

CHAPTER 3

THE METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction and Orientation

The previous chapter reviewing the research literature and identifying nine different approaches to the phenomenon of insight clearly reveals how significant methodological issues are in determining the outcome of the research.

It is recognised that there is a fundamental difference in the desire to understand, between the qualitative and quantitative approaches to the experience and phenomenon of insight. Yet these two approaches are equally valuable and need not be in competition with one another, but may be complementary to one another.

In this chapter predisposing factors as well as inter-related reasons for the choice of the existential-phenomenological approach will be enumerated. This will be followed by a brief philosophical background of existential phenomenology and its adaptation for psychology. The details of the methodology employed in the research process will then be examined.

3.2 Predisposing Factors in Choosing the Existential-phenomenological Approach

It has to be acknowledged that there were three predisposing and interlocking factors in choosing the existential-phenomenological approach: the researcher's own training and preference, the variety and complexity of the subject matter and the very diverse manner and fields in which the research participants experienced insight.

First, the existential-phenomenological approach formed a significant part of the course work preceding this thesis, with particularly valuable input in seminars from van Vuuren (1989,1991), Kunz (1998) and Alapack (1990,1999,2001,2007,2010). Despite living in Cape Town, the decision was taken to register at Pretoria University precisely because of the practical and

philosophical values inherent in this approach, which coincided with the researcher's own intuitions, values and appreciation of inclusivity. However it has to be admitted that at this stage the researcher's intuitions were relatively uninformed of the distinct disciplines and methodology of existential phenomenology.

Secondly, the desire to research the experience of insight was consciously reached as a result of the researcher's life and work experience well before registering at Pretoria. The fact that interdisciplinary experience was encouraged in accepting my application confirmed my own sense that rich, varied and detailed descriptions were essential for an investigation of the complexity of the subject matter: the experience of insight. Hence the variety in selecting the nine approaches in the literature review and the choice of the existential-phenomenological approach as the most relevant and inclusive of the nine, in order to gain understanding of the meaning and significance of these experiences of insight.

Thirdly, it was always the researcher's intention to choose research participants experiencing a variety of insight in different contexts, traditions, cultures and disciplines. It gradually became clearer that the existential approach of psychology with the increasingly rigorous steps delineated by Giorgi was the most appropriate. For more detailed reasons which follow on from these predisposing factors see section 3.4.

3.3 The Choice of the Existential-phenomenological Approach

There are a number of well-developed qualitative methodologies based on case studies (such as hermeneutics, heuristics and grounded theory), which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, the foundational approach selected for this study of the experience of insight is the existential-phenomenological method developed by Giorgi (1970, 1975a, 1975b, 1979, 1983, 1985b, 1995, 2003, 2004, 2009). What follows is not intended as a review of existential phenomenology but as an articulation of the main reasons why this approach was selected for this study:

(1) The stress in existentialism on the existence of the individual person as a free agent who is burdened with personal responsibility ‘rings true’ for many of my own experiences of insight, as its meaning and significance unfolds.

(2) The concentration in phenomenology on the detailed description of conscious experience while suspending or bracketing all preconceptions, interpretations and explanations, seems particularly important for researching the phenomenon of insight about which there are so many preconceptions and assumptions. The word *phenomenon* comes from the Greek *phaenesthai*, to ‘flare up’, to ‘show itself’, to ‘appear’, so it seems particularly suited to the experience of *insight* as well as accounting for the maxim of phenomenology, namely “to the things themselves”. The crucial importance of this maxim in investigating insight is revealed by the puzzling question in the approach of cognitive psychology to agree on the definition of an *insight problem*.

(3) The use of this human scientific approach of phenomenology has been chosen *both* for its appropriate philosophical underpinnings, especially its rejection of dualism which bedevils any understanding of an experience such as insight, *and* because “it is the one most tailored to psychological phenomena” (Woodrow 2006, p. 94). As Giorgi and Giorgi (2003, p. 244) express it: “The philosophers concentrated on assumptions and concepts and psychologists looked for methodical help”.

(4) The notion of intentionality has helped Valle: “to understand the nature of my everyday experience. It has provided a context in which to understand the essence of my transpersonal experiences ...” (Valle & Halling 1989, p. 258). This conceptual ‘bridging’ is of particular value for understanding both ‘everyday’ and ‘transcendent’ experiences of insight. Intentionality implies the deep implicit inter-relatedness between the perceiver and the perceived. This pre-reflective inseparability enables us, through reflection, to become aware of the meaning that was implicit in the situation as it was lived, which is especially helpful for a meaningful experience of insight, precisely because it often initially has an “other-than-me” quality about it.

(5) Finally, there is considerable heuristic value in the increasing rigour of the existential-phenomenological step-by-step process. This process helps to facilitate the challenge of discerning the essential data and structure in the research participant’s description of his/her experience. So it is submitted that this is the most appropriate methodology for studying the “what” rather than the “why” of the lived experience of insight.

3.4 A Brief Philosophical Background to Existential Phenomenology

This will be considered, concisely, under three headings: existentialism, phenomenology and existential phenomenology.

3.4.1 Existentialism

Existentialism owes its origin to the remarkable Danish scholar, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). His religious philosophy is concerned with individual existence, choice and commitment. He ruthlessly explored his own considerable struggles in life and found in them examples of universal struggles of being human. He had a brilliant mind and vivid way of expressing truth, seen for example in “Lying is a science, truth is a paradox” (Kierkegaard 1961, p. 158). He also with searing honesty described his own experience of mental pain, dread, fear of commitment and his relationship with God, shown in his description of faith as “the anticipation of the eternal which holds together the cleavages of existence” (Kierkegaard 1938 extract 605). He died at the age of 42 but his work remains incomparably the most perceptive diagnosis of the tortuous paradoxes of schizoid experience in *Fear and Trembling* (1941), *The Concept of Dread* (1946) and *The Sickness Unto Death* (1941).

The existential attitude is one of involvement and existential knowledge is based on an encounter in which a new meaning is created and recognised. The courage to face things as they are and to express the anxiety of meaninglessness has been potently exemplified by Nietzsche, depicted by Sartre in his play *No Exit*, evoked by T.S Eliot in his poem *The Wasteland* and characterised by Kafka in his novels, *The Castle* and *The Trial*. Tillich (1979, p. 147) describes Heidegger’s proposition that “the essence of man is his existence” as “the most despairing and the most courageous in all Existentialist literature”.

3.4.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology, as a distinct philosophy, may be traced back to the publication of *Logical Investigations* (1970, Vol. 1 originally published in 1900, and Vol. 2 in 1901) by Edmund Husserl. His thinking continued to develop, although not always in a linear way, with his *Ideas* (1983 & 1987, Vol. 1 originally published in 1931 and Vol. 2 in 1952). For Husserl, what

appears in consciousness is the “phenomenon”. There is an intertwining of subjective and objective knowledge in Husserl’s thinking; perception of the reality of an object is dependent on a subject. The transformation of experience into essential insights occurs through a process of “ideation” through which a meaning is created, a knowledge is extended. “Intentionality” refers to consciousness, such that the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are intentionally related. So self and the world are inseparable components of meaning. Every intentionality includes both *noema* (the phenomenon) and *noesis* (the meaning/s). “Intuition” is another key concept (see also section 7.16), for as Moustakas (1994, p. 32) boldly declares: “my intuitive knowing of myself and what presents itself of its own accord does not betray me”. This is also recognised by Levinas in his *Intuition of Essences* (1967).

Husserl’s (1900) main concern was with opening up the phenomena of everyday lived experience. To achieve this, he developed the idea of suspending what is believed to be true about the world. So everyday understandings are set aside and the phenomena are revisited, freshly and naïvely, in order that we may learn to “see”, distinguish and describe. This suspension of beliefs is referred to as *epoché*, a Greek word meaning to pause (in time), to hold back, to refrain. In this present context, it refers to holding back from judgments, preconceptions and presuppositions. This is also referred to as “bracketing”. The next essential step in the process is “Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction”. ‘Transcendental’ because it moves beyond the everyday to the pure ego in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time; ‘phenomenological’ because it transforms the world into mere phenomena; ‘reduction’, (from the Latin *reducere*, literally ‘to bring back’) because it brings us back to the source of the meaning and existence of the experienced world. So the phenomenon is perceived in its totality in a completely fresh and open way.

Giorgi and Giorgi point out that the transcendental perspective is a totally philosophical one and should not be a guide for psychological analysis in these terms: “It is psychological subjectivity that interests psychology, not the transcendental one” (Giorgi & Giorgi 2003, p. 245). This is followed by “Imaginative Variation”, in which the aim is to grasp the structural essence of experience. So that, if the specific dimension varied in imagination causes the object to ‘collapse’, it is regarded as essential for the object to appear as a whole. If the object is modified but still recognisable, despite the imaginative variation, then it is regarded as accidental rather

than essential. The final step is to describe the invariant aspect of the object, in other words its essence.

Husserl was the first German scholar to be recognised by the British after World War 1. He lectured in London in 1922. His exclusion from the university as a result of Nazi repression in 1933 led him, in the opinion of his research assistant “to concentrate on the function of phenomenology as support for the freedom of the mind” (Stein 1986). Husserl influenced many of the leading philosophers of the twentieth century who worked in the continental tradition, notably Heidegger (1962 & 1972), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre (1956). Spiegelberg (1982) gives the classical history of philosophical phenomenology, in much more detail than is relevant here.

3.4.3 Existential Phenomenology

Existential phenomenology, the confluence of these two streams of thought, came together in the work of Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1962). Heidegger expanded Husserl’s philosophy by shifting the concern from knowledge to emphasising what it means to be a person being-in-the-world (cited in Macquarrie 1968). Merleau-Ponty (in Madison 1999) combined Husserl’s approach to epistemology with an existential orientation derived from Heidegger. His central premise, in his seminal work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), is that objective thought distorts lived experience with the result that estranges “us from our own selves, the world in which we live and other people with whom we interact” (Langer 1989, p. 149).

3.5 The Adaptation of Existential Phenomenology for Psychology

Husserl believed that psychologists would be able to use his philosophical concepts and Merleau-Ponty (1962 & 1964) wrote about the relationship between phenomenology and psychology with conceptual clarity in ways that were sympathetic to the psychologist’s perspective. However neither Husserl nor Merleau-Ponty applied philosophical concepts to psychological research methodology. Sartre believed that phenomenological philosophical assumptions enable the interrogation of the experiential world but, as Giorgi and Giorgi (2003, p. 244) point out,

“although Satre’s insights are unmistakably helpful, just how he achieved what he did is not spoken to – that is, he presented results, not processes”.

So while the philosophers concentrated on assumptions and concepts, the psychologists looked for methodological assistance. It was Giorgi who pioneered a rigorous interpretation of how the phenomenological method, as developed within the continental philosophical tradition, could be adapted and made useful for the practice of psychology and concrete research with an articulated method that generated data that others could replicate. See Cloonan (1995) for a detailed history. The exact steps of the process that Giorgi pioneered will be outlined in the forthcoming sections of **3.6**.

3.6 The Research Process

It seems important to recognise from the start that an existential-phenomenological method is not simply a technique; it is an approach that uses steps, procedures and methods that will facilitate the central aim of discovering, understanding and communicating *meanings*. So, a description of existential-phenomenological methods needs to explicate its attitude, understandings and approach as well as the specific sequence of steps taken in carrying out the research.

In structuring the research process, the following steps and considerations were taken to explore the experience of insight in an ethical, methodical and human scientific way.

3.6.1 The Literature Review

Unlike most investigations, this study did not begin with a literature review. This was a conscious and deliberate decision in order to guard against the tempting tendency to examine the experiences of the research participants primarily for evidence confirming the theories that had emerged in the review of recent scholarship. The intention was to seek to be more naïve, vulnerable, sensitive and open to listening to the actual experiences of my research participants. So, although the literature review in chapter 2 precedes this chapter, it was in fact only

undertaken after the work on the investigation of the transcribed interview of the research participants and some preliminary findings were established.

3.6.2 A Self-reflective Search

A significant part of my interest in the phenomenon of insight stems from my own experience of a number of insights: one while becoming unconscious buried in a snow avalanche, several while reflective or prayerful and a number during conversation or in a therapeutic setting. So I decided to do a self-reflective search of my own experiences of insight, particularly focusing on their meaning and significance in the unfolding process of my own life, work and development. This series of reflections was undertaken, with three purposes in mind, in order to:

- (1) sensitise me to the nature of the research that I was embarking on and to become as empathic as possible to the experiences of my research participants
- (2) clarify my central research question for each research participant
- (3) attempt to identify my own preconceived notions or biases, with a view to ‘bracket’ them and so minimise their effects in explicating the meaning of the research participants’ descriptions.

I found this self-reflective search a valuable exercise in terms of all three purposes outlined above. What I had not anticipated was the significance of reviewing these experiences of insight, in terms of my understanding of my career changes, my most deeply held values, my move from the UK to live in South Africa and the way these experiences continued to illuminate the sense of meaning in my life. It was a profoundly moving and revealing experience and it remains like a quivering, freshly adjusted compass needle, pointing towards my true self.

3.6.3 The Central Research Question for the Interview

Having decided to start with interviewing research participants, rather than with a literature review, some thought was given to the kind of research question that would elicit thoughtful responses about a revealing personal experience of insight, whether sudden or gradual, which had occurred in each research participant’s life. The purpose of this central research question is to

generate a text of the interview that is meaningful for the research participant which is faithful to the existential-phenomenological experience of that person.

I identified six crucial elements for the central research question. I felt that, to be most useful for this study, the question would need to:

- (1) emphasise the importance of the participant's *personal* and *lived experience* of insight, rather than an objectified event or concept of insight.
- (2) ask the participant to describe the *concrete situation*, the historical context of the experience of insight.
- (3) evoke *specific details* of a particular experience of insight in the participant's life or work, rather than a generalised or summary response.
- (4) invite the participant to share what happened in all three dimensions, or 'ecstasies of time' present in the experience, *before*, *during* and *after* the experience.
- (5) elicit a response to the difference that this experience of insight may have made to the research participant's *way-of-being-in-the-world*.
- (6) express the *unity of perception, cognition and feeling* in the experience of insight rather than elevating one aspect at the expense of the others.

With these considerations in mind, and in the light of my self-reflective search, I formulated a central research question for the participants as:

Would you please describe an experience of insight, whether gradual or sudden, in which you saw or understood something that changed the way you viewed or lived your life, or which you were able to express in your work. Please describe in detail a particular lived experience; the context and what happened before, during and after; what you thought, felt and did.

In retrospect I recognise that this interview question was subtly formulated and clarified from the experience gathered from my self-reflective search (see section 3.6.2) rather than simply obtained from them methodological literature in three particular ways: an addition, an exclusion and a liminal space.

- (1) In asking the research participants to describe an experience of insight, I included the phrase "whether gradual or sudden" because, although it is always said that insight is a sudden

and unexpected experience, I was aware that I had sometimes been ‘struck’ by something which heightened my level of consciousness before the actual insight occurred. So to include this possibility I added the word “gradual”. Being ‘struck’ in this way also enabled me to recognise the significance of the word ‘impact’ when I came to review the existential-phenomenological approach to insight (see section **2.4.3**).

(2) In my own experiences of insight, ranging from the comparative trivial to what was almost certainly life-saving in the snow avalanche, there were a considerable variety of modalities in which the insight came, including pictorial images, auditory experiences and on one occasion an image of a text laid out in a striking way with certain words in red, while the main text was in black. I had originally wanted to find some phrase to include the possibility of a variety of modalities, but recognised that this was something to be deliberately bracketed (see section **2.4.6**) because it might be suggestive in an unhelpful way.

(3) When I was completely trapped and helpless, deeply buried in a snow avalanche, I was absolutely certain I was going to die. I was terrified. Despite the experience of insight, which may have occurred as I was going unconscious, I had no conscious experience of peace. I remained petrified. I was rescued after forty-two minutes and according to the medical specialist’s report I “must have been very much at peace with a considerably slowed heartrate, because the analysis of the impacted snow in the avalanche revealed that there was only enough oxygen to sustain life for approximately twenty minutes”. This experience helped to open up a liminal space for me to recognise the significance of the theatre of the body in the body-mind-spirit continuum, even when partially unconscious in the experience of insight. This was of particular value in appreciating Roger Penrose’s subliminal experience of insight (section **5.7**).

3.6.4 The Ethical Protocol and Informed Consent Form

Clearly, research with human subjects must serve both scientific and human interests. As a priest and psychotherapist, I feel honour bound by the ethical and moral requirements of both professions. As a researcher, I am responsible to the Research Proposal and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria, under whose authority this research is conducted.

So I first developed an ethical protocol and an informed consent form for consideration by that committee, which formally approved this study. This submission not only gave basic information about the nature of the research, process of interviewing, handling of information and safeguards around confidentiality, but also became essentially a written contract with each participant. Each consent form was therefore signed by the participant, me as researcher and Dr Assie Gildenhuis as my supervisor.

I am aware that the informed consent form I developed may differ from many others in at least three respects:

(1) I am committed to Lincoln's (1990, p. 286) proposal of "the negotiation of research processes and products with one's respondents, so that there is a mutual shaping of the final research results". I do not anticipate problems with the ideals of egalitarianism and mutuality of interests presupposed in this approach; in fact, I have a strong sense that it enhances openness and enables better results.

(2) provision was made for different degrees of confidentiality. The reason for this is not only due to the different nature of the insights that may be shared, but also due to the different lives of my research participants. Some are public figures, others very private; some have published accounts of their experience, others remain puzzled by their experience; some experiences are more meaningful if owned by name and fully contextualised, others are best left completely anonymous.

(3) it may be idealistic but I shall aim at some real reciprocity in what the subjects give and what they receive from participation in the research. This is based both on the value of exploring experiences and story-telling in psychotherapeutic practice, and on my own positive experience of being profoundly listened to in a research interview after giving evidence involving very painful experiences and insights to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

So these three considerations are specifically included in the informed consent form reproduced in Appendix C.

3.6.5 Selection of Research Participants

In qualitative research it is not necessary to obtain a carefully chosen random sample of research participants conforming to what can be measured in the way that is required of a control group in quantitative research. Nevertheless, for my own interest and with the intention of getting a good cross-section of people with experiences of insight, I attempted to seek out a reasonable variety:

- *of people* (in terms of sex, race, culture, educational background etc.) with an experience of insight, willing to be research participants
- *of contexts* (in terms of lifestyle, work, academic discipline, social and political contexts etc.) within which the research participants have experienced insight
- *of physical condition* (in terms of alone or with others, walking, relaxing, meditating, bathing etc.) under which the research participants have experienced insight
- *of forms* (in terms of words, associations, images, colours or sounds, whether sudden or gradual etc.) of insight experienced by each research participant.

Giorgi (1985, p. 19) suggests that the more research participants there are, the greater the variations, and hence the better the ability to see what is essential. Since I was going to be working with a fairly small number of research participants, I argued that the greater the varieties of experiences of insight the richer, more nuanced, more interesting the material would be, as well as increasing my ability to see what is essential, and therefore, hopefully, the more persuasive the research results would be.

With these considerations in mind, I selected seven people and wrote to them outlining the nature of my research and inviting their participation. See **Appendix B** for an example of this initial letter of invitation. Three people proved very willing to participate and a further one was open to gentle persuasion making four research participants in all. More details about the participants will be given in chapter 4 on the preliminary study and in chapter 5 on the investigation and findings.

3.6.6 A Preliminary and Exploratory Study

There was no intention, as is the case with some quantitative research methodology, of excluding the research participant selected for the preliminary and exploratory study from the main study. The preliminary study was seen as part of my learning curve, an opportunity to hone qualitative interview skills using an audio tape recorder, to test the viability of the research question, and to

get some practice at managing the protocols and the various steps in the existential-phenomenological research procedure. Whether the preliminary and exploratory study would be regarded as suitable for inclusion in the main body of research was left open for a decision in the light of the viability of the process and quality of the results.

I therefore selected a subject who was well known to me, lived relatively close by geographically, so that if necessary I could return to clarify points with him, and who would be reasonably understanding and forgiving of me. Significantly I chose a cartoonist who could be counted on to see the funny side of this strange activity.

I found that the qualitative research interview and the central research question seemed to generate sufficiently rich material. A detailed account of this preliminary and exploratory study forms the basis of the next chapter.

3.7 The Interview

Moving from the preliminary study back to the methodology as a whole, there are four aspects of the interview that are worthy of consideration at this point: theoretical clarification, qualitative characteristics, methodological implications and, finally, practical matters relating to recording, transcription and verification of the interview.

3.7.1 Theoretical Clarification of the Interview

According to the existential-phenomenological approach, interviews should be conducted in an open-ended, collaborative dialogue with the goal of obtaining “as faithful and complete a description of what was lived through by the interviewee as possible” (Wertz 1985, p. 161). A qualitative research interview, as collaborative dialogue, already creates a world of shared meanings and involves both the generation and interpretation of a text. The dialogue, as Todres (1990, p. 77) points out, “is already a hermeneutic endeavour in that there is an implicit or explicit task to achieve a sufficient degree of shared understanding as to the integrity of the experience”.

The level of understanding appropriate in the interview phase of the research may be called the ‘story level’, where a description of the details and the integrity of the whole experience is facilitated in such a way that both researcher and research participant are satisfied with the sense of ‘that is *how* it happened’. This means that the researcher is not asking the participant about his or her experience at a general level, or within a psychological attitude. These levels of explication are properly left to later procedures carried out by the existential-phenomenological psychological researcher.

Some natural scientific researchers might object at this point and assert that an interview may be a great source of confusion, distortion and contamination (cf. Giorgi 1986). Qualitative research interviewing has to address that objection seriously in terms of specific skills, as Kvale (1983,1996) does in detail. However, at a more fundamental level, existential-phenomenological researchers would contend, with Todres (1990, pp. 77-78), that understanding “the *meaning* of an experience is more likely to be enhanced through dialogue rather than be reduced by it. The crucial distinction is between *facilitative* and *non-facilitative* dialogue, rather than between ‘raw’ and ‘contaminated’ data”. So the vital difference is not between ‘leading questions’ and some hypothetical notion of a ‘neutral stimulus’, but between questions that help *ground the dialogue in a particular lived experience* and questions that tend to lead to generalisations, abstractions and theorising.

A further question, and possible objection to the interview as a method for eliciting data, could be conceived and argued in terms of what is sometimes referred to as the ‘power differential’ (Cieurzo & Keitel 1999, p. 70) between the researcher and the interviewee. In this research four factors contributed to minimising this power differential in each interview:

- (1) The research participants were all volunteers who had carefully read and signed the informed consent form.
- (2) In the interview situation, the research participants were given the freedom to express only those aspects of their experience of insight with which they felt comfortable.
- (3) Three of the four research participants were experienced and mature individuals who had already published some material related to their experience of insight.
- (4) All four research participants were reminded that the purpose of the interview was to gain an *understanding of the experience* of insight rather than *analysing the individual*. This was of

particular importance for one research participant who had been in therapy with me three years before. This presented a particular challenge, which I addressed by doing a personal reflection seeking to explicate the differences between the roles of researcher and therapist. This was done in order to raise my conscious level of awareness, so as to enable appropriate functioning in the research situation.

It is submitted that the combination of all four factors above affectively limited the ‘power differential’ in the interview situation and facilitated dialogue revealing valuable data about the research participants’ experiences of insight.

3.7.2 Characteristics of a Qualitative Interview

Kvale (1983) lists nine important characteristics of a qualitative research interview which have informed and guided my approach, so I include a brief summary provided by Todres:

1. One is theme-centred rather than person-centred; that is, interested in common structures revealed by the interviewee’s life-world.
2. One seeks to understand the *meaning* of phenomena in the interviewee’s life-world; that is, the interviewer covers the factual as well as the meaningful level ...
3. One is interested in the *quality* of the phenomenon; that is, the interviewer aims to obtain as many nuanced descriptions from the qualitative aspects of the interviewee’s life-world as possible.
4. One is *descriptive* in emphasis; that is, although interpretations and reflections may become part of the dialogue, the interviewer actively represents the importance of returning to the description of the experience as lived.
5. One is *specific* in emphasis; that is, the interviewer encourages descriptions of concrete situations and action sequences more than general opinions and reflective conclusions.
6. One attempts to be open to new and unexpected phenomena; that is, the interviewer is critically self-conscious of his/her own ongoing presuppositions.
7. One is focussed on certain themes; that is, the interviewer represents what the focus of interest is, but within this, allows as much non-directive freedom as possible.

8. One is open for *ambiguities of meaning*; that is, when ambiguities of meaning arise the interviewer helps to clarify the nature of the ambiguity and reflect it as such, or else clears up the ambiguity when it merely involves a misunderstanding.
9. One is sensitive to the ethics of the situation; that is, the interviewer should ensure that the experience is a positive one for the interviewee and that adequate ethical protection, such as confidentiality, is ensured. (Todres 1990, pp. 79-80)

3.7.3 Methodological Implications of the Interview

I interviewed each research participant at some length (usually between one and a half and two hours). While acknowledging that the interview needs to be essentially theme-centred, I did not start the interview with the central research question as detailed in section 3.6.3. I began by trying to establish a relationship of trust in which the participant, his or her background, as well as the context of the experience, could be understood as fully as possible. For this reason, I thought my research participants would be more at ease in their own homes and offices and therefore interviewed each one in his or her own place. Hagan (1986, p. 352) articulates my core belief in this respect when he says “significant knowledge of human life is obtainable by a genuine human relationship, not by a technical one”. It did not seem necessary to include all of this preliminary conversation in the transcriptions of the interviews.

Therapeutic experience is clear: the quality of listening and of mutual rapport greatly enhances the quality of the lived experience recalled and shared, in this case, by the research participant. Wertz and van Zuuren (1987) refer to the following “clinical skills” that are required to facilitate a qualitative research interview: being able to listen in depth, to summarize and to take the whole context into consideration, to be sensitive to implicit aspects of human expression, and to create a research situation of mutual trust and understanding.

The point at which I posed the central research question marked a turning point in each interview, from the general to the particular experience of insight and from the person-centred to the theme-centred focus of the interview.

3.7.4 Practical Matters Relating to the Interview

With the permission of the research participant, each interview was audio-tape recorded and then transcribed in order to obtain a written text of the interview (subsequently referred to as a protocol) which formed the basis for the step-by-step process for the analysis, described in section 3.6.8. A part of the agreement before the recording took place was that the researcher would submit the transcription to the research participant, for verification. The understanding was that at this point the research participant had the freedom to change, enlarge upon or delete anything so that he or she felt entirely happy with the final product. Interestingly, all of the research participants accepted the transcribed texts as they were, with the exception of a single word change by one participant. It had also been agreed previously that no attempt would be made to change the text from a verbal account to a more polished or sophisticated written account since it was regarded as valuable to conserve the immediacy of the interview.

3.8 The Procedure for the Analysis of the Protocols

The primary objective of the procedure is to arrive at a general structure of the experience of insight. This requires a disciplined series of steps which help to ensure that the interpretations of the researcher are rigorously informed by the protocols.

The meanings that are articulated in the general description are never considered “totalised” as Levinas (1969) expresses it, nor are they regarded as “universal” in Giorgi’s (1985, p. 50) terminology. The reason for this is that “fresh perspectives will undoubtedly further our understanding as different contexts of understanding take historical root. This is as it should be, as understanding always occurs within particular cultural and historical situations” (Todres 1990, p. 83).

The protocols were subjected to defined steps of procedural discipline primarily pioneered by Giorgi (1975,1983,1985a&b,1986,1989a&b,1994,2000,2004). Slight variations of this method have been described by, inter alia, Collaizzi (1978), Hoek (1988), Polkinghorne (1989), Stones (in Kruger 1988) and Wertz (1983,1985).

Each step of the procedure helps the primary task of analysing, understanding and explicating the structure of the experience of insight. It is something akin to the process of focussing a pair of binoculars; first, one eye clarifying the specific, explicit, and situated event, then shifting the focus for the other eye, clarifying the implicit and referential meanings, until both are magnified and in sharp focus.

The following steps are essentially based on Giorgi (1975) and additionally described by Polkinghorne (1989) and Todres (1990).

3.8.1 Obtaining a Sense of Each Protocol as a Whole Experience (Step 1)

Each protocol is re-read as many times as is necessary in order to get a feeling and understanding of it as a whole experience. Such a reading is, as Todres (1990, p. 84) points out, already active in two ways:

- (1) The researcher seeks to be immersed in the *world* of the research participant's description by becoming disciplined and attuned to being open to such a world. This requires the suspension or bracketing of preconceptions as much as possible. According to Todres (1990, p. 84): "[t]his constitutes a broadly phenomenological attitude".
- (2) The researcher focuses on a particular *lived experience* within that world, in this case an experience of insight. This requires an experiential focus and an ability and method of understanding such experience. As Todres (1990, p. 84) puts it: "[t]his constitutes a broadly psychological attitude".

This sense of the experience-as-a-whole is essential before going on to attempt to analyse the individual parts of the experience in the subsequent steps of the procedure. It also may, hopefully, serve at an intuitive level to prevent distortions in the interpretation of the *parts*, creating sufficient awareness of the *whole*, and enabling one to be aware of the inter-relationships of the parts, while attempting to articulate what those relationships are.

3.8.2 Discerning and Numbering Meaning Units (Step 2)

This step involves discerning and numbering meaning units (MU) that seem to express a self-contained meaning or constituent part of the experience of insight from a psychological perspective. This second step refines the contextual understanding achieved in the previous step by focusing on discreet changes of meaning within the larger context of each individual protocol.

So each protocol is re-read with the following question in mind: “At what stage in the protocol is there a change of meaning of the situation for the research participant in terms of his/her experience of insight?” This question reflects the adoption of a psychological attitude in which the researcher is interested in how the protocol says different things about the psychological nature of the phenomenon in question, that is, about qualitative changes in the experience for the participant.

At this stage the protocol is left intact: both the order of the units as well as the language of the research participant remains as transcribed from the interview. Changes in meaning are simply numbered and referred to as MUs. The purpose of numbering each change in meaning is to indicate that each part is to be considered a relevant constituent of the *experience as a whole*.

The discernment of MUs is significantly different from a “content analysis” where “elements” can be listed separately from their inter-relationship. MUs are, rather, *constituents* of the whole lived experience, in that they retain their identity as contextual parts of the research participant’s specific experience (Polkinghorne 1989).

The objective of this second step of discerning MUs is to provide a standard of discipline by which as many nuances of meaning as possible can be taken into account when articulating the general structure.

3.8.3 Stating the Meaning That Dominates Each Meaning Unit (Step 3)

This third step is the first transformation of the data from the research participant’s words to the researcher’s words. It involves stating the meaning that dominates each meaning unit as simply and concisely as possible in the researcher’s own words, while retaining the situated context in

which the experience of insight occurred to the participant. This is an attempt to express in an explicit way the implicit psychological aspects of the MU which is referred to as a transformed meaning unit (TMU).

So each MU is re-read with the following questions in mind: “[w]ithin the total context of this protocol what does this change of meaning tell me about [the participant’s] experience of insight?” and “[h]ow can I express this constituent of the whole in such a way that it does justice to the concrete situation, yet emphasises its more general psychological properties?” (Todres 1990, p. 87).

3.8.4 Interrogating Each Transformed Meaning Unit (Step 4)

In this fourth step the researcher works with the MUs (Step 2) and their first transformations, TMUs (Step 3), with the following questions in mind: “*What* is the experience of insight?”, “*How* does the experience of insight come about?” and “*Where* does this constituent of the whole lived experience fit into the process or structure of gaining insight?”

This is the second transformation by the researcher and reveals the structure of the experience of insight (the *what?*), reveals the style (the *how?*) and also reveals the constituent part of the whole (the *where?*) for this particular participant in this particular context. This is referred to as an “interrogated transformed meaning unit” (ITMU) and is expressed in psychological and phenomenological terms.

Polkinghorne, (in Valle & Halling 1989, p. 55), acknowledges that the transformation of an MU from the subject’s everyday language into a statement using psychological terms to describe the phenomenon being investigated as “one of the most difficult aspects of the data analysis process”. The transformations are necessary because the original descriptions given by the participants are usually naïve regarding psychological structures and often contain multiple and blended references. Yet it has to be acknowledged that in a few cases where the research participant has used particularly vivid, pertinent and psychologically revealing language, the original word or phrase is more powerful than any psychological terminology.

The transformation is not accomplished through abstraction or formalisation, nor does it remain at the level of the linguistic expressions as in content analysis, but focuses on the *experience* to which the language refers. The transformation “goes through” the everyday language to the reality it describes. This “going through”, according to Polkinghorne (in Valle & Halling 1989, p. 55), is accomplished by two thought processes: *reflection* and *imaginative variation*.

The process of *reflection* involves a careful and sensitive reading of an expression to answer the questions: “What is truly being described in the MU?” and “What is absolutely essential to understand the psychological dynamic operating here?”

The process of *imaginative variation* is a way of testing the answers initially suggested by the process of reflection. It is a type of mental experimentation in which the researcher intentionally alters, through imagination, various aspects of the experience, either subtracting from, or adding to, the *proposed transformation*, in order to stretch it until it no longer describes the experience underlying the participant’s naïve description.

A test of the correctness of an ITMU is that one can work backwards from the transformed expression to the original naïve expression. A further test is that such ITMUs must be *verifiable* by other researchers who agree independently that the transformed meaning does describe a psychological process that is, in fact, contained in the original expression. Giorgi (1989b, p. 73) reports that this degree of “inter-subjective agreement is surprisingly high”.

3.8.5 Synthesising These Interrogated Transformed Meaning Units into a Descriptive Situated Structural Statement (Step 5)

This fifth step involves an activity of synthesis and integration whereby the themes are highlighted in such a way as to reveal the unity of the experience as well as the specific contextual factors which go to make up the experience of insight.

So, according to Polkinghorne (1989, p. 54), this situated structural statement (SSS) of essential non-redundant psychological meanings for the whole protocol “continues to include the concreteness and specifics of the situation”, in which the research participant’s experience of

insight took place. This description answers the question “[w]hat is the psychological structure of [insight] as it presented itself to this participant in this particular situation?” (Polkinghorne 1989, p. 54).

In this fifth step the ITMUs are related to each other and to the sense of the whole protocol, while the researcher works with the following questions in mind: “How can I express the relationship between this ITMU and the experience as a whole?” and “Have the themes that I am synthesising sufficiently included this particular meaning?” and finally “What is the psychological structure of insight as it present itself to this participant in this particular situation?”

This step in the process involves a “back and forth” movement in which the generalities of the “emerging situated structure” are checked against the specifics of the ITMUs. It also includes a balance between a level of generality that is not repetitive, and a description that retains enough specific details of the context of the experience. It also incorporates the ordering of relevant meanings as well as the exclusion of irrelevant or repetitive meanings.

In this process, the researcher attempts in Todres (1990, p. 88) words to: “penetrate the meaning of the experience for each participant by reflecting not only on the explicit dimensions of what had been described, but on implicit dimensions as well”. This involves a degree of insightful interpretation that is aided by a phenomenological and psychological perspective.

The validity of the SSS can be judged inter-subjectively by other readers who may evaluate whether the description is insightful and retains a good degree of specificity and internal coherence.

3.8.6 Developing a General Structural Statement (Step 6)

In this sixth step the movement is from individuality to generality and the focus is on those aspects of the experience included in the protocol that are trans-situational or descriptive of the phenomena in general. So the researcher works with the following questions in mind: “What aspects of this experience transcend this particular context of the participant?” and “What is typical of the phenomenon?” as well as “What meanings persist through these factual variations?” as suggested by Todres (1990, p. 89).

In developing a description at the level of a “general structural statement” (GSS) it is important to recognise that “the description does not claim to be of a universal structure of consciousness, but it is claimed as having a general validity beyond the specific situation of the [participant]” (Polkinghorne 1989, p. 55).

The phenomenological process of *synthesis* is different from a process that adds up, or lists together, a series of elements; it requires an eidetic seeing of the whole. *In the grasp of the whole, the constituents are understood.* So this is an attempt to “grasp the relation of the essential meanings through their coherence” (Aanstoos 1986, p. 92). It is this process that distinguishes phenomenological synthesis from an inductive process or simple generalisation procedure. The researcher may move through these six steps with each participant’s protocol, developing a separate general description of the situated structure for each one. However, if the researcher begins with multiple protocols, Giorgi (1985, p. 19) concedes that producing a general description for each protocol *may* not be necessary, since “[t]he more subjects there are the greater the variations and hence the better the ability to see what is essential”. In the light of this it is clear that, when working with a number of research participants, this step of a GSS may anticipate and merge into the next and final step.

3.8.7 Elucidating a Comprehensive Structural Statement (Step 7)

In this final step the researcher directly elucidates and synthesises the findings into a single, consistent, systematic, essential and comprehensive structural description of the whole experience of insight from all the protocols. This is a “Comprehensive Structural Statement” (CSS), so features that are essentially invariant across individual experiences are thus retained.

This involves the reflective penetration into individual psychological structures in the light of other participant’s structures of experience of insight in order to find common features that are sometimes implicit. In this regard, Wertz’s (1983) suggestions for engaging in a general psychological analysis provided useful guidelines.

In this step, time and energy were devoted to allowing for the emergence of *themes* that recurred and were common to all of the research participants’ experiences. Their direct quotes explicitly

expressing, or implicitly revealing, these themes were then selected. This was not only to validate the themes but also to allow each one's own words describing his or her experience to draw us more deeply and more directly into that particular research participant's experience of that particular theme of insight.

So this final step involves movement from individuality to comprehensiveness. All the diverse individual experiences of insight are understood to contribute towards a comprehensive understanding of its psychological structure and nature. The aim is to establish what is typical of the phenomena, namely the experience of insight, and to express such typicality in a comprehensive, insightful and integrated manner.

It is recognised that Steps **6** and **7** may be conflated into a single step if the general structural statement (Step **6**) does not need to be done for each research participant individually, but can be done for all the research participants together (Step **7**), as proved to be the case in this study.

The next chapter focuses on the preliminary study and my initial attempt to apply the methodology described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE PRELIMINARY STUDY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with the purpose of this preliminary study, and the introduction of the research participant chosen for this learning experience. Following this there is an explanation of why it was necessary to focus on just one part of the interview selected for study, before presenting the *verbal text* (interview transcription) relating to Cartoon 5 with meaning units (MUs). Then the focus shifts to seven lessons learned from this verbal text and the way that it helped me to develop an understanding of, and to explore ways to slightly modify, the application of the methodology. The situated structural statement (SSS) is then expressed. Finally the extension of the study is explained and the focus turns to the application of the methodology to the *visual text* (Cartoon 5 itself), and why it is necessary to give consideration to the *context* (of the historical and socio-political *sitz in leben*) of the cartoon.

4.2 The Purpose of the Preliminary Study

There was no intention, as is the case with some quantitative research methodology, of excluding the data from the preliminary study from the main study. There were four main aims for the preliminary study:

- (1) establishing a working model of how the research might be conducted.
- (2) defining the researcher's learning curve and honing qualitative research interviewing skills using an audio tape recorder.
- (3) testing the viability of the research question and this particular approach to the specific phenomenon of insight.
- (4) gaining practice at handling the protocols with the various steps in the existential-phenomenological research methodology selected and described in the previous chapter.

4.3 The Research Participant

Tony Grogan, my research participant for the preliminary study, who has already been introduced in section 3.6.6, is an established and highly respected artist, as well as the cartoonist for the newspaper the *Cape Times*. He has also illustrated many publications and produced numerous books of his own paintings of various scenes and characters throughout Southern Africa. He was clear that, as his work was already in the public domain, he did not require or desire anonymity and, as the following interview will reveal, spoke freely and fully about his work. We also have a good personal relationship which extends over a number of years and which made the interview easier, but may have also complicated my analysis. I shall comment on that as one of the lessons learnt after the interview, which follows. His friendship and forgiving nature was put to the test early on because after a few minutes of the interview I decided on an impulse to check that the recording was working, and discovered to my horror that the tape was blank. He took it in his stride and we began again. As a result, I learnt to do a test *before* starting interviews.

4.4 The Selection of one Part of the Interview for Study

The additional interview material in Appendix A, reveals that I was not sufficiently focused in the interview on the material directly relevant for this particular study of insight. I was not wanting to exclude anything that might reveal something about the nature of **Tony's** experience of insight. In the initial stages of talking about the interview we looked briefly at nine different cartoons, to see what might be appropriate, covering a period of approximately ten years of his work, particularly during the height of the struggle for justice in South Africa. As researcher, I gradually became aware of feeling overwhelmed and of the need to focus in more detail on one particular cartoon. It was also at this stage that I introduced my central research question. This is the point at which the interview below begins, in which ... signifies a pause in the conversation and numbers in brackets e.g. (1) refer to contextual notes which follow in section 4.5.

MU1

John: I wonder whether at this stage it would be appropriate to look in more detail at a specific example. Would you be happy to do that?

Tony: All right.

John: It would be really helpful, Tony, if you could describe a lived experience of insight – whether it's gradual or sudden – in which you saw or understood something which you were then able to express in your work as a cartoonist. If you could describe it in detail, in particular the lived experience, the context of what happened before, during and up to how you executed it, and if possible focussing on what you thought, what you felt, what you did at the time.

Tony: Can we stop at this point while we just choose one? (pause of about 5 minutes)

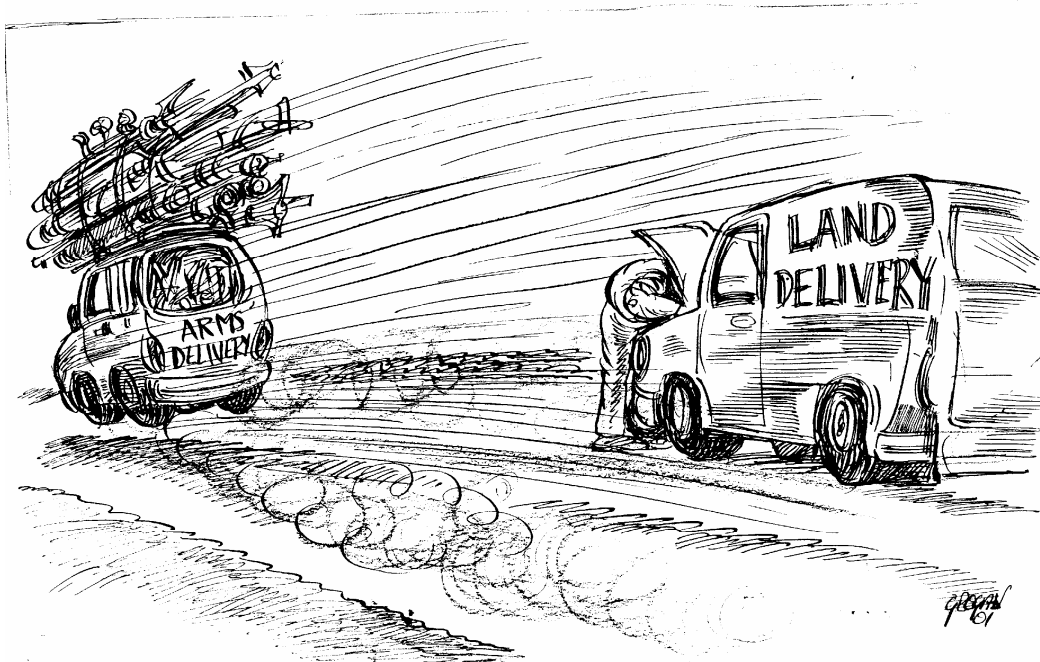


Figure 12. Tony's Cartoon 5

John: So Tony can you describe this cartoon and how it came to you?

MU2

Tony: This cartoon (Cartoon 5) came in the wake of the removal (1) of the squatters (2) from Bredell (3), from underneath the power lines. There was a rich irony here, because it

was so reminiscent of what used to take place under the old apartheid regime (4). So it obviously fixated my attention immediately.

MU3

Tony: Of course, the new government, the ANC, having to do the same thing, which is a very cruel process, so I felt I needed to say something ... demolishing shacks (5) in the middle of winter again ... the poorest of the poor ... the defenceless, and applying the letter of the law (6) once again. Obviously in a different context.

MU4

Tony: But I thought, what do I say about this? I had in fact commented on what I saw as the injustice of it, the cruelty of it, (see Cartoons 7 & 8 in Appendix A) but here I was involved with another issue, I just thought now, while the government is quite prepared to remove these people from the land, they have been particularly tardy over the years in resolving this whole land question (7), and there is no housing problem here, it is just a question of getting people a bit of land on which they can erect their own houses.

MU5

Tony: So really what was preoccupying me here was thinking about how much land was available, how effective the government has been in releasing this land for occupation, to all these marginalised people who have been flooding to the urban areas (8).

MU6

Tony: And in the process I thought they will probably say they haven't got the money, which is the usual excuse ... explanation. And then I thought, well, money is a problem, money is always a problem.

MU7

Tony: But if you look at another issue on which they have been very speedy to make decisions, that is the whole arms deal (9) which is highly questionable. Then I was sort of thinking about priorities, you know what are the priorities here? I thought of ... if you need all these arms, there must be a massive enemy just over the horizon (10), and then I thought of course that a bigger enemy to me, and one that could cause far greater

destabilisation to the present government, is poverty (11) rather than some vague enemy which might arise in the future (see Cartoon 6 in Appendix A).

MU8

Tony: So it made me think of the two issues – the one where the government was definitely failing to perform, and the other one where they were very quick.

MU9

Tony: I was thinking of the kind of images I wanted to use here. I always try to think of a symbol or a metaphor which is appropriate to the subject, like for example if I am thinking about the health services I like to use images or symbols which are associated with health like a hospital building or a figure of a person who is in a state of ill-health, or x-rays. If I want to say the health system is going to pot, I don't want to have a sinking ship, for example, because the image is inappropriate.

MU10

Tony: So here it is a question of delivery, and the obvious thing really in delivery ... I don't know whether this is entirely appropriate ... but delivering land ... it's a delivery van.

John: Now how did the thought of a delivery van come to you?

Tony: Well I think in the back of my mind there is this whole question of the government's tardiness in delivery in a whole lot of areas. And I know my colleague and fellow cartoonist, Jonathan Shapiro on the *Weekly Mail* and the *Sowetan*, he's got a little scooter, but I've always thought of it as a van being something which can pack more things so I mean that's a vehicle – a vehicle of ideas too – for delivery. I think that's something that I've used in several cartoons, this delivery van idea, which people might hopefully associate with.

MU11

John: And was that a sort of word association, or did you see it as a metaphor?

Tony: I think the word was connected ... *delivery*. Something that people can associate with. I mean you've got to set up some concrete image in people's minds, that's what you're doing. You try to devise the particular for the general, the concrete for the abstract. So that's my concrete symbol for that abstract idea of delivery.

MU12

Tony: **In devising a cartoon, I am trying to think of something funny as well, because my particular style of cartooning leans towards the lampoon rather than the sombrely satirical. So I always try to think of something amusing, which isn't to be flippant about the whole issue, but just simply entertains and makes it more readable.**

MU13

Tony: **So I thought of the arms deal, and that to equate the two you'd have to have two delivery vehicles. And what more appropriate delivery vehicle could you have than a Mercedes Benz (12), particularly a 4x4 which people immediately associate with this whole issue of the arms deal. So the Mercedes Benz also reflects on the corruption. So it raises the question of why has the government been so speedy in delivering arms. Is it because there are people standing to benefit from it? Because I think that's the issue of that vehicle there, carrying a whole load of rockets, guns, armaments on the roof rack.**

MU14

John: **So was that (pointing to the broken down Land Delivery vehicle) the first part of the cartoon that came to you, as it were?**

Tony: **No, I think this was (pointing to the Arms Delivery vehicle). They're delivering that. Now I've got to have a vehicle for that, and I think I thought an appropriate military vehicle would be a Casspir or a Tank, something like that. And then I thought, no, wait a bit, the 4x4 is far more appropriate, because it brings another allusion into the whole thing.**

MU15

Tony: **And also it occurs to me that this 4x4 can move at great speed as well, that's why it's overtaken that land delivery truck (13), which has actually broken down. I didn't have any particular figure, I just had an anonymous figure which represents the government, sort of fiddling round with the innards (engine) of that thing ... the land delivery truck. But it's all systems go for arms delivery, and I took quite a lot of delight in using those comic devices of speed ... lines ... and dust and what have you. The car suspended ... flying over the surface of the road like that gives it the added impression of speed.**

MU16

John: **It sounds as if this came to you gradually ... you had to work at it.**

Tony: **Yes, things do come like that. Sometimes you're lucky and something just comes to you, in a flash like that. You know that's a moment of happy inspiration. But most of these cartoons come as a result of quite a long process ... of associations.**

MU17

John: **And was that one working away here at your desk, or did *part* of that occur to you more spontaneously one evening?**

Tony: **No, that was a process of sitting at that desk there and just thinking it out. People say "Do you draw the ideas, or do they develop ... ?" Not really, I think up the idea first, and I make a few scribbles ... but it's a process of conceptualising. Other people say to me, if I'm introduced as a cartoonist, "Is that all you do?" (laughter). They look at the cartoon and say that it must be great, to sit down and draw something.**

John: **They have no idea of all the thought and work you do. (Laughter).**

MU18

Tony: **The process is the thing. You've got to feed in quite a lot of information, because I think that informs the cartoon as well. You should have a pretty good background idea of the facts pertaining to that particular issue, having cogitated about it and having thought it through. You know, and then go on to the conceptualisation of the cartoon itself. So all those things inform the cartoon. And I think your general attitude to things is pretty important.**

John: **That's a lovely cartoon.**

Tony: **I don't think there's much more I can say about that.**

John: **I don't think you need to. That's great. Thank you.**

I now turn to the broader *context* of Tony's experience, especially for those not familiar with these events in South Africa, around the remarkable transition to democracy. It might also be a useful *aide memoire* for some South Africans. I will seek to explicate the social, political and historical embedded quality of key terms and events referred to in this interview, by numbers in brackets.

4.5 The Context

Tony commented in the interview that “the first thing in the morning is to comb through the news in the *Cape Times*, because I focus more on the *Cape Times* because that’s what the readers are familiar with”. So the *Cape Times* is used as a source to explicate the socio-political-cultural context of key terms, as it relates directly to the cartoon used and gives clear contextual information and commentary about the events at the time at which the cartoon was produced. I am aware that this would not necessarily be part of the application of the existential-phenomenological methodology that has been selected, and yet it seems appropriate and hopefully helpful, as an *aide memoire*, as well as part of my own learning process in this preliminary study.

(1) **Removals.** These were not voluntary but were forced removals. It is estimated that between 1960 and 1982, 3.5 million people were victims of forced removals in South Africa. The *Cape Times* reported on 10th July 2001, the day that Tony’s Cartoon 5 appeared, that “Pretoria High Court Justice Carel Rabie heard final arguments on the government’s application for an interim order to have thousands of land invaders at Bredell, near Kempton Park, evicted from the land”.

(2) **Squatters.** They are defined in Encarta World English Dictionary as “illegal occupants of land or property”, but in the first world we think immediately of a squatter as somebody who takes over and lives in somebody else’s empty house. This situation in South Africa at the time was very different. It was estimated that 14 million people in South Africa are landless. The Congress of South African Trades Unions (COSATU) was reported in the *Cape Times* of 10th July 2001 as saying of the Bredell squatters that “their hunger for land and houses is a symptom of a crisis affecting thousands of poor landless people”. The counsel representing the squatters at the Pretoria High Court, according to the same report, argued that “returning the squatters to the ‘slums’ from which they had come, posed more of a health hazard than keeping them in the area of Bredell”. The *Cape Times* of 5th July 2001 reported that before being evicted from the site, 37 year-old chemist Mazibuko said he had come from the poverty-stricken Thembisa Settlement nearby, after learning that land was available for R25 per plot. “I am tired of sharing a house with eight people in my family. I have never had privacy and I think it is time to get my own place”. Mother of seven, Martha Mduli, 44, said it was unclear if the sale was legal, but she felt

that there was little to lose because the home shared in Thembisa had no electricity, running water or sanitation, and was cramped and cold.

(3) **Bredell.** The *Cape Times* of 10th July 2001 reported that “the saga started when Pan African Congress (PAC) members allocated people land in Bredell in exchange for a R25 fee”. The editorial of the *Cape Times* of 6th July 2001 stated that “the hundreds of acres of land being occupied by thousands of squatters belonged partly to parastatals, Transnet and Eskom, and partly to two farmers”. Tony, in conceiving Cartoon 5, was very aware that to some extent this was “public” land, and under the control of the Minister of Public Enterprises, which sharpened his sense of irony about the government having to remove the Bredell squatters from this land. See also cartoon 8 in Appendix A.

(4) **Apartheid Regime.** This was the way that the apartheid government and oppressive legislation were referred to by those involved in the struggle for justice in South Africa. The Defence Force during the apartheid years was always first and foremost an instrument of domestic policy, and the Police Force was very widely used to enforce unjust legislation.

(5) **Demolishing Shacks.** This activity was characteristic of the apartheid regime in order to enforce the unjust Group Areas Act. It was usually done in a ruthless and heartless manner, frequently during the rainy season and often starting in the very early hours of the morning before people were awake. Housing lies at the core of the new government’s Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The urban housing backlog was estimated in 2001 at 1,4 million units.

(6) **Letter of the Law.** This refers not to the letter of the apartheid legislation, but by contrast to just laws to protect land and property. The *Cape Times* of 9th July 2001 reported that the ANC spokesperson, Smuts Ngonyana, appealed to South Africans to see the PAC as “an organization of agents provocateurs, masquerading as a caring liberation movement when they are hypocrites...who jump at the...opportunity to exploit the plight of our people with the sole purpose of lining their own pockets”. The sensitivity of the issue and the importance of the “letter of the law” was emphasized by President Thabo Mbeki’s spokesperson, Bheki Khumalo, who underlined that “the government would not tolerate illegal land invasions. This is not a

banana republic” with an obvious allusion to the situation in neighbouring Zimbabwe. See also cartoon 7 in Appendix A.

(7) **Land Question.** In the *Cape Times* of 9th July 2001 it was reported that the PAC announced it would convene a Land Summit, as it had given up hope that the government would prioritise the land issue. The crucial importance of this issue was clearly illustrated by the fact that the Pretoria High Court trial hearing final arguments on the government’s application for an interim order to have squatters evicted from the land on 10th July 2001, was marked, according to the *Cape Times* of the same date, by the attendance of senior government representatives, namely Safety and Security Minister, Steve Tshewete, and Agriculture and Land Affairs Minister, Thoko Didiza. PAC Chief Whip, Patricia de Lille, said “the ANC is so used to blaming apartheid, capitalism and the PAC, that it forgets it is in power. It has failed to put in place a proper land policy. There is no comparison between us and Zimbabwe, but we should take note of (events) there. The government must make land reform a priority and not buying arms and building an elite”.

(8) **Urbanisation.** The worldwide process of urbanisation has been distorted in South Africa as a result of the Group Areas Act, reserving historic and developed urban areas for Whites, so the natural process of urbanisation was criminalised for the majority of the South African population. With the abolishment of apartheid legislation there had naturally been a tidal wave of previously historically disadvantaged people flooding to better-resourced urban areas.

(9) **Arms Deal.** The main components of the Arms Deal were three submarines and four 25,000 ton corvettes for the Navy; thirty light utility helicopters and big G-6 guns for the Army; Rooivolk helicopters and twenty-four Hawk lead-in fighter Pilatus trainers and twenty-eight Grippin advanced fighter aircraft for the Airforce. The significance of this Arms Deal needs to be seen against the background of the Police and Defence Force being used against the National Party’s political foes inside the country, as well as de-stabilising neighbouring countries in bloody cross-border raids. In addition to this, there were phenomenal budgetary increases to the military, particularly under P.W. Botha. As the time of Tony’s Cartoon 5, heated discussions were taking place prior to the first day of the Public Hearings into the controversial R43 billion arms deal in Pretoria, under the chairmanship of Public Protector, Selby Baqua. It began on 12th July 2001 and was scheduled to last for several months. The *Cape Times* of 20th June 2001

reported that the Public Protector, the National Directorate of Public Prosecutions, and the Auditor General's office were then investigating between forty and fifty allegations of wrongdoing in the Arms Deal at the request of parliament's watchdog Public Accounts Committee.

(10) **Enemy Just Over the Horizon.** The duplicitously-named Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB) specialised in the assassination of apartheid's opponents, within and outside the country. Ironically, despite the urgency and massive financial implications of the Arms Deal, the National Intelligence Agency was unable to identify a single obvious or clear military enemy, or threat to South Africa, in the continent. See also cartoon **6** in Appendix **A**.

(11) **Poverty.** Unemployment was estimated to be more than 40% of the economically-active population. Disparity in income, still largely racially based, was among the greatest in the world. On the 2nd July 2001, South Africa's churches, the AIDS Treatment Campaign, Trade Unions, and voluntary sector bodies, launched a campaign for R100 per month grant to the 25 million people (that is, half the total population) estimated to be living below the poverty line.

(12) **Mercedes Benz 4x4.** In the *Cape Times* of 9th May 2001 the front page news heading was: "Yengeni should face probe into his 4x4, says Registrar". On page 4 of the same edition, it was reported that the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS) admitted it facilitated special deals on Mercedes Benz motor vehicles to at least 30 prominent South Africans, and that it provided ANC Chief Whip, Tony Yengeni, with a 4x4 Mercedes Benz while he was Chair of Parliament's Joint Committee on Defence. In the light of the fact that previous decisions were reversed and German frigates and submarines were purchased, the symbolism of a German Mercedes Benz is powerful. It should also be noted that expensive off-road vehicles, of which the Mercedes 4x4 is a classic example, are often status symbols of the very wealthy, are sometimes used to intimidate other road users, and frequently never go off-road except to mount the pavement to get into a parking space in Cape Town.

(13) **Land Delivery.** The *Cape Times* of 6th July 2001 reports Idasa's analyst, Sean Jacobs, as saying "the government is still a long way from achieving its reform targets set in 1994, and adjusted last year (2000). Of 65,000 claims for restitution lodged, only 12,000 have been settled". According to statistics provided by the Department of Land Affairs, just 2% of the land had been transferred to claimants by January 2001. This was in stark contrast to the

government's 1994 Land Reform Target set out in RDP, to transfer 30% of land within a 5-year period. In March 2000, Land Affairs Minister, Thoko Didiza, said the target was unrealistic, promising the transfer of 15% of land by 2005. Hence the comment by Tony of a figure "fiddling round with the innards (engine)" of the land delivery vehicle in Cartoon 5.

4.6 The Verbal Text

As a result of working with the verbal material of this interview as a preliminary study, I learned some valuable lessons which are enumerated below.

(1) In reviewing the interview, I became aware of the richness and bewildering variety of the material and wasn't sure how to handle it, so took the decision to focus on the *verbal text* given in section 4.5, relating to Tony's description of just one cartoon, namely Cartoon 5, which we had selected together.

(2) I found it helpful to read the written text of the protocol out loud, rather than silently to myself, while entering imaginatively into the participant's way-of-being-in-the-world, and tuning in empathically to the lived experience of insight being described.

(3) Despite narrowing the field as described in point 1, it dawned on me that I had underestimated the density of this material and initially demarcated just five MUs (step 2). Becoming more familiar with the subtle shifts of meaning, I increased the number of MUs three-fold to eighteen, as indicated in the text. This enabled me to work in a more focused way.

(4) In attempting to articulate the meaning that dominates each MU (step 3), I was initially trying to be too comprehensive and not sufficiently simple and concise. As a result, I was tending to anticipate the next step in the process of interrogating the MU.

(5) I also experienced difficulty, in step 4, in finding the right psychological language in which to express my understanding of the *what* and the *how* of the process. It was a relief to read Giorgi (1985, p. 19): "A major obstacle for the process is the fact that there is no already established consensual psychological language". So, with relief, like most existential-phenomenological psychological studies, and in particular following Todres (1990, p. 87), I adopted non-technical,

everyday language to describe how a person in such a situation is feeling, thinking, acting, imagining and relating.

(6) A further difficulty I experienced in step 4 was remaining ‘bracketed’ with the *what* and the *how* questions, perhaps partly because, in the words of my supervisor, “the cartoons are so seductive because they say so much at a glance that one would easily be distracted at the tedious task of chipping away at the core meaning structure”. But it was also because I tended to understand the *how* in terms of requiring an explanation in hermeneutic rather than phenomenological terms. This resulted in a tendency to include information and knowledge not contained in the text, because of my relationship with Tony and involvement in some of the events he was describing. This continued to be a problematic issue with other research participants, and I will return to it in those contexts to reflect on it in greater depth.

(7) Despite this weakness, in working with step 4, I became increasingly aware of the discerning and refining power of each of these steps in the phenomenological method and process. It was not quick or easy, in fact it was slow and painful; but that seemed an inescapable and essential element in the learning process for me, as the two questions of the *what* and the *how* were addressed.

(8) It may be noted that steps 3 and 4 are not in fact included in this preliminary study. The reason is that our home was burgled and among many other things the laptop was stolen. These particular steps, 3 and 4, were the only material that could not be recovered from the memory stick or hard copy. As a result I learned to be much more conscientious about backing-up.

(9) For some time, I experienced considerable confusion with applying the methodology, which was clearly developed to explicate verbal descriptions, to the visual text of the cartoons themselves. I wondered whether I had been foolishly ambitious in attempting to explicate the experience of insight embedded not only in words, but in such seductive cartoons, depicting such fascinating social and political commentary? Was it madness to attempt this in a preliminary study? Probably, but with advice from supervisors I decided that the only way forward was to consider the verbal text, the visual text and the context in turn, but in terms of one another.

(9) Initially I struggled with the issue of time in seeking to explicate the SSS (step 5) because I found it difficult to find a clear *linear* progression in the process. So it was a significant part of the learning process to apply in practice the phenomenological understanding of the “unity of times three dimensions”, which in Heidegger’s (1972, p. 15) words, “consist in the interplay of

each towards each”. In the end, I expressed the SSS in a series of present tenses which inter-relate and connect back and forth, as explained in the next section.

4.7 The Situated Structural Statement

The SSS is expressed in terms of essential, non-redundant, psychological meanings. These meanings are given in a bulleted list because they are not related in a linear or necessarily sequential manner. The present tenses, picked out in bold, demonstrate the way in which aspects of Tony’s process of searching for insight inter-relate and connect back and forth.

- **Scanning** news to gather information and raw material for insight (MU2).
- **Selecting** an issue about which the subject feels passionately (MUs2-3).
- **Exploring** different perspectives of that issue (MUs3-6).
- **Juxtaposing** that issue with other issues, events and priorities (MUs7,15).
- **Conceptualising** what the subject wants to express as an insight (MUs8,17-18).
- **Imagining** appropriate visual symbols, images, ideas and metaphors or words for the insight (MUs9-11).
- **Searching** for something funny that gels as part of the insight (MU12).
- **Experiencing** insight, usually through a long process of associations which may emerge at any stage, either gradually and partially as a series of little insights, or suddenly and more completely formed as a flash of happy inspiration or insight (MUs13-17).
- **Expressing** insight in cartoon form which may trigger further associations or allusions (MU15).
- **Celebrating** the gestalt experience of insight, both at the time of expressing it and afterwards in reflection (MU15).

I have already touched on the seductive quality of the cartoons because they say so much at a glance. So it is to this visual text that I now turn, aware that it is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. I am aware that at this point the usual application of the methodology is being extended, but it would be patently absurd not to focus on the cartoon itself.

4.8 The Visual Text

In the verbal text, considered as the basis for the work on the meaning units, I drew extensively on Tony's specific comments about this particular Cartoon 5 in the qualitative research interview.

Now, in attempting to read the cartoon as text, it is necessary to step back and to get a different and broader perspective by considering this particular cartoon in the light of Tony's general comments about his work as a cartoonist in the qualitative research interview. Here I am also drawing on material in the interview (recorded in Appendix A) which was not considered directly relevant for inclusion in the text for the meaning units. I will attempt this under five themes: cartoons in opposition as an all-or-nothing statement, intended subtlety, unintended interpretations, and play on words. This will be done focusing on Cartoon 5, but illustrating some of the points with other cartoons and material from the extended interview.

Firstly, the theme of opposition: Tony says "cartoons are at their best when they are in opposition" (Appendix A). Clearly Cartoon 5 is intended to be read as a strong statement in opposition to both the speedy delivery of arms, and in contrast to that and therefore strengthening the sense of opposition, the slow delivery of land. Tony goes further: it is not just *cartoons* that are at their best when they are in opposition; the *cartoonist* is at his/her best when passionately opposed. He asserts that during "the apartheid era I found I was at my best, because I felt that I was very much more passionate about issues at stake then. The injustice was horrendous, the folly being pursued by the government at the time was absolutely unbelievable, and I think professionally speaking it was my most inspirational period" (Appendix A). Tony's passion, his anger at injustice, his love for his country and people, as well as his enthusiasm for life and all that is life-enhancing, raises his level of awareness, focuses his thought process, fires his imagination and sharpens his wit and insight. This passion is clearly evident as the source of creative energy in the process of conceptualising Cartoon 5 (as expressed in the verbal text) as well as in the artistic expression and execution of the cartoon (the visual text). As he says, "it's all systems go for arms delivery, and I took quite a lot of delight in using those comic devices of speed ... lines and dust and what-have-you. The car suspended ... flying over the surface of the road like that gives it the added impression of speed" (MU15).

Significantly, the experience of insight forming Cartoon 5 and its sub-text contains *opposition*, expressed by Tony, on at least three different levels, cognitive, behavioural and affective:

- opposition is expressed about problems of political "delivery"; the cartoon is conceptualised at a cognitive level.
- opposition is strengthened by contrasting the slow delivery of land with the speedy delivery of arms; the cartoon articulates a behavioural level.
- opposition is further strengthened and asserted passionately by the artist's "delight in using those comic devices of speed"; the cartoon expresses an affective level.

Secondly, the theme of all-or-nothing: Tony says "a cartoon is a very all-or-nothing statement ... you can't enlarge on the topic, and explain it ... yes, a single-frame photograph, and you can't fudge it around with explanations, ifs and buts, all that sort of thing" (Appendix A). Press and sports photographers are notorious for taking hundreds of shots of which only one may be printed and appear in the paper. In comparing a cartoon to a single-frame photograph, Tony emphasises how many potential cartoons end up on the cutting room floor.

Let me illustrate this by a private conversation I had a number of years ago with the person who devised the brilliant logo for British Rail, shown here in

Figure 13, alongside. I was teasing him, in a good-natured way as a friend, for being "paid so much for doing so little ... just a few lines". "That's the point", he said. "They didn't pay me for drawing those lines;



Figure 13. British Rail Logo

they paid me for all the lines I didn't put in!"... all the unnecessary lines which would have cluttered it up and spoilt the *simplicity* and *power* of it. The logo, like the cartoon, is an "all-or-nothing statement".

Tony reflects on no less than four different possibilities of the issues that he could have expressed in a cartoon focussing on Tony Yengeni in Appendix A:

- The cheap price of the Mercedes and the abuse of Yengeni's parliamentary position.
- The full-page advertisement in the press justifying his position to the public at an estimated cost of R250 000.
- Yengeni's responsibility to parliament as Chief Whip.

- Finally, whether to focus on the European Aeronautical Defence Systems Company (EADS) who made the bribes, rather than on Yengeni himself, before deciding which way to go.

So, one can see how many possibilities ended up on the cutting room floor. In this process there is not only passion but also pain; not only creation but also exclusion. In section 4.5, the text of Tony's lived experience of insight, one can trace in some detail the complex process behind Cartoon 5.

Clearly Cartoon 5 is a powerful "all-or-nothing statement" about the speed of arms delivery compared to the delivery of land which is at a standstill with engine problems on the side of the road. Doubtless the Minister of Land Affairs would be enraged by such an "overstatement". Part of the power of cartoons is to provoke reactions, raise questions and stimulate debate. As Tony, commenting on Cartoon 5, put it: "the Mercedes Benz also reflects on the corruption, so it *raises the question* of why has the government been so speedy in delivering arms. Is it because there are people standing to benefit from it, because I think that's the issue of that vehicle there, carrying a whole load of rockets, guns, armaments on the roof rack" (MU13).

Thirdly, the theme of intended subtlety, symbol, allusion and association: despite the fact that a cartoon is an "all-or-nothing statement", Tony asserts that "hopefully cartoons are fairly subtle. At least, I hope the cartoons I devise can be *read on these different levels*" (Appendix A). As we were discussing the creation of this Cartoon 5, Tony pointed to the land delivery van saying, "I think that's something that I've used in several cartoons, this delivery van idea, which people might hopefully associate with" (MU10). Later in the interview, I asked, "So was that (pointing to the broken-down land delivery vehicle) the *first* part of the cartoon that came to you?"... *assuming* that he was working *from the known* and familiar "van" *to the unknown*, and new "Mercedes Benz vehicle". I was surprised when he replied "No, I think *this* was (pointing to the arms delivery vehicle). They're delivering that. Now I've got to have a vehicle for that ... an appropriate military vehicle would be a Caspir or a Tank, something like that. And then I thought, no, wait a bit, the 4x4 is far more appropriate, because it brings another allusion into the whole thing. And also it occurs to me that this 4x4 can move at great speed as well, that's why it has overtaken that land delivery truck which has actually broken down ... " (MUs14-15).

Fourthly, the theme of unintended interpretation of the cartoon by the person ‘reading’ it. Tony explained in the interview that there was a rock in Namibia known as “The Finger of God”, which was gradually eroded and finally fell as a result of an earthquake. PW Botha was renowned for aggressively wagging his finger as he admonished people ... and here it collapses as he fulminates about the Soweto Uprising (see Cartoon 3. Appendix A). After seeing this cartoon the Director of Cape Flats Distress Association (CAFDA) said to Tony, “How did you get away with that cartoon?” Tony responded, “What do you mean, what was so different about that cartoon that was more actionable than any other cartoons I’ve done?” “Well”, he said “the allusion was to the Finger of God, and that PW Botha thought that he was God”. Tony mused: “It struck me as quite appropriate, though I didn’t think of it consciously, perhaps unconsciously ... the thought might have occurred to me, that the Finger of God was how PW thought of himself” (Appendix A).

That of course, is precisely why the cartoon is so powerful, compared with the written word, because it is very difficult to prove in a Court of Law that Tony had that particular association in mind at the time.

To take another example, when I look at Cartoon 5, I am immediately struck by “LAND DELIVERY” printed on the side of the van where there are no windows, so one cannot easily see in to check the contents of the van. For me, it is a subtle statement about the lack of transparency of the process in addition to the slow delivery of land. Yet at no point does Tony mention this detail; in fact, in subsequent conversation he assured me it was not his conscious intention, so here is another small example of the way that this cartoon makes links and associations in a person's mind. In Tony's own words, "it's the allusion and the parody which people read into things" (Appendix A).

The Mercedes Benz 4x4 has not only become a symbol of corruption in relation to the arms deal, but at other levels 4x4s are often status symbols of the very wealthy, and are sometimes used to intimidate other road users. So there are associations at the level of political and economic corruption, as well as in terms of image, power and prestige. Perhaps the Mercedes Benz 4x4 in Cartoon 5, although *on road* at present, also says, "I can go anywhere, *off-road*, and do anything". It was, after all, drawn before Tony Yengeni, the ANC Chief Whip, had ended up in

jail for corruption in relation to the purchase of this very vehicle. So clearly cartoons like this one "can be read at these different levels" (Appendix A).

Fifthly, and finally, the theme of the relationship between the visual text and play on words: as Tony expressed it in the interview: "I have an advantage of working as a cartoonist in the English language, because the English language is so nuanced; so much ambiguity in it. It's a language that is just made for punning. People say that punning is a feeble sense of humour, but it works incredibly well for cartoons, because you can make all sorts of allusions with the use of puns" (Appendix A).

A particularly clear example of this is cartoon 9 (in Appendix A), where Helen Susman, the iconic opposition Member of Parliament is saying, "What's going on in Lebowa?" and the response is "That's their funeral". People were being killed by the police and the Minister of Justice (Louis Le Grange) was not taking any notice at all – he was just allowing people to bury their dead and not investigating how people died. So Tony concludes: "And I'm sorry to say that *'that's their funeral'* is an appropriate phrase in English to use" (Appendix A).

So in relation to Cartoon 5, I asked Tony, "How did the thought of the delivery van come to you?" He responded, "I've always thought of it as a van being something which can pack more things, so I mean that's a vehicle - a vehicle of ideas too - for delivery ... this delivery van ... I think the word was connected ... *delivery*. Something that people can associate with. I mean you've got to set up some concrete image in people's minds, that's what you're doing. You try to devise the particular for the general, the concrete for the abstract. So that's my concrete symbol for that abstract idea of delivery" (MU10 & 11).

In this preliminary study I have sought to understand Tony's description of his experience of gaining insight for his cartoons in the *verbal text* of the interview, before turning to the broader *context* of these cartoons in terms of socio-political events in South Africa. I then attempted to explicate Tony's unfolding experience of insight in the creation of his cartoons, the *visual text*, as well as the associations and insights that the cartoon prompts for the person viewing or 'reading' it.

4.10 Closing Comments

As I draw this chapter to a close I want to record that at this stage of the research three things were becoming increasingly clear to me:

First, that insight, in Tony's experience at least, is not just the heady, conceptual, intellectual notion, that it is often portrayed as in the Western scientific orientated view. In his experience, it includes passionate feelings, imagination, playfulness, humour, associations, puns, images, metaphors, allusions, artistic ability and more. These non-rational components seem to be as important as the more rational components of scanning news, selection, conceptualisation, verbal dexterity and so forth.

Second, that insight in Tony's experience cannot be isolated and identified as occurring in a single moment; it is embedded like links within a chain. It is not even a straight linear chain; there are all kinds of twists, loops, kinks, and even broken links in it. In Richard Alapack's delightful play on words: you "catch" it at work in his experience; you do not "find" it under the microscope. Therefore the process of focusing narrowly on the *moment* of insight does not seem to do justice to the broader "lived experience" of insight. It is not, as Tony puts it, a "9 to 5 job".

Third, that at the time I felt perplexed and stuck; I didn't have sufficient understanding of existential phenomenology's three ecstasies of time to do justice to the lived reality and complexity of Tony's experience of insight. That was to become much clearer later (see section 7.6).

I recognise that this has been an unusual preliminary study, both in terms of length and variety, with the three dimensions of *verbal text, context and visual text*. However, for me it has been a valuable and rewarding experience, both because of the quality of Tony's material and because of the important learning process. So I wish to submit that it has achieved its purpose as a preliminary study, as well as meriting inclusion with the other three studies that follow, providing a rich variety of four experiences of insight.