (Sylvia, 165)

B. Attention mode

Intuitive listening is characterized by a special mode of attention : internal, peripheral, and involuntary.

- Internal attention

The attention that characterizes intuitive listening is above all turned inward to the internal processes. It is a question of listening to the repercussion of the sensations, the thoughts of the other inside oneself:

"I focus on myself in order to receive the echo of the other." (Alain, 86)

- External attention

However, it is sometimes the perception of an exterior event, sometimes a tiny detail, that will spark off the intuitive awareness, through a coincidence which makes us think of a phenomenon of synchronicity. In this way, Reik has the intuition that his patient has had a miscarriage at the very moment that she remarks to him that one of the books on the library shelves is upside down.

Remember however that for certain subjects, at the end of their phases of letting go and of connection, the limits between the interior and the exterior worlds become hazy, vague, which renders this distinction of internal and external attention of little pertinence.

- Panoramic attention, not focused on any special object

Unlike focused attention which is concentrated on a particular psychic content, narrow and rigid, the attention which characterizes intuitive listening is non-selective, peripheral, "floating", it covers vast territory.

"He who wishes to wake the lightning up must be a cloud for a long time." (Reik, quoting Nietzsche, p. 164)

"I stay conscious of everything that happens inside me without holding on to anything, simply with a presence and a lucidity about everything that is happening." (Judee,75)

This attention however is very attuned, sensitive to the slightest detail:

"More attuned and wider perceptions. I feel myself in a very focused state of consciousness, very, very present in the moment. (...) I have the impression of being a little bit like a funnel, a very long funnel with a very small opening, a little bit like a laser beam, which is at the same time there, very present, and at the same time I'm conscious of everything that is happening around me." (Francis, 28).

This form of attention seems to correspond to "lateral" thinking which characterizes the research strategy of numerous scientists, and which consists of thinking "aside", in a more vast framework than the narrow context of the problem itself.

- Involuntary attention, not directed towards any specific goal

Intuitive listening is characterized by the absence of any precise intention, of research of a defined goal. On the contrary it is being "open" enough to let the unexpected come. It is relaxed, detached, light. It does not involve any effort. It is a peaceful waiting, patient, which is not expecting anything in particular.

"I lay my hands down and I wait; it's as if it didn't depend on me. The huss is going to come or isn't going to come, but I can't do anything about it." (Amel, 150)

"What's needed is putting your hand, then you wait. And then little by little things are described in your hand. If you have an idea of what you are going to feel or want to feel, you don't feel anything, or just false things." (Monique, 77)

Intuitive listening corresponds to a state of receptivity, which consists not of looking for and grasping at, but of letting it come and welcoming it.

"To see in receiving, isn't casting your gaze towards something, projecting it, holding it out, but really it's letting the thing imprint itself in you. You are completely passive, and you let the color, the landscape, come to you. You aren't going to look for it, you're going to gather it in. You're there and you receive it." (Monique, 4)

This receptive gazing enables us to find the sensation in all its immediacy and freshness:

"When you look in this way, there's no filter in your head. It's more alive. Things are much more alive, more real. (Monique, 158)

Listening in a receptive way is not trying to recognize the sensations, to identify them immediately, and to pull out some information at all costs:

"The purpose of suspended attention doesn't consist of instantaneous understanding, of immediately situating it among known things." (Reik, p. 158)

It is a question of having a sufficiently attuned ear to listen to one's own sensations, one's own fledgling thoughts which "walk on dove's feet"¹, before conceptualizing anything:

"I suggest that he who seeks forget everything he has learned, heard, or read, and that he listens to his own answer." (Reik, p. 303)

4. Intuition

The descriptions of certain of our subjects whose consciousness of their intuitive functioning was particularly attuned has led us to discern three distinct moments in the appearing of an intuition : the moment immediately preceding the intuition, the emerging of the intuition, and the moments which follow this emerging.

4.1 The moment just preceding the intuition

The moment which immediately precedes the emergence of the intuition is often characterized by an "empty passage" ("passage à vide"), a moment of confusion, obscurity, silence.

"As for me, the appearance of the deepest, most obscure levels of thought is always preceded, for a fraction of a second, by a feeling of alienation, a fleeting impression of distraction, and even the sensation of a kind of confusion, (...) a moment of eclipse, of "absence" in the French meaning of the term, (...) a temporary chaotic situation." (Reik, p. 181)²

"Then complete emptiness, obscurity for a second." (Reik, p. 244)

In several of the intuitions that we have described, this moment of emptiness corresponds to the moment when the person is falling asleep or just emerging from sleep.

4.2 Intuition

¹ According to Nietzsche's formula.

² Reik compares this moment of confusion to the one that immediately precedes the understanding of a joke.

Unlike the other phases of the intuitive experience, the moment of the appearance of the intuition does not include a description of the act. The arrival of the intuition is not an action, but a process that cannot be forced. However, it is possible to describe:

- the sensorial form of the intuition,
- the threshold of the awareness of the sensation,
- the reaction of the subject to its contents,
- the internal state of the subject at the moment of its appearance.

A. Sensorial form of the intuition

The intuition can surge forth as an image, a kinaesthetic feeling, a sound or a word, or even a taste or an odor, most of the time in several simultaneous or successive sensorial forms¹.

- Image

Most often this means internal images, more rarely visual hallucinations:

"I take my bowl, and all of a sudden there comes out of the bowl... I can't say it otherwise, at that distance, a photo. A kind of face in black and white, a dark fellow with a black pullover, a black and white photo." (Sylvia, 8)

- Feeling

In the descriptions that we have collected we distinguish two kinds of feeling.

1) Sensations which reflect the interior state of the other person.

For example, during a Vittoz therapy session, Monique "takes on the vibrations" of the patient, that is she verifies the evolution of his interior state thanks to very subtle sensations that she feels in her hand. These vibrations are perceptible when she put her hand on the patient's forehead, but a well trained hand can feel them at a distance of several meters. Monique, for example, can discern a state of tension in her patient :

"In general ,when there is tension it's like champagne, you see, it goes ding ding... it stings in my hand; that's tension when something is happening that isn't true to a relaxed state." (Monique,3)

Judee captures the interior atmosphere of the other person in her stomach:

"I have sensations that are her/his sensations, I spot them in my body." (Judee, 83)

2) Sensations that forebode the imminence of an event or of a thought, are therefore in the category of internal signals.

- Son

Antoine hears habitually inaudible sounds that are emitted by vegetal and animal beings and vary according to their state.

- Word

The intuition takes on the form of words, either heard (usually interiorly) by the person, or pronounced out loud. For example, Reik received a patient without knowing that she had just had a miscarriage :

"Without the slightest hesitation and with a nuance of reproach in my voice, I answered her: "Why didn't you tell me that you had had a miscarriage ?". I said it without knowing what I was going to say, nor why I was going to say it. I had the impression that it wasn't me, but something in me which was speaking. I simply said what had been spoken in me, in opposition to all logic, and I was right." (Reik, p. 244)

¹ The scientific intuitions that have been described to us have also emerged in a visual and/or kinaesthetic sensorial form.

- Taste, odor

Sylvia had the same kind of intuition about a patient:

"I had a taste in the mouth. It was strong, it was as if someone had put blood under my nose and in my mouth. It didn't leave me." (Sylvia, 93)

- Several sensorial modalities

Most of the time the intuition appears in a synesthetic form, that is in the form of a simultaneity or a fading of sensations. Thus Muriel, while she was on vacation in the south of France, had the sudden intuition that her Parisian apartment was threatened by fire (which she later verified). This intuition was simultaneously manifested in the form of an image, a feeling and an interior voice.

- Image of my apartment

"Suddenly I thought of my apartment, and when I thought of my apartment, I immediately saw it in reality, I saw the inside of my home... I saw it as it was at that very moment." (4)

- Sensation of compression

"And at the same time that I saw this image, I had an unpleasant sensation, a little worrying... (...) My throat tightened. And at a point in my solar plexus, here, a feeling of ... not queasiness, but something that isn't normal, something that upset, a warning ...something is happening." (Muriel, 52)

- "I have the impression that it is very hot"

"I very quickly said something to myself, something that was linked to the heat. I said to myself "I have the impression that it is very hot, really too hot, in Paris." (48)

- "Thoughts without words"

When she enormously slowed down the interior "film" of her sensations, Muriel had the impression that at its very beginning the intuition appeared as a direct, global understanding, later differentiated into sensations and into distinct words.

B. Reactions to the content of the intuition

- A feeling of certitude

The emergence of the intuition into consciousness is often accompanied by a feeling of obviousness, of certitude.

"I really feel when I can be serious about this intuition. I know it. I am absolutely sure. I don't talk about it, I don't need to discuss with anyone about it, I am simply certain that I have the solution." (Barbara McClintock, p. 139)

For psychotherapists, this feeling of certitude is often shared by the patient:

"The patient doesn't believe the psychoanalyst's interpretation is right, he knows it." (Reik, p. 247)

- A feeling of coherence, of meaning

There is a feeling of coherence, of meaning added to this feeling of certitude. Not just an abstract meaning, but a living meaning, endowed with depth, thickness, density, rhythm, color... an incarnate sense, of which the corresponding concept is only the skeleton. This is no simple acquisition of information or of knowledge, but rather an experience which touches being in its totality.

C. Internal state at the moment of the intuition

Even if it is possible to prepare, to encourage the appearing of an intuition, this appearance always retains a capricious, unpredictable character; it escapes all control. All of the subjects – this is an invariable characteristic of the intuitive experience – notice a state of passivity at the moment when the intuition springs forth. "It escapes

from me", "It happens to me", "It doesn't depend on me", "It's given to me"... this kind of statement is found in all the descriptions.

This feeling of passivity can be partially explained by the absence of mental activity at the moment when the intuition appears. Recourse to concepts and rules, to learned knowledge, all form of memory like all form of premeditation, are excluded.

This feeling of an absence of control is linked to a transformation of the feeling of individual identity. The sensation of the floating of the limits of the ego felt in the preceding phases is accentuated: at the moment of the intuition, the sensation of being an "ego" distinct from the world vacillates and even dissolves:

"You forget yourself." (Alain, 86)

"I no longer exist." (Sylvie, 5)

"You forget who you are. You lose consciousness of yourself. I am no longer there." (Barbara McClintox , p. 155)

Paradoxically, at the same time the person feels that he has found his wholeness, that he has become unified, body and spirit, in harmony with his inner being.

"Body, emotion, spirit, all of a sudden it's as if these three were linked, indissolubly linked. In a kind of lightning state." (Muriel, 121)

She feels deeply in correspondence, in harmony with her surroundings. She has the feeling of being wholly herself, in the right place.

"I feel more myself than I have ever been." (Judee, 159)

" I feel that at that very moment I am the right person in the right place to be doing that thing." (Catherine, 50)

All of the subjects interviewed have the impression of living something very important, even when the intuitions have an innocuous content. They feel completely mobilized, captivated by the experience:

"The huss is a thing that gets hold of you in your totality. A little bit like a music that takes hold of you completely... It's a little bit like a thing of life or death." (Amel)

They feel that they enter into contact with something essential for a few instants.

"I have the impression that when I go down into my center, God is waiting for me there." (Monique, 204)

For some of them this experience brings on a sensation of astonishment, amazement, of being struck ... or of fear :

"I was afraid. I had the feeling that I was in contact with something I could not understand, that we cannot play with that." (Sylvie, 43)

For a lot of them it is a very moving experience, which brought tears when they told about it during the interview:

"One of the first vibrations that I felt was so beautiful in my hand that I had two big tears that flowed." (Monique, 42)

D. Threshold of awareness

The intuition does not always emerge in a precise, complete, immediately understandable form. Most often it first caresses the consciousness as a hazy image, a vague sensation, diffuse, a line of interior force.

The threshold of awareness of the sensations varies considerably from one person to another, and essentially depends on the degree of practice in pre-intuitive gestures. The more a person practices bringing on the calm inside and listening, with the special

mode of attention which characterizes intuitive listening, the more precocious will be his awareness, the more subtle will be the sensations perceived.

According to the people with the most experience, of those we interviewed, intuitive sensations are always present; the only variable is the attention we bring to them.

"The day that I realized that I felt in a different way, I became aware of it suddenly, but it was already there. It was obvious. Because I had probably been living it for years, it seemed obvious to me.; I knew how it functioned." (Antoine, 42)

It even seems that intuitive sensations can influence our behavior before they reach the threshold of awareness.

4.3 Moments immediately following the intuition

At the moment the intuition emerges into consciousness, several interior attitudes are possible

- chase away, repress the sensation:

"Little pieces of thought that I don't really let get in, that I don't let develop." (Annette)

The sensation sometimes continues to develop outside consciousness and reappears only when it has been transformed into a violent indisposition or a disease.

- grasp the sensation, either by immediately weighing it down with emotions or interior commentaries that will disturb listening:

"At the moment I hear something, immediately after comes an emotion and with the emotion a verbalization. And this verbalization disturbs me in listening to the information of the intuition." (Muriel, 137)

or by immediately seeking to give it a defined outline, to recognize it, to understand it, to interpret it, all of which have the effect of fixing it, of stopping it.

- Silently welcoming this sensation, this burgeoning thought, confidently and patiently letting it ripen, take form, by itself. One of the scientists describes the process of maturation of his idea in this way:

"It is in a way contemplating one's own development of this idea." (Roland, 18)

Several persons use precise strategies to translate their feeling into a communicable form, without fixing the feeling or cutting it off. For example, in order to do an "intuitive reading": first let the received image, which reflects the interior state of the other, become stable, become "distilled". Then enter into contact with the constantly moving "atmosphere" of the image, without forcing anything, until this atmosphere becomes recognized and one can associate a precise formulation to it. Communicate this formulation to the other person; if the words are right, this will have the effect of the developing of the image. And so forth until the end of the reading.

Some of the subjects interviewed use interior criteria which enable them to verify that the maturing process of the intuition has come to its conclusion.

4.4 Intuitive behavior

For several of the people that we interviewed there have been times when this receptive attitude which characterizes the intuitive state continues beyond just a few moments to become a behavior, a mode of being intuitive. In desperate circumstances they stop struggling and bring an intense attention to the situation in such a way that the situation spurts out from moment to moment; they enter into resonance with it, letting themselves be carried by it, adopting the right behavior that will save them.

III Remarks

Confronting the results obtained with other testimonies, and with other studies¹ that have been carried out on the themes of scientific invention, of artistic creativity and of psychoanalytic insight for example, would enable us to confirm them and to make them more precise. Comparing them with different traditions of meditation would also be enlightening. But that is not the purpose of the present article ; these comparative studies will be carried out in another article. In the following pages we will simply list the difficulties and questions that we encountered in our attempt to clarify and model the intuitive experience.

1. Difficulties of explicitation

- At first we found the technique of the interview of explicitation difficult to master; it took a certain amount of time before we gathered real descriptions of intuitive experiences. We were surprised to see how difficult it was for the interviewer to maintain the interviewee within the limits of his own experience, how much one needed both firmness and gentleness to guide the other person on the fine line of here and now . When the subject stopped fleeing to abstract levels and let himself live, or relive in the present, a singular intuition, he frequently began by stating : "I'm not doing anything" or "I don't know what I'm doing". Nevertheless, although the interview starts out with such a discouraging affirmation, the form of questioning of explicitation often enables the subject to describe the different gestures and states which make up his experience with unexpected precision; little by little during the interview he becomes aware of these gestures and states, sometimes with great astonishment. When the subject "lets go", gives up his representations, beliefs, and judgements about intuition, and begins speaking slowly, from this place inside himself where he is in contact with his lived experience, the words he says seemed to us each time extremely precious, in their smallest details.

- However we did notice a certain variation from one person to another in the difficulty of adopting a position of embodied speech and of becoming aware of the pre-thought experience.

Most often, it is those people who have most worked on their intuition, - generally psychotherapists or those practicing meditation -, who have the highest degree of awareness of their intuitive experience, and who access most easily, during the interview, what remains of pre-thought. Contrary to appearances, this preceding sentence is not tautology : for the general rule says that the more a person is an expert in his field the more his know-how becomes personal, incorporate, distant from easily transmissible knowledge in the form of concepts and rules, and the more the portion of pre-thought is important². If we had carried out research on the processes of memorization, we probably would not have noticed the same correlation between level of expertise and ease of explicitation.

¹ For example, the studies in experimental psychology gathered by Sternberg and Davidson in The Nature of Insight, or in the field of psychoanalysis the works of M. De M'uzan : De l'art à la mort, and of D. Anzieu : Le corps de l'œuvre. Essai psychanalytique sur le travail créateur.

² This is in particular the theory of Hubert Dreyfus in chapter 1 of Mind over Machine, entitled "Five Steps from novice to expert".

This correlation can be explained by the similarities that exist between the intuitive experience and the process of awareness of the pre-thought of an experience.

On the one hand, the interior state which encourages an intuition – the intuitive state – and the interior state which encourages awareness of pre-thought – the state of evocation –, are neighboring states. Both are characterized by an "embodied" attitude, a total presence in the singular situation, a situation which is present in the intuitive state, and past in the state of evocation.

On the other hand, the procedures used to access these two states are similar:

1) In both cases access to the singular situation passes through a modification of the relation to the body:

- the pre-intuitive gestures essentially consist in finding the awareness of one's body, of one's breathing, of one's corporeal sensations;
- in the interview of explicitation, access to the past experience is set off by the evocation of the sensorial modalities of the experience. There too, the subject is brought back into his body. But this return to the body is guided by the interviewer, who accompanies the subject in the evocation of the sensorial details through the use of well-adapted questions.

2) In both cases particular procedures are used to slow down the normal mental activity.

This means:

- in the pre-intuitive phase, techniques of visualization, designed to calm down the interior dialog, the flow of memories and the projections into the future;
- in the interview of explicitation, procedures to slow down the reliving, the "film" of the past experience, consisting, in particular, of helping the other to slow down his rhythm of speech.

Here again, the difference comes essentially from the presence or the absence of mediation.

All of these procedures have these objectives:

- to provoke a return of the attention towards the immediate interior experience,
- to induce an attitude of non-voluntary, relaxed listening of the interior processes.

For neither the awareness of the pre-thought nor the intuition can be provoked, forced.

This close relationship of the interior states and gestures explains the proportionality which we noticed, in the people interviewed, between degree of consciousness (awareness) and degree of intuitive expertise.

- We also noticed that a certain familiarity of the interviewer with the pre-intuitive gestures encouraged the process of awareness during the interview. The techniques of the interview of explicitation - techniques for guiding the other person into a state of evocation, techniques of questioning -, are indispensable, but not sufficient. For the interviewee to access a position of embodied speech, the interviewer must show him the way: it is preferable that the interviewer set aside his own representations of the intuition, his own beliefs and expectations, that his interior attitude be open and welcoming, in order to guide the subject towards the same attitude. The interview is successful when concern about using techniques and reaching the objective - gathering the description of the experience - no longer creates an obstacle to this state of receptivity.

When this is the case, a particular kind of relation seems to be created between the interviewer and the interviewee for the duration of the interview. Everything happens as if the interior space liberated by the interviewer constitutes a sheath for the interviewee, not only psychic but almost visibly physical, which enables him to momentarily give up

his representations, to relax, and to accept entering into relation with his own experience.

This relation resembles greatly the relation of connection which has often been described as one of the components of the intuitive experience. To really compare the two gestures, it should be necessary to carry out an explicitation of the internal processes of the interviewer and of the interviewee during the interview.

But if such is the case, if an intuitive connection exists during the interview, could it not bring about an influence of the interviewer on the interviewee, the former unconsciously communicating to the latter what he wants to hear?

This possibility constitutes an additional argument in favor of the interviewer's familiarity with the pre-intuitive gestures: for the interviewee to be able to become aware of his own experience, it is necessary that the interior space liberated by the interviewer be completely cleared of his representations and beliefs, including the unconscious ones, through deep process work.

2. Difficulties in modeling

- An important difficulty in the modeling phase comes precisely from the influence of the beliefs of the interviewer and from his own experience about the construction of models.

Indeed, each operation of analysis and each operation of abstraction carried out corresponds to an interpretation by the modeler. Whether it deals with dividing the description into phases, isolating descriptive traits in the text, bringing descriptive traits with close meaning into descriptive categories, or grouping these into yet more abstract categories, the modeler refers to his own understanding of the described experience.

To avoid that this interpretation becomes pure, simple projection, the modeler must have undergone an update of his own implicit representations, beliefs and expectations. Is it then desirable that he set aside totally "in parentheses" his own knowledge about intuition? On the contrary, it seems to us, as already said, desirable that the researcher should have a certain familiarity with the intuitive experience and that he uses it, in order to carry out his work of modeling. This familiarity enables him in particular to identify the aspects of the experience that he might not see or not be able to interpret if he had no understanding of it.

The fact that the modeling work includes an irreducible element of interpretation has a consequence on the objectivity of the models we have constructed; they are not "true" in the sense of being the only representations possible; other choices, another dividing up of the descriptions of the subjective experience, could have been made. However, we have set up two kinds of validation:

- 1) Each time that it was possible (that is in about 30% of the cases) we asked the interviewee to check the constructed model, which effectively led us to make some modifications, generally very slight.

- 2) The fact that the generic structures which emerged enabled us on the one hand to guide the next people interviewed to the discovery of the pre-thought aspects of their experience and on the other hand to understand and to structure easily the ulterior descriptions, constitutes for us a very strong confirmation, not of the "truth" of these models but of their fruitfulness. They are keys to exploring and understanding the intuitive experience.

- Another difficulty of this modeling phase comes from the lack of adequate descriptive categories. For example, our language provides few concepts to describe the interior movements of going down into the sensations of the body, of calming the mental activity and of renouncement, which make up the gesture of letting go.

In a general way, our language is very poor for describing the essential aspects of the intuitive experience: its corporeal anchoring, the return of attention to the interior, the absence of intentionality, the fine line of attention brought to the singular situation which is lived out here and now, the loss of a feeling of individual identity. There are even several aspects of the experience for which we have found no concept or adequate descriptive category. For example, in what category can we put the interior images which emerge during an intuition, which seem to be neither remembered nor constructed? How can we call kinaesthetic sensations which are strictly speaking neither interoceptive nor exteroceptive, because the subject no longer perceives the limits between his body and exterior space ?

We find this same difficulty of vocabulary at higher levels of abstraction, when it is a question of choosing a unique term to name interior gestures which are close because of their objectives and the procedures set up: "letting go", "connection"... , we experienced difficulties in finding terms which were sufficiently generic without being too distant from the descriptive traits used by the different people.

Is this difficulty inherent to language? Is language, which aims at categorizing and abstracting, in essence unadapted to describe the singular, embodied, intuitive experience with that element of indifferenciation which it is made up of? Unless the poverty of our vocabulary to describe the intuitive experience is only due to the fact that this experience, like the subjective experience in general, has been little explored in our culture?

Are the vocabulary and structure of other languages better adapted¹ ? Could we enrich ours with more specialized words and descriptive categories, transform its structure ? Could we elaborate a language adapted to describing and comparing the results of the explicitation of the subjective experience at the same time that we develop the tools to clarify explicitly this experience?

This study confirms our hypothesis at the starting point: intuition does correspond to an experience, that is, a set of interior gestures which involve the entire being. Even if intuition keeps an unpredictable, capricious character, it is possible to encourage its appearing, and to accompany its unfolding, by a very meticulous interior preparation. This preparation does not consist in learning, in progressively accumulating knowledge. It consists in emptying out, in giving up our habits of representation, of categorization, and of abstraction. This casting off enables us to find spontaneity, the real immediacy of our relation to the world. For astonishingly, our most immediate, most intimate experience is also the most inaccessible for us. A long detour is necessary before we receive awareness of it.

It is in this immediate, pre-representational and pre-discursive experience of the world that all our cognitive activity seems to be rooted. In this perspective, far from being an

¹ For example, Sanskrit includes about twenty terms for what we translate by "consciousness" or "conscience".

exceptional mode of knowledge, intuition would be a burgeoning thought, the source of thought. The fact that the original genetic level of thought has been so little studied is one of the most unexplainable aspects of western thought, which probably pays heavily for this oversight. May the phenomenological description of the intuitive experience which we have sketched out contribute to reinstating this blind spot in our culture.

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