

Review:

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Abstract: "Embodied Enquiry: Phenomenological Touchstones for Research, Psychotherapy and Spirituality" by Les TODRES is an inspiring book about the practice of phenomenology in qualitative research, psychotherapy and spirituality. It is written from a deep bodily participation of lived experience and existential meaning interweaving subject-object, unique and universal processes of possibility and vulnerability. Texture and structure are embodied in a clear and beautiful way, highlighting three main themes: 1) Research as embodied practice; 2) psychotherapy as embodied process of identity; and 3) spirituality as embodied movement of mimesis and poiesis between freedom and vulnerability. All three themes comprise different perspectives on experiential ways of knowing.

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1. Introduction

The theory and practice of phenomenology is a varied field highlighting experiential and embodied knowledge, interweaving body-mind-world into a dynamic paradigm. If you want a clear and well written introduction into the development of phenomenology a good place to begin is *The Phenomenology Reader* edited by MORAN and MOONEY (2002, pp.1-27) and *Speaking and Semiology* by LANIGAN (1991). TODRES' book is not a book of the history and development of modern phenomenology, but an investigation of practice and theory of lived experience, research and existential meaning. TODRES is interested in moving closer to the felt meaning of lived experience in research and psychotherapy. He deepens the understanding of embodiment as lived context, something that is dynamic and always moving. Highlighting the lived experience is pointing into freedom as a space of "being more than". In this way it is an important narrative opening into a dynamic paradigm of equal importance for qualitative research and the arts of life. [1]

2. Research as Embodied Practice—Toward a Phenomenological Research Methodology in Theory and Practice

The first part of the book deals directly with the problem of the what, the how and the why of doing embodied enquiry in practice. Those who are already familiar with the theory and practice of phenomenology know that phenomenological theory and methodology can be discussed in varied and rather complex ways. Embodied research is grounded in the classical phenomenological concept of the "lived body" and the "lived experience" and this means that knowledge has to do with lived experience. It is about embodiment as a sensitive and multidimensional way of interweaving body, movement and force as embodied rhythms of how it is possible to be present, to live and to experience, to express and to understand the living now from open perspectives in varied and nuanced contexts. It has to do with embodied enquiry as process and practice, expressing lived experience and embodied knowledge through aesthetic communication, touching all dimensions of life. The purpose is to take lived experience seriously and to come to a deeper understanding of practice as embodiment and processes of embodiment—as a dynamic movement marrying mimesis (*Einführung*) and poiesis (creation). In this way TODRES' book continues the phenomenological tradition of embodiment, taking the lived body and lived experience as the starting points of experiential knowledge of more nuanced truth values "embracing the widest contexts present" of life and human existence (TODRES, p.186). Authentic "sense-making" does not just involve logical and intersubjective agreement, but involves aesthetic dimensions of embodied meanings. [2]

Aesthetic dimensions of embodied enquiry open into narratives of intertwining movements of form-force-experience-meaning. It has to do with an embodied understanding that in multidimensional ways, open us toward the lived now and to the lived experience of meaning. It narrates truth as an interweaving of feeling, knowing and communicating by being and sharing. Understanding and communicating about it "cannot be separated from aesthetic participation" (p.9). It is not enough to make a phenomenological question clear and understood, it has to be "lived" by the researcher. TODRES has written about the phenomenological process of research in a way that also makes it possible for the reader to read the text as "the breathing of meaning" (VAN MANEN, 1990, p.36). It also has to do with finding forms that can express as precisely as possible the lived experience as an intertwining of "form, force, space and time" (BACHELARD, 2002, p.82). In this way a phenomenological embodied enquiry invites us into a multidimensional bodily experiencing opening into a poetics of soulful space. [3]

TODRES' phenomenology represents a postmodern approach to the embodied intertwining of the lived body, experience and meaning and is inspired by the philosopher GENDLIN's writings (1973, 1981, 1997). In the chapters on embodied identity and spirituality, TODRES also draws on the texts of the philosopher HEIDEGGER (1962, 1971, 1975, 1977). Phenomenology is a philosophy reflecting on the lived body or embodiment. It is important to understand the concept of the lived body as a dynamically relating and interweaving self and world, experience and expression. This presents us with a

phenomenology that opens into embodied processes of aesthetic dimensions and embodied gestures as experience-expressions coming close to the methodologies of art and performative social science (JONES et al., 2008). Self-worlds are dynamically intertwined as existential modalities that colour and create multidimensional ways to perceive deeper lived understandings of embodied enquiry in concrete practices. [4]

TODRES shows us in his clearly structured and poetically written narrative, what it can mean to undertake lived research and how it is possible to marry structure and texture in a poetic and informative way by moving into his own fields of practice and experience: research, subjectivity and life as a spiritual journey touching both freedom and vulnerability. I think it is very important to embrace this kind of experience-based research as part of an aesthetic-phenomenological practice. TODRES does not discuss this explicitly but expresses it implicitly through his use of language and metaphors. To write in a poetic language and yet with a clear structure provides a beautiful example of how it is possible to do embodied research but it is also a difficult balance since it has to do with the multidimensionality of lived experience to acknowledge "the more" of the multidimensionality of lived experience and meaning. I agree with TODRES that it is important to highlight the principle of balancing texture and structure, but also that it is very important to understand and evaluate this balance through a bodily reading and writing. TODRES describes and enacts this beautifully in his own text and also through the various possibilities of embodied rhythms of attention; for example, "attentive being with, focusing being with, interactive being with and invitational being with" (TODRES, pp.76-77). These are important touchstones of phenomenological practice and embodied research. There are many ways to be present and these ways make a difference in how we can touch knowledge of self and world and also to what kinds of knowledge we have access. [5]

This understanding of ways of being present as crucial to bodily understanding is well known and described in various ways in classical phenomenology. HUSSERL's five-step method of "phenomenology" (LANIGAN 1991, p.134) e.g. was developed into a phenomenology of movement by the American dancer and philosopher, SHEETS-JOHNSTONE who writes in detail on the embodied practice of phenomenology. Her special focus is on the lived meaning of the tactile-kinaesthetic body as the ontological ground of phenomenological research (1999). These phenomenological practices are basic experiential understandings of embodiment as lived presence and with a highly developed sensitivity for embodiment as enactment articulated through our repertoires of movement dynamics. [6]

TODRES describes this beautifully in his chapter on the rhythm of psychotherapeutic attention. This embodied practice of lived experience is described in detail in the more traditional phenomenological methodology of DEPRAZ, VARELA and VERMERSCH in their book *On Becoming Aware* (2002). They describe the phenomenological practice through four dimensions: epoché, intuition, expression and validation. The practice of the epoché is described as embodied inter-being of 1) suspension, 2) redirection and 3) letting go. The full

process of experiencing, describing and interpreting through intuition and imagination can be expressed as the lived expression of mimesis and poesis—as rhythms and attunement of the living encounter also with a deep understanding of embodiment as enactment of the living now. [7]

This can be expressed through texts in all genres and styles, but it can also be expressed through nonverbal forms-languages such as music, painting, dance, performance and art of all kinds. It can also be expressed through the metaphor "beginners mind" attending to whatever we are focusing on as if it was the first time. [8]

The psychologist CLAXTON (1998) describes it as a variation of perspective and focus on four basic ways of being attentive: 1) "attentive resonance" the master detective, 2) "the felt sense" based on GENDLIN's focusing technique, 3) "poetic sensibility" based on psychoanalytic inspired culture analysis as free association and 4) non-judgemental "mindfulness" based on meditation practices. [9]

Some basic questions of doing embodied enquiry according to TODRES are: How do we in practice undertake research that honours the dynamic processes of living encounter as the basic ground of all human understanding both in life and science? What does it mean to obtain experiential knowledge about something? And what kind of knowledge and perspectives can we draw from embodied enquiries? How is a lived experience interwoven with more universal and general understanding? Why is it so important to undertake research that honours embodied and highly unique knowledge? How are lived embodiment and the concrete practical process of doing research intertwined? What difference does it make to produce embodied narratives in different styles and genres to communicate lived experience and understanding? [10]

The purpose, as pointed out by TODRES and others before him, is to deepen the insight into the meaning of lived movement as self-world-chiasm of lived possibilities and vulnerabilities. It is a phenomenology that highlights the aesthetic dimensions of embodied enquiry as a sensitive and embodied creation of relational styles also described with the words "intersubjectivity" and "interembodiment" (ibid., p.31). TODRES highlights three perspectives of qualitative research: 1) embodied knowledge in postmodernity, 2) mimetic and poetic dimensions of embodied language and the lived experience and, last but not least, 3) practical implications both in life and in professional encounters in the practice of therapy and qualitative research. It is these three perspectives that are interwoven into a multidimensional and relational understanding. This is an understanding that is anchored in felt experiencing and aesthetic participation (GENDLIN, 1997, p.1; TODRES, p.9). [11]

3. Psychotherapy: Embodied Process of Identity

In part two, TODRES discusses the process of psychotherapy, highlighting the process as an open lived encounter that has the potential to find new possibilities, new understandings and new hopes and, in this way open healing as embodied processes of communication and transformation. The chapters on psychotherapy explore important themes like the unique experience as valuable for human understanding and research, avoiding fixations and deterministic language and categories of life opening into the importance of the unique case for multidimensionality and difference in being and understanding. It has to do with felt meaning and languages of what is experienced as important and why, but also how processes of lived encounter can be healing and opening into new experiential dimensions and possibilities. This means that research results can be better expressed as themes and not as final results (p.65). The themes can be understood as ways of organizing and sharing meanings and be faithful to the unique. It is a way of expressing the general in the particular, "the dance of the unique and the shared" (p.66). TODRES goes into a case study of his own psychotherapeutic practice. His research question was to ask ten people to describe a situation in therapy in which they saw or understood something which carried with it a greater sense of freedom (p.67). The study resulted in narratives of movements of insight, hope and self-acceptance and an analysis of key themes and their meanings: structured freedom, self-insight and the power of the narrative before and after moments of insight. The narratives open into a reflection of the qualities of the personal narratives and how "sense"-making has to do with processes of healing. One insight from the narrative was that there was always a "more" to the narrative and that "the more" has a life that can be felt and tapped into as openings into new hope and possibilities. "It is this experience 'of being more than' or 'being as possibility' that is the essential power of psychotherapy" (p.73). As a concluding reflection, TODRES stresses three important points in the methodology of therapeutic practice and research: 1) the importance of finding a language where we can intuitively share the phenomena described, a language of experience; 2) return to concrete individual experiences and balance between the unique variations of experience and the shared ground and 3) to remember the freedom of the unique experience by expressing essences and themes, not as final and law-like absolutes, but rather as possibilities. Truth in this perspective is a "melodic conversation" which depends on questions and context (p.74). The essence of "being-in-the world" is a dynamic and lived knowledge and understanding of being as lived possibilities and the identity and the story is always more that can be defined. It can never be objectified or turned into a "thing". [12]

4. Spirituality: Embodying Freedom and Vulnerability

The third part concentrates on the embodied experience and reflection on existential and spiritual perspectives and the development of the metaphor "soulful space" as an embodied intuitive and creative dance with the now. Embodiment or the lived body is a concept that is grounded in movement. It concerns process as the living encounter with now—as embodied presence. We all know from

bodily experience that embodied presence is not static. It is fluid moving and changing—not totally free—but within the possibilities of how it is possible to live the unique moment. Some of us also know—again from lived experience—that embodiment can change radically and that it changes our way of experiencing self and world (ENGEL, 2001, 2007). We also know that if the world changes this is also something that can radically change our embodiment and with that the relational styles and lived experience of how it is possible to be present. I see the phenomenological concept of the lived body or embodiment as a dynamic ground of being that has to do with movement and our repertoires and patterns of rhythms as vital to our ways of being present, experiencing, understanding and communicating. This means that embodiment as ontological ground of experience and meaning in my understanding is based on a resonant tactile-kinaesthetic body (SHEETS-JOHNSTONE, 1999, p. 263). We meet the world dynamically in creative dialogue of lived meanings in relation to rhythms, attunement, practices and possibilities. I think this is also in accordance with the understanding of TODRES, but he does not highlight movement dimensions explicitly. Because of this understanding of movement dynamics as grounds of experience and expression, spirituality can be understood as an embodied articulation of life through movements of mimesis and poiesis, between freedom and vulnerability, interweaving the intersubjective dynamics of subject-object, unique-universal as co-creation of existential meaning. It is an embodied co-creation and enactment of the space of the between and an aesthetic communication and sharing. The reader could conclude that qualitative embodied enquiry is related practical knowledge and know-how and that the meaning has to do with practice and lived experience. [13]

5. "The Angel of the Between"

TODRES finishes the book with an elaboration on four constituents of embodied enquiry and understanding: 1) as practice of lived experience and expression, 2) as a marriage of "head" and "heart"; 3) as an opening into the creative as pre-pattered "more" of the life world and 4) as a play of the unique and the shared. In his conclusion he reframes the purposes of qualitative research methodology, psychotherapy and spirituality as empathic understanding, a bodily grounded identity and embodied spirituality as ways of meeting lived experience as an opening into the widest context present to human experience. [14]

Embodied enquiry is a book that succeeds in expressing an embodied narrative through lived language that goes deep into the multidimensionality of experiential dimensions of lived practice, lived meaning and lived understanding. It is a book that continuously is living the text as embodied experience and understanding, using language as an embodied medium and messenger of living, sensitive understanding. In this concrete and sensitive narrative way, it is a practice that lives the balance between the mimetic as kinetic-kinaesthetic empathy and the poetic as co-creation of experience and meaning in a lived space-time. It is a truly chiasmic and dynamic understanding that comes to expression through a fluid narrative and poetic metaphors throughout the text. With one of the metaphors within the text, you are invited to fly between sky and earth on the wings of "the

angel of the between" (TODRES, p.18). Read the book and make your own inspirational journey into the landscape. It is all about presence and presence has to do with forms of life. Phenomenology has to do with the experience and creation of existential relationship and meaning. Awareness has to do with commitment. And commitment has to be "relived each time to become real" (MERLEAU-PONTY, 2002, pp.528-29). *Embodied Enquiry: Phenomenological Touchstones for Research, Psychotherapy and Spirituality* is a beautiful text, opening into a nuanced, sensitive and embodied narrative of the strengths and possibilities of the theory and practice of phenomenological research. It is a narrative focused on concrete examples of embodiment, processes of embodied research, identity and meaning. Reading the book has been a great joy and a great inspiration and I can highly recommend the book for scholars of all kinds, both seniors and beginners, those already experienced in the practice and theory of phenomenology and newcomers. [15]

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