What would apophatic Action Research look like?

Learning to consider delicate matters of silence and wonder in professional practices

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Non-knowing is not a form of ignorance but a difficult transcendence of knowledge. This is the price that must be paid to an oeuvre to be, at all times, a sort of pure beginning, which makes its creation an exercise in freedom.
Jean Lescure (1956, p. 78)

Abstract: Inspired by an 'apophatic turn' in theology, philosophy and art, and with insights from existential phenomenology, the article encourages us to step back as actors in order to let life or the phenomenon itself act upon us. This kind of apophatic thinking is not so far away from the thinking of the Norwegian philosopher Olav Eikeland when he describes "Insider and Praxis Action Research". And yet, the apophatic potentials in his way of understanding action research are here elaborated by pointing to three dimensions: the Knowledge-, Being- and Mystery dimensions in a praxis, and to the four ways of seeing praxis from within both a "gnoseology" and an "agnoselogy". The latter being led by a deep sense of wonder followed by what Daoist's call Wu Wei or "effortless actions".

Keywords: Praxis Action Research, apophatic philosophy, existential phenomenology, contemplative wonder

¿Qué aspecto tendría la investigación acción alfabética?
Aprendiendo a tomar en consideración temas delicados sobre el silencio y la interrogación en las prácticas profesionales

Resumen: Inspirado por un "giro apofático" en la teología, filosofía y el arte, y con reflexiones desde la fenomenología existencial, el artículo nos anima a dar un paso atrás como actores para dejar que la vida o el fenómeno mismo actúe sobre nosotro y nosotras. Este tipo de pensamiento apofático no está tan alejado del pensamiento del filósofo noruego Olav Eikeland cuando describe "Investigación Acción interna y la Praxis". Y aún así, los potenciales apofáticos de su manera de entender la investigación acción se elaboran aquí apuntando a tres dimensiones: la dimensión del Conocimiento, la del "Siendo" y la del Misterio en una praxis; y a las cuatro maneras de ver la praxis desde dentro tanto de una "gnoseología" como de una "agnoseología". Siendo lo último guiado por un profundo sentido de asombro por lo que los Daoistas llaman Wu Wei o "acciones realizadas sin esfuerzo".

Palabras clave: Investigación Acción basada en la Praxis, filosofía apofática, fenomenología existencial, asombro contemplativo

Introduction

As Action Researchers, how do we approach realities, experiences, and life phenomena which are inaccessible to discursive thought, ineffable, and yet occasionally saturated with a strange and unfathomable meaningfulness? We might sense this in rather delicate moments of deep contemplative wonder (Schinkel, 2021) or when experiencing beautiful moments of care, silence, love, sorrow, trust, deep joy, or inspiring and epiphatic moments of art, spiritual exercises, or walks in nature. These are important meaning-giving experiences connected to what the German sociologist Harmut Rosa terms the "vertical axes of resonance" and "our need for existential resonance"(Rosa, 2019, 2020).

How do we, as Action Researchers, capture such delicate and volatile experiences of meaning-giving moments and "callings", which appear to be woven into a practice or relationship, and which can only be understood from *within* this practice or situation by being deeply engaged with it or acting by virtue of it? If we are too eager to grasp these moments and phenomena through intentional actions, methods and clear concepts they seems strangely to disapeare in front of our eyes. As if these enigmatic events will only be seen if we arrive with a non-knowing, receiving, listening and effortless action attitude.

During the last decade I have, as a philosopher and an Action Researcher, developed what I have called "Socratic and phenomenological-oriented Action Research"(Hansen, 2014, Hansen, 2015, 2016a, 2017, 2018; Dinkings & Hansen, 2016, Hansen & Jørgensen, 2020). Here so-called "Wonder Labs" are used to create contemplative moments of non-knowing and shift in the mindset from an intentional "doing-mode" to an effortless "being-mode" that let life calls us to act.

Recently, I have fund a need to re-conceptualise my own thinking in dialogue with the work of the Norweigian philosopher Olav Eikeland and his Aristotelian-inspired praxis research, which is now seen as an important version of Scandinavian action research. By comparing his thinking with a new paradigm in philosophy called "the apophatic turn in critical thinking"(Franke, 2020), I find a way to place my work on practicing wonder-based and phenomenological oriented Action Research. In my studies of Eikeland, I see "apophatic potentials", which can be further developed through inspirations from existential phenomenology and hermeneutics (Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Gadamer) and Daoism.

In the following, I will first give a short description of what "apophatic thinking" is. Then I will turn to the work of Eikeland to spot the apophatic potentials. From there on I describe three dimensions inspired by existential phenomenology: the Knowledge-, Being- and Mystery-Dimensions. At the end I suggest four ways of seeing or getting in "resonance" with the ineffable events and experiences, which is not only relevant when doing action research in the artistic field but also when wanting to giving space for existential resonance in professional practices such as hospitals, hospice or innovative sections in public organisations.

Apophatic thinking

By using the word "apophatic" I plug into a long and fascinating tradition in theology, philosophy, and art that works from a so-called "negative theology", "negative ontology", and

tradition of "via negativa". The crux of the matter being that one should *not* insist in giving a "name to the nameless" before the unutterable and deeply meaning-giving phenomena. Only with a silent, listening, and wondrous attitude and through negation, existential negative dialectics (cf. Kierkegaard), and a "negative and indirect approach" can the researcher, "thinker", or artist create a "pointing act" to that which cannot be conceptualised and spoken of or written directly about. The apophatic tradition posits that you can neither tell, show or do it, intentionally, but only point to it indirectly and negatively or through an 'effortless action' (*Wu Wei*).

You can find this kind of mystical and apophatic thinking and experiencing in both Western and Eastern philosophy as well as in different religious and spiritual practices (Franke, 2007, 2014, 2020; Rhodes, 2014; Cooper, 2002, 2018; Kukla, 2005; Fiumara, 2006). The basic mood (*Grundstimmung*) of the apophatic attitude is being in a fundamental contemplative wonder: in a 'touched non-knowing'. Or as the French philosopher Jacques Derrida so eloquently describes, "I am trying, precisely, to put myself at a point so that I do not know any longer where I am going" (Derrida quoted in Rubenstein, 2011, p. 133)

Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin are examples of thinkers who aspires to this kind of apophatic thinking (Franke, 2007b).

What would an Action Research, which is inspired by this kind of apophatic thinking and way of being, look like?

Eikeland and Praxis Research

In two recent articles (Eikeland, 2012, 2015), Olav Eikeland circles in on a very special type of Action Research termed *Praxis Research.* As he argues, this method of understanding and practicing Action Research can probably be seen as the most foundational means of practicing Action Research when not merely conceptualising Action Research as an instrumental tool or as applied science but as *basic research* that is humanistic in and through itself. When conducting praxis research, the Action Researcher is doing research from *within* a practice itself, being in the midst of action, sensing what is at stake in a profession, and experiencing what the Action Researcher and participating practitioners ("co-inquirers") as actors are called to do in the specific "grammar" of this specific practice and this unique moment.

Eikeland's main philosophical inspiration is Aristotle (Eikeland, 2008), and he borrows Aristotle's notion of *praxis.* Briefly put, praxis is action and activities done without external goals or purposes. When in a praxis, the value of what you do and why you do it is intrinsic in the activities itself. When being praxis-minded, you do not take a walk in the forest *because* you have to do physical exercise as your physician has urged you to do. You take a walk in the forest because it *is* (or can be) a value in itself. As Eikeland says, "The end or objective is entailed in the activity itself as its own perfection, making it autotelic (meaning: carrying its end or telos within itself)" (Eikeland, 2012, p. 26).

One can say, as Aristotle appears to aspire to, that ethical actions and experiences, the action and experience of beauty, the search for truth and wisdom, as well as connecting with the gods through rituals and ceremonies: all these aesthetical, ethical, philosophical, and spiritual experiences and actions are praxis, and cannot be otherwise without harming or

reducing these acts and ways of being. On the other hand, the risk of making a sharp, black-and-white distinction between praxis and practice like this might isolate the search for beauty, goodness, and truth from everyday life; in particular, praxis-related activities in a neoliberal framework are easily reduced to entertainment in the private sphere. I believe that Aristotle would not have liked such a sharp distinction, but would prefer that we believe that this dimension must be integrated in our everyday life and function as the motor of our lives. Thus, there are numerous actions, activities, and performances in professional work life that are naturally and necessarily instrumental. Even professional *ethics* can be seen as a practice in a utilitarian and pragmatic context. However, this should not be seen as dubious or problematic by the Action Researcher conducting praxis research. It is only problematic if it is *only* this kind of practice-based and not praxis-based thinking and experiences which are recognised and examined.[1]

On another level, you will also be able to find instrumental practices that somehow transform into autotelic praxis. This might happen when, let us say, a carpenter becomes so experienced and entangled in the "callings" of the materials, that he or she goes from being a technician or apprentice in his profession to become an artist or master in his profession.

Eikeland (2007, 2012) indicates the practice-epistemology of Donald Schön and his notion of "reflection-in-practice" and "knowing-in-practice" as good examples of how we should, as action researchers, respect and find ways into what Eikeland terms "the grammar of practice". More precisely, he deliberately makes a distinction between *practice* and *praxis.* He recommends that the Action Researcher sees the difference between reflecting from within a practice which is instrumental or pragmatic in its nature and a praxis where the actions and activities are, so to speak, actions of the heart. In other words, actions that people are engaged in freely (the Greek word for this kind of free space and leisure time is *Skholê*), without external demands and motifs.

The strange thing is, as he points out, that something (a knowing-from-praxis) "shines through" in those moments in which the practitioner is unwillingly caught by the subject matter ("die Sache"), by that which calls the practitioner to act. To hear the call or see "die Sache shine through" is only possible for the very advanced practitioner: that is, the master of a profession or art. The apprentice has to "learn by doing" over several years in order to sense, what Eikeland calls, the "*gnoseology*" of a praxis (Eikeland, 2007). If that happens something "shines through" as a guiding light for the master of a profession.

Apprentices approximate and train themselves into the same form or pattern by imitation, experimentation, dialogue, and supervision, not striving to become identical to a particular master but to what "shines through" the masterly practice. The form or pattern of a common standard, "die Sache", "saken", or the "what-it-means-to-do-or-be-something", is separable as reflectively reified in thinking, and, as such, separate from any individual master. (Eikeland, 2012, p. 38)

The way to reflectively separate in thinking "die Sache" or what this moment and praxis calls the master to do, is also described by Eikeland using another important keyword given by Aristotle: the concept of *theôria. Theôria* should not be confused with what we today call "theory". Aristotle makes a clear distinction between *epistêmê* and *theôria.* The first indicates what we understand as being theory-directed and governed by a non-interventionist approach: that is, from a so-called neutral, context-free, or "objective" viewpoint. In contrast, *theôria* is

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1   I would like to thank Professor of Care Ethics, Carlo Leget, University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht in The Netherlands, for bringing my attention to the need to soften up a too rigid distinction between praxis and practice.

generated from within practice, training, exercise, and habituation. As Eikeland explains, "It emerges from the habitus engendered through accumulated practical experience (*empeiria*) as an articulation of its forms and patterns (sifting differences and similarities)" (ibid., p. 39).

When Eikeland refers to *empeiria* as experience in *praxis*, he makes two fundamental distinctions when discussing experiences. One kind of experience is "*Erlebnis*", which is "merely momentary experience" (ibid., p. 25). Another kind is "*Erfahrung*", which is described as "accumulated practical experiences exercised/habituated into us" (ibid., pp. 24–25). When things immediately appear to us, we experience *Erlebnis* as a kind of subjective impression of a thing or phenomenon. However, knowing-in-praxis or "praxis knowledge" (Eikeland, 2012) requires that we are able to see beyond the mere subjective experience into more general patterns and structures (forms) *in* these experiences.

Inspired by Aristotle and Wittgenstein's language game theory, Eikeland refers to this kind of insider-knowledge as the silent "grammar" of an experience. We cannot think our way into an insight regarding this grammar in the praxis. Instead, we must "accumulate practical experiences exercised/habituated into us". Such *Erfahrung* is akin to virtue ethics, where you also have to live your way into these virtues, not only by having a "merely momentary experience" but through hard work: that is, through many repeated practices and exercises, moving from being a novice to becoming a virtuos master in a specific virtue or art.

Thus, *Erfahrung* is not the kind of knowledge that is created through a reflection from the outside of an experience or what Donald Schön (1983) terms "reflection-on-practice". *Erfahrung* is enlightened and shared in a reflective manner through another fundamental means. This is where Eikeland connects praxis to *theôria*. *Theôria* is insider-thinking in contrast to outsider-thinking. By "insider-thinking" Eikeland does not, of course, imply merely subjective idiosyncratic thinking. Rather, through his references to Aristotle (and shortly Plato and Wittgenstein), he refers to a dialogical and dialectical form of reflection-*in*-practice, or what he would describe as reflection from within: praxis-knowing led by so-called "*epistemological impulses*" (Eikeland, 2006a). By epistemological impulses, he refers to the sense one can have in a dialogue and community of inquiry around a shared experience that leads to the emergence of certain standards or common patterns or principles (a grammar) that become visible to reflective practitioners.

For both Aristotle and Plato, moving "*up*" or "*in*" *to* an articulated insight in basic principles , i. e. common patterns, forms, and virtues of language use or similar activities: as novices or *from* how things appear to us phenomenologically here-and-now, goes explicitly and consciously through practice-based critical dialogue or dialectics, sifting and sorting, gathering and separating (cf. Eikeland, 1997, 2008). Dialogue was the Way (*hê hodôs*/Tao). (Eikeland, 2015, p. 386)

Thus, praxis research is a process of examining praxis experiences in a profession through critical reflection and dialogue or a "community of inquiry" (Eikeland, 2006b). By placing strong emphasis on the difference between practice and praxis in the Aristotelian sense, he also refines the notion of the "reflective practitioner" in a more non-pragmatic or non-utilitarian manner than Donald Schön does. What could be said now is that the kind of Action Research that Eikeland aspires to is not "practice epistemology", as Schön termed it, but a "praxis epistemology"(Hansen, 2016b). However, Eikeland does not call it that, but refers to it as "*gnoseology*" (Eikeland, 2007). He provides the following explanation in his article from 2012:

Praxis could and should be explored as a gnoseological paradigm for a different form of organisational science, based on reflective practitioner research where the knowers-practitioners study and develop their own practice and common standards working as collegial coordinating principles. (Eikeland, 2012, p. 27)

In Search of "apophatic potentials" in the work of Eikeland's Conceptualisation of Praxis Research

I am empathetic to Eikeland's significant work to ground Action Research in a genuine insider or praxis-oriented conceptualisation. I also see some "apophatic potentials" and "tonalities" in his thinking that could be developed further. What I want to pay attention to here is three expressions taken from two of the above quotations of Eikeland: "shines through ", "die Sache", and "Tao". It is interesting that Eikeland – when attempting to conceptualise the special experience and manner of being that is at stake in reflection from within praxis – refers to phenomenological and hermeneutic notions and phrases such as "die Sache" and "shines through". To my surprise, he even briefly refers to Eastern practice philosophy when using the word "Tao", which is a keyword in Daoism and can be translated from Chinese as "the Way".

Eikeland appears to see a progression from being a novice when only seeing how things appear to them phenomenologically in their "here-and-now"-ness, to other kinds of critical reflective dialogue and dialectic practices that prepare the final path towards an insight into "die Sache" from within praxis. Moreover, the way or the method (in Greek: *hê hodôs*) appears comparable to The Way (Tao) of the Eastern practical philosophy of Daoism. To the best of my knowledge, Eikeland has not elaborated on what he phenomenologically or hermeneutically implies by expressions such as "shines through" and "die Sache", or how Action Research (particularly praxis research) can be seen from the Daoist perspective (Flavel & Luzar, 2019; Tan, 2020).

In what follows, I want to dwell upon the kind of dialectical dialogue and Way of Being (Tao), that may pave the way, so that "die Sache", so to speak, "shines through" in *praxis.* First, I unfold a few phenomenological insights regarding the relationship between language and experience or the concept and life impression. Here, I focus on the existential phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics with reference to Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Gadamer. They can also guide us to dwell upon the nature of dialogue when it becomes critical and reflective in a dialectical and existential sense.

Thereafter, I show that these kinds of reflections open for a more wonder-based and apophatic approach to language and experience through concepts of "non-knowing" and "effortless-action", which is expressed with a "Daoist accent". I lastly propose this by referring to a concrete Action Research project by which I am inspired; a wonder-based approach that may help us to refine our thinking of the nuances between "reflection-in-action" and "wonders-in-action", between a "community of inquiry" and a "community of wonder", between "epistemological impulses" and "ontological impulses"; as well as why I find it important in praxis research to make a distinction between a "gnoseology" and a "a-gnoseology", the later being a concept that is connected to the tradition of apophatic thinking (Franke, 2014, 2020).

The "apophatic way" of doing Action Research can, I will suggest, help the Action Researcher to see beyond even "praxis knowledge" and the grammar of praxis in order to

sense the *light* ("die Sache") that "shines through" this praxis and grammar. These suggestions for distinctions and my pointing towards what an apophatic Action Research may look like can of course, due to the scope of this article, only be in the form of dense sketches or conceivable pointers.

What We May Learn From Existential Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

Some of the most original thoughts and ideas in existential phenomenology can be found in the thinking of the Danish philosopher of existence, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). In his philosophical dissertation entitled *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* (1989/1841), he raises the following question: What happens when we conceptualise things, phenomena and events around us and within us?

Kierkegaard writes (long time before Husserl reflected on phenomenology and Heidegger reflected on existential hermeneutics) that in order to conceptualise a phenomenon, say irony, one must approach the phenomenon like a reverent knight in front of his beloved maiden. The viewer of a phenomenon must be like a lover, where no features of the phenomenon escape from his caring eyes. When the viewer brings with him a concept to capture the essence and wonder of a phenomenon, Kierkegaard reminds us to be rather cautious, so that the phenomenon remains inviolated and "…that the concept be seen as coming into existence [tilblivende] through the phenomenon" (Kierkegaard, 1989/1841, p. 9).

Kierkegaard then goes on in a hermeneutic manner to note that a concept, just like an individual, has its history and cannot resist the dominion of time. But, "…in and through it all they nevertheless harbor a kind of homesickness for the place for their birth" (ibid.). In his philosophy of existence, Kierkegaard is attempting to navigate his way through the underwater skerries of subjectivism and idealism. Neither the poetic romantism of Goethe and Schiller nor the German philosophical idealism of Hegel and Schelling was the basis of his thinking. His negative and existential dialectics keeps alive the gulf or incommensurability between expression and impression, language and lived experience, thought and life. The existential or transcendent "spark" is ignited when this unbridgeable tension is at its highest: that is, when the human being experiences an excess of meaningfulness that goes beyond what is possible to articulate or express in discursive thoughts and representational language.

This meaningfulness might be "translated" and pointed to like in a pointing act through art, philosophy, or spiritual exercises, as elaborated by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Buber, and the German philosopher Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 1968; Franke, 2007, p. 121–136). However, this "spark" can so easily be turned off by an aestheticism, philosophical metaphysics, or mysticism. In all three cases, the error is the tendency of "anthropo-centrism", which is found in art if it is based only on an "inner feeling" or lived experience of the artists, or in philosophy when thinking has become metaphysical system-building, or in mystical contemplation when this contemplation is governed by clear methods of spiritual technics and "esoteric knowing". What Kierkegaard repeatedly attempts to indicate is the *wonder* of nature, things, and human beings and indeed also the Sacred that he finds in "the Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air" (Kierkegaard, 2018/1849; Mjaaland, 2021). Kierkegaard can be described as an apophatic thinker embedded in Christian negative theology (Kline, 2017).

Heidegger and Gadamer were not religious thinkers, but they were substantially influenced by the existential and negative dialectics of Kierkegaard and his apophatic indication towards that which cannot be spoken directly about and expressed in discursive thinking, but only indirectly communicated and lived: that is, through silence, irony, humor, paradoxes, contradictions, actions, or through art, philosophising, and contemplative practices that bring the person into an existential longing, wonder, and listening to a call that can only be heard in deep wonder and silence or by *living* the phenomenon that one wonders at.

When Heidegger talked about "die Sache' and about "shining through", he was indeed displaying a similarity with Kierkegaard. Similarly, when Gadamer (1998, 2006) discussed the difference between practice and *praxis*, theory and *theôria*, and "dead meaning" versus "living meaning", he too was very much in resonance with the apophatic thinking of Kierkegaard.

To summarise Heidegger's philosophy (see Capobianco 2011, 2015), one could say that Heidegger worked with three fundamental horizons in his philosophy: the ontic, ontological, and apophatic horizons. Each horizon has a foreground and a background on which the dimensions of the phenomenon or human being either become visible in the foreground or are withheld in the background. According to Heidegger, these distinctions are only to be understood as analytical distinctions. In real time, when being-in-the-world as a human being engaged in practices, these three horizons are at play all the time in every situation. However, the single human being, or specific group of people, may only be aware or focused or in resonance with a few of these horizons or foregrounds and backgrounds in the singular moment or approach to practice and the life they are living.

Being in the Ontic Horizon: "Ready-to-hand" and "Present-at-hand"

Heidegger terms the foreground that is at play in the ontic horizon as "present-at-hand" (*Vorhandenheit*) and the background as "ready-to-hand"(*Zuhandenheit*).

When we make the world around us and in front of us "present-at-hand" we are either in the pragmatic, instrumental, and problem-solving modes (what Aristotle described as knowledge-approaches, like *techne*). Or, we are in a scientific, theoretical, and detached "objective" analytical and reflective mode (what Aristotle described as *episteme*). When we employ utilitarian, problem-solving methods and entrepreneurship practices or conduct scientific and empirical studies in ways that would satisfy the methodological ideal of science (Gadamer, 2006), then we are in a process and intention and a sort of conceptualisation that aims to make the world knowable, calculable, and disposable.

To be in the world seen from the perspective of "ready-to-hand"(*Zuhandenheit*) is to be in the world in a embodied and intuitive manner. In moments of "ready-to-hand", the human being can be deeply immersed into the action or activity that he or she is engaged in. Donald Schön (1983) was one of the first modern practice theorists to reflect on the specific knowledge and reflections that only can emerge out of being in practice. Thus, when he talks about "reflection-in-action" as opposed to "reflection-on-action" or about being a "reflective practitioner", he turns our awareness to the special kind of practice grammar or insider knowledge that is incarnated in a particular practice or profession. He is critical towards "the

instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique" (Schön, 1983, p. 21). Technical rationality resides in "high-hard ground" and is disconnected from the "swampy lowland" of practitioners in real life. Schön is only one example of practice researchers out of many who make us aware of the invisible or tacit embodied background that is often taken for granted or overlooked in common professional and more technical and method-driven professions. Another example is Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart Dreyfus.

Being in the Ontological Horizon: Dasein and Sein

In their book *Mind over Machin*e (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1988) they introduced the concept of "the intuitive expert". However, Hubert Dreyfus (2004) later revealed that when they wrote that book they were not sufficiently precise in their description of the subtle dimensions that are at play when professionals become experts or "masters" in their field. Hubert Dreyfus turns to Heidegger and his distinction between the ontic and ontological and argues that an even deeper dimension than "ready-to-hand" can be conceptualised and elaborated upon in moments in which experts become *existentially* aware of their 'being-in-the-world', referring to a key notion in Heidegger's masterpiece *Being and Time* (1995/1927). The difference between "*the intuitive expert*'"who is intuitively governed by the tacit grammar of everyday understanding and practice culture of a specific profession, and the existential "*radical world-discloser*", which is the new name Hubert Dreyfus brings to bear in his later writings, is that the latter has existentially chosen the life and the practices he or she is engaging in. Dreyfus argues that this makes the practitioner even more present in his or her practice.

Hubert Dreyfus also connects to Heidegger's reception of Aristotle when Heidegger describes Aristotle's concept of "*phronesis*"(practical wisdom) as a way of being that has to do with being "authentically present in the moment". Heidegger sees an intimate connection between practical wisdom (*phronesis*) that is related to the concrete existential (*Dasein*) dimension on the one hand, and on the other hand what can best be described as apophatic wisdom (*Sophia*), which Heidegger connects to an ontological and mystical dimension (*Seyn*). If wisdom per se is readiness to see an act inspired by eternity *in* the temporal, the infinity *in* the finite, the ontological *in* the ontic, then *phronesis* can be described as being in an existential and creative fidelity towards the infinity ("die Sache") in the finite conditions of the moment. Hence, *Sophia* can be understood as the sense of wonder and intimations that direct our longings and aspirations towards that ("die Sache"), which transcends finite conditions, languages and grammar[2] of the moment and practices.

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2   The notion of "grammar" read through an existential interpretation of Wittgenstein (Braver, 2014) opens up a
     critique that points to the Being-dimension beyond the grammar and practice of a language.

Being in the Apophatic and Ethical Horizons: Seyn and Gelassenheit

Heidegger connects *phronesis* to conscience and existential reflection: that is, to *Dasein* and the existential moment in time (the *Augenblick*). On the other hand, *Sophia* is a kind of apophatic and ethical wisdom, which transcends *Dasein* and the ontological horizon of *Sein*. *Sophia* is connected to Eternity, to nature itself (in Greek: *Physis*) or *Seyn* (Capobianco, 2015), which can never be grasped, with nature or *Seyn* here being the enigmatic essence ("wesen") of things[3].

This kind of apophatic and wordless insight of nature itself can only be approached in wonder (in Greek: thaumazein) (Capobianco, 2011, pp. 70–86) and what Heidegger calls *Gelassenheit*, which can be translated to a "letting-be" and "letting-come" attitude towards phenomena. When being in that contemplative, open, receiving, and wondrous mode, the phenomenon in question appears to wake up and talk back, or grasp for a short self-forgetting moment the questioner so that he or she "is", or "lives", the phenomenon in that very moment. To be caught in this manner by wonder and the phenomenon as an event (Heidegger calls it an "*Ereignis*") that happens *to* you as a researcher or practitioner is to arrive to the third apophatic horizon, with the former being respectively the ontic and ontological horizon.

Six Apophatic Additions to Eikeland's Praxis Action Research

Now, I want to summarise the insights that are provided to the Action Researcher who wishes to be inspired by the existential phenomenology and hermeneutics, and by the apophatic dimensions that are inherent in this kind of contemplative philosophical thinking (*theôria*) and practice (*praxis*). In Apophatic Action Research, it is suggested that the Action Researcher

1) make a distinction between discussing experiences: both affective experiences (*Erlebnis*) and cognitive experience (*Erfahrung*)[4], in two different ways. Either as "ontic experiences" or "ontological experiences".

2) make a distinction between listening to the "epistemological impulses" on the one hand and "*ontological impulses*" on the other hand. When following epistemological impulses, the focus is on reflecting critical and analytical aspects from within the grammar of the lived experience and praxis. When following ontological impulses, the focus is on being in deep contemplative wonder ("thinking" in the sense that Heidegger (2004/1954) discussed from within the lived experience and praxis.

3) make a phenomenological difference being in a "community of inquiry" where the analytical and critical reflection is at the centre, and being in a "community of wonder", where the existential reflection and contemplative wonder and apophatic aspirations are in the centre.

4) reflect and dwell upon experiences from practice and praxis on fundamentally three different levels or horizons. These are a) the pragmatic and ontic "*knowledge level*", b) the existential and ontological "*being level*" and c) the ethical and apophatic "*mystery level*" (see also Visse, Hansen & Leget, 2019).

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3   Interestingly, Heidegger's notion of *Seyn* and *Gelassenheit* have receptively been connected to *Tao* and effortless actions (*Wu-Wei*); see for example May (1989).
4   Here, by *Erfahrung* I mean the cognitively processed experience, which of course also includes an affective level; whereas in *Erlebnis*, we are only engaged on an affective level.

5) add two more role models when conducting insider or praxis action research. Where "the reflective practitioner" is to be found on the ontic knowledge level of practice research, "*the philosophical practitioner*" and "*the contemplative practitioner*" could then be included as role models for the "being level" and "mystery level", respectively, of the praxis research. By "philosophical practitioner", I do not narrowly relate to professional academic philosophy, but to the existential praxis of "the love of wisdom" as a way and art of living (cf. Hadot, 1995). Therefore, aesthetical praxis can also be found on this "being level". In addition, by "the contemplative practitioner", I imply the kind of spiritual exercises that can be found in art, philosophy, and theology in the apophatic tradition and praxis (Franke, 2007a, 2007b).

6) instead of only discussing "reflection-in-action" and "knowledge-in-action", we can now add "wonder-in-action" and "non-knowing-in-action" at the "being level", and "wonders-in-action" at the "mystery level". "Wonder-in-action" and "non-knowing-in-action" refer to the specific existential and philosophical kinds of wonder, which can emerge when being grasped by a phenomenon and when attempting to actively understand it phenomenologically and hermeneutically. To wonder *about* something is what we normally do in critical and analytical thinking as well as in scientific and problem-solving approaches in general. This is also called "inquisitive wonder". But to wonder about something is not the same as to wonder *at* something. The latter is termed "contemplative wonder" (Schinkel, 2021). My conception of "wonder-in-action" is related to the contemplative form of wonderment.

On the other hand, "wonder*s*-in-action" are the epiphanic moments when you gaze into *a* wonder and wonder at it from *within* it. This is comparable with what the French ethical phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion calls the experience of the "saturated phenomenon" (Marion, 2002): that is, the proto or "Ur" phenomenon in and by itself. In these wonderful moments of "in-seeing", you are in a passive receiving mode and even lifted and pushed into action. I suggest that this could also be interpreted as moments of "Tao"and "effortless action", where it is not you who are the agent but the phenomenon in itself and by itself. In Daoisme, they call these moments "effortless actions" (*Wu-Wei*)[5]. This kind of Insider or praxis research that is driven by a wondrous non-action and non-knowing and by a deep sense of wonder is better described as an "a-gnoseology" and, therefore, not strictly identical with the "gnoseolog"', which Eikeland talks about. Or to be more precise, an apophatic Action Research is agnosiological (from the Greek word *agnosia*; see Rhodes, 2014).

To Live the Phenomenon and to Act Wisely Through 'Wonders-in-action': A Conclusion

Walter Benjamin, the German philosopher and art performance critic, once wrote the following sentence when giving advice on how to write thoughtfully: "The work is the death mask of its conception" (Benjamin, 2002, p. 459). This sentence beautifully captures the crux of the matter in how I understand "*die Sache* "and what is meant by its "shining through" the concrete practice and the language, which is used to give expression to this "die Sache-in-work". What Benjamin meant by this sentence is, that in the moment when "die Sache" has

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5   I do not have sufficient space in this article to elaborate further on this. I can instead refer to a few research articles on practice research described and criticized from a Daoistic perspective (Flavel & Luzar, 2019; Tan, 2020).

been put into language and at work in a concrete practice and context, we really only experience the "death mask" of *die Sache. Die Sache* has then coagulated into the structures and patterns (the grammar) of the lifeform and practice that it is caught in.

Then, my interpretation is that if we, as Action Researchers, only focus on the "grammar" of a practice as well as a praxis, we might only see its "death mask". What we need to do in order to sense what "shines through" as the living meaning of "*die Sache*"(cf. Gadamer) is to listen and look for that which is not yet embodied in a practice pattern or a practitioner's practice-intuition but can only be heard and intimated from within a philosophising (wondrous) and contemplative (sensuous and artful) practitioner.

In the experiences of philosophy and art, as Gadamer (2006) reminds us, we can find gateways to a transcendence experience of truth, the good, and the beautiful. I am of the opinion that Eikeland, when emphasising praxis instead of practice, and in the moments of *Skholê* and wisdom (*phronesis* and *Sophia)* as well as the importance of philosophical dialogues, he is indeed pointing in the same direction but from an "epistemological impulse" and horizon. When thinking (or listening, seeing, acting, and being) from within an "ontological impulse" and horizon, or even from an apophatic impulse and horizon of "non-knowing" and "effortless-action"', we just add new perspectives and openings to understand and to "be with" or near the Ur-phenomenon ("die Sache").

It is important to say that these horizons and impulses or levels of seeing must be described and understood as just as valuable for Action Research and as natural parts of different professional practices. Action Research can by no means be seen as one thing, as one entity. Of course, apophatic Action Research is only of relevance in certain cases and particularly when wanting to inquire into existential, aesthetic, ethical experiences and events and phenomena of an ineffable nature.

I will end this article by referring shortly to one concrete Action Research project in which the relevance of Walter Benjamin's words and my notions of "wonder-in-action" and "wonders-in-action" became very present for me and my co-inquirers.

This project was sponsored by the Danish Art Foundation and ran from 2019–2021. In this project, I worked with a few performing artists from an art performance group called Carte Blanche, who particularly wanted to inquire into how one can artistically create and philosophically understand spaces of wonder in public settings (Jensen, 2021). I followed them in their one year-long preparation and creation of an art performance called "Tom Rum" (Empty Spaces). This Action Research project also illustrated the relevance of the *three dimensions* (knowledge, being, and mystery) in doing apophatic Action Research, and whats new, it also pointed to *four different ways of seeing* when working as an apophatic Action Researcher. This became clear to us during our dialogues and ongoing reflections on their preparation work, artistic experiments, and creative flow of ideas as well as my mutual philosophical reflections upon and my wonder at their actions and thoughts.[6]

The first way of seeing is to **look at** something in a kind of detached and theoretical, instrumental, or utilitarian manner. Language is typically technical, discursive, and representational. It is the language of the outsider. In the art of writing one will criticise this kind of writing by saying 'Don't tell it, Show it! We are here remaining in the ontic and knowledge-expression dimension.

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6   The following division among four ways of seeing in Action Research is also inspired by my own work on
     design pedagogy (Hansen, 2014, pp. 251–252) and Herholdt-Lomholdt (2017, p. 173), although she does not
     elaborate these levels from a Heideggerian and apophatic perspective.

The second way of seeing is exactly a way of seeing by not discussing it but by showing it. I call this to **see with the field:** that is, with the "grammar" of the practice. The traditional "natural theatre" as well as the "epic theatre" is aware of this "practical art wisdom" of showing and not telling. As apophatic Action Researchers, we say that here we work with on the ontic *practice and praxis epistemological* dimension.

I learned the third way of seeing when the performing artists said, 'Do not even try to show it, *see it!*' In their sensuous and meditative manner of just being there, they told me how they repeatedly find themselves in a kind of pure presence, and although they had done a specific scene many times, almost every evening for weeks, they told me (and I also experienced it when I was occasionally a part of the performance) that they always felt as if this moment was completely new, as if they did it for the first time. I call this third way of seeing (See it!) to **see from within** your felt presence of the phenomenon. This is what I term the existential and ontological being-dimension of praxis. In these moments, the existential self (*Dasein*) of the action researcher and practitioner are called into being (*Sein*) in order to be present enough to hear, through a sense of wonder, what goes *beyond* both the cognitive I and the existential self.

Lastly, I call the fourth way of seeing **being seen by it** or **seeing in virtue of it.** This is indeed a strange moment, where you feel appropriate due to the phenomenon rather than you appropriate it or merely sense it from within your own presence. Walter Benjamin described this moment as a moment when the phenomenon suddenly appears to open its eyes and look back at the observer (see Conty, 2013), or as the Swiss art painter Paul Klee writes in his notebook *The Thinking Eye*, "now objects perceive me" (Klee, 1969). This kind of being seen or being appropriated by the situation or phenomenon itself could be described by the credo, "Be seen *by it!*" This is when the researcher and practitioner are in resonance with the Mystery-dimension of praxis. This experience indeed was what the performance artists in "Tom Rum" returned to when they wanted to point at what they perceived as the deepest level of their artistic creation. This is not the moment when you see something happen in front of you, and you gaze at it in amazement from within your own state of mind; no, this moment, can better be described as a moment of effortless action. In these moments, you *become* the phenomenon, or situation, or better you become appropriated by the phenomenon or situation. It is as if the situation or phenomenon acts through you. Or as the British poet Yeats says: "There is no performance, just life, when the dancer becomes the dance!"

For the apophatic Action Researcher, this is the Tao or moment of effortless-action and non-knowing. To become nothing or empty in order to serve the moment or phenomenon itself. This is the place where one can experience "wonders-in-action". You could also say that the performance actors repeatedly, every evening during the performances, attempted to defreeze the "death mask" of their art work not merely to repeat or fall into the rhythm of already made patterns and structures (or the grammar) of their art praxis.

The insights that these artists worked with is not only relevant for practice and the praxis of artistic creation. *Die Sache* and such callings from situations and how a sense of wonder can make the practitioner better hear this calling is also relevant for other professions like nursing. I have shown this in other Action Research projects where I worked with so-called Wonder Labs (Hansen, 2016a; Hansen & Jørgensen, 2021). Here, nurses at hospice and hospitals experienced how it is to be in wonder-based dialogues and communities of wonder, and how this nurtured their ability to 'see' their profession in the four different ways I have described above.

However, how we more concretely worked with these Wonder Labs is another story. Here, I end in the hope that the reader now may see the relevance of and also wants to work further on the question 'What would an apophatic Action Research look like?'

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