By the Light of Anecdote

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Anecdote as a Methodological Device

In 1983, when the Dutch author Lize Stilma was invited to publish some of her wonderfully evocative narratives in *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, she was pleased that the journal would translate and publish her stories. However, she did not like the suggestion that her stories would be gathered in a section under the title "Anecdotes." Although she did not say as much, the word *anecdote* seemed perhaps too plain, too everyday, too vernacular, too low-bred, too mundane. Anecdote is not a commonly accepted form of literary expression. Among authors, the notion of anecdote generally receives low status. In the behavioral social sciences, too, the employment of anecdote is avoided or frowned on. For behavioral scientists, the presence of anecdotes in research reports may indicate possible flaws in the evidential basis of scientific reasoning.

But this poor status of anecdote may be undeserving. It is worth noting that in everyday life the anecdote is probably the most common device by which people talk about their experiences. When teachers speak of their daily practice, they tend to do so at the hand of anecdotes. I am tempted to suggest that among teachers, and also among parents, anecdote is the natural way by which particular concerns of educating and living with children are brought to awareness. Better yet, anecdotal narrative allows the person to reflect in a concrete way on experience and thus appropriate that experience. To anecdote is to reflect, to think. Anecdotes form part of the grammar of everyday theorizing. In a reflective grasping, anecdotes recreate experience but in a transcended (focused, condensed, intensified, oriented, and narrative) form. Thus the act of *anecdoting* as concrete reflecting prepares the space for hermeneutic phenomenological reflection and understanding.

I should admit that my interest in the notion of anecdote was rooted in a reaction to a commentary by the philosopher Strasser (1963) on the phenomenological-pedagogical work by the human science proponents of the Utrecht School (see van Manen, 1979a, 1979b) during the '50s and '60s. During the

1950s in the Netherlands, a certain phenomenological method was practiced by members of the so-called Utrecht School. Some of their writings are still celebrated and mentioned in the literature as classic examples of this tradition such as Langeveld's The Secret Place of the Child (1983a, 1983b) and The Thing in the World of the Child (1984); Buytendijk's (1988) The First Smile of the Child; Van den Berg's The Handshake (1959) and The Sickbed (1952); and Bollnow's The Pedagogical Atmosphere (in this issue).[1] These texts were valued for their subtle insights, for their compelling vigor in directing our attentiveness to the lived world, for their transformative quality, and for their situated pedagogical normativity.

But indeed, not every Dutch contemporary of the exponents of the Utrecht School was admiring of their work. For some, such as Strasser, the products of the Utrecht School suffered from a lack of philosophical rigor or sophistication, thus yielding a soft, anecdotal form of phenomenology. He saw the use of anecdote as the main factor that contributed to an impressionistic and naive form of human science discourse. This is how, in a text entitled the *Science of Education and Educational Wisdom*, Strasser (1963) commented on the Utrecht School scholar:[2]

> the naive phenomenologist surrenders willingly to impressions which push themselves onto him; and he tries to transform these impressions into words. To the extent that he succeeds he is an *impressionist* (in the literary sense of this term). If he is artful at writing then he may be able—at the hand of suggestive examples, well-chosen anecdotes, compellingly arranged factual material—to give the impression to have proven something. In reality he does not prove anything. At the hand of other examples, other anecdotes, differently arranged factual material a second gifted author would be able to "show" the opposite. In this manner both impressionists may have provided literary contributions. However, from the point of view of science and philosophy their products are worthless. He who searches for truth sees in them only the expression of an unbridled subjectivism. (p. 68)

Strasser (1963) did not name any particular work or scholar but in the Netherlands one *knew* who were meant to fit the shoe. In some respect, however, Strasser's critique was already being overtaken by the developments in hermeneutic phenomenology at large. In *Phenomenology and the Human Sciences*, Strasser leveled a similar critique at Sartre's description of the gaze. Sartre (1956) describes, at the hand of an anecdote, how the act of looking at someone through a keyhole (motivated by jealousy, curiosity, or vice) is experienced in "a pure mode of losing

myself in the world, of causing myself to be drunk in by things as ink is by a blotter" (pp. 252-302). However, when suddenly I hear footsteps and realize that somebody is looking at me, an essential change occurs in my mode of awareness. Where moments before my mode of being was governed by unreflective consciousness, now "I see myself because somebody sees me. I experience myself as an object for the other." Sartre became so captivated by the example of his own anecdote, according to Strasser (1974, p. 298), that he failed to see that the gaze of the other not only has the power of robbing me of my subjectivity, it may actually enhance it as in the case of the athlete who is brought to wondrous feats as a result of the admiring eyes of the fans.

Although it is not my intention to comment extensively on Strasser's critique, I like to bring it into the view of my discussion because the use of anecdote in human science research might invite a similar reaction. My interest in anecdote resides here especially in its power to enhance the phenomenological and hermeneutic quality of human science text. At the basis of this interest lies the methodological notion of seeing the process of human science research to be intrinsically a textual or writing activity (van Manen, 1984, 1986, 1989).

There are without doubt many issues associated with a human science methodology which attempts to move the point of gravity of the research process toward the activity of writing itself. Fundamental to the notion of research as writing is the semiotic idea that the research text makes a claim to a certain autonomy and further that the text aims at a certain effect in its dialogic or conversational relation to the reader. Of course, the philosophic phenomenological text aims at a certain effect as well. From Strasser's point of view the philosophical text probably aims at the cognitive equivalent of *theoretical* or *intellectual truth* that he speaks about (1974, pp. 296-302). But what Strasser does not see or acknowledge is that the texts of scholars such as Langeveld and Bollnow have an *applied* pedagogic, rather than a philosophic, intent. Moreover, Bollnow (1974) points out that even in the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), knowledge is not a matter of theoretical or intellectual truth, or the formal intellect alone. Knowledge as understanding is transformative or *geistig*—a matter of the depth of the soul, spirit, embodied knowing and being.

Yet there is validity to Strasser's critique. A human science which is carried by genius rather than by method runs the risk, if guided by less than genius, of reducing its products into uninspired and undisciplined mush. Langeveld and some of his

brilliant colleagues produced finely crafted texts. But the methodological approach inherent in this work was difficult to imitate or emulate.

By inadvertently *hiding* their method, or perhaps more accurately, by largely remaining disinterested to reflect methodologically on the reflective nature of their own pedagogic discourses, Langeveld and his co-workers kept closed the possibility for others to exercise those same practices. There was in this sense perhaps an antipedagogic drift to the life of research of the proponents of the Utrecht School. Only a limited number of exceptional scholars were able to exercise their scholarly membership of the Utrecht School tradition. Possibly as a result of this, the tradition was sometimes accused of academic elitism. Only those who possessed a certain genius (insight) for perceiving the subtleties of the pedagogic lifeworld, and who also were able to express and transform these insights into outstanding phenomenological texts, were thereby acknowledged as privileged "theorists."

The poignancy of this critique is perhaps shown in the fact that with the retirements of Langeveld, Beets, Vermeer, and (in Germany) Bollnow, the Utrecht School seemed to have expired by the late 1960s. The tradition simply lacked longevity. However, in the early 1970s, Beekman, a student of Langeveld, experimented with a practical, down-to-earth approach to phenomenological inquiry into the lifeworlds of children. Beekman's subsequent important contribution to a revival of the Utrecht School—the invention of a *workshop approach* to phenomenological reflection (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 1984; Beekman & Mulderij, 1977)—was in a way a practical methodological response to the above described predicament. However, Beekman's attempt at democratizing the phenomenological pedagogical tradition suffered perhaps from two frailties: (a) the need for a textual or writing practice as an inherent part of the inquiry process was not part of his program; and (b) the normative pedagogical dimension of the work tended to erode as a result of the strong import of ethnographic elements into the inquiry process (see, for example, the otherwise interesting "Hide and Seek & Peekaboo" by Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 1983). In his dissertation *Dienstbaar Inzicht*, Beekman (1975) argued that pedagogy is a discipline which ministers to pedagogic practice. But the place and emphasis of the normative is somewhat differently practiced in the subsequent work of Beekman and his students Bleeker and Mulderij, when the normative is added to the investigative work as some sort of appended advice to policy makers. Beekman

aimed to bring the phenomenological methodology of the Utrecht School within reach of the *average* pedagogy student. Indeed, his approach was and remains remarkably successful. Yet the textual and the hermeneutic pedagogical requirements of this work have not been maximized.

It is only appropriate to make such comments about recent developments if one keeps in mind the original accomplishments of the Utrecht School as exemplified in the work of Langeveld, Beets, Bollnow, Van den Berg, and others. For example, Langeveld's (1983a, 1983b) The Secret Place of the Child exhibits a textual structure which is still modern and powerful in its effect of prompting the reader to a reflective pedagogic dialogue. What strikes us in the piece is its sustained sense of wonder about the meaning and pedagogic significance of a certain space experience of young children that most adults readily seem to recognize and recollect in Langeveld's interpretive description.

Before returning to the notion of anecdote as a methodological device, some remarks need to be made about phenomenologic research as writing (see especially van Manen, 1989).

Writing as "Method"

Barthes (1986) has argued provocatively that writing and textuality are at the heart of the method of human science inquiry:

> Some people speak of method greedily, demandingly; what they want in work is method; to them it never seems rigorous enough, formal enough. Method becomes a Law ... the invariable fact is that a work which constantly proclaims its will-to-method is ultimately sterile: everything has been put into the method, nothing remains for the writing; the researcher insists that his text will be methodological, but this text never comes: no surer way to kill a piece of research and send it to join the great scrap heap of abandoned projects than Method. (p. 318)

Although Barthes' pronouncement of method is as provocative as it is eloquent, I am impressed less by his point that research should not be ruled by method than by his derogation that such work tends to lack life and fecundity. With this second point, Barthes raises the question of the relation between research and writing. A basic assumption would be that the aim of human science research is to create a strong text in a phenomenological sense. Barthes argues that we are so preoccupied with issues of method that what may really count, the textual practice of writing, is considered of low priority or of little consequence. Almost in a taken-for-granted manner, the processes of research and writing remain methodologically separated be-

cause to bring research and writing into a close contact hints at incestuous relation, the product of which is the poor, impressionistic, sloppy work that Strasser (1963) criticizes.

There may be several reasons for this reluctance of fusing the images of researcher and writer. Researchers and writers are seen to have different epistemological loyalties: science in contrast with art. On the one hand, the image of the researcher is a methods person, a law-and-order person, even though most researchers admit that the essence of research, like what happens behind bedroom doors, is ultimately a passionate and creative affair. The author, on the other hand, is seen to be a born anarchist, a lover of text, someone who aims to seduce through language, even though the activity of real writing (what Barthes, 1986, calls "authoring") requires intense discipline. Yet this more literary discipline is distrusted by *methodologists* because it only wishes to follow the fickle vision of the author's genius. In the domain of the human sciences things seem more regulated and more systematic than in the literary domain. The human science researcher is a philosopher, or someone who has rubbed shoulders with the philosopher. And the philosopher wants to submit to sound logic and rational argument. Research texts that overflow the tight methodological container of strict human science discourse are easily dismissed as excessive, suggestive, subjective, and thus of dubious validity. To the methods-bound researcher, such texts look like literature (even though they are not to be confused with literature), and one does not quite know what to do with them.

The Practice of Research as a Form of Writing

Writing fixes thought on paper. It externalizes what in some sense is internal (or intersubjective); it distances us from our immediate lived involvements with the things of our world. As we stare at the paper, and stare at what we have written, our objectified thinking now stares back at us. Thus writing creates the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterizes the theoretic attitude in the social sciences. The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible. Researchers recognize this linguistic nature of research in the imperative reminder: *Write*! Human science research requires a commitment to write. But writing for a human science researcher is not just a supplementary activity. The imperative *Write*, as Barthes (1986) put it, "is intended to recall 'research' to its epistemological condition: whatever it seeks, it must not forget its nature as language—

and it is this which ultimately makes an encounter with writing inevitable" (p. 316).

For Barthes (1986), research does not merely involve writing: Research is the work of writing—writing is its very essence (p. 316). In the human sciences no research that has failed to write itself has understood its fundamental mandate. For scholars such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, the activities of researching and reflecting on the one hand, and reading and writing on the other hand, are indeed indistinguishable. When one visits the Husserl Archives at the University of Louvain this close connection between research and writing becomes evident in the symbolic value of Husserl's desk, which occupies a prominent place in the archival room. It is at this desk where phenomenology received its fundamental impetus.

More so than Husserl, Sartre was a phenomenologist who stood and acted in the middle of the hustle and bustle of social and political life. But as writing became difficult for the aging Sartre, thinking became difficult as well. "I still think," the 70-year-old Sartre (1977) said in an interview, "but because writing has become impossible for me the real activity of thought has in some way been repressed" (p. 5). Sartre was speaking about the difficulty that the loss of sight created for him as reader and author. It is obvious that for Sartre, writing was not just a mere moment in the intellectual life of the thinker. Writing was somehow at the center of this life. "The only point to my life was writing," he said. "I would write out what I had been thinking about beforehand, but the essential moment was that of writing itself" (p. 5). With this line Sartre has given us his most succinct definition of his methodology. Writing is the method. And to ask what method is in human science is to ask for the nature of writing. What is writing? How is writing research (thinking, reflecting)? Certainly, writing is a producing activity. The writer produces text, and he or she produces more than text. The writer produces himself or herself. As Sartre might say, the writer is the product of his or her own product. Writing is a kind of self-making or forming. To write is to measure the depth of things, as well to come to a sense of one's own depth.

To Write is to Measure Our Thoughtfulness

Writing expresses our antinomous relation to the world:

1. Writing separates us from what we know, yet it unites us more closely with what we know. Writing teaches us what we know, and in what way we know what we know. As we commit ourselves to paper we see ourselves mirrored in this text. Now

the text confronts us. We try to read it as someone else might; that is actually impossible because we cannot help but load the words with the intentions of our project. Yet the text says less than we want; it does not seem to say what we want. We sigh: "Can't we do any better than this? This is no good! We are not coming to terms with it. Why do we keep going when we are not getting anywhere? We need to scrap this. Let's try it again that way." Writing gives appearance and body to thought. As it does, we disembody what in another sense we already embody. However, not until we had written this down did we quite know what we knew. Writing separates the knower from the known (see Ong, 1982, for some distinctions in this section), but it also allows us to reclaim this knowledge and make it our own in a new and more intimate manner. Writing constantly seeks to make external what is somehow internal. We come to know what we know in this dialectic process of constructing a text (a body of knowledge), thus learning what we are capable of saying. It is the dialectic of inside and outside, of embodiment and disembodiment, of separation and reconciliation.

2. Writing distances us from the lifeworld, yet it also draws us more closely to the lifeworld. Writing distances us from lived experience but by doing so it allows us to discover the existential structures of experience. Writing creates a distance between ourselves and the world whereby the subjectivities of daily experience become the object of our reflective awareness. The writer's immediate domain is paper and pen or keyboard on the one hand, and language or words on the other hand. Both preoccupations have an alienating effect. The author who writes about the experience of parenting must, temporarily at least, "slacken the threads" between himself or herself and the world. Every parent/author knows the tensions between the demands made by the two roles, even if the object of interest in both cases is the child. Whereas on the one hand writing gets me away from immediate involvement with my child, on the other hand it allows me to create a space for pedagogic reflecting on my parenting relation with this child so that I may return to this child with a deepened understanding of the significance of certain realities of the lifeworld.

3. Writing decontextualizes thought from practice and yet it returns thought to praxis. Writing tends to orient us away from contextual particulars toward a more universal sphere. As we try to capture the meaning of some lived experience in written text, the text in turn assumes a life of its own. Thus writing places us at a distance from the practical immediacy of lived life by being forgetful of its context. Or rather, writing focuses our

reflective awareness by disregarding the incidentals and contingencies that constitute the social, physical, and biographic context of a particular situation. But as we are able to gain in this manner a deeper sense of the meanings embedded in some isolated aspect of practice, we are also being prepared to become more discerning of the meaning of new life experiences. Thus reflectively writing about the practice of living makes it possible for the person to live a more reflective praxis.

4. Writing abstracts our experience of the world, yet it also concretizes our understanding of the world. Because language is itself abstractive, writing tends to abstract from the experience we may be trying to describe. This abstractive tendency is a problem for human science research because its aim is precisely to return "to the things themselves," which means to return to the world as lived: "that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. ix). What is the great paradox of language? It always abstracts from the concreteness of the world which it was responsible for creating in the first place. Writing intellectualizes. We recognize this intellectualizing in the image of Kien, Canetti's bookish person, who appears thoroughly alienated from real existence (Canetti, 1978). And yet writing, true writing, can concretize the experience of the world more pithily, it seems, more to the shaking core (however strange it may seem) than the world as experienced. The narrative power of story is that sometimes it can be more compelling, more moving, more physically and emotionally stirring than lived life itself. Textual emotion, textual understanding can bring an otherwise sober-minded person (the reader but also the author) to tears or to exhilaration and to a more deeply understood worldly engagement.

5. Writing objectifies thought into print and yet it subjectifies our understanding of something that truly engages us. On the one hand, the inscribing, the writing of the text *is* the research. One writes to make public, to make conversationally available what the author lives with: an idea, a notion being questioned. On the other hand, the text once completed and in print circulation is now a testimonial, a relic of embodied reflections. More so than longhand writing, printed text is an object. We sense this in the greater ease with which we can take distance from our text once it has been converted into typographic print. There is a subjectifying and an objectifying moment in writing and in the way that the word allows us to understand the world. Research *is* writing in that it places consciousness in the posi-

tion of the possibility of confronting itself, in a self-reflective relation. To write is to exercise embodied self-consciousness. Writing plays the inner against the outer, the subjective self against the objective self, the ideal against the real.

Writing Exercises the Ability to See

Writing involves a textual reflection in the sense of separating and confronting ourselves with what we know, distancing ourselves from the lifeworld, decontextualizing our thoughtful preoccupations from immediate action, abstracting and objectifying our lived understandings from our concrete involvements (see Ong, 1982), and all this for the sake of now reuniting us with what we know, drawing us more closely to living relations and situations of the lifeworld, turning thought to a more tactful praxis, and concretizing and subjectifying our deepened understanding in practical action. Writing has been called a form of practical action. Writing is action in the sense of a corporeal practice. The writer practices his or her body in order to make, to *author* something. In other words, to write is to produce a body of knowledge (the text) as well as a knowing body (action sensitive sight). In one sense, the text is the product of the writer's practical action. But writing exercises more than our mere redactive skills. Writing exercises and makes empirically demonstrable our ability to *see*. Writing shows that we can now see something and at the same time it shows the limits or boundaries of our sightedness. In writing, the author puts in symbolic form what he or she is capable of seeing. And so practice, in the lifeworld with children, can never be the same again. My writing as a practice *prepared* me for an insightful praxis in the lifeworld. (I can now see things I could not see before.) Although I may try to close my eyes, to ignore what I have seen, in some way my existence is now mediated by my knowledge. And because we *are* what we can *see* (know, feel, understand), seeing is already a form of praxis—seeing the significance in a situation places us in the event, makes us part of the event. Writing, true writing, is authoring, the exercise of authority: the power that authors and gives shape to our personal being. Writing exercises us in the sense that it empowers us with embodied knowledge which now can be brought to play or be realized into action in the performance of the drama of everyday life.

The methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology is more a carefully cultivated thoughtfulness than a technique. Phenomenology has been called a method without techniques. The *procedures* of this methodology have been recognized as a project of various kinds of questioning oriented to allow an interrogation

of the phenomenon as identified at first and then cast in the reformulation of a question (van Manen, 1989). The methodology of phenomenology requires a dialectical going back and forth among these various levels of questioning. To be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld, writing may turn into a complex process of rewriting (rethinking, reflecting, recognizing).

Sartre (1977) describes how writing and rewriting aim at creating depth: constructing successive or multiple layers of meaning, thus laying bare certain truths while retaining an essential sense of ambiguity. This depthful writing cannot be accomplished in one straightforward session. Rather, the process of writing and rewriting (including revising or editing) is more reminiscent of the artistic activity of creating an art object that has to be approached again and again, now here and then there, going back and forth between the parts and the whole in order to arrive at a finely crafted piece that often reflects the personal *signature* of the author. Sartre (1977) calls this crafted aspect of a text "style" (pp. 5-9). Naturally, he alludes to something more complex than mere artistic idiosyncracy or stylistic convention.

One is reminded of Schleiermacher's (1977) use of the notion of *style* to refer both to the essential genius of a text and to the thoughtfulness of the author as the producer of the text (pp. 166-173). To write, to work at style, is to exercise an interpretive tact, which in the sense of style produces the thinking/writing body of text. For Schleiermacher, *style* was an expression of *Geist* (mind, culture, spirit), a *geistig* phenomenon. More modern phenomenological formulations see style as the outward appearance of the embodied being of the person. In writing, the author stylizes in textual form the truth that is given significance in his or her contact with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 59). "Style is what makes all signification possible," says Merleau-Ponty (p. 58). But we should not confuse style with mere technique or method; rather, style shows and reflects what the author is capable of seeing and showing in the way that he or she is oriented to the world and to language. It is this blessed moment where style gathers language to "suddenly swell with a meaning which overflows into the other person when the act of speaking [or writing] binds them up into a single whole" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 235).

What role does anecdote play in these semiotic considerations? For good or for ill, anecdote and story have become common methodological devices in human science research in general. Anecdotes, in the sense that they occur in the phenomenological writings of, for example, Sartre, Marcel, Merleau-Ponty are not

to be understood as *mere* illustrations to "beautify" or "make more easily digestible" a difficult or boring text. Anecdote can be understood as a methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us. The use of anecdote in human science discourse is analogous to the use of metaphor. We use metaphor to explain or provide insight into the nature of one phenomenon at the hand of an other phenomenon. Anecdote too is used as a methodological device to describe something indirectly when this phenomenon resists direct description. However, anecdote has a stronger phenomenological quality than metaphor. While metaphor may tend to dwell at the level of abstraction, anecdote turns the attention more naturally to the level of the concrete.

Story means narrative, something depicted in narrative form. All qualitative human science has a narrative quality (rather than an abstracting classificatory or quantitative character). And the story form has become a popular method for presenting aspects of qualitative or human science research. However, for the purpose of this discussion I would like to make a distinction between *story* and *anecdote*. Particularly for pedagogic discourse, anecdote holds special significance. This is not only because through anecdotes we talk of the experiences of our children. Formulating anecdotes may have significance that goes beyond everyday life storying. Anecdotes are a special kind of story; they resemble mini-stories possessing a rhetorical quality that moves them more closely into the direction of *sayings* and *proverbs* on the one hand, and *poetic fragments* on the other hand.

The Nature of Anecdote

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary definition of anecdote is "a usually short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident." The Oxford English Dictionary defines anecdote as "secret, private, or hitherto unpublished narratives or details of history." It speaks of the narrative of an incident or event as "being in itself interesting or striking." The term derives from the Greek meaning "things unpublished," "something not given out." Indeed, Cicero (and later Renaissance scholars as well) described some of his unpublished manuscripts as anecdotes, "things not given out." Anecdotes are social products. In everyday life the anecdote usually begins its course as part of an oral tradition. Often, it is originally a fragment of the biography of some famous or well-known person. Thus Samuel Johnson described anecdote as "a biographical incident; a minute passage of private life." Biographers and historians value anecdotes for their power to reveal the true character of persons or times

which are hard to capture in any other manner (Fadiman, 1985, p. xxi).

But often anecdote was information meant for insiders, material that for discretionary reasons did not make the written record. Sometimes the anecdote was used to characterize a way of thinking or a style or figure which was really too difficult to approach in a more direct manner. This is one epistemologically interesting feature of anecdote: If we cannot quite grasp the point or essence of a subject and we keep looking at it from the outside, as it were, then we may be satisfied with an anecdotal story or fragment (Verhoeven, 1987).

There is an amusing anecdote about Edmund Husserl whose voluminous writings on phenomenology contain painstaking refutations of every conceivable objection to his philosophical system. As a boy, Husserl wanted to sharpen his knife. And he persisted in making the knife sharper and sharper until finally he had nothing left (de Boer, 1980, p. 10). The anecdote aptly demonstrates the perfectionist qualities in Husserl's character. Husserl was accustomed to reflect with his pen and paper. His phenomenological research was truly a textual labor. He would revise, rewrite, and edit endlessly his philosophical writings. After his death, an astonishing collection of about 40,000 pages written in stenographic script was discovered.

An interesting case of the significance of anecdotes in human science thinking concerns the doctrine or philosophy of Diogenes Laertius, also called The Cynic or The Dogman, or "a Socrates gone mad" (Herakleitos & Diogenes, 1979, p. 35). There are no authentic texts left from this thinker, who at any rate considered living more important than writing. Only anecdotes are available. Legend has it that the youthful Alexander the Great one day went to visit the philosopher Diogenes about whom he had heard such strange stories. He came upon the philosopher while the latter was relaxing in the beautiful sunshine.

Alexander: I am Alexander the Great.
Diogenes: I am Diogenes, the dog.
Alexander: The dog?
Diogenes: I nuzzle the kind, bark at the greedy, and bite louts.
Alexander: What can I do for you?
Diogenes: Stand out of my light. (p. 30)

While Alexander wanted to show his benevolence and generosity to the thinker, the latter showed that he knew only too well the nature of worldly temptations. But rather than theorizing and getting entrapped in the addictive sphere of theoretical

knowledge, Diogenes *showed* his argument in verbal-physical gesture: "get out of my sun." By means of this pantomimic demonstration, Diogenes shows more effectively than theoretical discourse might how the philosopher frees himself or herself from the politician. He was the first person who was free enough to be able to put the mighty Alexander in his place. Diogenes' answer not only ignored the desire of power, but also the overwhelming power of desire (Sloterdijk, 1983, p. 265). This humble and wretched philosopher showed himself more powerful and autonomous than the feared ruler Alexander, who went all the way to the borders of India to satisfy his need for power. Did Alexander recognize the sense of superiority of the moral life of "the cynic"? History has it that Alexander once said: "If I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes" (Herakleitos & Diogenes, 1979, p. 36). Diogenes and Alexander the Great died on the same day, a fact to which people have attached superstitious significance.

Diogenes set out to teach his fellow citizens not by giving speeches or by writing books but by means of pantomimic exercise and by living example—a kind of street theatre, one might say. Sloterdijk (1983) has argued that the aureole of anecdotes that surrounds the figure of Diogenes is more clarifying of his teachings than any writings could have been. And yet the reason that Diogenes' philosophy has not been more influential may also find its cause in the fact that it is only anecdotes that have been preserved. Anecdotes have enjoyed low status in scholarly writings, because, in contrast with historical accounts or reports, they rest on dubious factual evidence. The shady reputation of anecdote may derive from the 6th-century Byzantine historian Procopius who called his posthumously published scandalous account of the Emperor Justinian *Anecdota* or *Historia Arcana* (Secret History).

In everyday life, too, anecdotes may get negative reactions. For example, we may hear someone say that a certain account should be distrusted because "it rests merely on anecdotal evidence." Evidence that is *only anecdotal* is not permitted to furnish a proper argument. Of course, it is entirely fallacious to generalize from a case on the basis of mere anecdotal evidence. But empirical generalization is not the aim of hermeneutic phenomenological research. The point that the critics of anecdotes miss is that the anecdote is to be valued for other than factual-empirical or factual-historical reasons.

An historical account describes a thing that has happened in the past, but an anecdote is rather like a poetic narrative which describes a universal truth. Verhoeven (1987) argues that what

Aristotle (McKeon, 1941) says about the poetic epic of his time applies to the anecdotal narrative of our time:

> The poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e., what is possible as being probable or necessary ... poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. (*Poetics*, 1451)

Anecdotes may have a variety of functions (see Verhoeven, 1987, for some distinctions made here; also Fadiman, 1985). Those that are of significance to human science discourse and to our discussion of research as writing may include the following characteristics:

1. Anecdotes form a concrete counterweight to abstract theoretical thought. The object of phenomenological description is not to develop theoretical abstractions that remain severed from the concrete reality of lived experience. Rather, phenomenology tries to penetrate the layers of meaning of the concrete by tilling and turning the soil of daily existence. Anecdote is one of the implements for laying bare the covered-over meanings.

2. Anecdotes express a certain disdain for the alienated and alienating discourse of scholars who have difficulty showing how life and theoretical propositions are connected. Thus anecdotes possess a certain pragmatic thrust. They force us to search out the relation between living and thinking, between situation and reflection. In this connection, Verhoeven (1987) and Fadiman (1985, p. xxi) too note how anecdote has acted as a leveling device, how it humanizes, democratizes, and acts as a counterweight to encomium.

3. Anecdotes may provide an account of certain teachings or doctrines which were never written down. Socrates and Diogenes are examples of great thinkers about whom anecdotal life stories form both their biographies and the essence of their teachings. This historical phenomenon also shows the great potential and generally unacknowledged power of anecdote in human science discourse. Plato's *Dialogues* is in a sense a collection of anecdotes about Socrates the philosopher. It differs markedly from the large body of philosophical writings that have followed it down the ages. At the methodological level, Plato's writings are roundabout or indirect reflections about fundamental human experiences such as friendship (*Lysis*), love (*Phaedrus*, *Symposium*), teaching virtue (*Meno*), and so forth.

4. Anecdotes may be encountered as concrete demonstrations of wisdom, sensitive insight, and proverbial truth. Classical figures considered their anecdotes as narrative condensations of generally acknowledged truths (Fadiman, 1985, p. xxi). For example, the anecdote of the cave in Plato's *Republic* is offered by Plato as allegory or possible story. Plato's accounts are offered not as factual truths in the empirical or historical sense but, in Plato's words, as "likely stories." By their anecdotal quality we come to see what is possible and what is not possible in the world in which we live (Cairns, 1971, p. xv).

5. Anecdotes of a certain event or incident may acquire the significance of exemplary character. Because anecdote is concrete and taken from life (in a fictional or real sense) it may be offered as an example or as a recommendation for acting or seeing things in a certain way. In everyday life an anecdote may be told as a tactful response (a *message*) to let the recipient of the anecdote sense or perceive a certain truth that is otherwise difficult to put into clear language.

Anecdotal narrative as story form is an effective way of dealing with certain kinds of knowledge. "Narrative, to narrate," derives from the Latin *gnoscere, noscere* "to know." To narrate is to tell something in narrative or story form. The paradoxical thing about anecdotal narrative is that it tells something particular while really addressing the general or the universal. Conversely, at the hand of anecdote, fundamental insights or truths are tested for their value in the contingent world of everyday experience. One may therefore say that the anecdote shares a fundamental epistemological or methodological feature with phenomenological human science which also operates in the tension between particularity and universality.

D'Israeli termed anecdotes "minute notices of human nature and of human learning" (Fadiman, 1985). Anecdotes can teach us. The use of story or of anecdotal material in phenomenological writing is not merely a literary embellishment. The stories themselves are examples or topics of practical theorizing. Anecdotal narratives (stories) are important for pedagogy in that they function as experiential case material on which pedagogic reflection is possible. Methodologically speaking, story is important because it allows the human science text to acquire a narrative quality that is ordinarily characteristic of story. A hybrid textual form is created, combining the power of philosophic or systematic discourse with the power of literary or poetic language. Anecdote particularizes the abstracting tendency of theoretical discourse: It makes it possible to involve us prereflectively in the lived quality of concrete experience while

paradoxically inviting us into a reflective stance vis-à-vis the meanings embedded in the experience. The important feature of anecdotal as well as hermeneutic phenomenological discourse is that it simultaneously pulls us in, then prompts us to reflect. In short, the lacing of anecdotal narrative into more formal textual discourse, if done well, will create a tension between the prereflective and reflective pulls of language (see van Manen, 1989, for more detailed probing of the methodological significance of anecdote).

The Pedagogic Significance of Anecdote

When Langeveld (1984) wants to explain the significance of a *thing* in a child's life, he tells a story about a little girl who offers her baby brother a tiny feather.

> The four-year old comes to her mother, who is busy with the newborn baby, and has a "treasure" in her hand. It is a tiny feather of a sparrow. This is for little brother, because he is still so small. Now that is a true gift! says Langeveld. (p. 218)

And he uses the anecdote to make a distinction between a present and a gift. A present is something we give to someone as a wedding present or as fulfillment of an obligation or debt. The French have a saying that small presents maintain friendship. Langeveld shows that it is directly reversed with gifts:

> A present can make friendship, but love and friendship make gifts, even the smallest ones, possible.... So the little girl's feather is small—so be it: Isn't the little brother small too? But how delicate and soft the feather is! It almost makes the beholder delicate and soft too! (p. 218)

And so Langeveld continues: Whoever gives a present to someone, that is, something from the store, it is often merely just a suggestion from the salesperson. But whoever gives a gift (and not just a mere present) gives himself or herself. He or she is the thing.

Here is another example. In his introduction to *Person and World*, Van den Berg tells an anecdote of a native of the Malayan jungles (Van den Berg & Linschoten, 1953). In order to learn what impression a large and modern city would make on an inhabitant of the jungle, one had placed this man unexpectedly and without much ado in the middle of the large city of Singapore. One walked with him through the busy streets in order to provide the native with ample opportunity to observe whatever a metropolis could offer. When, at the end of the trip, one asked him what had struck him most, he did not, as one might have expected, talk about the paved streets, the brick

houses, concrete buildings, cars, streetcars, and trains. Instead, he mentioned how to his amazement one person could carry so many bananas. What he appeared to have seen was a street vendor who transported his bunches of bananas on a push cart. "For the rest the native hardly had seen anything," says Van den Berg (Van den Berg & Linschoten, 1953, p. 5). This person who lives in the jungle village is engaged in a dialogue with the things of his world which allows him to see things in a manner which we, urban dwellers of postindustrialized societies, could not possibly share. The native is engaged in a different conversation with things. Every new object he sees appears in front of his eyes in a modality that permits a certain role in that conversation. Any object that cannot adopt such modality, therefore, cannot enter the conversational relation. It does not speak to him and therefore cannot be seen, says Van den Berg. Thus Van den Berg uses, among other things, the anecdote as a device for making comprehensible what may be called the phenomenon of *conversational relation* which every human being maintains with his or her world. What Van den Berg wants to show by way of anecdote and phenomenological explication is that the human being not only stands in a certain conversational relation to the world—the human being really *is* this relation.

I have argued that hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity. In the human sciences, research and writing are aspects of one process. Hermeneutics and phenomenology are human science approaches which are rooted in philosophy; they are philosophies in the sense of reflective disciplines. Therefore, it is important for the human science researcher in education to know something of the philosophic traditions. But Langeveld (1972) has reminded us that this does not mean that one must become a professional philosopher in an academic sense, or in the sense of Strasser (as discussed above). It means that one should know enough to be able to articulate the epistemological or theoretical implications of doing phenomenology and hermeneutics—without losing sight of the fact that one is interested in the pedagogic praxis of this research; more appropriately, it means that human science research practiced by an educator *is* a pedagogic human science.

The Pedagogic Orientation

For Langeveld the issue of the place and meaning of phenomenological inquiry is primarily a function of how one stands in the world. During his own student years Langeveld had followed lectures from Husserl, and he explicitly accepted phenomenological method while rejecting philosophical aims:

We use the term "phenomenology" after Husserl. With Husserl the term "phenomenology" occurs in two meaning contexts: (1) to signify a method, (2) to signify a philosophy. We use the term exclusively to refer to the method and remain completely impartial to Husserl's development of a phenomenological philosophy. (Langeveld, 1972, p. 105)

As human science theorist or researcher, Langeveld sees himself first and foremost pedagogically oriented. And, argues Langeveld (1979), pedagogy "is a science of experience, it is a human science, indeed it is a normative human science which is followed or studied with practical intent." He clarifies:

[Pedagogy] "is a science of experience because it finds its object (the pedagogical situation) in the world of lived experience. It is a human science because the pedagogical situation rests on human intent.... It is normative because it distinguishes between what is good and what is not good for a child.... It is practical because all this is brought to bear in the practical process of education and childrearing. (p. 178)

It is important to realize the full import of Langeveld's position. In his often reprinted and widely read Dutch and German text *Beknopte Theoretische Pedagogiek* (1979, Concise Theoretical Pedagogy), he argues that the pedagogical situation in everyday life is the obvious location of pedagogical experiences, and that this pedagogical situation is from the very first normative and uniquely anthropologically structured,[3] finding its genesis in the situated relation of parent and child or educator and student. The educator, including the pedagogical theorists or researcher, cannot get around the requirement of being charged with pedagogical responsibility to the child—and this unconditional pedagogical responsibility is there from the beginning (van Manen 1982a). And so, because of the nature of its object of study—the pedagogical situation—phenomenological pedagogical research cannot be interested in its questions merely out of purely academic or intellectual curiosity. Pedagogy does not just want to know how things are; pedagogical research always has an inherent practical intent because sooner or later this knowledge figures in how one must act (Langeveld, 1979, p. 1).

As suggested above, Langeveld, like most of his contemporaries in Germany and the Netherlands, had little interest in questions of research methodology.[4] He would probably have scoffed at the idea of developing a set of methodological rules or strategies for engaging in phenomenologcal pedagogical research (see also Levering & Klinkers, 1985). To my knowledge Langeveld never discussed how or why, for example, he makes such fre-

quent use of anecdote in his phenomenological pedagogical texts. But my hunch is that he did so not as a result of a particular methodological conviction, but rather because the pedagogic lifeworld seems to favor an anecdotal approach. Why? Because anecdotes, like pedagogic situations, are always concrete and particular. And for this reason much of practical *theorizing* (van Manen, 1982b) that many of us, parents and teachers practice in ordinary life is done at the hand of anecdotes.

Notes

1. Bollnow is usually associated with the German, more hermeneutic *Geisteswissenschaftliche* (Human Science) movement except that his work, more so than that of his German colleagues, expresses affinity to the more existential phenomenology of the Utrecht School.
2. Strasser (1963) does not name any particular work or scholar but in the Netherlands one *knows* who were meant to fit the shoe. In another book Strasser levels a similar critique at Sartre's description of the gaze (Strasser, 1974, p. 298).
3. German theorists (such as Nohl, Litt, and Flitner) before Langeveld had talked in this respect of the autonomous nature of the pedagogical situation and relation that cannot be reduced to any other human phenomenon or sphere of human activity.
4. Only after much pressure did Langeveld, in later editions, add a chapter containing a methodological discussion to his Concise Theoretical Pedagogy; but this discussion as well as his text *Capita uit de algemene methodologie der opvoedingswetenschap* [Subjects from the General Methodology of Pedagogical Science] still does not deal with questions of method that would have clear implications for the practices of phenomenological research.

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