

Meditation – research as development

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ABSTRACT. The article begins by registering the fact that meditation is extremely popular nowadays and surveying the current state of meditation research. The radical differences between normal and meditative consciousness call forth the question as to whether modern science and meditative practice must – in terms of their basic assumptions and empirical justification - be viewed as ultimately incompatible, or whether there is some theoretical framework in which they can be seen as structurally related. By way of an initial approach to this question, the extent to which the experience of meditation can be systematically described from a qualitative, cross-disciplinary perspective is explored. Whereas it is perfectly possible – within the span of the dynamic between the “profound meditation state” and the consciously employed “mental technique” - to give detailed descriptions of meditation processes in their own terms, there are still basic methodological refinements to be made in relation to the question posed above. Conceptual considerations on the communicability and structure of meditative experience open up wider possibilities for investigating it from a more intrinsic perspective. Here this is attempted on the basis of the structural phenomenology of cognition. The conceptual integration of two typical mental techniques (focused attention and open monitoring) brings into play a third descriptive dimension: that of the semantics of meditative experience in relation to the established framework within which the functioning of the human organism is currently understood. On this basis it becomes possible to derive meditative from normal consciousness. In conclusion, some light is thrown upon the role of meditation in professional skills development, using the teacher in the classroom situation as an example.

Keywords: rational/trans-rational approaches to validation, dimensions of meditative experience, deictic communication, pragmatism/semantics, fundamental structure of meditative experience, “anthropological” interpretation, fine-structure of teaching processes

Introduction

In the modern media landscape *meditation* is one theme that stands out very clearly. So conspicuous is it that one could be forgiven for regarding it as a well-known, cheap and convenient commodity. It comes in a diverse range of forms complete with explanations and user instructions, the latest versions of the latter featuring coloured cards with simple mottos on various “life situations”, all of which can be conveniently loaded onto a cell phone. Then there is the whole spectrum of manuals and films with accompanying recordings of relaxation music. If there were still any doubt as to the enormous popularity of meditation, it is quickly dispelled by the wide variety of courses and gatherings focused upon it and offered mostly by religious or spiritually based groups of one kind or another.

Moreover, it would seem that science has also taken up the subject in a major way. In the last ten years alone, more research papers on this topic have been published than in the previous forty – and the tendency looks set to increase further (Ott, 2010).¹ One main finding of the research done so far is that the practice of meditation seems to have a positive effect upon various aspects of psychological and physical health, as well as upon general feelings of wellbeing and fitness (Williams and Zylowska, 2009). This is very likely one of the reasons for the public’s increased level of interest. Apart from these more clinically oriented findings, however, there is a broad field of basic research, which seeks to investigate the psycho-physical processes underlying meditation. It owes its current vigour in no small measure to modern technological methods of brain research, with the help of which neuronal activity and brain patterns can be determined in terms, say, of their dependence upon the form of meditation or the length of

1. For each of the last two years (2010/11) some 1000 publications on the theme of *Meditation* are listed (see IONS Bibliography on Meditation)

time a particular experimental subject has been a practitioner. Such investigations actually demonstrate significant differences in the local intensity, frequency and level of coherence of neuronal activation patterns (Ott, 2008a; Cahn and Polich, 2006). It is assumed that long-term, regular meditation tends to shift brain activity towards the lower frequencies (Shapiro, Walsh and Britton, 2003) and leads to an increase in cerebral grey matter (the sectional studies necessary to back this up have still to be done; see Ott, 2010).

This is all very well, but it does not tell us very much. Insofar as it is associated with specific neuronal activity, for instance, meditation is no different from other forms of mental performance. Nevertheless, by comparing the recorded physiological effects of meditation with those of normal, everyday awareness the attempt is made to explain meditative states – as well as their combination and differentiation – in terms of the quantitative stimulation or inhibition of known mental functions (Ott, 2008b). For example, from the fact that two brain regions associated with particular aspects of self-awareness² are de-coupled during meditation, Norman Farb and his co-workers concluded that meditation sharpens distinctions within the perception of self (Farb, Segal, Mayberg et al., 2007). This, however, says nothing as to *what* and *how* a person perceives what they perceive in the process of meditating, nor *why* meditation has the effect it has.³

To approach an answer to this question the phenomenology of first-person mental states would need to be refined as much as the techniques for measuring and modelling neuro-physiological data have already been improved. A step in this direction is represented by the collection of data by means of surveys or interviews and their subsequent statistical evaluation (e.g. Piron, 2004). But here, in contrast to clinical studies in which the interviewees are questioned as to the effects of meditation upon their everyday consciousness, a fundamental problem of method presents itself. For if the utterances of experienced practitioners concerning the mental states they have experienced in meditation are taken seriously, it seems highly questionable whether they can be presented adequately in terms of everyday language or meaningfully interpreted on the basis of normal psychological models. Reporting on an experiment in which she analysed statements made by experienced meditators, Jennifer Barnes states:

While I took the conventional view of an experiential structure, I found myself writing that the experience of meditation did not fit into the usual structures of time, space, place and human relationships. (Barnes, 2003, p. 6)

This difficulty seems to increase according to how deep the state of meditation is (Barnes, 2003). Then there is the religious and cultural background behind the meditational tradition followed by a particular test subject to be taken into account. This context is very likely to have an appreciable effect not only on the way certain things are formulated, but also on what can be perceived in the meditative state or remembered afterwards.

While on the one hand it is necessary to clarify whether the experiential content of meditation can in any way be expressed scientifically, it would appear, on the other, that it is anything but vague and ephemeral. Roberto Assagioli characterises the position in the following manner:

It is then that the normally superconscious region, or sphere, is reached in full consciousness. At this stage one may experience the various psychospiritual qualities and activities, which have play in the superconscious. They are not something abstract, vague and evanescent, as those unfamiliar with them might claim. They are rather something *living*, intense, varied and dynamic, which are perceived as more real than ordinary experiences, both inner and external. (Assagioli, 1976, p. 1)⁴

From a transpersonal perspective meditative experience quite plainly has a special status. Its relation to everyday consciousness is in no way derivative, since its claim to reality appears much more intense and fundamental. Whereas normal, everyday consciousness only operates within the limits of the subject-object relation, deep meditative states are notable for their tendency to merge subject and object:

Subject-object consciousness fades away, and its place is taken by a form of non-dualistic awareness. (Zajonc, 2010, p. 79)⁵

Is it possible here to speak in the conventional sense of a first-person perspective, which is also able at any moment to switch to the third-person perspective? Hardly. At any rate, meditants commonly testify to the fact that this unified state, designated in Zen tradition as “merging with the all-one” (Mangoldt, 1970, p. 51), is accompanied by a feeling of boundless joy and an all-pervasive conviction of meaning (Piron, 2004). That it entails this possibility most probably provides a further reason – in addition to the previously mentioned effects on health, quality of life and fitness – for the great popularity of meditation, and indeed of spirituality in whatever form: in a world emptied of meaning by the combined effects of modern science and the “rude narcissism” (Freud,

2. cognitive-affective self-image – actual state of general wellbeing

3. “However, none of the approaches has yet isolated or characterized the neurophysiology that makes explicit how meditation induces altered experience of self.” (Cahn & Polich, 2006, p. 200)

4. cf. Barnes (2003): “Meditation presents the self with a reality that cannot be perceived with the senses. It is beyond the body and the material world.” (p. 9)

5. cf. Barnes (2003): “The object and the subject of consciousness become one on an intuitively deep level...” (p. 8)

1917, p. 3) of society, people are looking for a new orientation, a happy and meaningful life based on something authentic.⁶ – Whether this alternative can lead to a consistent worldview that is both in tune with individual life experience and scientifically credible remains to be seen. The question as to whether meditation’s validation perspectives and claims to reality (transpersonal and intuitive) can be reconciled with those of modern science (personal and rational) is still far from a solution. If this cannot be found, the only option left is either to grant primary status to one of these two parallel but incommensurable worldviews, or oscillate impartially between them. But is genuine integration even possible?

Dimensions of meditative experience

For any such integration to be regarded as genuine it would need not only to grant that each of the perspectives involved – meditative experience as well as scientific research – have a claim to the status of reality, but also to bring them into authentic, generative relationship. First of all, this means not demoting meditative (and by implication all mental) states to the level of mere epiphenomena of neuronal activity – meditation, say, as a highly developed natural process whereby the brain regulates itself –, nor writing science off as entirely inadequate to the task of explaining meditative reality – in other words, reducing the scientist to a mere example of the subject-object split.⁷ Over and above this, what is paramount is the establishing of a model of the development of mental structures. Such a model should be capable of giving a plausible account of the transition from one perspective to the other, for such transitions actually occur in persons engaged in meditation.

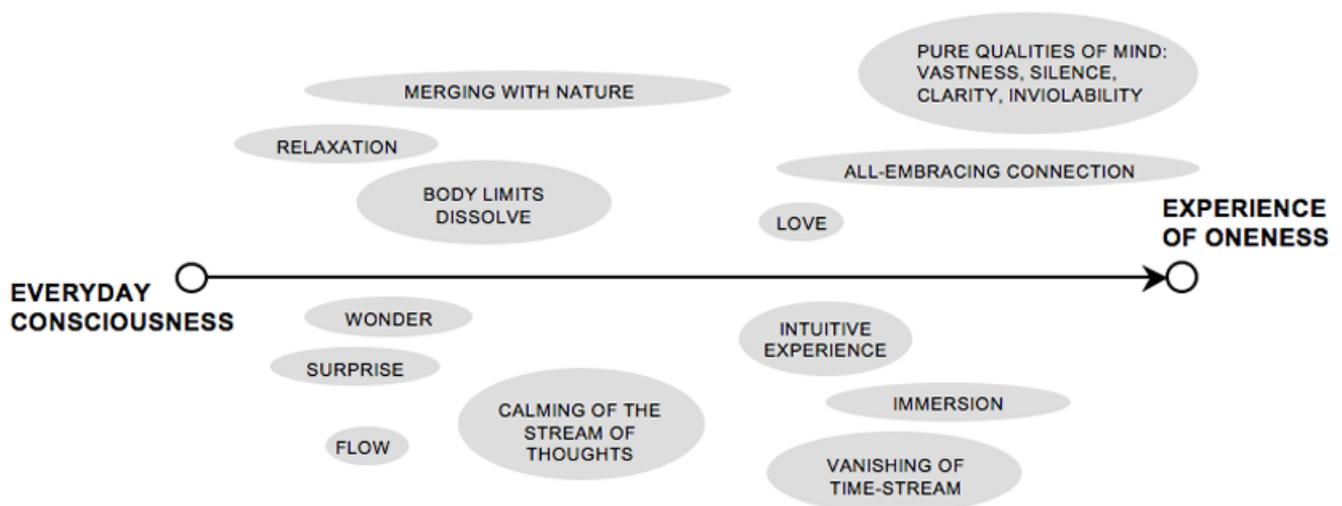


Fig. 1: Topography of conscious states (from Belschner, 2005, p. 133)

Without losing sight of the difficulties described above, the attempt could be made to continue along the path already started. In analysing individual reports the thing is to discern universal dimensions of meditation and to test their empirical relevance. To this end a useful starting point is the *deep phase of meditation* mentioned earlier. In his dissertation Harald Piron has shown that, regardless of the tradition to which the subjects he studied belonged, the deep phase stands out as a dimension of the meditation process displaying unified empirical qualities. On this basis it is reasonable to suppose that in their deep phase all forms of meditation would reveal a common structure (Piron, 2004). While Piron seeks to describe the deep phase of meditation in terms of a five-step scale, Wilfried Belschner has made an inventory of altered states of waking consciousness and assigned each one a place in a “topography of conscious states” (see Figure 1). While this inventory, simply through its use of one-dimensional positioning, gives a similar impression of specific states ranged upon a scale from ordinary waking consciousness to the experience of oneness, the necessity of having to display them in a vertical arrangement seems to imply that there may be some hidden descriptive dimension in play.

A second dimension of meditative experience can be brought into relief by comparing the typical *forms* it takes.⁸ This does not necessarily refer to the varieties of meditation associated with specific religions (e.g. Buddhist, Christian etc.), nor primarily to the

6. “No external good fortune, neither prosperity nor social standing, no manipulation of apparent certainty, no attempts to deny or suppress age and illness seem to be able to hold this feeling of alienation at bay for very long. We are searching for a different kind of certainty.” (Hemmerich, 2010, p. 24)

7. Wilfred Belscher describes this attitude as the “monopoly of everyday consciousness” (Belscher, 2005, p. 116). Cf. Walsh (1998): “That is, we value and derive our worldview almost exclusively from one state: the usual waking state.” (p. 679)

8. A suggestion pointing in this direction has already been made by Shapiro et al., (2003).

particular states of consciousness each one produces (as, for instance, in Fig. 1). What are meant are the concrete mental action patterns meditants actually use. In how far these are independent upon religious traditions would require separate investigation. In the professional literature, at any rate, two main forms of meditation are distinguished: *focused attention* (FA) and *open monitoring* (OM, e.g. Lutz, Slagter, Dunne et al., 2008). In connection with the search for a second descriptive dimension these two forms are interesting insofar as they appear to be complementary, both in respect of the techniques used and of the associated neuro-physiological activity.

Firstly, a comparison between the mental action patterns: FA-meditation requires 1) sustained concentration upon an object (e.g. one's own breathing, an actual or visualised object), 2) taking note of distractions, without becoming involved with them, and 3) the steering of attention back to the originally chosen object. If this means a concerted narrowing of conceptual focus, OM-meditation, by contrast, requires its radical expansion. In practising it the whole thing is not to focus attention on a particular concept or object. Thus the second of the above-named requirements for FA-meditation, in the performance of which it has a regulatory function, here has the main role – albeit with the crucial difference that it provides no point of reference to which attention is to be re-directed. OM-meditation thus begins by cultivating attention pure and simple,⁹ thus creating a platform for insight into the inner web of cognitive, affective and volitional habits (Slagter et al., 2007; Lutz et al., 2008).

If the neuro-physiological data relating to each of the two forms of meditation are now compared, what stands out is the polarity between local and global brain processes. Without going into detail, it is characteristic of FA-meditation that neuronal activity predominates in particular areas of the cortex and the mid-brain, as was indeed known mostly from earlier studies on focused attention in a non-meditative context (Lutz et al., 2008). In the course of OM-meditation, by contrast, the demands made upon specific brain regions seem to be considerably less – both in temporal and topological terms. Data analysis yielded a clear picture of targeted stimuli following one another in quick succession,¹⁰ thus demonstrating that the practice of OM-meditation leads to a more even temporal distribution of attention¹¹ and of correlative brain activity (Slagter et al., 2007). In discussing these results, Antoine Lutz and his colleagues take the view that the states of consciousness induced by OM-meditation most probably correlate to global states of the brain.¹²

Although they constitute a polarity, both in mental and neuronal terms, that FA- and OM-meditation can nonetheless be seen as complementary is shown by their combined use in the Buddhist Vipassana tradition. Here meditation begins in FA-mode to stabilise attention, so that the OM-mode can then be used to widen the conceptual focus (Slagter et al., 2007). Moreover, not only here are they found, but also in western approaches such as the anthroposophical meditation path. There are, however, certain differences, which can be made apparent by considering the following piece of meditation guidance from Rudolf Steiner:

The first step consists in contemplating the phenomena as exactly and with as much attentive energy as is humanly possible. Only *then* is one in a position to devote oneself to whatever feeling, whatever thought rises in the soul. The main thing is that one direct one's attention to *both* while maintaining complete inner balance. (Steiner, 1961, p. 4)

While the content of the first sentence can readily be identified with FA-meditation, the second one does not immediately yield a connection to the OM-type. In contrast to what was said of it above, here the emphasis is not upon turning away from the earlier focus of attention, but upon devotion to the thought or feeling that “rises in the soul”. That successful performance of the second step requires overcoming the unconscious routines and reaction patterns of everyday consciousness goes almost without saying; Steiner also mentions this: “He must have complete inner calm. He must cut himself off from the outside world [...]” (Steiner, 1961, p. 44). Here, however, what matters seems to be something different, something that has very much to do with the content of the preceding FA-phase. This is in marked contrast to the standard OM-phase, in which this conceptual focus normally needs to be abandoned in order to achieve a state of attention without expectation, a completely open awareness (the *purpose* of this will be dealt with later). The second difference lies in the bestowing of equal value on both meditation forms, rather than seeing them as a graded series, the one being the preparatory (warm-up) phase (FA), the other leading to the desired goal (OM). Following on from Steiner, Arthur Zajonc, in the course of a survey of various meditation traditions, speaks of the need for a dynamic balance between FA- and OM-meditation, designating this as a “cognitive breathing” (Zajonc 2010, p. 52).

Here, therefore, it is proposed that inherent in the complementary relationship between focused attention and open monitoring is a further dimension of meditative experience, characterised by particular intentional action patterns. Combining the dimensions of the *meditational deep phase* and the *meditation form* then opens up new possibilities for the accurate description of meditative experience. Referring back to Belschner's “topography of conscious states” (Fig. 1), the following provisional classification can be set out: the three states below the axis (“wonder”, “surprise”, “flow”) all arise out of intentional orientation towards a particular

9. “bare attention” (Slagter et al., 2007, p. 7); “nonreactive awareness” (Lutz et al., 2008)

10. In the time span of half a second.

11. I.e. a reduction of the “attentional blink”.

12. “The finding of a high-amplitude pattern of g-synchrony in expert meditators [...] supports the idea that the state of OM might best be understood in terms of dynamic global states.” (Lutz et al., 2008, p. 5)

object (or process), and thus, according to the action pattern inducing them, can be assigned to focused attention (FA). The three states on the other side of the axis (“relaxation”, “body limits dissolve”, “merging with nature”) lack such a specific orientation, and as such can be seen as emerging from a contextually unfixed, expansive awareness (OM). This forms the basis for the two-dimensional co-ordinate system for meditative experience shown in Fig. 2. While providing a more refined classification of static conscious states, this also displays the degree of FA or OM involved, and also the dynamics of their interaction.

What would typical meditation processes look like graphically? Starting from everyday consciousness, in which neither focused attention nor open monitoring are being used with any degree of intention or intensity, there would be, as meditative activity (FA, OM) gathered strength, an increasing distancing from everyday consciousness, with a concomitant deepening of the meditative state.¹³ The attainment of characteristic meditative states (e.g. “oneness”) could be displayed either as asymptotic convergence (Fig. 3a) or sudden transition (Fig. 3b).

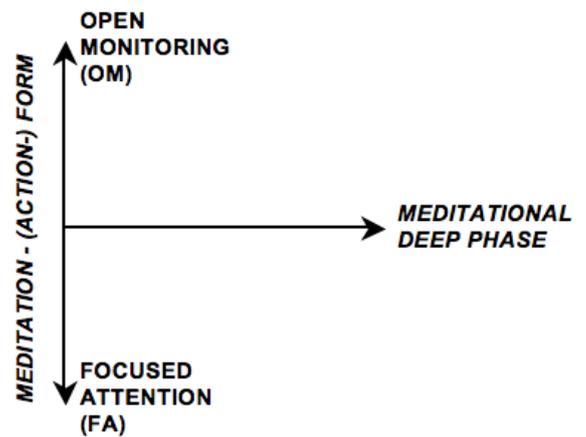


Fig. 2: Two-dimensional classification of meditative experience as asymptotic convergence (Fig. 3a) or sudden transition (Fig. 3b).

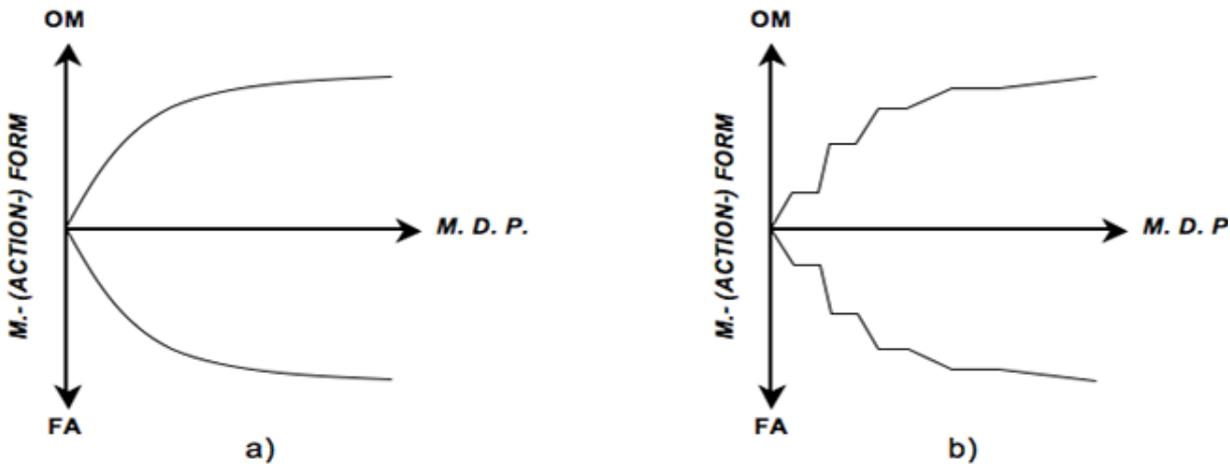


Fig. 3: Hypothetical meditation dynamics (I)

In these hypothetical curves, however, no account is taken of the previously mentioned dynamic interactions or possible balance between the two action patterns. It would indeed be possible to envisage curves assuming oscillations between FA- and OM-components (Figure 4).

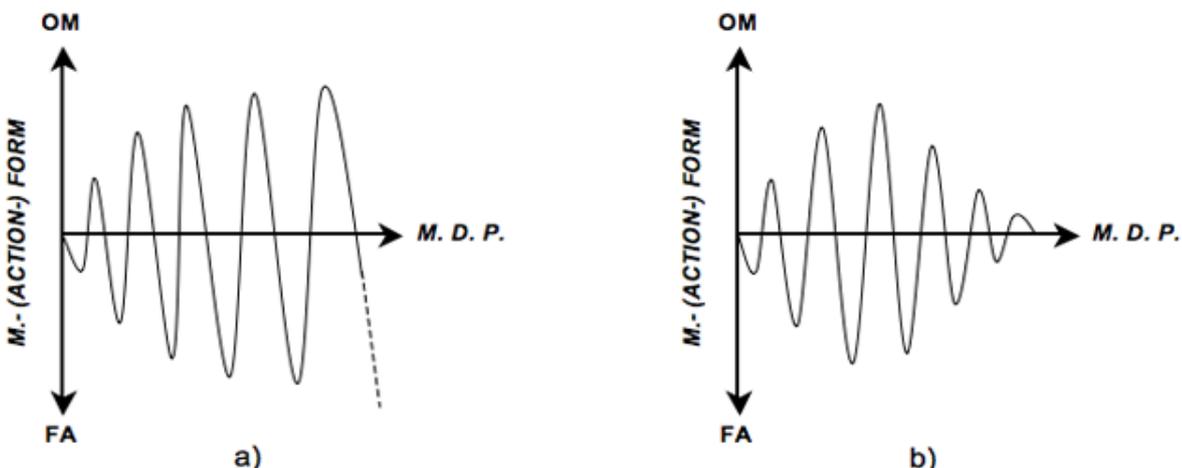


Fig. 4: Hypothetical meditation dynamics (II)

13. The parameter of each of these curves is time.

Apart from such oscillations between the action patterns, there is in relation to Fig. 3 a further point of divergence that needs to be discussed. While it was originally assumed that the deepening of meditation is always associated with a corresponding investment of effort (Fig. 3, a & b, Fig. 4a), there is also the possibility that increasing depth implies a reduction of activity (4b). Which of these two variants is considered plausible depends upon how the role of the meditator's own mental activity is interpreted (Metzinger, 2011). The testimonies of experienced meditators associating the deeper phases with "effortlessness" would tend to favour (b).¹⁴ Neuro-physiological findings showing correspondingly reduced neuronal activity lend support to such verbal evidence. Putting the word effortlessness in inverted commas, however, clearly points to the fact that we are after all referring to a state requiring concerted will power, and the equal likelihood that (a) might also be possible. The subjective impression of effortlessness in connection with undiminished, or perhaps even increased mental activity could also be interpreted as a side-effect of meditative proficiency – a "better utilisation of neuronal resources" (Manna, Raffone, Perrucci et al., 2010, p. 54). On the other hand, it is thinkable that with progress in meditation the action patterns associated with less deep states become modified in such a way as to produce deeper states, and that these changes are not necessarily experienced as requiring effort.¹⁵

Clarity as regards these hypothetical options and with it a more complete picture of the dynamic cartography of meditative experience may well be attainable through further empirical studies. But even if such a course of action succeeds in demonstrating sequential continuity between everyday and meditative consciousness, the question of how to integrate their respective reality levels would still be unanswered, for the graphs discussed above do not say anything about generative relationships between particular conscious states. In the absence of such a demonstrable relationship it remains unclear whether the search for meaning through meditation is ultimately an illusory and subjective undertaking – as it appears to be in experiments reconstructing meditative states as deficient combinations between functions of normal waking consciousness and their underlying neuronal processes – or whether meditation can lead to a higher level of understanding and reality that might even form the foundation of normal consciousness.

Modified methods required for investigating the intrinsic qualities of meditation

Using a phenomenological approach – chiefly that of Herbert Witzgenmann's structural phenomenology – an attempt will here be made to go some way towards answering this question.¹⁶ This approach, developed out of Rudolf Steiner's epistemology, is felt to be suitable because it encompasses, within the context of a systematic investigation of the qualities intrinsic to consciousness, a description of the characteristics of meditation and their associated concepts. Witzgenmann concurs with what has been said so far in emphasising the fact that there are two fundamental and complementary forms of meditation (Witzgenmann, 1989). He takes this a good deal further, however, by showing that these meditation forms are integral to the process whereby not only meditative but also normal waking consciousness arises. For Witzgenmann meditation means the act of raising into consciousness the usually unconscious process by which consciousness is formed.¹⁷ At the same time, structural phenomenology, as a method, is capable of throwing light upon the degree to which meditative experience has claims upon reality. Gaining this perspective requires making the transition intimated above: from meditation as an object of the time-honoured research methods of modern science, to meditation as a transcultural research method in its own right, capable of widening the perspectives of other disciplines (cf. Ott, 2007; Hemmerich, 2010).

An initial aspect of this change of direction in meditation research is a corresponding change of attitude to the person being tested. Meditators will no longer be brought in simply as "generators of data" on a particular meditation tradition, but will be treated as active participants in an open research process. Already Husserl saw himself as an "inductive psychologist" who "wanted to know how the soul looks 'from the inside'" (Husserl, 2003, p. 234). In the context of meditation Steiner spoke of the "spiritual researcher" (Steiner 1961, p. 9). And Jennifer Barnes lends this desideratum expression in designating her interview partners as "co-researchers" (Barnes, 2003, p. 4). These examples highlight a decisive role shift within the process of knowledge acquisition: it is recognised at the outset that knowledge processes are going on not only in the person conducting the research (the "research subject", perhaps a cognitive psychologist) but also – and more especially – in the person being studied (the "research object", the meditator), and that all are equally relevant and worthy of discussion.

Rating the former research object "meditation" as itself capable of doing research has two fundamental implications: 1) It will inevitably become apparent that the meditator will not be able to express the full qualitative range of his experiences and observations

14. For *FA-meditation*: "At the most advanced levels, the regulative skills are invoked less and less frequently, and the ability to sustain focus becomes progressively 'effortless'" (Lutz et al., 2008, p. 2). For *OM-meditation*: "In this way the 'effortful' selection or 'grasping' of an object as primary focus is gradually replaced by the 'effortless' sustaining of awareness without explicit selection" (Lutz et al., 2008, p. 2).

15. On the ambivalence in the question as to whether, and how much, effort is necessary for meditation, see also Piron (2004).

16. See, for instance, the entry on "Strukturphänomenologie (Witzgenmann)" in Wikipedia (so far only available in German).

17. He establishes "that modern meditation can be the making conscious of a subconscious process involved in the construction of our object consciousness" (Witzgenmann, 1989, p. 69).

“one to one” in everyday language, and so it will be imperative to take account of specific cultural and religious influences, not to speak of social attitudes and expectations (Assagioli, 1992; Brueck, 2010). This will not only mean using particular terms – most of which can be easily translated – but might also over-emphasise certain aspects of meditative experience at the expense of others, which would as a result remain unremarked.¹⁸ Among the latter might well be, for instance, the various preparatory measures leading up and into the onset of the meditative state. It would be especially important in this context to clarify the role played by the meditator’s own mental activity. 2) To the extent to which such blind spots can be detected and biases corrected the meditator-as-researcher will be able to make a valid contribution to the discovery and verification of the transcultural structures of meditation. As such s/he is no longer reduced to the role of mere reporter on rationally incomprehensible, “transcendental” experiences,¹⁹ but is directly involved in the development of methods for investigating the structure of human consciousness. The insights gained in this way could ultimately lead to the emergence of a scientifically founded, universal, integrated form of meditation.

For all this to come about requires the development both of a common terminological system and – at first as a working hypothesis – of an epistemological framework. Their purpose would be to mediate between everyday and meditative consciousness. If an explanatory framework is being sought for, on the one hand, the subject-object split that characterises our everyday consciousness, and, on the other, for its elimination through meditation, it would seem to be necessary to look for a system of terminology that could be as pre-subjective, pre-objective and therefore “pre-interpretive” as possible.²⁰ Paradoxical as this might sound, the simple fact remains that the whole project cannot succeed without recourse to language (in the widest possible sense). The question, therefore, is not whether, but how language is to be used appropriately for arriving at an understanding of meditative experience. In this connection the following might be said: If subject and object are regarded as results of elementary interpretation, they are preceded by non-interpretive acts of life and consciousness. From the point of view of the interpretation-laden content of everyday consciousness these acts occur unconsciously, but nevertheless involve our participation in the form of pre-subjective (pre-personal) activity, which is integral to any act of interpretation, whether subjective or objective (cf. Schieren, 2010a). If, however, there is a genuinely mental activity that contributes to the actual formation of consciousness, this activity should in principle be capable of being made conscious.²¹ Here language can make a contribution, for if it normally resides in our everyday consciousness, it does so as a *self-transcending medium*: the ability of language to establish referential validity is called *deixis*. The object made reference to *can* lie within the sphere of language (as, for instance, when reference is made to a text), but *it need not* (e.g. “here and now”). It can also lie outside everyday consciousness, in other words, it can “be something” that cannot be spoken about in the usual manner of a strict separation of subject and object (Steiner, 1894; Hemmerich, 2010). This makes clear that the negations quoted above (*non-spatial, non-temporal, “non-dualistic awareness”*), although they can be part of logically correct statements, cannot be said to have a proper deictic – i.e. positive referential – function, and thus will not be of any help in uncovering the characteristic qualities of the meditative state and how it comes about.²² In other words, it is a matter of re-visiting the basic elements of the phenomenological account of *intentionality*, i.e. the necessary relation of consciousness to an object. Husserl, Steiner and Witzgenmann all designate this as the essential prerequisite for conscious experience.²³ As such, however, intentionality need not be confined to the goal-oriented, comparatively static mode of the subject-object split, but is better construed as the *faculty* which is responsible for directing attention in the first place, while at the same time leaving the characteristics of the object of attention undefined. Whereas the act of objectification is usually associated with “destruction of the participatory unity in which observer and observed are merged” (Duerr, 1986, p. 16), the fact that *deixis* (intentionality) is capable of relating to processes means, by contrast, that it can open the way to description of states (which are processes rather than objects) in terms of motivational action patterns beneficial to development. Such descriptions, moreover, can be formulated in general, i.e. in terms that are independent of specific individuals.²⁴ In view of all this it would be a good idea to revise the language in use among meditation researchers. Alongside the normal view, expressed in negations and attempts to freeze-frame processes in fixed definitions, a positive, pre-practised focusing of intentionality upon itself could be cultivated (Steiner, 1894; Witzgenmann, 1985; Wagemann, 2010; 2011). Examples of what is meant here will follow later.

18. “This quest for what one has decided to look for can cloud the researcher’s gaze so that significant elements of the human activity that is being researched can be overlooked” (Willis, 2001, p. 1).

19. “Whenever the mind attempts to understand the essence of the transcendent realm, it always ends in paradox” (Valle, 1998, p. 113).

20. Willis speaks in this context of a “pre-interpretive hermeneutic by which we hold the phenomenon in our gaze [...], waiting for it almost to name itself in our consciousness [...]” (Willis, 2001, p. 5).

21. It is an unavoidable conclusion from the transdisciplinary-phenomenological point of view that there is a potentially accessible, pre-reflexive, but nonetheless genuinely mental activity, that cannot be made to fit into the framework of neuro-philosophical materialism. A detailed justification of this view can be found in Wagemann (2010; 2011).

22. The negation of all attributes may here be mentioned as a motif of negative theology, which holds God to be unknowable in principle.

23. Witzgenmann, (1985): “Upon this basis the orientational function of concepts within the realm of perception, where their necessary activity precedes the cognition of an object, becomes comprehensible. It also renders comprehensible the intentionality (goal-directedness) of all psychological activity.” (p. 105). See also Husserl (2003); Steiner (1917).

24. Johannes Kiersch, with his reflections on Steiner’s “living concepts” and their connection with Ernst Cassirer’s *Philosophy of symbolic forms*, seems to be moving in the same direction (Kiersch, 2010a).

If deictic language is capable of referring to pre-predicative states of consciousness, this makes a further refinement of method necessary, for deixis enables reference both to a meditant's *experiential content* and to his or her *own inner activity*. In other words, it can be distinguished in semantic and pragmatic terms. In most studies the pragmatic aspect is considered adequately accounted for through specification of the form of meditation (e.g. FA or OM). The semantic aspect, if discussed at all, is tackled through ranking meditative states topographically or according to a scale of depth (see above). Hitherto what has been missing, however, is a detailed investigation of the interactions between the pragmatic and semantic aspects. Moreover, to make the findings of meditation research capable of communication and conceptualisation in equal measure would entail clearly formulating the relationship between what the meditant does and what he or she experiences.²⁵ If this relationship is not made a subject of research, there is a danger of filling the explanation gap with magic, paradox or sheer mystery – either that, or interpretations based on neuro-scientific models, which for the meditant amounts to the same thing, since one has no inner observational access to his own brain activity. If the view is taken, that an intrinsic relationship between meditation techniques and meditative experience does not exist or cannot be found, then the attempt to reconcile the validation perspectives of practical meditation (transpersonal-intuitive) with those of modern science (personal-rational) will fail. By contrast, among the main motifs of structural-phenomenological consciousness research and meditation is that they demonstrate an *intrinsic and rationally comprehensible* relationship between both the pragmatic and semantic aspects of deixis – without reducing meditative action patterns and states to the purely rational perspective.

The fundamental structure of meditative practice

Gaining a clear picture of this will require a closer look at the previously discussed meditation forms, namely focused attention (FA) and open monitoring (OM). In doing so, it becomes apparent that both forms, regardless of the fact that they constitute an obvious polarity, mutually encompass each other in subtle ways: While it is true that in OM-meditation attention should not become fixed on any one object, it is also imperative for the meditant to *focus his attention upon his own attentiveness*. As with FA-meditation, here it is a question of keeping a specific focus, except that it is self-referential and directed towards an action (process). On the other hand, in FA-meditation every distraction inevitably leads to temporary loss of focus upon the chosen content. Recovering it requires a *turning away from the distraction*, which amounts to a content-free exploratory movement (cf. Wagemann, 2010). This short, but clearly observable transition phase is, in effect, a moment of open monitoring, which, if successful, results in a renewal of focus upon the chosen object of meditation.

The central features of each meditation form appear in somewhat modified form in each of their respective counterparts: The gesture of openness, which in OM-meditation is supposed to involve no definite content (object-free), features in FA-meditation as a necessary phase leading up to the stabilisation of a particular content (object). And the motif of focusing, that remains (mostly) transitive in FA-meditation, can in OM-meditation only be self-referential, while at the same time, of course, being essential for keeping the mental horizon open. There are thus, it appears, certain contextually unheeded and therefore unconscious regulatory factors in play in each respective meditation form. This clearly demonstrates a reciprocal functional relationship between the two forms, which renders plausible the assumption that they are not merely two separate techniques, and may well have a common basis. If this proved well-founded, then the specific character of each meditation form could be construed as a particular emphasis of certain features of this common foundation. As previously suggested, structural phenomenology opens access to such a foundation through its elucidation of the normally unconscious process behind the actual formation of consciousness, or in other words, the arising of our normal state of waking consciousness.

In order to arrive at a presentation of this process in keeping with the present context, it is necessary to return to the dynamic inter-relationship between the two meditation forms. This reciprocal connection has been described by Zajonc as “cognitive breathing”, and is here illustrated in the form of a lemniscate (Fig. 5). In thus comparing it to a rhythmic life process, it receives as clear illustration as could be desired. Steiner recommends the conscious cultivation of this mental life process through observing two processes: “life in its sprouting, thriving growth phase”, on the one hand, and “withering, wilting and dying” on the other (Steiner, 1961, p. 43). With the following remark: “*Wherever* the human being turns his gaze, such processes are *simultaneously present*” (Steiner, 1961, p. 43 – italics added) it becomes clear that not only external events are being referred to; the reason being that whereas there are manifold opportunities for observing “sprouting” or “withering”, they are surely not everywhere, not to speak of simultaneously present. For instance, in looking at a table neither of the two possibilities will be relevant, according to conventional

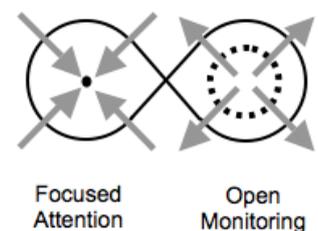


Fig. 5: „Cognitive breathing“ in alternation of meditation forms (Zajonc, 2010, p. 52)

25. “It belongs to the basic principles of true occult science that he who devotes himself to it do so with full consciousness. He should not take on anything, nor practice, unless he knows what effect it will have. A teacher who gives someone advice or guidance, will always say what consequences following it will have for the body, soul and spirit of the person striving for higher knowledge.” (Steiner 1961, p. 115)

thinking. What can only be meant here is to school perception in such a way that in any given situation it is increasingly receptive to those consciousness-forming processes that are *functionally analogous* to the corresponding life processes.²⁶ Only in relation to such inner processes can one justifiably speak of “everywhere” and “simultaneously”. – This cryptic reference²⁷ of Steiner’s to the actual formative basis of consciousness is made completely explicit by Witzmann. He does this by not only applying (like Zajonc) the functional characteristics of the two life-processes to the realm of mind, but also by identifying them with the formative gestures which are *always simultaneously* in play, and which underlie *all* consciousness.

It can be said, then, that the two typical meditation forms, whether practised singly or successively, will always both be in play, as was shown above in connection with their reciprocal relationship. This means that while one of them is being consciously practised, the other is also being practised²⁸ - unintentionally, but nonetheless necessarily. In Zajonc’s words, any particular meditation form will consist of “cognitive breathing” – with the emphasis, of course, on one of the two fundamental gestures (see Fig. 6). Thus both meditation forms can be understood as variations of a unitary structure-forming process, since in both cases specific structures, in other words, meditative states arise. This integrative understanding of meditation forms can, in accordance with Witzmann, be designated as a *fundamental structure*; it arises through the interpenetration of a universalising process (more explicitly – the OM component) and an individualising process (more explicitly – the FA component).²⁹ Only at this level can the formative underpinnings not only of meditative but also of mental structures in general be fully apprehended. In addition, the intrinsic nature of the non-accented aspect of the process in each case (shown in small print in Fig. 6) needs to be analysed further and set in relation to its respective, accented counterpart.

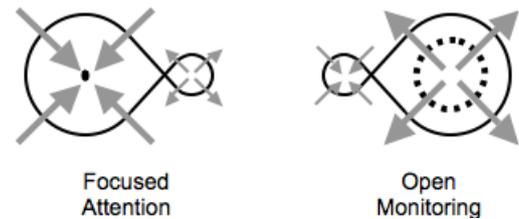


Fig. 6: Reciprocal relationship of meditation forms

can be fully apprehended. In addition, the intrinsic nature of the non-accented aspect of the process in each case (shown in small print in Fig. 6) needs to be analysed further and set in relation to its respective, accented counterpart.

How real is meditative experience?

It was shown that sustaining FA-meditation means going through a contextually and conceptually open phase, from which – in accordance with FA technique – there is always a reversion to the concept (or meditation object) originally chosen. By way of analogy with the principle of optical focusing a distinction can be made in this connection between *target* and *medium*: optical focusing requires both a light source and a convex lens; if either is missing there can be no question of focusing. Medium here could mean, for instance, sunlight; target could be an image of the sun reduced to a point on a piece of paper. – By the same token, it is clear that in FA-meditation under exclusive accentuation of the target, i.e. the object of meditative focus, the content of the medium that could be focused on is overlooked. It remains a fact, however, that when the meditator wards off a distraction the meditation object does not just pop back ready-made onto the attention horizon, but has to be constructed or outlined out of its own contextual attributes. Witzmann (following on from Steiner) designates the unfocused medium, the autonomous context, as the “pure concept”, the target as the “individualised concept” (Witzmann, 1983, p. 40; cf. Steiner, 1894, p. 107). Without a conceptual orientation to steer attention together with its convergence upon a target, it could never “get to the point”, could not *co-individualise*, in other words, focus itself. Not only in an optical, but also in a mental context the focusing process requires a medium that is unfocused, but nonetheless susceptible to being focused.³⁰

With this it is suggested that what is taking place in the open phase, as an inner gesture, as it were (unconscious in FA, conscious in OM), is the active process whereby it becomes possible to apprehend context, in other words, it is the basis of mental coherence. It is widely felt that neuro-philosophy has failed to deliver sound explanations. If in the face of this the assumption of a universal structural potential independent of the body seems plausible, the structural-phenomenological approach provides good grounds for thinking so (Wagemann, 2010). Moreover, the utterances of experienced meditators point in a similar direction:

Meditation is known and felt with an inner sense. It is understood as one’s connection with the infinite. [...] There is a sense of fullness, contentment and satisfaction that is not of the body or the mind. (Barnes, 2003, p. 17/18)

26. This analogy is an example of deictic use of a concept.

27. In his *Philosophy of freedom* (1894) Steiner also establishes relationships between “inner observation” and the formation of consciousness, the relevance of which for the context of meditative training are often overlooked (e.g. Kiersch, 2010b).

28. In the context of logical considerations, the mathematician, George Spencer Brown, arrived at a result that can be interpreted in a similar way: “In general a contraction of the frame of reference goes along with an expansion of awareness, while an expansion of the frame of reference goes along with a contraction of awareness.” (Spencer-Brown, 1997, p. 10)

29. “For there is no thing and no being that would not become real through such a formative process, just as in the process of cognition we experience the occurrence within us of an arising and passing away through the union of percept and concept. This union is one of universalisation and individualisation, a mutual permeating and interpenetration of growth and decay.” (Witzmann, 1989, p. 42; cf. Witzmann, 1983)

30. The fact that language can direct attention towards unfocused as well as focused contexts provides an immediate justification for applying the above-mentioned principle of deixis to intrinsic consciousness research.

I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing, I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me. (Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in Zajonc, 2010, p. 40)

With such expressions of a universal potential for structure or coherence, the transition from implicit to explicit OM-meditation has already been made. Now the previously unresolved question of *what* attention actually opens itself to can be answered. The above considerations have made clear that while the medium accessible to a subject-generated opening gesture may indeed be empty of any object, it is not nothing, but functions as a reality-establishing context (Wagemann, 2010).³¹ If this context – in an individualised state that has, as it were, “died” into definition – guarantees the apparent reality of single objects (FA), in successful OM-meditation it takes on an un-individualised, i.e. universal form that is more dynamic and “alive”. It is, in other words, neither formless, nor unreal, but can be experienced as a formative source of reality, both potential and actual.³²

Finally, Lutz and his co-workers suggest that “object-free concentration” upon a state of unconditional love and boundless sympathy for all living beings be included among the principles of OM-meditation:

Because ‘benevolence and compassion pervade the mind as a way of being’, this state is called ‘pure compassion’ or ‘non-referential compassion’ (Lutz et al., 2004, p. 16369).

This dissipation of focus on a particular object is achieved by letting the very essence of the meditation that is practiced (on compassion in this case) become the sole content of the experience, without focusing on particular objects. (Lutz et al., 2004, p. 16372)³³

This example illustrates the relation between universal, “pure” content (love, sympathy) and individual action pattern (opening, unfolding) to be practised, even though the receptive character of the latter seems to predominate. It has already been established that in OM-meditation the meditator mostly overlooks his own self-referentially controlled activity – just as in FA-meditation s/he will overlook the universal context. This phenomenon of receptivity or passivity can be shown to apply to many meditation traditions (Piron, 2004; Ott, 2008a), and on this point Willis remarks:

While stressing its intuitive, receptive modality, it is important not to over-emphasise the receptive nature of this kind of knowing. The human knower does not open the shutters of the mind and an image of some object or experience does not physically imprint itself on the psyche. *All kinds of knowing require work by the knower.* (Willis, 2001, p. 5 – italics added)

In corroboration of this it may be observed that the gesture of opening required for OM-meditation can only be realised by a centre of activity capable of functioning individually (“soul”, as e.g. in Steiner 1961, p. 19). This centre will also be relevant for FA-meditation in equal measure, but in this case will be acting in a manner that is polar to the former. From this point of view there is no such thing as “effortless” meditation (Lutz et al., 2008, p. 2). If this impression nonetheless arises (as variously reported), it must be that the necessary mental effort has been accomplished in earlier phases, or has disappeared into the background as a result of previous practice. But even then the meditation process is being maintained *by an act of will*, and meditators should be able to decide *themselves* when it will come to an end. Unless this is the case the process cannot be described as modern meditation, in the sense of an act performed out of an attitude of mind which is both self-motivated and self-referential; rather it would have to be diagnosed as a regression to externally determined mental states. This is where the oft-quoted “pre/trans” distinction (Wilber, 1995) becomes relevant. According to this view only certain meditation forms can be regarded as suitable for intrinsic methods of investigation. These are the ones that not only reckon with the keen-edged ego-consciousness of the current era – the mental basis of science itself – but also seek to extend it in a transpersonal direction.

From the analysis of the covert components of focused attention and open monitoring – insofar as they reach beyond the pragmatic dimension – arise the following *prerequisites* of the fundamental structure of meditation: 1) Individual *activity*, consciously practicable through self-referential attention. This can be carried out in expansive (opening, unfolding) or contractive (focusing, detached) form. Steiner designates the becoming aware in meditation of the soul’s centre of activity as “birth of the higher self” (Steiner, 1961, p. 154 f.), Witzenmann as “genuine self-realisation” (Witzenmann, 1983, p. 92). 2) An autonomous *meaningful context*, establishing the coherence of mental structures. This can arise in universal or individualised (or in graded transitional) form. The context that enables things to appear according to “their deepest inner being” Steiner calls “the spiritual world”, Witzenmann “unchangeable, ideal totality”. Over and beyond the pragmatic dimension, these two poles, which can be distinguished both empirically and in terms of structural theory, unfold a *dimension of meditative semantics*. This makes it possible

31. In the course of his consideration of a “third level of reflection” Gotthard Guenther comes to the quality of the “trans-finite”, the inversion of which leads “thinking into the real, enriched with immense spiritual experience.” He also characterises this level as “self-defining reflection and thus as the *I’s absolute relationship to itself*” (Guenther, 1957, p. 34/35, italics in original).

32. “Contemplatives who reach this stage experience consciousness in a radical *new way*. For them consciousness seems to have awakened and seems to see itself in all things; to recognize itself in and as all worlds, realities and beings of the universe; unbound by space, time and limits” (Walsh, 1998, p. 682).

33. Moreover, the global characteristics of the brain processes observed in this connection correspond to the hypothesis formulated above in relation to OM-meditation: “[...] massive distributed neural assemblies are synchronized with a high temporal precision [...]” (Lutz et al., 2004, p. 16372).

to interpret meditative experience in normal scientific terms, i.e. those that define the prerequisites for the genesis of mental structures.³⁴

In order to utilise the full reach of the fundamental structure principle, however, and to arrive at an understanding of the objective structures of everyday consciousness, yet another set of prerequisites needs to be taken into account. It has to do with the previously discussed theme of mental effort. Piron gives the label “obstacles” to the first of the five levels of meditative depth, backing this description up with a host of examples from the various traditions (Piron, 2004, p. 2). These obstacles – to give a few examples: “laziness”, “haste”, “ignorance”, “distraction” and the “inability to take a new step” – have a negative character, but implicit in each is a quality or ability which, if striven for, will lead to successful meditation. To be exact, this is not about achieving the first level of meditative depth, but about preparing for it through the *overcoming* of obstacles. If one enquires after the source of the obstacles to be overcome, it appears – in connection with phenomena of deeper meditative levels, which are defined in terms of success in overcoming the obstacles³⁵ – that its location is to be found in a particular function of the bodily organisation. According to Witzmann, this is traceable to a function of the body’s neural system (neuro-sensory system and brain). He calls it *decomposition*, by which is meant the dissolution or negation of mental context (cf. Wagemann, 2010, 2011). By the same token, the overcoming of meditative obstacles is equivalent to the gradual warding off of the neuronal decomposition function – and that in the form corresponding to the particular phase of the process or meditation type: universalising (main feature of OM) or individualising (main feature of FA).³⁶ Success in meditation is unthinkable without a transient bodily organisation. While the latter might be the source of alienation and with it distraction, illusion, loss of meaning and suffering, it is at the same time that which makes possible individuation in the positive sense. In the absence of a body, then, there would be neither impediment to be overcome nor a field of inner activity susceptible to being shaped and improved by practice. As regards meditation’s fundamental structure, then, a further set of prerequisites must be added to the two mentioned above: 3) A *bodily organisation* which causes mental decomposition *and* makes individualisation possible.³⁷ The functional trichotomy thus sketched provides an interpretational background upon which the relationship between meditative action patterns (“pragmatics”) and experiential content (semantics) can be described.

Of course, the human body is not only the “springboard” and “landing mat” for meditative processes, but determines the characteristics of our everyday consciousness as well. For the fact is that the decomposition effect associated with the latter works upon the neuro-sensory system in such a way that it does not construct the forms of objects nor facilitate other acts of mental coherence – as is widely assumed – but has precisely the opposite effect of deconstructing them (Wagemann, 2010). Everyday consciousness is never fully aware of the constant crisis of confrontation – i.e. pure percept – from which it has to be built up. This, however, does nothing to change the fact that the crisis must be met again and again. The required renewal or creation of mental structures consists in permeating disjointed percepts with meaning that endows them with context. Witzmann calls this process re-composition. It also points, within the context of both individualisation and universalisation, towards the fundamental structure introduced above, but with one main difference: whereas above it related to the inner world of the mind, here the perceptual element brings it into specific relation to the external world. The wide distinction between perception generated by sensory-neuronal processes impinging upon from without and that of one’s own self-produced, inner activity has the effect of making the results of successful re-composition seem like separate, estranged objects. And in the habitual fixation upon the object-like result, mental activity quickly loses its productive relationship to the re-composition process: it experiences itself not in its productive authenticity, but as a receptive subject facing an object.³⁸ In terms of process our everyday consciousness amounts to little more than the subject-object split rolling down a “one-way street” where “u-turns” in attention are officially forbidden – but not entirely impossible.

Our normal waking consciousness is characterised not only by the sharply contoured separation between subject and object, but also by that between the subject and its unconscious antecedents, in other words, its participation in the pre-personal process by which consciousness is generated. If the first split has advanced to become the cardinal virtue of the scientific mentality – detached and exact observation – the second demarcates the boundary of this attitude in respect of its own formative basis. If we designate – as a working hypothesis – the content of our everyday consciousness as *real*, then its formative basis must be granted a reality status of a not merely equal, but – for the sake of consistency – higher order. Simply because this formative process has not (yet) been observed within the framework of systematic research is no reason to regard it, in principle, as unreal. Rather, in connection with this process it is entirely apposite to see the reality of everyday consciousness as relative and strictly limited:

Indeed, the world’s contemplative traditions widely agree that our usual state of consciousness is not only suboptimal but significantly

34. Schieren (2010a) also draws a strong contrast between the two components in his characterisation of intuitive consciousness.

35. For instance, *Dissolution* of the subject-object split, *comprehensive* insight and certainty, *bodiless* experience of oneness (see above).

36. Wagemann (2010, p. 198) designates these two modes of warding incoherence off as “antagonistic” and “protagonistic”.

37. With this an idea is given of how a structural-phenomenological understanding of the human being (“anthropology”) that is both tri-structured and monistic could look (cf. Wagemann, 2010, 2011).

38. The details of this process (laying down of the primary memory layer) cannot be presented here for lack of space (cf. Wagemann, 2010).

distorted and dreamlike. In the East the dreamlike characteristics of our usual state have been called *maya* or illusion and in the West they have been called a consensus trance (Charles Tart), a verbal trance (Fritz Perls), hypnosis (Willis Harman), or a collective psychosis (Roger Walsh). (Walsh, 1998, p. 684).

Witzenmann also stresses the restricted reality content of our ordinary consciousness, but he goes beyond merely pointing out its shortcomings, in that he speaks of it as a “memory dream” emanating from our forgotten participation in the processes of the fundamental structure (Witzenmann, 1987, p. 19). In this way, in contrast to all pre-modern traditions, which go no further than rating meditative states ontologically higher than everyday consciousness, he establishes a relation between the two, which explains the genesis of the latter. This can be divided into three phases: 1) Pre-personal participation in the fundamental structure processes, 2) Personal constitution as its result (ordinary consciousness), 3) Achieving transpersonal awareness of the fundamental structure processes (meditative consciousness).³⁹ From this perspective the first phase can be seen as corresponding to deep sleep, the second to (memory-)dream, and the third to the kind of meditatively induced (super) wakefulness possible today (cf. Steiner, 1894, p. 85; Assagioli, 1992, p. 29). Returning to the previous discussion of the *depth* of meditative consciousness, it is clear that this can no longer be measured solely on the basis of its distance from everyday consciousness, but may also be associated with the degree and breadth of observational access to the actual structure generating process itself. When viewed in combination with the previously described relationship between meditative “*pragmatics*” (the action patterns of FA and OM) and *semantics* (the trichotomous interpretational background of meditative experience), the two-dimensional co-ordinate system becomes a three-dimensional field of experience and knowledge (Fig. 7). This develops from our essentially selective everyday consciousness through the meditative cultivation of the action patterns (FA, OM) in the direction of increasingly wakeful participation in the formative dynamics of consciousness (here displayed as a circular process). While effecting this transition demands that evasive action be taken to overcome the obstacles emanating from the body (decomposition, subject-object split), it also makes possible a comprehensive experience of the integrated systems that make use of the body. This means that the content of meditation does not have to be exclusively spiritual or psychological, but can just as well be centred upon processes arising from the bodily senses. For instance, Hemmerich (and this is echoed by Steiner) underlines this point: “When meditating it is actually highly advantageous to have the eyes open” (Hemmerich, 2010, p. 51). Structural phenomenology also favours this view. Such a broadening of basic attitudes is necessary in that it counters the danger, latent to a greater or lesser degree in all meditation traditions, of shunning the body and denying the world. Understanding the mental gestures of denying or embracing the bodily nature within the context of structure-generating processes, and bringing them into a balanced relationship will be crucial for the development of a progressive approach to meditation, both from a scientific point of view and that of practical living. For current meditation research this could mean incorporating transpersonal models, as sketched here, into the design of empirical studies, and testing them in relation to both meditation reports and the findings of cognitive psychology. For the modern meditator it could mean being able to tread a path of practice and development that would encompass classical meditation techniques, while at the same time, through its scientific foundations, reaching beyond them, and thus being truly transcultural.

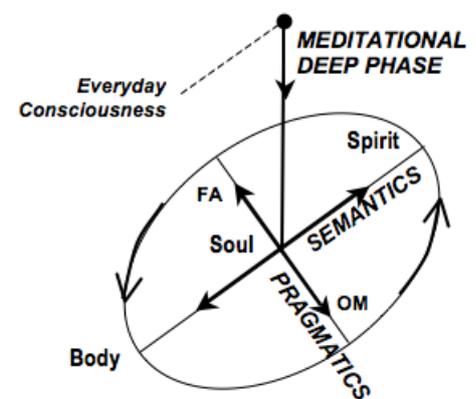


Fig. 7: Three-dimensional field of experience and knowledge

Meditation and professional development: its use in teaching

In discussions of the relationship between the meditative and professional life various tendencies are discernible. In the past they were wont to be seen as epitomising two contrasting attitudes of mind, either transpersonal-intuitive or personal-rational, and because these appeared to be incommensurable, they tended to be regarded as incompatible life-styles.⁴⁰ Nowadays this strict separation seems wholly out-of-date; the character of modern meditation is gauged much more in terms of its positive developmental effects upon everyday life and consciousness (Steiner, 1961, Zajonc, 2010, Lutz et al., 2004). If in the media meditation is still largely associated with recreation and private personality development, it is nevertheless the case (as mentioned at the beginning) that there are moves afoot to make use of the resources of meditative practice in the framework of professional development. Here a distinction must be made between a more extrinsic application of meditative practices towards the improvement of general wellbeing and productivity, and an intrinsic approach geared towards development through inner work upon the foundations of a particular profession. While the former aspect can be relevant for all professional groupings, here the realm of education will be used as an example of the latter aspect at work.

39. On this basis connections can be established to the three-level logic of Gotthard Guenther (Guenther, 1957, 1978) and the consciousness structures put forward by Jean Gebser (Gebser, 1986).

40. This scenario can be seen, for instance, in the biography of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha.

For the teaching profession Steiner set a specific standard; namely, that to practise it acceptably requires profound meditative work upon its pedagogical and scientific foundations (Steiner, 1997). In keeping with the empirical character of meditation, this should also entail a thoroughgoing observation of self. In this connection Steiner emphasises, on the one hand, that in such “observation of the soul” arriving at the state of being aware of the formative processes of consciousness would be an “exception” (Steiner, 1894, p. 40; Steiner, 1961, p. 31). On the other hand, he sees the purpose of meditative research as a “*comprehensive unfolding of every aspect of human nature*”⁴¹, and that this should modify the normal state of waking consciousness.⁴² Initially what seems to be important is to make a clear distinction between the preparatory exercise and its testing out in practice. With a suitably trained awareness of the processes involved in the forming of consciousness, however, those aspects of them that are relevant to professional practice, i.e. in the teaching situation, can then be meditatively cultivated.

On the basis of all that has been set out so far in this article, the implications of this will be made clear in a brief sketch. If in the course of a lesson a teacher seeks to communicate some aspect of the subject in hand (for instance, by giving a spoken introduction), s/he will be primarily concentrated upon the content of his presentation. If, however, s/he does not have, at the same time, a sense for the mental atmosphere in the class, there is a danger that his or her efforts will pass the students by – and that sooner or later the teacher will be confronted with problems of understanding, motivation or discipline. Relating this situation back to the structure-generating features of FA- and OM-meditation, it is clear this pedagogical challenge comes down to a balanced interpenetration of their two corresponding action patterns. Whereas in this situation the FA-component relates to subject content and the OM-component to the social or communicative skill of the teacher, this relationship is liable to change in step with the transition to another typical teaching situation: in her interaction with the class the teacher’s attention will repeatedly be focused exclusively upon one student or group of students. At this point the content aspect momentarily retreats, taking on the role of a horizon framing the social interaction, while the student’s personality takes centre stage – assuming, of course, that teaching is not just meant to be an automatic drip-feeding and testing process. Now the teacher’s attention, in its FA sense, rests upon a particular student with all his or her expressive qualities, and the individualised lesson content, now corresponding to the OM-aspect, can function as a meeting ground from which to be aware of the social context that unites students and teacher in this moment.

From having thus made concrete the pedagogical skills of subject presentation and communication (cf. Schieren, 2010b) it is clear how they are intimately bound up with each other in the fine-structure of the classroom situation. Meditative practice, which cultivates the FA and OM components in their dynamic interaction can give the teacher a much clearer sense of the fine-structure of his teaching.⁴³ It can also contribute to identifying particular teaching problems as imbalance in the management of his/her own mental activities – and to how to foster further development by working on them. All these considerations together pose the possibility of a form of training that goes beyond the mere addition of content-related and communicative skills, since it requires their individually accomplished, aesthetic integration. If, as envisaged by Steiner, teaching is to become an art, then the whole human being must come into active movement in such a way that she does not merely learn and practise a skill, but turns herself into an explorer of her own nature.

41. Steiner (1894, p. 271; italics in original); see also Witzmann (1989, p. 69; Hemmerich, 2010, p. 45).

42. “But the human being should, of course, apply everything of a higher spiritual nature to the physical world and cause it to work through him into the latter.” (Steiner, 1961, p. 165; cf. Assagioli, 1992, p. 43)

43. This represents a concrete interpretation of the much used, but seldom explained concept of “presence on mind”.

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