



Phenomenology as Impressionism

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Every now and then the question is raised if phenomenology can be critical. Phenomenology is indeed often thought to offer a mere description of lived experience and ordinary life, and it is said that the potential of critical theory, for instance, to provide a radical critique of society are not to be found in the phenomenological approach. In his *Phenomenology and the Human Sciences* (1974) Strasser tackles the problem of the critical in a more general way. He warns against a dangerous “phenomenon of degeneration” in the human sciences which he calls “phenomenological impressionism” (p. 297). By this term Strasser refers to the works of those phenomenologists in the Netherlands, Germany, and France who appeared to practice what he calls “an uncritical intuitionism”: the attempt to grasp the meaning of phenomena in an attitude of naiveté (p. 297). It is the so-called natural attitude that is adopted by the phenomenological impressionist and that natural attitude is precisely what Husserl tried to eliminate, according to Strasser. That natural attitude is a particular view of the relationship between the subject and the world. The subject is considered to be separated from the world. The world is posited to be out “there” and is mirrored in the subject’s consciousness, “here.” As Luypen put it: “Yet this view has become almost ‘second nature’ in Western thought: It is simply taken for granted” (Luypen & Koren, 1982, p. 47).

The epistemological consequence of this ontological separation of subject and world is an attitude of astonishing naiveness. Strasser (1974) argues that for phenomenological impressionists to know the world is no problem at all. The only thing you have to do is to “open your eyes.” That this is not what phenomenology is supposed to be all about was indicated in an inimitable way by Heidegger (1962):

The way in which Being and its structures are encountered in the mode of phenomenon is one which must first of all be *wrested* from the objects of phenomenology. Thus the very *point of departure* for our analysis requires that it be secured by the proper method, just as much as does our *access* to the phenomenon, or

our *passage* through whatever is prevalently covering it up. The idea of grasping and explicating phenomena in a way which is “original” and “intuitive” is directly opposed to the *naïveté* of a haphazard, “immediate,” and unreflective “beholding.” (p. 61)

Human science should guard against this popular trend of simply “rendering impressions” as is done in poetry and visual arts, says Strasser (1974). Because a similar trend may be characteristic of present-day researchers in the human sciences, I want to examine Strasser’s charge. What I do here is to explore the nature of Strasser’s critique by examining if impressionism in art can indeed be considered to be the model for one of the dangers of phenomenological research. Can impressionism really be seen as the practice of a naive, thoughtless, unreflective natural attitude? Or is Strasser drawing a caricature of impressionism? In posing these questions we may seem to drift away from the opening theme of this article, the critical potential of phenomenology, but I return to it in the last part.

Impressionism in Art as the Natural Attitude

When I was in high school I was confronted with a problem that I will now try to solve, at least in part. Fascinated by impressionism in painting and in poetry I was bothered by a question: How does the poet transform images into words? If it was indeed the case that in painting and in poetry one tried to accomplish the same task—the representation of reality as it is—then there had to be an important difference between what the painter did and what the poet did. The poet, as it appeared to me, had to perform some translation, to transform images into words. In contrast, the only thing painters had to accomplish was to put the images they saw onto the canvas.

The possibility of transforming images into words fascinated me the most. That you could do that with language, that you could catch images in language! Later on I learned that the most extraordinary thing about language is that you can do other things than create pictures, but let me first provide an example of an impressionist poem that transforms an image into words. I use the poem “*Zwanen*” (Swans) by the Dutch poet van den Bergh (1979):

Swans

They are blown nearer like time
we don’t see workings in their wings
the current always goes their way
and their glide is without strife.

They rest in the impossible life
that’s spread for them by air and water

they do not strive, and still they go ...
what would they be like in death?

Their head is high and full of will,
but their bodies without love
and their hearts are without passion ...
what would they be like in death?

Late in the evening only
they bow their white heads to the water's surface
and drink the water from the moon,
that makes by hands yellowy lucid

... Would that be thirst after late battle? (p. 52)

It really does not seem necessary to explain this poem. The poem is all image. It does not require that we interpret it but that we "see" it. Line after line the swan is sensitively drawn. Anyone who is familiar with this image of the swan (and who is not!) will be convinced of the accuracy of the picture. It is possible, of course, that in some respect a visible detail is depicted that one had not observed before. But the poem does not present new images. It is an affirmation of the sorts of pictures with which we have already been acquainted. And yet it has to be considered a miracle that it is indeed possible to catch in words a part of our reality in such precise detail.

It may be argued that van den Bergh (1979) is not completely faithful to the principles of impressionism from the first to the last line of the poem. I will not concern myself with the question whether it is desirable to follow the methodological rules as strictly as possible. My point is that the poem as a whole is impressionistic. The last line of the three last strophes differs with respect to the direct image-language that is characteristic for all the other lines. The poem asks, "What would they be like in death" and "Would that be thirst after late battle?" These questions do not represent images or aspects of the visual scenery. They stand *next to* the image of the swans; they speak of something *about* the image. As images these questions belong to a world outside the frame of the painting, outside the immediately perceivable. In other words, these are questions about the future and the past. Was van den Bergh really interested in the answers to these questions? Maybe the relevant consideration is that the images raise questions which strengthen the images.

In the last strophe the poem acquires the characteristics of a real impressionist painting. We see the reflection of the moon in the water and we see that our hands have a strange color. Would this be a good moment to watch real paintings?

Until now the story of impressionism fits well the formula of the natural attitude. In the poem reality is given "as it is." The poem does not function as an interpretation of reality; it has to be seen as reality itself. This project of "seeing things as they are" put a spell on the impressionist painter at the end of the 19th century. The impressionist would look at the world through the eyelashes to create an appropriate distance. Next the paint was applied in coarse separate strokes onto the canvas, without mixing the colors on the palette, but rather by adding them directly to the painting, one by one. The desired result had to be the re-creation of reality as such. The actual experience of reality had to be part of the performance of the eyes of the spectator.

When we want to develop an adequate understanding of the subject-object distinction that lies at the basis of the natural attitude, then we have to approach it from another side as well. Opposed to the object (the reality, the painting) there was the subject (the artist, his or her impression). Claude Monet put it this way when he said to Pierre August Renoir: "I wanted to reproduce an impression." What spectators of the impressionist painting see is the rising sun above the harbor of Le Havre, and it is not very easy to see other details. We can see the sun and its reflection in the water. In the middle foreground we see a boat with two people in it, one seated and one standing. The latter seems to have a pole in his hands. To the left, somewhat farther in the background, there seems to be a similar image. It is not possible to locate the horizon in the picture. In the distance to the left and to the right we perceive lines, verticals, horizontals, and diagonals, but we know for sure that those are masts of big sailing ships. Indeed Monet had mentioned ships. But it is the impression of that entire red-blue-purple complexity or mosaic that constitutes the essence of the picture. It is the atmosphere created by this whole that triggers the individual emotion. Monet tried to reproduce an impression, and he succeeded.

There are beautiful examples of efforts to catch impressions to be found in the work of Monet. "The Cathedral of Rouen" (1894) was painted by him several times, in bright daylight and at sunset for instance—just to catch the nuances in atmosphere. Also the variations in temperature and clarity can be felt. And when you see "Gare Saint-Lazare" (1877), you almost smell the station and you seem to sense on your skin that curious tingling freshness of steam produced by the approaching locomotive. "The Cathedral of Rouen" and the "Gare Saint-Lazare" are all about the impressions of the senses that are caused by the

physical reality; that is what impressionist paintings are created for.

The sensory impression is the subjectivity that is opposed to the objectivity of the world: the natural attitude. When we meet the impressionists as a group, we are immediately struck by these characteristics. And as we get to know impressionism a little better, it becomes clear that they are a collective of individuals. Along the way we notice the differences more and more. We are able to consider to what extent the personal played a role, because Monet and Renoir painted the same object more than once. Renoir's "La Grenouilliere" (the frog pond, 1869) counts as the first real impressionist painting. The gay and light leisure life of those days is revealed to us. In the center, on a little round isle people are sitting and standing, talking to one another. Some are dressed in bathing clothes, others are actually swimming. Via a platform one can reach a sort of veranda. In the foreground we see some rowboats, and a tree in the foreground provides shade for the entire scene. Renoir's paintings are bathed in light, which turned out to become an important characteristic of impressionist paintings. Impressionism banned the color black almost completely. Monet's version of the same scenery is heavier. In his painting black is still dominantly visible. Nowadays we are so familiar with the way the impressionists painted water that we almost have difficulty seeing it as a special technique. The revolutionary character of the new style of impressionism can only be established by comparing its works with realistic paintings of an earlier date.

Impressionism as a Movement and the Nature of the Scandal

The reason the impressionists started to associate as a group is easy to understand. Their works of art were not accepted by established salons. They needed to search for exhibition opportunities, and they founded for that purpose the *Société anonyme des peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc.* Only later did they adopt the name impressionists. The founders of impressionism are Monet, Degas, Pissaro, Renoir, Sisley, Guillaumain, and Morisot. Manet did not join the group; he was already an established artist. Degas joined only after some hesitation. The group as a whole was composed of about 30 artists. Among them were Cézanne, Bodin, and Braquemont. The first exhibition opened on April 15, 1874. The photographer Nadar placed his studio at their disposal. As far as the style of the group is concerned, the atelier of a photographer appeared to be a more than accidental choice. The critic Leroy, who was to be responsible for the name impressionism, wrote on April 25 in *Charivari*: "Impression—I was certain. I said to myself, because I was under the impres-

sion, there had to be something impressing in it ... and what a freedom, what a terrific craftsmanship! Wallpaper in embryonic state is more finished than this seascape." On April 29 Castagnary (1874) sighs in *Le Siècle*: "As soon as the impression is caught the work is done." In his view the artist did not know—and this was a severe accusation—how to capture the essence of the object. He too adopted the word Leroy was using: "When you want to characterize them in one single word, you have to create the term 'impressionist.'" Castagnary thought that the sketchiness of the young painters was insufficient, and he warned them to perfect the drawing; otherwise only superficiality was there to stay.

After the first exhibition of impressionists' works, not only was there a bitter fight to be fought against these sharp attacks of the press, but one also had to struggle with the indifference of the public. In some cases it was a fight of life and death, in the most literal sense. Sisley died in poverty and despair. Monet tried to commit suicide. In the attempt to sell some work, an auction was held in the Hôtel Drouot, almost a year after the first exhibition. Exhibitions were frequently interrupted by screaming and shouting of the public. Police assistance was sometimes called in to quieten the public. Gygès wrote in *Paris Journal*: "What a fun we had, with those purple landscapes, red flowers, black rivers, yellow and green women, and blue children, and those high priests of the new school of painters." But what was worse, proceeds were distressingly low.

Even more violent were reactions to the second exhibition in April 1876, when members of the public attacked the paintings with canes and umbrellas. The critic Wolff wrote in *Le Figaro*:

Some people assert that there are paintings at the exposition that has been opened at Duran-Ruel's. To the harmless spectator, who walks in there horrible things are shown. Five or six mentally disabled, among whom one woman, have gathered to exhibit their work.... These artists, with a style of their own, decorate themselves with the name non-compromists, impressionists. They take the canvas, throw a few colors on it, and sign the whole thing.

On the publication of this critical review, Eugène Manet, brother of the painter, spouse of Berthe Morisot, even wanted to challenge the critic to a duel. But luckily there was no duel.

The intriguing question is, how was the group able to cause this shock? When we try to discover the causes of the unexpectedly heated reactions of the public and the critics, there are some surprises waiting for us. In general we identify impressionism

with a style of painting. The use of colors, the thick strokes of paint, they indeed are symptoms of the breach with the controlled classical lines of the pencil that still ruled realism. In the beginning others could ignore the new style, for the impressionists were not taken seriously by the artistic establishment. They were not allowed to enter the official salons and the reaction of the critics was generally ridicule.

One does not have to be a psychoanalyst to see that there was more to that rejection that became even more violent as years passed. Above all it was the subjects of the paintings that broke the taboos. They painted Parisian street life, café and theater life, living in nature, rural life, and sports. For the first time ever, the distance between art and ordinary life was radically reduced. Where the classical painters painted historical subjects, the impressionists were painting daily life. From that moment, the subject was the actual, the purpose of "being among one's contemporaries," "to catch the moment." Eugène Delacroix (1789-1863), a forerunner of impressionism in a certain sense, once remarked "if you are not capable to record a worker falling from a roof, during the fall, then you are not capable of anything special." Movements had to be pictured whether they were flattering or not. Degas painted bowing ballerinas, taking the applause while the curtain went down. Artists painted the accidental, just what they saw while passing by: that particular leg, a glimpse of the faces of the men in the orchestra. They painted candid shots and they showed things that everyone was familiar with but that no one had ever put on canvas before. Above all, the scandal of impressionism was caused by the shock of the ordinary.

It was the new style that made it possible for the ordinary to be pictured the way it was pictured. Some historians sketch a line of development that ends in impressionism: The Middle Ages are characterized by the hierarchy of god-human-things, in the renaissance god disappeared, and in impressionism human beings and things are located at the same level. The human being is no longer placed at the center as if that were his or her proper place. In the so-called "decentric" approach of Degas we see ballerinas, often only half-pictured, at the edge of the immense empty stage. The impressionists painted without contours, ensuring the absence of any privileged position. That contourlessness was realized by emphasizing light, avoiding shadows, by painting colorful shadows, by banning black, by effecting the reciprocal influence of colors on one part to the colors on another part, and by applying thick, unmixed strokes to the canvas.

Monet had cajoled Renoir and Bazille to move outdoors to Fontainebleau, away from the conventional studio. The moment had to be caught on the spot and at once, otherwise there was a chance one would forget the pure impression or a chance that other impressions might contaminate the original experience. *Pleinairism*, painting in the open air, became one of the fundamentals of impressionism. Monet had a floating atelier, from where he painted the images of the Seine. The struggle against the artificiality of the old studio was very important. And, of course, it was also that loose manner, that fluency, that apparent imprudence, that was irritating, because it was the opposite of the older approach. Indeed Monet wanted to paint as a bird sings, with the rapidity of a Japanese calligrapher. But most people did not think much of it.

If we go and search for it, there is enough to be found that can support Strasser's judgment of impressionism as the natural attitude. Note, for instance, the way Renoir emphasized the naive attitude a painter should adopt: "I paint like a child sitting face-to-face with nature, with an artless soul and the instinct of my fingertips." But as far as the choice of subjects is concerned—the ordinary, the everyday—the project of impressionism appears to be comparable to the project of phenomenology.

The Scandal of Edouard Manet

Am I on a slippery road with all these comparisons? Am I trying to be fashionable by connecting everything with art? Is going back to history not merely a form of abdication that makes it possible to forget what we should have been talking about in our own time? In the following section I turn to the question of the critical potential of phenomenology. But for a few moments more I would like to stay in the second half of the 19th century.

If we were looking for scandals there is someone who can rival the impressionists. Eleven years before their first exhibition in Nadar's studio, some new rules had been formulated for the preparation of the salon of 1863. Of each artist, at the most three paintings were to be exhibited. Edouard Manet and Gustave Doré protested. What followed was a severe selection of the pieces sent in. Three thousand of the 5000 works submitted for consideration were rejected. Again petitions were sent to the minister of state. Napoleon III himself intervened by proposing to organize a separate exhibition of the rejected pieces. Thus the *Salon des Refusées* was arranged. Now the public was offered the opportunity to judge for themselves. Manet hesitated to participate. He was afraid that rejection by the salon jury might

be followed by rejection of the public. The consequences for him and for his reputation would have been tremendous. Things turned out even worse. The scandal of "Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe" led to the closing down of the *Salon des Refusées*.

The British critic Philip G. Hamerton recognized the problem of "Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe" at once. It is the combination of dressed men and nude women that calls for resistance. Hamerton knows immediately from whom Manet borrowed the theme. In the Louvre one can find a painting by Gorgione, from the early beginnings of the 16th century. The title is "Fête champêtre" (outdoor party). Hamerton writes in October 1863:

Now a lamentable Frenchman translated it into French realism, blown up with those awfully modern French costumes instead of those gracious Venetian. Yes, yes, there they sit under the trees, the main female figure, totally undressed ... another woman in a negligé is emerging from a fast flowing brook and two Frenchmen sit all dressed up on that very green grass with that stupid blissful gaze. There are more pictures of the same sort that lead one to the conclusion that the nude gets inevitably indecent when it is painted by vulgar types.

In general, plagiarism may be calling for disapproval; in art it often functions as a legitimating and admired device. Manet looked very closely at an engraving of Marcantonio Raimondi, "The Conviction of Paris" (c. 1520), an engraving after a lost Raphael. The posture of the three figures in the foreground is without doubt to be found in a detail of that 16th-century engraving. Hamerton does not speak of this similarity. But apart from this classical composition, and what Hamerton does not seem to notice, is that Manet's painting sneers at the classical themes. That the nude does not belong in the daily situation is obvious. The situation is rather confusing, because the woman in the background is taking the classical posture of a woman bathing. So the painting shows two nudes that are not of the same world. Many other objections have been made to the painting. The figures are not really integrated, either physically or psychologically. Although they are sitting next to each other, they are not really involved; they are not really looking at one another as they probably should be. The piece was not painted outdoors, of course. But that is not enough to explain why it seems so removed from real life. After all, there is that taboo-breaching quality the painting definitely had. Manet did not have anything evil in mind. He was far too bourgeois—in the true sense of the word—to intend to shock. He enjoyed modern Parisian life as no one else did. Manet did want to become famous, certainly, but not at all costs.

Despite the scandal of the "Déjeuner," two pieces by Manet were accepted by the next salon. And again one of them was a hit. Its name was "Olympia." Theophile Gautier wrote on June 14, 1865 in *Le Moniteur Universel*:

Certainly Manet is important: he has a school, he has admirers and even fans; his influence has a longer reach than you think. Manet is a potential danger. There is no way to understand "Olympia," even if you take it as it is, it is a miserable model stretched on a sheet. The color of the flesh is filthy, the forms are weak. The shadows are made with long sloppy strokes.... We could have been content with the ugliness if she had been truly studied and sublimated, by a special color-effect for instance. Even the ugliest woman has bones, muscles, skin and some color. I am sorry, but I have to say it: this is nothing, only the wish to draw attention at any cost.

That last remark was probably the result of a wrong observation. As in the case of the "Déjeuner" Manet seemed to have nothing evil in mind. His attitude seems to satisfy the criterion of naiveté which, following Strasser, is (in the case of the impressionists) connected to the natural attitude, and that naiveté is characterized by him as both impossible and undesirable. And maybe, again, we are here to meet one of those typical differences between artists and scientists. Maybe, naiveté is characterized by him as both impossible and undesirable. Maybe naiveté is an advantage for the former and a disadvantage for the latter. Manet is so upset by the whole affair that he flees Paris for a couple of years and takes up residence in Spain.

"Olympia," again, was painted after a classical piece. Here the copying was not limited to a detail, but it is the whole image that has been taken from Titian's "The Venus of Urbino" (1538). The posture of the nude is the same, and so is the layout of the room. The little dog at the foot-end is replaced by a little black cat. Where we see in the vista in the Titian two women in the background, there is a black servant in Manet's painting. Preeminently, "Olympia" would be playing the role of the example of plagiarism in art.

What is it that is so scandalous about this painting? Apart from the difference in style (looking past the objections that were made by Gautier, Manet is not yet painting like the impressionists), we meet in Manet many elements that are new when considered in the context of the work of the impressionists. The emphasis on the ordinary is fully present. George Bataille (1983) remarked that once in that era the whole society became bourgeois, but that art tended to stay aristocratic. The removal

of the distance between art and ordinary life must have caused a shock indeed. Until that time nudes had only played a part in historical scenes. Charles Beaudelaire (1965) talked about art as a carnival or a change of clothes, because, until then in the case of the nude there was a change of clothes, in a certain sense of course. It is said there was at that time a change of language in the art of painting; the poetic became prosaic. John Richerdson observed that "Olympia" was exactly that Parisian woman that most of the visitors of the salons tried to hide from their own wives. Although Titian's "Venus" had been contemporary and secular, she remained saintlike compared with that impertinent "Olympia" of Manet.

From the "Déjeuner" and the "Olympia" on, every painting became a still life, as it was sometimes said. It didn't matter any more what image it presented. The radical democratization of people, plants, and things, which has been connected to impressionism, had already been reached here. The equalization that became absolute in the work of Matisse was a direct assault on human dignity. Manet was frequently accused of superficiality. Richerdson even constructed an anthology of anti-Manet expressions to underline the charge. However, in Manet we find an unsparing form of superficiality, a form of superficiality that makes the viewer "clairvoyant," to use the words of Oscar Wilde. Is this not the most beautiful compliment one can receive? The question is, how one can abstract more effectively from meanings that have already crystallized? The impartiality that is apparent in Manet's work is indeed abstracting from the knowledge that is fastened down to lived experience in the language of that time. He refuses to look past the ordinary desirability and vulnerability of the body. In some still life pictures it looks as if he had more sympathy for things than for people. The superficiality of Manet is not a result of a lack of perspective, but is reflective of a perspective that is radically different: it is the perspective that frees the revolutionary power of the ordinary. Husserl appears to have said somewhere that he did not believe in depth, but in the superficial.

Manet's "Bar dans Folies Bergère" was painted in 1881 and was going to be an overall big success. It is classified as one of the prize pieces of impressionism. We see a girl at the center behind the bar that separates her from us.... She seems to ask us what we would like to drink. In the big mirror behind her we "see" the hum of the café. Everything has that inviting attractiveness. Maarten Beks (1986) wrote:

What was simply worth seeing is lifted up to be honorable. And without any doubt, the ordinary is made extraordinary. The serv-

ing is put on a pedestal. On the foreground we see, in symmetric, frontal, monumental form, a girl as a martyr of glorified status. In the mirror the confusion of the profane reality is ruling the scene. (p. 13)

Manet has worked significantly in giving shape to the reality depicted in the painting. For example, it is not clear where the exact beginning of the mirror is. He does not let the mirror reflect all the things we see in the foreground. That would be too confusing, too much. To the right in the mirror we see a girl from the back. She is talking to a gentleman with a moustache and a top hat. If Manet had realistically wanted to present the reflection of the girl who is talking to viewer, the customer (and that is what appears most probable), then the depiction is most curious. The reflection to be placed in the center, where it would belong, would have been too confusing and would have obstructed our view of the people in the bar. That is the reason why the girl's reflection is positioned to the side.

But now we must ask: Is this then the height of impressionism? This painting is entirely "constructed" rather than merely reflecting our impression of reality. We know that Manet always remained faithful to his studio and never let himself slide into pleinairism completely. But Manet was not only not completing the painting faithfully on the spot, he even added what he thought should be added for aesthetic reasons only afterwards, in his studio. The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam displays an oil-painted preparatory study of the "Bar dans Folies Bergère" that was painted in the bar itself. Looking at that version we can see what is correct and what is not. The scene is painted in typical coarse strokes of a preparatory sketch. The fluency is striking. The "real" impressionist probably would have thought that the sketch was the finished work. But all the elements that make the final painting special are absent from the sketch. The girl is not in the center at all but more to the right. She is not at all attentive to us, as on the completed canvas; rather she looks busy, as if she is doing the dishes. To *see* the special in the ordinary is one thing, to *show* the special in the ordinary is a different activity. In both activities there is without any doubt much construction. Compared with the completed version, Manet's sketch is of an astonishing superficiality. This would indeed have been a perfect illustration of the natural attitude on the one hand, and a victory over the natural attitude on the other!

Impressionism as the Victory Over the Natural Attitude and the Triumph of the Ordinary

When we look now, with new eyes, at the paintings of the impressionists, we find much more construction there than one might think. The accidental appears to be planned, the unposed cannot be captured otherwise than as a pose. When we look at "Madame Monet and her Child" of 1875, modesty rules the scene. Mother Camille is sitting at the center, her embroidery is absorbed by the flowered wall visible behind her. At the lower right sits a small child, as busy as the mother. A wooden horse on wheels stands between the two, unmoved, untouched. Mother and child are not actively involved with each other, but neither of the two can be taken away from the scene. The mother sits turned to the child; in the quietness of the child you can see that there is an adult around. The quick designation hides the composition that carries the image. The painting does not stop to the left of the mother, behind her back the spectator receives as a bonus an extra empty meter which is needed to draw our attention to the child at the other side.

Monet's "Breakfast" of 1873 differs considerably from the painting of the same title from 1868. In the earlier version the transfer to the new style has not yet been made. In the composition there is an accent on the child sitting at the table to eat. It is not only that both women are directed to the child, the empty part at the lower side directs our full attention to the child as well. The painting is half empty, apart from the children's belongings. There is a hat on the back of the chair and on the ground a doll and a ball. The "Breakfast" of 1873 was already eaten. The table in the foreground in the center is emptier than empty. We notice the almost empty glasses, the crumpled napkin, a piece of bread. Son Jean is playing on the ground. In the background are two women, strolling. The decentrism of Degas is employed here not accidentally, but purposefully, as an outstanding means of composition. There is construction throughout and all over this painting.

For neoimpressionists like Seurat and Signac the aesthetic element of composition would regain its place of importance. The scientifically based research on color became refined, putting the painting even more strongly in the position of reality as such. Considered from an impressionist point of view, however, with Signac's water-colors of "St. Tropez" and "Venice" the new tradition had already lost its impact again. Mannerism was going to make the ordinary invisible again.

Much can be said about the triumph of the ordinary. One could think of analysis of sociohistorical development, showing the common becoming more common. But the task of the historian is far easier than that of the scientist who has to say something about his or her own time. The latter cannot fix the eyes to a certain established trend in the development of values, taking that as a starting point, and rewriting history on that basis, for he or she will have to make his or her own choices. The scientist must be sensitive to what is worthwhile, even when it is yet to be discovered. The revolutionary power of the ordinary does have some relation to the critique of society. Critiquing the arbitrariness of empty authority, making explicit the discrepancies between talking and acting, speaking about things you apparently should not be talking about—those are all requirements of ordinary life and they do not ask for complicated societal analyses. And it is not that these processes do not have critical social implications. The problem here is not that the process of discovery is meeting cognitive difficulties; the problem is that a measure of civil courage is needed to raise such matters. If one distinguishes those things inadequately one confuses lack of prejudice with naiveté, for instance. The whole community sees what is going on: Everybody is looking right through the sham of the new clothes of the emperor, but only the child says aloud what she sees, because she is naive rather than courageous. She has not yet learned the things you are not allowed to speak about publicly.

The extraordinary is not ready to be picked up; vision is needed to see that it is there. In the process of discovery there is no place for naiveté, not even in the beginning. The epistemological foundations of the process of discovery are of an anthropological nature. Right from the beginning a part is being played by judgments of humanity, normative judgments of human characteristics and human interaction. In the freeing of the ordinary we indeed breach taboos, but that is not an end in itself. Breaching taboos has nothing to do with banality, but everything to do with the respectable. Looking at concrete situations by mere deduction from shared values would be a wrong way of looking. So we need those judgments of humanity in the form of open-value concepts to enable us to discover something new. We rarely discover something new, and even the new is generally something we had already known beforehand, although we were not able to put it into words clearly. Many analyses of phenomenologists seem to have as their main purpose to keep vivid those values that are considered of importance. It must be said that we cannot be reminded too often of the ways that children can be threatened in their existence, and

we cannot be critical enough of the question concerning which values have to be preserved that shape children's lives. But sometimes, as we attend to the ordinary, we may be lucky and successful in finding a rejuvenating force. Here is an example.

Some years ago I did some research aiming to find out what kind of changes have taken place in the relationship between parents and children since World War II. Among other materials I used were letters sent to a Dutch weekly magazine. Once a year the editors of that magazine ask their readers to write on subjects of human interest. In 1983 they asked children to write about their parents, and parents to write about their children. So I analyzed these letters which, of course, are constructions rather than reality. But I think it really does not matter whether the stories are factually real, or whether the parents and children made them up, because fabricated stories function as if they are real.

In the outpourings of the parents and children, many are disappointed by the results of upbringing. I noticed that the power of the parent was systematically overestimated. Children who are not happy with themselves and with who and what they have become blame their parents for it. Parents who think children did not do well blame themselves.

A few examples may illustrate this overestimation of the power of the parent and maybe of educators in general. Keep in mind, however, that these examples were not sought to fit into a specific hypothesis. The trend I noted was present in the material as such, although this "discovery" may not be that spectacular after all. Ordinary upbringing is full of tragedy. I do not have in mind at the moment those awful mistakes that Alice Miller (1986) informed us about, but I refer to the boundary of the pathological that is often crossed in those ordinary stories. Think, for instance, of that middle-aged son telling about his monthly encounters with his aged father. They meet halfway between Rotterdam and Gröningen in the railway station restaurant in Amersfoort. In this letter, the son describes how he enjoys the unrigging of the old man—the man he still hates because the father ruined his life when he was a child. More than once we meet children in these letters who refuse to become happy, and the only reason you can think of is that they just want to torment their parents.

But there are other tragic stories that do not force us right into the arms of Dr. Freud. Take, for instance, that mother who tells about one of her daughters, the most talented, good at everything, born for happiness, but she steps out of life and commits

suicide before she even reaches her twenties. The mother states that the event "slipped like sand through the fingers." And for the rest of her life the mother cannot find peace with this memory.

Overestimation of the power of the parent seems to be a part of the logic of upbringing. To take responsibility for children looks a lot like an act of irresponsibility, as far as the degree of risk is concerned. Adults who want to start a family and raise children have to suffer from at least some self-overestimation.

Analysis of the ordinary is not sufficient to make clear why the responsibility of the parents has changed over the last five decades. To understand the change from an unconditional form of responsibility in the late '40s and '50s to a conditional form in the '80s, one needs other methods of analysis. These methods are usually labelled "critical." A traditional economic analysis of the developments mentioned is of great importance too. And phenomenology cannot fulfill this task.

But let me turn back to ordinary upbringing and to what I experienced as a real "discovery." Next to the tragedies I pointed out earlier there are examples to be found of what are harmless forms of overestimation of the parent. The power of the educator is always limited in that sense, that it is the child who has to finish his or her own education; it is impossible for the parent to do that for the child. The child must affirm what is good in the upbringing by his or her parents. And now and then the child has to give a good turn to his or her own educational story. The child has to make peace with some unattractive traits of his or her own identity. Is this new? Did Langeveld (1970) not already speak of education toward self-education? Yes, but Langeveld put a conceptual end to upbringing the moment adulthood is reached, and there is much to say in favor of this view during the time that he defended it. But many of the present-day stories about upbringing that I have read show that they are not a minute shorter than lifelong, even when the parents died a long time ago.

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