

Contributions to Phenomenology 122

Jeff Yoshimi  
Philip Walsh  
Patrick Londen *Editors*

# Horizons of Phenomenology

Essays on the State of the Field and Its  
Applications

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# Contributions to Phenomenology

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The series is published in cooperation with The Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology.

Jeff Yoshimi • Philip Walsh • Patrick Londen  
Editors

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Essays on the State of the Field  
and Its Applications

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# Introduction



Patrick Londen, Philip Walsh, and Jeff Yoshimi

## 1 Overview

100 years ago Edith Stein had just ended her term as assistant to Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger was beginning his. Both were in the early stages of their own notable careers in phenomenology. They were drawn to the prospect of a new way of studying the world, oriented around the manifestations of entities, and their meanings to us, rather than to their objective properties. For example, the experience of living in a building, hearing a passage of music, or worshipping a sacred vessel, as opposed to a construction report, an acoustic analysis of tonal properties, or an archaeological description. Since then thousands of researchers have been drawn to the field and its many texts and themes, sweating through its extensive and jargon-filled primary literature, in the process creating a huge secondary literature and organizing into hundreds of groups and professional organizations, many of them associated with specific schools of interpretation.

Phenomenology continues to have broad appeal, both as a research program within philosophy and as a methodology, where researchers seek ways to supplement purely objective descriptions with more experiential, personal, or otherwise phenomenological descriptions. However, anyone entering the field, and even those with some familiarity, are faced with a problem: how to get one's bearings in an ever-expanding landscape of technical concepts, historical texts, and competing

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schools of thought? The primary literature is daunting, and the secondary literature is massive. Introductions and anthologies exist, many of them excellent, but they are typically focused on particular phenomenologists or topics, or offer an encyclopedic catalog of the discipline. What is missing is a broad characterization of the field as a whole—one that canvasses its many schools, camps, and styles—as a way to get situated in the area. What follows is such a guide, a kind of handbook or map of current research, to orient established scholars in areas outside of their primary expertise and also to orient newcomers, who can read these essays alongside introductory texts. This volume is thus a supplement to existing resources, a guide to further study, providing a selective overview of many of the paths the field has taken in the last 100 years, a summary of where things stand today, and indications of where they are going.

The volume is organized around a horizon metaphor. A literal horizon, the place where earth meets sky, serves to orient us in space, and is suggestive of both an outermost limit and of the many ways one can push forward into an area. The horizon allows us to find our way among objects and in the wider world. This metaphor was used by all the major phenomenologists. In Husserl “horizon” is a technical term with several meanings. He distinguishes an internal from an external horizon. The internal horizon of an object is the “systematic manifold of all possible perceptual exhibitings belonging to it harmoniously” (Husserl, 1970, 162). In other words, the set of possible ways an object can appear to a perceiver. An object’s external horizon is the field of “co-given” objects to which it is related, which “points finally to the whole ‘world as perceptual world’ . . . the universe of things for possible perceptions” (ibid.). Heidegger opens *Being and Time* by describing the provisional aim of the treatise as disclosing time as “the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being,” a kind of underlying background on the basis of which any understanding of being makes sense, a background which must be “laid bare” as part of ontological research (Heidegger, 1962, 40).

We don’t intend to make use of any specific technical sense of the term “horizon” here; this is not a treatise about the concept of horizon. Rather, we draw on the imagery of a horizon, and on the broad outlines of the philosophical concept, to organize the volume. Our aim is to consider some important points of reference for the field as a whole, as a way of orienting readers in the field, attuning them to its possibilities, and opening up ideas and avenues of future research. As a whole, the essays provide a broad sampling of contemporary approaches to phenomenology, both in terms of the state of current research within the field (“internal horizons”) and in terms of applications of phenomenology to other areas of research (“external horizons”).

Of course, any such guide is bound to be selective, reflecting the social networks and interests of the editors. This is not meant as an encyclopedia, but as a guided tour of the field, focusing on trends, approaches, and methodologies that have been left out of other collections. The volume originates in a conference convened at UC Merced, in California’s central valley, and attended by many scholars in California’s public higher education system (the University of California and the California State College systems). Still, we were fortunate to gather scholars with very

different backgrounds and training, to write essays on the broad outlines of the field and its many applications.

The first part of the book, on the “internal horizons” of the field, surveys the state of phenomenology today and raises questions that the field faces going forward. This part of the book provides an overview of some of the main schools of thought in phenomenology, the questions that animate them, and examples of projects and directions of research being pursued. Several schools of Husserlian and Heideggerian thought are covered, including more analytic “West Coast” phenomenology, the pragmatic form of existential phenomenology associated with Hubert Dreyfus and his students, and broad surveys of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty scholarship which includes coverage of several European research traditions. Many (but not all) of the topics covered in this part of the book are internal to phenomenology itself, such as exegetical and philosophical questions about being and consciousness, and clashes between rival schools of interpretation.

The second part of the volume showcases the “external horizons” of phenomenology, treating it as a living discipline that can both contribute to and draw inspiration from other areas. We do *not* cover several areas of application that are already well established, e.g. phenomenology and cognitive science, or phenomenology and the social sciences.<sup>1</sup> Instead, we focus on: (1) embodiment and questions of identity, (2) the arts, and (3) archaeology and anthropology. Each of these connections shows how phenomenology can open up new paths of thinking in an area.

The way that identity is embodied has long been a focus of phenomenological work. The theme is already apparent in Husserl and Heidegger, namely in their discussions of how structures of consciousness take shape through processes of historical genesis. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty both explore these issues in detail, treating the “transcendence” of consciousness as inextricable from its concrete, embodied, historical situation—its “facticity.” This set the stage for groundbreaking investigations into the way identity is gendered and racialized by Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon. Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* set the agenda for entire research programs, establishing connections between embodiment, socio-historical processes, and identity as enduring horizons for both phenomenological research and philosophy more generally.

Art has been a prominent topic within phenomenology from its inception. The experience of works of art provided key insights for some of the most influential texts in phenomenology (Heidegger on van Gogh; Merleau-Ponty on Cézanne, etc.). Art theorists and critics have, in turn, recognized how phenomenology offers a useful theoretical framework for understanding works of art, thus highlighting that a shared interest in investigating the structure and meaning of experience characterizes both fields. Art practitioners and theorists have also made use of

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<sup>1</sup>For a comprehensive overview of phenomenology and the cognitive sciences, see Petitot et al. (eds.) 1999. A survey of more recent work at this intersection is in Yoshimi (2020). The earlier literature on phenomenology and the social sciences is associated with Schutz (1972). Also see Natanson (1973). More recently phenomenology has been developed into one of the five main approaches to qualitative research in the social sciences (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

phenomenological concepts for their own creative and theoretical ends, often developing these ideas in ways that go beyond the simple application of a philosophical framework. Phenomenological reflection is not just a way for philosophers to understand art, but can also be a tool for artists and art theorists to investigate the subject matter of creative work. Understanding how artworks themselves can embody phenomenological investigation helps us see what philosophers can learn from those working in the arts.

Finally, archaeology and anthropology have a history of interaction with phenomenology, extending back to Husserl's early interactions with Levy Bruhl (Moran & Steinacher, 2008) and his dismissal of Heidegger's *Being and Time* as merely "philosophical anthropology" (Husserl, 1997), which reflects a mixed relationship between the areas. On the one hand, it is natural to supplement objective data about human societies with experiential accounts of life in those societies. Phenomenology has natural affinities with ethnographic field research, where an anthropologist spends an extended period of time with a group (for example, the Yanomami, a street gang, or the crew of a ship) and then describes those experiences in a detailed report. In a similar way, archaeologists are naturally led to consider what the experiences of those living in the ancient settlements they study might have been. However, phenomenological and ethnographic methods are subject to the criticism that they reflect the sensibilities of present-day phenomenologists or scientists in implicit and sometimes damaging ways. This was a source of controversy in Chanson's early ethnographic studies of the Yanomani (Albert, 1989), and also the basis of Husserl's own pejorative use of the phrase "philosophical anthropology" to characterize what he thought of as armchair speculations about contingent features of human experience. The contributions in this volume revisit these questions and suggest ways of overcoming or addressing them.

## 2 Internal Horizons

The section on internal horizons provides an overview of contemporary phenomenology, largely organized around major figures and scholarly directions in the field. The contributions focus on Husserlian, Heideggerian, and Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology, and give a sense of the main controversies, methodologies, and stylistic tendencies in these areas. The discussion is not comprehensive (none of the chapters is focused on Sartre or Beauvoir, for example). The goal, again, is to develop an illuminating rather than a comprehensive selection.

Pablo Contreras Kallens and Jeff Yoshimi open the section with a literal map of the phenomenology literature based on citational patterns. This is, to our knowledge, the first application of bibliometric methods to phenomenology, which promises to supplement our intuitive understanding of the structure of the phenomenology literature with objective citation data. The map contains nearly 12,000 nodes and 70,000 links, where nodes correspond to authors and links correspond to citations between authors. A clustering algorithm was used to identify groups of authors who

cite each other more than they cite authors in other groups. The results confirm the central status of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty in contemporary phenomenology. Other large clusters are organized around “embodied” approaches to cognitive science, contemporary philosophy of mind, and Kantian-Hegelian influences on phenomenology. The analysis is then recursively applied to the Husserl, Heidegger, and “French phenomenology” clusters, shedding light on internal divisions within these areas. The map also highlights a few areas that this volume largely passes over, e.g. contemporary discussions of theology and phenomenology in French phenomenology, as well as discussions of phenomenology in relation to Eastern philosophy and psychotherapy.

The next three chapters focus specifically on Husserlian phenomenology, beginning with John Drummond’s overview, which takes the form of a walk through “Phenomenology park.” This paper can be read as a first-person counterpart to the Husserlian section of the bibliometric map; a fun, opinionated overview of scholarly tendencies in the field. It is associated with an annotated bibliography.

David Woodruff Smith describes “West Coast” or “California School” phenomenology (Yoshimi et al., 2019), which is focused on links between Husserlian phenomenology and analytic philosophy. Smith’s style exemplifies a core practice of classical phenomenology: extended analysis of concrete perceptual experiences. Husserl spent several pages describing an apple tree in his garden (Husserl, 1982; section 88). Raymond Aron, pointing to a cocktail glass, told Sartre “You see, my dear fellow, if you were a phenomenologist, you could talk about this cocktail and make philosophy out of it” (Beauvoir, 1920, 112). Smith contemplates a Podocarpus tree in his backyard and a snowy egret in Merced. These simple acts are expressed using phenomenological descriptions like: “Phenomenally in this very experience I now here see attentively and intuitively that tall white egret stepping slowly through waving grass.” Smith identifies the logical form of this statement with the logical form of the experience it describes. This formal structure is associated with a horizon of implied meanings, which refer to possible worlds in which the egret might have been different. Smith also describes a “constitutive realism,” according to which our consciousness of the egret is built up over time but refers to an actual physical egret in the world.

Burt Hopkins considers a set of fundamental questions in Husserlian phenomenology, and in doing so exemplifies a different style of analysis. He considers experience of unity and manifolds in time, e.g. the ability to hear a manifold of five notes unfolding in time *as* five notes. This kind of ability occupied Husserl throughout his career, from his early work on the constitution of numbers in *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, to his late work on historicity, which Derrida famously critiqued, insofar as Husserl seems to assert that timeless essences develop in time (Derrida, 1989). Hopkins, who has worked extensively on this topic (Hopkins, 2005, 2013), returns to the issue here, focusing on Husserl’s account of time consciousness. Hopkins argues that there are several tensions in Husserl’s analysis, and indicates future research directions based on an account of time-consciousness which addresses these tensions.



The next two chapters are focused on Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology, respectively. Hakhamanesh Zanganeh develops a taxonomic overview of Heidegger scholarship and argues that only one position in this taxonomy actually corresponds to “Heideggerian phenomenology.” *Syncretic approaches* put Heidegger’s work in contact with other areas of contemporary philosophy (the Dreyfus school, discussed by Londen, can be located here); whereas *scholarly readings* focus on textual exegesis. Within the scholarly readings, Zanganeh further distinguishes between a *dual phased* reading that organizes Heidegger’s thought around a central *Kehre* or turn, a *teleological reading* that sees the later texts as the goal towards which the earlier works develop, and *genealogical readings* that emphasize continuities in the development of Heidegger’s thought. Within the genealogical reading Zanganeh emphasizes one that he argues is properly phenomenological; a reading which is “mostly genealogical but tries to preserve the specificity of individual works and topics.” Zanganeh ends the paper by pursuing some work within this reading, arguing that Heidegger’s account of temporality can be read as a Kantian/Husserlian project.

Robin Muller’s contribution turns to Merleau-Ponty, providing a comprehensive survey of Merleau-Ponty’s work organized around the central Hegelian conception of ambiguity. Muller shows how Merleau-Ponty applies this concept to topics internal and external to phenomenology, including questions about phenomenological method and the structure of perception, as well as questions at the intersection of phenomenology and psychology, art, anthropology, and other disciplines. Muller traces the development of Merleau-Ponty’s thought from his early work drawing on psychology (which has been of particular interest to philosophers of mind and cognitive science), to his later work focused on aesthetics and ontology. She defends a “unified reading” of Merleau-Ponty, whereby he engages with ontological problems throughout his career, and argues that this unified reading opens up new points of contact between Merleau-Ponty and several strands of contemporary research.

Patrick Londen provides an overview of a more or less unified school of existential phenomenology deriving from Hubert Dreyfus’ work, what he calls “Anglo-American Existential Phenomenology.” Often thought of as a particular interpretation of Heidegger (or “Dreydegger,” as it is sometimes called)—indeed, it may be the dominant approach to Heidegger interpretation in philosophy departments in the English-speaking world—this school of thought also draws from Merleau-Ponty and other figures, as well as more recent philosophy from the U.S. and U.K. It can be contrasted with European approaches to Heidegger interpretation which are focused more on textual exegesis (cf. Zanganeh’s “scholarly readings”) than on thematic developments or syncretic connections to other philosophical work. Londen focuses on four key issues in Anglo-American existential phenomenology: (1) the primacy of practice or “knowing how” over theoretical contemplation; (2) an understanding of practical know-how as coping, which fluidly responds to the nuances of a situation; (3) the role of ontology in background practices, whereby even in doing something like shopping for groceries we implicitly enact a background understanding of what humans and the goods they shop for are; (4) the way a meaningful life comes from taking a stand on one’s background practices. The

final section includes a discussion of how individuals can manifest their “culture in a distinctive way and thereby... reinvest in that culture by clarifying its style,” and how marginalized communities can transform pervasive background practices by introducing marginal practices into the mainstream.

We end the section with Steven Crowell’s discussion of what Husserl (2013) calls *Grenzprobleme* or “limit problems” in phenomenology: birth, death, animal consciousness, the unconscious, and the afterlife. These are seemingly un-phenomenological topics because they involve a study of what is *not* given to consciousness. This in turn raises the question of how phenomenology is related to metaphysics, which is arguably the most fundamental *Grenzproblem* opened up by phenomenology, and a central theme for all the classical phenomenologists: the relationship between phenomenology, which discloses conditions on the possibility of being, and metaphysical studies of being itself. Crowell summarizes a range of positions on the issue (which has been active in recent scholarship), including Husserl’s own late metaphysical view that being emerges from a network of interacting minds in an “inter-monadic community.” Crowell concludes on a skeptical note about phenomenological and metaphysics: “transcendental phenomenology is and ought to be metaphysically neutral; it should leave worldview proposals to the scientists and theologians.”

### 3 External Horizons: Embodiment and Identity

Céline Leboeuf’s chapter, “Phenomenology at the Intersection of Gender and Race,” functions as the volume’s pivot from internal to external horizons of phenomenology. The concrete ways in which one’s sense of identity becomes constituted through material and socio-historical conditions has always been a core concern of the “classical” phenomenological tradition. Beauvoir’s and Fanon’s systematic studies of gender and race, respectively, delineated major research trajectories for the second half of the twentieth century, and are some of the most active and interdisciplinary areas of phenomenology today. Leboeuf’s contribution situates these trajectories within the broader contemporary landscape of feminist philosophy and philosophy of race by developing her own “intersectional” phenomenological analyses of the lived experience of women of color. Classical phenomenologies of gendered and racialized embodiment (such as Beauvoir’s or Fanon’s) tended toward overly general descriptions of being a woman or being Black, while neglecting the particularities that come when identity categories like *Black* and *woman* intersect. Women of color do not necessarily experience the male gaze in the same way that white women do, nor do they necessarily experience the white gaze the way Black men do. In addition to her careful intersectional analysis of the gaze, Leboeuf also considers the particularities of women of color’s lived experience of body image, and the possibilities for “embodied resistance” in an oppressive society.

An important feature of Leboeuf’s chapter is that it articulates a shift from purely descriptive to *critical* phenomenology. Critical phenomenology emphasizes the role

of contingent historical and social structures in normalizing oppressive power relations. Francisco Gallegos's chapter explores this horizon of phenomenology through the distinctive lens of Mexican and Latinx philosophy from the mid-twentieth century through the present. A central topic in this tradition is the concept of *zozobra*: "an anxious condition characterized by the inability to be at home in the world." Gallegos goes beyond psychological accounts of *zozobra* to a more fundamental phenomenological analysis of how this condition arises at the level of our basic structures of sense-making, or what Heidegger would understand as the structures in virtue of which one "has a world" at all. In bringing together contemporary Latinx philosophers like Gloria Anzaldúa and Mariana Ortega with classical Mexican phenomenologists such as Jorge Portilla and Emillio Uranga, Gallegos guides us through a complex dialectic of what it means to be at home in the world. The concept of home can function as both ground of identity and mechanism of exclusion; as both illusory ideal and site of negotiation.

Rebecca Harrison's chapter on Merleau-Ponty and standpoint epistemology rounds out this section by taking up foundational questions concerning the very concept of a standpoint associated with a social identity category. Standpoint epistemology is a variety of feminist epistemology which claims that knowledge is always conditioned by socio-historically constituted perspectives, or "standpoints" relative to which members of different groups literally see the world differently. Harrison draws on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception to provide an analysis of this kind of situated perception, and in the process addresses a core challenge for standpoint epistemology: how is it that different standpoints "have different but nonetheless real experiences of a single external reality" such that some standpoints can make better or "less false" claims about that reality than others? Merleau-Ponty's accounts of perspectival realism, the horizontal structure of the perceptual object, and the normativity of perception (cf. Muller's discussion in this volume) serve as a model for understanding feminist standpoint epistemology's central insight: that some people are better situated to see certain realities than others. Harrison notes that in everyday perception, certain spatial orientations can offer better perceptual access than others: I can see someone better (for most purposes) at ten feet than at one hundred. Harrison argues that, for Merleau-Ponty, perspective isn't limited to spatial orientation. Social, cultural, and historical orientation can offer similar privileged perspectives: the Parthenon does not look the same way to us today as it did to the ancient Greeks, and they were better situated to appreciate its original significance. In the same way, Harrison points out, women in heterosexual domestic relationships tend to have a more accurate view of the unequal distribution of domestic labor than men, because occupying a social category like "woman" may offer a privileged position for seeing "certain gendered phenomena in the world, or how pervasive certain gendered phenomena are".

## 4 External Horizons: The Arts

Phenomenology has a rich history of engaging with art and artists. Phenomenologists have often looked to artworks to enrich their philosophical accounts of perception, consciousness, and ontology, and philosophers interested in art and aesthetics have often drawn from canonical works in phenomenology. Artists and those working in the arts more generally are often interested in phenomenology and use these ideas in their own theoretical discourse. These applications of phenomenological theory don't always make their way back into philosophy. This section explores some of these discussions of phenomenology in the arts, and the relevance of artistic practice for phenomenology.

Samantha Matherne investigates the relationship between the work of artists and phenomenologists in her chapter, "Are Artists Phenomenologists?" She compares Merleau-Ponty's frequently discussed views on art and artists with the lesser-known views of Edith Landmann-Kalischer. While both authors construe lived experience as the shared subject matter of artistic practice and phenomenology, the two disagree on whether artists themselves count as phenomenologists. Matherne argues that this disagreement lies in their differing views on the nature and goals of phenomenology. For Landmann-Kalischer, the phenomenologist "is a kind of psychologist who aims to analyze, classify, and lawfully-determine lived experience," whereas the artist seeks to produce works that "mirror lived experience in a faithful way." On this view, the phenomenologist and the artist approach the same subject matter in fundamentally different ways. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the phenomenologist and the artist share a goal as well as a subject matter: both aim to "present" lived experience so as to "evoke" that experience in the viewer, reader, or audience. Matherne thus identifies a common goal among artists and phenomenologists in the Merleau-Pontyan approach: their shared "endeavor to express, exhibit and evoke our still-mute experience."

Manuel Martín-Rodríguez explores the role of phenomenology in theories of the reader's experience of literature, focusing on the experience of encountering references to outside texts within a literary work: how does a reader negotiate an allusion to an unfamiliar text? Martín-Rodríguez reviews the development of reader response criticism, from Roman Ingarden's pioneering phenomenological work on the intentionality of the reader's experience of a text, to Wolfgang Iser's analysis of the active role the reader plays in helping to constitute the meaning of a text. But Martín-Rodríguez's views on reader experience are grounded not only in these theoretical debates but also in his own experience working through literary texts with students. He draws from his students' reading of José Antonio-Villareal's *Pocho*, an early work of Mexican American literature that contains a scene in which characters respond to a reading of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, a work unfamiliar to the students. Without any direct citations of Dostoevsky's novel, the reader of *Pocho* must negotiate this literary reference based solely on the characters' reactions to hearing the story read aloud. By gauging his students' frustrations with and insights into these intertextual gaps, as well as the evolution of that initial understanding

upon reading Dostoevsky's novel, Martín-Rodríguez constructs an "intertextually-based" account of reader experience that emphasizes the way any reading experience depends on and informs experiences of reading other texts. This empirically informed investigation into reader experience of intertextuality points the way to a decentralized and "more organic understanding of the history of literature than the one currently available to [students] from educational and other cultural institutions."

In "Phenomenology and Architecture," Jennifer Shields investigates how phenomenology and perceptual psychology are informing creative work in the fields of design and architecture. Shields notes the central role that two-dimensional graphic representations play in design, including exploratory sketches at the beginning of the design process, computer renderings that communicate finished designs to clients, and instructional graphics to aid in construction. Shields argues that we need a better understanding of how viewers experience two-dimensional images as representations of three-dimensional space. She draws from her own empirical work into the perceptual experience of graphic representations of three-dimensional space, including tracking eye movements in response to different kinds of images, and suggests that architects have a responsibility to better understand this phenomenological data. "If we could anticipate how spaces will affect the occupant's phenomenological experience by how they respond to images of it," Shields argues, "we could design a better built environment."

## **5 External Horizons: Archaeology and Anthropology**

Phenomenology is obviously relevant to anthropology, which interprets the lived experiences of human social groups, and also to archaeology, which studies past peoples via their physical remains. We begin with two papers on archaeological research. While it may seem impossible to get any insight into the phenomenology of long-dead peoples and civilizations, there is in fact a (controversial) tradition in archaeology of drawing on phenomenology. Both contributions to the volume return to phenomenological archaeology, but in a way that addresses concerns with earlier approaches. Both draw on objective methods (considerations about cognitive architecture, lab experiments, virtual reality research, and geo-spatial information models) to make informed conjectures about the experiences of past peoples, and also try to recreate certain aspects of those experiences.

Holley Moyes begins her chapter with a history of phenomenological archaeology, starting with Christopher Tilley's well-known landscape studies, which involved him walking through ancient sites like Stonehenge, and on that basis describing what he thought the experience of those living in at the time might have been like. The approach was meant to shed light on meaningful structures of the environment obscured by what Tilley (drawing on Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) took to be an over-emphasis on objective data. However, Tilley was widely criticized for the potentially biased perspective of his "solitary strolls." Moyes describes

the subsequent history of this controversy, then unpacks her own approach, which draws on multiple lines of evidence in developing an account of past phenomenology, including neural and psychological evidence about shared cognitive architecture, and laboratory experiments which test responses to physical features of the environment such as light and darkness. She then describes how she has used this methodology to study the ritual significance of darkness in caves.

Graham Goodwin and Nicola Lercari also describe ways of using objective data to develop plausible accounts of past phenomenology, in part by *recreating* past phenomenology. This is done using virtual reality, augmented reality, and multi-sensory displays, built around detailed reconstructions of physical sites. In this way Tilley's solitary and interpretive strolls around Stonehenge could be replaced with immersive and empirically grounded phenomenological simulations. Several case studies are described, including a site reconstruction of Catalhöyük in modern-day Turkey. Graham and Lercari caution against an oculo-centric emphasis associated with this kind of approach (VR tends to be focused on visual data), or on systems that only provide visual or auditory information. They describe ways to integrate visual and auditory data in multi-modal simulations, and argue that this provides for a more immersive, affective, and embodied form of recreated experience.

Finally, Christopher Stephan and Jason Throop turn to anthropology, which has its own long and at times fraught relationship with phenomenology. They develop the concept of an "eventive ground," which can be understood in contrast to simplistic alternative conceptions of an event, including Husserl's own concept of an event as a moment of life, "bracketed" in an *epoché*, and then reflected on in order to identify general essences. Stephan and Throop argue that events should not be understood in this way, nor should they be understood as anecdotes or curiosities which can be used to enrich existing phenomenological accounts. Instead, they conceive of events as generative structures that can direct our thinking "through" particulars to whole worlds. An event can be a "touch, a turn in conversation, recapitulations of ritual, a silence" whereby "a world (as well as a style of being in it) begins to become discernible." Their discussion is critical of traditional phenomenology but also aspirational. Anthropology is at its best when it "holds close to" the event, and in this way phenomenological anthropology has the potential to be "an in-between which aims to think phenomenologically from an eventive ground that always exceeds and transforms the grasp of the familiar."

## 6 Conclusion

The world is more than an aggregation of physical objects; it is a meaningful world, a lived world, a source of action and reflection. Across many areas of science and inquiry, the need for a discipline which studies these meanings has been felt. Gender, race, identity, artworks, novels, graphical representations, past civilizations, social groups, and present-day human societies all involve lived and meaningful experiences. Artworks produce experience in the viewer or reader, but also represent the

experiences of those involved, and can in some cases give insight into concealed features of everyday experience. Identity is experienced differently by those “in a standpoint” than by those outside of it, who construct it in multiple ways. Archaeology involves a reconstruction of past phenomenology from scant evidence, and even recreations of that phenomenology. Phenomenology itself can be pursued in many ways, from studying the logical form of the mundane experience of a tree, to describing the unreflective experience of getting on in the world, to delving into the most fundamental mysteries of temporality, the emergence of unities from the flux of ongoing experience.

Throughout these many domains of investigations deep and difficult questions arise. What are the proper categories of phenomenology? What is its method? Is it subject to inescapable bias? Are its many ambiguities something to be overcome or is this ambiguity the proper essence of phenomenology? Does phenomenology shed light on being, or is it metaphysically neutral? Is it best pursued using the austere categories of analytic philosophy or are those categories themselves problematic? Does it provide a way to overcome the limitations of the scientific method, or should it draw on scientific methods to supplement its inquiries?

We hope to give a sense of these many questions that arise at the horizons of phenomenology, in hopes of continued research, further pushing its boundaries and potential as it enters its second century.

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**Part I**  
**Internal Horizons**

# Bibliometric Analysis of the Phenomenology Literature



Pablo Contreras Kallens and Jeff Yoshimi

Phenomenology studies the structure and significance of conscious experience, or human existence, or *being* (terminology varies and there are definitional disputes; see Dreyfus, 1991). It is associated with several philosophical movements, including existentialism, post-structuralism, and Continental philosophy broadly, which emphasize human subjectivity, agency, and meaning; embeddedness in historical and social structures; and alternatives to scientific reasoning as a basic mode of access to knowledge. Phenomenology is often thought of as being organized around specific philosophers (e.g., Husserlian phenomenology, Heideggerian phenomenology, and Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology), or into regional or linguistic groups (French phenomenology, German phenomenology, Anglo-American phenomenology). It can also be organized by topic (phenomenology and race, embodiment, art, cognitive science, etc.). Some of these groupings can be further subdivided: for example, Husserlian phenomenology in America is sometimes divided into “West Coast” and “East Coast” schools of interpretation (Yoshimi et al., 2019) and several schools of Heideggerian and Merleau-Pontian phenomenology can be distinguished (Muller, Chapter “[The Landscape of Merleau-Pontyan Thought](#)” and Zangeneh, Chapter “[Heideggerian Phenomenology](#)”, this volume; also see Sheehan, 2001).

It is not clear to what extent these divisions are reflected in the organization of work done within the field, as expressed by patterns of communication between authors. To assess this, we analyze the phenomenology literature using bibliometric methods (Osareh, 1996). This makes it possible to supplement an intuitive understanding of its structure with an empirically grounded analysis of citation patterns. In particular, we extract an *author-wise* citation network (Radicchi et al., 2012) for

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the published phenomenology literature, a network of nodes and connections, where nodes correspond to authors of articles or books about phenomenology, and connections correspond to citations from one author to another. The resulting graph has 11,980 nodes and 69,324 connections.<sup>1</sup> We then study *clusters* in this network, that is, groups of authors who cite each other more than they cite authors in other clusters and compare this more bottom-up image of communication dynamics within the field to the different sub-groups identified in expert historical reconstructions.

We begin by considering how phenomenologists themselves describe the structure of the literature, drawing on the contents of anthologies, syllabi, and other sources. We then describe the author-wise citation network. We show that the self-descriptions and the citation network agree on large patterns—in particular, the idea that Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty are major organizing figures. We also show that there are interesting discrepancies between the two. We then recursively apply these methods to the Husserl, Heidegger, and French phenomenology literatures, to identify citational sub-clusters of those groups. Finally, we discuss the strengths and limitations of this type of research, and survey some of the many potential directions for further research.

## 1 Self-Understanding of the Phenomenology Literature

The self-understanding of a scholarly literature can be documented in several ways. Direct evidence is available via published accounts of the literature and qualitative interviews with practitioners. However indirect evidence is also available in anthologies, introductory texts, syllabi, and curated databases, which reflect expert decisions about how to present and organize the structure of that field. For example, Kuhn (1962) saw textbooks as reflecting the current paradigm in a scientific discipline, guiding students' perceptions of relevant problems and consensus viewpoints about valid attempts to solve those problems (e.g., Kindi, 2005).

We first considered anthologies about phenomenology. We focused on sources organized around authors since anthologies organized in other ways did not produce clear patterns. Our search yielded 6 such anthologies published since 2000.<sup>2</sup> We then considered their chapter headings. Those authors who appeared in chapter headings of more than two of these anthologies are shown in Table 1.

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<sup>1</sup>The terms “node” and “vertex” are used equivalently in what follows, as are “link”, “connection”, and “edge”; and “network” and “graph”.

<sup>2</sup>The anthologies used were: (Moran, 2000; Solomon, 2001; Lewis & Staehler, 2010; Luft & Overgaard, 2013; Grossman, 2015; Käufer & Chemero, 2015). To find these sources we searched Google scholar in Summer 2020 using the following phrases, without quotes: *phenomenology anthology*, *introduction phenomenology*, and *companion phenomenology*. In each case we considered the first 10 pages of results and focused on edited volumes and introductory texts with section titles keyed to named figures. We omitted anthologies organized only by topic (intuition, evidence, existential phenomenology, intersubjectivity, etc.) or focused on specific figures (e.g. Husserl) or applications of phenomenology (media, science, literature, religion, mind, etc.).

**Table 1** Authors appearing in chapter headings of three or more anthologies about phenomenology, ordered by their number of appearances

Author	Appearances
Husserl	6
Heidegger	6
Sartre	6
Merleau-Ponty	5
Brentano	5
Levinas	3
Derrida	3

**Table 2** Authors appearing in three or more phenomenology syllabi, ordered by their number of appearances

Author	Appearances
Husserl	17
Heidegger	16
Merleau-Ponty	14
Sartre	9
Beauvoir	4
Brentano	4
Fanon	3

Second, we searched for syllabi of introductory phenomenology courses, again with a focus on phenomenology courses organized around authors (as the majority were).<sup>3</sup> Syllabi for 17 phenomenology courses taught after 2000 were identified.<sup>4</sup> In each syllabus, we tallied every phenomenologist discussed as part of a section of the course or included as required reading. Authors that appeared in at least 3 of the syllabi appear in Table 2.

Third, we consulted the PhilPapers database, a comprehensive index of research content in philosophy. Within each research area of the database, section titles and organization are hand-curated by professional philosophers with relevant expertise. The section on phenomenology is curated by Ammon Allred of the University of Toledo. The top-level categories of the phenomenology section with the most associated references are Husserl (14,000), Heidegger (10,000), Merleau-Ponty (3000),

<sup>3</sup>We searched using the phrase “phenomenology syllabus” (no quotes) and identified 17 syllabi from the first 10 pages of results. We focused on syllabi where “phenomenology” was in the title of the course and excluded courses on some more specific topic like “eco-phenomenology”, “Husserlian phenomenology”, or “cognitive phenomenology”. We also excluded syllabi for proposed courses and courses without a named instructor.

<sup>4</sup>The syllabi were from CSU Northridge, CUNY Albany, Dickinson, Elon, Fordham, George Mason, Georgetown, George Mason, Guelph, Kentucky, SUNY Newpaltz, UC Berkeley, UC Los Angeles, UC San Diego, University of Nebraska, University of San Francisco, and UT Arlington.

and Levinas (2000). Allred's introduction organizes the field around the work of Husserl and Heidegger:

The historical movement called phenomenology is generally regarded as beginning with Edmund Husserl, who made phenomenological questions central to his entire philosophical approach, arguing that a phenomenological investigation of consciousness should ground philosophy construed broadly as well as the sciences. Under the influence of a second generation of phenomenologists, most famously Martin Heidegger, the centrality of consciousness was often called into question. Nonetheless, the name phenomenology continues to be used to describe the whole tradition that developed out of this Husserlian/Heideggerian framework.

Allred goes on to refer to Stein, Scheler, Merleau-Ponty, and Derrida.

Similar statements occur in encyclopedia entries on phenomenology and in introductory texts, but we did not perform a comprehensive review of these sources. We will consider some of what phenomenologists themselves have said about particular sub-literatures of phenomenology when we turn to that topic below.

## 2 Bibliometrics and Scientometrics

Bibliometrics is “the application of mathematics and statistical methods to books and other media of communication” (Borgman, 1989). It is closely related to scientometrics, the “science of science”, which applies the concepts and techniques of bibliometrics to scientific communication (Braun et al., 1985; Garfield, 2009; Mingers & Leydesdorff, 2015). One use of these methods is to produce quantitative measures of journals, scholars, articles, books, disciplines, and research areas. Examples include impact factor (based on the yearly average of citations of a journal) as a measure of journal quality, and the *h*-index (based on an author's publications and citations of these works) as a measure of researcher productivity. Within these broad areas, we focus on citation analysis, which studies patterns of citation between documents, authors, journals, and other entities.<sup>5</sup>

Citation networks are graphs, that is, collections of nodes and links between those nodes, which represent patterns of connections (in this case, citations) between documents, people, or research areas (the nodes of the graph). We focus on an *author-wise citation network*, where nodes correspond to authors and links between nodes correspond to citations between authors. Moreover, our network is *directed*, reflecting the fact that citation is an asymmetric relation: a citation from author  $a_1$  to author  $a_2$  does not imply a corresponding citation from  $a_2$  to  $a_1$ . Furthermore, these connections are weighted: each link has a magnitude corresponding to the number

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<sup>5</sup>They have existed “Since the pioneering work of Derek de Solla Price (1965), who realized that bibliographic data have a natural mathematical representation in terms of directed graphs” (Radicchi et al., 2012, p. 233). Other kinds of relations are studied, including co-authorship relations, where two documents are linked if they have the same author, and co-citation networks, where two articles are linked if they both cite a common source.

of times that particular author-to-author citation occurs in our data; in other words, our graph reflects not only that  $a_1$  cited  $a_2$ , but also the number of times they did so. For example, the weight of the link from “Yoshimi J” to “Husserl E” in our data is 8, which indicates that Yoshimi cites Husserl 8 times. This example also makes it clear that these links are asymmetrical: Yoshimi cites Husserl, but Husserl does not cite Yoshimi.

In the remainder of this section, we review some of the techniques we use to study author-wise citation networks.

First, at the level of individual nodes, we consider the properties of authors in the graph. The *in-degree* of a node is the total number of nodes that are connected to it. For an author in our dataset, this corresponds to the total number of unique authors who cite them, regardless of how many times they have been cited. In contrast, the *strength* of a node corresponds to the number of times an author has been cited in the dataset, which is represented by weighted in-degree, that is, the sum of the weights from all the nodes connected to it (therefore, strength is generally higher than in-degree, as each author considered for the in-degree calculation necessarily contributes to strength by at least 1). These metrics are used in the tables in the rest of this paper to indicate how prominent authors are in the dataset, in terms of how many people cite them and how often they are cited.

Citation graphs can help to represent groups or “communities” of researchers who frequently cite each other’s work (we will use the terms “group”, “cluster”, and “community” synonymously). Community detection methods identify groups of nodes in a graph which are more densely connected to each other than they are to other groups. In this case they detect groups of authors who tend to cite one another frequently. The whole graph can then be thought of as a collection of sub-graphs, each representing a community of nodes more densely connected to each other than to the rest of the network. Community detection algorithms work in many ways and there is not yet a consensus on how to determine which method is best for specific applications.<sup>6</sup> We used the “Louvain” method (Blondel et al., 2008), which is easier to interpret than some of the alternatives, though future work may suggest reasons to prefer other methods.<sup>7</sup> The Louvain algorithm assigns individual nodes to different communities by optimizing the *modularity* of the graph, which refers to the proportion of within-community links as compared to between-community links. The more “community-like” a network is, the higher its modularity. Because the

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<sup>6</sup>Cut-based or “clique” methods try to find communities which are as disconnected from each other as possible, e.g. groups of authors who cite each other but do not cite authors in other groups. Dynamical methods involve imagined “walks” through the network from one author to another cited author. Communities are then groups of authors that such an itinerant reader would tend to stay within over time. For a more detailed description of these and other methods, see (Fortunato, 2010).

<sup>7</sup>We ran all of the available algorithms in the *R* (R Core Team, 2020) *igraph* (Csardi & Nepusz, 2006) package on the network, with generally poor results (e.g. one large community or many small ones). Two exceptions are Spinglass and Walktrap, which may be worth further analysis. Fast-greedy (an optimized variant of the Louvain method) produces results nearly identical to Louvain.

Louvain algorithm depends on an initial random assignment of a community to all nodes, the results are not strictly deterministic. The specific version we used is included in the network analysis package *igraph* (Csardi & Nepusz, 2006) for R (R Core Team, 2020).

We also produced a direct visualization of our citation graph. A visualization of a graph is a “graph embedding”. As with community detection, there are several ways to perform a graph embedding, and they are generally non-deterministic. Their main goal is to represent connectedness (in the sense of number of edges between nodes) as distance in a visualized network; the more connected two nodes are, the closer they should be in the visualization (on “distance-based” visualization, see (van Eck & Waltman, 2014)). We use a “force directed layout”, *OpenOrd* (Martin et al., 2011), which achieves this goal by treating edges as springs. Edge weights are used to determine spring stiffness, so that authors who cite each other more are pulled toward each other. There is also a small repulsive force between nodes which ensures they do not end up on top of each other. The relative equilibrium state of these forces reflects a balance between pulling groups of densely connected nodes towards each other and a visually appealing “spread” of nodes within groups.

Note that a force directed layout like *OpenOrd* and a community detection algorithm like Louvain correspond to two distinct ways of representing community structure. In our study, the first uses spatial position to represent communities (communities are “pulled together” by citations), and the second uses color (communities are groups of nodes with the same color). A set of colored nodes organized using a force-directed layout thus allows for comparison between the two techniques. To the extent that the two methods agree, points of the same color will be spatially near each other. Combination plots like this can produce a kind of center/periphery structure. Authors at the “center” of communities tend to cite and be cited by members of their community. Authors on the “edges” of their communities are more “hybrid”, frequently citing and being cited by authors in other communities.

### 3 The Structure of the Phenomenology Literature

In this section we describe how we obtained and filtered our data, how we analyzed it using the bibliometric methods described above, and summarize the main results of our analysis. All the code and data we used are available on a public code repository.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup><https://github.com/jyoshimi/scientometrics>. All results in this paper are reproducible using the code there. High resolution color versions of Figs. 1 and 2, in pdf and svg format, are also available in the “Figures” directory.

### 3.1 Methods

We searched Web of Science (WoS) for journal articles whose *topic* field contained the word “phenomenology” in the years 1900–2020, yielding 5869 results.<sup>9</sup> The topic field is based on an article’s title, keywords, and abstract. Since articles in all languages must include an English-language abstract for indexing purposes, articles in multiple languages were returned.<sup>10</sup> The results were, nonetheless, primarily in English, reflecting a well-known Anglophone bias in public indexing systems (e.g., Baneyx, 2008). These results were further filtered to only include journal articles in philosophy (this removed tens of thousands of results, many of them using the word “phenomenology” in the technical sense of physics and other sciences). The word “phenomenology” occurring in the topic field of a philosophy article is thus our operational definition of an item in this dataset being “about” phenomenology.

The results were in some ways skewed. Journals like *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* are heavily represented in the Web of Science dataset while such journals as *Heidegger Studies* and *Research in Phenomenology* are not.<sup>11</sup> Early readers of this manuscript highlighted several biases this introduces, for example a skew towards “syncretic” approaches to Heidegger that emphasize connections to other areas of philosophy (Zanganeh, Chapter “[Heideggerian Phenomenology](#)”, this volume).<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, even though over 100 years of articles were extracted, the results are heavily weighted towards recent work, which is better indexed by WoS, resulting in a sparse representation of the primary literature in phenomenology (see Fig. 1). However, WoS still provides a useful avenue for initial exploratory analysis, as its strict requirements for indexing ensure that the included references have a homogeneous structure, including information about citations to other sources provided in a consistent format. For instance, all journals indexed in WoS are required to have

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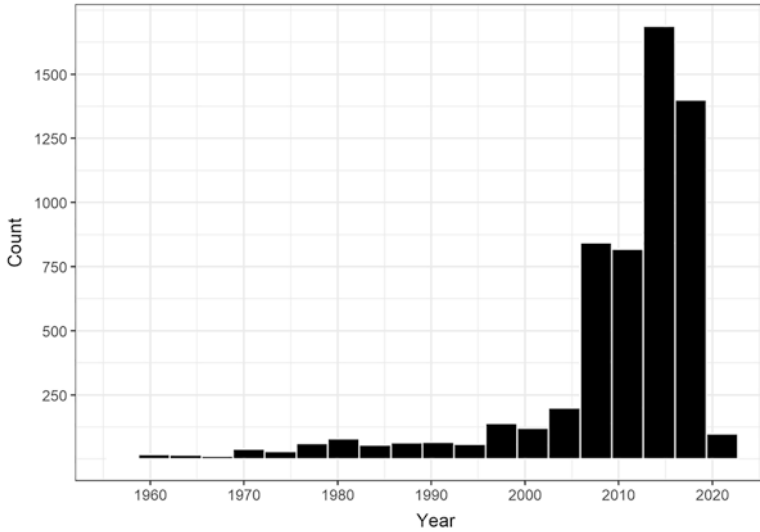
<sup>9</sup>“Web of Science” was previously “Web of Knowledge”. See <http://apps.webofknowledge.com/> Accessed on June 17, 2020.

<sup>10</sup>English (3523), Spanish (676), French (395), German (295), Russian (231), Italian (190), Portuguese (141), Czech (138), Slovak (62), Lithuanian (57), Slovene (41), Chinese (39), Dutch (34), Croatian (28), Polish (6), Catalan (4), Ukrainian (4), Unspecified (3), Turkish (2).

<sup>11</sup> 581 Journals are in the dataset. Journals containing more than 1% of the data, along with number of articles they contain, are: *Phenomenology And The Cognitive Sciences* (176), *Investigaciones Fenomenologicas* (166), *Journal Of The British Society For Phenomenology* (149), *Eikasia-Revista De Filosofia* (141), *Continental Philosophy Review* (137), *Studia Phaenomenologica* (134), *Filosoficky Casopis* (125), *Horizon-Fenomenologicheskie Issledovaniya* (112), *Husserl Studies* (112), *Journal Of Consciousness Studies* (105), *Philosophy Today* (101), *Voprosy Filosofii* (100), *International Journal Of Philosophical Studies* (86), *Research In Phenomenology* (83), *Phainomena* (79), *Filozofia* (77), *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie* (62), *Philosophy And Phenomenological Research* (59).

<sup>12</sup>One reader noted: “For Heidegger scholarship the main venues have been *Heidegger Studies* and especially *Gatherings* (the journal of North American Heidegger circle). For Merleau-Ponty the clear leading venue for scholarship is *Chiasmi*.”





**Fig. 1** Histogram showing number of sources in the dataset by year. Mean year of publication is 2010, with a standard deviation of 10 years. The data is clearly biased towards more contemporary work, occurring in journals indexed WoS

an English-language title, an abstract, and Roman script information about the authors, affiliations, and references.

For multi-authored articles only the first author was used. Authors were represented in a standardized last-name/first-initial format. These names were manually cleaned up by creating a table in which author names listed in WoS citations were mapped to standardized names. For example, “Aristotle” is written differently in different languages, and his name is sometimes misspelled in the database (variations include “Aristotel”, “Aristote”, and “Aristóteles”). Over 50 separate terms were mapped to “MerleauPonty M”. In some cases, books or article references were listed instead of authors, e.g., citations to “Hua”, or “Husserliana” (standard abbreviations for Husserl’s collected works). These canonical literature references were mapped to their corresponding author, e.g., “Hua” was mapped to “Husserl E”. After mapping all author entries to standardized names, further filtering was performed. Authors only cited once were removed, and authors who only cited these single-citation authors were also removed.

This filtered data was used to create a list of edges, represented as triples of the form “(source name, target name, citation count)”, for example “(Yoshimi J, Husserl E, 8)”, indicating 8 instances of Jeff Yoshimi citing Edmund Husserl in the data set. This list of individual connections between authors was converted to a citation network using the R package *igraph* (Csardi & Nepusz, 2006). The resulting graph contains 11,980 nodes (authors) and 69,324 directed weighted connections between nodes (citation counts between authors).

Because the concepts behind the Louvain method for community detection do not easily apply to directed graphs, we merged citing and cited authors into the same level when detecting communities. The community detection procedure was thus applied to an undirected version of the graph, that is, a graph where the directions of citations were ignored (in such a graph, citations from author  $a_1$  to  $a_2$  are not distinguished from citations from  $a_2$  to  $a_1$ ). This is one source of differences between the force-directed layout of the nodes visible as spatial position in Fig. 2 and the community structure analysis visible as color in that figure.

Note that authors who did not write directly about phenomenology can appear in the graph because they are cited by someone who did write about phenomenology. In a similar way, although nobody writing prior to 1900 should appear in the dataset as a citing author,<sup>13</sup> authors writing prior to 1900 do appear, e.g., Aristotle, Plato, and Kant, because they are cited. Emergent patterns in this data can also reflect connections between older authors: authors who are not directly connected can nevertheless be connected through an author who cites both.

### 3.2 Results

Table 3 shows a list of authors in the total dataset, ordered by the number of citations they received (strength), which gives some sense of their prominence in the data.

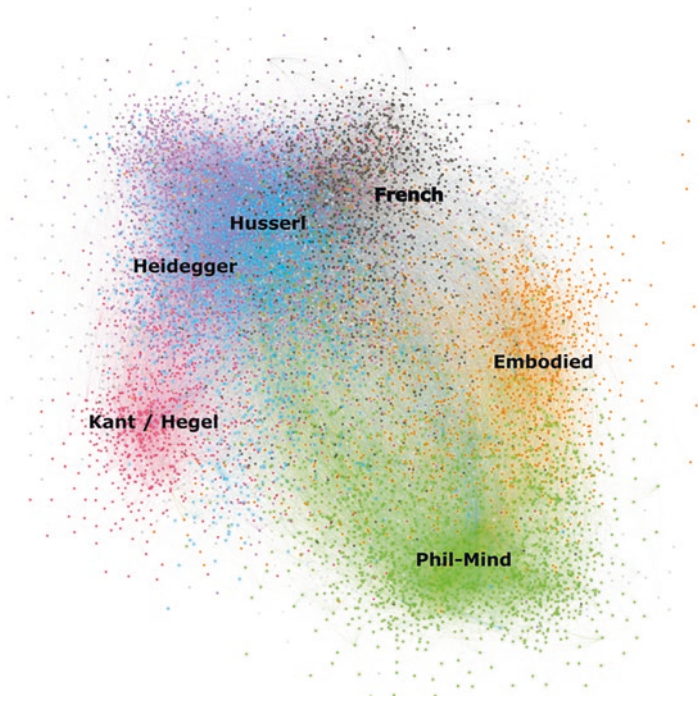
We ran the Louvain community detection algorithm on the dataset to identify groups of authors who tend to cite each other more than authors in other clusters. This produced 19 clusters. The six largest, in terms of total citations, are shown in Table 4.<sup>14</sup> Each cluster is discussed in the next section, where the labels we chose are also motivated. We will refer to clusters using all caps labels, for example using “HEIDEGGER” as shorthand for “The Heidegger cluster”. We also perturbed the data and re-ran the analysis to confirm that none of these results were artifacts of the randomization associated with the Louvain algorithm. In no case were the results substantially altered, though minor changes did occur, particular in the smaller clusters.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>There are exceptions, as some of the journals include republished older material and translations. An example from our dataset is (Husserl, 1998), a translation of several essays from a 1921 manuscript published in *Continental Philosophy Review* in 1988. These publications are, however, rare. There are eight for Husserl and one for Heidegger.

<sup>14</sup>Top authors of the remaining communities are (with size in parentheses): Fuchs (768), Schutz (395), Peirce (270), Bakhtin (266), Stein (228), Ortega y Gasset (195), Richir (158), Wittgenstein (109), Dussel (106), Cheyne (85), Demeterio (9) and Lapshin (2).

<sup>15</sup>For example, Wittgenstein sometimes formed into a larger cluster, drawing in Schutz, Ryle, Ihde, Heelan, Cavell, and Hacking (who otherwise are in the Schutz, Husserl, Peirce, or Merleau-Ponty clusters).



**Fig. 2** The graph embedding of the entire dataset, laid out using OpenOrd, and colored using the Louvain algorithm. Each dot corresponds to an author. Dots that are near each other have been “pulled” near each other by citations, which are treated like springs by the layout algorithm. Dots are colored by which community they are in. Communities are hand-labelled (the choices for labels are justified in the main text). To prevent the visualization from becoming too crowded, we only colored and labeled the six major clusters

**Table 3** Most cited authors, ordered by total number of citations (strength). Number of unique citing authors (in-degree) is also shown

Author	Strength	In-Degree
Husserl	3796	1550
Heidegger	1999	1122
Merleau-Ponty	1585	909
Kant	687	516
Ricoeur	640	414
Hegel	639	407
Derrida	638	410
Levinas	631	384
Sartre	616	427
Zahavi	529	372

**Table 4** The six largest clusters ordered by total citations (strength), along with number of authors (size), number of unique citing authors (in-degree), and the top 10 most cited authors. Cluster labels are motivated in the main text

Cluster	Husserl	Heidegger	Phil-mind	French	Embodied	Kant/ Hegel
Total strength	19,061	15,845	15,808	10,736	8718	7384
Total in-degree	13,734	12,186	13,166	8528	7112	6193
Size	1686	2056	1975	1640	1458	1125
Top 10 members	Husserl Zahavi Scheler Fink Bernet Brentano Spiegelberg Steinbock Sokolowski Drummond	Heidegger Ricoeur Derrida Levinas Gadamer Marion Henry Patočka Nietzsche Descartes	Dennet Searle Chalmers James McDowell Horgan Tye Fodor Clark Nagel	Merleau- Ponty Sartre Foucault Deleuze Waldenfels Barbaras Bergson Freud Butler Lacan	Dreyfus Gallagher Varela Thompson Noë Depraz Gibson Damasio Dewey Sheets- Johnstone	Kant Hegel Habermas Taylor Adorno Marx Hyppolite Cassirer Pippin Fichte

Figure 2 shows the graph embedding of the entire dataset combined with the results of the community structure analysis. The nodes are arranged using the force-directed algorithm OpenOrd such that the distance between two nodes is proportional to their degree of connectedness; moreover, each node was colored using the Louvain community detection algorithm. Labels for the six largest clusters were placed by hand near the center of mass of each cluster. As discussed above, using both methods makes it possible to compare the results of these two community detection methods. Cases where dots near each other are the same color show where the layout and the community detection algorithm agree; cases where dots of different colors are near each other show cases where the two algorithms disagree. A center-periphery structure is evident in all of the clusters, with some same-colored dots pulled near each other by OpenOrd, reflecting the “core” of a cluster, comprising authors who primarily cite each other in the dataset. Some same-colored dots are further away from this center and more dispersed, reflecting authors with more diverse citational practices, who are also cited by authors in other clusters. Notice that the center of the figure contains a mix of different colors, reflecting authors producing more “hybrid” citations.

Since OpenOrd is non-deterministic, we performed multiple runs to ensure that the results we report are robust. Each time we ran it, the main topological features shown in Fig. 2 persisted, though the actual locations and shapes of the main clusters varied. HUSSERL, HEIDEGGER, and FRENCH always overlapped in a large “supercluster”; EMBODIED was always between that supercluster and PHIL MIND, and both PHIL MIND and KANT/HEGEL were always relatively isolated from the other main clusters. We provide some interpretations of these features of the dataset below.



### 3.3 Discussion

We first consider the node attributes shown in Table 3, which largely match the field's self-understanding. Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty are the three most cited authors in the dataset (see Table 3) and are among the top 4 most referenced authors in syllabi, anthologies, and introductory texts. Sartre, Derrida, and Levinas are also among the most cited authors, and appear frequently in anthologies and syllabi. On the other hand, there are discrepancies. Sartre is frequently treated as a canonical phenomenologist (third most referenced in anthologies and fourth in syllabi) but is the ninth most cited in the dataset, possibly reflecting a decline in interest in his work or the English-language bias of our sample.<sup>16</sup> Brentano, Beauvoir and Fanon are notable for appearing in syllabi but not as top cited authors in the citation data (they are the 28th, 120th, and 309th). In the case of Beauvoir and Fanon this may reflect recent efforts to diversify the curriculum, which are not yet evident in citational practice.<sup>17</sup> A related explanation might be their *interdisciplinary* appeal: both Beauvoir and Fanon are known for their contributions to fields like gender studies, race studies, and cultural studies (Alessandrini, 2005; Simons, 2010), but less so for their contributions to phenomenology.

The six largest clusters in the dataset are shown in Figs. 2 and 3 and their top members and statistics are shown in Table 4. In the remainder of this section, we describe these clusters and their top authors in a qualitative way, comparing them with the results of the anthology and syllabus data presented in Sect. 1. In Sect. 4 we consider the three “core” phenomenology clusters in more detail.

The authors in HUSSERL are the most-cited authors in the dataset (both in terms of number of citations and number of citing authors). However, it is not the largest cluster: it contains fewer authors than HEIDEGGER or PHILOSOPHY OF MIND. Its top authors are primarily Husserl scholars. Zahavi, Bernet, Sokolowski, Moran, and Drummond are notable contemporary Husserl scholars. Others in this cluster were associates of Husserl. Brentano was Husserl's teacher and is often considered to be his most important influence (hence his presence in anthologies and syllabi). Scheler was an active member of the Munich and Göttingen circles, two groups of early scholars associated with Husserl, and a co-editor of the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, a prominent early journal founded by Husserl for dissemination of phenomenological thought. Spiegelberg wrote an influential account of the phenomenological movement in the 1950s, that is organized around Husserl and discusses the early social networks and scholarship associated with Husserl (Spiegelberg, 1981).

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<sup>16</sup>Rodney Parker (personal communication) offered the following explanation: “My guess would be that some sort of Anglo-American bias would account for both any decline in research that engages with his work and why he is not cited as much by English speakers. The received wisdom is that his politics made him quite unpopular in the US.”

<sup>17</sup>A collection of resources on the topic is maintained by the American Philosophical Association: [https://www.apaonline.org/page/diversity\\_resources](https://www.apaonline.org/page/diversity_resources)

HUSSERL occupies a central position at the top of Fig. 2, between HEIDEGGER and FRENCH (short-hand for “French phenomenology”, broadly construed to include Merleau-Ponty and Sartre and areas of largely Francophone philosophy inspired by phenomenology). The three clusters overlap heavily, as can be seen by comparing the force-directed layout—which aggregates these authors closely in terms of spatial position—and the Louvain algorithm, which was used to color the vertices purple, blue, and black. These three colors of vertex overlap, indicating that they are part of a larger supercluster. There are also numerous citations between these three clusters, evident in Fig. 3. This is suggestive of a classical phenomenology grouping, a “core phenomenology” supercluster that captures the canonical work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and others working within the phenomenological tradition, who are also the most cited authors in the syllabus and anthology data.

The HEIDEGGER cluster is the second-most cited cluster and also the largest, making up nearly 20% of the total dataset in terms of number of authors. This reflects the prominence of Heidegger in contemporary phenomenology. The cluster is more variegated than HUSSERL: in addition to Heidegger scholars, it contains philosophers associated with other schools such as Gadamer, Ricoeur, Derrida, Levinas, Henry, and Marion. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of Derrida, known more for his work on deconstructive approaches to literary criticism than for his work in phenomenology.<sup>18</sup> Gadamer, Ricoeur, Levinas, Henry, and Marion are also arguably founders of schools in their own right; these are discussed further in 4.2. Historical figures often cited alongside Heidegger also appear in the cluster: Descartes, Aristotle, Plato, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche.

Descartes’ presence is an example of what we will call “oppositional clustering”, a tendency of clusters to combine authors who cite each other as part of a critical engagement. Heideggerian phenomenology is openly anti-Cartesian, and Heideggerians often cite Descartes as an opponent (Dreyfus, 1991). That Descartes shows up with Heidegger rather than Husserl, who was famously Cartesian (Husserl, 2013), shows that the negative act of citing an opponent can produce more citations than the positive act of citing an ally. As one reader noted, justifying a critique of an opposing view sometimes requires more citations than giving credit to a friendly view.

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND is the third-largest cluster, both in terms of total authors and citations. It is composed largely of contemporary philosophers of mind and cognitive science, who use the term “phenomenology” to refer to first-person, subjective processes. In the 1970s Nagel was among the first analytic philosophers to argue that first person experience was irreducibly subjective, describing bat echolocation as something that could be objectively described but never really understood by humans (Nagel, 1974). Searle, Dennett, Chalmers, Block, and Tye all wrote on consciousness during the wave of interest in consciousness that began in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Searle, 1992; Dennett, 1993; Block, 1995; Chalmers,

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<sup>18</sup>Although Derrida’s dissertation and earliest works were on Husserl (Derrida, 2003, 2010) and he maintained an interest in phenomenology throughout his career.



1995; Tye, 1995). Dennett was a vocal critic of the concept of consciousness in this period and his inclusion in the cluster is (at least in part) another instance of oppositional clustering. Horgan, Clark, Fodor, and McDowell are philosophers of mind who either address consciousness directly or are cited by others who do. James is a historical figure who introduced such seminal concepts as “the stream of consciousness” and was among the first to attempt to understand consciousness in a scientific way (James, 2007).

Authors in this cluster make some reference to the phenomenology literature but are primarily in conversation with other contemporary philosophers of mind. Consistently with these observations, the force directed layout (Fig. 2) places this group further away from the main phenomenology supercluster, as a separate “island”. Authors in PHILOSOPHY OF MIND cite authors in the EMBODIED cluster (which is also focused on contemporary issues) more than authors in any other cluster in the dataset. There are relatively few citations in either direction between this cluster and HEIDEGGER or FRENCH (see Fig. 3). That PHILOSOPHY OF MIND is distinct from much of classical phenomenology is consistent with the self-understanding of the literature. These authors do not typically occur as chapter-headings in phenomenology anthologies or named sections of phenomenology syllabi. Many of these authors do appear in the PhilPapers database, but under separate headings, in particular “Philosophy of Consciousness.”<sup>19</sup> However, there are a substantial number of citations to authors in HUSSERL, which may reflect Husserl’s well known analytic orientation and status as a putative founder of analytic philosophy (Dummett, 1996; Walsh & Yoshimi, 2018).

The fourth largest cluster is FRENCH, as a shorthand for “French phenomenology”, broadly construed to include authors working in phenomenology or in areas of Francophone philosophy inspired by phenomenology.<sup>20</sup> In Fig. 2, it appears as a third area of “core phenomenology” overlapping HUSSERL and HEIDEGGER. Further supporting the concept of a core phenomenology supercluster are numerous citations between these three clusters (Fig. 3). Merleau-Ponty and Sartre are the two most cited authors in this group, consistently with the dominance of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre in anthologies, syllabi, and introductory discussions of phenomenology. Many of the most-cited authors in this cluster (Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Foucault, Deleuze, Bergson, Freud, Butler, and Lacan) also appear as top-level sub-categories of the PhilPapers page on Continental Philosophy. Several of the authors in this group (e.g., Barbaras and Waldenfels) are Merleau-Ponty scholars. The cluster also includes schools of thought that are distinct from but influenced by phenomenology. Butler, Deleuze, Foucault, and Lacan, for example are associated with poststructuralism, cultural studies, feminism, and continental psychoanalysis, respectively, all of which are subcategories of “Continental philosophy” in

<sup>19</sup><https://philpapers.org/browse/philosophy-of-consciousness>

<sup>20</sup>As a reminder, the Louvain algorithm automatically produced the cluster, and we chose a cluster label that seemed best to describe the authors in it.



PhilPapers. Freud and Bergson were also influential historical figures in these areas. This cluster is discussed further in 4.3.

The fifth largest cluster, EMBODIED, encompasses philosophers of mind, psychologists, and cognitive scientists who emphasize the role of the body and environment in cognition, against more traditional conceptions focused on internal mental representations. Most of the top members of this group (Dreyfus, Gallagher, Varela, Thompson, Noë, Gibson, and Damasio) appear in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on “Embodied Cognition” (Wilson & Foglia, 2017) and these same authors are mentioned in the top-level description of the PhilPapers category “Embodied and Situated Cognition”.<sup>21</sup> Also included are key precursors to the embodied approach, in particular JJ Gibson and John Dewey.<sup>22</sup> Like PHILOSOPHY OF MIND, it is separated from the core phenomenology supercluster in Fig. 2, placed between PHILOSOPHY OF MIND and FRENCH. Authors in these three areas frequently cite each other (see Fig. 3), which is consistent with its status as a broadly analytic sub-field of the philosophy of cognitive science that also draws on ideas associated with Continental philosophy, French phenomenology and especially Merleau-Ponty.

KANT/HEGEL consists largely of Kant and Hegel scholars who are in some way linked to the phenomenological tradition. Kant was a key influence on all the major phenomenologists, but especially Husserl and Heidegger. Husserl’s transcendental philosophy is explicitly Kantian (Kern, 1964). Heidegger wrote several important works on Kant (Heidegger, 1997a, b) and pursued a broadly Kantian transcendental project in his early work (Zangeneh, Chapter “Heideggerian Phenomenology”, this volume). Though there are important links between Hegel and Heidegger (Boer, 2000), his major influence on phenomenology was via Kojève and Hyppolite, who gave lectures in France attended by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and many other French intellectuals of the mid-twentieth century (Stone, 2017).<sup>23</sup> KANT/HEGEL also contains most of the major members of the Frankfurt School of critical theory (Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas, Marcuse, and Lukács), all of whom drew on Hegel. The cluster also contains Marx, arguably Hegel’s most famous and important reader, and among the primary sources of the Frankfurt school. These critical theorists drew on phenomenology, though often in a critical way, suggesting that their presence in the phenomenology dataset is due in part to

<sup>21</sup> <https://philpapers.org/browse/embodiment-and-situated-cognition>

<sup>22</sup> In their classic book on the topic, Lakoff and Johnson (also in this cluster, but not shown in the table) say “We want to honor the two greatest philosophers of the embodied mind... John Dewey, no less than Merleau-Ponty, saw that our bodily experience is the primal basis for everything we can mean, think, know, and communicate” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. xi). Moreover, it has been argued (see Lobo et al., 2018) that Gibson’s work was influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s ideas on the body and perception.

<sup>23</sup> One concern with this cluster was whether it was artifactual, given that the term “Phenomenology” occurs in the title of Hegel’s major work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. To check this, we removed the 232 entries in the dataset that mention this book in their title, keywords, or abstract. This did have the effect of moving Kant to the HEIDEGGER cluster, but a Hegel cluster remained and was largely unchanged in its top authors.

oppositional clustering. Adorno, for example, was dubious about Husserl’s account of the lifeworld as absolutely given and saw totalitarian possibilities latent in phenomenology, which for Husserl is a pure rational science of essences (Wolff, 2006). He also developed a Marxist critique of the Heideggerian/existentialist concept of authenticity (Adorno, 2002). Fichte and Schelling are associated with Kant and Hegel via the broader historical movement of German idealism. The cluster also contains such contemporary Kant scholars as Ameriks, Guyer, and Henrich, as well as Hegel scholars like Pippin and Houlgate (some of whom are outside of the range of the top 10 figures shown in Table 4).

## 4 The Internal Structure of Core Phenomenology

In addition to analyzing the phenomenology dataset as a whole, we also studied the three clusters within it comprising “core phenomenology”: HUSSERL, HEIDEGGER, and FRENCH. As a reminder, all-caps names refer to clusters in the total dataset. In this section we treat each of these sets of authors and citations between them as datasets in their own right and identify clusters within *them*.<sup>24</sup> These sub-communities will not be written in all-caps but referred to in terms of their most-cited authors, e.g., “Scheler” within HUSSERL and “Butler” within FRENCH. We only report sub-communities containing more than 1% of the total number of authors in a dataset.

We did not have as much data about the self-understanding of these sub-literatures as we did with phenomenology as a whole. However, descriptions of Husserlian, Heideggerian and French phenomenology exist. In addition to these descriptions, we also considered existing categories of the PhilPapers database and consulted experts in these areas.

### 4.1 Husserlian Phenomenology

We begin with the dataset derived from HUSSERL. As a baseline for comparison, we consulted several discussions of the scholarly landscape of Husserlian phenomenology (Spiegelberg, 1981; Bernet et al., 1993; Smith & Smith, 1995; Welton, 2000) as well as an extensive discussion of its North American reception (Ferri & Ierna, 2019). Welton refers to an earlier phase of Husserl scholarship focused on “exegesis and appropriation” and then describes two subsequent interpretive tendencies: an analytic reading focused on “detailed critical engagement, especially

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<sup>24</sup>Another approach would have been to re-create a dataset using keywords like “Husserl”, “Heidegger”, or “Merleau-Ponty” instead of “phenomenology”, which would amount to analyzing those as separate literatures, rather than looking inside these three clusters of the main citation graph.

with [Husserl’s] theories of meaning, perception, and judgement” and a continental or deconstructive reading originating in Derrida’s early work on Husserl. Welton mentions the following authors in association with these two camps:<sup>25</sup>

1. Analytic approaches. Tugendhadt, Theunissen, Smith, Føllesdal, Mohanty, Dreyfus, McIntyre.
2. Deconstructive approaches: Derrida, Levinas, Berger, Sartre, Ricouer.

The *Cambridge Companion to Husserl* (Smith & Smith, 1995) distinguishes several readings of Husserl, which can be thought of as sub-divisions of Welton’s “analytic approach”. Their discussion is focused on competing models of a specific technical notion in Husserl—the concept of “noema” (also see Smith, Chapter “[Constitution Through Noema and Horizon: Husserl’s Theory of Intentionality](#)”, this volume)—but they are also associated with broader interpretive tendencies:

1. Neo-phenomenalist model: Gurwitsch
2. Intentional object model: Ingarden
3. Content-as-sense model: Føllesdal, Dreyfus, McIntyre, Miller, and D. Smith. These authors are also sometimes referred to as members of the “West Coast” or “California School” of Husserl interpretation (Yoshimi et al., 2019).
4. The aspect model: Sokolowski, Drummond,
5. Aristotelian: Mulligan, B. Smith, Willard

The clustering algorithm identified 12 communities in the HUSSERL dataset. These communities, labelled by their most cited authors, and listed in order of their size (number of authors) are: Husserl (352), Quine (273), Schuhmann (223), Zahavi (200), Mohanty (126), Brentano (123), Ingarden (91), Steinbock (87), Sokolowski (60), Hopkins (52), Ryle (42), Patzig (25) (Table 5).

This dataset is notable for consisting almost entirely of Husserl scholars, whereas, as we will see, HEIDEGGER and FRENCH are more variegated.

The largest group within HUSSERL is associated with Husserl himself and might be referred to as “textually” or “philologically oriented”. The group contains the former directors of the Husserl archives in Leuven (Bernet and Melle), who are also the main series editors of *Husserliana*. They, along with Kern, Biemel, and Lohmar, have also edited individual volumes in the series. Welton is included in this group, consistently with his own reading of Husserl, which is focused on the “full scope” of Husserl’s thought (Welton, 2000, p. 1), as represented not just in the published text but in the thousands of pages of unpublished manuscripts housed at the archives and collected in *Husserliana* volumes. This group also includes several of Husserl’s own collaborators, like Fink and Landgrebe.

The Scheler group contains authors associated with the “earlier phase of exegesis and appropriation” Welton refers to. It includes members of the Munich Circle

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<sup>25</sup>Other authors besides these are mentioned by Welton, either as interlocutors in debates or as commentators on these readings.

**Table 5** Largest clusters in the Husserl data, in terms of numbers of authors (see main text for the cluster sizes)

Husserl E	1957	Zahavi D	215	Quine W	63	Scheler M	153	Sokolowski R	137
Fink E	175	Drummond J	141	Becker O	35	Schuhmann K	139	Hart J	65
Bernet R	173	Gurwitsch A	95	Weyl H	35	Spiegelberg H	109	Brough J	57
Biemel W	120	Moran D	85	Tieszen R	33	Mulligan K	55		
Kern I	104	Carr D	85	Carnap R	28	Reinach A	49	Brentano F	141
Lohmar D	100	Crowell S	83	Godel K	24	Geiger M	30	Frege G	47
Melle U	95	Smith D	78	Parsons C	24	Pfänder A	30	Stumpf C	45
Landgrebe L	93	Luft S	73	Schlick M	22	Lipps T	26	Dummett M	35
Held K	87	Føllesdal D	71	Wang H	21	Meinong A	26	Rollinger R	32
Welton D	57	Smith B	61			Hartmann N	23	Bolzano B	25
		Steinbock A	113	Mohanty J	121			Deharo A	24
		Holenstein E	42	Cairns D	93			Twardowski K	24
Ingarden R	85	Leibniz G	38	Embree L	36			Geniusas S	23
		Walton R	38	Farber M	31	Hopkins B	31		
Ryle G	35	Irlbarne	26	Edie J	23				
				Behnke E	21				

Up to 10 authors are shown in each cluster, alongside the number of citations they received. Only authors with more than 20 citations are shown

(Scheler, Lipps, Pfänder) and Göttingen Circle (Reinach, Geiger),<sup>26</sup> as well as Spiegelberg, perhaps the first to document these early social networks surrounding Husserl. Ingarden and Stein were members of the Göttingen Circle, but Ingarden shows up as his own sub-grouping of HUSSERL, and Stein is lead author in a separate cluster of the entire dataset. Schuhmann, who is also associated with the archives and author of the only major source on the events of Husserl’s life (Schuhmann, 1977) is also in the group.

The group containing Zahavi comprises a great deal of contemporary Husserl scholarship, and many of the authors listed by Welton as part of the analytic approach (Welton, 2000). In fact, members of all the competing schools listed in the *Cambridge Companion to Husserl* are grouped together in this cluster (Drummond, Willard, D. Smith), suggesting some oppositional clustering. Mohanty, who Welton groups with analytic readers, is in a separate cluster that includes earlier generations of largely American Husserl scholars, including Dorion Cairns, Marvin Farber, and James Edie.<sup>27</sup> Authors associated with Welton’s “deconstructive” reading of Husserl (Derrida, Levinas, Sartre, Ricoeur) do not show up in HUSSERL at all, but rather in HEIDEGGER.

Other clusters are associated with separate lines of research related to Husserlian phenomenology. The Brentano cluster consists largely of early figures in analytic philosophy and philosophers emphasizing connections between Husserl and

<sup>26</sup>A history of the Munich and Göttingen circles is in Salice (2020).

<sup>27</sup>See (Ferri & Ierna, 2019), especially part II.

analytic philosophy. Dummett, for example, is notable for treating Husserl as a founder of analytic philosophy (Dummett, 1996), and Rollinger for emphasizing a tradition of “Austrian phenomenology” centered on Brentano, Husserl, and Meinong (Rollinger, 2013). The cluster led by Quine contains Tieszen, Weyl, Gödel, Parsons, and Becker, all philosophers of mathematics influenced by Husserl, or mathematicians associated with these philosophers (for an overview, see Tieszen, 2005).

The cluster containing Hopkins also emphasizes Husserl’s approach to mathematics, with an emphasis on historical questions extending back to Plato about the status of numbers—the unity and multiplicity involved in grasping, say, the number three—as fundamental to phenomenology as a whole (Hopkins, 2011; Hopkins, Chapter “[The Problem of the Unity of a Manifold in the Development of Husserl’s Philosophy](#)”, this volume); the cluster includes the Plato scholar Jacob Klein, as well as Newton and Galileo. Authors in the cluster containing Steinbock emphasize Husserl’s late “monadology” (Crowell, Chapter “[Grenzprobleme of Phenomenology: Metaphysics](#)”, this volume), and “generative phenomenology” (Steinbock, 1995), according to which our sense of reality can be understood in terms of the associative genesis of meanings via Leibnizian “monads with windows” (Iribarne, 1991), and communal and historical meanings emerging from intersubjective structures across these monads (Steinbock, 1998).

## 4.2 *Heideggerian Phenomenology*

For the dataset derived from HEIDEGGER we had several sources to draw on as a baseline for comparison. Thomas Sheehan has written on the topic, and organizes Heideggerian phenomenology using a left-right political spectrum:

(1) On the extreme right stands the ultra-orthodox interpretation which finds expression in the journal *Heidegger Studies*. This tendency is generally associated with the work of Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann and the Heidegger *Gesellschaft* in Germany and with the Beaufret-Fédier-Vezin school of Heideggerians in France. (2) On the extreme left stands the rejectionist wing, much of it inspired by the revelations of Heidegger’s scandalous involvement with the Nazis... (3) The center-right represents the orthodox position, comprised of scholars dedicated to getting Heidegger right, not unlike the “Dantisti” of Italian studies whose goal is a close reading of every line of the *Divina Commedia*... (4) On the center-left stand the liberal-assimilationists. Beyond getting Heidegger right, these scholars seek to put his work into dialogue with other contemporary philosophers and perhaps to amend or correct him in the process.... (Sheehan, 2001)

The specific authors Sheehan mentions in connection with these interpretations are:

1. Far right: von Herrmann, Beaufret, Fédier, Vezin
2. Far left: Caputo
3. Center right: Kisiel, van Buren.
4. Center left: Dreyfus.

We also have the work of Zangeneh (Chapter “[Heideggerian Phenomenology](#)”, this volume), who organizes the field as follows:

1. Syncretic readings: Sallis, Scott, Schmidt, Dreyfus, Haugland, Olafson.
2. Scholarly genealogical readings: Biemel, Pöggeler, Courtine, Dastur.
3. Scholarly teleological readings. Schürmann, Granel, maybe Derrida, Mitchell.
4. Scholarly dual-phased readings. Richardson, (early) Sheehan, Grondin, Polt.

The algorithm produced 15 communities of the Heidegger literature. Ordered by number of authors (shown in parentheses), they are: Heidegger (408), Marion (241), Levinas (194), Henry (191), Derrida (164), Ricoeur (159), Patočka (122), Gadamer (103), Buber (100), Arendt (97), Otto (78), Kierkegaard (65), Nietzsche (64), Rorty (42), and Dilworth (28) (Table 6).

A central cluster is organized around Heidegger himself and prominent Heidegger scholars (more on this below), but the other main clusters are associated with philosophers who are arguably founders of schools of their own: Marion, Levinas, Henry, Derrida, Ricoeur, Gadamer, Arendt, Buber, Patočka, and Rorty.<sup>28</sup> Consistently with this idea, all of these authors except Henry appear as top-level subcategories of the PhilPapers category of “Continental philosophy”. Derrida, founder of deconstruction, is grouped with deconstructionist thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy. Gadamer was a student of Heidegger’s who became “the decisive figure in the development of twentieth century hermeneutics” (Malpas, 2018). Gadamer is grouped with his biographer Grondin. Marion and Henry both developed theological readings of Heideggerian phenomenology.

**Table 6** Largest clusters in the Heidegger data, filtered in the same way as Table 5

Heidegger M	969	Marion J	350	Derrida J	324	Gadamer H	162
Aristotle	93	Janicaud D	100	Nancy J	53	Grondin J	46
Kisiel T	68	Caputo J	79	Lawlor L	25	Patočka J	141
Von Herrmann F	45	Chretien J	50	Critchley S	25	Nietzsche F	120
Poggeler O	39	Augustine	41	Bernasconi R	24	Arendt H	90
Dastur F	38	Romano C	39	Ricoeur P	301	Agamben G	47
Sheehan T	30	Lacoste J	35	Greisch J	45	Taminiaux J	29
Figal G	28	Gschwandtner C	33	Henry M	243	Levinas E	359
Van Buren J	27	Kearney R	32	Descartes R	77	Plato	56
Dahlstrom D	26	Westphal M	30	Courtine J	52	Franck D	32
Rorty R	28	Blanchot M	30	Kierkegaard S	71		
		Buber M	22				

<sup>28</sup>Of course, the distinction between a Heidegger scholar and a founder of a school influenced by Heidegger is a matter of degree.

Many of the authors in this group are oppositionally clustered, insofar as they have participated in a debate about these theological readings (Janicaud, 2000; DeLay, 2018).<sup>29</sup> Levinas was among the first French philosophers to recognize Heidegger's importance (Fagenblat, 2015) and went on to become a noted reader and critic of Heidegger (Drabinski & Nelson, 2015). The Levinas cluster contains Levinas scholars such as Franck and Peperzac. Arendt, Heidegger's student and critic of totalitarianism, is grouped with Agamben and Taminaux, contemporary philosophers who have engaged closely with her thought and, like Arendt, have a close association to political philosophy as well as phenomenology.

All the authors associated with Sheehan's "right wing" reading of Heidegger (von Herrmann, Beaufret, Kisiel, van Buren), and most of Zangeneh's scholarly readings (Courtine, Dastur, Mitchell, Richardson, Sheehan, Granel) are in the main Heidegger cluster, which is a philologically oriented group of scholars comparable to the cluster in the Husserl dataset including Husserl himself and the *Husserliana* editors.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, authors associated with the "left wing" and "syncretic" readings of Heidegger appear in other parts of the larger dataset corresponding to phenomenology as a whole, which is not surprising given that these readings emphasize connections to other philosophical topics and thus involve distinctive patterns of citation. Thus, Dreyfus, Haugeland, and Olafson are in EMBODIED, Scott is in FRENCH, Schmidt is in KANT/HEGEL, and Biemel is in HUSSERL. Others end up in other sub-clusters of the Heidegger cluster, including the "far left" Caputo in the Marion cluster and "syncretic" readers Sallis and Derrida in the Derrida cluster. Zangeneh's scholarly teleological readers of Heidegger appear in several places: Schurmann in the Nietzsche cluster, Granel in the Patočka cluster, and Grondin in the Gadamer cluster.

### 4.3 French Phenomenology

For the dataset derived from FRENCH, there are few discussions of the area as a whole which could be used as a baseline for comparison.<sup>31</sup> Thus, we primarily considered existing categories in the PhilPapers database. Moreover, for Merleau-Ponty scholarship we had comments provided by Robin Muller as she prepared her critical

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<sup>29</sup>Consistently with this, most of the figures in the Marion cluster are associated with a debate about these theological readings. For example, a book on this debate, *Phenomenology and the "Theological" Turn: The French Debate* (Janicaud, 2000), includes discussions of Marion, Lacaste, Chretien, as well as Ricouer and Henry (who appear as leads of separate clusters).

<sup>30</sup>Minus a few authors who didn't appear more than once in the entire dataset (Vezin, Fedier).

<sup>31</sup>There are some discussions of specific topics, including Sartre scholarship (see the journal *Sartre Studies* and the PhilPapers category on "Sartre") and Merleau-Ponty scholarship (Muller, Chapter "The Landscape of Merleau-Pontyan Thought", this volume). A source we only became aware just as the article was going to press, which merits further study, is Dupont (2014).



survey of the Merleau-Ponty scholarship for this volume (Chapter “[The Landscape of Merleau-Pontyan Thought](#)”). She distinguishes the following approaches to Merleau-Ponty interpretation:

1. Philosophy of mind: Gallagher, Noë, Dreyfus, Marratto, Zahavi, Varela, Romdenh-Romluc
2. Engagement with classical phenomenology: Barbaras, Carbone, Johnson, Lefort, Foti.
3. Unified readings: Toadvine, Morris, Dillon, Hass.

Muller characterizes group 1 as drawing connections between Merleau-Ponty and contemporary philosophical work (compare Zangeneh’s “syncretic readings” of Heidegger), with a focus on earlier texts, in particular *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). She also describes a division in this group between scholars like Zahavi who see a close affinity between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty and those like Dreyfus who instead see an affinity between Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. Scholars in group 2 challenge classical Husserlian phenomenology and tend to emphasize Merleau-Ponty’s later works in aesthetics and ontology. Scholars in group 3 develop a unified reading of Merleau-Ponty with a focus on ontology.

The clustering algorithm identified 13 clusters in the French phenomenology dataset, associated with: Merleau-Ponty (310), Butler (297), Deleuze (148), Sartre (133), Sobchack (125), Bachelard (124), Foucault (117), Freud (86), Waldenfels (76), Csordas (72), Grosz (54), Dufrenne (54), and Gilligan (29) (Table 7).

Two of the largest groups in this dataset correspond to Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, i.e., classical French phenomenology. The Sartre group is associated with Sartre scholars, such as Canguilhem, Gardner, and Flynn. The Merleau-Ponty cluster is associated with Merleau-Ponty scholars and schools of interpretation. In fact, the *entirety* of Muller’s groups 2 and 3—representing two distinctive approaches to Merleau-Ponty scholarship—are combined (in part, we suspect, due to oppositional

**Table 7** Largest clusters in the French phenomenology data, filtered in the same way as Table 5

Merleau-Ponty M	704	Sartre J	221	Butler J	84	Waldenfels B	65
Barbaras R	92	Canguilhem G	23	De Beauvoir S	68	Freud S	62
Dillon M	38	Deleuze G	102	Young I	61	Lacan J	47
Casey E	37	Bergson H	71	Irigaray L	34	Lyotard J	33
Toadvine T	34	Badiou A	28	Alcoff L	33	Bachelard G	41
De Saint-Aubert E	30	Benjamin W	27	Fanon F	26	Barthes R	21
Goldstein K	24	Foucault M	99	Weiss G	25	Grosz E	30
Carbone M	23	Levi-Strauss C	25			Lopez Saenz M	23
Proust M	21					Dufrenne M	22



clustering) into the same cluster (Barbaras, Carbone, Johnson, Lefort, and Foti, Toadvine, Morris, Dillon, and Hass). Thus, all of the textually based Merleau-Ponty scholars are grouped together. On the other hand, the majority of authors in the more syncretic group of Merleau-Ponty scholars, Muller's group 1, appear in the EMBODIED cluster of the total dataset (namely, Gallagher, Noë, Dreyfus, Varela and Romdenh-Romluc).<sup>32</sup>

The rest of this dataset divides up into coherent groups of Continental thinkers inspired by but distinct from classical phenomenology (in this way FRENCH is similar to HEIDEGGER, but different from HUSSERL). The post-structuralist Foucault is oppositionally clustered with the structuralist Levi-Strauss, and with Foucault scholars such as Oksala and Gutting. The Butler community includes influences on Butler's work such as Beauvoir, Irigaray and Kristeva (Butler, 2006), as well as contemporary figures in feminist scholarship, including Alcoff, Young, Le Doueff, and Weiss, most of whom are also discussed in the PhilPapers entry on "Continental feminism". Deleuze is clustered with Bergson, who he wrote a book on—*Bergsonism* (Deleuze, 1988). Deleuze is oppositionally clustered with Badiou, who is notable for his critique of Deleuze (see Smith & Protevi, 2020, sec. 6.2). Freud is grouped with Lacan, known for his re-interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis (Fink, 1996). This group corresponds to the PhilPapers category of Continental Psychoanalysis.

## 5 Discussion and Critical Reflection on Methodology

There is a certain irony in our describing phenomenology using bibliometric methods, given that all of the classical phenomenologists argued that such empirical or "ontical" inquiries are derivative on the more fundamental investigations of phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962). Husserl refers to a historical process whereby mathematical objects came to be regarded first as stand-ins, and then as replacements for the *Lebenswelt*, that is, the "real world" given in perception:

we must note something of the highest importance that occurred even as early as Galileo: the surreptitious substitution of the mathematically substructured world of idealities for the only real world, the one that is actually given through perception [...] our everyday life-world. This substitution was promptly passed on to his successors, the physicists of all the succeeding centuries. (Husserl, 1970, pp. 48–49)

Heidegger, famously extending this line of thought in the *Question Concerning Technology* (Heidegger, 1977), argues that our current age is characterized by a pervasive form of "enframing", whereby things are drained of their primordial meanings and encountered as mere resources, to be calculated, harnessed, and optimized: "The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral

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<sup>32</sup>Zahavi appears in HUSSERL, consistently with his emphasis on affinities between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl. Marrato is in the Butler cluster.

deposit. The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and to maintain” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 14). From this perspective, a bibliometric analysis of scholarly activity transforms one of the deepest forms of human activity into a manipulable, quantifiable resource, a collection of *h*-indices and citation counts to be used in assessing scholarly performance.

We approach the issue in a pragmatic way. Bibliometric methods provide a useful but limited view on an academic literature. By utilizing multiple tools and recognizing their limitations it is possible to gain insight about an academic literature without “surreptitiously substituting” it for the reality of that literature. Compare cartographic maps, which obviously leave a great deal out about the fundamental reality of the areas they describe. There is much more to Africa or Russia than a piece of paper can convey, including the subjective experiences of those who live there. That is immediately understood by anyone who uses a map. Many forms of maps exist, each of which describes different features of a region. By combining these maps—physical, political, topographic, etc.—we can piece together an increasingly detailed (but always fundamentally limited) picture of an area. Doing this responsibly simply requires that we have a clear understanding of what each method reveals and in what ways it is subject to distortion or misuse.

In terms of virtues, bibliometric methods provide a relatively unbiased perspective on a field. They are less subject to individual bias than narrative reports and anecdotal data. From this standpoint, it is interesting to consider both cases where the data confirm the field’s self-understanding, and cases where there are surprises. These comparisons can have practical value. Maps like this could be used to direct work to new areas, help identify under-explored areas, facilitate literature searches, and in some cases correct our self-understanding.

As we’ve seen, the broad self-understanding of the field is supported by the citation data, in particular its organization around Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, and its loose coupling to embodied cognitive science, philosophy of mind, and Hegel. However, some features of the data were unexpected. We would have expected Fanon, Brentano, or Beauvoir to be cited more, given their prominence in syllabi and anthologies. There was no indication from anthology and syllabi that Zahavi would dominate to the extent that he does, although this may reflect the specific publication venues tracked by our data. Clusters organized around Stein, Schutz, Ortega y Gasset, Bakhtin, and Fuchs suggest the emergence of separate, coherent literatures in these areas.<sup>33</sup> In these and other cases there are multiple potential ways to explain the observations (beyond those already mentioned), which could serve as a fruitful basis for future research.

This kind of work also facilitates “serendipitous browsing” in a kind of virtual library. Speaking for ourselves and our specializations, we discovered some new work while we studied this data, including some new sources in embodied

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<sup>33</sup>In the case of Ortega y Gasset, this might be due to the Anglophone bias of our sample, as most scholarly work done about his work is published in Spanish.

approaches to phenomenology (Jones, Depraz, Sheets-Johnston) and some unexpected connections, e.g., between Agamben and Arendt. Compare someone making discoveries and pursuing suggestive leads while perusing books at a physical library or records in a music shop.

In terms of limitations, citations graphs can convey a false sense of objectivity. As noted above, the data is biased towards English, and towards articles published in the last 20 years. Most of the literature before 1970 is ignored—including the whole bulk of the original phenomenology literature. Even with a better sample, there would be limitations. Citations don't capture everything about a research community, and suffer well-known problems, which call to mind Husserl's and Heidegger's critiques of mathematization and technology. The *h*-index as a way of measuring faculty quality promotes a rich-get-richer effect, where highly cited papers tend to get cited more often, and at certain point it is just taken for granted that the most cited research is the most important research.<sup>34</sup> When these metrics are tied to institutional incentives it can also lead people to game the system in certain ways, for example by angling for citations and over-citing their own work.

## 6 Future Work

This is, to our knowledge, the first analysis of the phenomenology literature using bibliometric methods. The research is preliminary, but we hope to see more work along these lines in future studies, both in phenomenology and in other areas. One could imagine specific studies of the Frankfurt school, or Continental feminism, or critical race theory, or a deeper dive into Bakhtin or Buddhism in phenomenology. Or similar studies of literary theory as a whole, or some particular area of literature, such as psychology, or cognitive science. The methods are straightforward and should generalize to other scholarly literatures: identify a criterion to use in obtaining a dataset, create an author-wise citation network, identify communities, and create “maps” of the resulting networks using graph embeddings. Of course, these networks could be analyzed using other methods as well.

Focusing specifically on our study of the phenomenology literature, a great deal of additional work remains to be done. An obvious next step would be to expand the dataset. Scopus has coverage of more journals but was not easily integrated into our scripts. Google has more complete data but is proprietary. If there were a way to obtain more complete coverage of the published literature it would of course allow for a fuller, and less temporally or linguistically biased picture of the literature. Further data cleanup could also prove useful (e.g., Austen Clark and Andy Clark are collapsed to “Clark A” in our data). This may improve with further data curation, e.g., with broader use of unique author ids. A promising resource that meets some of these conditions already is the Open Commons of Phenomenology ([ophen.org](https://ophen.org)),

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<sup>34</sup>The literature on the rich-get-richer effect in bibliometrics is reviewed in (Siudem et al., 2020).

which provides free access to many of the primary texts as well as clean meta-data and author ids.

Analysis of filtered subsets of our data is another area for further study. This could facilitate an analysis of changes in the literature over time. A series of maps could be generated, to see how the literature has changed from one decade to the next. With improved coverage of the earlier literature this would be especially interesting. This method could be used to test the hypothesis that Sartre was more prominent in the earlier literature, or that Merleau-Ponty has risen in prominence in recent decades, or whether the presence of Beauvoir and Fanon on recent syllabi reflects a growing interest in these authors. The data could also be filtered by language, to focus, e.g., on the French or German phenomenology literature.

So far, we have discussed ways of filtering the data and re-running the same types of analysis as those canvassed above. However, there are many other ways these types of dataset could be analyzed. (1) A co-citation analysis, where nodes are still authors, but the connections between them reflect the number of times they have appeared as references in the same paper. This captures higher-level statistics and identifies links between authors that appear in similar articles even if they don't directly cite each other. Since co-citation networks are undirected, this would also allow us to use the same network in the community detection algorithms and the spatial layout algorithm. The interpretation of these networks is more difficult, given that they involve "relations of relations", which is why we chose to use the directed citation network in the present study. However, we have pursued preliminary co-citation analysis of this data and the initial results are promising. (2) Alternative graph embeddings (i.e. ways of laying out the network), and alternative community detection algorithms would allow us to better understand in what ways our results are artifacts of OpenOrd and Louvain. (3) Finally, the analysis of citations could be supplemented with semantic methods that extract information from the *content* of the articles, using for example the abstracts of papers in a specific field (an analysis along these lines of the cognitive science literature is (Contreras Kallens & Dale, 2018)). The focus on content over pure citational practice could be used to determine what the main topics or categories of work are in these data (for example, discussions of temporality, cognitive science, the body, theology, the self, etc.). This would provide another means for comparing the self-understanding of phenomenologists with the actual content of their work.

In his preface to the English translation of *Ideas*, written late in his career and decades after the German edition was first published, Husserl describes his phenomenological investigations in cartographic terms, characterizing himself as an explorer who has "wandered in the trackless wilds of a new continent".<sup>35</sup> He expresses disdain for those who would "exempt themselves" from such a journey based on the "refusals of geographers" who rely only on their maps and habitual prejudices. Husserl's imagery is evocative, and his message is basic to phenomenology (don't just rely on what others say; consult the phenomena yourself!), but the

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<sup>35</sup>Reprinted as the epilogue to (Husserl, 1990). See p. 422.

imagery is in other ways problematic, and his attitude towards geographers is misleading. Maps can play a crucial role in orienting explorers in large, complex domains, such as the millions of pages of the phenomenology literature.

We have created the first draft of a map of a literature that could direct work to new areas, help identify under-explored areas, adjust intuitions about the field, and facilitate new lines of study. However, more could be done. A good start would be the online publication of a more detailed map than Fig. 2, one which could be searched and explored and zoomed in on, in order to locate and contextualize specific authors and groups. Our longer-term hope is that more maps like this will be developed, in multiple areas and with rich interactive tools, to better orient those exploring the vast landscapes of contemporary scholarship.

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# Phenomenology Park: The Landscape of Husserlian Phenomenology



John J. Drummond

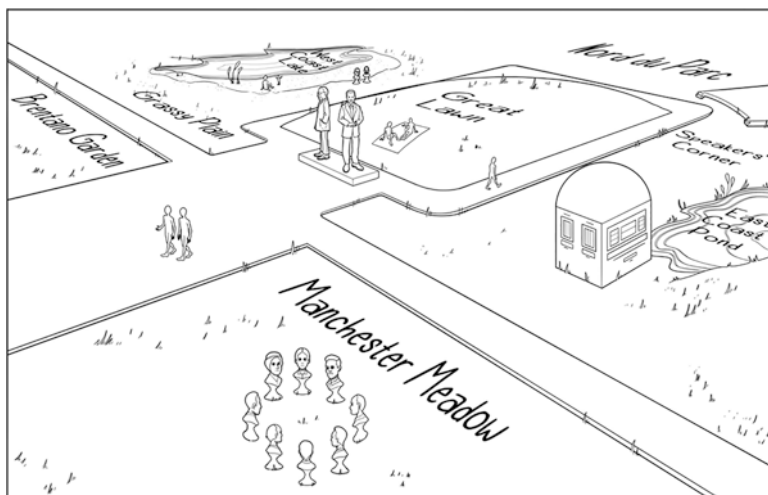
Perplexed was I when invited to contribute a paper addressing the “landscape of Husserlian phenomenology.” I had no idea of the intended import of the landscape-metaphor. The issue was further complicated by the fact that the paper was to be part of a collection titled “Horizons of Phenomenology.” “Horizons” I get; it’s a technical term for Husserl, who distinguishes between inner and outer horizons. So, were I to talk about horizons, I would talk about phenomenology’s inner horizons, that is, about the possibilities for further explication of the implications of various, already articulated phenomenological approaches and positions. And I would talk too about phenomenology’s outer horizons, that is, about new areas indicated for phenomenological reflection by already existing analyses, including and especially those areas that bring phenomenology into contact with other philosophical approaches and other disciplines. So, “horizons” I could have dealt with. But “landscape”?

It so happened that while attending a conference on the University’s Lincoln Center campus, I decided to spend the lunch break in Central Park—one block away from campus. I took a sandwich over to the park, ate while sitting on a park bench, and then walked through the park for the remainder of the break. Suddenly, it hit me: here was this beautiful landscape in the center of New York City that had this host of smaller, named areas within it. And thus was born the idea of Phenomenology Park—a vehicle to present the “lay of the land” in Husserlian phenomenology (see Fig. 1).

I’ll add just three caveats. First, I take it to be the case that the first great Husserlian phenomenologist —after Husserl, of course—was Heidegger. That, given the clear differences between them, sounds a bold claim, but it is clear to me that Heidegger—at least the Heidegger of the 1920s—understood what Husserl was doing and put his own stamp on it rather than simply rejecting it. Second, the philosophers mentioned herein are selected somewhat arbitrarily. I do not intend to give a comprehensive list

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**Fig. 1** An artist's rendition of phenomenology park (Soraya Boza)

of philosophers working in Husserlian phenomenology or of positions taken by Husserlian phenomenologists. Third, I am selecting representative thinkers, but all of them are also thinkers who connect their phenomenological reflections to developments in other philosophical approaches. I am selecting, in other words, philosophers—again, by no means all of them—who also expand the outer horizons of Husserlian phenomenology. The selections undoubtedly reflect my interests, but, then again, it's my park!

So, take a stroll through the park with me, and you'll discover my somewhat snarky, semi-serious, probably semi-accurate, certainly semi-inaccurate, and very brief survey of the current state of interpreters and interpretations of Husserl's phenomenology (broadly construed).

You enter the park from the south on a path taking you about 25 yards into the park. It's a beautiful day, and tourists are streaming into the park, among them many philosophers. In fact, people are coming in droves. Phenomenology Park has become a tourist attraction!

To the left of the path is Brentano Garden. It's appropriate that it borders the entry path to Phenomenology Park, since Brentano's descriptive psychology is a forerunner of phenomenology. Brentano reintroduced the scholastic doctrine of intentionality, and he identified intentionality as the mark of the mental. As an empiricist, however, he did not recognize the transcendental dimension of intentionality and, to that extent, fell short of phenomenology. In the gardens, I can see Uriah Kriegel (2018) and Tim Crane (2014), both of whom are indebted to Brentanian ideas, albeit not always the same ideas.

It's fitting, too, that on the other side of the path is Manchester Meadow, a tribute to Austrian philosophers and members of the Munich Circle that were Husserl's interlocutors or influenced by Husserl's early thought but who were ambivalent

about, if not opposed to, Husserl's transcendental turn. Arranged in a circle at the center of the meadow are busts of Bernard Bolzano, Theodor Conrad, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Johannes Daubert, Moritz Geiger, Roman Ingarden, Anton Marty, Alexius Meinong, Alexander Pfänder, Adolf Reinach, Max Scheler, Edith Stein, and Gerda Walther. Walking in the meadow and viewing the busts are Kevin Mulligan (1990; see also Cesalli and Mulligan 2017), Peter Simons (2014), and Barry Smith (1994)—no surprises there!

At the end of the entry path, you come upon two large statues of—you guessed it!—Husserl and Heidegger. What immediately catches your attention is that the statues do not directly face the entry path. Nor do they face one another, but they don't have their backs to one another either. Each is turned about 45°—not quite in harmony, but not quite opposed either. It looks like they are simultaneously trying to keep the other in view while appearing to ignore him.

At the north end of the entryway and moving to the left from the statues, there's a small grassy plain, and I can overhear Charles Siewert explaining phenomenology to someone. Is that John McDowell? McDowell's *Mind and World* names the intentional correlation, the main theme of phenomenological investigations, so it's possible it's him. Siewert (2007) on consciousness, McDowell (1994) on intentionality—no matter how close to phenomenology, it still ain't *transcendental* phenomenology.

Continuing northward, you cross the plain and come to a spot where the terrain slopes down toward a lake. The sudden and sharp contrast between the shore of the lake (there's a little beach there) and the quickly rising terrain adjacent to the beach could almost remind you a bit of the west coast. Dagfinn Føllesdal, Ron McIntyre and David Woodruff Smith are sharing a picnic on the beach. Of course, you'll immediately understand that "west coast" here is not a geographic name, even though Føllesdal, McIntyre, and Smith have all taught on the west coast (California). Like Husserl's use of the term "Europe," "west coast" and its opposite "east coast" refer to certain ideas, in particular, ideas about how best to understand the Husserlian doctrines of the phenomenological reduction and the structure of intentionality, especially the noema (more on that when we get to the other side of the park).

That's a Husserlian west coast, but there's a Heideggerian west coast as well. That accounts for the recent busts of Hubert Dreyfus and John Haugeland placed at one of the entrances to the beach. This part of the beach sees gatherings of folks like Bill Blattner (1999), Taylor Carman (2003), Jeff Malpas (2006, 2012)—I wonder why he's not landscaping the park!—Mark Wrathall (2006), Steven Crowell (although he's something of an east-coast infiltrator), Mark Okrent (2019), and Michael Kelly (2016a). It's not so much that these folks are committed to the same positions as the Husserlian west-coasters down the beach. It's more that they (again, excepting Crowell) think the Husserlian west-coasters are right about what Husserl *did* say whereas the east-coasters are correct about what Husserl *should* have said. (I've heard that the Heideggerian west coasters have moved the get-togethers to the east coast!)

Beyond the west coast's lake, we come to the north end of the park. As you continue across the north end toward the eastern edge of the park, you come to Speakers'

Corner right where you're forced to turn south. Here your attention is called to expressive experiences of various kinds. Don't stop now, though; we'll return later. Just keep forging ahead, and you'll soon come to the east-coast pond, an area where east-coasters gather to talk about the general structure of intentionality. A quick glance at some of the people here reinforces the idea of "east coast" as a non-geographical term: Robert Sokolowski and John Brough (District of Columbia), John Drummond and David Carr (New York), Dan Zahavi (Copenhagen), Richard Holmes (Ontario), Lenore Langsdorf (Illinois), Steven Crowell (Texas), James Hart (Indiana), Rudolf Bernet (Leuven), and many others as well. No coastline ties those places together! Nevertheless, these folks hang out together at the pond.

What divides the east-coasters and west-coasters is not the middle of the park but a dispute over the status of what Husserl calls the "noema"—what is thought about. West-coasters think that Husserl's noema is an intensional entity distinct from the intentional (intended) object (Føllesdal, 1969, 1990); Smith & McIntyre, 1984). Consequently, the phenomenological reduction is for the west-coasters a methodological device that transfers our reflective gaze from worldly entities to intensional entities by virtue of which we intend those worldly entities, which might or might not exist. The east-coasters, by contrast, hold that the phenomenological reduction is a change in attitude. In other words, the east-coasters reject the idea that the reduction discloses an entity that is not manifest in ordinary, straightforward experience. The change in attitude is a shift in focus from the *object* as significant for us to the *significance* of the object for us. One object, one significance, but a shift of focus from the entity to its meaning as disclosed by subjects with an experiential history, particular interests and concerns, and a particular structure of embodiment—but, nevertheless, with shared traditions (Holmes, 1975; Sokolowski, 1984; Langsdorf, 1984; Bernet, 1989; Drummond, 1990, 2012).

Everyone in the park is also interested in more particular forms of intentionality. Consequently, people, even though partial to a particular part of the park, regularly move to and fro among the different areas. Since it's in the areas along the path between the lake and the pond that the more particular forms of intentionality get discussed by folks from both coasts, let's backtrack a bit and see what we find.

In the *nord du parc*, many conversations tend to revolve around the themes of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. These themes encompass the consciousness of inner-time, self-awareness, the self, the body, empathy, personal identity, we-consciousness, and ultimately, community—all those things that make us the kind of beings we are. The regulars in this area include John Brough (1972, 2008, 2011), Dan Zahavi (1999, 2008, 2014, 2015), Shaun Gallagher (2006, 2017; see also Gallagher and Zahavi 2020), Søren Overgaard (2017a, b; see also Krueger and Overgaard 2012; Overgaard and Michael 2015), Thomas Szanto (2018, 2020; see also Szanto and Krueger 2019; Szanto and Slaby 2020), Steven Crowell (2001, 2013, 2015), Komarine Romdenh-Romluc (2008, 2011, 2013), Sara Heinämaa (2010, 2017), Matthew Ratcliffe (2012), Jakub Čapek (2017, 2019a, b), Joonas Taipale (2014, 2015, 2019; see also Taipale and Salice 2015), Rudolf Bernet (1993, 2020), Robert Sokolowski (1999, 2008), John Drummond (2006b, 2021), David Carr (1991, 1999, 2014), Daniel Dahlstrom (2000, 2003; see also

Dahlstrom et al. 2015), Nicolas de Warren (2009), James Dodd (1997, 2005), Antonio Calcagno (2007, 2018), David Woodruff Smith (1986, 2005, 2011a), Ed Casey (2004), Hans Bernhard Schmid (2012, 2014a, b, 2018), Klaus Held (1966, 2000, 2007), James Jardine (2014, 2015; see also Jardine and Szanto 2017)), Donn Welton (2012), Sebastian Luft (2011), Hanne Jacobs (2014, 2016, 2021), and Dermot Moran (see Jensen and Moran 2012, Szanto and Moran 2015a, b). Quite a crowd, but this isn't even a complete list because it's impossible to talk about intentionality at all without talking about subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

Recent discussions here in the *nord du parc* have centered on conceptions of empathy, the “we,” and community in Husserl, Edith Stein, Gerda Walther, Max Scheler, and similarly minded thinkers. In such a large group of people as mentioned in the previous paragraph, there are bound to be differences of opinion, but what is striking about the discussions of these issues is that there appears to be a unified research program that continues to develop in cooperative and complementary work.

Heading over to Speakers' Corner, we find people focusing on language and knowledge claims, on emotions and their expressive character, on action, including moral action, and on religious beliefs and practices. Just about everyone we saw up at *nord du parc* will turn up here at some time or another as well. With respect to language, however, standing out is the work of Robert Sokolowski (1974, 1978), Lenore Langsdorf (1983; see also Angus and Langsdorf 1992), Andrew Inkipin (2016), and the young upstart Hayden Kee (2018, 2020); with respect to knowledge, the work of Walter Hopp (2009, 2011) comes immediately to mind; and with respect to Husserlian approaches to religion, I think of Anthony Steinbock (2007a, 2012), Crina Gschwandtner (2012, 2015, 2020), and Bruce Benson (2013; see also Benson and Wirzba 2005).

When we turn to emotional expression—more generally, our affective lives—the explosion of work over the last 30 years or so has been enormous. There are fissures in this work. Fundamental is the division between axiological realists and constructivists, that is, the division between early phenomenologists (e.g., Husserl, Stein, Scheler) who believed that values are disclosed in and by intentional feelings and emotions and a later generation of phenomenological constructivists who believe that values are constituted in our exercises of freedom (e.g., Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir). Then, among the feeling-axiologists, there is a division on the issue of realism and the relation between intentional feelings and cognition. Schelerians, for example, Anthony Steinbock (1994, 2007b, 2013, 2014; see also Steinbock and Depraz 2018) and Zachary Davis (2005, 2012; see also Davis and Steinbock 2019), are strong realists, claiming that intentional feelings grasp a priori values directly apart from any cognitive basis. The cognition of an object is only the occasion for the feeling's apprehension of the value and its recognition of the object as a bearer of the value. By contrast, those following Husserl's suggestions, for example, Ingrid Vendrell Ferran (2006, 2008, 2015a, b, 2018, 2020, 2021, forthcoming), Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl (2009, 2014a, b, 2016), and John Drummond (1995, 2006a, 2010, 2013, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021; see also Drummond and Rinofner-Kreidl 2017, Drummond and Timmons 2021) might be called weak realists. They claim that the

axiological sense of the object—its value—is grounded in the non-axiological properties of the object. The sense of the object is given in a value-perception—an intentional feeling (or emotion) directed to the object as possessing the axiological attribute and the relevant non-axiological properties. This sense can be “perceptual,” that is, pre-predicative rather than propositional, although some complex emotions, while involving perception, have a propositional sense. Another way to characterize this opposition is to say that the strong realists understand emotions to be responses to the felt value, whereas weak realists apprehend the value (of the particular thing) in a feeling- or emotion-response to the thing’s non-axiological properties that are salient in the light of the subject’s physical constitution, experiential history, interests, and commitments.

The group of phenomenologists working on the emotions is large. Just a few others that I see up here by Speakers’ Corner, in addition to those already mentioned, are Sara Heinämaa (2020), Anne Ozar (2006, 2010, 2013), Sean Kelly (2002), Michael Kelly (2016b, c), and Paul Gyllenhammer (2011). There’s also another group up here, specifically Matthew Ratcliffe (2008, 2009, 2014, 2017) and Jan Slaby (2008, 2017); see also Slaby and Stephan (2008), Slaby et al. (2019), Schmitz et al. (2011), who take a different approach to the emotions. They exploit the Heideggerian discussions of *Befindlichkeit* (what John Haugeland called “sofindingness”), moods, and emotions and thereby expand the consideration to affectivity or affectedness or disposedness (depending on your translation of *Befindlichkeit*) in general. This captures the sense of how all these affective experiences are tied to what *matters* to us and how they encompass the evaluative dimension of our encounters of the world and entities therein.

Since actions express thoughts (perhaps more honestly than words!), Speakers’ Corner also attracts phenomenologists who connect their phenomenological reflections to ethics (and metaethics). Some of these thinkers are ones we’ve already seen in the park, ones who connect their (metaethical) discussions of feelings and emotions as evaluative to discussions of the actions undertaken to achieve the goods valued in our emotional experiences. Among those we’ve already mentioned in the discussion of emotions are Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl, John Drummond, Anthony Steinbock, Paul Gyllenhammer, Sara Heinämaa, Anne Ozar, and Michael Kelly. Also contributing to these discussions are Ullrich Melle (1991, 2002, 2007) and Henning Peucker (2012), both of whom, in addition to editing Husserl’s ethical writings, have offered careful commentary on those writings. Jack Reynolds (2013), Janet Donohoe (2004), and James Hart (1992, 2009) have developed ethical views in relation to Husserl’s philosophy. Sophie Loidolt (2012, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2021) has developed ideas from both Husserl and Hannah Arendt, while Steven Crowell (2013, 2015), William Smith (2011b), and Irene McMullin (2018) have addressed the question of moral normativity from a Heideggerian perspective.

We’re back to the east-coast pond. Let’s complete the trip around the perimeter of the park. Wedged between the pond and Manchester Meadow lies a structure with a domed top and skylights that makes me think of a domed observatory with its opening for a telescope. I imagine that the skylights retract at night, and telescopes

emerge to explore the night sky. Of course, that would never work in New York with all its ambient light. And alas, in any event the structure is less romantic than that; it just a meeting house, and a group interested in the purely formal side of Husserlian phenomenology meets in there now and then. (They should get out in the sunlight and fresh air!) Arguing the finer points of the interpretations of Husserl's philosophy of mathematics by Gian-Carlo Rota, Richard Tieszen, and Robert Tragesser are Burt Hopkins (2002, 2011), Stefania Centrone (2010, 2017), Claire Ortiz Hill (2002, 2009, 2016), Dieter Lohmar (2002, 2010, 2011), Mark van Atten (2007, 2010, 2015), and Mirja Hartimo (2006, 2010, 2017).

We've been skirting the edges of the park, but all the while I've noticed that many folks are heading toward the middle of the park and the well-known Great Lawn where many a concert has been performed. Let's follow the crowd. Ah, now I see why all those folks were earlier streaming into the park. There, on the Lawn, is an open-air, physically distanced conference whose program promises something to satisfy the interests of all the park-goers. In our covid-times, deprived of live music for so long, I confess I'd prefer an open-air concert.

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# Constitution Through Noema and Horizon: Husserl's Theory of Intentionality



David Woodruff Smith

## 1 To the Things Themselves: Phenomenology Emergent

What is phenomenology? Merleau-Ponty posed the question in 1945, pondering why the question needed to be asked nearly 50 years after Husserl had launched phenomenology. Today the question is well posed again, for philosophers have developed a variety of “phenomenologies”, and we are gathered in this volume to reflect on the horizons of our tradition of phenomenological reflection.

Phenomenology is the study of experience as lived in familiar forms of perception, thought, imagination, emotion, and action. Husserl characterized phenomenology as the “science of consciousness”, the disciplined study of *acts of consciousness*, as enacted or experienced from the first-person perspective: for example, “I see ...”, “I think ...”, “I imagine ...”, “I feel angry about ...”, “I act with intention to do ...”.

In the science of phenomenology, Husserl proposed, we are to focus on the character or structure of our lived experiences. This study is not an empirical study like psychology, but rather a logic of the phenomena of pure consciousness. Thus, we study various *forms* of consciousness we find in our everyday experience: most fundamentally, what Husserl called “intentionality”.

The leading principle of phenomenology, in Husserl's program, holds that consciousness is typically a consciousness *of* something: each act of consciousness is in that sense intentional, i.e. directed toward something in a certain way. Suppose, for example, I am gazing up at a tree in my backyard. This form of experience is more or less familiar to us all, and we may begin to reflect on what this experience is like. This token experience shares a type or essence with other token experiences. In reflection on this type of experience, we begin to analyze the form of visual consciousness itself. Thus, while watering plants around the patio, hearing a crow cawing high in the tree overhead, I raise my head and look upward into the tree. And

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now “I see”—I have a visual experience of “this towering Podocarpus tree overhead, its plentiful needle-shaped leaves obscuring the crow high in the tree”.

Husserl introduced technical terms designed to articulate the structure of intentionality. On Husserl’s account, my current act of consciousness in seeing the tree unfolds in a shifting flow of sensory visual impressions informed by a cognitive apprehension of this large Podocarpus tree. My visual experience consists, in Husserl’s terms, in a fusion of sensory data informed by an interpretive “noesis” yielding my experience of seeing “this Podocarpus tree ...”. The noetic part of my experience realizes an ideal type that Husserl calls a “noematic content”, or “noema”, glossed as “the tree *as perceived*”. (Echoing Aristotle, Husserl draws on the Greek terms: *nous*, *noesis*, *noema*—for mind, mental process, mental content.)

So, for Husserl, my act of consciousness is an occurrent process of consciousness, and the act’s noema is the ideal form by virtue of which the act is directed in a certain way. Moreover, my visual experience in seeing the tree carries a horizon of further significance, a pattern of further expectations about the same tree, expectations drawing on my prior experience of this and other trees—as when I have observed crows circling trees in the neighborhood.

With Husserl writing in the wake of Brentano, phenomenology would analyze the structure of an act of consciousness, featuring intentionality. Thus, in the above case of visual perception (adapting Husserl’s famous example), I see this huge tree in my backyard. In phenomenological reflection on this experience, we distinguish: my conscious experience, the noematic content of my experience, and the object of my experience, the tree before me. Here we distinguish the tree itself, the botanic thing in nature, from the way the tree is given in my experience, viz. as a huge Podocarpus looming over my backyard patio. For Husserl, the noema carried in my act of consciousness embodies this way of being given in phenomenal consciousness. This noematic form of meaning (*Sinn*, in German) fans out to include a horizon (*Horizont*) of implicated meaning including something of the biology of the tree and something of its cultural significance, the latter featuring my patio and my city’s designation of this particular tree as a “heritage tree”.

While scholars have debated how to read Husserl’s texts defining noema, I here leave aside the interpretation of Husserl’s texts and focus on results of phenomenological analysis in a Husserlian style.<sup>1</sup> We’ll focus on the structure of intentionality, the form of consciousness central to phenomenology in Husserl’s wake: including *inter alia* the ontology of noematic meaning and the cognate form of meaning called horizon.

Thus, we turn to “the things themselves”: *phenomena*, in the original sense of things as we are given them in our experience of the world around us. The ways things are given in consciousness we call *noemata*, forms of experience carrying the

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<sup>1</sup> Two competing models have developed, nicknamed the “West Coast” and “East Coast” approaches to the analysis of this phenomenological structure Husserl called “noema” (from the Greek for what is known or “minded”). Roughly, the “West Coast”, or “California”, model takes the noema to be a richly structured form of ideal meaning (*Sinn*), abstracting the way the object is given, whereas the “East Coast” model takes the noema to be the *object just as given*.



meaning that structures our consciousness of things in the world. The present aim is to lay out fundamentals and motivations of the California approach to phenomenology—a particular research program in the field of phenomenology (Yoshimi et al., 2019).

On the story to follow, you might say, we bring the logic to the phenomena in phenomenology. Or, inversely, we bring the lived phenomena to the logic in phenomenology. For, as Husserl distinguished formal ontology from material ontology, the logic is the formal structure shaping the lived forms of experience we appraise in phenomenology.

## 2 Phenomenological Description and Analysis

Phenomenology begins in description: pure description of experience, just as it is lived and given from the first-person perspective.

“Plain” phenomenology proceeds, to begin the enterprise, with formulating a description of an everyday form of experience. Husserl famously used an example of his seeing a tree in blossom, a similar example being my seeing a huge Popocarpus tree. I begin discussion now with an example bearing a rich horizon of meaning.

I am seated near a large window, glass from floor to ceiling. I am gazing thoughtfully out the window. I see—as my eyes follow—a tall white egret, stalking something, stepping silently, stealthily, through tall April-green grass waving gently in a breeze I can almost feel even this side of the glass. I am at the Horizons of Phenomenology conference (in April 2018), beginning to think about phenomenology itself just as our group is stirring into discussion.

We may form a phenomenological description of my experience, indicating a bit of structure, in everyday language:

I am attentively watching that elegant tall white egret, stepping stealthily through the waving grass, one long and slow step at a time, hunting something, perhaps a mouse.

More formally, simplifying for purposes of phenomenological analysis, we say:

I now here attentively see that tall white egret stepping through waving grass.

The point of this description of experience is to begin analysis of various features of the experience as lived: a conscious, phenomenal, intentional experience, a fairly simple act of consciousness. Indeed, as I watch the serene scene of the egret's movement, I am beginning to reflect on this visual experience itself, because colleagues and I are gathered to consider varieties of forms of phenomenology more than a century after the discipline took shape.

In the California approach to phenomenology with Husserlian roots, we begin to analyze *forms of experience* by looking to *forms of our language* about our own experience which “intends” *forms of things* in our surrounding world. In this approach we model our consciousness of things in our language about our own experience as of those things. Adapting techniques of contemporary logic,

specifically semantic theory, we focus on attendant structures of meaning realized in our experience. With this emphasis, we approach the “semantic” model of phenomenal intentionality.

In this mode of phenomenological analysis, we spell out a semantic alignment of forms of language, forms of experience, and forms of things in the world. This model articulates the basic structure of intentionality.

That said, we must bear in mind that our phenomenological descriptions are designed to articulate a model of our lived, sensuous, meaningful experience such as that of my seeing the egret as I crane my neck to look out the window during our conference. In a meta-phenomenological perspective, we may even adapt model theory or possible-worlds semantics to model more precisely the rich phenomenal content of our lived experience. Still, the formal structures so modelled are precisely structures realized in phenomenal experience. Indeed, I rely on my reader’s empathic sensibility for grasping the character and structure of the type of experience I am appraising and modelling.

### 3 The Logical/Semantic Turn in Phenomenology

Husserl brought a mathematician’s eye to Brentano’s conception of the descriptive analysis of the structure of consciousness. Husserl re-conceived phenomenology as a logical rather than an empirical, “psychologistic”, account of mind. Phenomenology as we know it was thus introduced in Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* (1900–01), which unfolded a complex structural analysis of world, language, consciousness, and knowledge: with intentionality central to the structure. In Husserl’s conception of phenomenology, “pure” logic models the relations among mind, language, and world. Accordingly, pure phenomenology mirrors pure logic in articulating the logical structure of intentionality: where an act of consciousness is by virtue of its content or *Sinn* directed intentionally toward an appropriate object in the world. Husserl amplified his logical account of phenomenology in subsequent works, including *Ideas I* (1913). Therein he introduced the transcendental technique of *epoché*: we are to “bracket” questions of the existence of things we experience, and thereby to focus on the way we experience things, thus the meaning things have for us in consciousness.

To appreciate Husserl’s mathematical sense of structure, and its role in phenomenology, we should bear in mind that the notion of manifold, a structured whole, is featured in all of Husserl’s writings, from early to late: echoing Riemann’s axiomatic re-fashioning of geometry and Leibniz’s ideal of a *mathesis universalis*.

Nineteenth century logicians had championed a notion of ideal meanings including propositions (aka *Satz an sich*), articulated by Bernard Bolzano, and also Hermann Lotze and others. However, contemporary mathematical logic was taking further shape right around Husserl, in the works of Cantor, Peano, Weyl, Hilbert, and Frege. In the 1930s Alfred Tarski and Kurt Gödel revolutionized logic with theorems about the powers of logical systems. Tarski’s semantic theory of truth (for

formalized languages) introduced the idiom of semantics as we know it today. A formal semantics would prescribe a structured pattern of relations—a mathematical model—between expressions in a language and the objects designated by the language: or a model, following Husserl's "pure logic", of the structured correlation between language and world, between structures of language and a model of structures of things in the world. This form of semantics can be seen as a mathematized model of intentionality expressed in language. And Tarski himself, though a pure mathematician, had studied with Polish philosophers trained by Brentano. Years later Gödel found in Husserl a philosophical vision supporting Gödel's own view of both truth and mathematical intuition.

The logical side of Husserl's thinking caught the eye of Dagfinn Føllesdal as he worked in mathematics and modal logic while reading Husserl, Frege, and Bolzano. Further, as model-theoretic semantics developed after Tarski, possible-worlds semantics emerged as a philosophical logic, specifically in the work of Jaakko Hintikka. Reading Kant and Husserl and Descartes and Aristotle alongside modal logics, Hintikka devised formal systems of semantics for our language about knowledge, belief, perception, and ultimately intentionality: philosophically inspired "models for modalities" (Hintikka, 1969).

The California approach to Husserlian phenomenology evolved in the light of these developments in logic and semantics. And accordingly, following that approach, a "semantic" conception of intentionality features a conception of noematic content as a structured ideal meaning.

## 4 The Fregean Perspective on Noema

As phenomenology developed in the 1960s, Føllesdal proposed a way of understanding the Husserlian notion of noema by comparison with Gottlob Frege's notion of sense, or *Sinn*. Frege's logic (or semantics) of sense and reference, of *Sinn und Bedeutung*, was familiar to many analytic philosophers who were largely unfamiliar with Husserl and phenomenology. So Føllesdal—who worked in logic and philosophy of mathematics alongside phenomenology—defined a structural parallel between reference via sense (per Frege) and intentionality via noema (per Husserl). For Frege, a linguistic expression (say, 'the morning star') expresses a *sense* (an ideal meaning) in virtue of which the expression designates or refers to an *object* (the planet Venus); similarly, for Husserl, an act of consciousness (say, seeing the morning star) has a *noema* (a form of ideal meaning) in virtue of which the act is intentionally directed toward an object (the planet Venus).

Frege himself said very little about what a *Sinn* is, but what little he said is illuminating. A *Sinn* embodies a "way of being given" (*Art des Gegebenseins*): that can only mean, a way of being given in thought, viz. *in consciousness*. The sense of a declarative sentence (say, 'the morning star is a planet') Frege called a "thought" (*Gedanke*). This is unmistakably the terrain of Husserlian phenomenology, and in

fact Husserl detailed his own schematic logic of sense and object, or *Sinn* and *Gegenstand*, technical details differing here and there from Frege's scheme.

From this semantic perspective on noema, and its role in intentionality, California phenomenology proceeds to study the rich formations of experience that Husserlian phenomenology explores: time-consciousness, space-consciousness, embodied perception, intersubjectivity, sociality, the life-world, and onward. Noematic analysis thus articulates the *structure* of the many ways in which we experience things. There are, however, several ways this idea is commonly misunderstood.

First, noematic meaning does not reside in some other-worldly Platonic heaven. Noematic meaning takes its ontological place *within* the concrete act of consciousness. An act's noema is drawn into the act as ideal correlate of the noesis in the act. In Husserl's idiom, the noesis is a dependent part (*Moment*) within the act, and the noema correlated with the noesis is thus an abstractable aspect of the temporal act in the stream of consciousness. Husserl said the act "harbors" or "carries" the noema in itself (*in sich zu bergen*). Ronald McIntyre and I said the act "entertains" the noema, or literally "holds" it "in" the act. Importantly, the noema is an *ideal* entity, as opposed to a spatiotemporal entity. A first cut on noematic meaning is that the noema of an act is simply the *type* of a token act of that type, what Husserl called the act's intentional essence (*Wesen*). A more refined "director's cut" on the notion holds that meanings, including noemata, are a distinctive kind of ideal entity, distinguished by their role in consciousness. (On these distinctions, see Smith, 2013).

Second, an act's noema does not stand like a veil of appearance between consciousness and the object intended. The Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena has sometimes been taken to imply that consciousness reaches only phenomena, things-as-they-appear, and never reaches *noumena*, things-in-themselves. Kant interpretation aside, the so-called Fregean model of noema does not entail that consciousness is *directed toward* the noema, behind which lies the object. Rather, the act is directed toward the object (if such exists) but only by virtue of the noematic content the act entertains.

Formally, on the "Fregean" view, the intentional relation of act to object is a composition of two relations: the act's entertaining a noema and that noema's prescribing a certain object (enjoining the terms McIntyre and I employed). A successful intentional relation obtains only if there exists an object that satisfies the noema. If no such object exists, the act is intentional, but merely as if veridically of an object.

The noema is not, then, an intermediate object of consciousness that serves as a Platonic "representative" of the real thing, say, the actual egret which I see in the waving grass. Rather, the act's noema is an abstraction of the way the act is directed toward its "intended" object. And a *bona fide* intentional relation is achieved only if the "intention" is successful. Only in phenomenological reflection does the noema of my experience come into view as an object of my consciousness: that is the aim of the technique of "bracketing" the question of the existence of the egret as visually given in my experience.

An important extension of this semantic approach to intentionality invokes the *actual* context of an experience, especially in the case of perception. What I see, as I am visually presented "that tall white egret stepping through waving grass", is an

object in a situation within my spatiotemporal surroundings—my *Umwelt*. Accordingly, the indexical content “that ... egret” semantically invokes the actual context of my experience: I am visually presented “that egret (actually now here before me and affecting my eyes)”. Perceptual acquaintance thus requires a sharp distinction between the object in my *Umwelt* and the noematic content in my visual experience. As Husserl already emphasized, the “object as perceived” is distinguished from the object itself that is perceived. Indeed, the object has physical properties that the content does not—even if the content is indexical. Thus, the focal content in my visual experience of the egret already implicates features beyond, say, the purely sensory qualities of color and shape, and there we feel the pull of “horizon”. For I experience the external object itself—white and egret-shaped and moving egretly—as drawing me to look it over from different perspectives in the space-time of my current experience.

## 5 The Horizon of Meaning in an Intentional Experience

A crucial part of the intentional content of an experience is what Husserl called “horizon”. When I see the white egret stalking through the grass, I would be very surprised if on a closer look I saw the egret moving with three long legs rather than the expected two spindly legs. Accordingly, part of my seeing the egret moving is my expectation that it move as I expect birds to move—having seen many birds strut around, from pigeons to crows and even long-legged egrets. The egret's having three long legs is not a possibility motivated by how I experience the egret; however, its searching for a mouse in the grass is a motivated possibility regarding what I am seeing. Thus, Husserl held, the content of my experience “predelineates” a horizon of further motivated possibilities left open by the content.

In California phenomenology, the notion of horizon has been explicated, a bit more formally, in terms of noema. Føllesdal has sometimes characterized an act's noema as a “pattern of expectations”, building horizon into the noema itself. McIntyre and I characterized an act's horizon as the structure of meaning *implicit* in the act's noema, a pattern of further noematic meanings indicating—predelineating—an open-ended array of further possibilities “left open” yet motivated by the explicit specifications in the noema.

On this model, an act of consciousness entertains a noema which takes its place in a manifold of interrelated meanings that define a horizon of meaning accruing to the act. Thus, the noematic Sinn entertained in my experience of seeing the egret implicates a system of further noematic meanings that characterize the same object in different ways compatible with and motivated by what the core noema prescribes of that object as so given. In the case of perception, as I regard “that egret stepping through waving grass”, the *motivated* possibilities are circumscribed by my immediate *Lebenswelt*, as I turn my eyes toward the egret outside the window at UC Merced.

In this scheme, we may speak of a correlation among horizons of object, act, and meaning. Thus, we define a correlation among *object-horizon*, *act-horizon*, and *meaning-horizon*. Accordingly, in an act of consciousness the object is given with a horizon of further possibilities regarding the object; the object is so given by virtue of a horizon of noematic meanings prescribing those possibilities; and the act takes its place within a horizon of further possible acts regarding the object so given.

Thus, we may say: the object of a particular experience is given within a horizon of possibilities, and so given via a horizon of meanings, a system of meanings entertained in a horizon of possible experiences presenting the object in various aspects. The system of noematic meanings entertained in appropriate experiences, actual and possible, then forms a model of the range of possibilities for the object as intended in the act and its associated further possible acts. This model structure correlates object-horizon, act-horizon, and meaning-horizon: for simplicity, however, we just speak intuitively of horizon, assuming the intentional relationship among act, meaning, and object.

Such formal models chart basic structures of lived experience, where phenomenology in practice delves into the concrete ways in which we experience time, space, perceived things, ourselves and others, our *Lebenswelt*. The rich notion of horizon keeps phenomenology grounded in our lived everyday experience. At the same time, the complex structure of horizon is aptly modelled by what has come to be called “possible-worlds” semantics, to which we turn briefly.

## 6 The Possible-Worlds Structure of Intentionality

The notion of horizon draws possibility—*modality*—into the very structure of consciousness. Thus, we define the horizon of my experience in seeing the egret as my sense of the range of possibilities left open by the noematic content in my visual experience: motivated possibilities, possible situations compatible with what I see just as I see it (“that egret stepping through waving grass”). That the egret is hunting a mouse is such a possible situation; that it is hunting a lion is not. That the egret flew in from marshlands to the west is such a possibility; that the egret is a clever robotic drone is not such a possibility, for my current visual experience.

The Leibnizian notion of possible worlds can be used to develop a formal model of the Husserlian notion of horizon. Leibniz was one of Husserl’s heroes, the notion of possible worlds occasionally appears in Husserl, and Husserl speaks of “modalities” of belief. However, we turn to more recent logical theory to amplify the Husserlian notion of horizon. In the 1950s, in the wake of Rudolf Carnap’s work in the 1940s, Jaakko Hintikka (with Stig Kanger) began a style of formal semantics for modalities, not only the logic of possibility/necessity, but also the logic of obligation. And in the 1960s Hintikka outlined a style of *possible-worlds semantics* for expressions of knowledge, belief, and perception. McIntyre and I subsequently deployed a variation on Hintikka’s logic of perception, explicating thereby the Husserlian notion of horizon as part of the formal structure of intentionality.

Consider again the case of my seeing the egret, characterized thus:

I now here see that tall white egret stepping through waving grass.

Not only does this experience aim toward or intend a particular egret outside the window where I'm seated. The experience intends that object within a horizon of perceptually possible worlds compatible with what the noema in my experience prescribes: a horizon of further possibilities involving the egret at work in the grass before me—not merely logically possible states of affairs à la Leibniz, but perceptually possible situations, that is, intentionally possible situations, those “motivated” in line with the noema in my experience.

On this possible-worlds model, the structure of intentionality in the egret case is a complex structure comprising: me (“I”), my visual experience (the act wherein “I see ...”), the noema in my experience (the meaning prescribing “that egret” before me), the horizon of associated noematic meanings (prescribing expected features of the egret's legs and habits), and the horizon of alternative intentionally-possible “worlds” compatible with the noema conditioned by its associated meanings. Accordingly, the possible-worlds structure of intentionality may be formally rendered—mathematized—as a style of model theory: where the experience, or its phenomenological description, is structurally aligned with an appropriate array of intentionally possible worlds, and thereby this “manifold” of possibilities is precisely a model of the intentional structure of the experience featuring what is “intended”.

As Husserl would have insisted, this mathematized model-theoretic structure is an abstraction from our lived phenomenal experience in our *Lebenswelt*. We draw upon the logical form of semantics in order to clarify the rich structure we find in our own lived intentional experience of things in our surrounding world.

## 7 The Constitution of Our World by Virtue of Noema and Horizon

According to Husserl's phenomenology, the familiar things we encounter in everyday experience—trees, egrets, people around us—are “constituted” in our consciousness. This idiom invites misunderstanding.

Husserl's doctrine of “constitution” may seem to be saying that things around us are constructed in our consciousness. The flavor of “is constituted” in English may encourage this view, but the German form is “*sich konstituiert*”, a reflexive form of grammar not retained in English. If we say the egret “is constituted” in my experience, one may want to ask: what does the constituting? Is it I *qua* subject, or is it the act *qua* intending? No, nothing like that. The literal rendering is “constitutes-itself”, or “self-constitutes”, but there is no entity that does the constituting.

Rather, in a typical act of consciousness, the object is given as “constituted” in a certain way, as having a particular constitution: viz., a structure of features prescribed by the act's noema *cum* horizon. Husserl's analysis of “constitution” follows



his paradigm case of looking at an object from different sides. On Husserl's account, the object is "intended" with a pattern of adumbrations (*Abschattungen*), comprising aspects of the object as it might be seen from different perspectives. *Abschattungen*, literally, are shadings as in different perspectives in the shifting light. Thus, when I see a thing before me, I am *visually given* a thing with a back side, indeed, with many different sides, each potentially visible from a particular perspective, visible with a particular adumbration of shape, color, kind, and spatio-temporal perspective (being now there before me).

The constitution of an object in consciousness is defined by a complex structure of intentionality. On Husserl's analysis, an object is intended in an act of consciousness by virtue of the act's noema within its horizon of further possible meaning. The constitution of the object in consciousness arises within this structure: wherein the object is intended as having a variety of features surrounded, as it were, by a horizon of further possible features. The constitution of the object consists, accordingly, in the array of properties and relations prescribed for the object by virtue of noema cum horizon.

And that complex structure is precisely the form of phenomenal intentionality realized, for example, in my experience of seeing the egret stepping through the waving grass as I am seated at the Horizons conference at UC Merced.

Husserl's texts have been read by some as endorsing an absolute idealism where all the world is drawn into pure consciousness: as absolute consciousness constitutes itself and all things in the world as mere intentional artifacts (cf. *Ideas* I, §§ 49, 55). Here, by contrast, we follow a *constitutive realism* running through the results of California phenomenology. Husserl seemed to experiment with a form of idealism, a transcendental idealism, yet he regularly inveighed against a subjective or Berkeleyan idealism, and he ultimately abandoned talk of "idealism". In the spirit of reflective equilibrium, then, we pursue a model of mind and world that preserves a basic realism in the structure of intentionality. And so the egret and I are acquainted in the very real world in which my consciousness of the egret takes shape, including its "constitution" in my experience.<sup>2</sup>

On Husserl's account, we should bear in mind, constitution is achieved in a dynamic process of consciousness. As I notice the egret moving stealthily in the grass, I turn my head and move to get a better look at the object. Is that an egret? Looking more closely, I see, more clearly, yes, "that egret ..." (not a blue heron, certainly not an osprey or an eagle ...). Were I not looking through the tall window, I might walk toward the egret for a closer look. What is it doing, hunting for a fish? No, the grass I can see is not in standing water. So I take it the egret I see is stepping through the grass while tracking something moving in the grass, perhaps a mouse? I am reminded of once seeing an egret spearing something in tall grass, then tossing it in the air and catching and swallowing it. Here we see the process of my experience flowing along in time, as my anticipations regarding the egret are gradually

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<sup>2</sup>See the concept of "Constituted Platonism" developed in (Tieszen, 2011) and "constitutive realism" in (Smith, 2020), which was originally suggested by Dagfinn Føllesdal in reference to Tieszen's work.

fulfilled by what I am seeing as the egret moves slowly within my visual field. Here the constitution of the object is a shifting pattern of significance, as I see “that white thing”, then “that white bird”, then a moment later “that egret”, then “that egret moving step by step”, then “that egret hunting a mouse in the waving grass”. As my stream of experience unfolds, my visual noesis at one moment is followed by a sequence of evolving *noeses*, each carrying a distinctive noematic content. The evolving constitution of the egret I see consists in this structure of noemata—each bearing a horizon of meaning—*realized* in a temporal sequence of noetic phases in my process of observing the egret in motion.

What Husserl called “genetic” phenomenology begins with the temporal dynamics of intentional experience wherein different forms of noematic meaning are successively drawn into the subject’s flowing stream of consciousness. Clearly, in the case of my evolving visual perception of the egret, rather sophisticated forms of meaning appear in the constitution of the egret in my experience. That is to say, the horizon of meaning accruing to my experience comprises ideas and concepts richer than pure sensory impressions. As I am sitting by the window, something “white” catches my attention, I see “a white bird” in the grass, I see “that white egret stepping through the grass”, I see it “hunting a mouse”. The concepts involved in this pattern of meaning depend on a background of not only my own experience (having seen egrets before), but also the experience and theorizing of biologists and birders who have formed the concepts I have acquired from their practices. Without those concepts, extant in my wider culture, I would not be able to see “that egret ... stalking a mouse”. Accordingly, genetic phenomenology places my particular experience, in seeing the egret beyond the window, within a *Lebenswelt* beyond my stream of consciousness.

## 8 Ontology Amid the Transcendental Turn in Phenomenology

Around 1907 Husserl took a transcendental turn, reconfiguring his fundamental conception of phenomenology, incorporating something of a Kantian perspective into his philosophy. Thus, in *Ideas I* (1913), Husserl re-launched phenomenology with the transcendental methodology of *epoché*. It is said that phenomenology turns away from the world with *epoché*. For we are to bracket, or withhold judgment about, the actual existence of what we intend in our activities of consciousness. Metaphysics, or ontology, is then to be bracketed as we practice phenomenology, or so it is said.

However, as Husserl developed his transcendental form of phenomenology, he made full use of the ontology he outlined at the opening of *Ideas I*. For Husserl, formal ontology features categories including ideal species, part-whole relations, dependencies, states of affairs, and numbers, sets, manifolds. Material ontology features substantive regions including nature (spatiotemporal things), consciousness

(intentional experiences), and Geist (social formations). Material structures of mind, nature, and society are accordingly shaped by formal structures of parts/wholes, dependence, states of affairs, groups, etc. This categorial scheme of formal and material structures weaves through the whole of *Ideas I* and *Ideas II* and onward into the late works of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929) and the *Crisis* (1935–38). The transcendental in phenomenology should thus be seen through Husserl’s own eyes, rather than in terms of the neo-Kantian program of avoiding both radical skepticism and all metaphysics.

Kantian transcendental philosophy seeks the “necessary conditions of the possibility of cognition”: defining synthetic a priori knowledge of things in space and time as necessarily constrained by fundamental conceptual categories that shape the sensory manifold defining what is possible in the phenomenal world—setting aside the noumenal world that lies beyond our cognitive reach. Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology follows a structure of *formal and material* ontological categories that find motivation not in the Kantian retreat from noumena to phenomena. Rather, the formal ontological categories envisioned by Husserl draw motivation from the developments of logic and mathematics in Husserl’s day. Husserl’s early conception of pure logic defined an alignment of forms among mind, language, and world, and this proto-model theory configures Husserl’s results even as he follows his transcendental turn.

When we deal with ideal *forms*, in the practice of pure mathematics, or pure logic, or pure phenomenology, however, Husserl holds that we posit such forms with “evidence” or “intuition”. In this way ontology and phenomenology work together—interdependently—in Husserl’s systematic philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, *epoché* in Husserl’s methodology does not eschew all metaphysics, by “reducing” the world to mere phenomena. Rather, Husserl explicitly uses an intricate ontology of formal and material categories that structure the world: including our own consciousness in its relations to the surrounding world. The structure of our consciousness is defined in terms of the material features of intentionality, noema, and horizon framed by the formal features of kinds and properties and relations, parts and wholes, dependence and independence, as well as number, set, manifold, etc. That complex structure, realized in consciousness, comprises the “necessary conditions of the possibility” of phenomenal intentional experience. Whence Husserl’s logical turn in phenomenology is not replaced but ramified in his transcendental turn. This perspective is evident in Husserl’s rather late work, *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929). Basically, transcendental logic is formal logic grounded in intentionality theory: in a more contemporary idiom, a semantic theory of intentionality.

The doctrine of “constitutive realism” at work here (cf. Smith, 2020) fits comfortably in a complex system of ontology along the lines of Roman Ingarden’s

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ideas I*, §§10ff on formal and material ontology; §16 on synthetic a priori knowledge, prefiguring the introduction of *epoché* in §§27ff; and §59, on *epoché* allowing “evident” use of “formal logic and the entire mathesis [universalis]”, which includes a pure logic that embraces formal ontological categories.

monumental work, *The Controversy over the Existence of the World* (written in the mid-1940s). Ingarden studied with Husserl but argued against Husserl's transcendental idealism, which Ingarden took as a form of subjective idealism. In my view, Ingarden's ontology can be seen as a richly detailed extension of key ideas in Husserl's system of formal and material ontology, obviating any radical idealism. In particular, Ingarden's system details a variety of different "modes of being". Thus, cultural works (from art to law) are, for Ingarden, intentional artifacts, dependent in their existence on our intentional activities; by contrast, things in nature are not ontologically dependent on our intentional experiences of perception, judgment, and scientific theorizing. Here is realism within a framework of intentionality and the "constitution" of egrets, mice, and fields of grass.<sup>4</sup>

Following Husserl, we may say both actual and possible situations are duly constituted in intentional activities but with different modes of being. Thus, the egret's movement is constituted in my perceptual experience as actual, whereas the egret's stalking a mouse is constituted in my perception merely as perceptually possible for my experience. Adapting Ingarden, we may specify the ontology more fully. Thus, the egret's walking in the grass is a situation whose mode of being is: actual, and intended in my perception, but ontologically independent of my perception. By contrast, the egret's stalking a mouse under foot is a situation whose mode of being is: not actual, but horizonally intended in my perception, and so perceptually possible for my perception, and ontologically dependent on my perception. That is, the horizontal situation (that of the egret stalking a mouse) is an intentional artifact of my visual experience, whereas the situation I see (that of the egret stepping through grass) is actual and not merely an artifact of my experience. To be clear, however, it is the same individual, that particular egret actually before me, which figures in both situations, the actual and the perceptually possible.

As we look to ontology on the horizon of phenomenology, we note that our phenomenal intentional experiences occur in a world whose structure clearly outruns the limits of our forms of consciousness and our evolving *Lebenswelt*. In the *Crisis* (writings from 1935 to 1938), Husserl worried about the "mathematization" of nature. Husserl had in mind Einstein and relativity physics, considering the differences between Riemannian and Euclidian geometry, the former defining spacetime in a relativistic way that differs from the way we seem to experience spacetime as in accord with Euclidian principles. Moreover, quantum mechanics was already on the horizon in Husserl's day, as Einstein himself saw the challenge of how quantum physics could even conceivably relate to observable objects or events (cf. the Einstein, Podolsky, Rosen thought experiment circa 1935). In a kindred spirit of "crisis", we worry today about the reduction of the intentional structure of experience to the mathematical structures of computation, as in the ontology of Artificial Intelligence. And if our lived conscious experience is ontologically grounded in neural processes in the human brain, which arguably run on quantum-mechanical

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<sup>4</sup>Ingarden's complex ontology is laid out in two volumes, recently translated into English as (Ingarden, 2013, 2016).

principles in our natural universe, then the mathematization of consciousness is all the more problematic. Constitutive realism entails that our consciousness and the objects we experience in our *Umwelt* are real and are constituted for us through our perception, thought, and action—including our best scientific and mathematical theorizing about all the above. We await twenty-first century developments!

## 9 The Modal Model of Consciousness

The horizon structure of intentionality, as outlined above, assumes a notion of *intentional modality*—such as perceivability as opposed to metaphysical possibility. This notion leads into a significant extension of Husserl’s own theory of intentionality.<sup>5</sup>

Husserl distinguished two basic components in the noema of an act of consciousness. The noematic *Sinn*, the core of the noema, articulates the way the object is given in the experience. The *Sinn* is modified by a component that articulates the “thetic” or “positing” character of the experience, as it were, the way the act is enacted by the subject, whether positing the object by seeing, by judging, by imagining, by willing, etc.

For example, the noematic content of my experience in seeing the egret we may characterize, simply, as follows—using angle brackets to specify noematic meaning:

< I see (that tall white egret stepping through waving grass) >

The first part of the description, < I see >, expresses the act’s basic *thetic* content, by virtue of which the object is posited *perceptually*. The second part, < that tall white egret ... >, expresses the act’s *Sinn* content, by virtue of which the object is presented or intended *as such and such*.

Hintikka’s logic of perception would cast the act’s linguistic description in a propositional form, say:

David sees that (that egret is walking in grass)

schematically rendered as

$S_d(p)$ ,

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<sup>5</sup>See Banick (2020), Hintikka (1969) and Smith and McIntyre (1982). A reviewer asked how modes of being given (as in perception) are being distinguished from modalities. A “modality” in the modal-logical sense is already a “mode” of a special sort: a modification in being that carries us into relevantly “alternative” situations in “worlds”, thus the special trick of two-world indexing invented by Hintikka and Kanger. The terms are etymologically fused. What has been largely missed in the literature is that, beyond the model-theoretic moves in the semantics of modal-logics, and beyond Hintikka’s assimilation of ‘It is necessary that’ with ‘It is perceived/believed [by a] that’, we should see a genuine ontological assimilation: a modification of the status of being from actual to relevantly/motivationally alternative to the actual. This in turn has links to the method of *epoché*.

where the perceptual modifier “ $S_d$ ” is treated as a modal operator governing the sentence “ $p$ ”, which specifies the perceived situation. Semantically, per Hintikka, the perception description is interpreted as asserting: in every perceptually possible world compatible with what the subject  $d$  sees in the actual world, it is the case that  $p$ . Following this possible-worlds style of semantics, then, the possible-worlds model of intentionality assumes an ontological framework of intentional modalities alongside the familiar ontic modalities of possibility/necessity. (Similarly, probability theory divides between subjective probability, as a measure of belief, and objective probability, as a measure of physical propensity.)

Assuming these perspectives drawn from Husserl and Hintikka, I've proposed a *modal model* of the structure of self-consciousness (cf. Smith, 2004). The aim is to articulate, and to distinguish, several formal elements in the overall noematic structure of an act of consciousness. For the case of my seeing the egret, we may expand on a basic phenomenological description of the experience in the following form—again using angle quotes to specify noematic meaning:

\* < Phenomenally in this very experience I now here see attentively and intuitively that tall white egret now there stepping slowly through waving grass >

Within this complex expression (\*), we indicate different formal elements of noematic content, each articulating a distinctive phenomenological trait in the experience. The separated underlinings mark out these distinguished traits: familiar aspects of experience, each a target of phenomenological study over many years, beginning not least with Descartes' “cogito”, or “I think ...”.

The leading idea, in this modal model, is the distinction between the mode of presentation of the object, and the modality of presentation in the experience. Thus, the object of consciousness is presented in a certain way by virtue of the content,

< that tall white egret ... >

Here lies the mode of presentation of the object in the experience. By contrast, the *act* of consciousness is executed in ways experienced by virtue of the *modal content*,

< phenomenally in this very experience I now here see attentively and intuitively >

There lies the modality of presentation in the experience.

On this modal model, we detail an integrated structure of specific phenomenological traits as follows:

- < Phenomenally >: the phenomenal character per se of the experience.
- < in this very experience >: the character of inner awareness of the experience.
- < I >: the subjective or egocentric character where “I” enact the experience.
- < now >: the temporal character of the experience flowing off in “inner time”.
- < here >: the spatial character of my experience as oriented around “my lived body”.
- < see >: the principal thetic character of my experience.
- < attentively >: the qualifying character of focus in my experience.
- < intuitively >: the evidential character informing my experience.
- < that tall white egret now there stepping slowly through waving grass >: the form of presentation of the intended object, including the sense of “outer time” as the egret moves.

In particular, we note three vital aspects of consciousness given a formal twist in the modal model. Phenomenality is treated as a primitive and ubiquitous modal form, often indicated by the theater metaphor of a spotlight, within which things appear in consciousness. Inner awareness is treated as a modal qualification of the act, rather than, say, a peripheral higher-order presentation of the act alongside the object, both presented by virtue of the *Sinn* component. Self-awareness—i.e. awareness of the subject “I” in action, in seeing, or in thinking, or in willing, etc.—is treated also as a qualification of the act, not as a presentation of the subject along with the intended object, placing myself and the egret within the purview of *Sinn*, making an object of both. Awareness of temporality and spatiality appears also within the modal content, as distinguished from the presentation of the object; the egret is indeed given “now” “there” before “me”, but these presented features do not “make an object” of act, subject, time, or place.

Paradigmatically, these modal features in an act of consciousness are mutually interdependent. In the case of my seeing the egret, for example, consciousness does not consist simply in the appearance of “that tall white egret ...”. Rather, consciousness takes the form of “see[ing] that tall white egret ...”, and moreover the first-personal form of “I see that tall white egret ...”. Of course, consciousness takes the form of “phenomenally I see that tall white egret ...”; that goes without saying in phenomenology. Further, consciousness typically includes a certain awareness-of-awareness, and so takes the form of “phenomenally in this very experience I see that tall white egret ...”. In Husserlian ontology, the features of phenomenality, inner awareness, and subject-awareness thus form a whole wherein these features are mutually dependent parts (or “moments”): thus comprising a basic “modal” character typical of everyday consciousness. As we turn to everyday visual perception, moreover, we find an intrinsic sense of spatiotemporal embodiment, as consciousness takes the form of “phenomenally in this very experience I now here see that tall white egret ...”—and where “I ...” typically move around, bodily, turning my eyes and head toward the object. In the normal course of everyday experience, these distinguishable characters do not come apart, but are mutually constitutive of consciousness. For a detailed study of interdependencies of noematic content, as assumed in the modal model, see the reconstruction of Husserl’s system in (Smith, 2013).

The modal model thus adds complexity to the basic form of intentionality. For intentionality consists not simply in a direction of consciousness toward an object, but in a directedness duly *modified* by a complex modal character comprising phenomenality, inner awareness, self-awareness, and even awareness of embodiment.

## 10 Conclusion

Our reflections have moved through horizons of phenomenological analysis, formal and material, reconfiguring the “transcendental” conditions of phenomenal intentionality. Husserl’s writings constantly demonstrate an interplay between formal



and material aspects of lived experience. Consider: our consciousness of the flow of time, our perceptual awareness of the space around us, our lived as opposed to physical bodies, our experience in bodily action, our empathy with the experience of others, our collective or intersubjective experience, our normative sense of what's happening in our *Lebenswelt*, the historical and social genesis of so many of our concepts or noematic meanings, the constitution of social reality, and so on. Of particular significance today is social ontology. What count as social relations, social groups, social and legal norms, and the basic forms of social reality turn on the structure of intersubjectivity grounded in empathy and informing our evolving communal *Lebenswelt*. Accordingly, the foundations of social phenomena are interwoven with the phenomenology of empathy and intersubjectivity, explored initially in Husserl's *Ideas II* (1912/1989) and sharply articulated in Edith Stein's *On the Problem of Empathy* (1916).

The formal side of phenomenology is not a rigid and absolute constraint on what we can see in reflection on experience. We abstract from phenomena. We reflect on the phenomena and the forms we recognize therein. We revise our sense of the phenomena. And on we go, seeking a reflective equilibrium between what we experience just as we experience it and what we make of the forms of experience, the noematic and horizational meanings that inform our everyday experience.

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# The Problem of the Unity of a Manifold in the Development of Husserl's Philosophy



Burt C. Hopkins

## 1 Introduction

Husserl's most systematic phenomenological work, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (Ideas I)* (Husserl, 2014), differentiates pure transcendental phenomenology, as an eidetic science, from the eidetic science of mathematics.<sup>1</sup> In line with the tradition of transcendental philosophy arguably—*ante rem*—stretching back to Plato, Husserl contrasts transcendental phenomenology with mathematics and argues that its conceptuality cannot be appropriately articulated and conceived in analogy with mathematics. While both mathematics and transcendental phenomenology are eidetic sciences, phenomenology “belongs to a basic class of eidetic sciences ... [that is] totally different from that to which the mathematical sciences belong” (Husserl, 2014, 136). The key differential between these two sciences on Husserl's view concerns the nature of the essences that are the subject matter of each discipline. Mathematics deals with exact essences, which he characterizes as ideas in the Kantian sense. Phenomenology deals with inexact essences, which Husserl characterizes as morphological.

Significantly, Husserl formulates the precise issue of the difference between the two kinds of essences at issue here in terms of the answer to the question: “Is the stream of consciousness a genuine mathematical manifold (*Mannigfaltigkeit*)?”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Husserl defines an “eidetic” science as “a science of essences” in contrast with a “science of matters of fact”, such as empirical psychology (See Husserl, 2014, 5).

<sup>2</sup>The term ‘manifold’ (*Mannigfaltigkeit*) as employed by Husserl has a range of meanings, all of which are related to the basic phenomenon of, on the one hand, a multitude (*Menge*) of items, and, on the other, their unity (*Einheit*). Multiplicity (*Vielheit*), collection (*Kollektivum*), totality (*Inbegriff*), are closely related terms and generally used by Husserl with the same intended mean-

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(Husserl, 2014, 132). His answer is “no.” The discussion to follow will focus on Husserl’s distinction between a mathematical and a phenomenological manifold in light of the development of his thought, together with an invariant problematic running through most of it, which is behind that distinction. For the purposes of this discussion, Husserl’s development will be divided into three phases: (1) the early descriptive psychological account of mathematical manifolds, (2) the pure transcendental phenomenological account of mathematical and phenomenological manifolds, and (3) the transcendental phenomenological account of the historicity of the different meanings determinative of both kinds of manifolds. The invariant problematic running through the second and third phases of the development of Husserl’s thought, the phenomenological account of the unity and multiplicity proper to the manifold of internal time consciousness, will also be discussed.

My discussion will endeavor to show that Husserl’s phenomenological account of the formal structure of a mathematical manifold does not adequately distinguish the formality of meanings that are ideal from that of those that are formalized. Symptomatic of this is Husserl’s use of the term “formal,” which refers to both ideal and formalized meanings in a manner suggesting that they share a common essential structure of “formality.” That they do not will be shown to be an important implication of Husserl’s phenomenological analysis of the constitution of ideal—in the sense of “ideas in the Kantian sense”—and formalized—in the sense of symbolic mathematics—meanings. Two phenomenologically significant consequences will be drawn from this.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, Husserl’s account of a mathematical

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ing, which is, again, the presentation of a phenomenon that is essentially characterized by more than one item that is nevertheless somehow unified as a whole or a totality. The technical, formalized mathematical meaning of ‘manifold’, discussed below, of course also figures in Husserl’s use of the term, and is clearly what is meant in this quote.

<sup>3</sup>Husserl consistently distinguishes formalized universality from generalized universality and the processes of formalization and generalization constitutive of them (Husserl, 2014, 27). On the one hand, generalized universality manifests the hierarchical structure of meanings constitutive of the material regions of being, from a given region’s highest genus down to the infima species determinative of the meaning of the manifold of individuals that instantiate the material region. Husserl characterizes the process of generalization that constitutes generalized meanings in terms of the variation that begins with examples drawn from factual (*faktisch*) experience and culminates in the imaginative variation that yields the essence of the various levels of generic universality (Husserl, 1973, 339–364, 1977, 53–63). On the other hand, Husserl characterizes formalized universality in terms of the non-hierarchical universality of the formal region “any object whatever” (*Etwas überhaupt*), which encompasses—without being reducible to—the generalized universalities constitutive of the meaning structure of the material regions of being. Husserl mostly characterizes the process of formalization in terms of the “emptying” of material meaning from generalized universal meaning structures, a process that is then sharply distinguished from the variation operative in the generalization that yields generalized universality (Husserl, 1973, 357). But he sometimes also characterizes formalization in terms of variation (Husserl, 1969, 249, 306). While Husserl is quite clear that the essential forms of meaning that characterize generalized and formalized universality do not share a common genus (Husserl, 2014, 27), in the case of the essential forms of meaning characteristic of ideas in the Kantian sense and formalized universality, Husserl often speaks as if both shared the essential commonality “ideal.” That they cannot do so on grounds intrinsic to Husserl’s own phenomenological analysis, will be shown in Sect. 8 below.

manifold will be shown to be problematical, insofar as that account has a dimension that is determined by a logical norm rather than a descriptively constituted *eidōs*. This is, of course, problematical, because phenomenology as a descriptive eidetic science cannot legitimately base its cognition, without more ado, on the appeal to norms, logical or otherwise. In the case at hand, its cognition must rather provide an account of a mathematical manifold that is based in the cognition of its descriptively constituted *eidōs*. On the other hand, Husserl's account of the constitution of the temporal foundation of the manifold that composes the stream of consciousness will be shown to be crucially determined by the appeal to eidetic structures whose formal conceptuality is mathematical rather than phenomenological. That is, Husserl's account of the formal unity and multiplicity constitutive of any given phenomenological manifold does not adhere to the distinction between a mathematical and phenomenological manifold presented in *Ideas I*. Hence, the formal character of the concepts Husserl employs to account for the unity of a phenomenological manifold—that is to say, their formal “conceptuality”—are mathematical, not phenomenological.<sup>4</sup> This is, of course, therefore inconsistent with the *eidetic* distinction Husserl himself draws between mathematical and phenomenological manifolds.

Once this is established, a detailed account of the phenomenological shortcomings of Husserl's employment of exact mathematical concepts to characterize the constitution of a phenomenological manifold will be provided. Its focus will be on the inability of the mathematical concept of a continuum<sup>5</sup> to account for the phenomenal *discontinuity* of the past from consciousness of present, both in the case of the manifold streams of consciousness that begin and end and the foundation of those manifolds in the living present. This discontinuity will be shown to be manifest in the phenomenon of *forgetting*, which Husserl's appeal to the “law of modification” to account for the retentional and protentional flow of consciousness as a continuum is unable to account for. The connection between sedimentation and

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<sup>4</sup>Mark van Atten (in an email exchange) pointed out to me that “Husserl realizes (at least sometimes) that in his account [of the manifold of time] the mathematical is an idealization—see the *Bernauer Manuskripte*, Hua XXXIII, p. 66 line 16, p. 307 lines 16–18.” In the first instance, the idealization in question concerns the ideal givenness of the limit of the modification responsible for the generation of the temporal manifold, insofar as its retentive flow fades into the infinite “in [a] mathematical idealization (my translation).” In the second, Husserl characterizes the duration of time—as the summation of concreta—in terms of “a performance that is ordered formally and systematically” and thus the “matter of a mathematical technique (my translations).” While these appeals of Husserl to mathematical idealization and mathematical technique are doubtlessly related generally to the question of the role of the mathematical in his account of the manifold of time consciousness, it is important to note that what I wish to call attention to here is *not* Husserl's idealized mathematical characterization of the extension of the concrete manifold of consciousness qua its flowing or streaming. Rather, what I want to point out is that Husserl's account of the very genesis of this streaming—which according to his presentation of the phenomenological method must have *constitutive* priority over its putative formal structure—already employs the (exact) formal conceptuality of mathematics. See below, Sects. 14, 15, and 16.

<sup>5</sup>“The running-off continuity of an enduring object is therefore a continuum whose phases are the continua of the running-off modes belonging to the different time-points of the duration of the object” (Husserl, 1991, 30).

forgetfulness made by Husserl in a late manuscript will provide the occasion to articulate the horizons of four future tasks for phenomenology: (1) investigate the role of the phenomenon of forgetfulness in the constitution of both internal and historical time consciousness; (2) reassess Husserl's account of recollection in making present transcendent objects in the living present, in light of the discontinuity of the horizon of the past from that of the present; (3) investigate the role of sedimentation, forgetfulness, and recollection in the constitution of the unity and multiplicity of the manifolds of consciousness that begin and end; and (4), investigate the intentional-historical meaning that is sedimented in the origins of the universal formalization that is the *sine qua non* for a mathematical manifold in contemporary mathematics.

## 2 The Collective Unity of a Manifold and the Formalized Unity of Its Units in Husserl's Early Work

The unity of a manifold emerges as a problem in Husserl's thought within a specifically mathematical context (*Philosophy of Arithmetic, PA*) (Husserl, 2003). The manifold in question is a multitude of discrete units whose unity is irreducible to either any property (or properties) of the individual units or to their simple aggregation. Because of this, the unity in question is termed "collective," in the precise sense of its capacity to unify the discrete units that compose a multitude into a whole while being neither a property of any one of the individual units nor of their aggregate; *and* to do so without the collective unity itself being predicable of any individual unit. The specific problem here is that of accounting for the peculiar *collectivity* of the unity in question. This is a problem given the inability of the whole-part structure of individual objects and their aggregation to account for it. This is to say that neither an account of the whole-part unity of each *individual* object, nor the unity of anything that can be predicated of such objects, can address, let alone account for, the collective unity that composes the collection of such objects.

The nature of this problem has a mathematical context, because the most basic objects of mathematics—natural numbers beginning with two—are characterized by their collective unity, which determines exactly how many units each specific number is composed of. Each number unifies collectively an exact amount of units, no individual unit of which is intelligible as a numerical entity, because only as a collection do the units belong to the number that determines their amount. For instance, the first number, "two," is composed of a unit *and* a unit, each of which is one, not two. Their exact amount—"two"—is therefore not predicable of either unit taken in isolation but only when both units together are part of the collection whose amount is "two." Despite the mathematical context of this problem, however, addressing it is not a mathematical but a philosophical one. This is the case not only because mathematical knowledge and the cognition behind it are perfectly capable of realizing themselves without philosophical reflection upon their basic objects and

concepts, but also because at issue in the foundation of collective unity is the intelligibility of the most universal and most fundamental phenomenon available to human understanding. "Every complex phenomenon which presupposes parts that are separately and specifically noticed, every higher mental and emotional activity, requires, in order to be able to arise at all, collective combination of partial phenomena" (Husserl, 2003, 75). Moreover, "simple relations (e.g., identity, similarity, etc.)" (ibid.) could not be presented "if a unitary interest and simultaneously with it, an act of noticing did not pick out the terms and hold them together as unified" (ibid.).

Another foundational issue arises here: the formal categorial structure of the concept of a unit is such that any arbitrary object from any domain of being whatever—perceptual, conceptual, imaginary—can fall under it. But again, the problem is one whose scope is not limited to a multitude composed of the arbitrary objects unified by number and therefore to mathematics. In this case, the problem is that of foundation of the intelligibility of the most basic concept of logic, that of the materially empty and therefore formalized category of "anything" (*Etwas*).

### **3 The Failure of Husserl's Descriptive Psychological Account of the Objectivity of the Collective Unity of a Manifold and Its Formalized Units**

Husserl's attempt to account for the philosophical foundation of the intelligibility of natural numbers addressed both the objectivity of the collective unity and the formalized unity of the individual units that compose the collectively unified multitude determinative of number. That is, for Husserl accounting for the intelligibility of number involves the answer to two questions. One, what is responsible for the peculiar unity of the units it unifies, given their materially empty and therefore formal universality? Two, how is it possible that a multitude of such units are unified as a *multiplicity* whose unity is neither derived nor derivable from the unity of each of the units belonging to their multitude, but that, as such, is nevertheless able to encompass them all? Husserl's early work, however, attempted to account for this within the context of the method of descriptive psychology, which focused on the psychological acts in which each kind of objectivity is given. In the former case, the act in question was that of collective combination, wherein the items in a multitude are successively combined into a unity, with the acts in question being indicated by the word "and." In the latter case, the act in question was that of the presentation (*Vorstellung*) in which any object of perception is given. In both cases, the descriptive psychological account of the inner perception (or, equivalently, reflexion<sup>6</sup>) of

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<sup>6</sup>"Reflexion" is preferable to "reflection" for translating the German word "Reflexion" within the context of Husserl's early work under discussion here. That work was informed by the Empirical account of the opposition between inner and outer perception, neither of which involved or other-



the acts in question was supposed to be capable of abstracting from the contents of the acts the objective meanings in question. In the acts of collective combination, the objectivity of the ‘collective unity’ is at issue and in the acts of perceptual presentation, that of the formal category of ‘anything’ is at stake. But as Husserl himself soon came to realize, from the inner perception of or reflexion on the psychological acts all that can be abstracted is the concept of the act in question and not the objective unity given in it.<sup>7</sup> The method of descriptive psychology therefore was rejected by Husserl, because it is incapable of providing the philosophical foundation for the collective and formalized unities that make intelligible the whole-part structure of the exact meaning of the natural numbers.

The fallacy of “psychologism” at issue in Husserl’s initial foray into the foundational problems connected with the most basic objects of mathematics, it is important to note, however, was not the logical variety that claimed that the exact meanings in question are in truth really psychological realities. That is, it wasn’t the kind of psychologism that Husserl criticized in the *Prolegomena to the Logical Investigations* (Husserl, 1970a). Rather, despite being fully aware of the non-psychological basis of the objectivity of the collective unity and the formal category of ‘anything’ (*Etwas*), Husserl’s initial approach to accounting for their foundations nevertheless sought to ground the *origin* of that objectivity in the description of its psychological genesis.

It’s important to note here, because it is often not recognized, that the philosophical problem of accounting for the foundation of the collective unity of a multitude and the formalized category determinative of its units remained a problem for Husserl’s thought subsequent to his rejection of the psychological method he had initially employed to address it. Thus, after Husserl’s rejection of the act of collective combination as the source of the objectivity of the collective unity of a manifold, accounting for that unity’s foundation remained a problem for his thought.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the problem of accounting for the philosophical foundation of the formalized category of ‘anything’ also remained after his rejection of the descriptive psychological account of that category’s origin.

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wise presupposed what Husserl would later characterize as the “thematic” mode of conscious awareness that is intrinsic to, for instance, the meaning of the English term “reflection.”

<sup>7</sup>In 1913 Husserl concluded, “from the reflexion on acts” of collecting “the concept of collecting ... is all that can result” (Husserl, 1975, 127) and therefore not the concept of the unity of the collection.

<sup>8</sup>See (van Atten, 2013) for a recent phenomenological attempt to account for this unity on the basis of the objectivation of the temporal form of the pre-given absolute flow of consciousness.

#### **4 Husserl's Self-Critique of the Descriptive Psychological Account of the Logical Foundation of Symbolic Mathematics**

What's behind the lack of recognition noted is Husserl's response to the second foundational problem in mathematics he sought to address in his early work. Namely, the foundation of the logic that allows both the blind manipulations of meaningful symbols and the use of meaningless symbols as if they had a meaning to achieve mathematical cognition. Husserl sought to establish the foundation of this logic by appealing to an understanding of "symbol" that took it to be a surrogate for the presentation of genuine mathematical objects. The genesis of symbolic surrogation on this view involved three crucial steps. One, the idealizing extension of the mind's finite powers of apprehending large and indeed infinite mathematical objects. Two, the substitution of sense perceptible signs for the idealized concepts generated by this idealization. And three, the manipulation of those signs according to other signs that express algorithmic rules for their combination and separation in the complete absence of any reference to the following: both the idealized concepts the signs that are the substitutes for and the original mathematical objects of which those concepts are the idealized extensions.

Husserl's account of the third step in his first book, *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (Husserl, 2003), led him to realize that the descriptive psychological thesis of the surrogative function of symbols in relation to the concepts of mathematics that had guided that book's account of the foundation of the logic of symbolic mathematics was wrong.<sup>9</sup> As Husserl related it in his famous letter to Karl Stumpf (Husserl, 1994, 12–19) (written after the book's completion), symbolic mathematics "is not a matter of the 'possibility' or 'impossibility' of concepts" (Husserl, 1994, 16), but "an accomplishment of the signs and their rules" (ibid.). Husserl concluded that symbolic mathematics, therefore, is "no science, but a part of *formal* logic" (ibid., 17), albeit a part that doesn't yet exist, as he knew "of no logic that would even do justice to the possibility of ordinary arithmetic" (ibid.).

#### **5 Husserl's Account of Categorial Unity of Numbers Does Not Account for the Objectivity of Their Collective Unity**

Husserl's next book, *Logical Investigations (LI)* (Husserl, 1970a), sought to lay the groundwork for formal logic, one that would include the capacity to account for the foundation of both the objectivity of natural numbers and the logic of symbolic mathematics. However, readers searching for non-psychologistic solutions to either of the two foundational issues raised in Husserl's earliest work will search in vain.

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<sup>9</sup>See (Willard, 1980) and (Hopkins, 2011a, b, Ch. 13).

Regarding the foundation of the objectivity of the natural numbers (beginning, as noted above, with the number two), Husserl included the species of those numbers among the categorial objects whose objectivity the breakthrough discovery to pure phenomenology—categorial intuition—was tasked with providing non-psychological perceptual access. Thus, for instance, in the case of the number five, the multitude of objects that compose that exact number were said to be “instances” of the categorial species “five,” whose objective unity is given as an ideal object that is irreducible to the psychological experience in which it is given. However, the question of the source of the ideal givenness of the collective unity of the multitude that composes any instance of the objective species “five” is nowhere addressed in that work nor anywhere else in Husserl’s account of categorial intuition in general. Husserl, in fact, notes explicitly in the *LI* that its investigations do not explore the foundation of the categorial unity of “*collectiva*.”<sup>10</sup>

## 6 Husserl’s Phenomenological Account of a Definite Mathematical Manifold

With regard to the foundation of the logic of symbolic mathematics, what Husserl presented in the *LI* (Husserl, 1970a, §§ 69–70) proved to be the basis of his definitive account of that logic, namely, his definition of a mathematical manifold.<sup>11</sup> Termed a “definite manifold” or “mathematical manifold in the precise sense” in *Ideas I* (Husserl, 2014, 130), this account of the logic of symbolic mathematics remained the basis of his account of that logic in his later published works, *Ideas I* and *Formal and Transcendental Logic (FTL)*. The logic in question has its basis in a finite system of axiomatic propositions and axioms that completely and univocally encompass the essence of a given mathematical domain (e.g., that of Euclidean geometry). As a result, every proposition formed from this finite set of propositions and axioms—no matter what its logical form—is either a formal logical consequence of them or their formal logical contradiction. In addition, this account of a definite or precise mathematical manifold also characterizes for Husserl the manifold that ensues when the material particularization of all the special domains of mathematical objects is subject to formalizing universalization. What then results is

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<sup>10</sup>In § 51 of the *LI*, “Collectiva and Disjunctiva,” Husserl calls attention to the lack of sensible perception of the collectivum and the “unitary object which corresponds” to the “act of collection.” However, significantly, he does not provide a foundational account of the objective unity of that object, but instead refers to the investigations in his *Philosophy of Arithmetic* of the signitive reference to a multitude that “does not therefore as yet possess the character of a genuine intuition of the collection as such” (Husserl, 1970a, 799).

<sup>11</sup>In *FTL* (Husserl, 1969), 29 years after the publication of *LI*, Husserl quotes extensively from § 70 of *LI*, noting that “I shall repeat here the strict characterization of the idea of a formal theory of theory forms—correlatively, a formal theory of manifolds. I cannot improve on it” (Husserl, 1969, 91).

the *pure* definition of a mathematical manifold, which accounts for the specialized logical form of any symbolic mathematical manifold whatever.

## 7 Fundamental Phenomenological and Logical Problems with Husserl's Account of Definite Mathematical Manifolds

There are two fundamental problems with Husserl's account of both specialized and pure mathematical manifolds, one that is based in his account of the difference between mathematical and phenomenological manifolds and the other in the development of the logic of mathematics in the early twentieth century.

The first problem is that Husserl's definition presupposes the possibility of a system of formalized axioms encompassing both the essence of the *objects* of the various specialized mathematical domains as well as the *forms* of the axioms of any such specialized domain. This possibility, however, is not established *phenomenologically* by Husserl. That is, Husserl nowhere provides concrete *descriptive* analysis of the morphological (*inexact*) essence or essences of the *genesis*<sup>12</sup> of formalized mathematical axioms and the propositions formed on their basis that refer adequately to (or otherwise denote): (1) the essence of either a given specialized domain of mathematical objects, or; (2) the essence of the forms of the axioms of any specialized domain of mathematical objects whatever. On the one hand, (1) would require a foundational phenomenological account of *both* the essence of a given

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<sup>12</sup>The paradox of a phenomenological account of the descriptive "essence" of mathematical—and therefore exact—cognition that would employ inexact essences, per Husserl's *Ideas I* account of phenomenology as a descriptive eidetic science, disappears when it is considered that Husserl's original foundational engagement with mathematics in *PA* was concerned with the genesis of symbolic mathematical cognition. The radicality of that concern and the problem of the foundation that characterizes what Husserl would later (in *FTL*, with explicit reference to *PA*) term the "constitution" (Husserl, 1969, 87) of the intelligibility proper to formalized mathematics, prevents accounting for the "essence" of the genesis of exact mathematical structures on the basis of essences that are themselves already exact. The paradox, then, is that the phenomenological essence of the genesis of the exactness of formalized cognition cannot itself be exact, because precisely what is at stake in that essence is an account of the origin of the peculiar exactness of formalized cognition. In other words, if—per impossible—the origin of exactness was already exact, it wouldn't properly be an origin. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Husserl's pure phenomenological distinction between "static" and "genetic" phenomenological approaches to the problem of phenomenological constitution reintroduced his original concern with the problem of genesis in *PA* into his transcendental phenomenology. It is also interesting to note that his concrete genetic analyses (both published and unpublished) did not return to the original problem of the genesis of symbolic mathematical cognition. Only in his final texts, so-called *Crisis* texts, did he return to this problem, albeit significantly in those texts the transcendental phenomenological problem of genesis was connected, on essential grounds, with the problem of the historicity inseparable from the genesis of the essence of the exact meanings constitutive of symbolic mathematics, and the mathematical concept of a manifold determinative of that mathematics.

specialized domain of mathematical objects *and* of its *specialized* axiomatic formalization. On the other hand, (2) would require a foundational phenomenological account of the *universal* formalization of the formalized axioms of the various specialized domains of mathematical objects.

As Dieter Lohmar (1989, 191ff) and most recently Thomas Seebohm (2015, 207) have shown, the context for Husserl's definition of a definite manifold was not only Hilbert's mathematical notion of axiomatic completeness, but the fact that Husserl accepted that notion as both mathematically and logically sound. Soon after Husserl published *FTL* Gödel proved that not all formalized axiom systems in mathematics are complete ("definite" or "precise" in Husserl's terminology), from which it follows that the universal scope of Hilbert's logical norm of axiomatic completeness is not well-founded mathematically. This development in logic renders Husserl's phenomenological account of a mathematical manifold problematic.<sup>13</sup>

## 8 Equivocation of Ideal and Formalized Meanings in Husserl's Account of the Mathematization of Nature

Husserl's pre-*Crisis* account of the formalized objectivity constitutive of mathematics is both sparse and inconsistent. He sharply distinguishes formalized universality from generalized universality and the processes of formalization and generalization constitutive of them (Husserl, 2014, 27). On the one hand, generalized universality manifests the hierarchical structure of meanings constitutive of the material regions of being, from a given region's highest genus down to the infima species determinative of the meaning of the manifold of *individuals* that instantiate the material region. Husserl characterizes the process of generalization that constitutes generalized meanings in terms of the variation that begins with examples drawn from factual (*faktisch*) experience and culminates in the imaginative variation that yields the essence of the various levels of generic universality (Husserl, 1973, 339–364, 1977, 53–63). On the other hand, Husserl characterizes formalized universality in terms of the non-hierarchical universality of the formal region "any object whatever" (*Etwas überhaupt*), which encompasses—without being reducible to—the generalized universalities constitutive of the meaning structure of the material regions of being. Husserl mostly characterizes the process of formalization in terms of the "emptying" of material meaning from generalized universal meaning structures, a process that is then sharply distinguished from the variation operative in the generalization

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<sup>13</sup>For comprehensive discussions of the implications of Gödel's incompleteness theorems for the concept of *mathematics* that guides Husserl's account of a definite manifold, see (Okada, 2002) and (van Atten, 2022).

that yields generalized universality.<sup>14</sup> But he sometimes also characterizes formalization in terms of variation.<sup>15</sup>

In the *Crisis* Husserl tends to equate the mathematization of nature with its idealization (Husserl, 1970a, b, 23, 35, 66, 301). Husserl's traces this tendency to Galileo's employment of the exact essences of Euclidean geometry to *idealize* both the primary and secondary qualities of the cognition of sensible bodies (Husserl, 1970b, 35). Hence, in Husserl's account the process of mathematization *per se* is not always distinguished from its idealizing origins. This is the case despite the fact that Husserl himself recognized that the mathematization initiated by Galileo did *not* employ the formalized symbolic mathematics invented by François Vieta's analytic method (pure algebra) (Husserl, 1970b, 44). Moreover, Husserl recognized that the implicit "arithmetization of geometry" (*ibid.*) and mathematics generally—made possible by Vieta's analytic innovation—led to the formalization of mathematical manifolds (Husserl, 1970b, 45). The latter formalization, then, is what leads for Husserl to the radical "emptying" (Husserl, 1970a, b, 44, 46)—by mathematization—of the intuitive meaning inseparable from the ontology of the life-world.

That said, however, Husserl's account in the *Crisis* of the constitution of the objective meaning operative in the mathematical sciences employed in the service of modern physics' mathematization of nature goes beyond his pre-*Crisis* accounts in two crucial regards. One, the condition of possibility for the constitution of the objectivity proper to the *exact* meaning operative in mathematical physics is tied to history, insofar as the handing down by tradition of such meaning is explicitly recognized by Husserl as a *sine qua non* for its *objective* constitution (Husserl, 1970b, 369). Two, Husserl's recognition of the *historicity* of the foundational meaning of the exact sciences (and its transmission by tradition) has as its condition of possibility the phenomenon of *sedimentation* (Husserl, 1970b, 362).<sup>16</sup> Thus, the constitution of the meaning of the exact sciences cannot be reduced or otherwise be traced back to the intentional modifications of perception, as Husserl had thought prior to the *Crisis* (Husserl, 1969, 158). And, indeed, it cannot be so reduced even if such modifications are understood to extend beyond that of merely subjective to the

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<sup>14</sup>"But formalization is something essentially different from variation. It does not consist in imagining that the determinations of the variants are changed into others; rather, it is a disregarding, an emptying of all objective, material determinations" (Husserl, 1973, 359).

<sup>15</sup>See *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, where Husserl explicitly connects the constitution of "analytico-formal universalities" (Husserl, 1969, 249) to "phantasy variation" (*ibid.*). See also (*ibid.*, 306).

<sup>16</sup>Husserl's last writings introduce the radical claim that "history is from the start nothing other than the vital movement of the coexistence and interweaving of original formations and sedimentations of meaning" (Husserl, 1970b, 372). By "sedimentation" Husserl means "the constant presuppositions" of the scientist "of his constructions, concepts, propositions, theories," such that these "mental products" take on "the form of persisting linguistic acquisitions, which can be taken up again at first merely passively and be taken over [merely passively] by anyone else" (Husserl, 1970b, 52). Husserl speaks in this context "about the possibility of complete and genuine reactivation [of the sedimented meanings] in full originality, through going back to the primal self-evidences, in the case of geometry and the so-called 'deductive' sciences" (Husserl, 1970b, 365).

intersubjective constitution of perception (Seebohm, 2015, 187). Thus, as the original editor of Husserl's core *Crisis* texts, Eugen Fink, reflected in the subtitle he added to Husserl's "Origin of Geometry," the function of sedimentation in the constitution of the objective meaning of geometry, and, by extension, of the exact sciences in general, exhibits an "intentional-historical" (Husserl, 1970b, 353) dimension.

Husserl thus saw in the *Crisis* that the formalization of meaning presupposed by modern mathematics is inseparable from its institution in an intentional-historical process. This formalization cannot be accessed by the empirical methodology employed by the positive science of history (Husserl, 1970b, 371). The conceptual suppositions behind the method and facts established by empirical history on Husserl's view make it blind to the region of the formal concepts that compose the mathematical objects of modern algebra and the analytic conceptuality generally that is constitutive of modern mathematics. And empirical history's explanatory methodology, rooted in the notion of efficient causality as the engine that drives historical change, is incapable of accounting for the kind of change that occurs in the historically dated conceptual transformations at issue in the history of ideas. It is precisely the latter kind of change, operative in the mathematization of nature initiated by Galileo, that Husserl sought to account for in the *Crisis* by aligning transcendental phenomenology's epistemologically foundational concerns with historical reflections whose quarry is not historical *facts* but the historically dated origins of the exact meanings that are both presupposed by and that drive the exact sciences (Husserl, 1970b, 72, 370).

As already mentioned, despite recognizing the distinction between the idealized conceptuality of Euclidean geometry and the formalized conceptuality of algebra and symbolic mathematics generally, Husserl was wont to use the terms "mathematization" and "idealization" interchangeably. Moreover, notwithstanding, as already mentioned, his attentiveness to the arithmetization of geometry responsible for the primal institution of formalization and the intuitive emptying of the life-world inseparable from the conceptuality of formalized mathematics, Husserl himself never analyzed the epistemological-historical origins of formalized mathematics.

## 9 Phenomenological Manifolds in Husserl's Pure Transcendental Phenomenology

Husserl's phenomenological account of the manifold of the stream of consciousness has its basis in the reflective thematization of the subjective experience in which the objective identity of the things in the world and the world itself as their horizon appears. Prior to the methodological intervention requisite for the phenomenological description of the stream of consciousness, the objective identity of things and the world horizon appear directly, without any explicit awareness of the subjective experience that is disclosed by phenomenological reflection to be a condition for the



appearing of objectivity as such to consciousness. This phenomenological reflection thematizes the subjective experience in which the objective identity in question appears. As thematized, the experience in question itself *appears*, and does so as the *manifold* of perspectives that are conscious of the objective identity of both the things in the world and their worldly horizon. These latter, in turn, *appear* as *unities* that stand out from the multiple perspectives directed to the unity of each that composes the manifold stream of consciousness.

The manifold of perspectives thematized by phenomenological reflection pertains to what Husserl terms the “eidetic singular” (Husserl, 2014, 26), which is an essence’s lowest specific difference. What is singular here is precisely the flowing perspectives that compose the manifold as a *concretum*, that is, the essence of that dimension of subjective experience that is “absolutely independent” (ibid., 30) of any other essential determination. The descriptive articulation of the essence of the concretum brings to the fore the objective unity of the thing that appears in the flowing perspectival appearances. The latter *flowing* of experience cannot be “conceptually and terminologically” (ibid.) secured. Rather, only “the essential content in the fullness of its concreteness” can be so secured and thus cognized eidetically. Hence, while there can be “no talk of a univocal determination of *eidetic singularities*” (ibid., 135), in this case, of all that belongs to the flowing manifold of consciousness that composes the essence of the subjective stream of experiences in which objective identities appear, the content of that essence *itself* can be taken as something univocal. Namely, “as an ideally identical essence that, like any essence, could be instantiated, not only *hic et nunc* but in countless exemplars” (ibid., 134). In the case at hand, it can be instantiated in any arbitrarily given reflectively thematized subjective experience in which the unity of objective identity appears.

Presumably, the “essence” at issue in the phrase “like any essence” here refers to the non-exact, descriptive essences that are the concern of the eidetic science of phenomenology. Thus, for instance, the account of the manifold perspectives of the subjective experience in which the unity of the identical object appears through its flowing is descriptive, since flowing does not appear as the specification of an essence with the characteristic of an Idea in the Kantian sense. The essential status of ‘flowing’, therefore, is not—*per impossibile*—that of a moment in the extension of experience inseparable from the passage to an exact (and therefore) mathematical limit. Rather, ‘flowing’ is an instance of the ideally identical descriptive essence of *any* arbitrarily given subjective experience in which the appearance of the unity of the objective identity of things and the world horizon appears.<sup>17</sup> As the instance of

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<sup>17</sup>The question whether Husserl’s account of the ideally identical character of the descriptive essence, whose status is *inexact* according to Husserl’s *eidetic* distinction between the exact status of mathematical essences and the morphological status of phenomenological essences, tacitly presupposes the *idealization* in some sense of the descriptive essence, cannot be addressed here in detail. What can be remarked here, however, is that the status of the *ideality* of the descriptive essence for Husserl is radically different from that of the mathematical essence. It is so, above all, because the *ideality* of the latter but *not* the former requires for its constitution the passage to a limit that according to Husserl is essentially characteristic of mathematical exactness. To the extent that Husserl’s phenomenological account of the descriptive essence is not just terminologically but

an essence, ‘flowing’ therefore does not refer to anything individual according to Husserl, that is, to something whose unity is empirically determined and therefore contingent, because as contingent it can always appear otherwise.

## 10 The Constitution of Internal Time Consciousness

The flowing manifold of the stream of subjective experience exhibits a phenomenological unity, which according to Husserl is constituted in “internal time consciousness.” The meaning of ‘internal’ here is initially developed in contradistinction to the time of the clock, so-called “external” or “objective” time. However, the subjectivity of Husserl’s account of time consciousness and the temporality constituted therein is in no way opposed to the time of the object. Rather, it is tasked with presenting the constitution of the unity of the object’s presentation *as objectively present* in subjective experience from *within the temporality of that experience’s flowing manifold*. This is the case, because subsequent to the *epoché*, the ontological opposition between the perception of “inner” and “outer” objects is transformed into the transcendental distinction between the constitution of “immanent” and “transcendent” meanings (*Sinne*). The constitution of the unity of the latter meanings, therefore, cannot be accounted for in an opposition between the manifold of the stream of consciousness and the unity of an object external to it, but rather, it must be sought precisely in the phenomenon of the flowing manifold itself. This is to say, the phenomenological unity of the immanent and transcendent meanings must be sought within the manifold that composes the stream of consciousness.

Husserl’s phenomenological account of the temporal unity of the manifold of consciousness tracked the development of his phenomenology from “static” to “genetic.” On the one hand, the static account employed the perceptual presentation of the transcendent object and the unity of its meaning as the “guiding” clue to account for the constitution of the temporal unity of the manifold of consciousness. On the other hand, the genetic account sought to account for the constitution of the immanent unity of the temporal manifold of consciousness itself on the basis of syntheses of consciousness that are both passively given *and* pre-objective. Both accounts apply the same correlation between the three phases of time consciousness—retention, primal impression, and protention—to the temporality of objective presentation, i.e., past, present, future. In the static account, this correlation is presented by Husserl as the essence of the temporal unity of the finite streams of consciousness that come and go (Husserl, 2014, 157). In the genetic account, the correlation is presented as the essence of the absolute, pre-objective and

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also substantially related to both the status and controversy over the true being of the *eidê* in Plato and Aristotle—and that extent on my view is considerable—the definitive answer to this question requires the disambiguation of that status and controversy which is sedimented in Husserl’s self-interpretation of phenomenology as an *eidetic* science. (For a detailed discussion of this, see Hopkins, 2011a, b, especially 21–82 and 254–272.)

unobjectifiable, standing-streaming origin of the living-present wherein appear and disappear the manifold finite streams of consciousness.

## 11 Husserl's Static and Genetic Accounts of the Constitution of the Temporal Unity of the Ego

The methodological commitment of transcendental phenomenology to account for the unity of the phenomenological manifold without appeal to objects or objective meanings that do not have their source in the *transcendental* immanence of that manifold, as has been remarked often enough, is broken by Husserl's Cartesian self-interpretation of the phenomenological manifold's subjectivity. For my purpose, only the implications of this for his account of the unity of the phenomenological manifold will be taken up. These implications concern Husserl's account of the static and genetic constitution of the unity of the transcendental Ego as an object immanent to the phenomenological manifold.

In the case of Husserl's static account of the Ego's unity, that unity is accounted for as a *pole* that underlies the manifold flowing perspectives of the stream of consciousness, which are intentionally directed to the unity of the meaning of the transcendent object. As such, the Ego's unity, as a pole, is constituted in opposition to the objectivity of the meaning of the transcendent object, which is itself characterized by Husserl as a *pole* whose unity underlies—in the technical sense of transcending—the manifold perspectives in which it appears to consciousness. Husserl's static account of the constitution of the Ego's unity is therefore dependent on it being posited in opposition to the unity of the object's meaning as transcendent. One consequence of this is that the constitutive account of its unity as an object immanent to the phenomenological manifold is derivative. It is derivative in the precise sense that the account of its unity as a pole presupposes that of the objective pole to which it is opposed in Husserl's descriptive account of its unity.<sup>18</sup>

Husserl's genetic account of the Ego's unity recognizes that because the Ego's static unity as a pole belongs to the stream of consciousness, its unity as an enduring identity in the *temporality* of the flowing of that stream is something whose constitution must be accounted for in terms of its genesis in that temporality. The static account of the Ego's unity is limited in this regard, as its status as a pole underlying the temporal flowing of the manifold of consciousness places its unity as somehow being constituted outside of that flow. Husserl attempts to get around the temporal limits of this static account by providing an account of the temporality of the Ego's mode of givenness as a unity. This account attends specifically to the Ego's mode of appearance as an object immanent to the flow consciousness, wherein its identity as

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<sup>18</sup> See Klaus Held's (Held, in Drummond, 2019, 212–213) definitive analysis of the correlation between the Ego as pole and the object pole and the dependence of the former on the latter in Husserl's account of the static constitution of the Ego.

the “subject” of that flow presents itself as a unity not only in that flow’s present moment but also in the moments of that flow that are no longer present and therefore past. As such, the unity of the Ego’s identity must encompass two temporal dimensions, those of the present and the past. The genesis of its unity therefore requires an account of *how* the two different temporal moments that compose its identity are unified.

Husserl’s account of the ‘how’ in question appeals to the *act* of reflection in which the Ego is given as a reflected phenomenon that manifests itself in terms of the radically different dimensions of time that characterize the *how* of its phenomenal manifestation. The reflective act in question is charged by Husserl with the task of synthesizing the Ego’s givenness as a unity *having been* present and therefore as no longer present but past, with its givenness as enduring in the present. Such a synthesis is supposed to take place on the basis of the recognition that both the present and past temporal dimensions of the Ego are essential components of its identity as Ego, such that its unity as the *same* Ego is constituted. The Ego’s unity is therefore constituted as a *unity in temporal difference* or, equivalently, as a *difference in temporal unity*.<sup>19</sup> Husserl’s term for the peculiar temporality of this unity is the “living present.”

## 12 Problems with Husserl’s Genetic Account of the Ego’s Temporal Identity

There are two interrelated and fundamental problems with this genetic account of the Ego’s temporal identity. The first concerns the phenomenological status of its unity. The second concerns that of the phenomenological origin of the manifold its unity putatively unifies.

Regarding the account of the constitution of the Ego’s unity as an identity that encompasses its past and present temporality, it is evident that Husserl’s account of the form of this unity does not originate in the manifold that composes that temporality. But rather, it is imposed on it from without, by an act of reflection that does not belong to that manifold. The resulting ‘unity’ of the Ego, as the putative *living present* wherein the past and present phases of the Ego are supposed to be united in the genesis of the Ego’s identity despite the difference between these temporal phases, therefore has its basis in the unity of another temporal manifold: namely, the act that generates the reflection on these phases. The genesis of the unity of this second manifold cannot be accounted for by the unity of the Ego’s identity since it is supposed to be responsible for that unity. It is therefore apparent that this account

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<sup>19</sup>For a particularly nuanced account of the lack of priority of ‘unity’ and ‘difference’ in the temporality of the Ego at issue here, see (Mickunas, 2001, 164–165).

of the genesis of the identity of the Ego, as that which encompasses the living present, does not have its basis in a unity generated from a phenomenological manifold. Instead, it has its basis in a *form-content* schema that is, in effect, a reconstruction of that which it is supposed to provide a *phenomenological* account of: namely, the Ego's unity as an identity constitutively generated by the phenomenological manifold to which it belongs. The 'form' in question is the living present that is supposed to be synthetically generated from the reflective act of recognition that the temporally discrete past and present phases of the Ego's temporality belong to the same Ego. The 'content' in question is the temporally determinate manifold composed of the discrete temporal phases whose unity *as* temporal the form of the living present is supposed to unify.

Regarding this content, that is, the manifold phases of temporality that the reflective act is supposed to synthesize into the unity of the living present, a closer look at Husserl's account of its genesis will disclose that this account, too, has its basis in the form-content schema. As such, this account reconstructs rather than evidentially discloses the *descriptive* essence of the flowing stream of consciousness that composes a phenomenological manifold. Moreover, Husserl's account of this content itself, on closer inspection, will be disclosed as having its basis in the conceptuality of exact mathematical essences. As mentioned, Husserl's account of the subjective phenomenon of time articulates it in terms of the essential correlation between the phases of time consciousness and those of temporality. Hence, essentially correlated to the temporal phase of the past is the consciousness of the past consciousness—retention—while to the temporal phase of the future is correlated the consciousness of the future—protention—and to the temporal phase of the present is correlated the consciousness of the originary now—primal impression. These three phases of time and the consciousness of them are meant both to capture the essence of three of the four phenomenal dimensions of the unitary phenomenon of time and to prepare the way for capturing the essence of time's fourth dimension, that of its succession.

Husserl's account of succession employs the descriptive terms "flowing" or "streaming" to characterize the morphologically eidetic singular *movement* of time consciousness. Husserl traces this movement in terms of an account of the relation of retentions and protentions to the originary now. Retentional consciousness is described as the awareness of the past that at once is a succession of just passed (elapsed) nows *and* an enduring awareness of the passing of the elapsed nows *that takes place in* the primal impression of the originary now. Protentional consciousness is described as the awareness of the future that is at once the arrival into the originary now of a succession of anticipated nows and the enduring awareness of their anticipation in the original now's primal impression.

### 13 Three Salient Aspects of Husserl's Account of the Essence of Temporal Succession

Three things stand out in this account of the essence of the successive movement characteristic of the phenomenon of time. One, although it characterizes the essence of a succession, the essence in itself is not successive. That is, both the elapsing and arriving nows are characterized in terms of their relation to the original now's impressional awareness, which, unlike the nows that elapse and arrive, is characterized as unmoving. It is so characterized, since as the reference point for *elapsing* and *arriving* units of meaning, it itself does not move. Two, despite its non-motion, the primal impression is nevertheless the origin of the movement of time by virtue of its status as the *source* of the multitude of nows that compose the temporal manifold of consciousness. This is the case because Husserl's descriptive account of that manifold maintains that each just passed elapsing now retains a relation to the impressional now, which, among other things, can only be possible if each elapsing now is replenished by a *fresh* now that is fully present just insofar as it hasn't elapsed yet. And three, nowhere so far in this account of the content of the manifold of the phases of temporality and the consciousness of those phases has the eidetic singularity of the peculiar differentia of the units of meaning that compose these temporal and conscious phases been accounted for. Insofar as the differentia in question here concern the constitution of each of the phases *and* the consciousness of them as an instance of something that is multiple, this is to say that Husserl's account of the temporal manifold of consciousness discussed so far does *not* address the phenomenological conditions of the possibility of its givenness precisely as a phenomenological *manifold*.

### 14 Husserl's Account of the Constitution of Time Consciousness Does *Not* Reflect His Late Criticism of the Immediacy of the Givenness of Impressions

Husserl's early investigations of inner time consciousness account for the differentia in question on the basis of a characterization of the material (*sachlich*) content of the primal impression, namely its phenomenal status as a *sensation*. In contrast with the characterization of sensation in empirical theories of perception, namely, as unified bundles, Husserl initially maintained that the *phenomenon* of sensation appears as a "datum." As such, its "apprehension makes us conscious of something objective as given, 'in person', which is then said to be objectively perceived" (Husserl, 1991, 7). Sensory or "hyletic data" composed half of Husserl's initial account of the most fundamental and primitive distinction in the composition of a phenomenological manifold, the other half being "intentional form." While Husserl's mature investigations in the *Crisis* rejected the fundamentality of this hylomorphic schema and with that, of hyletic data as being "immediately given"

(Husserl, 1970b, 125), he nevertheless did not abandon the crucial role of the *primal impression* in his late manuscripts' account of time. Indeed, the primal impression remained absolutely essential in Husserl's account of the source of the most basic units of the meanings proper to the temporality of the phenomenological manifold. Specifically, it is essential to his account of the original now given in it as something *punctual*, namely, as a "now point."

Husserl's account of the now as a *point*, as an *ideal limit*, as something *abstract*, as a *form*, gives rise to two crucial questions. On the one hand, in what sense, if any, are these terms descriptive, in the precise sense of the criteria Husserl presented in *Ideas I* for distinguishing essences that are phenomenological from those that are mathematical? On the other hand, what methodological perspective is responsible for discerning this as well as the other essential characteristics of the flowing manifold of time consciousness?

Mindful of Husserl's criteria for distinguishing mathematical, which is to say, *exact* essences from phenomenological, i.e., *morphological* essences, the first question can be reformulated as follows: is it possible to understand the terms in question—point, ideal limit, abstract, form—morphologically? On the surface, the obvious answer would seem to be "no." 'Point' and 'ideal limit' signify something *exact*. And while 'form' and 'abstract' need not signify something exact, nevertheless, if the form and abstraction in question referred to a point and ideal limit, both would appear to mean something that is exact. But these terms are meant to describe *not* this or that *individual* phenomenological manifold but the *essence* of any arbitrarily given manifold, and therefore, to describe the essence in the sense of an *eidetic singular*. So, the question may be refined, such that what is under interrogation is whether the phenomenologically peculiar ideal status of the essence *itself* that is characteristic of the flowing dimension of the phenomenological manifold is appropriately characterized—in reference to the *phenomenon* of flowing—by terms that have exact conceptual meanings, even though that which instantiates this essence is something that is *inexact*. Point and ideal limit, then, would characterize *that which makes possible* the appearance of something like a flowing that, in its concreteness, is neither punctual nor limited in the exact sense.

The answer to this refined version of the question is no doubt connected with the answer to the question regarding the methodological perspective from which the basic units of the temporal phases of time are differentiated and time consciousness' relationship to them discerned. In general, of course, the perspective in question is governed by the methodological protocol of the *epoché*. More particularly, the reflection in question is directed to the mode of givenness of the phenomenon of time, which is to say, its appearance. As mentioned already, Husserl's account of its appearance tracks the static and genetic phases of the development of his thought, and for both the crucial aspect characteristic of the appearance in question is the primal impression. Husserl's methodical access to the phenomenon of time clearly presupposes the attempt to *grasp* the primal impression, whether in terms of its static correlation with the appearance of the object or its pre-objective and passive genesis. Crucial to either methodical approach is the resolution into a unity of that



component of the primal impression that is designated as ‘flowing’, together with an account of the origin of the movement associated with that flowing.

## 15 Ambiguity in Husserl’s Account of the Origin of the ‘Now’

Leaving aside for the moment the implications of Husserl’s own late recognition that impressions are *not* immediately given for his account of the origin of the movement in question, his account of the relation of the primal impression to the now can be seen to be problematic on its own terms. On the one hand, new impressions or sensations are characterized by him as already informed by the now, in which case the now is not presented as the content of the impression but as its form. “[T]he primordial temporal form of sensation, or, as I can also put it, the temporal form of primordial sensation, here of the sensation belonging to the current now-point and only to this ... must, in strictness, be defined through primordial sensation, so that the proposition asserted has to be taken only as an indication of what is supposed to be meant” (Husserl, 1991, 69). On the other hand, the primal impression is characterized by Husserl as the phase of time consciousness that “has as its content that which the word ‘now’ signifies... Each new now is the content of a new primal impression” (Husserl, 1991, 70).

What is problematic here is not so much the “circular definition” (Bernet, 1982, 103)—or, better, fallacy of equivocation evident in the account of the relation between the primal impression and the now but the methodological presuppositions responsible for the ambiguity behind it. That is, the logical problem implicit in the characterization of the ‘now’ as both the form of the primal impression, and thus as a structure inseparable from its appearance, as well as its content, and thus as something that appears to and therefore is *other than* the primal impression’s appearance, is derivative. As such, it has its source in the methodical attempt to grasp the eidetic singular of temporal flowing according to a form-content schema. Once this schema is projected onto the phenomenological manifold composed by time consciousness, the *inexact* essence of its flowing is divided *exactly* in two. A symptom if not a sign of this is Husserl’s characterization of the ‘now’ as belonging both to the form of the impression and to its content.

The methodological inappropriateness of Husserl’s employment of exact terms to characterize the inexact essence of the phenomenon of flowing determinative of time consciousness is compounded by his use of the concept of a *continuum* to characterize the essence of the temporal flow proper. The units of the continuum are characterized as a manifold of nows, each one of which has a temporal position relative to the primordial now point in which it originates and to which its temporal position remains related as it shifts with each *fresh* now. The continuum is composed of two dimensions, the past and future, from which the single dimensional flowing of time consciousness is constituted. The key to Husserl’s account of the

manifold of nows as continua of past nows and nows to come (future) is the "law of modification" (Husserl, 1991, 31, 339) that governs the generation of their temporal position. The now point, as an ideal limit, manifests the *form* of the ever-new nows generated by the primordial impression. The law of modification governs the movement of these nows in the temporal dimensions of the past and future. The former dimension is constituted by the modification of the primordial impression called *retention* and the latter by the modification of it called *protention*. In retention the primordial impression's now is initially divided into the originary now and the just past now, which as *just* past remains a part of the primordial impression. Husserl terms this initial retention *primary memory*.

Retention is also responsible for the modification of the just past now into the just-just past now, and again, the just-just-just, past now, and so on, such that a continuum of retended nows is composed that recedes from the originary nows associated with the primordial impression. The law of modification also governs each retention's retention of all the just, just past nows, and so on, divided from the impressional now "preceding," as it were, its division from the now point limit connected with the primordial impression. Thus, on Husserl's account, the law of modification governs the generation of the phenomenon of the past as a series of just past nows, each one of which is itself a retentionally generated continuum containing retentions of all the just past nows up to the primordial now from which it was originally divided. This continuum of retended nows forms the retentional horizon of the originary nows wherein is constituted primary memory. Husserl contrasts the unmediated relation of primary memory to its origin in primary impression with the mediated relation to the originary nows of secondary memory, which he designates as "recollection." On Husserl's account, the retentional horizon exhibits the capacity to be awakened, such that that which was originally presented in the primal impression is recalled as an identity that transcends the unmediated flow of primary impressions ceaselessly slipping away in the continuum of retentions. The making present (*Vergegenwärtigen*) of the identity in question constitutes the transcendence of the thing in the living present as something that is identical, and therefore as something that stands in *objective* contrast to the *subjective* manifold of the unmediated pre-objective passive flow of the continuum of impressions and retentions in which it originally presented itself.

Three things stand out in Husserl's account of the essence of the phenomenological manifold of time consciousness, that is, his description of the eidetic singular that articulates the phenomenological condition of possibility of this manifold's flowing movement. (1) The ambiguity of the now, which is manifest in its characterization by Husserl as both the form and content of the primordial impression, makes it impossible to discern *eidetically* the origin of the phenomenological manifold in which time consciousness is constituted. This is the case, above all, because the origin of the form and content of this manifold is attributed to the same structural phenomenon, i.e., the now. Thus, in the cases of both the finite and absolute manifolds at issue here, it is impossible to discern on the basis of Husserl's account whether the source of the multiplicity of nows that constitutes them is *formal* or *material* (*sachlich*). (2) Either way, the division of the unity of the present now into

the continua of just past nows and nows to come, each one of which—just past or to come—according to the law of modification, presupposes rather than accounts for the *phenomenal* basis of the cuts in question. That is, rather than appeal to the *how* in their appearance the temporal shifts come about that constitute the flowing stream of just past nows and nows to come, the (exact) *concept* of continuum invoked by the law of modification is supposed to account for the phenomenological conditional of possibility of these shifts.<sup>20</sup> (3) The priority of *memory* in the making present of the transcendent object, brings to the fore the question of the relation of the phenomenon of *forgetting* to both memory and to the *emergence* of that which appears as present in the living present.

## 16 Husserl's Methodological Presuppositions Block a Phenomenological Account of the Unity and Multiplicity of a Phenomenological Manifold

For our purposes, Husserl's use of an exact *mathematical* concept to characterize the eidetic singular putatively responsible for the flowing of the temporal manifold will be the focus of the discussion of these points. The difficulty if not the impossibility of accounting for the phenomenon of forgetting once the concept of continuum is invoked in connection with the law of modification is evident in the answer to the following question: Does the *law* of modification in the case of retentive consciousness admit exceptions? If not, the original now in which the continuum of any finite phenomenological manifold is generated should *always* be capable of being remembered. Husserl, in fact, admits as much: "*idealiter* a consciousness is probably even possible in which everything remains preserved retentionally" (Husserl, 1991, 32). This account of memory is thus challenged to account for the fundamental *discontinuity* of the *phenomena* of both the past and that which is forgotten from present consciousness. Moreover, one searches in vain in Husserl's manuscripts on time consciousness for an account of forgetting.

Likewise, in the case of the protentional scope of the law of modification, there is the related difficulty of accounting for the phenomenon of the emergence of something to come that is unanticipated and therefore *discontinuous* with what is

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<sup>20</sup>Thus my claim here is *not* that Husserl employs the mathematical concept of a continuum to *model* the non-exact essence of the phenomenal (intuitive) "continuum" of the manifold stream of time consciousness, but rather: that his very account of the phenomenological genesis of the streaming of time illegitimately employs exact concepts, in this case, that of a continuum, in its descriptive account of the phenomenological essence of the genesis proper to time consciousness' eidetically singular streaming. On my view, then, the issue here isn't the putative priority of an intuitive continuum over a mathematical continuum, an issue that implicitly posits or otherwise presupposes their opposition. On the contrary, the issue as I see it is that of the legitimacy of characterizing the phenomenological essence of the manifold of time consciousness as a *continuum* at all. See (Tarditi, 2018, especially, 144) for an account of the view I am opposing here.

unexpected. Given Husserl's account of the symmetry between protentional and retentional modifications, as well as the role of the latter in the structure of the former, the answer to the following question is crucial: whether exceptions to the *lawful* foundational role of retentions in the constitution of protentions are possible. Or, in other words, can the lawful modification that generates protentions account for the phenomenal emergence of something that is *completely* unanticipated? Given the tight connection in Husserl's account between retention and protention, wherein the continuum of retentions adumbrates the horizon of the continuum of protentions, the answer to this question would seem to be no.<sup>21</sup>

Husserl's appeal to exact mathematical concepts to characterize the eidetic singular of the flowing unity of the manifold of time consciousness has been shown to be inadequate to the task of accounting for the essential inexactness of both the unity and multiplicity of the phenomenon in question. The phenomena of unity and multiplicity, however, remain, and indeed, they remain in need of a phenomenological account of their essential conditions of possibility. At issue, then, is an account of the constitution of the unity and multiplicity of the phenomenological manifold uncovered by Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which, as we have seen, involves the appearance of two manifolds: (1) that of the living present and (2) that of the (finite) streams of lived-experience that come and go in the living present. Accounts of both are therefore tasks for the future, the horizon of which will be sketched in the remainder of this discussion.

## 17 Historicity of the Unity and Multiplicity Constitutive of Phenomenological and Mathematical Manifolds

Husserl's last work, *Crisis* (Husserl, 1970b), introduced historical meditations on both the essences of the meanings operative in the exact sciences and the most immediate experience of the world. In both cases, manifolds are involved, and therefore the constitution of both the unity and multiplicity out of which they are composed. Because of the fragmentary nature of these meditations, however, they only offer hints about how to advance the problematic. In order to advance beyond those hints, the historical horizon of the meaning inseparable from the unity and multiplicity of manifolds adumbrated in Husserl's last work will be delineated.

There are three manifolds in play here: (1) that composing the living present, (2) that composing the finite streams of lived-experience that come and go in the living present, and (3) that composing the domain of mathematics. As we have seen above, Husserl's account of both the unity and multiplicity composing each of these

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<sup>21</sup> Husserl's sole discussion of surprise in his analyses of time consciousness (Husserl, 1991, 144) does so in terms of an unfulfilled expectation, in which the unexpected now to come doesn't come. This account, however, does not address the condition of possibility for the appearance of a pretended continuum of nows that arrives in the primal impression that is neither expected *nor* anticipated.

manifolds cannot withstand phenomenological self-critique. In the first two manifolds mentioned here, that is because both the unity and multiplicity of each are accounted for on the basis of illegitimate appeals to mathematical (exact) concepts. In the last-mentioned manifold, it is because both unity and multiplicity are accounted for on the basis of a logical unity that is not phenomenologically established and, moreover, rejected by the development of the science of logic in the first half of the twentieth century.

In the version of the text “*Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem*” published by Eugen Fink (Husserl, 1939), a connection between “sedimentation” and forgetting is made. “Sedimentation is always somehow forgetfulness” (Husserl, 1939, 212).<sup>22</sup> This connection provides a crucial hint for future research on phenomenological manifolds, as it points in the direction of the phenomenological fundamentality of *forgetfulness* over memory in the constitution of the past. In connecting the passive diminishment of the original meaning of words and concepts constitutive of the phenomenon of sedimentation with the phenomenon of forgetfulness, Husserl seems to recognize the phenomenological priority of *discontinuity* in the constitution of the horizon of the past in relation to the consciousness of the present.

Sedimentation is inseparable from the traditional transmission of knowledge. The phenomenon of tradition, on Husserl’s view, manifests the intentional-historical dimension of the past that constitutes an essential horizon of the living present. In Husserl’s fragmentary analyses in the *Crisis*, the multiplicity of present-day philosophies is symptomatic of the lack of unity crucial to the essence of philosophy. It is precisely this lack of unity that motivates Husserl’s historical reflection back to the original intentional-historical processes constitutive of the foundational meanings of the exact, natural, and philosophical sciences. Husserl’s term for the goal of this reflection, “reactivation,” however, indicates that he is still under the spell of his account of the primacy of memory in the constitution of the past that is evident in his account of internal time consciousness.

Hence, a first task for future phenomenological research is the investigation of the role of the phenomenon of forgetfulness in the constitution of both internal and historical time consciousness.

Related to this first task is the second of reassessing Husserl’s account of ‘recollection’ in the making present of the transcendent object in the living present. This is the case, because once the discontinuity between the horizon of the past in relation to the present is recognized, the phenomenological account of the horizon of the past being directly accessible to acts of recollection, such that the latter exhibit the unmediated capacity to “awaken” primary memories, becomes problematic. It does so, because recognition of the essential discontinuity between the phenomena of the present and past presents evidence that challenges any phenomenological account that presupposes, without further ado, the direct access of present acts to the

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<sup>22</sup>This sentence is left out of Biemel’s Husserliana (Husserl, 1976) version of the text, translated by Carr (Husserl, 1970b).

past appearances to consciousness of both objects and their modes of presentation. In connection with this evidence, the investigation of the phenomenological appropriateness of the descriptor 'recollection' for a phenomenon—namely, recollection—in which there is no *forgetfulness* in play, is another task for future phenomenological research.

The third phenomenological task involves the investigation of the constitution of both the multiplicity and unity of the immediately given manifolds that begin and end. Absent the immediacy of impressions in their givenness, and absent, too, the priority of memory in the constitution of their flow, the investigation of the role of the phenomena of sedimentation, forgetfulness, and recollection in their constitution in the living present is called for.

A fourth and final phenomenological task involves the investigation of the constitution of the logic proper to the symbolic mathematics that determines “what in fact, and in a way practically understandable in mathematical work, a coherent mathematical field is” (Husserl, 1970b, 45). This task is called for, because Husserl still holds that the answer to this question is to be found in his notion of “theory of manifolds” (ibid., 46) as “the universal science of the *definite* manifolds” (ibid.). That is, Husserl's answer to this question in his last work is the same as that in his first phenomenological works, as his footnote in (ibid., 46) makes clear, by referring the reader of the *Crisis* to “a more exact exposition of the concept of the definite manifold” (ibid.) in *Ideas I* and the *Logical Investigations*. Inseparable from this task is an account of the intentional-historical meaning that is sedimented in the origins and development of the “universal ‘formalization’” (ibid., 45) that is the *sine qua non* for contemporary mathematics and therefore, of foundational importance for the intelligibility of its meaning. Such an account would have to be attentive to the distinction between idealized and formalized mathematical meanings mentioned above. In connection with this investigation, the possibility of complete *reactivation* of these origins in light of the role of forgetfulness in the constitution of the phenomenon of sedimentation will also have to be critically explored.

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# Heideggerian Phenomenology



Hakhamanesh Zangeneh

Was Heidegger a phenomenologist? Can his work be considered phenomenological? Can he be affiliated with phenomenology in some way beyond biographical contingencies? The answer to these questions is neither obvious nor uncontroversial. In the following, I propose to address these questions by starting from a typology of the literature on Heidegger. My hope is that with such an overview it will become easier to identify a specifically phenomenological (as opposed to hermeneutical, deconstructionist, etc.) development in and of his work.

Unlike many philosophers, Heidegger was neither unknown nor obscure during his lifetime. Having acquired a reputation early in his career,<sup>1</sup> his works have by now been widely read, interpreted, and developed in variegated directions. A side-effect of this longstanding, broad reception is that the field of Heidegger studies is so differentiated, dispersed, and fragmented that it becomes impossible to adjudicate conflicting claims on a purely conceptual level. There are simply not enough shared assumptions to open a genuine debate among the rival interpreters (hermeneuticians, deconstructionists, pragmatists, phenomenologists, etc.). This state of non-communication is reflected at an institutional level as well. The different types of Heideggerians have, by now, competing societies, conferences and even summer workshops.<sup>2</sup>

I propose to remedy this situation by way of what might be called a ‘philological reduction.’ I want to look at the literature by bracketing the claims made by interpreters concerning Heidegger’s *philosophy* and focusing instead on the

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<sup>1</sup> See Hannah Arendt (1978), Van Buren (1994).

<sup>2</sup> To take but two camps, the hermeneutical Heideggerians meet annually, in the summer, in Northern Italy, while the pragmatist Heideggerians, shunning the Italy workshop, hold their own workshop but at a secret time and location (reputed to be Asilomar, Ca.).

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*philological* foundations of those claims. By organizing the different readings according to the empirical ways in which they take-up Heidegger's texts, i.e. what counts as central, what is marginal, what relates to what, etc., by indexing claims to their textual conditions of possibility, we can produce a simple taxonomic classification of the field. Having carried out this simplification it will be easier to identify a specifically phenomenological reading of Heidegger, to appreciate its context and to understand its limitations. While previous presentations of the literature have organized the field according to competing conceptual claims or varying interpretative decisions (we can call these first-order claims), my scheme is more akin to a meta-study (a second-order view).<sup>3</sup> Whereas, on a first-order level, the mutual intractability may suggest that it would be impossible to find a level of analysis to which all groups might acquiesce, on the meta-level all such differences disappear.

The following are the second order categories of Heidegger interpretation employed in this paper. First, I make a distinction between scholarly readings (SR), focused historically on the texts and on the development of Heidegger's thinking, and selective syncretic readings (SSR), focused more on linking selected topics in Heidegger to non-Heideggerian material. Within the scholarly readings, I distinguish three approaches: a genealogical reading (GR), focused on early texts and the continuity of the corpus, a teleological reading (TR) focused on later texts, and a dual-phase reading (DR), which emphasizes the distinction between earlier and later phases organized around a "turn." I will focus on GR, the genealogical reading. This reading further divides into a strict construal that is very heavily focused on textual sources, and a loose construal, that aims to emphasize the specificity of Heidegger's individual works. Finally, I argue that Heideggerean phenomenology should be located in the loose construal of the genealogical reading. This is the "phenomenological interpretation" of Heidegger, that emphasizes the Kant book and other earlier sources.

## 1 The Philological Reduction – SR vs SSR

Regardless of how interpreters of Heidegger construe his topic, goal, or method, in order to count as readings of Heidegger, they would sooner or later have to make contact with Heidegger's writings. This is where my typology of readings sets in. How do the different readers refer to the texts (and again, we are ignoring their properly philosophical claims in those texts)? What do they focus on, what do they take into consideration, and what do they leave out of consideration? What patterns do we find when the mutually opposed groups are reduced to their textual bases? To begin with, adopting this level of analysis has the merit of placing all readings on

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<sup>3</sup>There are surprisingly few literature reviews in Heidegger studies. Sheehan (2017) is an example of a (highly polemical) first-order scheme, while Janicaud (2001) is a different type of second-order scheme, using history as opposed to philology, and limited to work in France.

one plane – after all, to count as an interpretation of Heidegger, any reading must contain a discernible construal of Heidegger’s texts.

As far as these texts are concerned, they are published in the *Heidegger Gesamtausgabe* (complete edition), in non-chronological order.<sup>4</sup> As of this writing, 95 volumes of the 102 total have been published. There are 16 volumes containing everything that Heidegger published during his lifetime (these range from 1910 to 1973). Another 47 volumes contain fully developed manuscripts used in his lecture courses (1919–1944). Some 17 volumes contain completed but unpublished book manuscripts. Finally, 20 volumes contain more fragmentary teaching materials, notes and diaries.

The first obvious distinction to make in the literature on Heidegger is between interpretations that tackle a large number of the above volumes and those that do not. This is a distinction between what I will call scholarly readings of Heidegger (because they seek to make a contribution, among other things, *also* to the scholarship of the complete works) and selective-syncretic readings of Heidegger (because they syncretically relate selections from Heidegger to material foreign to him). This basic distinction yields a number of descriptive features.

The selective-syncretic readings (SSR) have a smaller footprint in the GA and do not consider the task of accounting for the whole of Heidegger’s work to be of philosophical interest. The selection of Heidegger’s texts is based least of all on context or chronology. Instead, they read Heidegger in connection with and through works by authors foreign to Heidegger. As such, this literature harbors interdisciplinary, emergent, but also anachronistic topics. These approaches are highly innovative with respect to Heidegger, insofar as they connect his ideas with material that he had never engaged with. The preponderance of English-language, indeed U.S. American, work on Heidegger fall in this camp. The two most well-known representatives of SSR are Hubert Dreyfus in Analytic philosophy and John Sallis in Continental philosophy.

In the case of Dreyfus, it is well-known that in his most widely read work, the textual base in the GA is limited to approximately one half of *Being and Time*, *Sein und Zeit* (*SZ* hereafter). Even there, the resources he draws upon to elucidate Heidegger’s ideas are drawn from a wide array of figures beyond Heidegger. The selection is importantly not led by context: Wittgenstein, Bourdieu, Latour, James and Dewey all play roles.

In the case of Sallis, the textual base in the GA is wider, but not in any way systematic. While various works are analyzed in distinct moments, there is no project of attempting to account for the whole of those texts. At the same time, Heidegger is read through insights developed by his philosophical progeny, so to speak, namely Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida.

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<sup>4</sup>Abbreviated as GA followed by volume number. Published by Klostermann, Frankfurt, 1976.

Both of these approaches led to novel consequences. Dreyfus, based on his interpretation of Heidegger, famously developed an early critique of certain forms of artificial intelligence (AI) and subsequently oriented generations of his students towards a theory of what he called “skilled coping.” A good compendium of the work of two generations of Dreyfus students is Wrathall and Malpas (2000a, b). Sallis for his part, crafted readings of classical German philosophy on the topic of the imagination, and later in a series of works rooted in Plato’s *Timaeus*, developed a project he termed “chorology,” after the Platonic *chora*. Freydberg (2012) Maly (1995) both attest to the influence of Sallis. The common denominator in all this is that Heidegger of course was either ignorant of these topics (AI) or had paid little attention to these texts (the *Timaeus*).

Grouping these two highly influential U.S. American Heideggerians together will undoubtedly raise eyebrows, if not incite outright insults! Despite the familiar way in which Analytic and Continental philosophers are opposed, the philological reduction here places the two camps together, united in the empirically observable ways in which they reference Heidegger’s GA. The major distinction in Heidegger literature now turns out to be not one between Analytic Pragmatists and Continental ‘Postmodernists’ but rather a distinction between Anglophone Analytics and Continentals on one side, and French-German historical, contextualists on the other side.

The scholarly readings of Heidegger (SR, as opposed to the SSR), as already mentioned, are characterized by the attempt to account for all of Heidegger’s works – all or as many as possible. They thus put considerable effort into integrating every new publication of the GA, which they reference in the original German. They are also bibliographically more holistic viz. the GA, or more ‘conservative’ depending on one’s perspective. When SR makes a foray outside of Heidegger’s works, it is into contextual texts and authors. Distinctive features of the outcome of this approach are an account of the development of Heidegger’s thought as well as insights into his linguistic manner of expression. While SR has explanative power with respect to Heidegger’s texts, it does not foray into the emergent topics, the interdisciplinary extensions or the subsequent figures after Heidegger. Instead, these interpretations develop the discourse tied to traditional philosophical notions such as subjectivity, time, freedom, truth, art etc. The overwhelming majority of work stemming from Europe has fallen into this camp (Table 1).

**Table 1** Two types of Heidegger readings

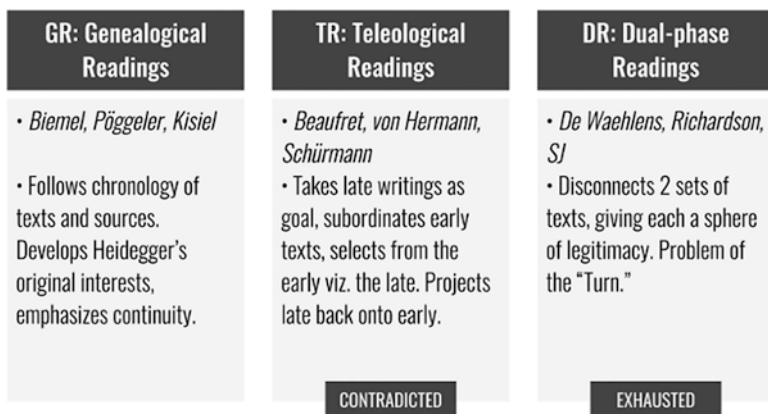
<i>Scholarly Readings (SR)</i>	<i>Selective-Syncretic Readings (SSR)</i>
French & German	Uniquely USA/Anglophone
Holistic, historical, textual	H. Dreyfus – Analytical/Pragmatist
Classical philosophical problems	J. Sallis – Continental/Hermeneuticist
	Interdisciplinary, emergent topics

## 2 Species of SR: GR, TR and DR

For the sake of my goal here, I will now suggest some distinctions, still of a purely philological nature, which can be observed within the field of SR. I propose to further distinguish the scholarly readings into three subgroups: the genealogical, the teleological, and the dual-phased readings of Heidegger (GR, TR, and DR respectively). One group of scholarly readers have organized their bibliography so as to investigate the genealogy, or the origins, of Heidegger's philosophy. These latter (GR), privilege chronology, linear development, and a continuity of project, striving to stay true to Heidegger's earliest, more classical insights. Their claim is that these insights and commitments are never dropped but only developed in continuity thereafter. Another group foregrounds later writings, explicating texts where Heidegger employs his most challenging modes of presentation. These texts are taken to be the telos towards which the early work is striving (hence TR), and thus the interpretation takes from the early only that which elucidates the late. Some of the significant contributors here were also post-WWII acquaintances of Heidegger such as Jean Beaufret and Friedrich Wilhelm von Herrmann, but also younger scholars such as Reiner Schürmann. Finally, the dual-phase reading (DR) accords autonomy to two separate spheres of thinking within the Heideggerian corpus, the early Heidegger vs the late Heidegger, construing them almost as two entirely different philosophies. The names that stand out here reach back to some of the earliest publications on Heidegger such as Alphonse de Waelhens (1942), and William J. Richardson, S.J. (1963).

While my tripartite grouping of the scholarly readings remains largely applicable today, capturing most activity in the field, it is also the case that the three groups are not as equally active anymore. Here, my taxonomy departs from the purely empirical philological scheme – though only very minimally. Within the field of scholarly readings, the predominant amount of activity in recent years has been within the genealogical readings. This is because, I would suggest, DR has been exhausted and TR contradicted. As far as DR is concerned, ever since its first articulation by Bill Richardson, S.J., it has faced the problem of being unable to adequately explain the alleged “turn” from Heidegger I to Heidegger II. Postulating two autonomous philosophies with distinct sets of texts cohering around two chronologically separated epochs raises the obvious question of the relation between the two. While attempts will undoubtedly continue to be made to solve the problem of the “turn,” the *communis opinio* has largely abandoned that paradigm in recent decades.

A similar fate has met TR, though this development is not as widely noted. But that is likely due to the relatively less conventional appeal of the TR paradigm to begin with. The motives behind this development are rooted in the publication history of the collected works. Starting in 1989, the GA began publishing manuscripts from the completed but unpublished set (these are GA64–73). The major manuscript from that set, GA65, the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, contains elements of Heidegger's ‘auto-interpretation,’ or self-critique. Written roughly ten years after *SZ* and reflecting on that decade's intellectual itinerary, Heidegger, in



**Fig. 1** Scholarly readings of Heidegger

GA65, explicitly rejects a teleological relationship between his works, rejecting the notion that his later works are the culmination of his earlier project. This same rejection of TR has resurfaced in other volumes which have been published since (e.g. GA66, GA69, also viz. his Kant-book of 1929). Although one might argue that this rejection is but one interpretation among others, the fact that Heidegger himself is the origin of the rejection has likely contributed to the demise of TR (Fig. 1).

### 3 GR

Regardless of the reasons behind the demise of the TR and the DR paradigms, it is empirically the case that GR has been ascendant over the last two decades. But it is important to note that the prototypes of this interpretation were already developed during Heidegger's lifetime by German philosophers, e.g. Otto Pöggeler (1963), as well as Heidegger's former students, e.g. Walter Biemel (1976). While the first exemplars of GR were penned by Germans, the most influential work in this vein, both for the US and Europe, was undoubtedly Ted Kisiel (1993). In fact, Kisiel's work turned the attention of Anglophone readers back to his European predecessors, e.g. the unjustly neglected Italian Franco Volpi, as well as Jacques Taminiaux, both of whom then enjoyed a delayed reception in English. These readings always privilege chronology, while also affirming an evolution in Heidegger's "path of thinking," but this is an evolution which has more continuity than is implied by the 'the turn.'

More concretely, what this means is that Heidegger's works are understood viz. a sequence of authors whom he had studied in an empirically ascertainable order. We know that Heidegger entered the University on a church scholarship, having declared theology and natural science as interests. Once enrolled however, the bulk of his training focused on Aristotle and Medieval Philosophy. This culminated in his

dissertation on medieval logic and grammar in the work of Thomas of Erfurt (pseudo-Duns Scotus). Given this well-defined body of work, GR seeks the foundation of Heidegger's magnum opus, *SZ*, in Aristotle (or in Heidegger's Aristotle interpretations). The beginning of Heidegger's professional career subsequently brought him into the proximity of Husserl and of his circle; this move is contemporaneous with Heidegger shifting the focus of his attention to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is in this period that the publication of *SZ* occurs and, therefore, GR seeks the methodological orientation thereof in Kant (or, again, in Heidegger's Kant interpretations). Beyond the magnum opus, in tracking down the subsequent decades, GR serially engages with Nietzsche, Hölderlin, the Pre-Socratics, Ernst Jünger, and so forth, guided by the chronological sequence in which Heidegger wrote about them.

The evolution of GR has led to some basic high-level claims garnering broad consensus among interpreters. To begin with, it is now fairly well understood that the analysis of being-in-the-world is (or emerges out of) an interpretation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics VI*, or the intellectual virtues, *arête dianoetike*. The set of distinctions between *praxis-poiesis*, *phronesis-techne*, is widely taken to be the core constituent<sup>5</sup> of Heidegger's notion of *Eigentlichkeit*, canonically, if unfortunately, translated as 'authenticity' since Macquarrie & Robinson (1962). What Heidegger terms the 'existential analytic' overlaps with what he refers to in his earlier works as a 'hermeneutics of facticity.' That, in turn, consists in an Aristotle interpretation focused on the *Nicomachean Ethics* but with the important, and original, addition of the *Physics* as key to opening the dimension of existence called the 'movedness of factual life.' This latter is the idea that life (later: care, and thus time) can be analyzed as structured by what Aristotle calls *kinesis*. As these few statements already suggest, one feature of GR, particularly when strictly construed, is that the specificity of individual works by Heidegger is dissolved into a much larger project with very broad scope. The side effect of this is that topics that occur in isolated fashion throughout the corpus receive little explication.

Here, I would suggest it is useful to make a further distinction, though it will be admittedly less empirically obvious and less philologically clear-cut. We can roughly separate a strict construal GR from a loose construal GR. In the strict construal, the identification of sources takes the upper hand and the predilection for continuity in the corpus leads to an undervaluing of ideas which do not occur over a broad stretch of time. I would contrast this with the loose construal GR, i.e. an approach which is mostly contextualizing and mostly genealogical but tries to preserve the specificity of individual works and topics by resisting a reduction to sources.

I argue that Heideggerian phenomenology is located in the loose construal of GR. In other words, it is only when the texts have been construed in *this* particular way that Heidegger has emerged as a phenomenologist and it has only been on *this* philological basis that Heidegger's works have been developed with strictly

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<sup>5</sup>Core constituent but not the only constituent: Husserl of course also employs the distinction *eigentliche vs uneigentliche Vorstellungen*. See *Logical Investigation V*.



phenomenological goals and interests. Which is to say that debates between phenomenological, pragmatist, hermeneuticist and deconstructionist interpreters of Heidegger are really not debates about the same author, much less the same topic. We see here, I would argue, in the field of Heidegger studies, an excellent illustration of Thomas Kuhn’s insight into the different function of paradigms in the natural sciences and in the humanities (or ‘creative disciplines’ in his terminology). Whereas paradigms in physics succeed one another sequentially (such that, e.g., it is no longer possible to hold to the Newtonian paradigm for the orbit of Mercury), in philosophy, on the other hand, paradigms only multiply and do not replace one another (e.g. Kantian ethics has not replaced Aristotelian ethics but exists alongside it) (Fig. 2).

### 4 Phenomenology and Heidegger

The obvious reason why Heideggerian phenomenology is encountered in loose GR is above all that Heidegger makes positive references to phenomenology in a set of texts clustered in a specific period of his oeuvre. The less autonomy is attributed to this textual cluster, the less phenomenological Heidegger’s philosophy will appear. While this period does not have precise termini, it is conventionally thought, per Greisch (1994), that 1919–1929 constitutes Heidegger’s “phenomenological decade.” The biggest reference points in that cluster are: (a) the claim to phenomenology as method in 1927, in *SZ*; (b) two manuscripts eight years apart, both entitled *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1919/20, GA58, and 1927, GA24) (c)

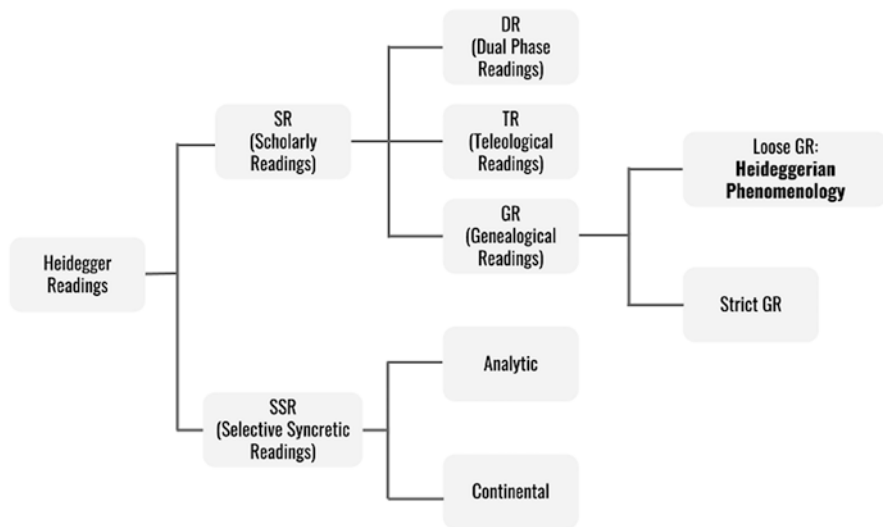


Fig. 2 Heidegger readings

five manuscripts in between carrying the term ‘phenomenology’ in the title (these constitute the Aristotelian sub-cluster): *Phenomenology of Intuition and of Expression* (1920, GA59), *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (1920/21, GA60), *Phenomenological Interpretations on Aristotle* (1921/22, GA61), *Phenomenological Interpretation of Selected Aristotle Treatises on Ontology and Logic* (1922, GA62), and *Introduction to Phenomenological Research* (1923/24, GA17); (d) a substantial analysis of Husserl (with some reference to Brentano) in a manuscript misleadingly entitled *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (1925, GA20); (e) a manuscript from 1927/28 entitled *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* (GA25). Taken individually, outside of this contextual cluster, any one of these references can look like a highly idiosyncratic version of phenomenology. However, read as a genealogical whole, they display an intrinsic, evolving, thematic focus as well as a clear continuity with their intellectual context (the main rivals of phenomenology in Germany during that period, Neo-Kantianism, *Lebensphilosophie* and *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* are all targets of Heidegger’s arguments in these texts).

It is important to note as well that this cluster of texts has only been accessible in English relatively recently. Of the eight phenomenology books mentioned above, five have only become available in English translation since 2001, the most recent one dating from 2013 and one is still untranslated as of this writing. This is a very late development as far as the history of the interpretation of Heidegger’s philosophy is concerned. When one considers the publications of the main champions of alternative paradigms of Heidegger research, particularly in the Anglophone world, it is clear that their limitations are correlated with the lack of access to texts. Some notable exceptions to this are to be found in Dahlstrom (1991) who chronicles the evolution of Heidegger’s writings on Kant, as well as more recently Engelland (2017) who presents a more recent interpretation of the transcendental nature of Heidegger’s phenomenological project. Works on Heidegger’s Aristotle studies in light of *SZ* can be found in McNeill (1999) and (2006). A first, basic commentary in English on Heidegger’s analysis of Husserl in GA20 can be found in Moran (2000). But perhaps, the biggest representatives of the phenomenological development of Heidegger are to be found in France and Germany. In order to move things along more quickly I will now point to just a few French works and leave the German ones for another occasion.

Working out Heidegger’s project as a specifically phenomenological one, and thus as extending rather than rejecting Husserl’s project, has been the hallmark of Françoise Dastur’s work from Dastur (1990) to Dastur (2016). Central to her approach to Heidegger is the idea, found in *SZ* §7, according to which the phenomena of phenomenology are *not* directly given and thereby *make* phenomenology necessary as method to begin with. This methodological directive to wrest the phenomenon from the given, being from beings, resonates with Husserl’s directive of a reduction or *epoché* of the given. This methodological state of affairs is what makes phenomenology suitable to Heidegger’s ontological project, to the point that the two, phenomenology and ontology, according to Dastur (2016), become synonymous.

From the outset, her work has championed the notion of time as the central focus of Heidegger's phenomenological ontology. Thus, Dastur (1990) works out the foundational role of temporality in Heidegger's philosophy and brings it again into the proximity of a Husserlian phenomenology which considers consciousness to be ontologically grounded in time. While noting such points of affinity between Husserl and Heidegger, she is nonetheless careful to emphasize where Heidegger goes beyond Husserl, e.g. on the issue of the finitude of time, the relationship between truth and history, or the contrast between the ego and *Dasein* (Dastur 2004).

This line of interpretation has led Dastur (2004) to contextualize Heidegger's phenomenological decade by way of references to his readings of Kant's first *Critique*, and more specifically, the doctrine of apperception as auto-affection, in addition to the much-noted importance of the faculty of imagination and of schematism. Examining Heidegger's Kant interpretations of the phenomenological decade, she finds the metaphysical structure of Heideggerian temporality to replicate that of (or at least bear great resemblance to) Kantian apperception, which then extends the affinity of Heideggerian phenomenology through Husserl to Kantian transcendental philosophy. While defending this transcendental reading of the phenomenological Heidegger, she also suggests that Heidegger's awareness of this idealist 'excess' leads him to compensate from an opposing standpoint in his works subsequent to the 1920s. Finally, it is also noteworthy that Dastur has rigorously defended her construal of the phenomenological Heidegger against later systematic criticisms from Levinas, Ricoeur and Derrida, e.g. in Dastur (2016).

Another long-term project dedicated to elaborating and clarifying the sense of phenomenology in Heidegger's writings, particularly in light of his relationship to Brentano (as well as to Neo-Kantianism), is in the work of Jean-Francois Courtine. While Husserl readers are familiar with Brentano from the latter's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, Courtine emphasizes the importance of Brentano's work on Aristotle's ontology and psychology, in order to show a continuity of concerns with Heidegger. Heidegger had himself referred to Brentano's early study *On the Manifold Senses of Being in Aristotle* (1862) as having been formative for his path and Courtine has been able to elaborate on this in some detail, e.g. in Courtine (2005). While Aristotle writes that being (*to on*) is ambiguous, he spells out the components of that ambiguity in terms of the categories, act/potency, essence/accident, and truth. Brentano had argued that the chief sense driving Aristotle's conception of being was to be found in the categories. According to Courtine, this type of approach to Aristotle's ontology is inherited by Heidegger, who then argues for truth as the focal point, instead of the categories. What persists despite the change in focus is an orientation towards a unified, central meaning of being, from which other meanings would eventually be derived. Much like Dastur, Courtine thus construes Heidegger's central problematic as an ontological one. Indeed, to a large extent, Heidegger's ontological interest appears firmly situated in the tradition of the medieval doctrine of the 'analogy of being,' Courtine (2005). However, through a series of transformations, Courtine shows that the topic of this ontology is givenness itself (*Gegebenheit*) and Heidegger thereby rejoins Husserl's conception of phenomenology as inquiry into the origin of the given. Pursuing the thread of the

given in the early manuscripts up to *SZ*, Courtine (2007) elaborates the phenomenological aspect of the investigation by reference to Heidegger's notions of 'factual life' and facticity. This usage of terms related to life, *leben*, *Erlebnis*, is also an instance of Heidegger engaging with philosophers of his period. Another instance thereof can be found in the development of Heidegger's views on logic and language. Here, Heidegger is seen as engaging with Husserl's but also Lotze's views, in particular when he formulates a phenomenological critique of judgment as the site of truth (Courtine 2007).

In general, the interpretations of Heidegger that have integrated the writings of his first decade into phenomenology – and done this with a specific historical sense – have been written by authors who have published equally as much on Husserl. This is the case for Dastur and Courtine, as mentioned above, but also for Bernet (1994), who for his part explicates continuities but can also articulate criticism of some of Heidegger's positions, for example on the issue of the hierarchy of temporalities in *SZ*.

Among the younger generation of phenomenological readers of Heidegger, the work of Alexander Schnell stands out. Schnell (2005) argues that Heidegger's development through 1929 exhibits an almost unnoticed shift from the problem of being to a phenomenology of world (which is then inherited by Eugen Fink). More interestingly, Schnell (2010) analyzes the relationship between subjectivity and temporality and develops an original conception of transcendental philosophy, which he integrates with Heidegger's phenomenology. Starting in the first *Critique* and then working through the major authors of Classical German Philosophy, Schnell emphasizes the function of notions of possibility in the definition of the transcendental project, arguing that Heidegger's phenomenological project (in addition to those of Husserl and Fink) attributes a central role to possibilization, or making possible, *Ermöglichung*.

## 5 Phenomenological Critique of Kantian Reflection via Temporality

If we were to now outline the phenomenological interpretation of Heidegger in broad strokes, we might say that (1) it takes Heidegger's goal to be ontology, in a sense much more traditional than not, (2) it involves a form of phenomenological method that is an extension of Husserlian method, (3) it construes this method as a transcendental one, and (4) it engages Heidegger's theory of time in depth, as the culminating element of the phenomenological decade. In this final section I would like to briefly outline an example of an active research project situated within the genealogical reading, loosely construed, and conforming to the above features.

To begin with, we establish a philological basis: we are here limiting ourselves to GA 21, *Logic: The Question Concerning Truth*, GA 25, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, GA 3, *Kant and the Problem of*

*Metaphysics* – the Kant readings from the phenomenological decade. Heidegger's Kant readings from the period of *SZ* have long been interpreted as an important ingredient in the history of *SZ*. We propose instead to take the Kant readings as part of the genealogy of the Kant-book, GA3 and not of *SZ*. By taking the systematic treatise out of that development we can construe the 1929 Kant-book as an installment in the project, promised in *SZ*, of a critical engagement with the history of philosophy by way of the concept of time. The Kant-book is then an instantiation of the destruction of the history of ontology that follows the guiding thread of temporality – which was promised in the introduction to *SZ*.

This modest philological reordering might seem inconsequential at first blush but it opens novel implications in Heidegger's Kant encounter. When we subordinate GA3 to *SZ*, we can evaluate, or situate Kant, based on the argumentative framework supplied by fundamental ontology, particularly with respect to the notion of time. Based on the variety of temporalizations elucidated in division two of *SZ* (authentic time, inauthentic time, the time of concern, common Now time), we can reflect on the significance of Kantian thought having access to *that* particular temporal conception which it employs. At a very basic level, this means that we would read the Kant-book not as an interpretation but more as an argument in a systematic context. Thus, we can wholly eschew the question of the soundness of Heidegger's interpretation. The importance of subordinating GA3 to *SZ* lies in the following. The Kant-book (1929) contains substantially less detail in the analysis of temporality than does *SZ* (1927). This is not because Heidegger had abandoned that detailed theory in 1929. Noticing exactly *which* instance of temporality from the *SZ*-account recurs in GA3 makes the critical nature of Heidegger's encounter clear. Heidegger argues that in the Kantian context, very simply put, time is to be equated with the Self. We then explicate *which* concept of time and *what* understanding of Self, thereby refocusing attention on the critical dimension in these readings.

Throughout his interpretations of Kant (that is, in GA 21, GA 25, GA 3), Heidegger develops a link between subjectivity and temporality. If we can expand on this in detail as far as the temporal side of the subjectivity-temporality equation is concerned, then we must also pay close attention to what is understood by subjectivity in that equation. Our analysis of that claim, in all its manifestations, shows that the sense of subjectivity invoked there bears profoundly idealist affinities. We can show how Heidegger, in each one of his different engagements with Kant from 1925 to 1929, despite the differing interpretative routes he takes within the first Critique on different occasions (again in GA21, GA 25, GA 3), each time, Heidegger construes Kantian subjectivity in a manner which hearkens strongly back to idealist conceptions. Previous commentators, hewing closely to Heidegger's own stated declarations, have emphasized the notion of finitude in these texts, and have thus been prevented from affirming the idealist affinities of Heidegger's Kant. Again, whether the focus of Heidegger's reading is on apperception as auto-affection or on the imagination, whether he more deeply investigates the Transcendental Aesthetic or the Schematism, the A deduction or the B deduction, and these are all variations that occur between 1925 and 1929, in all readings, Heidegger emphasizes patterns

of auto-position in Kant – whether this invokes ‘positing’ (*setzen*) explicitly, or renders positing through the lexicon of form (*bilden, Bild*).

As we mentioned already, Heidegger’s *SZ* presented a plurality of concepts of time. Now, it is crucial to note that these different instances of time are not merely a set of independent descriptions. Heidegger’s aim was not to catalogue the variety of temporal experience. Rather, on Heidegger’s account, each notion of time has some domain of validity or applicability. Furthermore, the various instances of time exhibit relations of foundation and derivation amongst each other. Now, in the course of our project we are able to identify the persistence of a specifically derivative temporality in Heidegger’s Kant interpretations – what he terms the temporality of concern. We then recall that this is always occurring *within* a reading of Kant (albeit unfolding along different textual routes). If the Kant readings, despite their variety, keep linking a derivative temporality with a notion of the Self, then perhaps this is because according to Heidegger’s *SZ* framework, Kant’s idealist standpoint on the Self and Subjectivity *can* only lead to a derivative temporality. If the amount of textual evidence pointing to an idealist Self in the Kant interpretations cannot be overlooked, then the most plausible reading seems to suggest that, for Heidegger, the Kantian philosophy of reflection, *Reflexionsphilosophie*, is limited to a temporality of concern.

With *SZ* as backdrop, we can claim that the instance of temporality which is disclosed through Kant never accedes to what is termed authentic temporality, namely running ahead-repeating-instant. Instead, the temporality of subjectivity is, in all three of Heidegger’s approaches to Kant, a time derived out of Nows. This is the case when Heidegger focuses on apperception, when he focuses on the three syntheses of the A Deduction and when he focuses on the formative imagination. While Heidegger’s three approaches show chronologically progressive depth, they never break beyond the confines of the temporality of concern and of what he terms ‘common’ Now-time. Thus the lesson of the three Kant readings is that the philosophy of reflection, the philosophy construing the self as idealist auto-position, is bounded by and limited to the derivative time of concern and of the Now.

The argument of the Kant book as concerns temporality is not a modification of the argument of *SZ* nor is it simply identical to it. It is rather, a deriving of the *SZ* conception’s implications for *Reflexionsphilosophie*. Contrary to what might be thought when the texts are lined-up strictly chronologically, authentic temporality is not the absolute subjectivity of the idealist tradition. It is rather the ground of absolute subjectivity.

The consistent evolution of the Marburg Kant-readings, from before *SZ* to after, shows that construing these to be the culmination of *SZ* temporality is mistaken. The idealist reading of temporality is fatally flawed hermeneutically. *SZ* is not a piece of that development, rather the Kant-interpretation of the 1920s shows that the philosophy of reflection is bound to the temporality of concern.

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# The Landscape of Merleau-Pontyan Thought



Robin M. Muller

## 1 Introduction

Merleau-Ponty wrote prolifically throughout his life on psychology, aesthetics, and politics, on pedagogy, physics, and painting. Between his appointment to the Université de Lyon in 1945 and his sudden death in Paris in 1961—a copy of Descartes’ *Dioptrique* on the desk in front of him—the survey of courses he taught is dizzying in scope. For all its promise, however, the interdisciplinary nature of Merleau-Ponty’s work, and the abruptness of its end, raises the question of how these projects connect. The question is encouraged by Merleau-Ponty’s own notes, which indicate that the book he was working on at the time of his death was meant to return to problems left “insoluble” in *Phenomenology of Perception* (VI 200). Did he hope for this work to supersede the *Phenomenology*? to correct for its false start? to press on in the same direction?

That his career would be punctuated by this kind of ambiguity is fitting. Merleau-Ponty is, as de Waehlens noted, a “philosoph[er] of the ambiguous” (SB xviii). We emerge from his first major text, *The Structure of Behavior*, having undermined, rather than clarified, productive oppositions between stimulus and response, cause and effect, form and content, and *Phenomenology of Perception* blurs the boundaries that separate conscious subjects from the world of objects that cannot think or perceive. “Eye and Mind,” Merleau-Ponty’s last complete philosophical work, seamlessly weaves Cartesian vision science and the metaphysics of painting. From an interpretive standpoint, moreover, it would go against the spirit of Merleau-Ponty’s work to resolve these ambiguities: Though he does not name it until the 1950s, Merleau-Ponty strives to resist what he calls “bad dialectic”—that is, any dialectical argument that culminates in a “final synthesis” (VI 143). In this sense, he

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comes to see phenomenology as an ongoing interrogative process that never arrives at a positive answer.

An effect of this method is, of course, that it introduces considerable difficulty: Researchers hoping to find their footing by locating Merleau-Ponty in the history of phenomenology will discover that he resists doing the kind of exegetical work or textual commentary that would make clear how he views the tradition of which he is a part, and without careful attention to the rhythms of the dialectic, it is easy to mistake the views he means to undermine for his own. Moreover, since Merleau-Ponty's task lies as much in muddying as in clarifying the scientific and philosophical problems within his own core areas of interest, we discover that certain key terms—the body, perception, habit, movement, consciousness, nature—do not exactly have the same sense by the time Merleau-Ponty has finished with them. An effect is that otherwise opposing camps have been able to conscript Merleau-Ponty to their side. Can we 'naturalize' Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology and so revolutionize the sciences of mind,<sup>1</sup> or is his concept of nature incompatible with contemporary natural or cognitive science?<sup>2</sup> Is Merleau-Ponty an idealist, perhaps even of a straightforwardly Kantian sort,<sup>3</sup> or a realist?<sup>4</sup> The ripple effects of these ambiguities are evident in a scholarship now so fractious that we are sometimes left with the impression that there is no single Merleau-Ponty, perhaps not even in the space of a single text.<sup>5</sup>

My aim here is to offer a way out of these difficulties. Taking seriously a remark Merleau-Ponty made in a 1946 interview—that his philosophy seeks to “escape idealism without falling back into the naïveté of realism” (CPM 85)—I will argue that everything from Merleau-Ponty's ontology of nature to his interest in the psychology of perception, from his aesthetics to his critique of Liberal politics, contributes to this aim. The method by which he arrives there, however, owes a profound indebtedness, not only to Husserl and Heidegger, but—crucially—to the humanized, Marx-inflected Hegel of the French tradition, who came to Merleau-Ponty through Jean Hyppolite and Alexandre Kojève. Understood through this lens, we discover that Merleau-Ponty does not mean to endorse either the classical realism of the natural sciences or an idealism of the transcendental or absolute sort, but to show how the phenomena philosophy tries to lay hold of will always resist or escape clarification in the abstract concepts handed down by the history of philosophy and science. The result is a uniquely 'aesthetic' phenomenology, involving a process

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<sup>1</sup>For the classic expression of this line of argument, though centering Husserl, see Petitot et al. (2000); see also Dorfman (2013). For discussion of the problem of method for this project, see Zahavi (2004), Smyth (2010), Moran (2013), and Cerbone (2016).

<sup>2</sup>See Morris (2013); see also Gardener (2017). For a critical presentation of this incompatibility, see Baldwin (2013)

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., Baldwin (2013); for the view that it is an “original” idealism, see also Gardner (2015); cf. Pollard (2014).

<sup>4</sup>See Kelly (2007) and Allen (2019). See also Harrison's essay in this volume, according to which Merleau-Ponty's position is a kind of perspectival realism (**this volume**)

<sup>5</sup>See, on this point, Hyppolite (at Pr.P 39), Gardner (2015).

Merleau-Ponty calls, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, “vertical history” (VI 186). Properly practiced, a vertical history does not map out the linear progression of events or ideas, but demands that we return to the things themselves—to embodied perception, the political subject, nature, organic life—again and again, the way we might return to an enigmatic poem or to a painting to catch it in a new light.

I want to approach this chapter in that Merleau-Pontyan spirit, returning to Merleau-Ponty’s texts to center their ambiguity. I begin in §2 by addressing the question of method, positioning Merleau-Ponty in the landscape of classical phenomenology by focusing on his modification of Husserl. I then show, in §3, how this modification could open up so many different interpretive possibilities, inspiring radically different modes of interdisciplinary uptake in contemporary scholarship. I then return to Merleau-Ponty’s own thought. In §4, I reconstruct the basic architecture of his dialectical method and show where the transcendental status of ambiguity uncovered by that method urges, for Merleau-Ponty, a fundamental rethinking of the traditional categories of philosophy and science. I conclude, in §5, by considering the ‘unthought-of’ in Merleau-Ponty’s thought, sketching where the idea of a transcendental ambiguity could point toward new, and more radical possibilities for phenomenology.

## 2 Approaching Merleau-Ponty: The Problem of Method

In the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes that the aim of phenomenology is not to explain or analyze conscious experience, but to describe it, with the goal of understanding what Husserl called “the natural attitude.” From outside the phenomenological tradition, this approach seems peculiar. What does it mean to understand something through *description* and not through *analysis*? And to what extent does this involve, as Merleau-Ponty argues, a “disavowal of science” (PP lxxi)? This is perhaps an odd demand for a philosopher who draws from sciences ranging from physics to empirical psychology.

Initially, Merleau-Ponty avails himself of a Husserlian answer: Phenomenologists should suspend or “bracket” any judgments about the objects of experience, facilitating a rigorous re-description of conscious experience that is, ostensibly, ‘theory’-free. This move disavows science, then, only in the sense that it is a refusal to pre-endorse the scientists’ account of the ‘reality’ of the objects of experience. However, Merleau-Ponty also stresses the *dependence* of science on phenomenology—a point he expresses by repurposing Husserl’s method of “reduction.” Whereas the suspension of judgment, for Husserl, is supposed to identify the transcendental pre-conditions of the natural attitude through a momentary reduction to “pure” consciousness, Merleau-Ponty argues that it is always in the perceived world that any kind of “understanding’ arises, including, he argues, Husserl’s understanding of “pure” consciousness. On this view, a ‘reduction’ to the plane of pure consciousness, far from helping to illuminate the conditions of possibility of experience,

would require us to artificially bifurcate those conditions by excising perceiving consciousness both from the material body and from the world.

In proposing this objection, it should be stressed that Merleau-Ponty is making two claims. First, he is identifying the world of lived perception as the ground of any conceptual or cognitive understanding of the structures of conscious experience and therefore as the world of which science—including a science of consciousness—“always speaks” (PP lxxii). The rigorous descriptions phenomenologists pursue, he argues, should therefore be of the “perceived world” in which we are always already inserted—a prescription that loosely aligns Merleau-Ponty with Husserl’s “existential dissidents” (PP lxxvii), most notably Heidegger and Sartre. Second, however, he is noting that this does not entail a repudiation of Husserl. To the contrary, locating the source of our idea of pure consciousness in embodied, innerworldly perception highlights the “most important lesson of the reduction” (PP lxxvii), which is that if we bracket not just our judgments about the metaphysical status of intentional objects, but also the world of lived perception from within which phenomenology is practiced, we bracket too much. Merleau-Ponty concludes from this that the reduction—indispensable though it may be as a tool of the phenomenological method—is, despite Husserl’s intentions, “impossible” to “complete” (ibid.).

There is considerable debate as to where the convergence of these points locates Merleau-Ponty in the history of phenomenology. For some commenters (e.g., Dreyfus, 2005; Carman, 2008), Merleau-Ponty’s embrace of an *existential* method of phenomenology represents a sharp break from the transcendental strategy pursued by Husserl. For others (e.g., Heinämaa, 2013; Morris, 2013), it is a modified continuation of it.<sup>6</sup> Before I return to this difference below, however, I want to isolate two conclusions we might be tempted to draw from Merleau-Ponty’s own method of “reduction.”

The first is this: that, despite Merleau-Ponty’s explicitly positioning his project as an “escape” from idealism, it nevertheless remains idealist, as Searle puts it, “in a rather traditional sense” (Searle, 2008, 125); after all, Merleau-Ponty ‘recasts’ the reduction as a demand for a certain kind of self-critical perspective that is, *qua* perspective, still pursued from within perceptual experience itself. As we expect, Merleau-Ponty will be adamant in resisting this charge. “To return to the things themselves,” he writes, taking up the Husserlian slogan, “is absolutely distinct from the idealist return to consciousness” (PP lxxii). His reasoning is that, if there is to be some kind of unifying act on the part of the ‘subject’ (say, in a perceptual judgment), there must already be the “spectacle” of a world demanding to be unified—a spectacle, Merleau-Ponty argues, that always overflows our judgments about it (PP lxxiii). He concludes that the world disclosed in perception cannot be the

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<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of some of the ambiguities in Merleau-Ponty that point in these diverging directions, see Jack Reynolds (2017). As Reynolds notes, readings that tend to “deflate” or downplay the transcendental dimensions of Merleau-Ponty’s thought are generally “more ‘analytic’ in orientation” or are “the work of the more empirically-minded phenomenological philosophers who engage very seriously with Merleau-Ponty.” Here, Reynolds names Hubert Dreyfus, Shaun Gallagher, Evan Thompson, and Alva Noë (81).

construction of an insulated consciousness, but is *material* and *real*, comprising stones and rivers, works of art and cups of coffee, all of which “motivate” me to take them up, in perception or action, in multiple ways.

As I will suggest below, efforts to assess how successful Merleau-Ponty is in wielding this discovery against the charge of idealism require us to first puzzle through the issue of how, precisely, Merleau-Ponty and his critics are using that term. But Merleau-Ponty’s own defense already invites a second temptation. For, as Merleau-Ponty argues, this spectacle of the real is present to the perceiver thanks in part to the ‘medium’ of the body. This emphasis makes it tempting to see phenomenological description as useful chiefly as an adjunct or even a corrective to traditional accounts of consciousness precisely because it enables us to properly highlight the role of the body in perceptual and intellectual life.

Merleau-Ponty’s work on embodiment has indeed been put to productive use in this way—including, most recently, in 4-E research programs in cognitive science.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Varela et al.’s seminal introduction to enactivist psychology positions itself as a “modern continuation of the research program ... founded by Merleau-Ponty” (Varela et al., 1991: xv). But this framing, I think, risks missing that, even if the body is ‘infused’ with mindedness, or if “mind” is “rooted in” the body, the body is not, for Merleau-Ponty, the Cartesian extended thing, encased in skin, any more than “I” am an isolated “cabinet of consciousness” separable from my body. Whatever we make of Merleau-Ponty’s uptake by cognitive science, in other words, it is important to stress, first, that embodiment for Merleau-Ponty chiefly describes the way in which the perceiving ‘subject’ is enmeshed in a world and that it is, second, in embodied experience that she learns what and where her body is. Since embodied perception always overflows the idea I have of my body, we cannot ground a new science on the phenomenological discovery of the body unless we first account for the way in which the body emerges *as a body* in my experience of a material world. With the conjunction of these points, we arrive at the central tension—and, I argue, the crucial methodological insight—of Merleau-Ponty’s thought.

Let us begin from the side of the tension: On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty has argued that the world is present to—is present *thanks to*—the perceiving body. On the other hand, he has argued that the world always transcends what is immediately given. The objects in my milieu withhold their backsides from my view, even when they “show” themselves to objects located elsewhere (PP 71); “my body as given to me by sight is broken at the height of the shoulders” even though “I am told that an

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<sup>7</sup>4-E research programs are those that stress (some or all of) the theses that “minds” are not separable from the body, that mindedness can therefore extend beyond the boundaries of the skull, and perhaps even beyond the boundaries of the physical body, in which case mind is defined in part in terms of its modes of interaction with the surrounding environment, and last that the environmental ‘stimuli’ to which embodied minds are responsive are at least partly constituted by the agent (a process of quasi-construction known as ‘enaction’). In sum, 4-E cognition is an umbrella term for a family of views that treat mind as Embodied, Extended, Enactive, and/or Ecologically embedded. For a range of discussions in this area, see Newen, de Bruin, and Gallagher (2018).

object is visible for others in this lacuna in which my head is located” (SB 213); my life is bookended by a birth I cannot remember and a death I could never live through. It appears, in other words, as if a “contradiction” is inserted “at the center of philosophy” (PP 382). Merleau-Ponty formulates this contradiction as a question: “How,” he asks, “can I be open to phenomena that transcend me” if these phenomena “only exist to the extent that I take them up and live them” (PP 381)? Rather than responding to this question, however, he takes it as a demand for phenomenology: If perceptual experience ultimately discloses a fundamental—Merleau-Ponty here uses the term “transcendental” (ibid.)—ambiguity, this is a point we can appreciate only if we turn the phenomenological method on phenomenology itself. “To phenomenology understood as a direct description, a phenomenology of phenomenology” must therefore “be added” (PP 382).

What, exactly, does a phenomenology of phenomenology entail? It is sometimes lamented that Merleau-Ponty does not fully develop this idea. It seems, nevertheless, that the phenomenology of phenomenology functions throughout his work as a kind of hermeneutic principle that asks of the phenomenologist not only that she suspend judgment about the objects of experience but also suspend the judgment that the concepts deployed in the phenomenological attitude could ever be wholly adequate to the experience they seek to describe. In this light, Merleau-Ponty’s point about the *incompleteness* of the reduction takes on a different valence. What it urges is not just a refusal to pre-endorse the explanations of conscious experience furnished by the sciences and by so-called “common sense,” but also resistance to the finality or completeness of phenomenological description. Merleau-Ponty’s criticism of Husserl emerges in this light as ambivalent: He charges Husserl both with going too far in the reduction, and with not going far enough.<sup>8</sup> Too far, that is, in supposing we could ever arrive at a plane of pure consciousness. Yet because Husserl fails to ‘bracket’ precisely that presupposition when interrogating perceptual experience, he does not go far enough.

We can return with this ambivalence in mind to the idea of phenomenology as a disavowal and continuation of science. As Merleau-Ponty writes in an evocative analogy, what the phenomenologist uniquely grasps is that the world of knowledge and ideas is dependent on the world of lived experience, much as “geography” is related to “the landscape in which we first learn what a forest, a meadow, or a river is” (PP lxxii). As he reads it, this dependence demands two things: first that we be rigorous in ensuring that any science—indeed any body of knowledge—recognize where it remains tethered to the perceived world out of which its organizing concepts are abstracted, and second that we resist ever concluding that our bodies of knowledge could wholly capture what can be said or known of that world. Merleau-Ponty’s method here emerges as essentially “open”: Just as the landscape is expressible *as* geography, so is it expressible in other ways—as a painting, for instance, or in a poem. This principle of openness, moreover, applies just as much to the world of perception as to the history of phenomenology: much as we return to Husserl’s

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<sup>8</sup>For helpful discussion of this point, see Heinämaa (2002) and Smith (2005).



*Ideas* or to Heidegger's *Being and Time* and find something new there on each reading, the phenomenologist should return again and again to the "original text" of "perception itself" (PP 22), not—importantly—to find out what it "really says," but to grasp what in it lends itself to a multiplicity of descriptions. It is this principle of openness, I think, that is the definitive insight of Merleau-Ponty's career.

### 3 Surveying the Scholarly Terrain

As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty transformation of the phenomenological method signals his recognition of the ongoing, interrogative nature of phenomenology. But it also presents an interpretive challenge: If Merleau-Ponty resists "final answers," how exactly can we make use of his insights?

That this is a significant challenge is evidenced first of all by the fractious and often contradictory state of the philosophical scholarship on Merleau-Ponty, second by the replication of those fractures in the interdisciplinary engagement with his thought. For instance, Merleau-Ponty's work has attracted interest in fields as wide-ranging as architectural theory (Locke & McCann, 2016) and animal studies (Westling, 2014; Lestel et al., 2014); environmental thought (Abram, 1997; Cataldi & Hamrick, 2007; Toadvine, 2009) and archaeology (Malafouris, 2013); physics (Wiltsche & Berghofer, 2020) and psychopathology (Fernandez, 2018; Sheets-Johnstone, 2019), yet these fields often draw on very different, and sometimes seemingly incompatible aspects of Merleau-Ponty's work. They are encouraged, moreover, by a scholarship that finds radically different arguments within the primary texts. My presentation so far has been intended to smooth over some of these differences. But an important question concerning the aim and the unity of Merleau-Ponty's method—Is there a turn in his thinking, and if so, where?—now emerges as essential for justifying the pluralism of Merleau-Ponty's legacy on philosophical grounds.

From the outset, it must be stressed that the question of a turn in Merleau-Ponty does not receive a simple "Yes" or "No" answer. Some scholars (e.g., Barbaras, 2005) emphasize apparent philosophical or methodological shifts that occur between the completion of *The Structure of Behavior* in 1938, and the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception* in 1945. Others (e.g., Evans & Lawlor, 2000) locate an even sharper turn, perhaps away from the "humanism" of phenomenology, in Merleau-Ponty's later ontology. Against these discontinuous presentations, we find scholars who emphasize—as I will—the unity of Merleau-Ponty's thought. For some, however (e.g., Foti, 2013; Landes, 2013), this is a thematic unity that may demand a new start through the later, more explicitly metaphysical works, and for others (e.g., Dillon, 1997; Morris, 2018), Merleau-Ponty's work is both metaphysical and phenomenological from beginning to end. What these otherwise divergent readings share, I take it, are two points: that the "early" and "later" Merleau-Ponty are distinguished by sharp differences in style, and that the question of

Merleau-Ponty's relation to other thinkers is complicated both by those differences and by the openness of his method.

To appreciate these complications, let us first consider the question of Merleau-Ponty's place within classical phenomenology. One debate in this area, which generally takes place at the intersections of phenomenology, philosophy of mind, and cognitive science, is how far Merleau-Ponty is from Husserl. Does he mean to include Husserl under the targeted heading of "intellectualism"—a family of views that broadly correlate perception and judgment and which is painstakingly critiqued throughout *Phenomenology of Perception*? If so, does he misread Husserl? These questions do not only touch on the fate of Husserl in Merleau-Ponty's work. They speak directly to the originality of Merleau-Ponty himself, since many commentators who would include Husserl as a target of the critique of intellectualism (Hubert Dreyfus, Francisco Varela) find gestures in Merleau-Ponty that point toward a radical new form of cognitive science the seeds of which others (Zahavi, Thompson) already see in Husserl.<sup>9</sup>

One approach to resolving this question is historical. Part of Merleau-Ponty's charge of intellectualism is the failure to recognize the rootedness of thinking in the body. Since Husserl makes the lived body a part of his thinking as early as 1907, the extent to which Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodiment is unHusserlian is therefore resolvable with close attention to these aspects of Husserl's work and to what Merleau-Ponty says of them.<sup>10</sup> This approach requires attention to biography and context. For instance, we know that Merleau-Ponty formed his appraisal of Husserl in part on the basis of unpublished manuscripts housed in Louvain, where Merleau-Ponty conducted research beginning in 1939 (Van Breda, 1992). Thus, as Zahavi (2002) has argued, scholars who compare Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl only to the "published" Husserl risk being misled.<sup>11</sup> But the greater challenge for this approach is that it requires getting clear on Merleau-Ponty's actual appraisal of Husserl's thought. And this task is frustrated by Merleau-Ponty's refusal to mine philosophical texts for evidence of what they "really" say—that is, to engage in what he dismisses as "philology" (PP lxxi). For just as we do not want to say definitively that the text of the perceived world is limited to our propositional judgments about it, neither, Merleau-Ponty argues, can we reduce the history of phenomenology to a pile of books. By consequence, even in his more direct engagements with fellow phenomenologists, such as his compelling re-reading of Husserl in "The Philosopher and His Shadow," Merleau-Ponty centers his efforts less on commentary than on unearthing the "unthought-of element" in their thought (S 160). Embracing this point, it might be offered that the very idea of a positive answer to the question of the Husserl/Merleau-Ponty relation runs against the grain of Merleau-Ponty's conception of phenomenology.

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<sup>9</sup>For discussion of the difference between these views, see, for instance, Thompson and Zahavi (2007, esp. p. 83n2).

<sup>10</sup>For a range of approaches to this topic, see Toadvine & Embree (eds.) (2002).

<sup>11</sup>Zahavi specifically names Dillon, 1997 and Madison, 1981 as examples of this narrowed scope.

Initially, it appears as if we can sidestep this problem by narrowing the focus to Merleau-Ponty's place in the field of *existential* phenomenology. After all, as many scholars note, there are clear affinities between Merleau-Ponty and other existentialist thinkers, including Heidegger and Sartre. Each figure, for instance, shares in the view that our orientation toward practical value takes precedence over detached theoretical contemplation or deliberative reasoning and so each offers sharp critiques, not just of classical psychology, but of the internalist orientation of much of contemporary analytic philosophy of mind.<sup>12</sup> These criticisms are powerful regardless of whether or not they also target Husserl.

Stressing this shared line of criticism has been enormously fruitful. Pursuing a Merleau-Pontyan alternative in the direction of embodied action, for instance, has been instrumental in breaking down a number of boundaries between so-called “analytic” and “Continental thought”<sup>13</sup> and has inspired new research programs in embodied and enactivist psychology. But this strategy comes up against a different problem. For Merleau-Ponty also advances sharp criticisms of his fellow “existential dissidents,” affording a central place to certain phenomena—perception, life, embodiment—that are conspicuously left out of the formal analysis of Being in *Being and Time*<sup>14</sup>; in *Phenomenology of Perception*, he repudiates Sartre for over-emphasizing human freedom, for failing to grasp, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, that “I do not choose myself continuously from nothing” (PP 478). (More damningly, *The Visible and the Invisible* includes an entire chapter charging Sartre with a dualism Merleau-Ponty seeks to overcome [VI chap. 2].) Indeed, we see on closer inspection that whether we stress Merleau-Ponty's proximity to Heidegger and Sartre, on the one hand, or his distance from them, on the other, we are pulled in contradictory directions. Does Merleau-Ponty defend a non-conceptualist, pragmatic conception of embodied action, or do we instead find resources in his early writings that gesture in a more conceptualist direction?<sup>15</sup>

Strikingly, Merleau-Ponty's refusal to give positive answers may light a way out of the problem: as I will show in a moment, Merleau-Ponty ultimately means to argue that any opposition between bodily habit and thought, between conceptual and non-conceptual contents, between form and content, existence and essence, matter and idea, must derive from a deeper ambiguity. If this is right, Merleau-Ponty's most impactful contribution may well be that he enables us to move beyond this kind of debate. But it is also here that the impression of disunity, and the diversity of style in Merleau-Ponty, present an interpretive roadblock. His interest in ambiguity, for instance, leads him to experiment with philosophical methods (including the attribution of philosophical work to painting and poetry) and to

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Dreyfus (2002) and Dwyer (1990). For further work in this area that does not necessarily stress these connections, see Romdenh-Romluc (2015) and Noë (2004).

<sup>13</sup> For more on this point, see Hass and Olkowski (eds.) (2000).

<sup>14</sup> For rich discussions of this issue, see Aho (2005) and Askay (1999).

<sup>15</sup> On this topic, see Bimbenet (2008). For a defense of the non-conceptualist reading, see, e.g., Noë (2004), Carman (2008), Kelly (2001). For the alternative, see, e.g., Berendzen (2010, 2013) and Matherne (2016).

introduce new ontological categories (including the quasi-Romantic conception of a sense-generating nature) that are, on the surface, a poor fit for uptake in the analytic philosophy of mind. An effect is that the scholarship on Merleau-Ponty largely continues to re-entrench certain intra-disciplinary boundaries. It is common, for instance, to see Merleau-Ponty compared, approvingly, to thinkers as wide-ranging as Wittgenstein and Deleuze, Peirce and Derrida, but rarely in the space of a single work.

With respect to Merleau-Ponty's interdisciplinary applications, these boundaries are especially unfortunate. In the posthumous *The Visible and the Invisible*, for instance, Merleau-Ponty names the deeper ambiguity he discovers "flesh." This text therefore affords a metaphysical status to an ambiguous "element," "partway between matter and idea," that produces the supposedly opposing terms that structure much of the history of thought. At the same time, the currents of criticism in that work, which run throughout his writings on aesthetics and ontology and are directed, *inter alia*, against the phenomenological strategies of Husserl and Sartre, make it tempting to see these later projects, and so Merleau-Ponty's understanding of ambiguity as a metaphysical category, as separable from the project of *Phenomenology of Perception*. Noting this, it is common among philosophers of mind to take on board Merleau-Ponty's embodied and existential phenomenological strategy without attention to the broader metaphysical implications of this thought. The effects of this reverberate in other fields that have found productive use for Merleau-Ponty's embodied method of phenomenology.

Let me offer one example: I suggested above that Merleau-Ponty's modification of phenomenology has inspired a variety of new approaches to thinking about the "embodied mind," which has in turn transformed disciplines ranging from archaeology (Boivin, 2008; Malafouris, 2013) to theater studies (Tribble, 2011). In the case of archaeology for instance, Merleau-Ponty offers an alternative to 'idealist' research programs, which generally seek to reconstruct the intentions and values of past human societies by analyzing symbolic or representational meanings preserved in 'inert' matter, without this entailing a return to their positivist antithesis, which had focused on the observable record. This can impact, for one, how the archaeologist conceives of her role: As Moyes demonstrates, an archaeological method that centers the embodied practices of the archaeologist—wandering the landscape, conjuring a field of sensory experience—can make newly accessible a living past that overflows its material record (Moyes, this volume). It can also impact how we think about the *meaning* of the record. For instance, as Malafouris and others have argued—drawing from Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenological efforts to rethink the boundaries between minds and the material world at the level of action—a cognitive archaeology that looks 'beyond' the dualism of activity and passivity, of matter and idea, can open new avenues in thinking about the evolutionary history of mind by stressing the constitutive role of matter in shaping human cognition (see, e.g., Malafouris, 2018). Considered in this context, we are urged to reconceptualize a material artefact not as the reservoir of symbolic meanings and values, as if meaning were stamped onto matter like words on a page, but as the effect of a bi-directional coordination between 'mind' and world—a coordination in which the

environment considered in its *materiality* both constrains and motivates its own use within human beings' collective symbolic and practical activity.

But here is the concern: If cultural meanings and values are to be understood as both motivated and constrained by non-human matter—if there is, in other words, a kind of inchoate meaningfulness discernible in matter that is not, as Merleau-Ponty argues, “posited by thought” (N 3)—are there certain claims about the metaphysics of meaning we have to take on board? What does it mean, for instance, from a developmental perspective, to say that matter can actively “press back” on the mind in its organic and social development?<sup>16</sup> Does a material engagement framework enable us to preserve the distinction between perceivers and the sensible world, or does Merleau-Ponty's ontology of flesh—an category meant to express the originary mutual imbrication of mind and body and world—entail, perhaps, some form of panpsychism?<sup>17</sup>

If we see Merleau-Ponty's embodied methods as detachable from his ontology, these kinds of questions about the metaphysics of meaning can remain unasked. That is, they can remain beyond the scope of research for those for whom phenomenology is a practical apparatus above all else. Perhaps this is not to the obvious detriment of those fields. Even without consideration of ontology, for example, we see in archeology where the phenomenological framework brings to the foreground certain aspects of the archaeological record—hesitation marks in knapped stone (Malafouris, 2018), the color or texture of soil (Boivin, 2008)—that had not been previously incorporated into our understanding of our cognitive pre-history. Yet to proceed without raising these questions is to avoid probing a connection on which Merleau-Ponty himself insists. Asked, for instance, whether his descriptions of perceptual activity in *Phenomenology of Perception*—the basis for much of his enduring impact on the phenomenology of mind—“entail the philosophical conclusion on ‘the being of sense’ which [he] ... developed after it,” Merleau-Ponty answers: “Yes” (Pr.P 116). Merleau-Ponty himself, in other words, rejected any separation between his philosophy of perception and action, on the one hand, and his later considerations on the metaphysics of meaning, on the other.

We return to our challenge: How can we pursue this connection when there is so little scholarly agreement as to what Merleau-Ponty ‘actually’ thought? What consequences follow from the idea of a consistency—beneath differences of style—to Merleau-Ponty's work? And last, how can we demonstrate the range of radical new

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<sup>16</sup>While it is outside the immediate field of phenomenology, see, however, Barad (2007).

<sup>17</sup>These questions are not entirely ignored by those concerned with Merleau-Ponty and the philosophy of mind. See, for instance, Thompson (2011) and Zahavi (2017)—both of whom argue for the necessary preservation of an ontological distinction between the flesh of the perceiver and the perceived. Discussions of the ontology of flesh, however, are more often pursued within the context of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature or among those we might describe as Merleau-Ponty's more ‘Continental’ interpreters. Thinking beyond these boundaries, for a range of views on which an ontological distinction is crucially preserved within the category of flesh, see Dillon (1997) and Dastur (2000). For the view that flesh may suggest some version of panpsychism, see Abram (1996) and McWeeny (2019). For the view that panpsychism would be incompatible with the first-person stance of phenomenology, see Toadvine (2005, 2007).

possibilities that follow from this idea? To answer these questions, let me engage in a bit of “vertical history” returning to the question of Merleau-Ponty’s methodology. My hope is that a reconstruction of Merleau-Ponty’s thinking here that presents it in a single voice can make headway in breaking down the intra- and interdisciplinary boundaries that fracture the field.

## 4 The Architecture of the Dialectic

Let us recall at this point Merleau-Ponty’s stated aim, which is to escape idealism without falling back into realism. So far, these terms have been loosely defined. This is no less the case in Merleau-Ponty, for whom they are sufficiently capacious as to cover a range of thinkers from Skinner to Kohler, from Spinoza to Kant. This diversity of representatives suggests, I think, that we should think of these terms less as isolating specific positions than as capturing two ways to express the relationship of a conscious subject and the enviroing world. “Realism,” in this context, encompasses a range of views on which it is the “world”—however conceived—that acts on the subject; “idealism” emphasizes the construction by the subject of that world. A desire to move “beyond” realism and idealism—whether this movement occurs within philosophy or in contemporary science—is a desire to think beyond the dualistic language of activity and passivity, construction and impact through which these positions are presented as alternatives.

Initially, the aim of thinking beyond realism and idealism closely aligns Merleau-Ponty with other thinkers of his generation, who, in their own way, saw those alternatives as precluding any genuine understanding of the relationship of consciousness and world. We find this kind of framing, for instance, in *Being and Nothingness*, where Sartre characterizes the challenge facing phenomenologists as the challenge of finding “another solution” when, having “ruled out a *realist* conception of the phenomenon’s relation with consciousness” as well as the “*idealist* solution . . . , [w]e seem to have closed every door” (Sartre 2018, 25). In his own career, however, Merleau-Ponty begins this movement not within phenomenology itself, but by identifying a problem that conscious experience poses for natural science. The need for a phenomenological methodology arises in this context out of the discovery that the frameworks of “realism” and “idealism” are wholly inadequate to the human behaviors they seek to explain—an inadequacy that is evident only when close attention is paid to the lived dimensions of conscious experience. As we will see, Merleau-Ponty’s deployment of this method affords a unique place in experience to the ‘natural’, ‘material’ world. In attending to materiality, for instance, he discovers that we must think of the natural world not in terms of the “matter” of physical science, but as the ambiguity of flesh—an expression that is meant to capture the way in which material reality could be both the repository and the “Ur-sprung” of sense. It is the conjunction of these points that unifies Merleau-Ponty’s otherwise scattered criticisms of his fellow phenomenological thinkers, from Husserl to Sartre: Each of



these figures, he argues, has failed in different ways to see how phenomenology emerges from a specific exploration “at the margins of science” (CPM 85).

There is any number of ways we could reconstruct the movement beyond realism and idealism and so uncover Merleau-Ponty’s critical thought. In the spirit of a vertical history, however, I want to begin, not (as Merleau-Ponty does) in the narrower context of early twentieth century natural science, but with an experience that continues to animate philosophy today: the tingling of skeptical anxiety as it arises in visual perception. Beginning here, I argue, lets us track throughout the history of philosophy and perceptual psychology a series of competing explanations for that anxiety whose shortcomings point, not toward a new or better explanation for it, but toward a common way of misunderstanding its significance. I will then show how Merleau-Ponty deploys this objection in order to unearth the ground from which realism and idealism, activity and passivity appear for us as opposing terms in the first place.

#### ***4.1 The Prejudices of Naïve Consciousness***

Let us begin by adopting the position of “naïve consciousness,” which is roughly synonymous for Merleau-Ponty with the “natural attitude.” In the case of visual perception, what is distinctive of this attitude, for Merleau-Ponty, is the effortless way in which my gaze alights upon objects and finds them “where they are” (SB 185). If I open my eyes and glance around my room, for instance, I will see, with no special effort, the desk and the computer in front of me, or my pitbull, Marlowe, who is curled up on the rug with a view of the hillside through my window. “I see,” as Merleau-Ponty says—alluding to Husserl—“the things themselves” (VI 3).

If I like, I can next put this visual perception into words. As I do so, I will feel as if I am recording the contents of a genuine reality. But then the tip of a tree branch disperses and takes flight; I realize it was not a tree branch, but a gathering of black birds. Whereas at first, I had such a vivid and immediate experience of closeness with the world, I am now confronted with a question: If I can manage to get things ‘wrong’ in this way, how can I know that my experience is of things *as they are*? Much like the experience of illness dissolves the otherwise tight connection I feel with my body, this question threatens to unravel the perceptual threads that in my everyday experience connect me to the world.

This feeling of untethering is important for Merleau-Ponty for two reasons. First, unlike the everyday perceiver, who might shrug her shoulders, content to let this peculiar experience recede into memory, the philosopher feels the tug of anxiety: Without a theory of perception, she worries, how can I avoid entrapping myself in a skeptical paradox? This is a worry for the philosopher, moreover, because, second, when I try to put this feeling of unravelling, this shaking of my “perceptual faith” (VI 3) into words, I discover those words are rife with ambiguities: When I say, for instance, that “My eyes deceive me,” do I really mean to impute that deception to my eyes—that is, to my perceptual system as a physical complex—or to my mind?



If I say that “I was misled,” do I mean with this peculiar grammatical construction to signal a passive undergoing, or do I take myself to have performed some active miscalculation? This problem constitutes, for Merleau-Ponty, the distinctive predicament of the philosopher, whose “distinguishing trait” is to possess “*inseparably* the taste for evidence and the feeling for ambiguity” (IPP 17). The philosopher, in other words, craves certitude precisely because she feels where it continually evades her.

This characterization of philosophy underlies Merleau-Ponty’s reconstruction of the history of perceptual psychology. That history, he argues, flees continually in the direction of “certainty”, pursuing that certainty as a series of competing attempts to ‘correct’ the reports of “naïve consciousness” by resolving its ambiguities: Perhaps error really arises at the point of bodily receptivity, as when catastrophic injury affects the transmission of the sensory stimulus to perceptual consciousness. Or perhaps the error is internal to perceptual consciousness, in which case there is a range of views attributing that error to the process of assembling associated sensations or to the infinite scope of the will. If this is right, of course, then what we find in this history is not, on Merleau-Ponty’s view, the work of genuine philosophy—which would be marked, as he distinguishes it, by a willingness to make ambiguity “a theme”—but instead the misleading efforts of a range of thinkers who are “menace[d]” by ambiguity and strive to eradicate it (IPP 17). This framing thus helps isolate what, for Merleau-Ponty, is the failure of the history of psychology: it offers us a series of competing solutions to the problem of skeptical anxiety, which are misleading, not because they are wrong, but because they are *solutions*.

This is, admittedly, a peculiar objection, so let us look closer. For it is essential to appreciating its force that we isolate what was genuinely “naïve,” for Merleau-Ponty, on the part of naïve consciousness.

One tempting answer is to say that everyday perception is *realistic*, without being *realist*. That is to say, the naïve perceiver is naïve in the sense that she has no need for an underlying theory of perception at all. This kind of naïveté would explain, then, why the everyday perceiver shrugs at an experience that sends the psychologist in pursuit of a theory: to the former, the world displays itself to her consciousness as if impacting her without any effort on her part—a feeling that persists without her needing to explain or account for the nature of that impact. The psychologist is not satisfied without such an account. But Merleau-Ponty wants to preserve the perceiver’s “naïveté” in light of a deeper worry. The reason the perceiving subject does not have to choose among competing theories in her everyday attitude is not that she remains naïvely uncommitted. She does not have to choose, he argues, because each available explanation shares the same presupposition: that, whatever misfiring of perception we discover, it arises from me and not the world. Merleau-Ponty calls this shared presupposition “*le préjugé du monde*” (PP 5). When he urges our return to the natural attitude so that we might replace the “naïveté of realism” with the rigor of phenomenological description, it is this prejudice, this unquestioned belief in a world to which the mind will adequate itself, that he hopes to dislodge.

Let me take a moment to underline here that “le préjugé du monde” is a key expression in Merleau-Ponty’s thought, rendered by Smith as the “prejudice in favor of the objective world” and by Landes as “the unquestioned belief in the world.” Each of these translations preserves (and each erases) different subtleties. I first want to urge, then, that what is initially at issue for Merleau-Ponty is a prejudice *in favor of*, or an unquestioned *belief in* the world and not a *thesis about* the world. This is not because that belief has no metaphysical implications, but because those who endorse it are not forced to make it explicit and so may not recognize it as a thesis at all. Second, the expression captures what is, historically, a belief in *the* world or a prejudice in favor of an *objective* world in the sense that that belief concerns something—“the world”—understood to be distinct from the “subjective” distortions of a perceiving mind. Merleau-Ponty calls this certitude about the objective world “objectivism.” It is this implicit and uncritical endorsement of a shared objectivist framework that underlies, for Merleau-Ponty, the range of available positions—from the most realist to the most idealist—in the history of perceptual psychology.

Admittedly, the idea that this otherwise varied history is animated by a single presupposition is surprising. But consider, as one example, the opposition between empiricist and “intellectualist” accounts of the epistemology of perception, whose confrontation Merleau-Ponty stages in the Introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception*. As is well known, these are diametrically opposing accounts of the source of the ideas implicated in conscious perception, at least on a traditional presentation. Do the ideas that help structure experience come from nature via the medium of the body, thus retaining their link to the sensible world, or are they there innately thanks, as Descartes argues in the third *Meditation*, to nature or to God, in which case they first arise in us without the mediation of the body? The consequences of this dispute at first seem massive for the epistemology of perception. If they come from nature via the body, for instance, then perceptual error has to arise somewhere upstream of that transmission, in my process of association, maybe, or in the projection of memories (PP chap. 2). But if they are there innately, the gap in our experience would arise from the gap between the operations of judgment and the contents delivered by sensibility (PP chap. 3). Merleau-Ponty argues, however, that those who hold these opposing views do not actually disagree on the infrastructure out of which perceptual experience is built. In other words, both empiricism and intellectualism construct competing ‘solutions’ from precisely the same components, whose contours, whose appropriateness to the task, are never in question. It is for *this* reason—and not because they are wrong—that Merleau-Ponty finds fault with both of them.

So, what are these components? As I read Merleau-Ponty, he discerns in objectivism four points. First, the conceptual resources from which objectivist theories are built are in each case the same: they are consciousness and nature, passive body and active mind. Second, each objectivist theory takes perception to be analyzable into sensation, on the one hand (considered generally as the *atomic content* of experience), and idea, on the other (considered as the form of, or the form given to, some relation of sensations). Third, each objectivist theory locates Nature at the ground

floor of perception, where—at both the empiricist and the intellectualist extremes—it serves as a causally impactful external world of which the bodies and the ideas that structure our perceptual judgments are the effect. Fourth, and finally, each competing account shares the very same *idea* of nature: ‘Nature’ is “a given nature” (PP 41) that is opposed—conceptually, ontologically—to consciousness or to mind. These commonalities bring into view for Merleau-Ponty the overarching limitation of objective thought: that, as he puts it, it “knows only dichotomies” (PP 50).

Armed with this discovery, we can now see why Merleau-Ponty returns to assess the natural attitude and finds in it a kind of crisis. No theory pursued within objectivist limits can resolve the skeptical anxiety, because those limits dissolve theoretical differences into a shared belief that is itself betrayed by the experience those theories are supposed to ‘explain’. Objectivism, in other words, holds apart what naïve consciousness experiences as a basic, ambiguously expressible contact with the world and so leaves that contact perpetually out of our conceptual reach.

This discovery now sets us at the threshold of phenomenology. On the one hand, in grasping that the original reports of naïve consciousness, in their ambiguous fusion of active and passive, body and mind, get us closer to understanding lived perception than any theory of perception that would resolve those ambiguities on one side or the other, we have arrested that flight toward certainty that characterizes the history of science. Yet we do not thereby give up our “taste for evidence,” which the philosopher, Merleau-Ponty argues, must possess “*inseparably*” from her feeling for ambiguity. The demand therefore emerges for a new, no less rigorous methodology that will not only allow us to remain attentive to lived experience, but will also equip us to make ambiguity “a theme” (IPP 17).

## 4.2 *The Naturalist Thesis, the Idealist Antithesis, and Their Synthesis in Phenomenological Ontology*

We have set ourselves a specific task: to dislodge from the natural attitude any uncritical belief in a “given nature” considered as the objective world external to and independent of consciousness. If we are able to expose and overcome that prejudice, the ambiguous reports of naïve consciousness will appear less as problems in need of resolution than as calling for attention on their own terms. As Merleau-Ponty shows in his early work, this turns out to be transformative for any science that hopes to *account for* experience, since it means, as we will see, that that science must be able to ground experience in neither matter nor mind, neither nature nor consciousness, but in something ambiguous between these. On Merleau-Ponty’s view, however, the centering of this ambiguity will not pull phenomenology wholly apart from science, even as it undermines the implicit assumptions that have driven the history of science. Instead, it is emblematic of what he calls “good ambiguity”: that is, of an ambiguity that “contributes to establishing certitudes” (IPP 17) without confusing these certitudes for final answers.

How do we arrive at this “good ambiguity”? The path, for Merleau-Ponty, involves first of all ‘clearing’ away solutions to the problem of the relation of consciousness and nature that are offered by realism—under the heading of “naturalism”—in the natural sciences and by the Critical idealism of neo-Kantian philosophy of science. The interpretive challenge is then that this clearing is accomplished not through direct criticism from a classically phenomenological posture, but through a dialectical confrontation between those competing positions: his first goal is to show how naturalism gives way to its idealist antithesis; the second is to demonstrate where, in absorbing the ‘truth’ of naturalism, we are led, not to idealism itself but to a phenomenological synthesis. In centering this dialectical strategy, we see that the ‘phenomenological’ heritage Merleau-Ponty calls upon is quite diverse. He unifies under that heading not just Husserl and Heidegger, but a range of thinkers—Hegel and Marx, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard—whom he sees as urging us to think beyond the choice of realism and idealism considered as an either/or.

To see why this broader heritage is significant, let us begin by looking more closely at the first move. So far, we have come to see Merleau-Ponty’s desire to avoid “falling back” into the “naïveté” of realism as an attempt to avoid the pull of the objectivist prejudice. From the perspective of certain natural and physical sciences, however, the pull toward the ‘objective world’ is straightforwardly appealing. It is appealing in the case of a science of perception, for instance, because it enables us to trace each perceptual judgment back to the certain reality of a law-governed nature, whether nature is present in the ‘law’ that structures the basic operations of rational consciousness (as in contemporary cognitivism) or as a residue in every sensation (as we find in empiricist philosophy of mind). In this context, the furthest empiricist extreme is represented by behaviorism, a framework that brackets “naïve” consciousness entirely, counting as relevant only the observable effects of ‘conscious’ perceptions in the motions of the body. This is where Merleau-Ponty opens his first major text, *The Structure of Behavior*.

From the behaviorists’ perspective, the decision to bracket consciousness has an obvious advantage. By blocking appeals to consciousness, the scientist is purportedly granted access to a “bare” transaction in nature, enabling her to render ‘perception’ as it ‘really is’: a reaction of the body to sensory stimuli. Notice, however, what is distinctive about the behaviorist strategy here: that it raises the prejudice in favor of the objective world to an explicit principle. That is, it supposes it is possible to purge from science any “feeling for ambiguity,” allowing the scientist to ‘explain’ perceptually guided behaviors without having to correct for the subjective distortions of perceiving consciousness. In precisely this supposition, Merleau-Ponty argues that the behaviorist betrays her own strategy: Any description—say, a description of the motions of bodies—is necessarily of the object as disclosed to perceptual consciousness. In presuming, then, that ‘natural’ events are “objectively” describable in themselves, the behaviorist misses that her bracketing of consciousness could never be “complete.”

I am framing the objection in this way in order to bring out one interpretive thread, which is that Merleau-Ponty’s assessment of behaviorism mirrors a criticism he later lodges against Husserl: Just as Husserl had presumed, on Merleau-Ponty’s

reconstruction, that we could gain access to “pure” consciousness by suspending a thesis about the reality of its intentional object, the behaviorist proceeds as if she could avail herself only of what is accessible in her object of study considered physiologically—as if she could gain access to events of nature, in other words, by suspending any contribution on the part of consciousness. In both cases, Merleau-Ponty argues, it is impossible to complete this task. For instance, it is precisely in supposing that her object—bodily behavior—could reduce to a series of causal transactions observable within physical nature that the behaviorist reveals she has not gone so far as to suspend her judgment about the nature of the object itself. Perhaps because of this parallel, Merleau-Ponty does not shore up this line of criticism by juxtaposing behaviorism to a phenomenology considered under that name, but by bringing into view certain behaviors that are inexpressible in behaviorist terms.

Let me offer an example. Consider the seemingly reflexive pain reaction that is produced when I take a sip of scalding coffee and recoil. Were we to adopt the behaviorist’s interpretive framework, we would have to insist that this ‘instinctive’ behavior consists in a bodily reaction. That is, it is causally provoked by certain physical properties expressible, say, in the quantitative model of a Fahrenheit scale, which properties belong to the stimulus considered independently of its impact on my body. Merleau-Ponty would counter, however, that my reaction is equally impacted by my expectation of what those properties will be. My expectation, for instance, that the coffee will have cooled since I poured it precedes my reaction and *shapes* it—even if there is no ‘real’ change in the temperature of the stimulus. What is especially striking about this expectation is that it does not come to behavior in the form of a propositional belief; it is carried by the body—as a certain tension in my lips, for instance, and in the position of my tongue. Merleau-Ponty reasons from this that the role of bodily anticipation in determining how the stimulus will show itself to me undermines any description of the behavior *as* purely a reaction. At the same time, it supports the behaviorists’ idea that behavior must be analyzed through the movement of the body. This discovery urges him to reorient the study of behavior in such a way that we can bring into view the entire “intentional arc” that dynamically links the perceiving body to the perceived environment.

Through examples like this, Merleau-Ponty unearths new and distinctive phenomena that are inexpressible in traditional natural scientific terms. It is here, for instance, that we find his earliest gestures toward the concept of motor-intentionality and his first accounts of the ‘enactive’ role played by the body in the constitution of its intentional object. These concepts have become central for enactivist, embodied, extended, and ecological theories of mind, and through them for considerations of embodied action from the philosophy of technology (Ihde, 1990) to the phenomenology of dance (Bergonzoni, 2017). Yet it is equally important that these phenomena are also inexpressible in the language of idealist philosophy of science. Merleau-Ponty’s primary goal is not to augment existing scientific or philosophical frameworks through the simple addition of new concepts, but to show that those frameworks as they are traditionally understood *preclude* the addition of the relevant concepts, and preclude it in precisely the same way. For Merleau-Ponty, the clearest way into this double critique is by staging a dialectical confrontation

between these competing frameworks and to show that this confrontation resolves, not on one side or the other, but into a synthesis that is ambiguous between them. This confrontation requires Merleau-Ponty to take up the neo-Kantian position in an instrumental way.

What does this look like? As Merleau-Ponty reconstructs it, the relevant objection posed within neo-Kantian philosophy of science concerns the possibility of a science pursued “without consciousness.” As the neo-Kantians argue, any assumption on which behavior would be reducible to causal transactions within nature does not, in the end, serve to exclude or bracket consciousness, but in fact to swallow nature within it. “What we call nature,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “is already consciousness of nature,” just as “what we call life is already consciousness of life” (SB 184). The idealist finds confirmation of this point already lurking in the realists’ own theories—returning to the clash between empiricism and intellectualism, for instance, she sees that what unified these theories was precisely the same *idea* of nature. While Merleau-Ponty takes on board the spirit of this objection, however, he argues that the idealist way of cashing it out will not work. What naturalism objectifies in fact, idealism objectifies as an idea (N 96). In other words, idealism explicitly says that we do not have access to nature considered independently of human consciousness, yet it shares with naturalism the assumption that consciousness and its ‘inner’ active operations are conceptually opposed to the idea of external nature comprising causal forces and physical laws. Their apparently massive methodological disagreement, Merleau-Ponty notices, now dissolves into a dispute regarding which side of this dualism—the side of consciousness or of causal nature—an ‘objective’ science must prioritize. When Merleau-Ponty says that he wants to escape idealism without falling back into the naïveté of realism, he means that he wants a way out of this dispute. And we could just as easily frame his objective in the inverse way: The aim is to resist the gravitational pull of realism without this meaning we must go so far as endorsing idealism.

Before I look more closely at this point, let me pause to note three things. First, Merleau-Ponty explicitly stages this dispute as one between naturalism in the sciences and idealism in the philosophy of science. Yet contemporary philosophers of science rarely subscribe to the kind of neo-Kantian position that plays the role of “idealism” in *The Structure of Behavior*. It should be emphasized, for this reason, that Merleau-Ponty’s target, as we just saw, is not any specific formulation of idealism so much as the division of nature as the “realm of law” from an autonomous sphere of consciousness to which is attributed the work of imposing “order” or “meaning.” As Rouse (2006) points out, the view from which he wants to “escape” therefore includes not only transcendental idealism, but *any* constructivist position, including those that attribute the imposition of form or meaning on matter to history or culture. While it is originally presented as a confrontation between empirical science and the idealist philosophy of science, the dialectic Merleau-Ponty stages here applies equally to any discipline shipwrecked by disputes between realist or materialist and idealist or constructivist frameworks. Indeed, throughout the 1940s and ‘50s, Merleau-Ponty reapplies this same strategy to disputes in anthropology, child development, politics, even literary theory.



Second, while I have argued that we should hear the terms “realism” and “idealism” in the loosest sense—that is, as designating two different ways to organize the relation of consciousness and its (natural or phenomenal) object—it should be clear that the choice of behaviorism as the stand-in for realism in *The Structure of Behavior* is not arbitrary. Just as the goal is to show, nourished by idealist criticisms, that considerations of behavior cannot proceed without consciousness, a ‘science’ of consciousness that proceeds without consideration of the natural, material world also fails. We discover this through a psychology that analyzes ‘experience’ in terms of the material body. It is only in those moments that escape behaviorist description that we discover a dimension of “consciousness” in which its distinction from any ‘object’—and therefore in which the boundary between mind and world—is “obscured” (CPM 86). The force of this point is easy to miss, given the humanist and existentialist directions of Merleau-Ponty’s thought, but a philosophy that begins from the assumption that the reduction cannot go so far as to sever the perceiver from her world has now emerged as one that also considers that world at least partly in naturalistic, material terms.

If we mean to take this point seriously, then, last, the *dialectical* structure of Merleau-Ponty’s strategy is especially significant. As a point about method, his argument is reasonably described as indifferent to questions of ontology: Does it matter whether we take the dualisms he undercuts—cause and effect, stimulus and response, matter and idea—to be *merely* conceptual or whether we really take those concepts to fail because they do not carve the world at its joints? What the Hegelian legacy suggests, however, is that, for Merleau-Ponty, the purpose of any dialectical process is not to find more data in experience so that we might resolve philosophical conflicts on one side or another, but to reveal why those conflicting options have appeared to us as the only alternatives. On his view, they appear to us as alternatives because, remaining uncritically within the grips of objective thought, we know “only dichotomies”; freed from that grip, we are no longer compelled to flee ambiguity. What this means for science is then that we can absorb what is “true” in both realism and idealism and think beyond their apparent contradictions.

We have already encountered these truths. First, phenomenology must absorb a “truth” from idealism: that we are always already ensnared by consciousness. Merleau-Ponty argues, however, that the consciousness that ensnares us is a natural, historical consciousness. This is because we must also absorb a truth from naturalism: that our ideas necessarily trace back to their origin in nature itself. Absorbing both of these truths, Merleau-Ponty argues, requires a different ontology: the consciousness from whose perspective we cannot escape must be an embodied consciousness that resonates not just to values and ideas but to material meanings, or *sense*. Conversely, the nature to which embodied perception connects and out of which the body is formed cannot be the objective nature of externally impactful and causally interacting things *partes extra partes*, but a nature in which sense—that is, “the idea in its nascent state” (SB 206)—already inheres. A phenomenology that embraces these truths will center on the living body, then, precisely because it is, for Merleau-Ponty ambiguous between matter and idea. The very idea we have of the



body as bounded *thing* is a product that emerges from our dynamic bodily interactions with the material world from which that body is formed.

If we take a step back here, I think, we are now in a position to glimpse the general trajectory of Merleau-Ponty's career: Establishing the phenomenological method and bringing out how it must be centered on the body is a crucial task of *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*.<sup>18</sup> Merleau-Ponty then reanimates the question of method in his "late ontology" in order to uncover the status of nature as the "auto-production of meaning" (N 3). This angle also enables us to appreciate Merleau-Ponty's interest in both empirical science and in poetry and painting. As I have said, Merleau-Ponty's concern is always to return to the experience that empirical science attempts to explain, with the goal of re-describing it. We have just seen that this means re-describing it without presuming that the terms of our description, the ontological categories at our disposal, or even the aspects of the experience those descriptions will have to try to capture, are limited to those pre-endorsed by the history of philosophy or science. Indeed, what Merleau-Ponty discovers is ultimately that *any* term is outstripped by what is there in the experience itself. Since this overflowing of experience, this refusal of the world to obey conceptual boundaries, is a central concern of poetic metaphor and expressionist painting, he will come to see these as alternative ways of demonstrating the dependence of our organizing concepts on a 'real' that always transcends them.<sup>19</sup> It is this feature of Merleau-Ponty's thought that leads the philosopher Émile Bréhier, in attendance at Merleau-Ponty's 1946 lectures on the *Primacy of Perception*, to note, somewhat ambivalently, that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology appears less as philosophy than it "results in a novel" (Bréhier to Merleau-Ponty, PP 30).

To assess the significance of this comment, let us return once more to the perceptual scenario with which we began and re-describe it, centering the moments of ambiguity Merleau-Ponty picks out.

### 4.3 *Back to the Things Themselves*

We are back in my office. I am trying to capture to the best of my descriptive capacities *what it is like* to perceive. To do this, I settle in my chair, lift my hands off the keys and focus on the computer screen in front of me. I find that I can trace with my eyes the various items in my perceptual field, carving them out one by one. There is my screen, rimmed by the solid metal frame of my laptop, there is the desk it is resting on, lined with books set against the white plaster wall. As I continue surveying the scene, I discover layer upon layer of complexity all the way out to the fuzzy outer boundaries where I am sensing... *something*, a blur of color that is no color in

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<sup>18</sup> See also "Cézanne's Doubt," published the same year as *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which Merleau-Ponty attributes to Cézanne the desire to "depict matter as it takes on form," and through this to reconnect the "sciences" with the "nature" on whose "base" we "construct" them (SNS 13).

<sup>19</sup> For further discussion, see, especially, Carbone (2004) and Toadvine (2004).

particular, a hazy horizontal limit I cannot name. Something moves there. I turn my head. It was a flick of Marlowe's tail. I realize that no matter where I turn, my visual field is always limned by a horizon where determinable perceptual objects seem to bleed at their edges and evaporate away. This is not a limit in the sense of a hard line I cannot cross, so much as a rich outer zone always potentially filled with things I could access with a turn of my head. I realize, now, that I encounter this limit even if I close my eyes to try to isolate the pure sensation of color; I only 'see' the point of color against the un-bordered blackness of my eyelids. In the direction of complexity and of simplicity, I come up against the indeterminacy of perception at the edges of the perceptual field.

The first thing to isolate through this description is what Merleau-Ponty identifies, following Gestalt theory, as the figure/ground structure of experience. This is a central concept for the entirety of his thought, and in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty uses it to undercut the basic building block of empiricism and intellectualism: the atomic sensation. Since sensation, he argues, "corresponds to nothing in experience" (PP 3–4), any theory that depends upon sensation rests on a postulate we cannot use to recombine the experience it purportedly explains. He also recognizes, with Gestalt theory, that the background against which the sensible datum appears as a datum is always edged by a hazy and indeterminate border zone. I cannot perceive the background, then, without its thereby constituting a bounded figure and so ceasing to be the background.

For Merleau-Ponty, these reveal two things: First, returning to the experience I have been focused on, if I were to engage in any kind of deliberate aspect shift that could bring the background into focus (say, the plaster wall instead of the figure of the books), I could do this only by making that background the figure of another ground whose borders would then evade my perceptual grasp. Second, these shifts are not only initiated by deliberate thought: Like rack focus in cinema, lived perception finds things come into relief and retreat into a blurry indeterminacy in accordance with dynamic environmental demands and ongoing practical aims. As I sit here trying to capture the character of visual perception, for instance, that aim brings into focus the visible faces of things. But the feeling of hunger or a glimpse at the title of a book on my desk might suddenly disclose to me aspects of the environment I did not originally intend.

For Merleau-Ponty, these insights take us beyond the discovery of the *structure* of experience and point to an ineradicable ambiguity at its center. As we have just seen, what belongs to the background of any given experience may shift, but there is always *some* background, and thus something indeterminate that is left "out of view." He counter-poses this point to Gestalt theory: It is possible to bring the figure/ground structure into view as the "essential" structure of perception, only by backgrounding the material support in which the idea of form originally inheres. Or more plainly: We can have the idea that structure is constitutive of meaningful perception only if that idea (*viz.*, structure, form) is an ideal that has been abstracted from a range of material grounds. The promise of a genuinely "self-critical" phenomenology—one that never forgets the rootedness of ideas in the world on which

they depend—now becomes the promise to see the “structure” of perception as one expression of the original unity of matter and form.

Merleau-Ponty reaches for different terms to express the original fusion—what he calls the “transcendental ambiguity”—of form and content over the course of his career: “Actual structure,” “sense,” “lived body,” “flesh.” In each case, Merleau-Ponty sees his emphasis on ambiguity as distinguishing his approach, not just from Gestalt theory, but also from those pursued, on some readings, in Husserlian transcendental phenomenology and Heideggerian fundamental ontology. Yet the insight is relevant beyond plotting the diversity of phenomenological research. When I turn this point against my original description, for instance, I discover that the ambiguities uncovered in visual perception left me barely cognizant of other ambiguities *as* ambiguities: the fuzzy connection where I end and the chair begins, which is not given to me until I feel a pain emanating from my tailbone, the fact that this object holding down my papers does not appear *as* a water glass until the tickle of thirst is in my throat, the admixture of chance and circumstance that place me here, at this desk, in this room, in Los Angeles—even the peculiar intertwining of vision and other sense modalities that I express, perhaps inadvertently, when I say, glancing at the window, that it *looks* as if it is warm out. What I now realize is that I am not capturing perception *in itself* here so much as I am mining an experience for what in it is relevant to the phenomenon—in this case, visual experience—I am trying to describe. Whatever I do, that phenomenon always outstrips my descriptions.

This is a point about phenomenology, as we have seen, but also about the idea of interdisciplinarity: different disciplinary engagements with the same phenomenon will necessarily carve it out from the background in different ways. It makes no more sense to rank their results in terms of their access to the “real,” than to say that my desk’s *woodiness* is more real than its being the desk from my childhood bedroom. Recognizing this, the apparent contradictions in Merleau-Ponty scholarship appear, perhaps, less as contradictions than as different ways of carving figures from the ambiguities Merleau-Ponty unearths in his work.

## 5 Returning to the Landscape of Merleau-Pontyan Thought

In an unpublished text, Merleau-Ponty speculates that the “insolubility” of certain problems in *Phenomenology of Perception* likely stems from a failure to appreciate what he calls the ambiguity of sense. The worry, he says, is that “the study of perception could only teach us ‘bad ambiguities,’” which he understands, roughly, as an equivocation between opposites. The later ontology, by contrast, will strive to found these in a “good ambiguity”: a foundation that “gathers” oppositions—mind and body, “past and present, nature and culture” together “in a single whole” (Pr.P 11). In this last section, I want to point toward some of the possibilities opened up by a return to the question of the figure/ground structure in *Phenomenology of Perception* in light of this concern.

Let's go back one final time to our description. Since we are closer at this point to the material dimension of the experience, one thing I might grasp, which I had not centered before, is that I cannot fully understand the interplay of figure and background except in a framework that includes the active body: The indeterminacy of the perceptual field, after all, does not mean that aspects of that field are *indeterminable*, but the perceptual determination of a figure always involves, at a minimum, a movement of the body—the turn of my head toward the flash of color, the darting of my eyes along the borders of the computer screen, which carves it out from the background of the plaster wall. Even the fact that I am sitting at my desk and not on the couch by the window means that items in my visual field show this face to me and not others—presentations that would change were I to lean ever so slightly in this or that direction.

From the intention of developing a “theory” of perception, this simple centering of the active body makes clear the gap between perception and judgment: As I move my head to the left or right, for instance, the coffee mug will cease to be perceived *as* a coffee mug before it will slip out of view. One thing that has been especially productive in Merleau-Ponty's work, then, is that his objections to intellectualism also stress what belongs to that “gap.” Specifically, intellectualism misses that, before I can perceptually determine an object as this or that thing, I must first participate in a process that makes it perceptually available. In the language of phenomenological biology, I “enact” it. Let us follow this thread.

We encountered enaction earlier as an ongoing interchange of body and world, as an ambiguous concept partway between activity and passivity. In that context, enaction was introduced in order to undercut the behaviorist reduction of behavior to reaction. It is equally important that there is nothing ‘unnatural’ about it. Consider the case of an animal's perceptual responsiveness to the environment. As we have seen, the behaviorist would want to characterize this responsiveness as the reaction of the animal body to a causal impact from the outside. But the animal's perceptual system had to evolve to be naturally responsive to those environmental ‘stimuli’ and not others. If we want to say that the animal remains ‘passively’ responsive to external impacts, then, we must also admit that the animal's responsiveness is shaped by the evolutionary history of the species, which molds its perceptual system through a process of development that unfolds from the ‘inside’. As Merleau-Ponty argues, the animal's responsiveness is thus equally describable through the lens of activity—as the organism “selecting” its stimuli in accordance with its evolutionary role. With this admixture of activity and passivity, inside and outside—with this nesting of the organism within a situation within a developmental phase within the natural history of a species—the organism evades considerations as either robotic performer of a biological law or as the continuous production of pure freedom. And we are not limited to finding the “good ambiguity” of active productive and passive reception, of freedom and constraint, in the body of the organism. There are traces of it everywhere, from the Chartres Cathedral (Boivin, 2008, 156ff.) to the quantum world (Barad, 2007).

In his early work, Merleau-Ponty names the ambiguous fusion of freedom and law *normativity*. Moving beyond the context of animal behavior and into the

so-called ‘human order,’ he then shows, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, where perception, considered as ambiguously ‘enactive’, infuses both the perceiving body and the perceived world with normativity in such a way that when I perceive an ‘object’ in my visual field, I do not only find what in it is relevant to my biological being, but perceive it through the lens of “what one does” with things. When the dryness of my throat motivates me to lift my hands from the keys and respond to my thirst, for instance, what is illuminated by this intention is the glass of water to my right and not the puddle of rainwater on the patio. This is a kind of cultural ‘knowledge’ I carry in my body; I do not have to choose the tap water over the rain puddle, I simply reach for the glass. (There are, as many readers note, close connections here between Merleau-Ponty’s interest in practical value and the central considerations of American pragmatism.<sup>20</sup>).

Merleau-Ponty’s fusion of body and mind, of freedom and determinism, re-centers normativity in the psychology of perception and the science of behavior. But what is left out here? One answer is that Merleau-Ponty does not seem to appreciate the diversity of lived experience among human bodies, especially those we can describe, following Garland-Thompson (1996), as “non-normate”: How, for instance, does the ‘disabled’ body experience a world that does not afford it the same bodily opportunities?<sup>21</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the body also seems indifferent to the race or gender of those bodies. Young points out, for instance, that Merleau-Ponty has little to say directly about how gender could inform one’s sense of the body as situated in space (cf. Young 1980). And what might it mean at the level of lived experience to be persistently seen as an object and not the subject of experience?<sup>22</sup> For someone so concerned with materiality, is there not a peculiar blindness in Merleau-Ponty to the material differences among bodies?

These are important questions, though it is equally important that they are not Merleau-Ponty’s. His approach explicitly re-formulates the traditional concept of intentionality as essentially *bodily*—something only appears as a figure against the background of a world disclosed to a bodily ‘subject’—but the importance of the cultural and historical meaning of the body across social categories is not part of that approach.<sup>23</sup> This is a strange lacuna, since Merleau-Ponty also argues that in order to theorize intentionality as the unity of subject and object, I must first grasp the origin of those categories in both individual and cultural history. Yet precisely

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<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Gallagher (2009). This interpretive tradition is initiated by Dreyfus and pursued also, most prominently, in Carman (2008). See also, in this spirit, Dwyer (1990). For a clear line of objection to this approach, see, for instance, Heinämaa (2010).

<sup>21</sup> The literature on Merleau-Pontyan approaches to disability often points both to the limitations and the latent possibilities of Merleau-Ponty’s thought here, given his centering of the body. For a range of approaches to this topic, see Joel M. Reynolds (2017); Weiss (2015); Salamon (2006), and Ahmed (2019).

<sup>22</sup> See Beauvoir 1949/2011 and Fanon, 1952; for further work in this direction, see also Alcoff (2006), Lee (ed.) (2015). See also Leboeuf (this volume), who argues that phenomenologists must not only consider questions of race or gender, but also their intersection.

<sup>23</sup> See, on this point, Irigaray “The Invisible in the Flesh,” in Irigaray (1993). Cf. Chanter (2000).

that concern for origins, when coupled with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the figure/ground structure, may point toward radical possibilities for an answer to the question Merleau-Ponty does not pose. Let me turn to that now.

Consider first that in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty unearths the origins of the subject-object categories in perception itself. When I make contact with the environing world, for instance—when I pick up the water glass or shake another's hand—it is these points of contact that 'teach' me the boundaries of my body. On this view, the lived body is the condition of possibility for my awareness of my body as sheathed in skin. If we broaden our phenomenological scope beyond this immediate moment of contact, however—a moment already richly discussed in the literature on habit and the body-schema<sup>24</sup>—we recognize that even the body sheathed in skin is not purely a physical thing. It is, as Merleau-Ponty puts it in *The Structure of Behavior*, the "acquired dialectical soil" (SB 210) on which an intertwining of nature and culture is preserved. If the object is only an object against the background of bodily subjectivity, in other words, the bodily subject is only a body against the background of a nature intertwined with human history.

If we take Merleau-Ponty's ontological commitments seriously, he is already trying to show how our conceptual categories bear traces of this material history. This must reasonably include categories—of race or gender, sexuality or ability—consigned to the background of that history. Working in this spirit, and at the outermost horizons of phenomenology, Spillers (1987) has argued that what Merleau-Ponty would call "the flesh of history"—though she does not explicitly reference Merleau-Ponty—functions as a "zero-degree of social conceptualization" (Spillers, 1987: 67) in which a dominant culture marks out some bodies as subjects and conceals others under other (racial, gendered) categories.

Yet we do not have to take up this broad historical perspective to bring this point out. Consider that, when I grasp a water glass or the hand of the other and I feel the faint line, that centripetal limit, that distinguishes what is *me* from what is *not* me, it is this limit that Merleau-Ponty argues I idealize as the "subject"- "object" distinction. Yet this is only an idealization, he tells us, since the line 'separating' what is me from not me can shift. Just as my hand held in front of me can function as the perceivable object, and so occupies the objective pole of my perceptual field, so can the car I am driving, the pen I am holding, recoil "on the side of the subject" (Pr. P 5). In this context, we discover both that embodied experience is the origin of the subject-object distinction and an experience within which the clarity of the language of "subject" and "object" begins to break down.

There are two points about the figure-ground structure to be detangled here. One lesson Merleau-Ponty underlines is that the subject/object structure is reversible. Much in the same way that my body can become an object for me—when, for instance I hold my hand out to count the bones that appear as so many ridges under my skin—so can material things (a pen, a notebook) be taken up into the sphere of

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<sup>24</sup> See, for a range of discussions, Moran and Jensen (eds.) (2014); for a conceptual discussion of the "body schema," see Gallagher (1986).



subjectivity; there are resonances in this reversal, as commenters have noted, of a theory of “extended mind.”<sup>25</sup> Yet it is equally important that this reversibility is figured against a far more stubborn background. When I hold my hand in front of me, try as I might to spread my body between the subjective and objective poles to their breaking point, nothing I do can make it so that I not perceive that hand as *belonging* to me in a way that other objects in the perceptual field do not. In the perpetual slippage between my body as the subjective and objective aspects of a unitary experience, what cannot be ‘reduced’ away is my always being located *somewhere*. Merleau-Ponty thus describes embodiment as an original opening or perspective necessarily limned by the indeterminate sphere of “situational spatiality” (PP 102). This space, he argues, functions like a “vague reserve of power” for every perspective my body could take up: It is “the darkness of the theater required for the clarity of the performance, ... the zone of non-being in front of which precise beings, figures, and points can appear” (PP 104.). It is the constitutive background. So, what would it mean to bring *this* background into view?

In one sense, the “vague reserve of power” in Merleau-Ponty’s own work remains underthought. When he refers to it, it is often to say how forcefully it is kept out of view. As he writes in “Film and The New Psychology,” for instance, “the idea we have of the world would be overturned if we could succeed in seeing the intervals between things—the space between the trees on the boulevard—as objects and, inversely, if we saw the things themselves—the trees—as the ground” (SNS 48–9). But he does not reject the possibility of this “overturning.” His interest in Cézanne’s expressivist landscape painting, for instance, is an interest precisely in the fact that Cézanne paints these intervals and reawakens “wonder” at the world.

Perhaps this movement from phenomenology toward painting is too hasty, too evasive of the political dimension of “overturning” the “idea we have of the world.” This is a point Sara Ahmed (2006) explicitly takes up: returning to descriptions of experience in Merleau-Ponty and other classical phenomenological thinkers, for instance, she uncovers where their work is dependent on a background that can remain ‘invisible’ to them only because of the (gendered, racialized) labor performed to keep it out of view. What they do not see, she argues, is, moreover, the way in which that background is a reserve of sedimented values that guide behavior by orienting bodies in “the right way.” Playing around with the phenomenological concept of “orientation,” she finds radical opportunities here for “queering” phenomenology.

In a different spirit, Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) of his experience existing in that stubborn background—that “zone of non-being”—using phenomenological resources to describe the “extraordinarily sterile and arid region” to which Black existence is historically consigned (Fanon, 1952: xii). Picking up on this language, the frameworks of Afro-pessimism and Black nihilism offer radical

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<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, Zavota (2016).



opportunities to think racial identity through the lens of constitutive exclusion<sup>26</sup>—that is, in terms of bodies and ways of being that, thanks to the force of violence and history, are held in the background, in the “reserve of power” of dominant bodily subjects. To return to Merleau-Ponty here, perhaps what he has left unthought is not just the status of “non-normate” bodies, but also how anything like a variable “reserve of power” belongs, as a reserve, only to certain kinds of historically and culturally constituted subjectivities. If Merleau-Ponty’s method is “open” in the way that I have argued, a critical interrogation of the cultural and historical “background”—in the past as well as the present—should be understood as inseparable from the practice of phenomenology itself.

## 6 Conclusion

In this essay, I have chiefly presented Merleau-Ponty as a thinker of ambiguity. The goal has not been simply to translate his work into a more ‘approachable’ idiom, but to understand the philosophical motivations for its difficulty: In order to overcome the roadblocks in any discipline—politics, linguistics, anthropology, physics—it is necessary first to break free from the objectivist prejudice that resolves both the object of inquiry and the process of inquiring onto on one side or another of a dichotomy.

There are countless dichotomies Merleau-Ponty confronts over the course of his work: stimulus and response, cause and effect, body and mind, matter and idea, essence and existence, nature and history. These terms function like puzzle pieces out of which most of philosophy and the natural and human sciences have been constructed. The concern for phenomenology is then that the various positions into which these have been constructed have never been fully adequate to experience itself because the world of experience—whatever its metaphysical status—always escapes or spills over the boundaries that separate those concepts. In one sense, this desire to think beyond dualisms puts Merleau-Ponty in conversation with certain obvious methodological cousins, from the pragmatists to Bergson and Deleuze. But it has also led him beyond the traditional limits of philosophy itself. Expressivist painting, for instance, does not strive to reproduce the sharp lines that separate categories or other abstract concepts but to express their ambiguity. It is important to underline that this is not, for Merleau-Ponty, a way to turn *away* from a more rigorous philosophy. The philosopher must possess both a feeling for ambiguity and a taste for evidence and possess them “*inseparably*” (IPP 17).

The approach, of course, has certain limitations. It forces us to recognize, for instance, that in carving up experience in any way, I cut it off from a

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<sup>26</sup>For an overview of Afro-pessimism, see Gordon et al. (2017); see further discussion in Gordon et al. (2017) and Slaby (2019); on Black nihilism, see esp. Warren (2018).

background—perceptual, historical, personal—that partly constitutes it. A perspective that is not narrowed in some way or another is impossible. But what his dialectical strategy uncovers bit by bit is an ontological category inexpressible in the dualistic conceptual framework of either traditional philosophy or science, one “partway between matter and idea,” accessible only to a method—phenomenology—that gives ultimate status to neither.

Appreciating this last point will prove useful, I hope, in two ways. It is useful, first, for navigating the sometimes overwhelming landscape of Merleau-Pontyan thought. I have drawn out his method, for instance, through the contrast of phenomenology and science, but I have also suggested that we find the same argumentative structure repeated elsewhere: The autonomous subject of classical Liberal politics is an abstract ideal that forgets the materiality of the body that gave rise to it. The adult who conceives of herself as wholly independent misses how she is wrested from her bodily intertwining with the body of the mother only via a developmental process that inserts her into the fabric of culture and history. Even phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty reminds us, cannot be reduced to what Husserl or Heidegger have said of it without reducing its history to a paradox. Second, it helps us appreciate Merleau-Ponty’s commitment to phenomenology, considered as an ongoing process that can return to those phenomena again. Its project is unfinished, and so invites its own critical turn, not because of Merleau-Ponty’s untimely death, but because of the nature of phenomenology itself.

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- PP *Phenomenology of perception*. Trans. Donald Landes. New York: Routledge, 1945/2013.
- Pr.P *The primacy of perception*. Trans. William Cobb. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.
- SNS *Sense and non-sense*. Trans. Hubert Dreyfus and Patricia Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992.
- SB *The structure of behavior*. Trans. A. L. Fisher. Boston: Beacon Press, 1942/1963.
- VI *The visible and the invisible*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964/1968.
- CPM The contemporary philosophical moment. In *The Merleau-Ponty reader*, ed. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1946/2007.
- N *Nature*: Course notes from the Collège de France. Trans. Robert Vallier. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003.
- S *Signs*. Trans. Richard McCleary. Northwestern University Press, 1964.
- IPP In praise of philosophy. In *In praise of philosophy and other essays*. Trans. John Wild. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.

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# Beyond “Dreydegger”: The Future of Anglo-American Existential Phenomenology



Patrick Londen

Although there are many philosophers responsible for introducing phenomenology to philosophy departments in the United States and United Kingdom (e.g. Charles Taylor and Richard Rorty), arguably none has been as broadly influential as Hubert Dreyfus (1929–2017). It may not be too much of an exaggeration to claim (as some have; see Kelly, 2005), that the reading of Heidegger taught in most philosophy departments in the English-speaking world is some descendent of Dreyfus’s Heidegger—or “Dreydegger” as it is sometimes called. This portmanteau is at once a term of endearment and of derision. The union of the two thinkers represents some of the best of Dreyfus’s personal contributions to philosophy: the willingness to look to philosophical texts of the past for insights that can help untangle current theoretical problems; and the boldness in appropriating and reimagining the thinking of one of the most influential thinkers of the past century. But the term also stands for a certain style of reading texts in the history of philosophy that, some argue, gives short shrift to the historical context of the thinking that went into it, the life and legacy of the philosopher who wrote it, and most starkly, the original intentions of the text itself. As Marjorie Grene, a contemporary and colleague, remarked, Dreyfus “purveys *his* Heidegger, not wholly uncritically, but with deep intellectual passion and undoubted pedagogical brilliance to all—hundreds a year—who come to listen, and uses that Heidegger, in turn, for his own philosophical purposes” (Grene, 1976: 33).

I have argued (with Mark Wrathall) that the approach to phenomenology inaugurated by Dreyfus is better described as “Anglo-American Existential Phenomenology” for its fusion of pragmatist and analytic currents in academic philosophy with existential approaches to phenomenology, as found in Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and others (Wrathall & Londen, 2019). We identify a number of core commitments or

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claims that characterize Dreyfus's philosophical teaching and writing, as well as a collection of views put forward by his many collaborators, colleagues, and students.

In this chapter, I build on that proposal by examining the challenges and prospects of this ongoing research program. My goal is not to present a history or a catalogue of this view, or family of views, but to lay out its internal logic, with an eye to the gaps in that logic and areas that stand to benefit from further philosophical investigation.

Let me start by listing these core commitments:

1. The Primacy of Practice thesis.
2. The paradigm for understanding practice in general is highly skilled, fluid coping.
3. Ontology is contained in background practices.
4. A meaningful life comes from taking a stand on one's existence.

Broadly construed, the Primacy of Practice thesis holds that practical engagement, agency, or *doing* is in an important sense more fundamental to human life than theoretical engagement, cognition, or *knowing*. The most basic way we have of finding ourselves in a world, of relating to others and to ourselves, is by *acting* in the world rather than *thinking* about it.

This thesis is a response to a traditional view about the kind of intelligence that characterizes human understanding. A traditional view in the history of philosophy, which Dreyfus, following Heidegger, traces at least back to Descartes, holds that knowledge and cognition are basic to human understanding, and that intelligence is modeled on reflective thought (Heidegger, 1962, 44; Dreyfus, 1972, 147, 1991, 3). Practical engagement, on this view, involves representing both the stuff we engage with and what we are doing in that engagement. This capacity to represent the world and what we are doing is taken to involve our "higher" faculties of reasoning and knowing. Thinking of practical engagement along these lines often leads to explanations of human activity in terms of beliefs, desires, intentions, and causal connections among these states.

The Primacy of Practice thesis seems to invert this relationship. What is basic, Dreyfus argues, is not the experience of being a detached observer reflecting on one's mental states. Rather, we manifest our intelligence primarily in skillfully responding to the world, or as Dreyfus says, in "coping" with it, without that engagement being mediated by mental states that represent the world. As Wrathall puts it, "So rather than starting from cognition as the primary locus of intelligence, and *building out* to an account of action, Dreyfus starts with the premise that skillful activity itself is the consummate form and foundation of human intelligence, and derives an account of cognition from coping" (Wrathall, 2014, 3).

But the Primacy of Practice thesis is not just the inversion of the traditional view. Dreyfus insists that it would be a mistake to construe Heidegger's commitment to the primacy of practice as the claim that the tradition views two ways of relating to objects, one practical and the other theoretical, and that the issue concerns which comes first. "Heidegger does not merely claim that practical activity is primary," Dreyfus explains; "he wants to show that *neither* practical activity *nor* contemplative knowing can be understood as a relation between a self-sufficient subject with

its intentional content and an independent object” (Dreyfus, 2014, 77). The problem with the traditional view is that it regards all manifestations of human intelligence, including skillful practical activity, in terms of the relation between an intellect and a world that is the object of its representations. The Primacy of Practice thesis holds, more precisely, that practical engagement has its own kind of intelligence distinct from that of the intellect and that the *form* or *structure* of intelligibility manifested in practical engagement is basic to human experience, and the form of intelligibility native to cognition is derivative.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis thus assumes that cognition and practical activity, respectively, are embodied in attitudes with distinct forms or structures. The idea is that attitudes like believing and desiring, understood as native to cognition, make recourse to propositions, whereas basic practical engagement in the world is not faithfully expressed in these kinds of attitudes. For example, when I enter a room with a crooked picture frame and am moved to adjust it, we might understand what I am doing in terms of the mental states of belief and desire: I might believe that the frame is crooked and want to fix it. The belief that the picture frame is hanging crooked on the wall involves being in a certain relation to the proposition *that this picture frame is hanging crooked on the wall* or to the meaning of the sentence that expresses that fact. The desire to make the picture frame parallel to the ceiling and floor has a similar propositional structure, in wanting it to be the case *that the picture frame be parallel to the ceiling and floor*. This point about attitudinal structure is that much of our ordinary practical engagement in the world, as we experience that engagement for the most part, is not best captured by these kinds of attitudes. The claim is that when I enter a room with a crooked frame and am moved to adjust it, I don’t need to represent the states of affairs identified in the above-mentioned propositions. The attitude responsible for making the adjustment need not be identified by these propositions and my way of relating to them. Instead, I can be drawn to make the adjustment by my grasp of the whole context in which the frame stands out as crooked and needing adjustment. What I experience in this case is an invitation or a solicitation to make a certain adjustment; that’s what strikes me when I enter the room in this case. This view of practical engagement draws from Heidegger’s conception of understanding as a kind of know-how and his analysis of everyday equipment as ready-to-hand (available for use), Merleau-Ponty’s conception of motor-intentionality, and ecological views in perceptual psychology, especially the concept of affordances developed by James J. Gibson.<sup>2</sup> This kind of attitude, which is operative when things stand out as directly soliciting my engagement with them, has a different form from the attitudes that involve representing states of affairs in

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<sup>1</sup> This follows William Blattner’s formulation: “I have maintained that Heidegger’s early philosophy embraces a thesis that I call “the primacy of practice,” namely, that the intelligence and intelligibility of human life is explained primarily by practice and that the contribution made by cognition is derivative” (Blattner, 2007: 10).

<sup>2</sup> *Being and Time, The Phenomenology of Perception*, Gibson’s *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (1966) and *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1979).

the way sketched out above. The Primacy of Practice thesis is the claim that the former attitude is basic and the latter derivative.

Before raising some questions about this thesis, let me first review the second core commitment, which is closely related to the first. While the Primacy of Practice thesis concerns the relationship between the form of intelligibility manifest in everyday practical engagement and that manifest in the cognitive attitudes, the second core commitment concerns which model of action is taken to be the paradigm for practical engagement. We can contrast Dreyfus's preferred model of action—"coping"—with a more traditional philosophical model of action. We can call the traditional model "deliberative action" (following Wrathall, 2015, 194). On this model, action proceeds from a judgment about what to do, made on the basis of reflection or a process of rational deliberation. Typically, this involves careful consideration of what one wants to do or what one's ends or goals are in acting, as well as the courses of action one believes will satisfy those desires or ends. This process is characterized by the formation of an intention to act which constitutes the agent's reasons for acting and represents the conditions of satisfaction of that activity. This model of action places rationality and reflection at the heart of agency. What it means to act well is to act rationally—that is, to act in light of what one judges to be a good reason to act, and this judgment is epitomized in the conclusions of deliberative reasoning.

By contrast, what Dreyfus identifies with the term "coping" is a form of activity that responds immediately and fluidly to solicitations to act within a given practical context. Everyday activities that rarely issue from acts of rational deliberation, like getting dressed in the morning or navigating a crowded supermarket, fall within this model of action. When we are coping at our best in these activities, we do so without any explicit sense of effort, responding intuitively to the unfolding of circumstances without having to stop and think about our desires or ends, what is needed in order to satisfy these, or otherwise needing to represent the conditions of satisfaction of this activity. "Highly skilled, fluid actions," Wrathall explains, "are experienced, not as the deliberative outcome of my aims and desires and beliefs, but as being drawn out of me directly and spontaneously by the particular features of the situation, without the mediation of occurrent mental or psychological states or acts" (2015, 195).

According to this second core commitment, coping is taken to be the paradigm for practical engagement generally. On this view, action that flows from rational deliberation, far from being exemplary of consummate action, is actually the hallmark of a defective practical engagement. It is only when I am not directly and fluidly responsive to the ways the practical situation solicits me to act that I am forced to consider explicitly what I am doing or trying to do and what reasons I have for so acting. This doesn't mean that fluid coping is rote, mechanical, or insensitive to meaningful changes that affect appropriate responses. On the contrary, fluid coping is meant to embody skills that are highly sensitive to the nuances of the situation. In developing the coping model, Dreyfus drew not only from his reading of German and French phenomenologists, but also from observations and empirical work on expertise: experts, Dreyfus argues, are precisely those who are able to

respond in highly skilled and nuanced ways to a range of situations in their domain of expertise without having to stop and think about what they are doing.<sup>3</sup> Careful deliberation, then, is characteristic of the early stages of learning a skill, when the skill is still new and has yet to be mastered. This model of expertise is meant to carry over into the everyday activities of navigating the world, which we often don’t think of as domains of expertise but with which we are often highly adept. The need to deliberate might arise when a given situation fails to present a clear possibility for action, or when one’s competence in a given domain is not up to what the situation demands. Such cases of “breakdown” often require more explicit consideration of one’s desires, beliefs, and whatever thinking is needed to get back into the flow of action.

These first two core commitments raise a number of questions for this school of thought. A question raised by some of its proponents is whether there really is a clear distinction between cognition and practical activity. Some have critiqued the “unthinking” character of many forms of practical expertise based on empirical evidence (see e.g. Montero, 2013, 2016), or argued that thought itself is a kind of activity that requires phenomenological investigation of the sort that the ordinary habitual activities have received (Braver, 2013). Others argue that cognition enhances our ability to act skillfully in many ways: making judgments, reflecting, and deliberating can reorient us to the practical situation so that we are in a better position to respond fluidly. So this phenomenological approach to action should not construe thought to be inimical to fluid coping.

Another question concerns the nature of the dependence relation asserted in the Primacy of Practice thesis: in what way is cognitive intelligibility *derivative* of practical intelligibility? There are at least two ways to understand this claim. First, we can understand this as the *foundational claim* that the cognitive attitudes are made possible by the practical attitude operative in fluid coping; this is the claim that the cognitive attitudes are grounded in or are explained by practical engagement. Second, we can understand the Primacy of Practice thesis as also including a *genetic claim*—that the cognitive attitudes arise out of a modification of a pre-existing practical attitude; this claim asserts a particular developmental story about the origins of the cognitive attitudes in experience. According to the genetic claim, we first engage in coping, responding immediately and skillfully to the solicitations of the environment. “At some point,” Dreyfus explains, “because of some breakdown, or just through intrinsic interest, I may come to focus on some aspects of this navigational know-how. I may begin to classify things as ‘obstacles’ or ‘facilitations,’ and this will change the way I live in the world” (Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015). By focusing on particular features of the environment, I can isolate these features from the context in which they have their practical significance, transforming my mode of engaging with the world: “analytic attention brings about a radical transformation of the affordances given to absorbed coping. Only then can we have an experience of

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<sup>3</sup>Hubert Dreyfus first developed his account of skill acquisition and expertise working with his brother Stuart, starting with a report for the Air Force Office of Scientific Research at the University of California, Berkeley. See Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1980, 1986, 1987.

objects with properties, about which we can form beliefs, make judgments and justify inferences” (Dreyfus, 2014, 123). While the foundational claim is the one that is central to the Primacy of Practice thesis, the genetic claim is often taken to be included in this thesis because the foundational claim is often justified by appeal to the genetic claim: it’s because propositional attitudes like believing and desiring only arise out of a modification of the pre-existing and ongoing practical attitude that we have support for the claim that those propositional attitudes are grounded in the more basic practical attitude. The problem with this strategy is that defending the Primacy of Practice thesis would then require an account of how exactly those propositional attitudes, or their intentional contents, emerge from skillful coping. Furthermore, even with such an account, there is the additional question of how this genetic account is supposed to support the foundational claim at the core of the Primacy of Practice thesis.<sup>4</sup>

Attempts to justify the foundational claim independently of the genetic claim raise further concerns. One of the reasons offered to think that cognition is a derivative mode of intelligibility is that practical intelligibility is too fine-grained to be expressed in propositional terms: the seasoned boxer, for example, is able to respond to incredibly nuanced and subtle cues in her opponent’s movements that she would not be able to express fully in a declarative sentence. Another putative reason is that fluid coping is too indeterminate to be adequately captured by propositional or sentential attitudes, or by the conceptual apparatus that comes with logical analysis of these attitudes. Finally, the fact that attitudes like belief are taken to be in principle available to explicit thinking is sometimes offered as a reason to think that highly skillful exercises of practical expertise, the nuances of which are often not explicit even to the expert, are thus more basic than those cognitive attitudes. These strategies often appeal to Heidegger’s critique of the pervasiveness of the subject-predicate form of judgment, and the linguistic structures that judgment embodies (Heidegger, 1962, 196). But the model of judgment that is the target of Heidegger’s critique does not match up with more recent conceptions of the propositional and sentential attitudes that do not rely on this predicate logic or instantiation in a natural language sentence (for this argument, see Golob, 2014). There are prominent views on which one can believe things for good reasons “without being able to say what those reasons are” (Harman, 1973, 28) and in which propositions or their equivalents can be as fine-grained or as indeterminate as can be.

Nonetheless, one potential strategy for establishing a dependence relation between basic practical intelligibility and the cognitive attitudes is to point to the apparent logical structure of those attitudes. A feature of mental states is that their representational contents are isolatable from the attitudes that are directed toward

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<sup>4</sup>Dreyfus credits Samuel Todes (1969) for providing an account of the “transformation of the embodied, involved attitude into the disembodied, spectatorial attitude” and notes that Todes is committed to the view that “embodied perception is more basic than disembodied thought” (Dreyfus, 2014, 100–101). Yet Dreyfus also cites Todes’s claim that in these two kinds of attitudes, “We have two irreducibly *different ways* of experiencing things... Neither capacity is derivable from the other” (Todes, 2001, 201; cited in Dreyfus, 2014, 102).

those contents. As Gilbert Harman puts it, “The belief that Benacerraf is wise, the hope that he is wise, the fear that he is wise, and the desire that he be wise are all about Benacerraf, and all represent him as wise. The difference between these mental states is a matter of the difference in the attitude they represent toward Benacerraf’s being wise” (Harman, 1973, 57). Using Merleau-Ponty’s vocabulary of motor intentionality for basic practical intelligibility, Taylor Carman notes, “[W]hereas the propositional contents of cognitive attitudes are detachable or abstractable from the psychological attitudes in which they are embedded, motor-intentional content is constituted by and dependent on the concrete exercises of bodily skill they inform and govern” (Carman, 2013, 175).<sup>5</sup> So while a defining feature of propositionally structured mental states appears to be the separability of those attitudes from their representational content, a defining feature of coping or motor-intentional attitudes is the inseparability of those attitudes from their “content” or meaning. The goal of the Primacy of Practice thesis would be to show not just that thinking about the world requires first engaging in it, but that our ability to treat the content of our acts of thinking and judging as independent from those acts themselves requires identifying that content in terms of the ways we engage in and with the world. If, furthermore, there is reason to doubt that it makes sense to think of a propositional content or thought in the absence of an attitude that is directed toward that content, then there may be room for arguing that we need an account of the constitutive relation between our intentional attitudes and their content. The account of practical, embodied engagement may be able to provide an account of this constitutive relation between intentional attitude and intentional content. But more work would need to be done to show how this constitutive relation applies in the case of practical engagement, and how this informs the relation between intentional attitudes and their contents more generally.<sup>6</sup>

The third core commitment of this school of thought flows from the extension of the model of fluid coping within a particular domain of expertise to practical engagement in a world more generally: just as we can be experts in particular domains like cooking, dancing, or chess, we are generally *already* experts at being in a world.

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<sup>5</sup>Here Carman (2013) is characterizing Sean Kelly’s (2002) strategy, but he does so in order to endorse it. While both Kelly and Carman point to the attitude/content or force/content distinction to argue for the Primacy of Practice thesis, neither clearly distinguishes that argument from those that depend on the claims that propositional attitudes are not fine-grained enough, too determinate, or too tied to explicit thinking to capture basic practical intelligibility.

<sup>6</sup>There is one more central question raised by the first two core commitments of this school of thought, which concerns the coping model specifically: if fluid coping does not require representing success conditions, what establishes the kind of normativity that guides this form of activity? I don’t go into this question here, because this question is treated in more detail than I can here in (Wrathall & Londen, 2019). In brief: Dreyfus appeals to Merleau-Pontyan notion of having maximal grip on the situation (or of forming an optimal whole or Gestalt with the situation, so that solicitations to act are directly met with the appropriate response). Action in this context is guided by a sense of maintaining this optimal self-world gestalt, by way of felt tensions as one deviates from this gestalt. We still need more of the details of this picture to get a better account of the normativity of action on the fluid coping model.



Just as our understanding of what there is and what we are doing in a particular domain consists not in our beliefs about that domain or objects in that domain, but in our ability to navigate that domain skillfully, the same can be said of our understanding of the world and our place in it more generally. Thus the third core commitment: ontology is contained in background practices. If we think of our being-in-the-world as a kind of practical engagement that is in the background of more particular domains of practical engagement, then our understanding of that broadest of domains consists in our ability to navigate skillfully within it. This means being able to tell what ways of engaging are appropriate or inappropriate given the social and normative constraints that structure one's engagement in that domain. Thus background practices (of being a body in a world, or of living with others) manifest and reinforce our understanding of what entities are and the kind of being they have. When I engage in a practice like shopping for groceries, I comport myself in distinctive ways when perusing the aisles, or paying at the register. In doing this, I'm also participating in and reinforcing an ontology—an understanding, for example, of groceries, or of what it means to be a human being. My comportment as I walk down the supermarket aisle expresses my recognition of grocery items as food, just as my interaction with the person at checkout expresses and reinforces my understanding of what it means to be a human being. To understand these categories of entities means seeing how they function within the practices in which they have meaning as the things they are. And like the objects on the supermarket shelves, the ontology of the entities of nature as they are studied by the natural sciences are also wrapped up in our practices. (For a model of natural science that construed its objects as functions of their role in scientific practices, see Haugeland, 2000, 2013).

To say that ontology is “contained” in background practices could entail one of two competing metaphysical theories, namely that background practices *give us access to* the entities we interact with, or that they *constitute* these entities. Thus this third core commitment about ontology makes room for both realist positions (that there are entities that have determinate structures that are independent of us and our practices; see Carman, 2003; Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015) and idealist positions (that entities do not have these independent structures; see Blattner, 1994, 1999).

Whereas there has been a healthy debate on the ontology of the objects of natural science in this school of thought, on the topic of *social* ontology there is still considerable room to grow. Of particular interest would be an ontology of some basic categories of identity, including race, gender, and sexuality. Although examples are often given that make use of the idea of what it means to be a woman, or Japanese vs. American (Dreyfus, 2013), the implications of the larger model of ontology has yet to be explicitly thematized in relation to these social categories. To wit: given that our understanding of what entities *are* is expressed in our ability to navigate practices in which they play a role, what *are* race, gender, or sexual orientation? An articulation of background practices for which race, gender, and sexuality play a shaping role—practices that are surely more pervasive than is typically recognized in much of philosophy—could offer a compelling account of the ontology of these categories. Such an account may prove quite valuable given some of the



alternatives. For example, essentialist views about race and gender often involve the claim that there is a fact of the matter concerning these categories that could be stated and understood independently of the practices in which these categories make sense. On the other hand, social constructivist views are sensitive to the historical and social conditions that give rise to these categories, but these views generally provide accounts of where these categories come from or how they function rather than what these categories *are*.<sup>7</sup> A pragmatist and phenomenologically sensitive view of ontology that views ontological categories as they are expressed in our practices, like that offered by the Dreyfus school, may offer some compelling answers to the relevant ontological question about these social categories, if there are those willing and able to develop these accounts.

The last core commitment concerns the broadly ethical dimension of human life, namely that a meaningful life comes from taking a stand on one’s existence. This claim is broadly ethical in the sense that it concerns how one should live, but the claim springs from the previous core commitment concerning ontology. Many of the background practices that shape our basic understanding of entities and of ourselves are pervasive but are themselves contingent. Since it is in these background practices that we can come to understand what it means to be, say, a human being, this understanding is itself contingent. This reflects the fact that human existence is fundamentally contingent, finite, and vulnerable, that our lives are deeply marked by our mortality and our place in human history, and that our basic frameworks for understanding the world and ourselves can change, fade, or collapse. Recognizing this contingency and vulnerability, in who and what we are, is essential to finding meaning and purpose in our lives. On this view, more traditional sources of meaning that come from things that are eternal and unchanging are ruled out: metaphysical construals of God, the afterlife, the eternal soul, or immutable structures of experience are incompatible with the ways we understand human life from within our contingent practices.<sup>8</sup> One assumption on this view is that the recognition of the contingency and vulnerability of one’s meaning-giving practices can itself be a source of meaning: an individual can sometimes “sense that their culture’s finite understanding of what is meaningful and worthy is not grounded in reason or God but depends on them, so they devote themselves wholeheartedly to articulating the culture’s current understanding of being” all while remaining open to “the vulnerability of their current understanding of being” (Dreyfus, 2017, 70). It’s in part because of the recognition that my basic framework for understanding myself and the world is itself contingent and vulnerable that I can invest that mode of understanding with purpose and meaning. Combined with the previous core commitments and their implications for the contingency of our modes of understanding, this recognition is *required* for finding meaning in life—it’s the only option we have left after alternative sources of meaning have been ruled out.

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<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of these problems for existing views, and a hermeneutic alternative to them that is closely allied with existential phenomenology, see Georgia Warnke (2008).

<sup>8</sup>As Dreyfus says, “our practices can never be grounded in human nature, God’s will, or the structure of rationality” (Dreyfus, 1991, 37).

There are, however, obstacles to our recognizing the contingency of our background practices, obstacles which Dreyfus and others unpack in their readings of Heidegger on technology. Although our sense-making practices have always been historical and contingent, there is a tendency in the history of philosophy to offer an account of all entities that prioritizes a particular understanding of being. “Metaphysics grounds an age,” Heidegger argues, “in that through a specific interpretation of what is and through a specific comprehension of truth it gives to that age the basis upon which it is essentially formed” (Heidegger, 2002, 57). This all-encompassing and exclusive understanding of things and people, what Julian Young (2001) calls “the absolutization of a horizon of disclosure” (37), reaches a particularly condensed form in our current age, defined by our relationship to technology. While the medieval age understood the basic ontological categories in terms of the demand to conform to God’s will, and the modern age understood these in terms of the mastery of nature through reason, the technological age attempts to understand things and people such that they are reliably efficient and predictable, not to promote any particular goal or ideal, but to maximize options for consumption and commodification (Dreyfus, 2017, 185). This offers a particularly potent form of the tendency toward an all-encompassing and exclusive understanding of being, since every attempt to offer an alternative understanding of things and people is construed within technological practices as just another option, implicitly reinforcing technology’s injunction to maximize options. Following his reading of Heidegger, Dreyfus observes that we are “caught in especially dangerous practices, which... produced man only finally to eliminate him, as they more and more nakedly reveal a tendency toward the total ordering of all beings” (Dreyfus, 2017, 162). These dominant background practices “eliminate man” to the extent that they ignore the role that human beings play in establishing those practices in the first place and sustaining them through continued participation in these practices.

If we can break through these dominant modes of thinking and recognize our practices’ finitude and contingency alongside our own, we can derive meaning in our own lives by taking a stand on how each of us fits into our culture. One way to re-engage in practices with a recognition of this contingency is to become what Dreyfus calls a “social virtuoso”—someone who is an expert in the current cultural environment, and who seeks to manifest that culture in a distinctive way and thereby to reinvest in that culture by clarifying its style (Dreyfus, 2017, 40). Or one could become a “cultural master,” a “charismatic figure” who introduces some set of marginal practices into the mainstream culture, effectively changing the mainstream culture itself (Dreyfus, 2017, 41). A marginal practice is a background practice that exists outside or alongside the background practices that dominate the culture and the age. Dreyfus gives examples like the practices of publishing and the independent dissemination of ideas introduced with the printing press at the dawn of the modern age, which began as a marginal practice, and came to define the modern age (Dreyfus, 2017, 52). Dreyfus also points to the little sacred moments, like making the perfect cup of coffee on a winter’s day, that can offer a reprieve from the dominant modes of technological thinking when one approaches routine practices with a

sense of ritual, attentiveness, and care (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011, 255–258). Sacred moments like these do not offer full-fledged alternatives to the dominant modes of thinking and acting, but they offer reprieves that may allow individuals to get a better sense of their relationship to and independence from the dominant background practices.

But, it should be noted, it’s not only the practices which are marginal in relation to the dominant ones, but also importantly the practitioners of those practices who are marginalized within the wider culture. This point is under-developed in the Dreyfus school, and as a result the examples of “marginal practices” tend toward familiar examples from history or toward mundane examples (like making the perfect cup of coffee). But if we think of marginal practices in light of the marginalization of the people who engage in those practices, the discussion is greatly enriched. Consider the practices that emerged within gay communities in response to the AIDS crisis in the U.S. As a result of being excluded from the dominant culture, the health needs of LGBTQ individuals were at first largely ignored even as those same communities were devastated by the AIDS epidemic. In response, organizations like the Gay Men’s Health Crisis emerged to promote practices of safe sex among a community that had been excluded from the “monogamous” sexual and relationship practices extending from the traditional institutions of marriage and the nuclear family to various aspects of personal and professional life. As a result of these efforts, widespread education campaigns emerged to spread a new model of healthy sexual practice—use of condoms, open communication about sexual history, etc.—as an alternative to the dominant practices surrounding monogamy, abstinence, and sexual shame. As one chronicler of this history notes, “gay people invented safe sex” (Crimp, 2004, 64). Not only did these safer-sex practices develop on the margins of dominant sexual practices; they developed precisely because of the marginalization of those who developed them. It is because of this marginalization that genuine alternatives to dominant practices could emerge. While we might find little sacred moments in our everyday activities that can offer sanctuary from the dominance of the current paradigm, the practices developed within marginalized communities have the potential to offer rich and compelling alternatives to the dominant and pervasive practices of the age. It’s within those groups that we can hope to find examples of individual “cultural masters,” or change-making communities, with the resources to forge new possibilities for redirecting or enriching available practices.

My hope in this chapter has been to raise some questions and concerns for the productive research program launched by Dreyfus and championed by his many colleagues and students, in order to identify areas on the horizon that are ripe for further philosophical investigation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Thanks to Jeff Yoshimi and Yvonne Tam for helpful comments on this chapter.

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# *Grenzprobleme* of Phenomenology: Metaphysics



Steven Crowell

In approaching the topic of this volume – “horizons” of phenomenology – my first thought was simply to list the contents of *Husserliana* volume 42, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*. In homage to the great Alan Ginsburg’s dictum – “first thought, best thought” – I provide the short list of those contents here (Husserl, 2014, v–xvii):

1. Phenomenology of the unconscious and the limit-problems of birth, sleep, and death
2. Phenomenology of the Instincts
3. Metaphysics: Monadology, teleology, and philosophical theology
4. Reflections on Ethics

My second thought was to focus on the problems or open questions that have loomed large in my own phenomenological work, a list that partially overlaps with Husserl’s:

1. Phenomenology of reason
2. Ontological pluralism and metaphysics
3. Phenomenology of thinking
4. Second-person phenomenology

But a list is not an essay, and so I will limit myself to a question that arises in reflecting on the relation between phenomenology and metaphysics. Among the various topics mentioned in *Grenzprobleme* under “metaphysics,” I will mostly leave teleology and theology aside and will focus on monadology – more specifically, on how to understand monadology in light of the relation between givenness and being established by the transcendental reduction.

The editor of *Husserliana* 42, Rochus Sowa, distinguishes, within the general heading of *Grenzprobleme*, between “margin” or “limit” problems (*Randprobleme*)

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and “totality” problems (*Ganzheitsprobleme*). The former treat issues – e.g., animal consciousness (animal “monads”), birth, death, and the unconscious – that are *motivated* within the field of direct phenomenological evidence but require “privative” or “constructive” methods for their elucidation. The latter, among which Husserl includes “metaphysical” problems, concern *totalities* such as the community of monads (and its ultimate theological “teleology”) and “the constitution of the world as a totality” (Husserl, 2014, xxiv–xxix). Though the two sorts of *Grenzprobleme* communicate with one another in significant ways, my focus in what follows will be on totality-problems. In my view, Husserl’s (tentative) approach to these totality-problems entangle him in something like Kant’s Antinomy of Reason: the purely dialectical extension of concepts that have validity within the realm of experience to totalities that escape such experience in principle yields equally compelling, yet contradictory, conclusions. I will illustrate this matter (rather than demonstrate it) with reference to Theodore Sider’s physicalistic metaphysics, in which the subjectivity that Husserl takes as metaphysically basic is *eliminated* through such pure argumentation.

Among the many questions that arise along this path, I will focus on whether the transcendental reduction entails that the physical world metaphysically depends on consciousness. My own view – to state this up front – is that it does not, though Husserl seems to have thought that it did. This is why the question of “monadology” is not only a “margin problem” (e.g., animal monads) but also a “totality-problem” for transcendental phenomenology, one horizon for phenomenological investigation. To set the stage, I will first present some reflections on what I take transcendental phenomenology to be (§1), moving from there to a contrast between the resulting “metaphysically neutral” conception of transcendental philosophy and A. D. Smith’s version of a “metaphysically idealist” conception that draws on Husserl’s concept of the monad (§2). I shall then briefly examine three other accounts of the relation between phenomenology and metaphysics, only one of which (I argue) really confronts the kind of metaphysical monadology that we find in the *Grenzprobleme* volume, i.e., Husserl’s own conception of what “metaphysics” is. This, in conclusion, will lead to a warning of problems ahead if we follow Husserl’s lead here (§4).

## 1 Phenomenology and Contemporary Philosophy

Elsewhere, I have argued that what is distinctive of transcendental phenomenology is its focus on normatively structured meaning (Crowell, 2001, 2013). This is what defines, or ought to define, the phenomenological approach to consciousness, being, phenomenality, and other such concepts. For some, this focus on normativity veers away from what is distinctly phenomenological toward concerns more typical of analytic philosophy. Phenomenologists tend to understand such concerns in much the way Husserl understood Paul Natorp’s neo-Kantianism – namely, as motivated by “top down” logical construction, conceptual presuppositions, and dialectical argumentation, rather than by “bottom up” descriptions of how such constructions



are evidentially grounded in the givens of pre-reflective consciousness, the protologic of perceptual experience. But while this “proto” dimension can no doubt be explored phenomenologically, the main *philosophical* reason for doing so, I think, is to better understand intentional – that is, meaningful – experience. I don’t claim that consigning transcendental phenomenology to the “space of meaning” is original with me; on the contrary, my claim is that this is what Husserl had in view in the approach to consciousness made possible by the transcendental reduction. Similarly, I have argued that whatever Heidegger meant by “being,” the phenomenologically defensible takeaway is the distinction between an entity and what it is/means to be that entity.

Today, many Husserlians seem to think that a position is phenomenologically significant only if it “genetically” pursues intentional content back to modes of consciousness that lack normative structure, and many Heideggerians seem to believe that Heidegger’s real phenomenological contribution consists in breaking with transcendental “subjectivism” in favor of an ontology of the “event” (*Ereignis*). I remain unconvinced. As I see it, such proposals are to be evaluated on the basis of whether they are necessary to account for normatively structured meaning (i.e., canonical intentionality, the “as-structure”). *That* is our best point of reference for assessing their validity; in the absence of such a point of reference we are free to accept or reject such proposals, according to our whim, as more or less interesting speculative visions.

This insistence on there being some check on the validity of philosophical claims informs the phenomenological principle of *Evidenz*, and it determines the specific sense in which phenomenology is a *transcendental* philosophy. More pointedly, to retain its distinctive kind of epistemic authority phenomenology cannot abandon its focus on intentional correlation. Phenomenological philosophy is what one gets when one adopts the reflective stance and remains exclusively within it (Crowell, 2001). But even if reflection picks out the *topos* of phenomenological inquiry – namely, *experience* as a descriptively accessible correlation-structure – it is equally important to emphasize that the meaning which inhabits this experience is normatively assessable. For instance, experiencing something *as* a snake, tree, or apple involves conditions of satisfaction that are right there *in* the experience, at stake in it, and the “operation” of such normative conditions must therefore be reflectively *described*; neither logical reconstruction nor neurological or cognitive-scientific explanation can do the job. If this is true, then whatever ground is attained by a phenomenological reflection on conditions of possibility – or, put otherwise, whatever is supposed to elucidate the constitution of meaning – must be something that is responsive to norms *as normative*. This puts strong constraints on what can be invoked in phenomenological philosophy.

Like logic, phenomenology is not restricted to philosophy, transcendental or otherwise. Logic serves as a necessary tool in all domains of inquiry, and phenomenology, understood as careful attention to the way things show up for us in first-person experience, has a similarly essential role to play in any discipline where something like *Evidenz* establishes what that discipline is *about*. Sometimes phenomenology’s contribution is a critical one. For instance, phenomenological reflection can identify

points at which physicalist presuppositions distort the way questions about perceptual content are raised in cognitive psychology. As Husserl said already in relation to the psychology of his time: those who deny the importance of “armchair” descriptions of first-person experience in the study of perception, insisting on nothing but what can be confirmed experimentally, must already appeal to such experience to determine whether their experiments actually have perception in view at all (Husserl, 1983, 181–190). Sometimes the contribution is more positive. Phenomenological reflection on embodiment and temporality contributes directly to work in cognitive science, and phenomenological reflection on empathy and intersubjectivity has significant implications for research in the social and human sciences. But if we are talking about phenomenological *philosophy*, things look different.

Philosophy is a complex practice of inquiry with its own norms and stakes that circumscribe what is at issue in “doing” philosophy. Of course, as a social practice, the norms and stakes of philosophizing are frequently contested and hierarchized in different ways, producing “schools” and “traditions” within a broader field in which at least *some* commitments are shared. Here is not the place to analyze this sort of practice in detail. My point is only that, in contrast to phenomenology’s role in relation to other disciplines, phenomenological *philosophy* must – according to Husserl, and rightly in my view – be pursued within what Husserl called the “*epoché*.”<sup>1</sup> That is, philosophy (which has a stake in “ultimately grounded” truth and so follows the practical norm of “presuppositionlessness”) can borrow nothing from other sciences as premises for its own inquiry. The strength of the reasons for this commitment to the autonomy of philosophy *vis-à-vis* empirical and formal sciences is disputed, but Husserl was quite right to insist on it, as was Heidegger.

Husserl introduced these reasons in his critique of “naturalism,” or better, “scientism.” There need be no necessary conflict between “consciousness” and “nature” in all possible understandings of these terms, but both Husserl and Heidegger objected to the idea that natural science should dictate the terms in which philosophical questions are asked and answered. Instead, philosophical questions must address the field of normatively structured meaning that becomes thematic through the transcendental-phenomenological “reduction.” The questions on the horizon of phenomenology – its “open questions” – are thus the open questions of philosophy generally, questions that *stay* open since there is always more to be said about whatever stage the discussion has reached. But what is distinctive about phenomenological philosophy is that those questions will always entail a stance on the meaning of the reduction. By way of example, I will here explore the relation between transcendental phenomenology and *metaphysics*: Does the reduction permit of a metaphysics carried out entirely on the ground of transcendental phenomenology?

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<sup>1</sup> In a recent Special Issue of *Continental Philosophy Review*, Matthew Burch argues that “applied” phenomenology is necessarily a collaborative and interdisciplinary research program (Burch, 2021). In the same issue, Dan Zahavi argues that in such contexts it is not necessary to invoke the *epoché* and transcendental reduction (Zahavi 2021). However, it is otherwise in phenomenological philosophy.

Both Husserl and Heidegger view phenomenology as a way of investigating the disclosure or constitution of that meaning through which entities are given, rather than as a direct investigation into properties of entities. In contrast, it is often thought that metaphysics investigates the essential properties of entities and provides causal (or otherwise “grounding”) explanations for “what there is.”<sup>2</sup> So the question arises: by what means could phenomenology segue from a transcendental concern with meaning to a determination of the basic properties of entities – i.e., to a metaphysics of what Husserl called “ultimate facta” and Heidegger called “beings as a whole”?<sup>3</sup>

If the positive (empirical) sciences, broadly construed, explore the properties of entities (“empirical realism”), perhaps Kant was right to hold that philosophy has no access (via argument, or some *intuitus originarius*) to more “basic” metaphysical properties of those entities. And if that is so, metaphysics as an inquiry into “ultimate facta” or “beings as a whole” (*ta onta*) is not a cognitively grounded inquiry.<sup>4</sup> When it seeks to establish cognitive *bona fides* by drawing premises from the positive sciences, metaphysics becomes world-view. Theodore Sider’s physicalism is refreshingly direct about this: his argument for being metaphysically realistic about what he calls “structure” concludes by summarizing the “worldview” that results. It consists of an “ideology” (a set of primitive terms), a “fundamental theory phrased in terms of the ideology” (identifying metaphysical laws that are more basic than the laws of physics), and a “metaphysical semantics for nonfundamental discourse” (using the ideology as a translation manual for ordinary linguistic behavior) (Sider, 2011, 292).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The idea that metaphysics deals with “what there is” has a long pedigree, but in recent analytic metaphysics its proximal source is Quine and refers to the “ontological commitments” of a language or theory. In a phenomenological context, this can be confusing since, for Husserl (and, I would argue, for Heidegger also), “ontology” and “metaphysics” are distinct, though related, inquiries. For Husserl, as we shall see, ontology is an eidetic inquiry which deals with possibilities, whereas metaphysics deals with ultimate questions of fact. The analytic literature treats ontology as part of metaphysics, while recognizing that metaphysics is not exhausted by questions about “what there is” – for instance, there are questions about what grounds what, ultimate causes, mereology, teleology, fundamentality, perdurance through change, free will, and so on. See Hofweber (2009). Though many of these topics are also taken up in *Grenzprobleme*, I will focus here exclusively on the question of whether “what there is” metaphysically depends on transcendental subjectivity.

<sup>3</sup>On the conception of metaphysics that is shared, despite significant differences, by Husserl and Heidegger, see Crowell (2018).

<sup>4</sup>Uriah Kriegel (2013) carefully examines the various epistemological options open to “revisionary” metaphysics for establishing the cognitive significance of its theses and finds them all lacking. While he does not consider transcendental phenomenology specifically, I would argue that his critical insights apply to any metaphysics supposedly grounded in the latter.

<sup>5</sup>We shall return to Sider’s “knee-jerk” metaphysical realism (2011, 20) below. In Sider’s terms, Husserl’s idealistic “worldview” would also consist of an ideology (a set of primitive terms provided by monadic structure of consciousness), a fundamental theory (of “constitution” as the metaphysical “law” of monadology), and a metaphysical semantics or translation manual (e.g., recasting ordinary things as “noemata”).

Some contemporary phenomenological metaphysics is pursued in a similar way: just as the physicalist moves from a sense of “physical” established in natural science to a (quasi-) reduction of all phenomena to the physical as their metaphysically “fundamental” reality, some phenomenologists inflate a certain concept that derives from phenomenological reflection on first-person experience (e.g., flesh, desire, *Erscheinung als solches*, possibility, monad, the given/gift) into a fundamental principle of the whole of what is. Such approaches pose a challenge to the claims – in comparison, very modest ones – of transcendental phenomenology, and in my view the Husserl of the *Grenzprobleme* falls into this category. But in what sense, if any, do such phenomenologically crafted concepts retain their meaning and authority when extended to domains where no first-person evidence is possible, to the “actually” infinite totalities – world, God, monad – which Husserl calls “totality-problems”? That, it seems to me, is an open question.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 Transcendental Phenomenology and Metaphysics

I thus arrive at the horizon of phenomenology that I wish to explore in some detail: Is transcendental phenomenology – governed by the reduction, for Husserl, and inseparable from transcendental *idealism* (Husserl, 1989, 419–20) – a *metaphysical* idealism? Does it have metaphysical “implications”? Husserl argued that though phenomenology “excludes every naïve metaphysics that operates with absurd things in themselves,” it “does not exclude metaphysics as such” (Husserl, 1963, 38). But what does Husserl understand by “metaphysics” here?

This question has recently received a good deal of attention, focused on Husserl’s idea that transcendental subjectivity has the character of a “monad” and that the “ground” of the “world” is a “community of monads” which exists “absolutely” and to which the world, with all its “transcendent realities” is “relative.”<sup>7</sup> A clear statement is found in *Cartesian Meditations* where, after describing the ego as both a “pole of identity” and as a “substrate of habitualities,” Husserl proposes to call the “ego taken in full concreteness” by “the Leibnizian name: monad.” He continues:

The ego can be concrete only in the flowing multiformity of his intentional life, along with the objects meant – and in some cases constituted as existent for him – in that life. Manifestly, in the case of an object so constituted, its abiding existence and being-thus are a correlate of the habituality constituted in the ego-pole himself by virtue of his position-taking (Husserl, 1969, 67–68)

<sup>6</sup>Of course, there are approaches to metaphysics that take direct aim at phenomenology – for instance, so-called “speculative realism,” which proceeds by adopting the logico-mathematical idea of “possible worlds.” And many versions of “new realism” proceed on phenomenological grounds but reject Husserl’s idealism: for instance, Gabriel (2016), Figal (2010), and Keiling (2015). Here, however, my focus will be restricted to the question of what Husserl’s own metaphysical “idealism” is and whether it can be defended phenomenologically.

<sup>7</sup>For some critical discussion, see Mertens (2000), Tengelyi (2014), Loidolt (2015), De Palma (2015), Loidolt (2017), Jansen (2017), Zahavi (2017), De Santis (2018).

So the monad is neither simply a “pole of identity” nor the stream of conscious experiences as such, but that stream insofar as it involves a form of self-awareness that can “habitualize” itself into the constitution of “existent” (transcendent) objects. This, in turn, as Husserl writes later in the same text, is possible only if the monad “is in communion with others like himself: a member of a community of monads” without which there can be no *objective* “world of experience.” Such communion, established by way of empathy, replaces Leibniz’s pre-established harmony: Husserl argues that because “communion” between monads is in principle unlimited, “there can exist only a single community of monads” and “only one objective world” (1969, 139–40).

All this raises as many questions as it answers, of course, so to make a start toward clarifying the picture, I will here focus on a single strand of the monadology issue: Within transcendental idealism, what does it mean to say that the world *depends* on consciousness?

Now, this question is not unambiguous, and the ambiguity turns on the meaning of the phenomenological reduction. In *Ideas I* (1913) Husserl introduced the reduction in the context of an “epistemological” project involving a “Cartesian” search for a “presuppositionless” beginning in philosophical inquiry (Husserl, 1983, 66). The ordinary realism of the natural attitude – roughly, the view that the world and the things in it are simply “there” as they present themselves in experience and serve as the ground of all cognitive and practical projects – is to be “suspended” (*epoché*) in order to reflect “critically” on the perceptual and other conscious acts in which worldly things are given *as* the things they are. These acts, responsive to norms of validity, enable experiences to be “mutually legitimated or corrected by means of each other” instead of merely “following upon” or subjectively “replacing” one another (Husserl, 1965, 87). The “transcendental reduction,” then, is the reflective method that discloses the correlation between conscious acts and their intentional objects (“noemata”) and the syntheses of identification in which the meaning of those objects is “constituted.” Husserl calls this correlation-structure “absolute consciousness,” and I will argue that this “absolute” should be understood in a *metaphysically neutral* way.

What do I mean by “metaphysical neutrality”? The *epoché* precludes us from “positing” the existence of the objects that show up in the natural attitude; that is, “we make no use” of their supposed “valid being” in any kind of philosophical explanation (Husserl, 1983, 61). Of course, we do not *deny* their existence either; rather, they are reflected upon solely as “unities of meaning” (Husserl, 1983, 128) correlated with specific (types of) acts of consciousness united with one another in the unity of one stream of consciousness by means of temporal and “founding” relations. According to Husserl, it is exclusively within this correlational unity of consciousness that the *Evidenz* supporting all natural-attitude positing of being can be critically assessed for its scope and adequacy. The transcendental-phenomenological concern, in other words, is not whether this tree or this state of affairs actually exists; rather, it is solely the “epistemological” one of identifying the essential *evidential* demands involved in positing the tree or state of affairs *as* what it is,

including its claim to exist.<sup>8</sup> If metaphysics has to do with claims about “what there is,” then transcendental phenomenology is metaphysically neutral in the sense that it makes *no* such claims but only claims about how things present themselves evidentially as being. Dan Zahavi summarizes the view: “On such a reading” – he is referring to David Carr’s – “all that transcendental subjectivity can be said to be constituting is the meaning of the world and not its being” (Zahavi, 2010, 78).

But what does “being” mean here? Husserl’s account of the reduction in *Ideas I* might appear to undermine the metaphysically neutral interpretation. A key text in this connection is §44 of *Ideas*, where Husserl argues for the “merely phenomenal being of something transcendent” (here, empirical reality) and the “absolute being of something immanent” (i.e., consciousness). What does “absolute being” mean?

Husserl initially approaches the term by considering the different kinds of *Evidenz* in which consciousness and transcendent reality are given.<sup>9</sup> A transcendent thing is given in “profiles” that always entail more than what is sensuously given; hence, the evidence for its existence is always “presumptive.” In contrast, consciousness or immanent being, grasped in the evidence of reflection, is not presumptive. Consciousness is not “adumbrated” (Husserl, 1983, 96), so the *existence* of consciousness is “apodictically” given in any genuine grasp of one of its moments, even though the temporally structured stream of consciousness as a *whole* can no more be given adequately than can a transcendent thing. So consciousness is absolute being in the sense that the validity of its claim to exist now does not depend on the further course of experience. On this picture, transcendental phenomenology can remain metaphysically neutral because, in considering this kind of evidence, it can *acknowledge* the distinctive way in which the existence of consciousness is given without, however, making any use of it in *explaining* the (metaphysical) nature of things. Phenomenology is not in the business of explaining the nature of things; it is transcendental clarification of the meaning and validity in which things of whatever sort, including consciousness itself, are given. Transcendental idealism is just the recognition of this (asymmetrical) correlation structure that underlies the realism of the natural attitude: “transcendental idealism contains natural realism entirely within itself” (Husserl, 1962, 254).

However, the language of §44 might be read in a more metaphysical way when Husserl later seems to suggest that transcendent reality is not merely “relative” to consciousness in the sense that its meaning and validity is given through (constituted in) consciousness, but rather *depends* on consciousness *for its existence*.

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<sup>8</sup>This locates phenomenology in the neighborhood of verificationism, and A. D. Smith interprets Husserl’s metaphysical idealism as requiring an “ideal verificationism” (2003, 186). However, if one sets aside Husserl’s own metaphysical ambitions, phenomenological verificationism might support a “deflationary” understanding of metaphysics as “descriptive” rather than “revisionary,” akin to that proposed by Amie Thomasson (2015).

<sup>9</sup>Indeed, in copy A Husserl changes “Being” to “Givenness” in the title of the section. However, he also adds a marginal note: “None of §44 can be used!” It is interesting to observe that as late as the 1950s Heidegger still urges that historical “account-settlers” might find “much to consider” in “comparing” *Ideas* §44 with §44 of *Being and Time* (on truth as disclosedness), though the numerical overlap is “entirely coincidental” (Heidegger 2020, 12).



Reality is “according to its sense, a merely intentional being” which can be “determined [...] only as something identical belonging to motivated multiplicities of appearances: beyond that it is nothing.” Indeed, “in the absolute sense [reality] is nothing at all” (Husserl, 1983, 112–13). Further, Husserl argues that “no real being [...] is necessary to the being of consciousness itself” (1983, 110).

The metaphysical picture would then be this: through the reduction I grasp that consciousness exists necessarily, while its intentional correlates are *phenomena bene fundata* – posits whose existence has continually demonstrated itself in the evidence of ongoing experience, and in relation to which nothing currently speaks against the expectation of their continued existence. On such a reading, consciousness is a “monadic unity” with its own “thoroughly peculiar ‘forms’,” a unity that “in itself has nothing at all to do with nature, with space and time or substantiality and causality” (Husserl, 1965, 108). Worldly things, in contrast, as unities grounded in syntheses of identification (the intuitive fulfillment of intentional implications), depend on consciousness, *cannot exist* without their metaphysical ground. If “absolute” means metaphysically *fundamental*, transcendental idealism would be a metaphysical idealism.

The ambiguity in §44 is incorporated into Husserl’s conception of consciousness as a “monadic unity.” In *Philosophy as Rigorous Science* Husserl introduced the term in a metaphysically neutral way, namely, by highlighting two distinct modes of givenness. The monad’s unity is provided by *normative* forms or laws that enable its experiences to “correct” or “refute” one another rather than simply replace one another in time, whereas “nature” or transcendent reality is governed by non-normative relations of space and time, substantiality and causality. Here, monadic unity is “Leibnizian” only in the sense that normative laws do not permit admixture with non-normative laws of “nature” – and not in the sense that only monads truly *exist* as, e.g., “metaphysical points.”<sup>10</sup> As Husserl says in the *Crisis*, consciousness is a realm of “mental [*geistige*] processes” – not psychological (*psyche*) but normative, “minded” – that “constitute forms of meaning [...] entirely out of mental material.” But by this time a hint of Husserl’s metaphysical idealism is unmistakable: The monad is “completely closed off within itself, existing in its own way” (Husserl, 1970, 112). This way of existing allows for “communalization;” indeed, the individual monad “functions constitutively only within intersubjectivity” (1970, 172). That is, the “world” as a *valid* “meaning-construct [*Sinngebilde*]” is grounded in a *community* of monads (1970, 113). As Daniele De Santis (2018) has shown, in *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl uses this transcendental premise to argue to a “metaphysical result [*Ergebnis*]” concerning one of the *Grenzprobleme*’s “totality-problems” – namely, that there can be only one actual world.

Still, by itself such a metaphysical “result” does not directly address the question of whether the *world itself* – and everything in it – “depends” on the monadic community for *its* existence. The claim that it does is at the heart of A. D. Smith’s

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<sup>10</sup>On the Leibniz-Husserl relation, see the essays in Cristin (2000). Also Mertens (2000), and Pradelle (2007).



metaphysical reading of transcendental idealism. Smith argues that, for Husserl, consciousness – the monad, or rather, the monadic community – exists absolutely and physical (transcendent) things *supervene* on consciousness. Given the right concatenations of acts, a physical world *must* exist as the noematic correlate of consciousness, but physical things can no more exist apart from those acts (their “supervenience base”) than a game of rugby can exist without its supervenience base in “human behavior, intentions, etc.” (Smith, 2003, 184). The supervenience relation is asymmetrical, since all sorts of human behavior can exist without a rugby game existing – or, more to the Husserlian point, all sorts of concatenations of consciousness can exist (e.g., ones in which, as Husserl imagines, the ongoing course of experience allowed for no syntheses of identification) without a physical world existing. Thus the *existence* of the latter depends on the existence of consciousness: “physical facts are ‘nothing over and above’ experiential facts” (Smith, 2003, 185).

To pose the question of metaphysical dependence more precisely, I will look at three recent papers which examine Husserl’s transcendental idealism, focusing on how each construes the dependence of reality on consciousness. I choose these papers because they neatly present the dialectic in Husserl’s thinking about metaphysics, though they by no means exhaust their authors’ views on the topic. Each author embraces the claim that Husserl’s idealism is consistent with empirical realism, and each recognizes the broadly verificationist role of reflection on intentional correlation (concerned with the “meaning and validity” in which things are posited, rather than with actually positing anything). Further, all three seem *primarily* interested in showing that transcendental idealism is not wedded to its Cartesian beginnings: the constitution of “actual reality” requires that transcendental subjectivity be embodied, embedded, and intersubjective, that it “realize itself” along with the world that it constitutes.<sup>11</sup> But this argument leaves the metaphysical dependence question open: Rudolf Bernet defends something quite close to a metaphysically neutral conception of Husserl’s idealism. Against this, Dan Zahavi argues that transcendental idealism does have metaphysical *implications*, namely, of an “anti-realist” sort. Ullrich Melle, finally, poses the dependence question in the context of

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<sup>11</sup> In the *Crisis* Husserl argued that his original way of motivating the reduction in *Ideas I* by “reflectively engrossing oneself in the Cartesian *epoché* of the *Meditations*” had the “shortcoming” that it “brings the ego into view as *apparently* [my emphasis] empty of content” (Husserl 1970, 155). As our authors emphasize, Husserl’s mature view acknowledges that constitution of the world is the achievement of transcendental intersubjectivity (or a community of monads) bound together through empathy, and so through a necessary embodiment. Nevertheless, Husserl retains a certain priority for the “indeclinable” and “primal ‘I’” which is “actually called ‘I’ only by equivocation,” whose “transcendental life” involves “making itself declinable,” whereby “it constitutes transcendental intersubjectivity” (1970, 184-85). The point of mentioning these perplexing aspects of Husserl’s transcendental idealism is this: even granting that a real world requires intersubjective constitution, the “fundamental” phenomenological (and eventually, metaphysical) ground is the individual monad.

what *Husserl himself* understood by “metaphysics.”<sup>12</sup> If Melle’s picture captures what Husserl thought transcendental idealism entails, I suggest that we not follow him. Though I will not be able to provide the full argument here, it seems to me that a metaphysical understanding of monadology is not *entailed* by the transcendental reduction but rests on *arguments* that are, just as in Kant, antinomical.<sup>13</sup>

### 3 Three Approaches to Transcendental Idealism

Rudolf Bernet characterizes Husserl’s transcendental idealism as an “epistemological type of idealism that is exclusively concerned with the relationship between knowing and the known” (Bernet, 2004, 10), but he marshals Husserl’s revisions to the Sixth Logical Investigation, composed around the time of *Ideas I*, to argue for an idealism that owes more to Leibniz than to Descartes and is “less problematic” than the one found in *Ideas I* (2004, 4). While Bernet does discuss the dependence of empirical reality on consciousness, his real concern is to show that consciousness is not a *metaphysical* absolute. Properly understood, transcendental idealism will “no longer have any reason” to take the “dependence” of things on consciousness to entail the *independence* of consciousness from its “intentional objects.” A consciousness that can constitute an actual world must belong to that world, must “be ‘*empirical*’ in a sense that would not run counter to its purity” under the reduction (2004, 16). The crux of his analysis is found in the distinctions Husserl draws between ideal possibility, real possibility, and actuality (*Wirklichkeit*).

For present purposes, the distinction between “ideal” possibility and “real” possibility concerns *empirical* objects, not mathematical or logical “idealities.” An ideally possible object (e.g., a centaur) is one that can be imagined quite apart from any connection with the motivated course of our actual world-experience. A real

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<sup>12</sup>Husserl uses the term “metaphysics” differently in different contexts, and we cannot sort them out here. Thus both Bernet and Zahavi can be said to treat some aspects of what Husserl understood by the term. But only Melle’s approach deals with the kind of “totality-problems” which were the ultimate horizon of Husserl’s metaphysics. Zahavi (2017, 65), for instance, lists five senses of metaphysics, one of which is “a speculatively constructed philosophical system dealing with the ‘highest’ and ‘ultimate’ questions concerning the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, etc.” Leaving aside the issue of whether Husserl’s ultimate position is “speculative” (in the phenomenologically “bad” sense, as I will argue it is), these are surely questions that Husserl understood as on the horizon of transcendental phenomenology. But Zahavi limits his concern to another of these senses, namely, “the issue of whether reality is mind-dependent or not.” Following Melle, I will argue that for Husserl himself the answer to this question (as a metaphysical rather than a transcendental one) is not decideable in abstraction from his “speculatively” constructed monadology.

<sup>13</sup>Kant, of course, attempted to get around the limits placed on metaphysics by the antinomy of reason with an appeal to the demands of “pure practical reason” and its “postulates.” Husserl makes a similar attempt at a “rational faith” grounded in an “*absolutes Sollen*” (eg., Husserl 2014, 317), which provides another path from transcendental “monadology” to a metaphysical teleology and theology. Though I won’t go into that aspect of Husserl’s metaphysics here, I find it unconvincing for reasons that are extensively, if uncharitably, articulated by De Palma (2019).

possibility, in contrast, is motivated; it is one “for which something makes a case,” one that *could* “fit in with [our actual] realm of reality,” or world. For instance, it is really possible that, when I cut holes in the walls and ceiling of my study, I will find wooden joists and studs. Such objects, “were they actually given,” would “be integrated harmoniously into the actual reality that is the field of our common experience”; it is *motivated* by our previous experience (Bernet, 2004, 8). A real possibility becomes an “actual reality” through its “realization” – that is, through the “accomplishment of an act of [intuitive] fulfillment” (2004, 8). A purely “ontological” (eidetic) approach to possibility, such as Husserl pursued in the *Logical Investigations*, cannot account for “actual” being, but a “phenomenological” approach, which appeals to the criterion of intuitive fulfillment, can (2004, 4).<sup>14</sup> And for Bernet, “it goes without saying” that this account of actuality “is a phenomenological thesis not a metaphysical one” (2004, 9). What are the implications of this approach for the question of whether actual things *depend* on consciousness for their existence?

First, to be actual is to be more than just a “particular case of the essence of reality,” since this is still only real possibility; the actuality of an object “entirely depends on the intuitive and actual givenness of this object” (2004, 10). But if, as Husserl claims, no series of perceptions can “verify the actual existence of a thing,” how *can* such a thing be distinguished from real possibility? Bernet’s answer is two-fold. On the one hand, establishing something as actual through the “realization” of a prior (real) possibility depends on a consciousness that itself “actually exists” (2004, 11). Such a consciousness is worldly in the sense that it is the course of its own previous experience that provides the “norm” of “adequate knowledge” governing the possible validity of its anticipation. But second, this norm is “not imposed from the outside”; rather, it is the (actual) *thing itself* (2004, 15) – a regulative idea or “Idea in the Kantian sense” – a teleological concept that depends on infinitizing the contingent, empirical way things show up for us.<sup>15</sup> Thus the “actual reality of the world depends *phenomenologically* on the actual reality of consciousness,” i.e., “on the actual course of pure experience” (2004, 12–13).

An “empirical” but “pure” consciousness is thus a *Faktum*; consciousness has the “necessity of a fact” (Husserl, 1983, 103). Husserl explains that while an eidetic (rational) ontology contains the grounds for a *possible* nature, it contains “nothing of a factic one,” and so “facticity is not the terrain of phenomenology and logic [i.e.,

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<sup>14</sup>Ontology is an eidetic investigation which takes the “world” into account as a possible “contentful” (empirical) manifold governed by “consistency and compossibility”; that is, ontology “constructs the *logos* of a possible world.” All such possible worlds, including the actual world, are “real” in Husserl’s sense. What makes the actual world actual is not a distinction in ontological status but rather the fact that, if we are to discover its *logos*, we must “begin from the factically empirical,” consult what is intuitively given (Husserl 1959, 213–14). This “facticity” will become the terrain of Husserl’s metaphysics, but it follows that such metaphysics can only rest on a *conditional* apriori: if the factic course of experience continues to validate itself, then its apriori world-ontology must hold. Hence metaphysics cannot be purely eidetic – a mere “doctrine of categories” – and this raises questions about its cognitive ground.

<sup>15</sup>On the infinite in Husserl’s metaphysics, see Tengelyi (2014, 534–548).

ontology] but of *metaphysics*” (Husserl, 1956, 394). And, he continues, “the miracle here is rationality”: since there is no *eidetic necessity* that the course of conscious experience allow for a strict natural science, the “miracle” – from the transcendental point of view – is that “a correlation obtains between factic consciousness and empirical science” in the actual world, a point registered in the *conditional* character of the phenomenological apriori (see fn 14).

Bernet cites Husserl to the effect that “it is inconceivable that a thing would exist” without this “relation to the *hic et nunc*” of “the one who actually determines it,” but he interprets this to mean that such situatedness is necessary for any epistemic *verification* of actuality (Bernet, 2004, 17; Husserl, 2002b, 271). He thereby reproduces the ambiguity surrounding the *metaphysical* dependence question we encountered in §44. Bernet does not leave it at that, however. He concludes by distinguishing between idealism in a “broad” sense – the *ontological* thesis of a “necessary correlation between the possibility of objects and the possibility of an intuitive consciousness of such objects” – and idealism in a “strict” sense, which “goes much further” (2004, 19). This latter is *metaphysical* in the sense just elucidated, having to do with the facticity of the world. It “makes claims about ‘things in themselves’” and “it makes their actual existence depend on the actual existence of embodied subjects” (2004, 19). If it is “banal” (2004, 3) to say that “there are no thinkable things without a consciousness that thinks them,” it is far from banal to say that “no transcendent empirical things can exist without there existing embodied subjects that have an actual [...] experience of them” (2004, 19).

In the end, then, does Bernet think that transcendental phenomenology entails this “strict” or metaphysical form of idealism? It is hard to tell. On the one hand, he notes that when Husserl claims that “the meaning of the being of the object depends on its intuitive givenness,” this promotes “consciousness to the role of supreme judge of all issues concerning being” (Bernet, 2004, 20). On its own, however, this says nothing about existence-dependence. Husserl’s account of how the *meaning* of “actual” being depends on consciousness is easily understood in metaphysically neutral terms. On the other hand, Bernet also notes that Husserl “undoubtedly set about bringing to light a dependence of the nature of objects and of their modes of being on acts of intuitive consciousness,” and he (rightly) argues that this sort of “transcendental idealism” is *inseparable* “from Husserl’s phenomenology” (2004, 20). But to say that the “nature” (essence) and “modes” of being (ontic modalities) of objects depend on intuitive consciousness just restates the thesis of “broad” ontological idealism, underwritten by the reduction as our methodological access to all such meaningful distinctions. It need not entail metaphysical dependence. Indeed, Bernet concludes by reminding us that transcendental idealism is grounded in Husserl’s “phenomenology of knowledge,” and he warns that “every extrapolation of the meaning of Husserlian idealism beyond the limits” of this epistemological approach “is exposed to the worst sorts of misunderstandings” (2004, 20). To my ears, this sounds like a version of metaphysically neutral transcendental phenomenology.

But if transcendental idealism is not directly a metaphysical idealism – i.e., is concerned with meaning and validity rather than with positing an absolute metaphysical *Faktum* or ground – might it nevertheless have metaphysical *implications*?

Dan Zahavi answers this question affirmatively, so we might wonder whether the existential dependence of real things on consciousness is among those implications.

Like Bernet, Zahavi seems primarily concerned to undermine the view that transcendental subjectivity is a Cartesian consciousness cut off from the world; and, like Bernet but against Dermot Moran and A. D. Smith, he argues that transcendental idealism is not a “speculative” and “baroque” form of “metaphysical” idealism (Zahavi, 2010, 75). Finally, again like Bernet, the position he defends is transcendental idealism in a “fundamentally and essentially new sense,” as Husserl put it, “the proof [of which] is phenomenology itself” (Husserl, 1969, 86; quoted in Zahavi, 2010, 76). Such an idealism aims “not to offer a metaphysical account of reality, but to justify and understand what it means for the world to count as real and objective;” that is, it aims to *elucidate* “mundane transcendence through a systematic disclosure of constituting intentionality” (2010, 77). Thus, for Zahavi, the phenomenological correlation, revealed by the reduction, is basic; the necessity of such correlation, and any “dependence” of things on consciousness that follows from it, does not entail “metaphysical dependence” (2010, 78).

At the same time, Zahavi rejects the metaphysically neutral interpretation of the reduction, according to which phenomenology excludes “the actual existence of the world from consideration” in order to focus on its “sense or meaning” (Zahavi, 2010, 78). This won’t do, because it would mean that transcendental phenomenology is “in principle compatible with a variety of metaphysical views, including metaphysical realism or subjective idealism” (2010, 78) – and Zahavi is keen to show that transcendental phenomenology is incompatible with metaphysical realism. Hence the dependence question, signaled in the title of his paper, looms large: in what sense is consciousness “absolute” such that transcendent things, as metaphysical realism understands them, could not exist without consciousness?

Beginning with metaphysical idealist interpretations such as Smith’s, Zahavi examines and dismisses several suggestions for what the “dependence” of things on consciousness might mean. Causal dependence is dismissed, since this would turn “transcendental subjectivity” – the embodied, embedded, intersubjective “realization” of “pure” consciousness, as Bernet put it – into a “prime mover” in direct competition with empirical cosmological theories like the Big Bang. Supervenience is also dismissed, since it suggests a phenomenalism that Husserl explicitly rejects (Zahavi, 2010, 79–80).<sup>16</sup> Against such views, Zahavi holds that “Husserl’s decisive point” is that “reality, far from being some brute fact that is detached from every context of experience and from every conceptual framework is rather a system of

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<sup>16</sup>Zahavi also briefly considers whether the relation might be one of *Fundierung*, which he seems to identify with supervenience, arguing that this would entail a form of “panpsychism” (2010, 80). While I do think that panpsychism might follow if *Fundierung* were a relation of metaphysical grounding – which, while not necessarily a causal relation, operates on the same “ontic” explanatory level as causality – I would argue that phenomenological founding is a transcendental relation and is the best candidate for clarifying the kind of dependence of transcendent things on consciousness that Husserl has in view. See Crowell (2021).

validity and meaning which needs subjectivity [...] if it is to manifest and articulate itself" (2010, 80).

One might think, however, that this changes the subject. Of course – one might say – if reality is understood as a “system of validity and meaning,” it can *show itself* only in a correlational context. But this seems to get us no further than real possibility in Bernet’s sense. It does not justify Husserl’s apparently stronger claim (Husserl, 1983, 129), referenced by Zahavi, that “reality depends on subjectivity” because “it is just as nonsensical to speak of an absolute mind-independent reality as it is to speak of a circular square” (Zahavi, 2010, 80). Zahavi understands this to mean that “an objectivistic interpretation of [the world’s] ontological status” must be rejected on phenomenological grounds. Husserl’s idealism thus “redeem[s] rather than renounce[s] the realism of the natural attitude” (2010, 80). But – such a realist might ask – doesn’t the natural attitude understand the existence of the things it deals with precisely as metaphysically (or “ontologically”) mind-independent?<sup>17</sup>

Zahavi’s position on the absolute character of consciousness, and so also on the meaning of Husserl’s idealism, involves accepting the sort of argument pursued by Bernet – “no object is thinkable as *actual* without an actual subjectivity capable of realizing such an object in actual cognition” (Husserl, 2002a, 277; cited in Zahavi, 2010, 82) – and also involves formulating the precise sense in which the relation between subject and object is asymmetrical: “the absoluteness that Husserl ascribes to subjectivity pertains to its manifestness”; that is, as “self-manifesting or self-constituting” it possesses “something that all objects per definition lack.” Objects “are relative and dependent” *in the sense that* “the condition for the appearance of any object is located outside that object itself” (2010, 83). So far, this is entirely compatible with a metaphysically neutral interpretation of the reduction. But further, Zahavi affirms that transcendental idealism “doesn’t deny the existence of mind-independent objects in the uncontroversial sense of empirical realism but only in the controversial sense of metaphysical realism” (2010, 84). So to address the *metaphysical* dependence question it is necessary to understand what metaphysical realism is.

As a first approximation, Zahavi describes it as the view that a transcendent reality “exists independently of any thought or experience” we may have of it (2010, 85). This could mean two things: first, that it is possible for something to exist that in principle precludes *all* possibility of our experiencing it, a Kantian *Ding an sich*. Husserl, Bernet, and Zahavi all reject this view.<sup>18</sup> Second, it might mean that a given transcendent thing, correlated to a specific veridical act (or series of acts), exists whether or not such acts take place. On either meaning, the metaphysical realist holds that if we want to grasp reality, we need to “strip away the subjective” from our experience of the world – all the ways in which “it happens to present itself to us human beings” (2010, 85). Thus Zahavi seems to have in mind a view like

<sup>17</sup>As we shall see, Ullrich Melle argues that precisely because Husserl’s idealism is metaphysical, it poses a direct challenge to the realism of the natural attitude.

<sup>18</sup>There is much to be said about this matter, but we will have to leave it aside here. For arguments against Husserl’s thesis, see Yoshimi (2015).



Theodore Sider's, who aims, by means of an artificial language ("ontologese"), to theorize the (metaphysically) "real," abandoning both experience and "conceptual frameworks" other than physics, our "best empirical theory" about "what is."

Sider expresses incredulity at the thought that subjectivity could play a role in metaphysics (Sider, 2011, 18). Further, "knee-jerk realism requires that the physical description of reality be objectively privileged" because, he argues, "physical notions carve [nature; what is] at the joints" (2011, 20). In phenomenological terms, Sider is convinced that what Husserl calls the "physicalistic abstraction" from all subjectivity, which defines the "naturalistic attitude" (Husserl, 1989, 27–29), leaves nothing metaphysically *fundamental* out of account. According to Zahavi, Husserl's transcendental idealism "amounts to a rejection" of this sort of "metaphysical realism" (2010, 85). Hence it is not metaphysically neutral because the reduction has this *negative* metaphysical implication: a mind-independent physical world, as Sider understands it, is just as "nonsensical" as a "round square." But is it really?

Zahavi's argument that it hinges on the claim that transcendental idealism is "defined" by its "deliberate blurring of the distinction between ontology and epistemology": the "meaning" of being, existence, actuality, and so on is defined by reflecting on how that meaning is given and constituted. But why should this entail that a physical world metaphysically independent of consciousness cannot exist? Zahavi admits that the "deliberate blurring" in question might appear to yield "a rather deflationary definition" of idealism (Zahavi, 2010, 85), but if it is a form of deflationary ontology, then it precisely leaves the existence-dependence question out of account, or else denies that it is meaningful. Amie Thomasson, for instance, sees Husserl as embracing a "meta-ontological deflationism" that rejects "substantive" metaphysical questions, such as existential dependence, precisely *because* there is "no sense to 'ontological' questions in which they cannot be answered easily, by perfectly ordinary standards" (Thomasson, 2015, 295–317).<sup>19</sup> Along these lines, as we saw, Zahavi explicitly denies that Husserl's idealism entails that "consciousness is the metaphysical origin or source of reality." But he also admits that, as a philological matter, "Husserl might indeed consider consciousness as a necessary condition for reality" and that, if he does, "Smith is right in saying that for Husserl nothing would exist in the absence of consciousness" (Zahavi, 2010, 86). But if that is truly Husserl's position – that is, if, in contrast to the view of idealism Zahavi himself defends, Husserl's *own* conception of idealism includes "a theoretical investigation of the fundamental building blocks, of the basic 'stuff' of reality" (Zahavi, 2019, 51) – then it *is* a metaphysical idealism. There would be something metaphysically impossible (and not just "nonsensical" in the deflationary sense) in the very idea of a purely physical world. Husserl's idealism would be the mirror image of Sider's physicalist metaphysics: according to both, but by appeal to precisely opposed metaphysical arguments, phenomenal beings (ordinary tables, artworks, and trees) do not metaphysically "exist."

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<sup>19</sup> Identifying what these standards are is not necessarily "easy," but there is nothing metaphysically arcane about them.



I will argue that Ullrich Melle is right to find such a metaphysical view on the horizon of Husserl's idealism. The point about Zahavi's position that I want to emphasize here, however, is that his "deflationary" reading of transcendental idealism differs from a metaphysically neutral reading *only* in its *argument* for the "negative" metaphysical implication that (supposedly) rules out metaphysical realism. The argument is *grounded* in the distinctively phenomenological, or transcendental, "blurring" of ontological and epistemological motifs, but this blurring is not itself *defended* metaphysically. Hence the "anti-realism" toward which it points us (Zahavi, 2010, 87) is, I would argue, best understood in metaphysically neutral terms – that is, as eschewing any argumentation that aims to draw metaphysical "implications," whether idealistic or realistic. For any such implication will run both ways: If phenomenology entails that a reality metaphysically independent of consciousness is impossible, this equally implies that reality *metaphysically depends* on consciousness.

Ullrich Melle takes up many of the themes and arguments that we have already encountered in the previous two papers, but with the advantage (in this context) of interpreting them in light of Husserl's own "strict," or explicitly metaphysical, interpretation of transcendental idealism. Hence it becomes possible to locate more precisely the steps in Husserl's argument where metaphysical theses are supposedly entailed by the reduction – and to evaluate the plausibility of this supposed entailment.

To begin with, Melle takes note of the fact that Husserl's claims – for instance, in §44 of *Ideas I* – about the "relativity" of empirical actuality to consciousness belong to an *eidetic* analysis of the different ways in which consciousness and reality are evidentially given – that is, they are meant to *motivate* the reduction and are carried out "still on the ground of the natural attitude" (Melle, 2010, 94).<sup>20</sup> The "abyss" between consciousness and reality (Husserl, 1983, 111) that results from this "epistemological" reflection poses the ontological problem of how the two can be related to one another at all, a problem that non-phenomenological approaches often attempt to solve by means of a "picture" theory or "sign" theory of perception. In *Transzendentaler Idealismus* (Husserl, 2003), many of whose texts were written at the time of Husserl's articulation of the transcendental reduction, Husserl expends much effort refuting such theories: there is no phenomenological basis for "indirect" theories of perception; in perception, the object is "given in person [*leibhaft gegeben*]" (Melle, 2010, 96). But this introduces a further problem, namely, a potential "gap between the [transcendent] object and its [immanent] appearing." It is this gap that the reduction is supposed to close, and in the texts of *Transzendentaler Idealismus* such closure has a "strict" metaphysical meaning (2010, 96).

As Melle notes, Husserl's argument hinges on the idea that perception, in being directed at the real thing, is simultaneously "directedness toward validity" in a "process of demonstration [*ausweisen*] and justification." The "being" or "actuality" (*Wirklichkeit*) of a transcendent thing "does not appear" as the thing does; it must

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<sup>20</sup>All translations from Melle's original German are my own.

“prove itself” (2010, 96). If we ask how this directedness toward validity, revealed by the reduction, can overcome the gap that threatens to leave us stuck in immanence – why the “thing itself” cannot lie beyond the reach of all experience – Husserl will respond that we have understood “immanence” *psychologically* and have thereby fallen back into an “indirect” theory of perception (Melle, 2010, 97). The reduction, then, facilitates Husserl’s “refutation of this [kind of] skepticism and the false metaphysics of a thing-in-itself bound up with it” (2010, 97). But it does so, as Melle explains, by means of an idealism that understands the dependence of things on consciousness in a *metaphysical* way, one that goes beyond the “deliberate blurring” of epistemology and ontology.

To appreciate this point it is important to note, as Melle does (2010, 93), that in these texts Husserl – uncharacteristically, given his frequent rejection of such “dialectical argumentation” – is constructing a *proof* for transcendental idealism; that is, he is constructing an argument, based on transcendental (“verificationist”) premises established within the phenomenological reduction, to a metaphysical conclusion which itself escapes any, howsoever mediated, phenomenological *Evidenz*. We are familiar with these transcendental premises: In order to posit the existence (“actuality,” *Wirklichkeit*) of a transcendent thing, it is necessary that the thing show itself and maintain itself in an ongoing and norm-responsive (*Geltung*-tracking) series of experiences of various sorts. Though this is never definitive, so long as the thing consistently shows itself in such experience there is no reason to doubt it, and so also no reason to think that it is “merely an appearance [*blosser Schein*]” (Melle, 2010, 98). The price we pay for this “securing of transcendence,” however, is the “assertion of an in principle relativity” of actuality to consciousness, which means that the connection between transcendence and consciousness cannot be “external, additional, and contingent.” As Melle unpacks this point: “no being and no truth is thinkable without possible givenness and without possible knowledge” (2010, 99).

To show how this entails a metaphysical conclusion, Melle draws on the distinctions between ideal possibility, real possibility, and actuality central to Bernet’s account of Husserl’s “Leibnizian” approach to transcendental idealism, incorporating them into Husserl’s “proof” of metaphysical idealism. First, the idea of an actual thing-in-itself (or actual world outside our own) is merely an “ideal” possibility, something for which nothing in our experience speaks. It is thus equivalent to a “fiction.” Matters stand otherwise with respect to the idea of an actual transcendent thing which is not now being experienced, since we conceive such things as *real* (that is, *motivated*) possibilities. But this sort of motivation presupposes “some connection with and reference to a current [*aktuelle*] experience” that can be motivated by it (2010, 100).

So far, so good; all this remains intelligible within a metaphysically neutral reading of the reduction. But for Husserl it follows that “the world owes its actuality to consciousness,” that without the latter “there is and can be no actuality.” Or, as Husserl writes, “If one says that a world could exist [*existieren*] without an existing ego that grasps [*erfasst*] it, this is nonsense” (Husserl, 2003, 119; quoted in Melle, 2010, 101). This direct statement of existential dependence is immediately hedged, however: the reason it is nonsense is that the *truth* of the *claim* that such an actual

world could exist “is nothing without groundability [*Begründbarkeit*] in principle,” and groundability presupposes, as we have seen, an *aktuelles Ich*.

So despite Husserl’s metaphysical conclusion, the reasoning behind it still turns on the verificationist premises established by the reduction; roughly: The very idea that an actual world could exist independent of consciousness is absurd. This is because phenomenology shows that the world is intrinsically (i.e., not “externally and contingently”) *relative* to consciousness. Intrinsic relativity is established through the reduction to the necessary correlation between the positing of any actual being and an actually existing ego, a coherent, *Geltung*-tracking series of intentional experiences (monad). Thus, no claim about an actually existing world that excludes consciousness can be *justified*.

Melle then examines certain predictable objections. In his responses we can see how Husserl’s proof is supposed to work, and why, despite its verificationist premises, it must be given a “strict” metaphysical reading. The first objection holds that even if the groundability of the *truth* of positing an actual empirical object presupposes an “actual” ego capable of intuitive acts of fulfillment, as Bernet argued, this does not mean that “the *existence* of the object of that truth” requires it; it does not entail the *dependence* (*Abhängigkeit*) of the object on consciousness (Melle, 2010, 102). Melle’s Husserl dismisses this objection: whatever we *think* we mean by it, once phenomenology has shown that without reference to an actual ego we are in fact only trading in “ideal possibilities” equivalent to “fictions,” the distinction between truth and “actual” existence itself proves to be “groundless” (*bodenlos*). Of course, as Husserl notes, consciousness can take many forms, some of which are incapable of the norm-responsiveness required for any consciousness of meaning and validity; the existence of a rational consciousness, then, is a “*pure factum*” (“the miracle here is rationality”) which we continually experience in ourselves. We rational beings can and do make distinctions between ideal and real possibilities, and we do so on the basis of “actual” experience, which therefore can and must serve as the “norm” of all being (Melle, 2010, 104).

A second objection is more worrisome. It attacks the *conclusion* of the argument through a seeming *reductio*, drawing on the “fact of the evolution of consciousness in natural history” (Melle, 2010, 103): How can the actual emergence of consciousness be understood, when, prior to that emergence, there was no actual ego to anchor its intuitive fulfillment? Husserl answers that just as the actual existence of things contemporaneous with, though not currently experienced by, my actual consciousness can be established as real possibilities thanks to *motivated* “experiential paths that lead from actual experiencing to the ends of the earth,” so too there is a *temporal* experiential path, “anchored” in my present, that leads from now to the most distant ages of natural history (Melle, 2010, 100, 103).

As Melle goes on to explain – thereby making common cause with Bernet and Zahavi – the full argument requires that the consciousness in question be “worldly,” i.e., that it has “realized” itself *in* the world constituted through its intentional achievements. No sense can be made of an “anchoring” in an “actual” ego that is not itself experienced as embodied, embedded, and intersubjective (Melle, 2010, 104). But, as Melle shows, Husserl takes this point to entail a metaphysically idealist

conclusion. First, if Husserl's "proof" has gone through, then, as Zahavi also argued, "a merely material world is impossible; the actual world must be a psycho-physical world with [...] humanoid creatures in it" (2010, 104). This does not mean that the existence of the world metaphysically depends "on a part of it" (namely, the current human community); in regard to that "part," we are still on the ground of the verificationist or conditional phenomenological apriori: an actual world can only demonstrate itself *if* there is a suitably rational monadic community (2010, 105). Such a view is consistent with a metaphysically neutral interpretation of the reduction, but Melle's reading highlights Husserl's metaphysical intentions: To say that "the world does not exist independently of consciousness" means that "the world cannot [first] exist as a merely material world in which, subsequently and contingently, certain material things attain [*erhalten*] a conscious appendix" (2010, 105). Understood in this metaphysical way, the empirical "emergence" of consciousness in natural history presupposes the *prior* "absolute" existence of consciousness. So Husserl *accepts* the supposed *reductio* but does not see the conclusion as absurd because he doubles down on the idea that grounding, in the sense of justification, has *metaphysical* import.

With a good deal of understatement, Melle notes that this idea "has far-reaching metaphysical consequences" (2010, 105). For instance, Husserl's position somewhat resembles the strong anthropic principle: since the current world is one in which rational minds can successfully pursue science, the emergence of such sapient life is somehow *necessary*, though this necessity cannot be derived from the laws of physics. But Husserl's claim is in fact much stronger: because a merely material world is not possible, the metaphysical *ground* of the world must include consciousness. Phrased otherwise, if *anything* exists, then consciousness must exist. This is not panpsychism, since Husserl does not maintain that transcendent things *themselves* possess consciousness as one of their real parts. Rather, the metaphysical ground is absolute consciousness itself, the monad – or rather, the monadological community (*Monadennall*) whose members "realize" themselves as human beings within the limits of birth and death but whose metaphysical actuality is, as Melle puts it, "from eternity to eternity" (2010, 106).

#### 4 The Horizon of Phenomenological Metaphysics

This last point directs us to one place (among many) in the *Grenzprobleme* where Husserl's metaphysics of the monad appeals to a dialectical *argument* that moves from a phenomenologically evident premise to a conclusion about a "totality-problem" that far exceeds such evidence (Husserl, 2014, 145–53). First, given the essentially temporal (protentional-retentional) structure of consciousness, Husserl argues that it is *impossible* for consciousness to begin or end. If that is so, it follows that in what we imagine to be geological periods in which all consciousness was absent, the monadological community did in fact *exist*, but in a state of "torpor" (*Dumpfheit*). Husserl does not pretend to have done more to clarify what this means

beyond making a metaphysical argument for its necessity, based on premises delivered by the reduction's transcendental *ontology*, its clarification of the meaning of being. Nor, as Melle notes, does this argument establish “why absolute consciousness or the monadic community awoke to world-constitution, and how much necessity or contingency there is in this awakening and in the course of world constitution itself” (Melle, 2010, 106). These are the “teleological” questions that, for Husserl, remain on the horizon of phenomenological metaphysics.

As Melle explains, such arguments go beyond the ontological “relativity” (or deflationary ontological “pluralism”) that follows directly from the reduction. Husserl's proof is meant to “free us from the limits of the natural attitude” – naïve realism – and so constitutes “an argumentative alternative to the method of *epoché* and reduction.” In contrast to Zahavi, Melle argues that “both paths lead to the same metaphysical truth about absolute being,” a truth that “stands in contradiction to the general thesis of the natural attitude” and is, indeed, “the exact mirror-image [*Widerspiel*]” of the latter (Melle, 2010, 106).

In this respect, Husserl's metaphysics is the “exact mirror image” of Sider's. For both, ordinary things are *phenomena bene fundata* but do not figure into the fundamental metaphysical structure of what is. For Sider, that structure includes only “physics, logic, and set theory” (2011, 292). For Husserl, in turn, metaphysical structure includes only *monads* and their various levels of constitutive accomplishment. Further consideration of this dispute between the two positions would show that the arguments they employ to arrive at the metaphysically “fundamental” are themselves mirror images of one another – that is, we find ourselves facing an *antinomy* in which we have nothing to go on but pure argumentation, the conclusions of which cancel each other out. The lesson I suggest we draw from this is not exactly the one that László Tengelyi proposes – namely, that we have to do here with an *agon* between two fundamental worldviews, transcendentalism and naturalism (Tengelyi, 2014, 411–433) – but it is close: transcendental phenomenology is and ought to be metaphysically neutral; it should leave worldview proposals to the scientists and theologians.

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**Part II**  
**External Horizons: Embodiment  
and Identity**

# Phenomenology at the Intersection of Gender and Race



Céline Leboeuf

Research on the experience of gendered embodiment, on the one hand, and racialized embodiment, on the other hand, has emerged as an important tradition in phenomenology thanks to the works of Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) and Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) respectively. Beauvoir's work has been prolonged by pioneering feminist phenomenologists, such as Iris Marion Young and Sandra Bartky, who have investigated both the cultural significance of female bodily functions and the alienating effects of feminine standards of beauty for women. And those inspired by Fanon—for example, George Yancy and Alia Al-Saji—have homed in on the experiences of persons of color confronted by the white gaze or entering white spaces. While each of these lineages has contributed to expanding the discipline of phenomenology, specific descriptions of the bodily experiences of women of color have received comparatively little attention in this field. This chapter aims to fill this gap by exploring the bodily experiences of women of color, thereby making a case for expanding phenomenological work at the intersection of gender and race.

I discuss three phenomena that speak to the need for intersectional phenomenologies: body image, the gaze, and embodied resistance. These topics have received considerable attention in critical phenomenological works, either from feminist or critical race perspectives. Yet, treatments of these topics have not considered particularities about the experiences of many women of color. First, feminist studies of body image have probed the allure of thinness and the imperative to one's control one's hunger that are characteristic of eating disorders and diet culture, more generally. This focus, however, is not necessarily relevant to all women. As I will show, they do not speak to the experiences of many African American women. Second, both discussions of the male gaze and the racializing gaze have identified its alienating and objectifying character; furthermore, the literature in the philosophy of race

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focuses on the typically hateful character of the racializing gaze. Yet fewer analyses have considered how women of color are confronted by this gaze. I argue that in certain instances—most notably, with male partners in the context of interracial heterosexual relationships—they are objectified in a way that exoticizes and overly sexualizes them. Third, I explore how embodied forms of resistance to oppression may take shape for women of different races. Before broaching these phenomena, though, I would like to clarify the notion of “critical phenomenology,” within which I place feminist phenomenology and phenomenological work on racialized experience. In addition, I will define the term “intersectionality.”

In her article “Critical Phenomenology,” Lisa Guenther offers an account of critical phenomenology worth pausing over. This account contrasts classical phenomenology and critical phenomenology. Classical phenomenology articulates how experience is structured to reveal that one is not a “bare cogito,” but rather “a vector or arrow that gestures beyond itself in everything it thinks and does” (2020, 11). Guenther faults classical phenomenology with being “insufficiently critical” by “failing to give an equally rigorous account of how contingent historical and social structures also shape our experience” (12). More specifically, “structures like patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity” are “not things to be seen but rather *ways of seeing*, and even ways of *making the world* that go unnoticed without a sustained practice of critical reflection” (12). The task of the critical phenomenologists is to take into consideration “the contingent social structures that normalize and naturalize power relations” (12). Not only that, but the critical phenomenologist partakes in the effort to understand how the world may be restructured so that “new and liberatory possibilities for meaningful experience and existence” may come into being (15). Thus, critical phenomenology attends not only to the features of social life that shape lived experience, but also to the ways in which such experience may be shaped for the better. In light of these considerations, I take feminist phenomenology to be that branch of phenomenology that has historically focused on the experiences of women, and phenomenologies of racialized experience as those that have discussed how racialization constitutes lived experience. This chapter brings these branches of critical phenomenology together and develops a critical and intersectional phenomenological project.

I now turn to the notion of “intersectionality.” Intersectionality has become a dominant paradigm in analyzing oppression. This paradigm gained traction in the 1990s, thanks to the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, who defined the term in her legal scholarship. In her path breaking article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” Crenshaw sought to explore “how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” (1991, 1243). More generally, we may define intersectionality as the project of understanding how social categories, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and dis/ability, intersect to shape individual experience, and of illuminating how overlapping forms of oppression create particular forms of discrimination and disadvantage. As intersectional feminist projects have demonstrated, accounts of the oppression of men of color and those of white women gloss over the specificities of the oppression of women of color, or fail to recognize

their oppression entirely. Consider the following examples. To begin, not only black boys, but also black girls, typically face harsher school discipline than their white peers, but black girls tend to be overlooked in conversations about racial stereotypes and the school-to-prison pipeline (Hill, 2018). In addition, the fact that transgender women of color face disproportionate anti-transgender violence is a topic that deserves investigation.<sup>1</sup> Yet the dearth of scholarship on this topic speaks to a failure to address violence against women intersectionally.<sup>2</sup> An intersectional phenomenology of gendered and racialized embodiment would further the mission of intersectional feminism by showcasing the experiences of women of color.

## 1 An Intersectional Phenomenology of Body Image

This section deals with body image in women of color, specifically African American women, with the aim of uncovering aspects of their experiences that are neglected in feminist phenomenologies. I will draw on the work of Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, a social scientist who has dedicated much of her career to elucidating the gendered and racialized identities of black women. To preview, Beauboeuf-Lafontant's work shows that the image of black women as strong and able to bear the "weight of the world" on their shoulders, may motivate overeating as a coping mechanism, and cause these women to be overweight or obese. Furthermore, because of preferences within black communities, the association between femininity and slenderness is not as tight as it is for white persons. But to better illustrate this contrast, I will first survey feminist research on body image.

Since *The Second Sex*, feminist phenomenologists have underscored the fact that women face social pressure to adopt an extreme focus on their physical appearance. Contrary to some psychoanalysts of her time, Beauvoir asserts that cultural influences—namely, the objectification that women encounter in the eyes of others—lead them to objectify themselves: "It has sometimes been asserted that narcissism is the fundamental attitude of all women. . . . What is true is that circumstances invite woman more than man to turn toward self and dedicate her love to herself" (2011, 667). To support her claim, she summarizes earlier findings from *The Second Sex* concerning girls' upbringing: "If she can put *herself* forward in her own desires, it is because since childhood she has seen herself as an object. Her education has encouraged her to alienate herself wholly in her body, puberty having revealed this

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<sup>1</sup>According to the Human Rights Campaign, transgender women of color account for four out of five of all anti-transgender homicides: [https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/2018AntiTransViolenceReportSHORTENED.pdf?\\_ga=2.244363980.891827719.1586698524-1315631137.1586698524](https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/2018AntiTransViolenceReportSHORTENED.pdf?_ga=2.244363980.891827719.1586698524-1315631137.1586698524)

<sup>2</sup>While it is difficult to fully gauge the extent to which the experiences of transgender women of color have been researched, it is worth flagging that there are few Google Scholar results for "violence against transgender women of color" and no papers listed on the online philosophical article platform PhilPapers that discuss this issue.

body as passive and desirable” (2011, 667–668). Simply put, Beauvoir believes that feminine narcissism is a socially contingent trait of women’s psychology.

The theme of feminine narcissism has been taken up by later feminists, most notably, Sandra Bartky, whose main contributions were published in the 1980s and 1990s. In her classic essay “Narcissism, Femininity and Alienation,” first published in 1982, Bartky explains that women face what she calls “repressive narcissism.” This expression refers to the compulsion to subject oneself to punitive standards of physical appearance. Speaking of the network of corporations that sell fashion and beauty products or services, Bartky declares:

The fashion-beauty complex produces in woman an estrangement from her bodily being. On the one hand, I *am* it and am scarcely allowed to be anything else; on the other hand, I must exist perpetually at a distance from my physical self, fixed at this distance in a permanent posture of disapproval. (1982, 135).

Through the influence of these corporations, women learn to strive to beauty standards that are all too often out of their reach: they must be or remain very thin, have perfect nails and hair, shave or otherwise remove most body hair, and so on. Bartky recognizes that there may be a place for narcissism in our lives, and that we should not shun interest in physical appearance altogether. Thus, she concludes that a “non-repressive narcissism” would constitute a mode of resistance to oppressive “beauty work.”

Beauvoir’s and Bartky’s phenomenological research on feminist narcissism has been pursued by feminist philosophers, many of whom have studied one particularly punitive standard of beauty: thinness. For instance, in *Unbearable Weight* (1993), Susan Bordo analyzes women’s experiences with anorexia and diet culture. She calls our attention to the need for control that motivates restrictive eating patterns, and traces this need to anxieties about women’s role in society and “archetypal associations” between femininity and insatiable appetites.<sup>3</sup> The repressive character of norms of feminine thinness has continued to garner attention in feminist philosophy, for example in works by Sheila Lintott (2003), Cressida Heyes (2007), and in my own research on online platforms devoted to “thinspo, or “thin-spirational” content (Leboeuf 2019a).<sup>4</sup> To summarize, a significant portion of the philosophical literature on feminine body image ties women’s experiences of their bodies to the pressure of living up to standards of thinness. Yet the ideal of thinness

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<sup>3</sup>Bordo attributes gender associations between women and anorexia to several factors: first, the “fear and disdain for traditional female roles and social institutions”; second, “a deep fear of ‘the Female,’ with all its more nightmarish and archetypal association of voracious hungers and sexual insatiability” (1993, 155). For example, as an illustration of the first factor, she highlights some anorexic adolescents’s disgust before the female body: they express disdain for “womanly” bodies and some go so far as to avow the desire to remain children forever (Bordo, 1993, 155–156).

<sup>4</sup>In my “Anatomy of the Thigh Gap” (2019a), I argue that the fetishization of the thigh gap—that is, the space that some women have between their upper thighs when they stand feet together—originates in repressive narcissism, the pressure to be thin, as well as the visual culture that has flourished on the Internet thanks to “thinspo” websites and social media platforms.

that has garnered so much scholarly attention is not as prevalent as discussions suggest. With this in mind, I now consider Beauboeuf-Lafontant's research.

In "Strong and Large Black Women? Exploring Relationships between Deviant Womanhood and Weight" (2003), Beauboeuf-Lafontant demonstrates that African American women are generally valued for their toughness and portrayed as indomitably strong, and that this image translates into a body image that diverges from thinness. Beauboeuf-Lafontant traces the ideal of the "strong Black woman" to the "controlling image" of "Mammy" as an expression of black womanhood.<sup>5</sup> In her words:

Mammy was rewarded and elevated for being, simultaneously, a capable, domesticated woman and a dutiful, grateful slave. Physically removed and distinguished by her size, skin color, and age from the ideo of true (white) womanhood, she embodied a deviance—a "dark heaviness"... (112).

The "Mammy" image conveys the message that black womanhood is valued for its nurturance and solidity, as opposed to its sexuality or frailty. Beauboeuf-Lafontant goes on to note that this image of strength also transpires in accounts of Sojourner Truth by nineteenth-century white feminists, who focused on her "almost Amazon form, which stood nearly six feet high" (113). This way of valuing black woman, Beauboeuf-Lafontant explains, comes to be translated in African American communities into the ideal of the "strong Black woman," who "singlehandedly raises her children, works multiple jobs, and supports an extend family" (113). Commenting on Nama-Ama Danquah's autobiographical account of depression, Beauboeuf-Lafontant highlights how the ideal of strong black womanhood led whites and blacks to denigrate Danquah's avowal of depression. For instance, one white acquaintance exclaimed, "It's just that when *black* women start going on Prozac, you know the whole world is falling apart," while blacks accused her of being a "race traitor" by seeking psychiatric counseling (115).

How does the ideal of the strong black woman translate in terms of body image? Beauboeuf-Lafontant describes how "from a symbolic approach to the body and weight, we may view some overweight and obese Black woman as literally carrying the weight of the world on their bodies" (2003, 115). Based on her study body image literature and a series of interviews conducted by Jacqueline Walcott-McQuigg et al. (1995), she draws attention to the prevalence of overeating as a coping mechanism for the demands placed on black women. Moreover, she comments on the effects of overeating on their body image: given the image of the "strong Black woman," Black women do not face the same type of stigma that some white women do for being overweight or obese (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003, 115–118). Beauboeuf-Lafontant concludes:

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<sup>5</sup>The notion of a "controlling image" is one introduced by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000). Such an image resembles a stereotype to the extent that both controlling images and stereotypes limit our perception of others, but whereas stereotypes are typically construed as static images to be shed by racist or sexist or otherwise bigoted persons, controlling images are "malleable, and the meanings that individuals make of them are under their control" (Collins, 2020, 79).

Black women's tendencies to mask their emotions, frustrations, angers, and fears, all in an attempt to live up to the image of the strong Black woman, contribute to some of the weight that individual Black women carry—through overeating, lack of regular exercise, or a general sense that focusing on their own health needs is trivial or selfish. (119).

In short, because of the norm of “strong Black womanhood,” black women are expected to take on burdens that lead to eating behaviors that may be detrimental to their health, thus undermining the very strength for which they are valorized.

In light of Beauboeuf-Lafontant's research on black women, I believe that body image in women of color is a topic of phenomenological investigation that deserves further scrutiny. Whereas phenomenological descriptions of body image in women have historically stressed the conjunction of feminine narcissism and the valuation of slenderness, a symbol in the West of (white) women's need to control their lives, Beauboeuf-Lafontant's research emphasizes a different set of norms within African American communities. Her work thus motivates the need for phenomenologies of female body experience that take intersectionality into account.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 An Intersectional Phenomenology of the Gaze

I now turn to a second phenomenon that speaks to the need of intersectional phenomenologies: the gaze. To set the stage, I address both how Beauvoir and her heirs have described the male gaze, and how Fanon and his heirs have depicted the white gaze.

In *The Second Sex*, especially in the chapters entitled “Childhood” and the “The Girl,” Beauvoir describes how over the course of puberty, girls begin to garner the attention of men and how the male gaze alienates them. The passage below describes a girl's reaction to a man's commenting on her calves:

“At thirteen, I walked around bare legged, in a short dress,” another woman told me. “A man, sniggering made a comment about my fat calves. The next day, my mother made me wear stockings and lengthen my skirt, but I will never forget the shock I suddenly felt in seeing myself *seen*.” The little girl feels that her body is escaping her, that it is no longer the clear expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same moment, she is grasped by others as a thing: on the street, eyes follow her, her body is subject to comments; she would like to become invisible; she is afraid of becoming flesh and afraid to show her flesh. (Beauvoir, 2011, 321, emphasis in the original).

This passage offers us a glimpse into a girl's experience of being objectified by the male gaze during puberty. Notice how Beauvoir depicts the girl as losing a transparent relationship to her body and as experiencing her body as *foreign*. This bodily alienation is an outcome of the experience of seeing yourself through the eyes of another—more specifically, the eyes of a dominant other. She goes on to describe

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<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, I should note the paucity of images of Black women within thinspo culture (Leboeuf 2019a, 4).



how this alienation interferes with girls' ability to engage with others and their environment: they are haunted by their appearance in the eyes of men.

The topic of the male gaze has continued to attract the interest of feminist phenomenologists. Take the work of Iris Marion Young. In "Women Recovering Their Clothes" (first published in 1988), Young discusses how the male gaze mediates women's relation to their clothes. While her article focuses on how women can "recover their clothes"—that is, resist this mediation—it is useful to quote from her description of the male gaze:

"See yourself in wool." Yes, I would like that. I see myself in that wool, heavy, thick, warm, swinging around my legs in rippling caresses. ... But who's this coming up behind me? Bringing me down to his size? Don't look back, I can't look back, his gaze is unidirectional, he sees me but I can't see him. But no—I am seeing myself in wool seeing him see me. Is it that I cannot see myself without seeing myself being seen? So I need him there to unite me and my image of myself? Who does he think I am? So I am split. I see myself, and I see myself being seen. (Young, 2005, 63).

Young's phenomenology focuses on the "split" between a woman's aesthetic appreciation of her body clad in wool and that of an imagined male viewer. Her account echoes Beauvoir's: for both authors, women's experience involves seeing oneself seen through the eyes of another. What accounts for this split? At its origin, Young and Beauvoir would argue, lies masculine privilege; men have the license to look at women, and judge them as they please, whereas the reverse is not typically true.<sup>7</sup> Even if a woman were to ask herself whether her women friends would like her outfit, Beauvoir and Young would argue that the standards that she (and her friends) ultimately submit to are men's. It is worth noting that Young, like Beauvoir, believes that internalizing the male gaze affects the ways in which girls and women experience their bodies; in fact, according to Young, it affects the very ways in which they *use* their bodies. In an earlier essay "Throwing Like a Girl" (first published in 1980), Young contends that feminine motility is "a transcendence that is at the same time laden with immanence" (2005, 36). She employs this term to characterize the lack of fluidity that feminine movement has; women move hesitantly, in a cramped manner, as though their movements were constrained by an external force. Relatedly, Young contends that feminine motility is marked by an *inhibited intentionality*, which "simultaneously reaches toward a projected end with an 'I can' and withholds its full bodily commitment to that end in a self-imposed 'I cannot'" (36). Movements are performed, as though one were holding oneself back. Young attributes the differences in feminine and masculine motility to women's tendency to view themselves through the eyes of others and objectify themselves: "The source

<sup>7</sup>While Beauvoir's and Young's analyses may still have some truth to them today, some phenomena, such as the growth of body image issues and eating disorders in men, speak to the idea that self-objectification may be increasingly prevalent for them, and that the stringent standards of beauty to which women have been traditionally held to affect them as well. Although body image and eating disorders have not been studied as fully in men as they have in women, recent research highlights their incidence and causes. For example, Alleva et al. (2018) discusses the correlation between body appreciation, a facet of body image, and the internalization of appearance ideals in men, and finds that body appreciation is inversely correlated with comparisons to masculine norms.

of this objectified bodily existence is in the attitude of others regarding her, but the woman herself often actively takes up her body as a mere thing (44).

Research by feminist phenomenologists has continued to fill in the picture described by Beauvoir and Young. I name a few contributions that tie directly into Young's or Beauvoir's works. In *Body Images*, Gail Weiss (1999) adopts a critical perspective on some aspects of Young's descriptions of female embodiment, and calls our attention to Young's seeming privileging of transcendence in her discussion of girls' and women's inhibited ways of navigating the world in her essay "Throwing Like a Girl." In "Simone de Beauvoir on the Allure of Self-Objectification," Nancy Bauer (2015) delves into the temptation to "subvert the risk posed by other people's objectifying gazes by preemptively objectifying ourselves," studied by Beauvoir, and insists on its continued relevance, in particular to college-aged women. Building on the Beauvoirian idea that the body and bodily experience are socially constituted, Luna Dolezal (2015) probes the shame that many of us, not just women, feel when we see ourselves seen. In exploring the ways in which we cope with shame, Dolezal focuses on the experiences of women who undertake cosmetic surgery to lessen body shame. She does not question the motivation of those who seek beauty-enhancing (and shame-ridding) surgeries, but criticizes the rigidity of beauty standards that compel women to experience "limiting body shame"—that is, shame so restricting that it "must be overcome for life to have the possibility of dignity and fulfillment" (2015, xv).

Let us now switch gears and review the phenomenology of the racializing gaze in the Fanonian lineage. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon draws attention to the reifying character of the white gaze; in its face, the black man finds himself an "object among other objects" (2008, 89). Not only is this gaze reifying, but it is saturated with hatred; indeed, the chapter on the lived experience of blacks opens with the striking line: "'Dirty nigger!' or simply 'Look! A Negro!'" (89). Beyond Fanon's work, later phenomenologists have depicted the white gaze as essentializing and rigid. In "A Phenomenology of Hesitation: Interrupting Racializing Habits of Seeing" (2014), Alia Al-Saji explains in the racializing gaze is one where "one cannot but help" to feel or see the other otherwise. To quote from the work of George Yancy, in his experience as a black man, "I feel that in their eyes I am this indistinguishable, amorphous, black seething mass, a token of danger, a threat, a rapist, a criminal, a burden, a rapacious animal incapable of delayed gratification" (2008, 844). This sentence illustrates Al-Saji's notion that the racializing gaze is blinkered both at the level of the content it recognizes and at an affective level.

Women of color may have similar experiences in the face of the male gaze or the white gaze as those just described above, but they may also encounter the male gaze as objectifying in a distinctive manner. In what follows, I describe how women of color are viewed by some men as special sexual objects in virtue of their race. My claim is that beside being objectified sexually, women of color may be regarded by men not of their own race as *objects of curiosity*. In order to support this claim, I present research analyzing images of women of color in print media as well as first-personal accounts of sexual objectification by men of different races.

What do mainstream media images of women of color tell us about how we view them? In “How Women of Color are Portrayed on the Cover of Magazines: A Content Analysis on the Images of Black/African, Latina, Asian and Native American (BALANA),” Connie Johnson identifies the following traits in magazine cover images of women of color: “hypersexualization, objectification, likeness to whiteness and intensified exoticism” (2015, 2). Commenting on their exoticization, Johnson notes, “In visual imagery WOC tend to be portrayed in stereotypical garb, accentuated phenotypic traits, stereotypical contextual cues, facial traits, body traits or environmental related to racial categorization” (4). In her analysis of magazine covers, she notes that hypersexualization was the most distinctive difference between portrayals of white women and women of color (20).

If we examine first-person accounts, we discover the traits of hypersexualization and exoticization described by Johnson. First, in her poem “Truth Is...,” Alessandria Rhines expresses her frustration with her fetishization as a black woman, and denounces the treatment she and other black women receive from white men:

Don’t pat my hair. Don’t touch my skin and call it chocolate or caramel or mocha or ‘body bingin’ like butta’ . . . I am not your experiment. Your diversity quota. Your cultural trophy. . . Fetishes are for the fools who can’t tell the original from the copy. I am neither, for I am, the truth. (quoted in Leboeuf, 2018, 165).

The notion of experimentation reveals a new facet of the male gaze that is not present in Beauvoir’s description of the gaze. Rhines’ hair and body attract an unusual attention on the part of her white partner. She is viewed and treated as an uncommon sexual object; this testifies to her exoticization. Moreover, the words “bingin’ like butta’” testify to her hypersexualization. Let’s turn now to a second case. In an interview with Brittany Wong for HuffPost, an Asian American woman, Lillian, whose name was not provided for privacy reasons, discusses the types of messages she receives on dating apps in these terms: “No man has ever opened with how white women are so ‘exotic’ or opened with an assumption about how white vaginas are different from other vaginas. . . . None of these messages have the same intense pre-occupation with race.”<sup>8</sup> Lillian’s account, like Rhines’, speaks both to her exoticization and her hypersexualization. To broach a third example: Luna Diaz, a Costa Rican and Dominican woman, in an interview with Kelsey Castañon for Refinery 29, recounts: “I’ve had white folks sexualize my entire existence — asking me to speak Spanish during sex or calling me ‘exotic.’”<sup>9</sup> Her words could not evoke more clearly the phenomenon I am addressing here.

I have said that women of color are simultaneously reduced to sexual objects and objects of curiosity. At this juncture, I should clarify what I mean by being viewed as an “object of curiosity.” In *The Habits of Racism* (2017), Helen Ngo contrasts “domination staring,” which is prominent in Fanon’s descriptions, with a form of

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/asian-fetish-dating-red-flags\\_n\\_5ce6ca27e4b05c15dea89437](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/asian-fetish-dating-red-flags_n_5ce6ca27e4b05c15dea89437)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/05/197463/latina-hispanic-stereotypes-culture-fetishization>

looking called “baroque staring.” Baroque staring stems from curiosity. Ngo’s account draws on the taxonomy of the gaze from Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s *Staring: How We Look* (2009). There Garland-Thomson explains that “[t]he urgent question, ‘What is that?’ stirs baroque starers” (50). Indeed, as I argue elsewhere, the racializing gaze can take the form of baroque staring in the face of those whom we perceive to be racially “ambiguous” (Leboeuf, 2020). To return to Rhines’ words, what is distinctive of the male gaze in her experience is the fact she is coveted as a “novelty.” This, in my mind, harkens to Ngo’s and Garland-Thomson’s discussions of baroque staring. Likewise, Lillian, mentioned above, explicitly uses the language of curiosity to depict her experience: “We are not here to satiate your sexual curiosity.” She adds: “We are not passive objects. We have our own inner lives... Asian Americans are filled with small idiosyncrasies, just like any other human — though we shouldn’t have to convince anyone of that.” In light of their experiences, we might characterize the look in these instances as asking, “What is that?” and then adding, “I want that!” The male gaze, ever possessive, finds a special appeal in the “unusual” physical features of its conquest. In short, to account for this exoticization and hypersexualization, I believe that it is worth introducing the idea that women of color are viewed simultaneously as sexual objects and as objects of curiosity.

All in all, while the gaze has received considerable attention in phenomenology, the experiences of women of color in the face of racializing male gaze have not received the detailed, in-depth phenomenological explorations that those of “women” and men of color have garnered. Besides calling attention to this fact, I would like to add that it would be worth exploring the bodily alienation that might result from such a form of objectification. Does it differ in force or in quality from the bodily alienation that stems from other types of sexual objectification?

### 3 An Intersectional Phenomenology of Embodied Resistance to Oppression

In my sketch of the notion of critical phenomenology, I asserted that such phenomenologies describe how contingent social conditions have modulated and continue to condition human experience; in addition, I claimed that they face forward and look toward *new possibilities* for meaningful experience. This section envisages the nature of resistance to oppression from an intersectional perspective. I zero in on the possibility of *embodying* resistance to one’s oppression and examine how such resistance for women takes different shapes depending on race. What do I mean by “embodying resistance”? While resistance to oppression can take the shape of civil protest, legal reform, changes in economic institutions, and so on, embodied resistance differs from these in that the work of undoing oppressive social structures is engaged in via “bodily strategies.” As Chris Bobel and Samantha Kwan convey in their anthology *Embodied Resistance: Challenging the Norms, Breaking the Rules*

(2011), such strategies are diverse: they may include embracing counterculture aesthetic norms, such as not removing certain areas of body hair for Western women, or engaging in deviant bodily practices, running the gamut from breastfeeding in public to living as a dominatrix. As was the case in the first two sections, I begin with the work of Beauvoir, but in this case, rather than following through her appropriations, I adopt a critical angle on her argument via the work of Shannon Sullivan.

Beauvoir largely focuses on the macro-level social changes that would be necessary for women's liberation—economic emancipation, sexual autonomy, access to safe abortions, an eliminating sexual violence, and changing expectations concerning housework and childcare, among others (Beauvoir, 2011, 721–742). Yet she also alludes at several points in *The Second Sex* to athleticism as a form of individual resistance to oppression. For instance, in her chapter on lesbians, she notes:

Many women athletes are homosexual; they do not perceive this body which is muscle, movement, extension, and momentum as passive flesh; it does not magically beckon caresses, it is a hold on the world, not a thing of the world. (2011, 423).

As I explain elsewhere, “Beauvoir’s language suggests that she equates athleticism with the power to affirm oneself over one’s environment; rather than being an object, the athletic body is a ‘hold on the world’” (Leboeuf, 2019b, 455). I contend that the counterpoint to Beauvoir’s claim is that “to the extent that women are alienated from their bodies and invest themselves in their bodies as objects, to that extent they have a ‘lesser’ grasp of the world” (455). Women athletes offer a model for resisting oppression because their activities express a subjective, or first-personal, relationship to the body, in contradistinction to the self-objectifying attitude inculcated by society.

Athleticism, to be sure, might be a vehicle for women to combat their oppression. Nevertheless, as Shannon Sullivan argues, this strategy may not be relevant to all women—in particular, to black women. In “Race After Beauvoir,” she states that “Beauvoir’s treatment of physical activism...privileges the experiences of white middle-class females” (Sullivan, 2017, 455). She observes that black women are already stereotyped as aggressive and physically strong.<sup>10</sup> Discussing these stereotypes in the context of the criminalization of black girls and women, Sullivan questions the usefulness of Beauvoir’s focus on physical activism:

The relevant question is not how to help black girls develop their physical aggressiveness, even though possessing confidence in their bodily strength and actions is just as important for them as it is for white girls. Rather it is how might black girls and women put their anger and revolt in their muscles so that sexism, racism, and the increasing incarceration rates of black females are countered? To be effective, Beauvoir’s notion of physical activism needs to be (re)developed intersectionally so that it addresses the lives of black girls and women. (2017, 456)

In short, athleticism does not hold the same liberatory significance for black girls and women at present than it may have for white girls and women. Undoing

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<sup>10</sup>This analysis ties into my earlier description of the controlling image of the “strong, black woman.”

oppression for black women would, thus, have to lie in creating a space for black girls and women to embody physical confidence without facing censure or overt punishment.

While I do not have a full-fledged account of how to create such a space, I will conclude by sketching some avenues for it. Let me preface, though, that this is not supposed to be a general account of embodied resistance for all women of color. Just as the avenues of embodied resistance may differ between white and black women, so too differences within the lived experience of women of color will structure the forms embodied resistance may take. I wish to pursue Sullivan's line of criticism and imagine what embodied resistance might look like for black girls and women insofar as they are already viewed as dominant and aggressive. To do so, I will dive into some "tools" that Sonia Renée Taylor envisages in her work on reclaiming one's body in the face of oppression.

In *The Body Is Not an Apology* (2018), Taylor takes aim at the shame we experience when our bodies do not live up to normative images. For her, "living in a female body, a Black body, an aging body, a fat body, and a body with mental illness is to awaken daily to a planet that expects a certain set of apologies to already live on our tongues" (11). By this, Taylor means that those whose bodies do not conform are expected to make excuses for their failure to live up to bodily standards, whether in the form of overt verbal apologies or habits, such as not taking up physical space, which speak to their marginalized status. Taylor advocates developing a "radical self-love" in the face of this form of oppression, and she offers several tools for cultivating this self-love, two of which are worth mentioning here. To begin, she believes that being in *movement* is an important part of a flourishing relationship to one's body. But unlike Beauvoir, she discusses alternatives to athleticism, such as dance. For instance, she relates her positive experiences trying "West African dance...a dance for women overcoming adversity" (108). Another part of this toolkit is *community*, which Beauvoir does not mention in her account of athleticism. Taylor writes, "radical self-love is not a solo journey" (112). Communities offer spaces for oppressed persons to be vulnerable and recognize the commonalities in experience, and this, according to Taylor, lays the ground for resilience in the face of oppression (112–113). Her observations recall the accounts of embodied resistance collected by Bobel and Kwan: groups, either informal (for example, friends) or formal (e.g., official organizations serving different marginalized populations), play a central role in supporting efforts to combat constraining norms. The avenues toward an embodied self-love that Taylor describes may afford the means for black girls and women to reclaim their bodies and to develop the bodily confidence prized by Beauvoir. Nevertheless, there are limits to this picture: if black girls and women are to fully flourish as embodied beings, society as a whole will have to address controlling images of them, as well as abolish the forms of oppression that they face.

My aim in this paper has been to motivate the need for phenomenologies that deal intersectionally with gender and race. I have drawn our attention to three phenomena that call for intersectional analyses: body image, the gaze, and embodied resistance. I began with the observation that one of the limits of classical



phenomenology was its failure to consider how contingent social and historical structures condition lived experience. What my paper reveals are some of the limits of prominent feminist phenomenology and critical phenomenologies of race. In *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (2006), Linda Martín Alcoff describes our situated identities as embodied “horizons” through which we interpret the world. The identities of the feminist phenomenologists and phenomenologists of race whose works have risen to prominence may explain the relative paucity of intersectional accounts of gendered and racialized embodiment. But if we take intersectionality seriously, as we should, then we may expand the horizons of phenomenological research.

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# The Phenomenology of Zozobra: Mexican and Latinx Philosophers on (Not) Being at Home in the World



Francisco Gallegos

This chapter traces a line of thought that runs from the work of Mexican phenomenologists in the 1940s and 1950s to the work of contemporary Latinx phenomenologists in the US. The central topic is the phenomenon of *zozobra*, an anxious condition characterized by the inability to be at home in the world. According to the philosophers discussed in this chapter, *zozobra* has marked the Mexican and Latinx experience. This assessment raises a number of questions: Is *zozobra* a manifestation of internal tensions inherent to Mexican and Latinx multicultural identity, or do its origins lie elsewhere? What are the effects of *zozobra* on Mexican and Latinx communities, and what can and should be done to address it?

One possible approach to the topic of *zozobra* would focus on the *psychology* of identity. In the tradition of Latin American philosophy, it is sometimes said that because Latin America was born in the Conquest and colonization of the people indigenous to the western hemisphere, Latin Americans are prone to suffer from conflicting attachments to their indigenous and European roots.<sup>1</sup> These conflicting attachments are said to be embodied in the principal ethno-racial identity within

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<sup>1</sup>For example, in her overview of the Latin American philosophical tradition, Ofelia Schutte (1987, 27) says: “Despite almost five hundred years of assimilation into Western European tradition, many Latin Americans still feel the conflict provoked by the conquistadores’ subjugation and extermination of millions of Indians who dwelt in the region. The Indians have come to symbolize the ancient, exploited, maternal heritage of the Americans, in contradistinction to the technologically advanced, civilized, foreign conqueror. How to resolve this tension in an unalienated and authentic manner is one of the challenges of Latin American philosophy today.” In this vein, Octavio Paz (1985 [1950], 26–27) offers a psychological account of the *zozobra* in Mexico along these lines: “The Mexican does not want to be either an Indian or a Spaniard. Nor does he want to be descended from them. He denies them. And he does not affirm himself as a mixture, but rather as an abstraction: he is a man. He becomes the son of Nothingness... That is why the feeling of orphanhood is the constant background of our political endeavors and our personal conflicts.”

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Latin America—viz., *mestizo*, a term that means “mixed race” and usually refers to a person of indigenous and Spanish descent.<sup>2</sup> *Mestizos* may feel themselves to be too “white” to be indigenous, and too “brown” to be European. As a result, they may feel themselves to be excluded by, and/or distance themselves from, those with a less complicated relationship to their indigenous or European identity. Thus, between the inner conflict generated from opposing affinities with indigenous and European cultures, and the poignant sense of not belonging to either of those communities, *mestizaje* or “mixedness” can be fraught with psychological dissonances that undermine one’s sense of being at home in the world.

Nothing in what follows explicitly rejects this analysis. However, the thinkers discussed in this chapter seek to illuminate some of the deeper dynamics that may be underlying and even driving such contestations of identity. Thus, in place of a psychological account of *zozobra*, this chapter examines the *phenomenology* of *zozobra*, focused on how basic structures of sense-making are affected when one is unable to be at home in the world. From a phenomenological perspective, *zozobra* arises not from one’s thoughts and feelings *about* any given situation but, rather, from breakdowns in the “horizons of understanding” that make it possible to encounter well-defined situations in the first place. And when we examine these breakdowns of world from the perspective of *critical* phenomenology, we become attentive to the mutually reinforcing relationship between *zozobra* and the oppressive social structures affecting Mexican and Latinx communities, guided by the hope that a phenomenological understanding of *zozobra* might shed new light on ways for these communities to resist and overcome this oppression.<sup>3</sup>

Section One begins with a discussion of what it means to be at home in a world, drawing on the seminal account of “world” in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Next, Section Two examines the work of the Mexican phenomenologist, Jorge Portilla (1918–1963), who considers some questions that are urgently relevant to Portilla’s own circumstances: How should we understand the breakdown of a world? And what happens to a society’s capacities for sense-making when its members find themselves in a world that has become inhospitable? Portilla holds that *zozobra* arises from the disintegration of a community’s normative framework, which gives rise to the fragmentation of the various “subworlds” in a society and produces a number of personal and social pathologies.

Sections Three and Four examine an alternative approach to *zozobra* proposed first by the Mexican phenomenologist Emilio Uranga (1921–1988) and later echoed

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<sup>2</sup>As Sánchez (2015, 67) puts it: “With the first mestizo comes the first internal duality, the first tension, and the first conflict of identity.”

<sup>3</sup>Critical phenomenology, as Lisa Guenther (2020, 12) describes it, combines classical phenomenological analyses of experience offered by figures such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger with an “equally rigorous account of how contingent historical and social structures also shape our experience.” For critical phenomenologists, “structures like patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity” are “not things to be seen but rather ways of seeing, and even ways of making the world that go unnoticed without a sustained practice of critical reflection” (12). Moreover, critical phenomenologists strive to understand how the world may be restructured so that “new and liberatory possibilities for meaningful experience and existence may come into being” (15).

and developed by the Latina philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004). Both Uranga and Anzaldúa argue that while *zozobra* may become more *apparent* when communities are subjected to social and political subordination, ultimately *zozobra* is an essential aspect of the human condition. As such, they argue that *zozobra* should be embraced and even cultivated as a source of authenticity and political empowerment. Indeed, both thinkers call for the construction of a new overarching normative framework that can unify their communities' horizons of understanding under the banner of “nepantla” or *in-betweenness*, thus conceiving of hybridity itself as the organizing principle of a new form of identity that can escape colonial paradigms of identity and agency. Section Five examines an alternative approach to these issues in the work of the contemporary Latina phenomenologist, Mariana Ortega. Instead of calling for a new and unifying normative framework, Ortega sees liberatory potential in what she calls “hometactics,” the “micropractices” that enable marginalized individuals to move between subworlds in a less disorienting and destabilizing way.

Surprisingly, it is rare for Mexican and Latinx philosophers to be considered together as participants in a shared discourse, as this chapter aims to do. Scholarship on the intersections between these philosophical traditions has centered almost exclusively on the work of Anzaldúa (Pitts, 2014, Stehn & Alessandri, 2020, Alessandri & Stehn, 2020) but has not highlighted the relationship between her work and that of Uranga or other Mexican (or Latin American) *phenomenologists*.<sup>4</sup> This chapter thus aims to provide new insight into the common concerns motivating prominent phenomenologists in each tradition and to illuminate the intimate interplay of the perspectives they offer. The dialectic I trace in this chapter can contribute to important discussions within what is sometimes called “critical phenomenology” on the ways that oppression influences, and is influenced by, our sense-making practices. The various positions staked out by Portilla, Uranga, Anzaldúa, and Ortega, represent three distinct directions that these discussions might be taken. As we will see, Portilla is in some ways a *social conservative* who believes that our ability to pursue meaningful lives depends on the existence of stable and widely shared social norms. Uranga and Anzaldúa are *visionaries* who call for the radical reconstitution of identity on the basis of our shared homelessness. Ortega is a *pragmatist* who celebrates the small victories that allow marginalized groups to survive and adapt in worlds that are hostile to their existence. Future discussions of the phenomenology of home would do well to learn from all these perspectives, and to recognize that home is several things simultaneously: an essential foundation for human existence, an illusory ideal whose pursuit leads us to exclude vulnerable others and vulnerable parts of ourselves, and a site for the negotiation of the circumstances in which one finds oneself, in the tragic and beautiful hope of creating a life to call one's own.

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<sup>4</sup>For a phenomenology of the Latinx experience informed by Mexican phenomenology, see Sánchez (2015, ch. 5). For a discussion of the relationship between the Latinx feminisms of Anzaldúa and Ortega and feminist work in Latin America more generally, see Rivera-Berruz (2020).

## 1 Heidegger on Being-in-the-World

It will be helpful to begin this examination of *zozobra* with a brief and partial review of Heidegger's seminal discussion of "being-in-the-world" in *Being and Time*. In this text, Heidegger famously argues that for Dasein (the kind of entity that human beings are), all our sense-making activity takes place within—i.e., is made possible by, presupposes, refers to, and is inextricable from—a richly meaningful "world." Heidegger describes a *world*, in this sense, as a "referential totality" (1927 [1962], 105). Just as the meaning of a word necessarily refers to the meaning of other words, so that no particular arrangement of symbols or phonemes is meaningful in isolation, Heidegger argues that the meaning of each thing we experience depends on its relationship to the wider meaningful context in which it is embedded. For example, the significance of a nail in a carpenter's workshop cannot be understood in isolation from its relationship to hammers, wood, construction projects, the skills and traditions of carpentry, customers, the human need for shelter and furniture, and so on. In this way, the nail implicitly "refers to" the hammer and, ultimately, to the world of the carpenter as a whole. According to Heidegger, then, all meaning is holistic and embedded in a world: "a horizon of understanding, a space of possibilities, on the background of which we understand" ourselves and everything we are or could be involved with (Blattner, 2006, 63).

If a world is a "space of possibilities," it is important to clarify that the kind of "possibility" at issue here is roughly equivalent to what William James called a "live option."<sup>5</sup> A live option is an action or attitude that is not merely *physically* or *theoretically* possible, but one that *makes sense* for a person to perform or adopt, based on the way that their identity and concerns align with the significance of the action or attitude in question. For example, if you are deeply devoted to the craft of carpentry and able to make a good living from it, you would not agree to significantly lower the quality of your work simply for additional profit. While doing so may be physically or theoretically possible, it will not show up to you as a live option, because the action would violate the commitments that are central to your self-understanding and so make no sense for you to perform. As James (1979 [1896], 199) puts it, "the notion makes no electric connection with your nature—it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all." By the same token, an action that would otherwise "scintillate" in this way, but which has become physically impossible, will no longer be a live option. With this in mind, we can think of a world—for example, the world of carpentry, or the world of a small farming village in nineteenth century Germany—in terms of a network of live options, a setting for meaningful possibilities to unfold, defined both by a *normative framework* within which certain actions and attitudes are understood to be credible and important, and a corresponding *practical infrastructure* that enables people to pursue and maintain those actions and attitudes.

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<sup>5</sup>A reference that is more proximal to Heidegger would be Husserl's notion of "motivated" possibilities. For discussion, read Walsh (2013).

From Heidegger's perspective, we know and inhabit worlds primarily through our practical familiarity and committed participation in them, rather than through intellectual or cognitive reasoning. The notion of *being at home in a world*, in the sense that is relevant here, derives its meaning from the ordinary experience of having a home, a particular built environment that provides shelter and serves as the setting for one's domestic life. "Home" is thus conceived here as a place of *intimacy*, a place where one is comfortable performing mundane and routine activities of personal hygiene and other "backstage" (Goffman, 1978) operations that are usually concealed from public scrutiny. Home is also intimate in the sense that it is a primary place to pursue certain projects that are deeply important to our identities, such as those related to family and the activities one chooses when not at work.<sup>6</sup> With this in mind, we can say that "being at home in a world" combines two elements: (a) *familiarity*, a relatively well-developed practical know-how for maneuvering in a given space of possibilities, attuning oneself to what matters in various situations, and discerning the relevant saliences and affordances in order to pursue what counts as a live option in that space, and (b) *identification*, an implicit endorsement of or harmonization with that world, especially with regard to the way that world makes it possible for one to pursue the projects that are central to one's self-understanding. Both familiarity and identification are a matter of degree, and as such, one can be more or less at home in a world. Moreover, these notions refer to conditions that are an ambiguous mix of "objective" and "subjective" states, insofar as *being* familiar can be distinguished from *feeling* familiar, and the fact that one's identity is inextricable from a given world does not necessarily imply that one experiences a felt sense of "mineness" in relation to it.

Heidegger did not explain as clearly as we might have wished whether he believed there is just *one* world that we all share, or, if there are multiple worlds, how they are distinguished from and related to one another. Heidegger's interpreters, however, often describe worlds as *nested* and *interwoven* domains of human life, in the sense that the world of a carpenter's apprentice would be contained within the world of carpentry, which in turn might be partially overlap with other "subworlds" within the wider world of nineteenth century Germany.<sup>7</sup> Although there may not be any bright lines demarcating the upper or lower limits of this nesting pattern or the boundaries between worlds, the very notion of "a world" calls to mind the image of a sphere and seems to imply a domain that is relatively *bounded*, *internally coherent*, and *stable*. At any rate, *Being and Time* certainly seems to

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<sup>6</sup>For critical analysis of the notion of home in the context of oppression and resistance, see Lugones (2003, ch. 9), and hooks (1990, ch. 5), both important sources for Ortega's analysis of home discussed below, as well as Gallegos de Castillo (2016).

<sup>7</sup>For example, Mark Wrathall describes a world as "a particular style of organizing our activities and relations with the things and people around us.... Whole books are devoted to helping us get a feel for foreign worlds—The World of the Reformation or The World of Texas Politics, or The World of the Maya or The World of the Suicide Bomber. Despite the fact that the very same physical and chemical laws apply to both Texas politicians and suicide bombers, there is a very real sense in which they inhabit different worlds" (2005, 20).

assume that worlds have these qualities, insofar as the text does not raise questions about how worlds may become destabilized or disintegrated. Indeed, Heidegger's central concern in this text is not the possibility that worlds might break down but, to the contrary, the question of how individuals might resist the intense pressure to conform to social norms and achieve personal authenticity—a concern that would seem to gain its urgency in a context in which the worlds in question are especially secure and tightly connected. However, as we will see, when Mexican phenomenologists consider these issues from the vantage point of Mexico City in the 1940s and 1950s, different concerns come to the fore.

## 2 Jorge Portilla on the Disintegration of Community

Portilla's phenomenology of "world" is marked by his view that mid-century Mexico was in the process of disintegrating. In the decades following the tumultuous revolution of 1910, Mexico had engaged in an intense nation-building effort, seeking to construct a unified national identity that could bind together the various social groups in the nation; however, by mid-century this project was severely strained, and the promise of a national rebirth had faded.<sup>8</sup> There was a widespread sense, discussed incessantly among Mexico's intellectuals, that everyday life in Mexico had become deeply permeated by "zozobra," a Spanish term often translated as "distress" or "anxiety," and which connotes instability, ungroundedness, and the wobbling that precedes the capsizing of a ship. But while some prominent Mexican intellectuals such as Samuel Ramos (1972 [1934]) and Octavio Paz (1985 [1950]) offered *psychological* accounts of zozobra, focused on an examination of "the Mexican mind," Portilla and his fellow phenomenologists rejected these psychological interpretations as degrading and misguided, and in their place, they offered *phenomenological* accounts of zozobra, focused on an examination of what happens when worlds come apart.

In his 1949 essay, "Community, Greatness, and Misery in Mexican Life," Portilla offers a phenomenological account of zozobra that begins by affirming Heidegger's description of a world as a "horizon of understanding" in which all meaning is embedded. Portilla emphasizes the role of other people in one's community in constituting this horizon. "Our action," Portilla (2017 [1949], 187) says,

is not carried out in the middle of the desert, but in community. We cannot project any action whatsoever without counting on others.... Our action is inconceivable to ourselves if a somewhat precise halo is not attached to it, one of approval or reproach, of incentive or of obstacle, whose source is the community, those "others."

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<sup>8</sup>See Santos Ruiz (2015) for a critical discussion of the relationship between Mexican phenomenology and Mexico's nation-building project. For the history of Mexico during this period, see López (2010).



When things are going well, we often take this interpretive horizon for granted, only noticing its importance when things go wrong. When we travel to a foreign country, for example, we may discover that the normative frameworks and practical infrastructures we encounter there are quite different from those we are accustomed to, so that we find it difficult to properly make a joke, give a compliment, demonstrate practical competence, and do things that express our character. Such experiences illustrate that “horizons [of understanding] have critical importance for human action. One of their primary functions is that of serving as walls against which bounce the echoes that carry the meaning of our actions”—a fact that becomes painfully obvious to us when the “echo” that bounces back “makes it evident that our [action] did not have the exact meaning that we were giving to it” (184).

Portilla notes that at any given moment, we may simultaneously occupy many nested and interwoven worlds and subworlds. As he puts it,

we always live in a multiplicity of communal horizons that mix and weave with each other and that remain always potential or actual, depending on whether our action reveals or conceals them. We live always simultaneously immersed in a national community that can take various forms, from the political to the aesthetic: in a professional community; in a guild; in a class; in a family.... (183–84)

As this passage suggests, Portilla is especially interested in the ways that *nations* can constitute a world. Indeed, throughout Portilla’s work, we find a consistent argument for a view that we might call “phenomenological nationalism,” the view that individuals’ sense-making capacities are mediated and structured by their belonging to a nation.<sup>9</sup> Portilla emphasizes, however, that all nations do not influence individuals’ sense-making activity in the same way. One important way that nations differ, in his view, is the extent to which subworlds (such as those related to family or profession) are “integrated” within a larger horizon of understanding that binds together the national society as a whole. Portilla thus imagines a spectrum between a “sub-integrated” nation and a “super-integrated” nation. He suggests that Germany, for example, may be an instance of a “super-integrated” nation, in which the various social roles a person may occupy—worker, father, music-lover, and so on—all fit together in a tight, cohesive package, so that all of a person’s activities work together to express the national way of life (187–88).

In a super-integrated nation, Portilla argues, individuals gain what we can call *agential freedom*, the freedom to take meaningful action. High levels of integration in the horizons of understanding enable individuals to anticipate the meaning of their action, and so they can simply set their minds to acting as they are willing and able to act. Portilla says that in such a nation, the “atmosphere seems to be a space

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<sup>9</sup>For discussion of Portilla’s phenomenological nationalism, see Sánchez & Gallegos (2020, Ch. 2.) *Phenomenological nationalism*—the view that our sense-making activity is shaped at a deep, existential level by our nationality—does not involve the use of phenomenology for nationalistic purposes, and so it should be sharply distinguished from *political nationalism*. Indeed, Portilla abhorred political nationalism and consistently argued (e.g., in his examination of Mexico, the United States, and Germany) that the influence of nationality on people’s sense-making capacities was *detrimental* to their flourishing as sense-makers.

of incredibly open opportunities for individual action, something like a paradise for the industrious man”—adding, on a more ominous note, “a paradise that frequently transforms itself into the dominion of the predator” (189). By the same token, however, individuals in a super-integrated nation suffer from a lack of what we might call *normative freedom*, the freedom to alter the normative framework that helps to establish the meaning of their actions. Individuals in super-integrated nations may *violate* social norms, of course, but this is not equivalent to inhabiting a world in which the normative framework is more inchoate and open to *innovation*. In this vein, Portilla quotes Karl Vossler, a German academic who, after visiting South America, wrote: “Central Europeans of today, who are at the point of smothering our healthy members with a system of well-intentioned bandages and of making ourselves immobile by force of organization, can take example in the free spirit of independence of the Latin American” (quoted in Portilla, 2017 [1949], 189).

Nevertheless, too much normative freedom is no freedom at all. According to Portilla, Mexico is a “sub-integrated” society, located on the far opposite end of the spectrum of worldly integration. In Mexico, he says, “everything happens as if these structures of transcendence that we have named horizons of community suffered...from a lack or in-articulation” (189). Although Mexicans are not “smothered” by rigid social norms, Portilla says that the horizons of understanding in Mexico are so unclear, incoherent, and unstable that the basic conditions for the possibility of meaningful action are undermined, together with the possibility of agential freedom. For this reason, Portilla describes the state of sub-integration as “a species of social malnutrition that forms a thin yet suffocating spiritual atmosphere for whomever must form their personality within it” (131).

According to Portilla, then, *zozobra* arises when the discontinuities and dissonances between the subworlds one inhabits become so pervasive and persistent that it becomes largely impossible to enjoy the experience of familiarity and identification with the kind of situations one encounters on a daily basis. Imagine, for example, that actions which are highly valued in your family life are repudiated in your professional world, and vice versa, or that you would like to be an idealistic patriot but find that the practical infrastructure for serving your nation is undeveloped or operates in a dysfunctional manner, while the infrastructure for participating in corruption is well-developed and operates efficiently. As Manuel Vargas (2020, 2) notes,

A precise characterization of these misalignments can be elusive. In relatively mild cases, the misalignment is localized to features of a job, or a group, or some particular practice. More encompassing cases of misalignment leave one feeling more radically at unease with wider or more comprehensive swaths of one’s milieu. In these more extreme instances, we might characterize the situation as producing a sense that one is ‘ungrounded’, perhaps normatively unmoored, in that it is unclear how one is to proceed, what the significance of one’s choices will be...

In the absence of a larger, shared world that can hold together the subworlds we inhabit, a person will find themselves constantly toggling between normative frames and unable to proceed wholeheartedly on the paths available to them. This is the condition of *zozobra*.

Some common psychological effects of zozobra, according to Portilla, include self-doubt and quietism, cynicism, nostalgia, and apocalyptic thinking. These effects that become distinctive social pathologies in sub-integrated nations. The primary and most direct effect of zozobra is quietism, a hesitation to take action of any sort. As Portilla puts it:

In effect, if the community's reception or response in regard to our action cannot be determined with a certain amount of clarity, it is likely that we will indefinitely postpone the demanded action until the horizon clears up and, if this does not happen, we will carry it out only when the circumstances themselves turn it into a demand that cannot be postponed, and then it will probably carry within itself the mark of improvisation. Nothing slows down the impetus toward action more than uncertainty in regard to the manner in which the work to be done will be received. (187)

Together with this sort of quietism comes a tendency toward cynicism that is also characteristic of zozobra.

Thus, in a disarticulated community such as ours, the man of action, and even the intellectual, will find himself affected by a certain cynicism which is nothing more than a defensive maneuver or a movement of self-affirmation, which can be described with the analogy of whistling or humming in the dark so as to forget one's fears....

It is clear that a failed, unnatural, or badly interpreted action will turn us into introverts, melancholic and hopeless. Action becomes imaginary: everyday conversation in Mexico is filled with stories about men who attempted a noble act, who tried to realize a useful or noble endeavor, an act that was ultimately crushed by the harshness of the external world, or invalidated by collaborators who were inept or of bad faith. (188)

Portilla thus sees the tendency toward introversion, sentimentality, and nostalgia—a desire to escape into fantasy or into memories of a bygone era when life made sense—as an expression of the cynicism that grows from zozobra (188).

Finally, Portilla argues that zozobra often gives rise to an apocalyptic imagination and a profound sense of the fragility and contingency of life. He compares what it is like to live without a clear and stable communal horizon of understanding to the situation of an “explorer or sailor working with a malfunctioning compass. Her horizon, in this case a geographical horizon, has become confusing and more than likely threatening” (184). In a similar way, he says, a person navigating everyday life in a disintegrated society will experience themselves as vulnerable in a deep and primordial way.

The individual, prevented from securely founding his being on the web of human relations, finds himself painfully exposed to the cosmic vastness. We live always simultaneously entrenched in a human world and in a natural world, and if the human world denies us its accommodations to any extent, the natural world emerges with a force equal to the level of insecurity that textures our human connections. (189)

In other words, our sense of security is largely a function of our sense of community, and so a fragmentation of a widely shared horizon of understanding will leave us feeling incapable of coping with the disasters that seem to be impending at every turn.

Widespread corruption is both a sign of *zozobra* as well as a practice that exacerbates it, according to Portilla. Because the nation does not function effectively as a horizon of intelligibility that shapes individuals' sense-making practices, actions that would involve sacrificing one's self-interest for the sake of the national community simply do not show up as making sense to people in a compelling way. As Portilla puts it,

the functionary does not act as a representative of that communal transcendence that we call the State, but rather as a representative of his own personal interests. Here we have a failure of that sentiment of solidarity that should have integrated this functionary to the total person of the State. . . . His community-State horizon disappears and the only thing that remains is the sufficient means for his particular relations to easily turn into personal relationships in which only personal interests are at play. (185)

In this way, Portilla insists that corruption—"that specter that carries with it all the fault of our national misfortunes"—is not merely an issue of "individual morality" but, rather, "an alteration or weakness of the moral foundation which is the community" (185).

Thus, Portilla views *zozobra* as something that arises when a nation disintegrates, and when this occurs, *zozobra* gives rise to profound personal distress and social dysfunction. Let us turn now to Portilla's philosophical collaborator, Emilio Uranga, who challenges this view by arguing that *zozobra* reflects the human condition and so is unavoidable, and that, in fact, communities that have been oppressed can and should *embrace* *zozobra* as a vehicle for their existential and political empowerment.

### 3 Emilio Uranga on Authenticity and Colonial Ideology

In his 1952 text, *Analysis of Mexican Being*, Uranga argues that the *zozobra* that marks Mexican life has been inflamed by the social and political subordination of Mexico and Mexicans by European powers. This socio-political dynamic has robbed Mexico of material resources for constructing the practical infrastructure that could support a more integrated horizon of understanding, while simultaneously imposing a normative framework that prevents many Mexicans from being at home in their world. In the normative framework that enjoys global hegemony, the European is centered and seen as necessary, admirable, and fully human, while the Mexican is marginalized and seen as expendable, deficient, and less than fully human.

The European does not ask himself the question regarding his own being because he immediately identifies the human and the European. He does not justify himself before humanity because, for him, his own being is the measure of the human. We, on the other hand, have to justify ourselves. It is a historical fact that endures, one registered on the historical record, that humanity has been denied to us, being men has been denied to us; but it is from this original situation that we must elevate our thinking. (Uranga, 2021 [1952], 138)

Thus, according to Uranga, in the background of Mexican life there is a persistent, felt need to justify one's very existence in the face of dehumanizing subordination.

When a group of people is treated with contempt by those who are in positions of social and cultural dominance in this way, Uranga says, there arises an unsettling doubling of perspective. Members of marginalized and subjugated social groups must constantly monitor themselves through the internalized perspective of those with privilege and power and so do not have the luxury to simply *be*, but instead find themselves always questioning the *meaning* of how they are being.<sup>10</sup> This “oscillation” between normative frameworks is characteristic of zozobra.

Zozobra refers to a mode of being that incessantly oscillates between two possibilities, between two affects, without knowing on which one of those to depend on, which justifies it, indiscriminately dismissing one extreme in favor of the other. In this to-and-fro the soul suffers, it feels torn and wounded. The pain of zozobra is not obviously identifiable with fear or anxiety, it takes from both in an emotionally ambiguous manner. (180)

To illustrate his analysis, Uranga compares Mexico to Spain, saying that among the Spanish there is little evidence of the normative uncertainty or zozobra that characterizes the Mexican way of being.

Amongst themselves, Spaniards shout and speak loudly, the interjections and insults fly without injury; however, amongst us, we [Mexicans] know ourselves as overly “fragmented” and avoid the least provocation, even the most gentle and inoffensive ones, and we avoid also the raising of our voice or the harsh word. A nature which is substantial also manifests itself in the predictable, clear, and somewhat mechanical way with which the Spanish takes a position before certain limit situations of human life: love, death, kinship, friendship. In all of these situations the Spaniard reacts in an always expected way (he knows what to count on), while the Mexican always hesitates and has to extract the appropriate attitude out of his zozobra. The Mexican does not know how to explain his conduct and feelings, he does not objectify himself, but rather lives in indeterminateness and vagueness, and is often depressed. On the other hand, the Spaniard brutally objectifies himself, calls bread “bread,” wine “wine”; he grabs hold of himself with certainty and confidence, while we unravel amongst our indeterminations. (157–58)

According to Uranga, then, the Spanish way of being is characterized by an absence of zozobra, enjoying instead a sense of stability, familiarity, and identification with regard to the normative order of everyday life, and this gives the Spanish confidence and a capacity for self-assertion that are comparatively absent in Mexico.

However, rather than searching for some way to escape the insecurity of zozobra, Uranga argues that zozobra should be proudly accepted as the price that must be paid for being authentic and in touch with most vital aspects of the human condition. Uranga draws a distinction between two possible ways of being, which he calls “substantiality” and “accidentality.” This distinction is loosely derived from Aristotle’s well-known distinction between substances and accidents, according to which an accident is an attribute that may belong to a substance, but which does not affect the substance’s essence. For example, a dog is a substance, while the color of its fur is an accident—whether the fur is white or black is irrelevant to its being a dog. Using this Aristotelian distinction as a rough analogy, Uranga uses the terms

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<sup>10</sup> It would be fruitful to compare Uranga’s analysis here to DuBois’ (1897) discussion of “double consciousness,” as well to related ideas in Fanon (1967/1952), Alcoff (1999), and others.

“substantiality” and “accidentality” to describe two basic ways that a person might experience the things they encounter. While substantiality would be characterized by “plenitude or fullness of being, an entity without fissures or edges” (104), Uranga says that the accidental form of experience

finds itself...at a distance, alienated, detached...fragile and fractured...both in being and not in being. There lies its essential vulnerability or affectivity, the ‘encountering itself’...but, at the same time, the not knowing what to depend on, the not adhering in a definite sense, hesitation, or *zozobra*. (118–19)

With this distinction in place, Uranga then argues that, at bottom, *all* human beings are accidental, and that substantiality is ultimately impossible for creatures like us. Drawing on Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Uranga argues that human beings are essentially self-questioning and self-defining entities, and therefore the meaning of our existence will always be uncertain and open to doubt (152ff). Unlike a rock, which is defined by objective properties, or a table, which is defined by its assigned functions, as a human being I am defined by my self-understanding, which is always subject to suspensions and revisions. From Heidegger’s and Uranga’s perspective, there is no “true self” inside of us to provide certainty about who and how I should be. Instead, as Heidegger puts it in a passage quoted by Uranga, “I decide for my existence through a radical possibility that is my proper constitution.”<sup>11</sup> For this reason, the being of human beings is essentially uncanny, incomplete, uncertain, and vulnerable to the experience of *zozobra* (Withy, 2015).

For this reason, Uranga holds that the accidentality that defines the Mexican way of being is more “authentic” than the Spanish way of being.

If the human being is constitutionally accidental, then it becomes understandable why the Mexican has to be described as authentically human, given that he exists in immediate proximity to the accident. This is another way to say that the Mexican is authentic because life is lived as originally ontological, or in proximity to his own being. (109)

Authenticity, in this sense, is a quasi-ethical ideal of human flourishing, one that involves humbly and honestly facing up to one’s self-questioning and self-defining nature, and then taking responsibility for creating one’s own life in the face of the fragility and uncertainty of the meaning of our existence. “Inauthenticity,” in contrast, “would be to flee the condition of accidentality and to substantialize oneself” (105). The Spanish are inauthentic in this sense, from Uranga’s perspective, because they take for granted the meaning of the things around them and of their own lives, as though such things were immutable facts, thus denying their responsibility for participating in the creation of those meanings. Although accidentality is an “original” human condition, nevertheless, “what passes itself off as human being in general, namely, generalized European humanity, does not appear to us to define itself as accidental, but precisely as arrogant substantiality” (107). Thus, given the nature of human beings, to take one’s normative order as stable and certain, as Uranga says is characteristic of the European outlook, or to remain immersed in one’s projects without disorienting periods of self-alienation, can only be a result of bad faith,

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<sup>11</sup> Heidegger (1929 [1995], 43), cited in Uranga (2021 [1952], 153).

self-deception, and a refusal to acknowledge or admit to what is, in fact, a universal human vulnerability—a dishonest state that will ultimately require both inward and outward violence to maintain.

Uranga thus calls upon Mexicans to “accidentalize” themselves—that is, to relate to their accidentality not merely as a “given,” but instead to take it up as “a project to be realized,” and even to affirm to themselves, “*it must be realized*” (105). To make his case for the intentional pursuit of accidentality, Uranga brings together a socio-political critique of coloniality, on the one hand, with an existentialist view of the human condition, on the other, as we see in the following passage:

America, Hegel said, is an accident of Europe. *This proposition must be taken literally*. To be accidental should not involve, for us, an inferior value before the substantiality of Europe, but it should highlight precisely the notion that that which is authentic or genuinely human is nothing consistent and persistent, but something fragile and fractured. This ontological condition is more originary, more primitive than that of man as substantial, which represents a derivative state, one that at bottom represents a deviation from the demands posited by the human condition at its very core. (155)

Uranga thus suggests that substantiality is a distinctively European value. In European philosophy, he argues, there has been a tendency to assume that what gives value and dignity to humankind, what makes us most human, is some quality that we possess, such as rationality, autonomy, identity, will, agency, a strong commitment to well-defined values and projects, etc.—while opposite qualities such as fragility, lack, uncertainty, and incoherence are denigrated and disdained.<sup>12</sup> But this set of values reflects the “arrogant” perspective of those who enjoy social and political dominance, whose privilege protects them from many of the circumstances that provoke a sense of self-alienation, fragility, lack, uncertainty, and incoherence for those who are marginalized, while at the same time facilitating the imposition of the strong over the weak and the callous disregard of those in need.

In this way, Uranga challenges the assumption that confidence and self-assertion is always better than uncertainty, hesitation, and gentleness, suggesting instead that the exclusive valorization of substantiality is a manifestation of an oppressive coloniality and colonial ideology. If this is correct, then by intentionally cultivating the accidentality and zozobra that has been imposed on them, Mexicans can undermine this colonial ideology and transform their accidentality into something that supports rather than undermines their flourishing. This strategy is similar to the way some oppressed groups have appropriated slurs used to denigrate them, in the hope of finding a kind of invulnerability in the act of taking on for themselves that which others sought to impose (Brontsema, 2004, Herbert, 2015). But in the case of appropriating zozobra, what is appropriated is the very *form of consciousness* that arises

<sup>12</sup>Discussing this point, Vargas (2020, 15–16) says, “Philosophers have tended to valorize cross-situationally stable, normatively unified agents, and the Kantian and Aristotelian traditions have tended to defend this sort of view in different ways.” Vargas cites Korsgaard as an example of a philosopher explicitly arguing for this view. For this reason, when Uranga argues that accidentality “constitutes the being of all human beings,” he views this as a philosophical position that has the potential “to overturn the teachings of the Western tradition” (Uranga, 2021 [1952], 111).



when one is subordinated—and this would be the ultimate invulnerability. Uranga thus calls for a generational movement that embraces and celebrates *zozobra* in order to undermine the normative hegemony of those who pretend to embody substantiality.

Noting that the notion of accidentality is drawn from European philosophy, Uranga suggests that the generational movement to celebrate *zozobra* might instead organize itself under the heading of “*nepantla*,” a term taken from Nahuatl, the language of indigenous communities in southern Mexico and Central America.

We pointed out that the mode of being of the Mexican is oscillatory and pendular, moving from one extreme to the other, making simultaneous two instances while never sacrificing one for the sake of the other. The Mexican character does not install itself over—for lack of a better term—two agencies, but between them. The Nahuatl term “*nepantla*” captures this phenomenon perfectly; it means “in between,” in the middle, in the center. We thus have before us, in all its purity, the central category of our ontology, autochthonous, one that does not borrow from the Western tradition, satisfying our desire to be originalists. The content within which our being oscillates is, suddenly, indifferent with regard to its matter; there is, for its part, nothing that would invalidate the form that binds it together. (166–67)

By elevating *nepantla* as the organizing principle of a new communal identity, Uranga hopes to undermine the colonial logic of identity, in which identity is inextricable from exclusion and the imposition of an artificial coherence. “The people of *nepantla*” would include everyone who can find no stable home in the world and who do not fit neatly into the identity categories offered by the dominant normative framework. Ultimately, this would include everyone, since all human beings have only a tenuous hold on their identity and place in the world—a vision of humanity in which the paradigm is not the European, but the Mexican.

As we turn now to discussions of *zozobra* in contemporary Latinx philosophy, we find a striking degree of continuity in the line of thought initiated by Portilla and Uranga.

#### 4 Anzaldúa on the New Mestiza

The *phenomenon* of *zozobra* is a central concern of contemporary Latinx philosophy, even if the *term* “*zozobra*” is rarely used when discussing it. As many Latinx philosophers have pointed out, while Latin American identity is complex, Latinx identity is often even more so, insofar as Latinx identity is a mixture of mixtures, bringing together what is often already a *mestizo* identity of Latin America with one or more of the various, complex, and conflicted identities found in the US. For this reason, in addition to navigating the inter- and intra-personal tensions associated with being both “too white” and “too brown” for inclusion in indigenous or Anglo-European communities, many Latinx individuals must also navigate the tensions associated with being “too Latin American” to feel fully at home in US culture, and “too American” to feel fully at home in the Latin American culture of their heritage. “*Ni de aquí ni de allá*,” from neither here nor there: this common refrain among the

children of Latin American immigrants to the US expresses a sentiment that can persist within Latinx communities for generations.

One specific way this pattern can play out is a felt need to be or act “whiter” in professional spaces, or even to enact a more general self-distancing from one’s *latinidad* or “Latinness” to maintain or improve one’s social status. Discussing this topic, Maria Lugones (1987) describes the disorienting experience of suddenly losing access to certain of her character traits and capacities that she deeply cherished, such as her “playfulness” and sense of humor, whenever she entered professional spaces in the US. This dynamic can give rise to “impostor syndrome,” in which Latinx individuals doubt their talents and accomplishments and experience a persistent anxiety about being exposed as a fraud—a condition that Carlos Sánchez (2011) describes as “post-immigrant fear,” in which the descendants of non-white immigrants remain vigilant of the threat of being asked to show one’s “papers” (i.e., demonstrate one’s credentials or proof of belonging) on pain of being “deported” from certain social spaces. As Jennifer Morton (2019) points out in her discussion of the “costs of upward mobility,” such fears often reflect the reality of a society in which many Latinx communities are oppressed, and so those Latinx individuals who gain wealth or education risk becoming increasingly isolated from their friends and families.

One of the most well-known discussions of Latinx zozobra is found in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, who writes eloquently about her own experience of not fitting into simple identity categories.

Being a mestiza queer person, una de las otras is having and living in a lot of worlds, some of which overlap.... Moving at the blink of an eye, from one space, one world, to another, each world with its own peculiar and distinct inhabitants, not comfortable in any one of them, none of them “home,” yet none of them “not home” either. (Anzaldúa, 2009, 141)

Despite the challenges associated with this zozobra, Anzaldúa offers a perspective that is strikingly similar to Uranga’s, calling on us to embrace zozobra as a source of personal and collective liberation. Like Uranga, Anzaldúa begins by arguing that fragmentation is the human condition, insofar as all people experience some amount of the self-splitting that is so pronounced in the Latinx experience.

We all have many different selves or subpersonalities, little “I’s”: This self may be very good at running the house, taking care of the writing as a business, making a living from the writing, and figuring out expenses. This other self is very emotional and this other self is the public figure who goes out, does speeches and teaches. Whatever subpersonalities you have (and some are antagonistic to others)—they all make up *el árbol*, which is the total self. (Anzaldúa, 2000, 242)

Anzaldúa thus holds that the multiplicity of the self is not inherently problematic or something to be avoided or corrected; to the contrary, it is full of creative potential.

Indeed, Anzaldúa argues that the dysfunctions associated with multiplicity are in fact caused by the imposition of hegemonic normative frameworks that demand people to be coherent, orderly, and stable—demands that may now be beginning to be subjected to skeptical critique.

Now people are integrating that desire not to compartmentalize into their lives, into everyday activities. But compartmentalization has been a way of life for so long—to be different people and even aware of it: life forcing us to be one person at the job, another at school, and yet another with our lesbian friends—that it feels really ambiguous to bring all those other identities with you and to activate them all. (141)

Again echoing Uranga, Anzaldúa calls for Latinx individuals to refuse to check parts of themselves at the office or classroom door, and to insist that the world begin to accommodate their complexity. She thus envisions a movement of people who embrace a new conception of *mestizaje* that is not tied to any ethnic or racial origins but only to mixture and hybridity itself.

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldúa, 1987, 79)

Thus, calling for us to take up the mantle of “*nepantleras*” (i.e., or people who take up *nepantla* as a project to be realized), Anzaldúa aims to construct an alternative normative framework that can bring a unified meaning to the fragmentation experienced by the Latinx community, without reproducing the violence inherent to colonial conceptions of identity.

However, it is not clear whether an identity that is so inclusive can function as an identity category at all, not to mention provide the kind of normative framework that would enable a community to avoid the negative effects of disintegration described by Portilla and others. With this in mind, let us now conclude our examination of *zozobra* with a less ambitious but perhaps more practical approach to coping with *zozobra*.

## 5 Ortega on Hometactics

In her 2016 text, *In-Between: Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self*, Mariana Ortega offers a treatment of *zozobra* that is framed as a response to Anzaldúa’s description of the multiplicity of the self. Ortega begins by arguing that multiplicity and the *zozobra* that accompanies it are both a matter of degree, and that while “all selves may experience not being-at-ease occasionally,” some individuals “experience it continuously” (Ortega, 2016, 60). In particular, Ortega says, the condition of multiplicity becomes intensified and more burdensome for those who are members of oppressed and marginalized social groups.

While the account of multiplicitous selfhood offered here is to be understood as a general account of self—that is, all of us are multiplicitous selves—...[for] those multiplicitous selves whose experience is marked by oppression and marginalization due to their social identities...multiplicity is sharper, sometimes piercing, thus leading to a sense of alienation and *Unheimlichkeit*, or uncanniness, that makes their lives more vulnerable to injustice. (51)

Oppression intensifies and exacerbates zozobra, in Ortega's view, because (1) members of oppressed social groups are frequently forced to enter into subworlds dominated by privileged social groups, for work, education, and other social and practical goods, and (2) members of oppressed social groups tend to experience a strong sense of unfamiliarity when they are in subworlds dominated by privileged social groups. Presumably, members of privileged social groups would also tend to experience a strong sense of unfamiliarity if and when they visit subworlds dominated by oppressed social groups, or any social groups to which they do not belong. However, those who are privileged often enjoy the ability to remain inside relatively segregated social bubbles and so can work, study, and take care of other concerns without having to venture out of familiar social spaces.

In this way, members of oppressed social groups tend to be the ones who must bear the cost of the disunity and fragmentation of a society's subworlds.

Since there is overlapping between worlds, some of these worlds will share norms, meanings, and points of view, while in other cases there will be minimal overlapping. Power relations at work in these various worlds are established differently and construct the multiplicitous self in various ways... there will be cases in which there will be incommensurability, and some elements will be lost in cross-cultural communication.... Complete translation is not possible, and the multiplicitous self-will in some sense always be an outsider. (67)

On this basis, Ortega criticizes Heidegger's assumption that the domain of "everydayness" is a domain in which we feel at home and can rely on unselfconscious, skillful coping. For many Latinas, Ortega argues, the demands of daily life take them into social spaces in which they feel forced to suppress or abandon practical identities and ways of being that are central to their own self-understanding. "The selves described by Latina feminists continually experience not being-at-ease or tears in the fabric of everyday experience while performing practices that for the dominant group are, for the most part, nonreflective, customary, and readily available" (61–62).

According to Ortega's analysis, then, the worst effects of zozobra arise when members of oppressed social groups are alienated from subworlds that they must frequently inhabit but are dominated by privileged social groups. It follows from this analysis that one way to cope with the worst effects of zozobra would be to diminish this alienation and strengthen the sense of familiarity and identification with the relevant subworlds. This task might be accomplished through *assimilation*, adopting the practical identities, attitudes, and ways of being of the dominant group. However, moving in the direction of assimilation often gives rise to "sense of confusion, ambiguity, or even contradiction" (81) about one's own personality and values. In this way, a Latina is more likely to find herself experiencing an "existential crisis based on the anxiety that arises when she faces extremely difficult choices given her multiple personalities" (54). The painful intensity of this zozobra itself constitutes a significant harm, and it also makes a person more vulnerable to various kinds of oppression by weakening their ability and willingness to resist injustice.

With this in mind, Ortega commends the use of what she calls "hometactics" as an alternative to assimilation. Hometactics are practices that support a person's

“sense of familiarity, ease, or...belonging in a space or location, even though the space is a new or foreign one” (205). Examples of hometactics include “painting the walls of your apartment with bright colors, such as the ones that remind you of a childhood home or your country origin” and “making and sharing foods you used to eat in your past by improvising with ingredients that are available” (206). Another example of hometactics is “rethinking, refeeling the meaning of family by developing new relationships with a neighbor, getting so close that he becomes family, too”; “finding ways of relating to members of other groups with whom one was not associated before”; or “switching languages in different contexts or integrating words from familiar languages to feel more at ease” (207). Each of these practices functions to increase the amount of “overlap” between subworlds in which one enjoys familiarity and identification and subworlds that are less unfamiliar and alienating, thus making it easier to move between these subworlds without becoming disoriented or estranged from important dimensions oneself.

Hometactics are typically improvised, small in scale, and temporary. As such, it is unclear the extent to which they will help to alleviate the *zozobra* experienced by the oppressed or constitute a serious challenge to the oppressive social structures themselves. Indeed, as Ortega admits:

[There are important] questions as to the extent to which such hometactics might be found to be too opportunistic within dominant schemas, might be representative of not just making do but of “selling out,” might be too passive, might be too complicit in dominant schemes, or might or might not preclude the possibility of more sustained political projects need to be examined. (206)

However, by way of conclusion, let us note that there is no deep incompatibility between the approaches to *zozobra* commended by Ortega, Anzaldúa, and Uranga. One could employ hometactics to “alleviate the stress, pain and anxiety that arises from a life of in-betweenness” (207) while at the same time pursuing “grander and more sustained political projects” (206), including the construction of a new paradigm of identity under the banner of *nepantla*. After all, hometactics do not aim to eradicate *zozobra* entirely by instituting a stable normative regime to one’s liking, but only to alleviate the most painful aspects of *zozobra*, which may then give one more access to the creative and liberatory potential that is inherent to liminality.

I hope to have shown that the topic of *zozobra* is a point of shared concern that connects the traditions of Mexican and Latinx phenomenology and, what is more, that the voices and perspectives we find within these traditions can be helpfully understood as participating in a shared dialectic. This dialectic offers a phenomenological approach to understanding some of the tensions that mark Latin American and Latinx identity, which have typically approached by scholars from a psychological point of view. As we have seen, the approach taken by Mexican and Latinx phenomenologists does not focus merely on the thoughts and feelings of the individuals who are questioning, asserting, or reinventing their identities but rather, examines the ways that the experience of identity is already shaped by *conditions of possibility* that are *external* to the individual. These conditions of the possibility of identity include the horizons of understanding that constitute the world within

which individuals and groups construct and contest particular identities, or—when those horizons disintegrate—constitute a setting within which individuals will struggle to form any stable or coherent identity at all. In turn, this line of thought illuminates several perennial issues in the domain of classic phenomenology, such as the nature of worlds and what it means to be at home in the world, by examining these notions in light of distinctive sorts of breakdowns that occur in the Mexican and Latinx context.

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# Merleau-Ponty and Standpoint Theory



Rebecca Harrison

## 1 The Problem(s) with Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint theory is a variety of feminist epistemology that has been active since the 1980s. Its two central tenets are (1) that knowledge is necessarily situated within a socio-political context, and (2) that certain socio-political positions or standpoints are epistemically privileged when it comes to “reveal[ing] the truth of social reality” (Hekman, 1997, 349).<sup>1</sup> Over the course of its history, standpoint theory has encountered a number of problems which have revealed stark divisions among its supporters over certain fundamental philosophical commitments (e.g., a commitment to realism about empirical claims). In this chapter, I sketch out a phenomenological account of perception that can begin to address some of these problems, drawn largely from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*.

There are two major issues that I believe a Merleau-Pontyan view of perception can help alleviate. One is that there has never been a thorough articulation of a theory of perception underlying standpoint theory’s central claims. This is surprising, since arguments in favor of standpoint theory often emphasize that occupying a certain standpoint enables one to *see* the world differently. Arguably the most influential early articulation of standpoint theory, Nancy Hartsock’s, 1983 book *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* describes a standpoint as follows: “the concept of a standpoint rests on the fact that there are some perspectives on society from which, however well intentioned one may be, the real relations

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<sup>1</sup>See also Crasnow, 2008, Sec. 3. Notably, Crasnow (2013) later introduces a third feature she refers to as “the achievement thesis,” but that discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.

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of humans with each other and with the natural world are not visible” (Hartsock, 1983). Later theorists take up this language of *visibility* in explaining what is meant by “standpoint”—Lorraine Code, for instance, writes that from different standpoints “the world looks quite different from the way it might look ‘from nowhere’” (Code, 1996, 196).

The strong implication throughout the early literature in which a “standpoint” is defined is that epistemic standpoints have perceptual underpinnings; it is taken to be intuitive that people occupying different social positions will literally *see* the world differently, and that these perceptual differences are meant to help explain how different epistemic standpoints could arise. And yet, feminist standpoint theorists never discuss the underlying theory of perception in any detail. This chapter aims to provide some suggestions (or at least some helpful nudging) towards what such a theory might look like.

The other problem that a Merleau-Pontyan account of perspectival perception may be able to address is the complex tension between standpoint theory’s two central theses<sup>2</sup>: on the one hand, knowledge is always and necessarily socio-politically situated, and on the other, certain ways of being thusly situated can be *better* or *worse* when it comes to understanding the reality of certain social phenomena. The problem is that knowledge being necessarily situated seems to make it difficult to account for one single reality or world about which some particular group could be epistemically privileged (and then, of course, there are problems with defining such groups in the first place).<sup>3</sup> In particular, if we affirm that there is not one single standpoint that one monolithic group known as “women” occupy (as numerous theorists compellingly argued in the 80 s and 90 s),<sup>4</sup> it becomes especially difficult to see how it wouldn’t be the case that (as Alison Wylie puts it) “standpoints fragment into myriad individual perspectives,” and standpoint theory reduces to a sort of empty relativism (Wylie, 2004, 341).

Thus, there is some confusion about how it could be possible for different standpoints to have different but nonetheless real experiences of some singular external reality in the first place, let alone how there could be some mechanism by which certain standpoints are privileged. Susan Hekman calls this issue the “central problem” for feminist standpoint theory: “given multiple standpoints... how can we talk about ‘better accounts of the world,’ ‘less false stories’? And, indeed, how can we talk about accounts of the world at all if the multiplicity of standpoints is, quite literally, endless?” (Hekman, 1997, 358).

As Miranda Fricker points out, there seems to be a “need for an epistemology which gives a strong role to socio-political values,” but which nonetheless maintains

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<sup>2</sup>This problem is most famously articulated by Susan Hekman, in her critical essay “Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited” (1997).

<sup>3</sup>Hekman points out that “Originally, feminist standpoint theorists claimed that the standpoint of women offers a privileged vantage point for knowledge. But if the differences among women are taken seriously and we accept the conclusion that women occupy many different standpoints and thus inhabit many different realities, this thesis must be reexamined” (Hekman, 1997, 349).

<sup>4</sup>See e.g. Hooks, 1984, Grillo, 1995 for compelling critiques of this sort of essentialist view.

a realist stance about beliefs drawn from experience (Fricker, 1994, 95). I'm not going to defend this point about realism at length in this chapter, but I am generally in agreement with Fricker that feminist epistemology needs a realist account of empirical belief. At the very least, the ability to make meaningful political claims in general would seem to depend upon one's ability to make "empirical claims about real states of affairs in the world." Fricker further notes that "the backbone of [feminist politics] is a set of beliefs about real states of affairs and, in particular, real experiences had by women" (Fricker, 1994, 99).

I believe the second problem (the tension between standpoint theory's two central theses) is at least partially derivative of the first (the lack of an adequate account of the perceptual basis for standpoint epistemology). The recognition of "myriad individual perspectives" need not lead to the aforementioned fragmentation, if we can square the recognition of such perspectives with a realism about perceptual experience. Such a view would have to explain how distinct, sometimes even apparently conflicting, perspectives might nonetheless be reconciled as revealing genuine aspects of a single real world to which they all belong. Merleau-Ponty can help us begin to resolve these issues. He does so by providing an account of perspectival perception that includes a multiplicity of different perceptual standpoints (all of which nonetheless put us in touch with a single external world), and explains how it could be that some standpoints are better than others when it comes to accessing certain features of this world.

## 2 Merleau-Pontyan Horizons

Most discussions of perspectival perception assume that perspective is primarily a matter of spatial orientation. Even when discussing the difference between distance conceived of as a standardized spatial measurement (e.g. 200 ft.) and distance conceived of in a more practical sense, as is typical of a Merleau-Pontyan phenomenological account (e.g. the need to walk towards something in order to see it better),<sup>5</sup> the presumption is that a "point of view" is characterized by spatial orientation. Ultimately I will argue that this view of perspectival perception should include not only spatial orientation but also one's historical, cultural, political, and personal situation—but it is useful to first understand Merleau-Ponty's account of the spatial aspect of perspectival perception in order to fully grasp the significance of his view of perspective more generally.

In the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume points out that there seems to be a difference between what we see from our particular perspective and what the objects of our perception are supposed to be in themselves: he claims that "the table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it" (Hume, 2007, XII.1). This phenomenon is called "perspectival variation," and Hume—like

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<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Kelly, 2005, 34.

many other philosophers after him—takes this observation to be sufficient to prove that we do not perceive the object itself, since the object itself does not change in size. Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, takes perspectival variation to be a feature of what it is to perceive objects themselves, rather than a sign that we are somehow cut off from those objects by the limitations of our particular point of view. For Merleau-Ponty, perception itself is characterized by the dynamicism of perspectival variation, and tied to “the object itself” as that of which every perspectival moment is a particular expression.

The kind of perspectival dynamicism that characterizes perception for Merleau-Ponty is not unusual or unfamiliar: we walk around things or turn things over in our hands all the time, which involves a continuous series of perspectival variations. “To the extent that I move around the cube,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “I see the front face, which was a square, lose its shape and then disappear, while the other sides appear and each in turn become square” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 210). Merleau-Ponty is insistent that we should not understand this process as a set of discrete instances, or some determinate number of perspectives which we “add together” in our minds in order to understand the object: “I do not have one perspectival view, then another, along with a link established by the understanding: rather, each perspective passes into the other” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 344). There is a continual development of our familiarity with the object through our ongoing exploration, as we turn it over in our hands or walk around it, or otherwise engage with it further. Indeed, it is this continual development through our bodily engagement with the world that characterizes perception in general for Merleau-Ponty, and “each appearance of the thing that falls before our perception is still nothing but an invitation to perceive more” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 242).

According to Merleau-Ponty, each perspectival moment “passes into” the others in the sense that each perspective is already present (more or less indeterminately) in the horizontal structure of all the others. Of course, the concept of the “horizon” is central to the phenomenological tradition, and there are sometimes subtle but substantive differences in how different phenomenologists treat it. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the “horizons” of an object refer to the hidden or implicit aspects of the object that nonetheless play a positive role in one’s experience of the object. For a relatively simple example: when I look at a coffee cup, I do not experience the cup as only having the sides that are immediately visible to me—I experience the cup as having sides that are not currently turned towards me, sides that I would see if I turned the cup around, or if I were sitting on the other side of the table. The “horizontal structure” of the object includes not only the side I am facing, but also its other sides, and all the other possible ways of viewing or interacting with the object.

When we engage with an object in perception, we have a grasp on its horizontal structure from a particular point of view: certain aspects of the object are presented fairly determinately, in the foreground, while other aspects of it remain or are pushed into the background, indeterminate but nonetheless present in our perceptual experience. For Merleau-Ponty, these indeterminate features are present in our experience of the object, not something we infer, project, or otherwise intellectually

constitute on the basis of what's in the foreground, so to speak.<sup>6</sup> And when Merleau-Ponty says that *we pass into* one perspective from another, the idea is that we are engaged in a continued exploration of the object, of the same horizontal structure, but with a new part of it in focus, and the prior perspective pushed into the background.

The best way to describe this process is not as a sort of summation of an increasing quantity of perspectives, from which we construct a model or representation of the object in our minds. For Merleau-Ponty, it is an ongoing process of exploration and familiarization with the object itself that takes place over time. Every perspectival moment of the object is a direct engagement with the horizontal structure of the object and thus an engagement with the object itself, and the object is present in every perspective on it, more or less indeterminately. The perspectival structure of perception renders perception always to some degree indeterminate, but it is also what makes perception possible in the first place. Perspective, for Merleau-Ponty, is the means by which things “unveil” or “show themselves” to us in perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 70).

This is an important feature of Merleau-Ponty's view that distinguishes it from Husserl's earlier discussion of the concept of the “horizon” in perception. For Merleau-Ponty, the sides of the object that are not immediately presented in my visual field are nonetheless actually already present in my experience, however indeterminately, not as expectations or projections I have formed about the object but as part of the “positive ambiguity” or indeterminacy<sup>7</sup> that is built into perceptual experience itself.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Merleau-Ponty adopts a sort of direct perspectival realism: each perspectival view may present us with a different aspect of the world, or arrangement of its horizontal structure, but what we see is the world itself through our particular perspective.<sup>9</sup>

Given that each perspective includes a more-or-less indeterminate presentation of the object, one might wonder whether some perspectives might be more determinate than others, or whether the object “reveals” or “unveils” itself *more* to certain perspectives. Intuitively, the answer would seem to be yes: seeing someone from 10 feet away is *better* than seeing them from 100 feet away. You can see more detail, recognize them (or not) more easily, even see what kind of mood they might be in or what their attitude or behavior towards you is much more easily at 10 feet than at

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<sup>6</sup>For further discussion on this point, see Kelly, 2005, 79. Here I am following Kelly's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's account of horizons and spatial perspective in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, which I am generally in agreement with.

<sup>7</sup>Merleau-Ponty insists very early on in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that “there is an *indeterminate vision*, a *vision of something or other*, and, if taken to the extreme, that which is behind my back is not without visual presence... We must recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 6–7).

<sup>8</sup>See Kelly, 2005, 79–81 for further elaboration of this point.

<sup>9</sup>Reading Merleau-Ponty as a “realist” is not an uncontroversial position, and I have made more detailed arguments in favor of it elsewhere. What I have in mind is similar to the “unproblematic realism” that both Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus attribute to Merleau-Ponty, and to Heidegger as well.

100. In this sense, distance (or spatial orientation more generally) is not just a descriptive but also a *normative* feature of perceptual experience.<sup>10</sup>

For Merleau-Ponty, an object's horizontal structure is normatively ordered: to be familiar with the object is to know which perspectives to privilege under which circumstances, and to feel a certain tension drawing you to take up those particular perspectives. If you are standing too far away from a sign to read it, you feel compelled to move closer (and may even do so without thinking about it); your distance from the sign is not just a descriptive but also a normative feature of perceptual experience. The normative character of an object's horizontal structure determines which of the possible perspectival orientations towards the object I *should* take up, and I *feel* that "should" as a tension, insofar as my current position deviates from the norm. It is important to emphasize that this tension is felt, and does not consist of a "judgment" but rather the sensing of a certain call to action: according to Merleau-Ponty, what I perceive when I perceive the distance to an object, e.g., is a need to move closer or farther away in order to see the object better. Merleau-Ponty (2012) writes:

For each object as for each picture in an art gallery, there is an optimum distance from which it requires to be seen, a direction viewed from which it vouchsafes most of itself: at a shorter or greater distance we have merely a perception blurred through excess or deficiency. We therefore tend towards the maximum visibility, and seek a better focus as with a microscope. (315–316)

This tendency towards "maximum visibility" applies beyond relative distance, and beyond visibility too. There are some obvious examples related to sound, for instance: imagine repositioning yourself relative to a speaker system to optimize your listening experience, or the frustrating experience of having the worst seat in a symphony hall.

Each perspectival moment is "ambiguous," in the sense that it involves both the explicit perspectival view of the moment, but it also presents, implicitly and with varying degrees of indeterminacy, all the other perspectival variations on the object. Even the "maximum visibility" state remains ambiguous, because it is impossible to have every aspect of or every perspective on the object in view determinately all at once. This is why, if we want to familiarize ourselves with a building, e.g., we do not simply stand in one "optimal" position before it satisfied (or, for that matter, simply ask to see the blueprints); we walk around it, we explore inside it, and to really "know" the building, perhaps we live in it for a while. We do this because we understand that a single perspective is not the only

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<sup>10</sup>It is worth noting that this normativity arises as a result of the way in which the structure of the object itself interacts with our own structure, that is, the actual physical structure of our living bodies. The object draws us to interact with it in a way that allows it to reveal itself the most *to us*, given our particular manner of embodiment in the world (which includes things like our size, physical capabilities, perceptual apparatus, etc). The normative character of an object's horizontal structure is a feature that belongs to the object, but (like the object's other features!) it is revealed through our particular embodied interactions with it.

informative or legitimate one to have, and is insufficient for really familiarizing ourselves with something.

These further perspectives do not merely “add up to” the complete object: they give us a better intuitive sense of which perspectives to privilege as the normative ones in any variety of circumstances, and of the internal horizontal structure of the object on the whole. Paris, for Merleau-Ponty, is not simply a “thousand-sided object,” and that’s not just because it has indefinitely more than one thousand sides (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 293). To become familiar with Paris, or to become familiar with any object, involves getting to know it, to know your way around it, to recognize its own style, what it demands of you, and in a sense, its own point of view, and thus to understand how it fits into the world that is home to this object and all others, and to you yourself as well (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 71).

### 3 Socially-Situated Perspective

Importantly, perspective is not just a matter of spatiality for Merleau-Ponty. He describes the relationship between the world and the experiencing subject as an “intentional arc,” writing that “perceptual life... is underpinned by an ‘intentional arc’ that projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or rather, that ensures that we are situated within all of these relationships” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 137). Our perceptual experience has *meaning* for us because of the way our particular position in historical time, or within a culture or a political body, or even within our own personal history, reveals certain aspects of the world to us. This is not because we do some kind of post-hoc interpretation of our experience in light of all of these things; rather, we engage with the world in perception *through* “our human milieu.”

One example that makes this fairly obvious is language perception. There is a profound difference between hearing a language that you know, that has meaning for you, and non-linguistic sounds. Wittgenstein makes a similar point when talking about the visual difference between written language you understand and mere marks on the page—or even written language that is familiar to you but which is printed as a mirror-image of itself (Wittgenstein, 2001, 169). If perception were only a matter of spatial features, there should be no difference—a sound is a sound and a mark is a mark. In order for us to explain how we perceive the world the way we do qua language, whether written or spoken, we have to include culture and personal history in the story.

There are plenty of other examples where certain things have different meanings to different people depending on their particular social, historical, political, or personal circumstances. For Merleau-Ponty, even on the most basic level, perception is not a matter of bare sensory features—we perceive things in terms of how they solicit our behavior (e.g. chairs are for sitting, coffee mugs are for drinking). Komarine Romdenh-Romluc puts the point this way: “One’s surrounding environment is immediately presented in perception as ‘requiring’ or ‘suggesting’ a certain



sort of behavior such that the perceiver is not confronted with things that have merely objective qualities such as size, shape, etc., but with entities that are edible, throwable, kickable, and so on” (Romdenh-Romluc, 2007, 45). All of this, of course, depends on our own personal histories and skills, as well as our cultural and historical situation—and, given certain differences between our respective situations, something that appears e.g. “edible” to me may not for you.

As was mentioned earlier, Merleau-Ponty makes it clear at numerous points in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that the objects themselves consist of, and are present in, every possible perspective one could have on them. But this point takes on a new significance when we consider that this infinitude of perspectives, all of which present a real aspect of the object, are not only spatial but also socio-historical in nature. For Merleau-Ponty, the account of perspective should also apply to this richer notion, beyond the merely spatial. Thus, I want to make the following four claims, which apply what we have already said about spatial perspective to socio-historical perspective as well:

1. Just as our perspective is always limited spatially—there is always more to see just around the bend—so too is it limited in this socio-historical sense. In short, there are always more ways for something to have significance for someone than I will ever know. As with spatial perspective, this sense of something’s significance extending beyond my own immediate experience of it (having “unseen sides,” as it were) nonetheless plays an important role in my experience, and lends it a sense of reality or of belonging to an external world that will always outstrip my individual grasp.
2. Just as the object itself is really present to us (however indeterminately) through our particular spatial perspective, so too is it really present to us (however indeterminately) through our particular socio-historical perspective, as we engage with the aspects of the world that that particular socio-historical perspective reveals.
3. Just as an object’s horizontal structure has a normative element spatially speaking (seeing someone from 10 feet away is better than trying to see them from 100), similarly there are socio-historical perspectives that are better than others for perceiving certain aspects of the world. Language is an obvious example: someone fluent with a certain language will be much more adept at perceiving facts like “what is written on this sign” in the relevant language than someone who is not.
4. Therefore, there are ways the world *really is* that I perhaps do not have the best view on, or that I may never actually see, because of my particular socio-historical perspective (but that someone else might!)

For a more complex example, I imagine the Parthenon does not look the same to me as it did to an Ancient Greek, and this is not only because of age and decay. It may be awe inspiring to both of us, but in very different ways, and the cultural meaning it has for each of us is different. The complex role the Parthenon played in the lives of contemporaneous Greeks would have been much more obvious to the Ancient Greek than to me: the religious significance of its status as a temple to Athena, for

example, would have been much more concrete for someone living within that culture at the time. For me, that aspect of the Parthenon's significance certainly remains and influences my experience of it thousands of years later, but with a certain mysteriousness and distance from its original practical use. In that sense, the Ancient Greek's perspective is *better* for understanding the original religious significance of the Parthenon (which is surely a real, historical fact about it). Similarly, both I and the Ancient Greek would certainly have a sense of the Parthenon representing a triumph of Greek architecture. But the nature of that triumph would have a much more current and perhaps political significance (and perhaps elicit feelings of patriotic pride) for the contemporaneous Greek. My own experience is distanced from those features of the Parthenon, but includes a sense of its sheer awesomeness as a human construction that was first built thousands of years ago, and its status as a symbol of Western civilization in general.

Since I am not and could never be an Ancient Greek person, I cannot have the same perceptual experience as they did, and their perspective is thus much better at revealing the Parthenon in its original significance to the Ancient Greeks than mine is. But both my experience and that of the Ancient Greek are part of the horizontal structure of the Parthenon. When I experience the Parthenon, the experiences of the Ancient Greeks are present, however vaguely, on the periphery of my experience: the sense of the Parthenon as having deep religious and political significance to contemporaneous Greeks (the actual experience of which I nonetheless do not have immediate access to myself) is part of what lends it a certain mysteriousness and profundity to my own experience of it. The experiences of the Ancient Greeks are some of the "implicit" or "hidden" aspects of the Parthenon, and this is part of what gives my experience its meaning. According to Merleau-Ponty, I am "always surrounded by indeterminate horizons that contain other points of view" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 141), and those other points of view—however indeterminate to me—contribute to the rich socio-cultural significance embedded in my own perceptual experience.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty thinks that history as an academic discipline or field of inquiry would be impossible if there were not "overlap" between my experience and the experience of Ancient Greeks, even given the many intervening years of remove between our lived perspectives. Merleau-Ponty (2012) writes:

"[Historical knowledge of the past] would be impossible if I did not have—through the intermediary of my society, my cultural world, and their horizons—at least a virtual communication with [past civilizations], if the place of the Athenian Republic or of the Roman Empire was not somewhere marked on the borders of my own history, if they were not established there like some particular individuals to meet, indeterminate though preexisting, and if I did not find the fundamental structures of history within my own life. The social world is already there when we come to know it or when we judge it." (379)

The "indeterminate though preexisting" connections we have to people in different socio-historical positions (which includes not only past civilizations, but also

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<sup>11</sup> Sartre makes a not-entirely-dissimilar point in *Being and Nothingness* when he claims that we are always "situated in a human space" when we perceive (Sartre, 1956, 372).

current cultures that are not our own) is what makes our attempts to understand “the world of the Ancient Greeks” possible, and its present-yet-indeterminate character is perhaps what makes that attempt at understanding such a provocative project that spawns entire subdisciplines of academic study (not to mention the humorous trope in fiction and other media of historical figures time-traveling to the present and being appalled at how much we’ve gotten wrong).

Merleau-Ponty writes that “we have learned in individual perception not to conceive of our perspectival views as independent of each other; we know that they slip into each other and are gathered together in the thing. Similarly, we must learn to find the communication of consciousnesses in a single world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 369). In a somewhat literal sense we can never actually possess each other’s experiences directly: each person’s individual perspective is unique, and the way the world reveals itself to you will be different from how it reveals itself to me, even if our particular personal histories are very much alike. Merleau-Ponty sometimes refers to this as a sort of “necessary solipsism,” but the fact that our unique individual perspectives present us with a world that outstrips our individual grasp, and that (more or less indeterminately) includes the perspectives of others, presents “the absurdity of a solipsism-shared-by-many, and such is the situation that must be understood” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 376).

Despite our “enclosed” individual perspectives, other people’s perspectives—perhaps drastically different from my own—are present to me, more or less indeterminately, as “other sides” of the stuff of my own experience. Like the other sides of the coffee cup, other people’s perspectives are part of the horizontal structure of an object or phenomenon and lend a certain depth and significance to my own experience. Put another way, my own perspectival experience implies others.<sup>12</sup> This is part of what it is to engage with real (non-imaginary, non-hallucinatory) objects in perception: those objects are intersubjectively available, and we experience them as such. We live in the same world as the things we perceive, and in the same world as each other—your experiences and my experiences are of the same world, and we meet up with it and with each other through and in virtue of our particular perspectives.

## 4 Consequences for Standpoint Theory

We can thus begin to get a sense of how a Merleau-Pontyan account of perception might help ground the standpoint epistemological picture. Earlier in this chapter, we laid out the task in the form of two main questions to be answered:

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<sup>12</sup>Merleau-Ponty writes that “Every other person exists for me as an irrecusable style or milieu of coexistence” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 382). Merleau-Ponty also somewhat humorously remarks that “solipsism could only be rigorously true of someone who succeeded in tacitly observing his existence without being anything and without doing anything, which is surely impossible, since to exist is to be in the world. In his reflective retreat, the philosopher cannot avoid dragging others with him” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 378).

1. How is it possible for different perspectives (which ground different standpoints) to have different but nonetheless real experiences of a single external reality?
2. How is it possible that some perspectives can be *better* than others when it comes to certain social phenomena?

On a Merleau-Pontyan view, we can reconcile the recognition of “myriad individual perspectives” with a realism about the experience that those perspectives provide. For Merleau-Ponty, it is not a problem if each perspective is incomplete, partial, or even apparently conflicting with other perspectives: this is what we would expect of our socio-politically informed perspectival access to the world. Because our access is always “limited” by our particular perspective, our point of view might look much different from someone else’s, but it is also the *means by which* we access the same world as everybody else—and the wide variety of others’ perspectives is the means by which our experience of the world takes on the sort of significance that it does. Merleau-Ponty writes that “we are, for each other, collaborators in perfect reciprocity: our perspectives slip into each other, we coexist through a single world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, 370). In other words, the proliferation of standpoints need not lead us into an unacceptably relativistic framework, as long as we are able to conceive of each of these standpoints as giving whoever occupies it access to some particular aspect of or a unique access point into a singular, real, shared world.

That unique access point will be characterized in terms of the subject’s socio-political situation, among other factors, and standpoints will have a normative structure. This can help make sense of standpoint epistemology’s claim that people with a particular socio-political position may have privileged access to “social truth,” or at least some part of it. Point (4) above—the idea that there are ways the world really is that I may not have the best view on due to my particular situation—leads directly into Hartsock’s claim that there are some perspectives from which certain social phenomena are just not visible: perhaps one person’s particular perspective allows something to show up for them in a way it just doesn’t for someone else. In the same way that a certain spatial orientation can be better or worse for perceiving an object, certain socio-political situations are better or worse for perceiving social phenomena.<sup>13</sup>

For Merleau-Ponty, perspectives can be epistemologically privileged insofar as they are grounded on a perspective that provides the subject with a better grip on the phenomenon in question. In the same way that it is easier to read a sign from closer up, it is sometimes easier to “read” a social situation from a socio-political position that puts one “closer” to the phenomenon. Being treated as a woman, e.g., might make it easier to recognize certain gendered phenomena in the world, or how

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<sup>13</sup>This view of perceptual experience also dovetails very nicely with an epistemic approach Lorraine Code calls “Normative Realism” in her recent book *Epistemic Responsibility*. In particular, Code’s view emphasizes the possibility of dramatically different but similarly accurate socially situated, perspectival “takes” on a situation, while maintaining that such “takes” can be better or worse “both morally and epistemically” insofar as they are more or less accurate, and appropriately *responsive*, to the object or situation in question (Code, 2020, 139–141).

pervasive certain gendered problems are.<sup>14</sup> The Ancient Greek is in a better position to grasp and understand the original religious and political significance of the Parthenon, due to the immediate relevance of that fact to their own everyday life—similarly, people who are generally treated as “women” are likely to be in a better position to grasp and understand sexist or gendered phenomena in the world, insofar as it presents itself as immediately relevant to them in their everyday lives in a way that it does not for people who are not typically read as “women.”<sup>15</sup>

Some immediate examples that come to mind are the pervasiveness of public harassment and catcalling, and the effect that those phenomena have on one’s perception and movement through public spaces. The actual perceptual experience of walking alone at night through public areas (an empty parking lot, say) has a much different character for those subject to sexist harassment or even violence than it does for those who are not.<sup>16</sup> Other possible examples include more subtle effects of sexist societal norms, such as the expectation that women handle domestic chores. Several recent surveys, combined with time-use studies, show that men in heterosexual domestic relationships often incorrectly believe that they are shouldering an equal portion of the domestic labor, whereas their partners have a somewhat more accurate grip on the continuing reality of the unequal distribution of domestic labor (even when both partners work full time).<sup>17</sup> It is hard to explain this disparity in their respective beliefs without recognizing that people in a certain socio-political position (i.e. women partners of heterosexual men) can see the situation somewhat better from where they are standing, so to speak.

Merleau-Ponty’s view also has the strong advantage of responding to concerns about the “difference problem.” Much of the discussion of this problem involves the apparent assumption of early standpoint theories that “woman” is a social identity category that consists of one monolithic standpoint, which ignores the experiences of women who do not fit the dominant view of what a “woman” is (typically white, heterosexual, cisgender, of a certain class, cultural, and geographical background

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<sup>14</sup>Note also that this claim does not assume that *just* occupying a certain socio-political position (e.g. “woman”) is *enough* to make one an “expert perceiver” of the relevant phenomena; it might be the case, as several feminist standpoint theorists have pointed out, that some kind of increased political awareness is also an important factor.

<sup>15</sup>Notably, this does not require that there actually be some monolithic category of “women” who all occupy exactly the same standpoint in every respect; rather, every relevant individual’s perspective and socio-political position can be different, and yet all of these different positions will include the particular way(s) in which they are treated as “women” by society at large.

<sup>16</sup>Arguably this effect can be understood as an instance of what Iris Marion Young calls “inhibited intentionality,” in which our capacity for bodily engagement with the world is complicated or frustrated by a simultaneous sense of hesitancy or restriction in the face of potential harm. In this way, “[women’s] bodies project an aim to be enacted but at the same time stiffen against the performance of the task” (Young, 2005, 34–38). On a Merleau-Pontyan view, that would make for a much different experience of the parking lot — and that experience itself is a fairly common social phenomenon that women are likely to have privileged perceptual access to.

<sup>17</sup>See Yavorsky et al., 2015, Miller, 2015, Schaeffer, 2019, Barroso, 2021, and others. See also Miller, 2020 regarding the unequal distribution of home educational responsibilities during the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

and so on). On Merleau-Ponty's view, the claim that all women would share a single monolithic standpoint is obviously false: a huge variety of factors integrate to form each individual's unique way of meeting up with the world through their particular perspective. Nonetheless, there will be some interests and concerns more likely to be held by people who read as "women,"<sup>18</sup> largely due to their actual lived experiences of being treated as women by the rest of the world. Thus, "woman" need not name a single monolithic identity or standpoint in order to still refer to a relevant set of common gendered experiences that condition the individual perspectives of people who are treated as "women."

Merleau-Ponty's view can do this while also maintaining that there are aspects of the world that are revealed to one standpoint better than another, and that those aspects of the world are real. For Merleau-Ponty, there is no tension between the claim that subjects engage with the world via their unique standpoints or perspectives and the claim that there really is a shared reality with which we are all directly engaged (and about which one can have a better or worse account), because it is those unique standpoints that put us in touch with real states of affairs in the world. In this way, a Merleau-Pontyan perspectival realism can give us a picture of what the perceptual underpinnings of standpoint theory might look like—and why it might be not only an ethical but also an epistemic imperative that we support members of marginalized groups in their efforts to have their voices heard.

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<sup>18</sup>Note that this can include interests and concerns that are particular to intersectional identities; i.e., not all women need have those interests and concerns in order for them to count as specifically gendered *qua* women.

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**Part III**  
**External Horizons: The Arts**

# Are Artists Phenomenologists? Perspectives from Edith Landmann-Kalischer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty



Samantha Matherne

## 1 Introduction

Phenomenologists often appeal to artists as allies, as engaged in the phenomenological effort to return to the ‘things themselves’, albeit in their own way. This is perhaps nowhere more prominent than in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), in which he presents artists, like Cézanne, Proust, and Balzac, as engaged in the same phenomenological project that he is. Merleau-Ponty, indeed, emphasizes this point in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945):

Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne – through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state (PhP lxxxv).

In light of remarks like this, one may begin to wonder: are artists phenomenologists?<sup>1</sup>

While Merleau-Ponty’s approach might seem to point toward an affirmative answer, if we look to an earlier figure in the phenomenological tradition, Edith Landmann-Kalischer (1877–1951), we find reason to answer in the negative.<sup>2</sup> In her article, “On Artistic Truth” [*Über künstlerische Wahrheit*] (1906),

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<sup>1</sup>As I understand this question, it is not a question of whether artists conceive of themselves as phenomenologists; surely some do, but most do not. Rather the question I am interested in is whether, from the outside, we can describe what artists do as a kind of phenomenology.

<sup>2</sup>Translations of Landmann-Kalischer are my own. Daniel Dahlstrom (as translator) and I (as editor) are preparing a translation of CV, OAT, and PV for publication in the Oxford New Histories of Philosophy series (Eds. Christia Mercer and Melvin Rogers).

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Landmann-Kalischer draws a sharp contrast between what artists do and what phenomenologists do.<sup>3</sup> According to Landmann-Kalischer, whereas phenomenologists ‘translate’ our lived experience into ‘concepts’, artists find ways to make our lived experience sensibly present (OAT 495–6). In so doing, she claims that the artist accomplishes something unique:

Just as we would never see our own face [*Anlitz*] were it not for a mirror, so too we would never see our inner life opposite [*gegenüber*] us were it not for the mirror of art. *Only* art exhibits [*dar...stellt*] it to us. *Only* through art can we cognize it (OAT 463, *emph. added*).

No matter how careful the translations of the phenomenologist are it would seem they cannot make us see our lived experience in the way that artists can. From Landmann-Kalischer’s perspective, then, it would appear that artists are not phenomenologists.

Though the views of other phenomenologists no doubt bear on the question of whether artists are phenomenologists, in this paper I shall pursue the dialectic between the negative answer modeled by Landmann-Kalischer and the affirmative answer modeled by Merleau-Ponty. I do so, in part, in keeping with the aims of this volume: although Landmann-Kalischer’s phenomenology has been neglected, she is one of the ‘horizons of phenomenology’, which merits our attention moving forward. Moreover, she and Merleau-Ponty are among the most aesthetically sensitive phenomenologists, who devote a considerable body of work to issues in aesthetics.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, as I argue below, the comparison between the two reveals choice points where phenomenologists might converge and diverge in how they think about the relationship between artists and phenomenologists. Both Landmann-Kalischer and Merleau-Ponty maintain that artists and phenomenologists share the same subject-matter, *viz.*, lived experience. However, they come apart with respect to their conceptions of what phenomenologists are supposed to do. Landmann-Kalischer endorses a more scientific account of phenomenology, according to which a phenomenologist is a kind of psychologist who aims to analyze, classify, and determine the laws that govern lived experience. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty treats the phenomenologist as someone who is supposed to present lived experience in a way that evokes that experience in us. Given that presenting and evoking lived experience is precisely what he takes an artist to do, we find Merleau-Ponty embracing a more aesthetic conception of phenomenology, according to which there is not just

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<sup>3</sup>As I make clear below, Landmann-Kalischer refers to phenomenologists as ‘psychologists’; hence, the contrast she explicitly draws in OAT is between artists and ‘psychologists’ (see 495–7).

<sup>4</sup>Landmann-Kalischer’s first pieces are dedicated to aesthetics (*Analysis of Aesthetic Contemplation* [*Analysis of ästhetischen Contemplation*], “On the Cognitive Value of Aesthetic Judgments,” and “On Artistic Truth”), as is her posthumously published work, *The Doctrine of the Beautiful* (1952). In addition to aesthetic themes running throughout the *Phenomenology* and *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty takes up aesthetic issues in the essays, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” “Metaphysics and the Novel,” “The Film and the New Psychology,” “Indirect Language and Voices of Silence,” and “Eye and Mind” (see Merleau-Ponty (1993)).

something of the phenomenologist in the artist, but something of the artist in the phenomenologist.

In the end, I will not defend one position over the other; rather, my aim is to show that in order to answer the question whether artists are phenomenologists, we must also answer the question, how should phenomenologists be?<sup>5</sup> I proceed as follows. I begin in Sect. 2 with a discussion of Landmann-Kalischer's analysis of the difference between phenomenologists and artists in "On Artistic Truth". In Sect. 3 I turn to Merleau-Ponty's account of the continuity between artists and phenomenologists as he articulates it in the *Phenomenology* and his 1948 essays in *Sense and Non-Sense*, "Cézanne's Doubt," "Metaphysics and the Novel," and "The Film and the New Psychology." I conclude in Sect. 4 by pointing out that although Landmann-Kalischer and Merleau-Ponty agree that artists and phenomenologists share subject-matter, their answers to the question whether artists are phenomenologists come apart on account of a fundamental disagreement about how phenomenologists should be.

## 2 Landmann-Kalischer: Artists are Not Phenomenologists

In order to explore Landmann-Kalischer's negative answer to the question whether artists are phenomenologists, I begin with a discussion of her approach to phenomenology, before turning to her account of artists. And because her work is still relatively unfamiliar, I will spend more time situating her account of phenomenology and art than I will when I turn to Merleau-Ponty.

### 2.1 Landmann-Kalischer's Phenomenology

Landmann-Kalischer began developing her philosophy in the early days of the phenomenological movement, prior to the ascendancy of Edmund Husserl and his school. She published her doctoral thesis, *Analysis of Aesthetic Contemplation* [*Analysis of ästhetischen Contemplation*] in 1902, just on the heels of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900–01). And her next major pieces, "On the Cognitive Value of Aesthetic Judgments" ["*Über den Erkenntniswert ästhetischer Urteile*"] and "On Artistic Truth," appeared in 1905 and 1906, respectively, a year before Husserl's lectures on the "Idea of Phenomenology." Though she engages with Husserl, e.g., in "Philosophy of Values" ["*Philosophie der Werte*"] (1910) and *The Transcendence of Cognizing* [*Die Transcendenz des Erkennens*] (1923),<sup>6</sup> her

<sup>5</sup>I am indebted to Becca Rothfeld for helping me formulate and think through this question.

<sup>6</sup>She briefly engages with Husserl's distinction between 'ideal' and 'real' sciences in the *Investigations* in PV: 74–6, but his views in the *Investigations* and *Ideas* serve as a major foil for her in *The Transcendence of Cognizing*.

conception of phenomenology is not framed by Husserl's formulation of it. Instead, her conception of phenomenology emerges in the period in which 'phenomenology' has not yet stabilized as the primary label for this movement, and terms like 'psychology' and 'descriptive psychology' are more common. Indeed, in her early writings, we find few references to 'phenomenology' by name, and many references to 'psychology' and 'descriptive psychology'.<sup>7</sup>

One helpful way of situating Landmann-Kalischer is alongside the disparate group of thinkers who take their cue from Franz Brentano, including Alexius Meinong,<sup>8</sup> Carl Stumpf, Christian von Ehrenfels, Anton Marty, and Kasimir Twardowski.<sup>9</sup> In spite of their many differences, what Landmann-Kalischer shares with these thinkers is a basic Brentanian conception of the subject-matter and method of phenomenology.<sup>10</sup>

As Brentano's description of phenomenology as the "science of mental phenomena" suggests, the Brentanians align the subject-matter of phenomenology with 'mental phenomena' (*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* 19). However, since, *per* Brentano, mental phenomena are defined in terms of 'intentionality', i.e., directedness towards objects, phenomenology requires the investigation of both the subjective and objective sides of mental phenomena. So understood, the Brentanians do not think of the subject-matter of phenomenology in purely subjective terms; they take it to be a complex of the subjective- and objective- sides of mental phenomena.

In keeping with this conception of the subject-matter of phenomenology, Landmann-Kalischer claims that the 'task' of phenomenology is to "to uncover psychic reality" and "subjective phenomena" (OAT 495).<sup>11</sup> That is to say,

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<sup>7</sup>See, e.g., PV 63, where she describes a "purely phenomenological treatment" as a "science of thinking and acting."

<sup>8</sup>Landmann-Kalischer and Meinong had an extended correspondence and he credits her with influencing his theory of value. For example, in "On Emotional Presentation" ["*Über emotionale Präsentation*"] (1917), he says, "I myself owe to the essay "*Über den Erkenntniswert ästhetischer Urteile*," despite initial fundamental reservations, substantial stimulations for the conceptions which are now, in the present writing, developed in some more detail" (pp. 415–416, quotation in Reicher-Marek (2017): 82)). See also his claim in "For Psychology and against Psychologism in General Value Theory" ["*Für die Psychologie und gegen den Psychologismus in der allgemeinen Werttheorie*"] (1912), where he asserts, "Landmann-Kalischer's remarks on the 'cognitional value' of the feeling, which appear to me today, contrary to my first impression, as far as their main idea is concerned, to be the most important thing that has been put forward so far for the justification of the position which is to be sketched here" (p. 278, translation in Reicher-Marek (2017): 82)).

<sup>9</sup>Rollinger (1999) refers to this group as 'Brentanists' and (2008) as 'Austrian phenomenology', and Ferran (2014) calls it the '*Brentanoschule*'. For a discussion of the relationship between Landmann-Kalischer's value theory and that of Brentano and Meinong, see Ferran (2014). For a discussion of the relationship between her aesthetic theory and that of Brentano, Meinong, and von Ehrenfels, see Reicher (2016), Reicher-Marek (2017).

<sup>10</sup>This is not to say that they all identify as phenomenologists; rather I am using 'phenomenology' here to refer to Brentano's conception of philosophy.

<sup>11</sup>In this passage, she refers to this as the task of psychology, but here she has in mind the task of descriptive psychology, which is tantamount to the task of phenomenology (as I discuss shortly).

phenomenology investigates the domain of consciousness and the various types of mental phenomena in it, including perception, memory, feelings, judgments, volitions, etc. However, Landmann-Kalischer insists that ‘uncovering’ psychic reality is not just a matter of attending to the subjective-side of lived experience; it requires attending to its objective-side as well:

in every lived experience we distinguish a subjective and an objective side. Sensing, representing, feeling, willing are a psychic, subjective lived experience; the sensed, represented, felt, and willed are objective.... Act and content [*Akt und Inhalt*] can be distinguished in every psychic lived experience (PV 35).<sup>12</sup>

She investigates the relationship between the subjective- and objective- sides of lived experience at length in the *Transcendence of Cognizing*, where she describes this relationship both in her preferred terms of ‘transcendence’, but also in Brentano’s terms of ‘intentionality’ (8). In a Brentanian spirit, Landmann-Kalischer thus conceives of the subject-matter of phenomenology as the complex of the subjective- and objective-sides of lived experience, and the relation of transcendence or intentionality between the two.

Meanwhile, regarding method, the Brentanians follows Brentano in conceiving of phenomenology as a *science* of mental phenomena. More specifically, they regard phenomenology as a kind of natural science, which studies mental phenomena ‘from an empirical standpoint’. For this reason, they endorse Brentano’s claim that, “the true method of philosophy is none other than that of natural science” (*Über die Zukunft* 137, my transl.).

More specifically, Brentano and his followers align phenomenology with ‘descriptive psychology’ (*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* 29, fn1). Unlike ‘genetic’ psychology, which aims at giving a causal explanation of mental phenomena, ‘descriptive’ psychology aims at describing phenomena as they are given in ‘lived experience’ [*Erlebnis*] (*Descriptive Psychology* 31). With this description, the phenomenologist aims to notice, analyze, and classify these phenomena, and to determine the general laws that govern them (see *Descriptive Psychology* 31–32).

However, for some Brentanians, descriptive psychology is best suited to clarify the subjective-side of lived experience, and, as such, it needs to be supplemented by an investigation of the objective-side of lived experience. Twardowski’s account of the content-object [*Inhalt-Gegenstand*] distinction and Meinong’s ‘object theory’ [*Gegenstandstheorie*] are attempts in this vein.<sup>13</sup>

Landmann-Kalischer’s approach to the phenomenological method follows along these lines. In general, she eschews any metaphysical program, in favor of an

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<sup>12</sup>“*Empfinden, Vorstellen, Fühlen, Wollen ist ein psychisches, subjectives Erlebnis, das Empfundene, Vorgestellte, Gefühlte, Gewollte ist ein Objektives.... Akt und Inhalt läßt sich... an jedem psychischen Erlebnis unterscheiden.*”

<sup>13</sup>See Twardowski’s *On the Content and Object of Presentations* (1894/1977) and Meinong’s “On Objects of Higher Order and Their Relationship to Internal Perception” (1899/1978) and “The Theory of Objects” (1904/1960).

empirically-based method, modeled on natural science.<sup>14</sup> And in order to investigate the subjective-side of lived experience, she deploys descriptive psychology.<sup>15</sup> As she presents it, descriptive psychology takes as its starting point the ‘facts’ pertaining to lived experience, and aims to ‘describe’ this “factual state of things [*tatsächlichen Stand der Dinge*]” (PV 32, 68–9; CV 304).<sup>16</sup> And by means of this description the phenomenologist “analyzes the complexes of consciousness, classifies their elements, and establishes the lawful relations between them” (OAT 495). For example, if we were to pursue descriptive psychology with respect to aesthetic experience, we would begin with a lived experience of a particular work of art. We would then “describe and analyze” that lived experience in order to uncover what is ‘typical’ of aesthetic phenomena, e.g., having a feeling of pleasure and making an aesthetic judgment about the beauty of a work of art (CV 285).

However, according to Landmann-Kalischer, in order to do justice to the subject-matter of phenomenology, we need to also investigate the objects that we relate to through mental phenomena. For this reason, she claims that in addition to descriptive psychology, we need “objective sciences” that investigate the relevant phenomena, e.g., we need a science of the true for logical phenomena, a science of the good for ethical phenomena, and a science of the beautiful for aesthetic phenomena (PV 62–3). This said, she nevertheless claims that descriptive psychology is a ‘presupposition’ of these “objective sciences” (PV 62–3). That is to say, these objective sciences are to take as their starting point our lived experience of the true, the good, and the beautiful, and their task is to elucidate the objects and law-governed relations among those objects that those mental phenomena relate to. For her part, Landmann-Kalischer develops a kind of realist account of the true, the good, and the beautiful, according to which they are neither reducible to something wholly subjective, nor are they something wholly independent of human beings. Instead, she argues that the true, the good, and the beautiful are analogous to secondary qualities, like colors: they are parts of the world that are nevertheless essentially related to subjects.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Her criticism of idealist metaphysics is a running theme in PV (see, e.g., 58–9) and in the *Transcendence of Cognizing*, where she criticizes Husserl specifically.

<sup>15</sup>For a sense of Landmann-Kalischer’s account of different mental phenomena, see Part 3 of “On Artistic Truth” (463–94), where she discusses various types of mental phenomena that most directly relate to art, including sense impressions, *gestalts*, perceptions (Section 1), representations of memory (Section 2), representations of fantasy (Section 3), representations of the probable and necessary, and complex representations (Section 4), and feelings (Section 5). In Part II of “Philosophy of Values” (34–52) she develops a ‘psychology of the emotional sphere [*emotionalen Sphären*]’, in which she distinguishes between ‘pure feelings’ [*Gefühle*] and ‘affects’ [*Affekten*] (Section 2). And in “On the Cognitive Value” she develops an account of the aesthetic judgments and judgments of the senses, i.e., judgments about sensory qualities.

<sup>16</sup>She is, however, critical of Brentano’s reliance on ‘inner perception’ (see PV 72–73). She objects that inner perception can only make us aware of a narrow set of mental phenomena, that outer perception can be as certain as inner perception, and that when Brentano relies on inner perception as evidence of the correctness of judgment, his view is circular because he treats correctness of judgment as the criterion of evidence.

<sup>17</sup>She develops the secondary quality analogy with respect to the beautiful in CV (for discussion see Reicher (2016), Reicher-Marek (2017), Matherne (2020)). She then expands this to an account of the good and the true in PV (see Part 2, Section III.2 and 3) (for discussion see Ferran (2014)), and this culminates in her defense of realism against idealism in *Transcendence of Cognizing*.



In step with Brentanian phenomenology, Landmann-Kalischer thus understands the subject-matter of phenomenology in terms of the complex of the subjective- and objective- sides of mental phenomena. And she construes the phenomenological method along scientific lines, as something that is best executed via a pairing of descriptive psychology, which studies the subjective-side, and objective sciences, which study the objective-side.

## 2.2 *Landmann-Kalischer on the Asymmetry Between Artists and Phenomenologists*

With this picture of Landmann-Kalischer's phenomenology in place, I can now turn to why she answers the question of whether artists are phenomenologists in the negative. To this end, I begin with a few brief remarks about her overarching cognitivist account of art, before addressing why she regards what the artist does as different from what the phenomenologist does.

In "On Artistic Truth," Landmann-Kalischer defends a cognitive analysis of the relationship between art and truth, according to which art conveys truth and we gain knowledge by engaging with art. More specifically, as I mentioned in the introduction, Landmann-Kalischer argues that art conveys a distinctive kind of truth, viz., truth that pertains to 'psychic reality' or 'subjective phenomena'. To this end, she claims that, "Art does not give us objective reality [*Wirklichkeit*], instead it is the mirror and exhibition [*Darstellung*] of the psychic world" (OAT 463). So understood, art's primary task is to exhibit to us subjective phenomena, like our lived experience of sense impressions, perceptions, memories, fantasies, feelings, etc. That said, Landmann-Kalischer notes that art can sometimes give us something from objective reality, but this is contingent:

Artistic truth... *can* in certain circumstances also be something objective; it *can* reach the being of objects [*Wesens des Gegenstandes*], it *can* uncover [*entdecken*] a hitherto unknown side of it. For aesthetics, however, this is only a contingent coincidence.... [T]he coincidence of artistic and objective truth is only an isolated case, and this is not enough to determine the concept of it (OAT 476–7).

What is essential to art, according to Landmann-Kalischer, is that it mirrors or exhibits subjective phenomena.

Landmann-Kalischer moreover maintains that the truth of art hinges on its ability to correctly exhibit this psychic reality: "Art... is true to the extent that it is a faithful exhibition [*getreue Darstellung*] of the psychic world" (OAT 463). To this end, she claims that the truth of art, like all truth, requires 'agreement' [*Übereinstimmung*] (OAT 459). But in the case of art, the agreement is between the work of art and psychic reality. More precisely, she claims that the agreement is between the 'content' [*Inhalt*] of the work of art, "what it says, narrates [*erzählt*], shows [*zeigt*], or

expresses [*ausdrückt*],” and subjective phenomena (OAT 459). For example, consider the following passage from Maggie Nelson’s *Bluets* (2009):

Suppose I were to begin by saying that I had fallen in love with a color. Suppose I were to speak this as though it were a confession; suppose I shredded my napkin as we spoke. *It began slowly. An appreciation, affinity. Then, one day, it became more serious* (§1).

From Landmann-Kalischer’s perspective, the truth of this passage turns on the agreement between what it says about the lived experience of blue and that lived experience. And because Nelson’s words are faithful to this lived experience, *Bluets* expresses a truth about that lived experience, and this is why we can gain knowledge through it.

It is in this cognitivist framework that Landmann-Kalischer situates her account of artists. She conceives of an artist as someone who conveys truths about psychic reality through an artistic medium. However, given that the truths the artist conveys are ones that pertain to psychic reality, we might wonder: why shouldn’t we think of the artist as engaged in the same project as the phenomenologist?

According to Landmann-Kalischer, it is, indeed, the case that the artist and phenomenologist are concerned with the same subject matter, viz., psychic reality and subjective phenomena. And this is why they both take as their point of departure our lived experience. However, Landmann-Kalischer argues that artists and phenomenologists nevertheless diverge with respect to the methods they deploy.

In phenomenology, Landmann-Kalischer claims that the method of descriptive psychology involves ‘translation’:

As with every science, psychology translates something intuitively given... into concepts. It analyzes the complexes of consciousness, classifies their elements, and establishes the lawful relations between them (OAT 495).

By translating an intuitively given experience into concepts, Landmann-Kalischer claims that we ‘elevate’ that experience into something more generic, which can be analyzed, classified, and lawfully determined (OAT 496). For example, if a phenomenologist were to investigate their lived experience of the beauty of the opening lines of *Bluets*, they might notice that it is, first of all, an aesthetic type of experience. They might then analyze the aesthetic experience into its ‘elements’, e.g., an aesthetic feeling and an aesthetic judgment<sup>18</sup>; classify it as an experience of the beautiful in contrast to that of the sublime; and attempt to identify certain lawful relations that govern this experience, e.g., lawful relations that obtain between the elements internal to the experience (e.g., between representations and feelings of pleasure) or between certain stimuli and the experience.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., *Analyse der ästhetischen Contemplation* and CV for Landmann-Kalischer’s analysis of the elements of aesthetic experience.

<sup>19</sup> Landmann-Kalischer takes these lawful relations between objects and aesthetic experiences to be what psychological aesthetics ultimately reaches for, but she notes that it has not yet developed to this stage (see CV 296, 321; PV 80–1).

By means of this method, Landmann-Kalischer claims that the phenomenologist seeks to ascertain general truths that pertain to different classes of mental phenomena and the lawful relations that govern them. These truths are, in turn, the sort that systematically cohere in an ‘interconnected’ way in a scientific body of knowledge about mental phenomena (OAT 497). And it is this sort of science, with its systematically connected truths, that the phenomenologist hopes to establish.

The method Landmann-Kalischer attributes to the artist is distinct in kind. Instead of translating what we are intuitively given into concepts, she claims that the artist endeavors to remain on the intuitive plane:

Art makes what is given to inner perception accessible to another organ.... it makes perceptible to the eye and the ear what was only present to ‘inner sense’.... [I]t makes the content of an abstract representation sensibly present, it gives feelings an audible or colorful gestalt.... Art creates agreement by creating a counter-image [*Gegenbild*] of the psychically given that leaves it as it is (OAT 496).

Here, Landmann-Kalischer argues that the artist proceeds by way of creating a ‘counter-image’ of our lived experience, which leaves that experience ‘as it is’. That is to say, the artist endeavors to create something that sensibly exhibits our lived experience in a way that remains faithful to that lived experience. Consider, for example, Fahrelnissa Zeid’s painting *Resolved Problems* (1948). From Landmann-Kalischer’s point of view, we can regard this painting as Zeid’s attempt to create a ‘counter-image’ of the lived experience of flying in a plane, an experience in which, “The world is upside down. A whole city could be held in your hand: the world seen from above” (*Fahrelnissa Zeid* 17).<sup>20</sup> This said, while the language of ‘counter-images’ might seem to suggest something accessible to the outer senses, Landmann-Kalischer conceives of ‘counter-images’ in capacious enough terms to be able to include literary works of art as well. For example, we can treat the following phrase in *The Last Samurai* (2000) as Helen DeWitt’s ‘counter-image’ for a lived experience of revelation: “after 30 h or so enlightenment came not in an hour of gold but an hour of lead” (20). So regardless of whether the artist uses colors, sounds, and textures, or words, concepts, and metaphors, on Landmann-Kalischer’s view, their works of art will count as ‘counter-images’ as long as they mirror lived experience to us, in a way that makes it present to us.

Insofar as artists aim at producing ‘counter-images’ that mirror lived experience in a faithful way, Landmann-Kalischer claims that their method is geared not towards generic, systematically connected truths, but toward “individual truths” that pertain to specific lived experiences (OAT 497). As I noted earlier, on her view, artistic truth involves agreement between a work of art and a specific kind of lived experience. And, for Landmann-Kalischer, the truths the artist is after are the truths that reflect specific lived experiences, e.g., a falling in love with blue, a seeing the world upside down from a plane, or a leaden enlightenment. In this regard,

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<sup>20</sup>In this context, Zeid says, “I did not ‘intend’ to become an abstract painter; I was a person working very conventionally with forms and values. But flying by plane transformed me” (*Fahrelnissa Zeid* 17).

Landmann-Kalischer claims that a work of art is supposed to serve like “a press for fruit”: through it, the artist ‘compresses’ and ‘crystallizes’ the ‘individuality’ of a lived experience (OAT 502–3). The artist thus uses their method in order to create a particular work of art, that agrees with a lived experience, in all its specificity, and conveys an individual truth about it.

It is in this spirit that Landmann-Kalischer asserts that, “The claim that art discloses its own truth [*eine eigene Wahrheit*] contains another claim, that *only through art* can this truth be mediated” (OAT 502). What she means is that art is uniquely positioned to present individual truths to us because its method turns on creating counter-images that mirror specific lived experiences. And it is for this reason that she claims, as we saw at the outset, that,

Just as we would never see our own face [*Anlitz*] were it not for a mirror, so too we would never see our inner life opposite [*gegenüber*] us were it not for the mirror of art. *Only* art exhibits [*dar...stellt*] it to us. *Only* through art can we cognize it (OAT 463, *emph. added*).

The artist enables us to ‘see’ our lived experience because she ‘mirrors’ that experience for us, in a way that exhibits it and makes it present.

So, why does Landmann-Kalischer deny that artists are phenomenologists? Although they both take lived experience as their starting point and ultimately want to disclose some kind of truth about mental phenomena, they use different methods to this end. In keeping with Brentano, Landmann-Kalischer conceives of the phenomenologist as someone who is engaged in a scientific endeavor in which they use description to translate lived experience into something more general, which can be analyzed, classified, and lawfully-determined. And through this process the phenomenologist seeks to develop a scientific body of knowledge, a set of interconnected truths about mental phenomena. By contrast, the artist endeavors to remain with our lived experience and create a ‘counter-image’ for a specific lived experience, which sensibly presents that lived experience to us, as in a mirror. And through these efforts, the artist seeks to create a particular work of art that brings to light an individual truth about a specific lived experience. So even though the artist and phenomenologist are interested in the same subject-matter, Landmann-Kalischer thinks that their methods commit them to fundamentally different projects.

### 3 Merleau-Ponty: Artists are Phenomenologists

As we now shift away from Landmann-Kalischer toward Merleau-Ponty, we not only shift toward an affirmative answer to the question of whether artists are phenomenologists, but also to a much later period in phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty is writing well after both Husserl and Heidegger’s seminal works in phenomenology, publishing the *Phenomenology of Perception* in 1945. As should be expected, his underlying conception of phenomenology departs in significant ways from Landmann-Kalischer’s. After looking at his approach to phenomenology, I then take up his phenomenological characterization of artists and, by implication, his aesthetic characterization of phenomenologists.

### 3.1 Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology

Merleau-Ponty presents his phenomenology as an effort to blend together commitments from both Husserl and Heidegger. Indeed, he opens the Preface of the *Phenomenology of Perception* with the question, "What is phenomenology," and he offers a unified answer, which builds on an account of the subject-matter and method of phenomenology that, he contends, is in the spirit of both Husserl and Heidegger.

Regarding the subject-matter of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty claims that, "The task of radical reflection... consists paradoxically in recovering the unreflective experience of the world" (PhP 251). The 'unreflective experience' that he has in mind is, what Husserl calls, our 'still-mute' experience of the world (PhP lxxix). That is to say, as a phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty is interested in the lived experience of the world that we have not yet formulated to ourselves reflectively in thought. As he makes this point in "Metaphysics and the Novel" essay,

a phenomenological or existential philosophy assigns itself the task, not of explaining the world or of recovering its "conditions of possibility," but rather of formulating an experience of the world, a contact with the world which precedes all thought *about* the world (MN 27–8).

As the reference to 'existential' philosophy makes clear here, Merleau-Ponty identifies the still-mute experience of the world with the sort of experience that Heidegger seeks to elucidate in his 'existential analytic' in *Being and Time* (1927), i.e., the unreflective experience each of us has of being thrown into the world (PhP lviii).

Merleau-Ponty, in turn, frames the method the phenomenologist uses to investigate this subject-matter in terms of 'phenomenological description' and the 'phenomenological reduction'. According to Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenologist endeavors not to "explain or analyze" lived experience in causal terms, but to 'describe' it (PhP lxxi). And with this description, Merleau-Ponty claims that the phenomenologist must not "substitute a reconstruction" for experience, but "adhere to" it (PhP lxxiii).

However, unlike the Brentanian gloss of phenomenological description that Landmann-Kalischer endorses, Merleau-Ponty situates his account of description within the context of Husserl's phenomenological reduction.<sup>21</sup> Merleau-Ponty articulates the phenomenological reduction as follows:

Because we are through and through related to the world, the only way for us to catch sight of ourselves is by suspending this movement... or again, to put it out of play.... This is... because... the presuppositions of everything thought... are "taken for granted" and they pass by unnoticed, and because we must abstain from them for a moment in order to awaken them and to make them appear.... Reflection does not withdraw from the world...; rather, it steps back in order to see transcendence spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connects us to the world in order to make them appear (PhP lxxvii).

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<sup>21</sup>I return below to the topic of how Landmann-Kalischer's conception of phenomenological description differs from Merleau-Ponty's.

I want to highlight two functions that Merleau-Ponty attributes to the phenomenological reduction in this passage. The first is what I shall call the ‘arresting function’ of the reduction. Ordinarily, our lived experience is caught up with the world: how we experience something is bound up with what we are experiencing. In order to disentangle that lived experience from everything it is caught up in, Merleau-Ponty claims that we need the reduction to ‘arrest’ that experience. Through the reduction, the ‘intentional threads’ that connect our experience to the world are ‘loosened’ and this allows us to seize upon our experience.

The second function is what I shall call the ‘appearing function’. According to Merleau-Ponty, in addition to arresting our lived experience, the reduction is supposed to make that experience show up to us. As he puts it later in the Preface,

The relation to the world, such as it tirelessly announces itself within us, is not something that analysis might clarify: philosophy can simply *place it before our eyes* and *invite us to take notice* (PhP lxxxii, my emph.).

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty claims that the reason we use description is in order to place lived experience before our eyes:

Phenomenological or existential philosophy is largely an expression of surprise at this inherence of the self in the world and in others, a description of this paradox and permeation, and attempt to make us *see* the bond between subject and world, between subject and others, rather than to *explain it* as the classical philosophies did (FN 58).

On Merleau-Ponty’s view, then, phenomenological description and reduction are means through which we ‘arrest’ our lived experience and ‘make it appear’, in a way that remains ‘faithful’ to that experience (PhP lxxx, 60).

### ***3.2 Merleau-Ponty on the Symmetry Between Artists and Phenomenologists***

If we now look at Merleau-Ponty’s characterization of what artists do, we find him articulating their efforts in the same terms he uses for the phenomenologist. To this end, he treats our ‘still-mute’ experience of the world as the subject-matter of art, and he claims that the artist endeavors to arrest that lived experience and make it appear. This is evident both in Merleau-Ponty’s general descriptions of art and in his discussion of specific artistic media.

Beginning with his general claims about art, in “Cézanne’s Doubt” he asserts,

The artist is the one who arrests the spectacle in which most men take part without really seeing it and who makes it visible to the most “human” among them (CD 18).

For Merleau-Ponty, the ‘spectacle’ that we take part in without noticing is our unreflective lived experience. And here, he attributes the arresting and appearing functions to the work of the artist, claiming that through art, the artist seizes upon that lived experience and makes it ‘visible’ for us.

Meanwhile, in his analysis of artists working in different media, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the ways in which these artists arrest and make appear different aspects of our lived experience. For example, in his discussion of novels, he claims,

The work of a great novelist always rests on two or three philosophical ideas.... [F]or Proust, the way the past is involved in the present and the presence of times gone by. The function of the novelist is not to state these ideas thematically but to make them exist for us in the way that things exist. Stendhal's role is not to hold forth on subjectivity; it is enough that he make it present (MN 26).

Here, Merleau-Ponty indicates that Proust arrests and makes appear our experience of the idea of the past, whereas Stendahl does this for our idea of subjectivity.

Meanwhile, about film, Merleau-Ponty asserts,

This is why the movies can be so gripping in their presentation of man: they do not give us his *thoughts*, as novels have done for so long, but his conduct or behavior. They directly present to us that special way of being in the world, of dealing with things and other people, which we can see in the sign language of gesture and gaze and which clearly defines each person we know.... For the movies... dizziness, pleasure, grief, love, and hate are ways of behaving (FNP 58).

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the way in which directors can arrest and make appear our 'conduct or behavior'. Consider, for example, the scene in *If Beale Street Could Talk* in which Tish and Fonny first see their loft together. From Merleau-Ponty's point of view, although in the novel (1974), James Baldwin is able to give us an idea of their excitement and love in this moment, in the film (2018) Barry Jenkins is able to show this to us in their behavior, e.g., in Fonny's dynamic movements and gestures as he envisions the space and in Tish's luminous stillness as she comes to share this vision.

Finally, with regard to painting, Merleau-Ponty maintains,

The painter recaptures and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things. Only one emotion is possible for this painter – the feeling of strangeness – and only one lyricism—that of the continual rebirth of existence (CD 17–8).

Here, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the way in which painters are able to arrest and make appear our perceptual encounters with the world. In a painting like Cézanne's *Apples* (1878–9), Merleau-Ponty claims that Cézanne is able to “remain faithful to the phenomena... of perspective,” because he captures the way in which,

perspectival distortions... contribute, as they do in natural vision, to the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes (CD 14-15).

Given this understanding of what artists do, it should not be surprising that Merleau-Ponty aligns artists with phenomenologists in the passage we considered in the introduction:

Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne – through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state (PhP lxxxv).



Developing this thought at more length in his analysis of the relationship between literature and philosophy, Merleau-Ponty says (here I fill out a quote cited above),

Everything changes when a phenomenologist or existential philosophy assigns itself the task, not of explaining the world or of recovering its “conditions of possibility,” but rather of formulating an experience of the world, a contact with the world which precedes all thought *about* the world.... From now on the tasks of literature and philosophy can no longer be separated (MN 27–8).

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty claims that once we appreciate that phenomenology endeavors to “giv[e] voice to the experience of the world,” then we should recognize that this effort is of a piece with the novelist. However, as we have seen, this is not a point he confines to the relationship between phenomenologists and novelists, but one he extends to phenomenologists and artists, more generally.

So far, I have concentrated on the ways in which artists are engaged in the same effort to arrest and make our lived experience appear that phenomenologists engage in; but what about description on Merleau-Ponty’s view? Is there reason to think that artists deploy something like phenomenological description? In light of Landmann-Kalischer’s treatment of description, we might think that the answer is no: whereas the descriptions of the phenomenologist translate lived experience into generic terms, the artist’s modes of expression leave that experience ‘as it is’. However, if we take a closer look at Merleau-Ponty’s treatment of description, we find him characterizing it, and employing it, in a fashion that is more akin to Landmann-Kalischer’s artist than her phenomenologist.

As we saw above, Merleau-Ponty insists that through description we are supposed to ‘adhere’ to our experience in a way that remains ‘faithful’ to it. However, more than this, Merleau-Ponty treats description as something that is supposed to *evoke* lived experience in us. As we saw him make this point in his characterization of the reduction, phenomenological description is supposed to ‘awaken’ in us what we take for granted (PhP lxxvii, see also lxxii, 34, 213). Making this point about the phenomenological description of perception, he claims,

The fundamental philosophical act would thus be to return to the lived world...; it would be to awaken perception and to thwart the ruse by which perception allowed itself to be forgotten (PhP 57).

For Merleau-Ponty, then, the phenomenologist is supposed to ‘awaken’ or evoke in us the lived experiences described.

True to this conception of description, in the *Phenomenology* we find Merleau-Ponty offering his own descriptions in an evocative style. Consider, for example, his description of being aware of the spatiality of one’s body:

If I stand in front of my desk and lean on it with both hands, only my hands are accentuated and my whole body trails behind them like a comet’s tail. I am not unaware of the location of my shoulders or my waist; rather, this awareness is enveloped in my awareness of my hands and my entire stance is read, so to speak, in how my hands lean upon the desk (PhP 102).

In his description of this lived experience, Merleau-Ponty uses images and metaphors that make this experience vivid for us. Indeed, much like DeWitt’s description

of enlightenment that comes in the hour of lead, Merleau-Ponty's description is meant to elicit a response from us, a response in which the experience resonates. And this is by no means an isolated moment in the *Phenomenology*; throughout the text we find Merleau-Ponty using description to evoke and awaken experiences in us. For example, describing grief, he says,

When I am overcome with grief and wholly absorbed in my sorrow, my gaze already wanders out before me, it quietly takes interest in some bright object, it resumes its autonomous existence (PhP 86).

Or about illusory love, he writes,

in false or illusory love I am willingly united with the loved person; she really was, for a time, the mediator of my relations with the world. When I said: "I love her," I was not "interpreting"; and my life really was engaged in a form that, like a melody, demanded a certain continuation (PhP 397).

In these, and other passages like them, Merleau-Ponty uses description to evoke lived experiences in us.

What these considerations about Merleau-Ponty's evocative conception of description reveals is that he not only recognizes a phenomenological strand in what artists do, but also an aesthetic strand in what phenomenologists do. Like the artist, the phenomenologist pursues the reduction and utilizes description in the effort to make lived experience palpable to us. For Merleau-Ponty, then, the affirmative claim that artists are phenomenologists is bound up with an aesthetic conception of phenomenology, as an endeavor to express, exhibit, and evoke our still-mute experience.

## 4 Conclusion

Over the course of this paper, I have laid out two answers to the question, whether artists are phenomenologists: a negative answer modeled on Landmann-Kalischer's views and a positive answer modeled on Merleau-Ponty's. In spite of their disagreement, one thing that they both agree on is that phenomenologists and artists share a subject-matter: they are both interested in elucidating our lived experience. However, the reason that they ultimately diverge is on account of different conceptions of how a phenomenologist should be. For Landmann-Kalischer, phenomenologists should be engaged in a kind of scientific endeavor, in which they use description to translate lived experience into something more general, which we can analyze, classify, and lawfully determine. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty thinks that a phenomenologist should be engaged in an effort to arrest our lived experience and to make that experience appear to us. And though he thinks we use description to this end, instead of translation, he conceives of description as something that involves a kind of evocation, a presentation of lived experience that awakens it in us. Given Landmann-Kalischer's more scientific and Merleau-Ponty's more aesthetic conception of how a phenomenologist should be, we can see why Landmann-Kalischer regards the

artist's attempts to mirror our lived experience as an endeavor that is distinct from phenomenology – and why this mirroring is precisely the sort that Merleau-Ponty strives for. In the end, in lieu of an answer to the question whether artists are phenomenologists, with this dialectic I hope to have brought out the need to also attend to the question of how a phenomenologist should be.<sup>22</sup>

## References

### *Abbreviations of Merleau-Ponty's Works*

- PhP *Phenomenology of Perception*. Transl. D. Landes. London: Routledge, 2012.  
 CD "Cézanne's Doubt." In *Sense and Non-Sense*. Transl. H. Dreyfus and P.A. Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.  
 MN "Metaphysics and the Novel." In *Sense and Non-Sense*. Transl. H. Dreyfus and P.A. Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.  
 FN "The Film and the New Psychology." In *Sense and Non-Sense*. Transl. H. Dreyfus and P.A. Dreyfus. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

### *Abbreviations of Landmann-Kalischer's Works*

- CV "On the Cognitive Value of Aesthetic Judgments: A Comparison Between Sense and Value Judgments," translated from "Über den Erkenntniswert ästhetischer Urteile: Ein Vergleich zwischen Sinnes- und Werturteilen." *Archiv für die Gesamte Psychologie*, 1905, 263–328.  
 OAT "On Artistic Truth," translated from "Über künstlerische Wahrheit." In Max Dessoir (Ed.), *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*. Stuttgart: Enke, 1906, 457–505.  
 PV "Philosophy of Values," translated from "Philosophie der Werte." *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie* 18, 1910, 1–93.

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# The Reading Process: An Intertextual Approach



Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez

## 1 Reader Response Theories: From Ingarden to Iser

In the long history of interconnectedness between philosophy and literature, the twentieth century was marked, to a large extent, by significant developments in the exploration of ties between phenomenology and theories of reader response and reception. In addition, novel philosophical ideas about time, subjectivity, and consciousness influenced many early- and mid-twentieth century authors, whose innovative and experimental works posed newfangled challenges to readers. Understanding and enjoyment of the experimental texts they produced hinged upon a series of cognitive processes that were considerably more complex than what the nineteenth century literary works used to require.

Directly or indirectly, Husserl's thoughts on the structures of consciousness found an enthusiastic literary corollary in the development of the interior monologue and of similar techniques during the heyday of modernism, with authors such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner (among many others) focusing their work on depicting not reality itself (the lofty but dated goal of nineteenth-century realism) but, rather, how their characters perceived it in complex subjective mental processes that modernist narratives struggled to reproduce in detail.

Upon encountering for the first time the opening lines of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, for example, readers are confronted with the evocation of a scene that is not descriptive in the traditional sense (that is, rendered understandable to them by a narrator that processes and delivers phenomenological information) but

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My title is intended as a critical homage to Wolfgang Iser's 1972 seminal essay "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach."

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experiential: what the reader encounters are the seemingly unmediated thoughts of a character who is not introduced by name or in any other manner but who shares his perception of things as they appear to him:

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit. (Faulkner, 2016, 3)

What in this scene is self-apparent to the speaking character remains (at least in part) a mystery to the reader. What flag? Who are those people? What are they hitting? We have little trouble imagining a flower tree that may or may not be exactly like the one the character sees near Luster, but we just cannot come up that easily with a proper ideation of the flag. What type of flag? What purpose does it serve? In this famous opening, readers are forced to see the landscape through Benjy's impaired mind, and it is only much later in the novel that they realize that Luster and Benjy are outside a golf course that was built on land that used to belong to Benjy's formerly wealthy family.

As narrative developments like this became dominant in both prose and poetry, literary critics and scholars found in hermeneutics and phenomenology some useful vocabulary and theoretical approaches to begin conceptualizing the role of a reader who now was confronted with higher degrees of indeterminacy than ever, even if their analyses extended further back into much earlier periods in the history of literature, acknowledging the role of gaps and incomplete information in works from previous centuries, such as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, a rather experimental novel in that regard.

Influenced by Husserl's ideas on intentionality, Roman Ingarden was among the first to bolster the role of the reader in the literary process, suggesting that works of literature should be treated as intentional objects, that is, as entities that resulted from the articulation of a reader's intentionality working on the schematic codification of an author's previous intentionality (Ingarden, 1973, 14). As such an intersubjective object, the text could no longer be controlled by the mind of the author who produced it, but the reader would not be at liberty to realize its words in complete independence either, since the reader's experience of the text would be governed by the linguistic materiality of the text.<sup>1</sup>

Central to Ingarden's understanding of the intersubjective nature of the literary text was the concept of places of indeterminacy, i.e., unrealized aspects of the text that the reader would "fill" by concretizations arising from the reader's previous experiences (whether in literature or in life). In principle, for example, a reader familiarized with the world of golf would be in a better position to imagine what the flag and the hitting are (in Faulkner's quote above) than that of someone unfamiliar with the sport. By the same token, imagination of the undefined flower tree in that same quote would depend on what types of blooming trees are part of a reader's

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<sup>1</sup>Due to space constraints, I cannot do justice to this and other complex arguments below. For a more detailed analysis of Ingarden's intersubjective object, see Çelik (2016, 43ff).

experience, painting a different actual image of the plant in each reader's mind. This form of ideation is one of the key elements of the act of reading, eloquently summarized by Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges in an anecdote told by Alberto Manguel, who used to read to Borges when the latter was already blind:

Stopping me after a line he found side-splitting in Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights* ("dressed and painted to represent a person connected with the Press in reduced circumstances"—"How can someone be dressed like that, eh? What do you think Stevenson had in mind? Being impossibly precise? Eh?"), he [Borges] proceeded to analyse the stylistic device that, while appearing to be exact, forces the reader to make up a personal definition. (Manguel, 1996, 17)

Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics focused, precisely, on the problems that result from such a manner of evoking phenomena through language, in particular considering that language is a means for intersubjective communication, what he terms *I-lessness*, or the fact that "[t]o speak means to speak *to* someone" (Gadamer, 1976, 65, original emphasis). From Aristotle to St. Augustine, and on to Gadamer's days and to our own present, the function that writing plays so "that we might be able to converse also with the absent" (Augustine, 1948, 846) enables the possibility to inquire how that conversation is even possible, as Borges's question to Manguel also wondered. The hermeneutic activity of the reader, according to Gadamer, negotiates the process of connecting the alien or unknown with the familiar, the latter serving as necessary support to understand the former (Gadamer, 1976, 15). The ensuing task of filling places of indeterminacy and making personal definitions in the literary communication between subjects hinges upon the reader's ability to ideate phenomena that the reader (in this sense as blind as Borges) cannot possibly see directly but only through the textual conversation with the absent author.

Building somewhat on Husserl, but much more on Gadamer and Ingarden, Wolfgang Iser's attempts to understand and analyze the act of reading resulted in one of the most influential theories of reader response and sense building to date. To develop his own interpretative model, Iser inevitably had to challenge some of the tenets of his predecessors. His critique of Ingarden, for example, revolved in part about questions that are central to a reader's ability to construct meaning out of a text. According to Iser, Ingarden's dissatisfaction with contemporary texts was based on what the latter perceived to be deliberate or programmatic incomprehensibilities (which the Faulkner example above may illustrate), since Ingarden was still operating under the assumption that texts should be understood to have a normative or preferred concretization that aligned the reader's interpretation with the author's intentions,<sup>2</sup> something the more experimental texts of the twentieth century apparently refused to do. Iser, on the other hand, advocated for the possibility that "a work may be concretized in different, equally valid, ways" (1987, 178), thereby approaching "difficult" texts not so much as potential communicative failures but as

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<sup>2</sup>In this regard, Iser quotes a self-acknowledged banal example offered by Ingarden to explain why, if no other options are offered to the reader, the reader should understand that a character described as very old should be imagined as having gray hair (Iser, 1987, 176).



works that intentionally opened up the range of potential interpretations.<sup>3</sup> As he would later clarify in his study of negativity in Samuel Beckett's prose, "negativity can be regarded here as a structure of bringing forth—at least potentially—infinite possibilities" (Iser, 1993, 141).

In consequence, Iser's model highly bolstered the role of the reader beyond what Ingarden and even Gadamer had proposed (though not to the extreme positions advocated by other theorists like Stanley Fish),<sup>4</sup> and it saw the act of reading as that which creates meaning when readers interact with texts, not with authors. In order to study that interaction, Iser proposed several important concepts, on which I will also rely for part of my argumentation, including those of the *strategies* and the *repertoire*. According to Iser, strategies "organize both the material of the text and the conditions under which that material is to be communicated" (1987, 86). In that sense, the strategies offer readers the possibility of formulating whatever arrangements of the text materials they consider effective or viable, rather than presenting them with an already fixed structure. Faulkner's example above may, once again, be of use to clarify this concept, and it should be apparent that the disjointed, disorganized structure of his text not only serves to codify his writing in a certain manner, but also to lay out a basis for communicating with readers, one in which the reader must be willing to interact with a polyphony of un/identified voices, a disorderly sense of time, repetitions of topoi from multiple points of view and, in sum, a seemingly chaotic narrative that requires constant syntheses and self-correction in the minds of the readers. This is the type of communicative situation that, while somewhat alienating Ingarden, attracted Iser for its potential for addressing the process of reading as a sense-building operation. Because reading is sequential (in both time and space), and because the text can never be apprehended at one time, "[t]he 'object' of the text can only be imagined by way of different consecutive phases of reading" (Iser, 1987, 109), which means that the relation between reader and text cannot be that of an observer in front of an object. Rather, Iser claims, "instead of a subject-object relationship, there is a moving viewpoint that travels along *inside* that which has to be apprehended," a defining quality that he considers unique to literature (1987, 109, original emphasis). It is the process of reading which constitutes the literary object, then, and no existence of that object prior to the act of reading can be acknowledged.

The repertoire, in turn, "consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged" (Iser, 1987, 69); but Iser emphasizes that familiarity cannot be reduced to identity or reproduction of that which the reader already knows. On the contrary, he argues, what makes the familiar territory interesting to readers is not the fact that it is known to them already, but rather that it leads in an unaccustomed direction by virtue of its appearing

<sup>3</sup>For an early summary of Iser's critique of Ingarden's intentionality theories, see Brinker (1980).

<sup>4</sup>For Fish, interpretive strategies are not put at the service of making sense of the text; rather, "they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as is usually assumed, arising from them" (1980, 13).

reformulated in an unfamiliar context (1987, 70), which enables readers “to see what they cannot normally see in the ordinary process of day-to-day living” (1987, 74).

To further explain these and other elements of the act of reading, Iser also relied on an additional pair of key concepts, those of *blanks*, which I will address immediately below, and *negations*, to which I will return after a brief consideration of the literary repertoire. As Iser explained these two terms,

Blanks and negations both control the process of communication in their own different ways: the blanks leave open the connections between perspectives in the text, and so spur the reader into coordinating these perspectives—in other words they induce the reader to perform basic operations *within* the text. The various types of negation invoke familiar or determinate elements only to cancel them out. What is canceled, however, remains in view, and this brings about modifications in the reader’s attitude toward what is familiar or determinate—in other words, he is guided to adopt a position *in relation* to the text.” (1987, 169, original emphases)

The blank as a concept sounds so similar to Ingarden’s places of indeterminacy that Iser was forced to explain the difference by stressing that blanks operate by fostering not *completion* but *combination* of elements to address indeterminacies in the text, an essential aspect to explain why readers understand texts differently instead of arriving to the same conclusions as all other readers. According to Iser, a reader does not negotiate blanks by simply supplying missing information but by concretizing connections that the blank disrupted. In doing so, the reader creates an idiosyncratic synthesis of textual materials that reflects her or his own reading at that particular reading instance, which may be different from syntheses made by other readers (or by the same reader at different times in her/his life). Such divergences in interpretation (from reader to reader, and from reading to reading) explain why the blank is not an informational gap that can be filled with missing data, but a relational imbalance that requires the reader’s sense-making intervention.

## 2 Negotiating Literary References

For my purposes in this chapter, the most important aspect of Iser’s model concerns his understanding of the literary repertoire, that is, the un/familiar presence of previous literary works or genres in the text being read, but I will approach its study by connecting the repertoire to both blanks and negations. For Iser, the literary repertoire plays a double function during the act of reading: “it reshapes familiar schemata to form a background for the process of communication, and it provides a general framework within which the message or meaning of the text can be organized” (1987, 81). If we think of a well-known literary text like Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, it should be easy to see the ways in which that double function works. In the first sense, readers should have relatively little trouble to see behind Cervantes’s novel other literary schemata that had been popularized before 1605, including—of course—the chivalric romances that Don Quixote loves to read

and that the novel is said to parody, but also the conventions of road-oriented narratives, as in the so-called picaresque novel. In Cervantes's reshaping of the norms of the novels of adventure, in turn, readers of *Don Quixote* encounter a springboard for organizing their own sense-making activities, which are then free to pursue rather divergent and even unexpected courses. Considering the notion of the quest, for example, a reader may wonder why would Don Quixote want to become a knight errant at that particular juncture in time instead of enlisting to participate in the still active exploration and colonization of the Americas; through that and/or similar speculations some readers may raise mental questions about social and political norms that other readers might not entertain.

The effectiveness of Iser's method, as far as the literary repertoire is concerned, seems to hinge on the reader's preexisting familiarity with those earlier literary conventions and presences that the text invokes and rephrases. When that is the case, I find his model rather useful and convincing. It is obvious, however, that different readers bring to the act of reading diverse sets of cultural capital and social backgrounds, which means that while some of them would have no trouble finding in *Don Quixote* the rephrased schemata of the chivalric romances, others will be unlikely to do so. This raises an intriguing set of research questions, some of which I intend to explore in the rest of this chapter. In particular, I want to reflect on the issue of how to negotiate explicit intertextual references, meaning those moments in which a literary text mentions or references in unambiguous terms another. What happens when the reader is not familiar with the referenced text? How does a reader deal with different forms of citation or allusion? When does it become necessary for readers to familiarize themselves (as much as they can) with the mentioned text, and when and how do they decide to ignore a particular reference and simply continue with the text they are reading?

At the bottom of these questions lies precisely the Iserian notion by which texts can be described as reformulations of an already formulated reality, in which whatever blanks a reader encounters may be negotiated through the kind of ideation that would permit readers to navigate unfamiliar territory in the text by appealing to what they already know, the basics of Gadamerian hermeneutics, as well. When we read a description of a city or a landscape that is unfamiliar to us, we can still make inferences from the words in the description to construct a mental image of the place, as in the case of Faulkner's blooming tree cited above. As Charles A. Hill further suggests, discussing visual images, "[e]ven if the viewer has never seen a real, unmediated cow, the viewer understands that such creatures exist, and that they have particular traits and associations that the creator of the image would like to bring to the forefront of the viewer's consciousness" (2003, 129). If we could transpose those images from the visual to the written arts, Merleau-Ponty's views on the visible/invisible in painting might be of help to further explore what Iser terms *reformulation*.<sup>5</sup> Written words, in that sense, would serve as the visible that makes

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<sup>5</sup>According to Merleau-Ponty, painting "gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible" (1964, 166).

present the invisible, even if they do so as arbitrary, non-representational signs. In such an absence of visual images, a reader who encounters an unknown linguistic term (“chabudai,” for example) could look it up in a dictionary or, if s/he so chooses, s/he could skip that operation and simply form a mental image of that object using contextual clues that may suggest the idea of a short-legged table, then supplementing the image—as needed—with his/her own knowledge of different types of furniture. The blank, in that case, is negotiated not only by making the unintelligible understandable but also by coordinating perspectives within the text (pondering why is a somewhat uncommon word like *chabudai* used or what does that usage say about characters, narrators, setting, and the like). Beth Hernandez-Jason’s contribution to *With a Book in Their Hands: Chicano/a Readers and Readerships Across the Centuries* offers a good, empirical example of this type of reader activity. Revisiting and rereading as a 26 year old the Nancy Drew books that she loved as a child, Hernandez-Jason explains the re-reading process:

As I continue to read, I am surprised by the vocabulary words—“unscrupulous,” “exonerate,” “insoluble,” “titan.” I do not even know what “titan blond” means, and I surely did not know then. However, if in other books her hair was described as strawberry blonde, I must have simply guessed what “titan” meant at the time. (2014, 90)

Though Iser would have expected a reference to the famous Venetian School painter to be easily understood by an ideal reader, the particular real reader I am citing, unfamiliar with Titian’s iconic palette, negotiated the blank in the text through inference and contextual clues.

But, what happens when the reader encounters a reference in the text not to “reality” but to another text? In the studies of narratology and intertextuality the citing text is known as the hypertext and the cited text is called the hypotext, following Gérard Genette’s influential nomenclature (1982, 11–12). Iser almost takes it for granted that the readers of a hypertext would be familiar with the cited hypotext(s), and that they would use that familiarity to make sense of the citation, but—as mentioned—such an understanding of the communicatory structure of the literary text requires a number of assumptions about cultural capital that disregard patterns of access (or lack thereof) to education, exposure in certain regions and cultures to certain texts and not to others, and the like, which seriously compromise an actual (versus an ideal) reader’s ability to negotiate intertextuality. Even the most well-read individual is bound to find references to unknown hypotexts that would have to be either negotiated or dismissed as the reader advances through the hypertext.

Paraphrasing Iser, who claimed that the text is “a formulation of an already formulated reality” (1987, x), one could argue that the main challenge in making sense of intertextual references or citations is that the reader needs to deal not with textual passages that refer to an already formulated reality but to an already formulated *formulation* of reality, one that challenges the reader in ways that the text s/he is reading cannot always satisfy through contextual clues. Two examples from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions* may serve to illustrate (and differentiate) some of the challenges involved in making sense of intertextuality. In the first and easier to handle of the two, Rousseau reflects on problems he had experienced in the past

with the printing and the reception of his books (especially with the banning of some of them), just as a wealthy patron has proposed to take charge of a new publication of his, which Rousseau fears will be banned as well:

Elle trouva le moyen de faire entrer dans ses vues M. de Malesherbes, qui m'écrivit à ce sujet une longue lettre toute de sa main, pour me prouver que la *Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard* était précisément une pièce faite pour avoir partout l'approbation du genre humain, et celle de la cour dans la circonstance. Je fus surpris de voir ce magistrat, toujours si craintif, devenir si coulant dans cette affaire. (1824, 420)<sup>6</sup>

Rousseau's *Émile* (the hypotext in this example) was banned in Paris and Geneva because of its section entitled "Savoyard's Vicar's Profession of Faith." A reader not familiar with that circumstance can easily look it up online nowadays, or in a reference book, and make *some* sense of that particular intertextual citation, since what is needed to negotiate this intertextual blank is mostly factual information, and not a deeper knowledge of the contents of the "Profession" itself (even though such a knowledge would doubtless result in a more meaningful reading experience). The reader may not know yet the entire relevance of the citation, but upon learning of the Paris/Geneva ban most readers would probably feel that they have enough information to go on reading the *Confessions*, even if they had never read the "Profession" themselves.

Unlike the previous example, which we could categorize as a case of *referential citation*, the following one (which we might call *phenomenological citation*) will prove to be somewhat more challenging for the purposes of sense-making:

Je trouvai dans son souris je ne sais quoi de sardonique, qui changea totalement sa physionomie à mes yeux, et qui m'est souvent revenu depuis lors dans la mémoire. Je ne peux pas mieux comparer ce souris qu'à celui de Panurge achetant les moutons de Dindenault. (Rousseau, 1824, 372)<sup>7</sup>

The mention, in this case, is not of another text *qua* text, but of a particular trait in a particular character's countenance in a hypotext. This type of intertextual linkage does not remit the reader to a previous authority invoked as such; rather, it forces the reader to come up with an ideation of a previous ideation of an unseen phenomenon. Why would Panurge smile as he was purchasing those sheep? Once again, a reader not familiar with Panurge or Dindenault could look them up online or in a print reference book. Such a search is likely to furnish an explanation that more or less properly describes Panurge's purchase of Dindenault's sheep in François Rabelais's *Fourth Book of Pantagruel*. But how does one form an image of the sardonic smile

<sup>6</sup>"She managed to bring M. de Malesherbes into her view, who wrote me a long letter on the subject in his own hand, proving the 'Savoyard's Vicar's Profession of Faith' was just the piece to receive the universal approbation of mankind, and of the court, too, under the circumstances. I was surprised to see this magistrate, usually so timorous, become so free and easy in this matter" (Rousseau, 1856, 281).

<sup>7</sup>"There was an indescribable sardonic smile on his countenance, while saying this that, to my eye quite altered his physiognomy, and which has often occurred to my mind since. I can compare it to nothing but the expression on Panurge's countenance while buying the sheep of Dindenaut" (1856, 249–250, original punctuation and spelling).

that Rousseau is trying to depict by resorting to his ideation of Panurge's smile as found by him in the Rabelaisian text? This is not an image of the more or less generic or abstract cow described by Hill (above) but almost its opposite, a description so precise that it can only leave the reader as confounded as Borges was by Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights*. Moreover, since not all readers would negotiate the blanks in the story of Panurge's purchase in the same manner, the reader of the *Confessions* cannot help but be at Rousseau's sense-making and ideation mercy if s/he is not familiar with Rabelais's text. In the quote above, the reader encounters not the *Confessions's* formulation of an already formulated reality but the *Confessions's* formulation of the *Fourth Book of Pantagruel's* formulation of an already formulated reality.

To further complicate matters, for these type of "phenomenological" citations, looking up information on the hypotext would be of limited utility for a different reason: since any description of the hypotext would be conditioned by the particular understanding of that book by the person who wrote the description, such information may not be applicable at all to the conditions under which a different reader is encountering the intertextual reference. For instance, the Wikipedia entrance on "Panurge" explains the episode of the purchase of the sheep (and even quotes part of the text from Rabelais) but it includes no mention whatsoever of Panurge smiling, sardonically or in any other manner, which would not help the reader of my Rousseau example.

In fact, if we were to look up the original episode in Rabelais's text we might be surprised to find out that there is no mention in it of Panurge smiling. The episode of Dindenault's sheep begins in chapter VI of the *Fourth Book of Pantagruel*, continues in chapter VII, as the merchant tries to drive a hard bargain by praising his sheep without restraint, and it ends in chapter VIII when, after paying a good sum of money for a ram, Panurge throws it overboard the vessel that carries all of them, which results in all of the other sheep following the ram off the ship onto their deaths, with the last one of them carrying into the water Dindenault himself, who was frantically trying to hold on to it, in order to save his last living animal. The closest Rabelais gets to suggesting the possibility of a smile in Panurge's face is at the very end of chapter VIII, with a reference in Latin to the concept of retribution: "Mihi vindictam & caetera. Matiere de breuiaire" (Rabelais, 1552, 18), an abbreviated biblical citation from Romans 12:19 (loosely translated as "vengeance is mine, I will repay," followed in Rabelais's text by the narratorial note that identifies the quote as extracted from a breviary). That is close to suggesting a (potential) smile, but not close enough. Except for the unlikely possibility that Rousseau might have read an edition of *Pantagruel* with an alternative text from the original, we cannot help but conclude that Panurge's smile is the result of Rousseau's (not Rabelais's) ideation.

What we do find in Rabelais's passage is the invocation of earlier hypotexts that further complicate and challenge our sense-making operations, i.e. the same descriptive approach and strategy later employed by Rousseau. Beyond the biblical quote just referenced, in describing the drowning of Dindenault, Rabelais's narrator explains: "Le mouton feut si puissant qu'il emporta en mer avecques soy le

marchant, & feut noyé, en pareille forme que les moutons de Polyphemus le borgne cyclope emportèrent hors la caverne Vlyxes & ses compaygnons” (1552, 18),<sup>8</sup> a more or less evident allusion to Homer’s *Odyssey*. The narrator also explains why the sheep would follow one another blindly by citing yet another hypotext, Aristotle’s *History of Animals*: “Aussi le dict Aristotles lib. 9 de histo: animal. estre le plus sot & inepte animant du mōde” (1552, 18).<sup>9</sup> In this, like Rousseau, Rabelais gives us clear examples of a referential citation (Aristotle) and of the more complex, phenomenological citation (Homer). Though pursuing these other intertextual links would make me stray too far from the argumentation I am constructing, it should suffice to say that Rabelais’s reader would be equally at a loss if s/he is not familiar with Homer’s *Odyssey*, especially since Rabelais’s quote is also potentially misleading: while clinging to the sheep results in the death of Dindenault in *Pantagruel*, the same strategy permits Ulysses and his companions to save their lives in the *Odyssey*, so that a formal similarity (“en pareille forme que les moutons de Polyphemus”) in fact reveals a substantially dissimilar content.

Complex as the second example from Rousseau may seem, intertextual gaps can be much more complicated and difficult to navigate for readers, as I will illustrate with an instance of what I will call *aesthetic citation*, for reasons that will be apparent at the end of this chapter when I discuss the invocation of intertexts as aesthetic objects. The quoted passage in this case, below, is from José Antonio Villarreal’s *Pocho*. Published in 1959, *Pocho* was one of the first contemporary Mexican American novels, and it centers on the life of young Richard Rubio and his family. In the novel, Richard is born in the Santa Clara, California, area to illiterate, immigrant Mexican parents, but he soon develops a love for reading that permeates Villarreal’s novel, while peppering it with references to all kinds of hypotexts. The one that will be of interest here is found in the final part of the novel. As Richard’s family begins to fall apart due to the pressures of negotiating traditional Mexican cultural expectations in the context of daily life in the United States, Richard makes an almost desperate attempt to bring them back together by reading out loud to them, something he seems to have done in previous occasions as well. Though somewhat long, the passage is worth quoting in its entirety, because of the details that it gives readers about norms that are being challenged, transformed, or negated (in the sense of Iser’s *negation*):

That night, for the first time in months, they had dinner together in the old way. After dinner, his father sat on the rocker in the living room, listening to the Mexican station from Piedras Negras on short wave. When the kitchen was picked up, the girls sat around restlessly in the living room, and Richard knew they wanted to listen to something else, so he said to his father, ‘Let us go into the kitchen. I have a new novel in the Spanish I will read to you.’

<sup>8</sup> “The Ram was so strong that he carried the Dealer into the Sea with him, so that he was drowned, in the same manner as the Sheep of Polyphemus, the one-eyed Cyclops, carried Ulysses and his Companions out of the Cave” (Rabelais, 1893, 65).

<sup>9</sup> “Moreover, Aristotle says *lib. ix, de histor, anim.* that it is the most foolish and silly Animal in the World” (Rabelais, 1893, 65).



In the kitchen, around the table, his mother also sat down, and said, 'It is a long time, little son, that you do not read to us.'

How blind she must be, he thought. Aloud he said, 'It is called "Crime and Punishment," and it is about the Rusos in another time.' He read rapidly and they listened attentively, interrupting him only now and then with a surprised 'Oh!' or 'That is so true!' After two hours, he could not read fast enough for himself, and he wished that he could read all night to them, because it was a certainty that he would not get another opportunity to read to them like this. They would never get to know the book, and he knew they were to miss something great. He knew also that they would never be this close together again. (Villarreal, 1959, 187)

As I have explored elsewhere (Martín-Rodríguez, 2003, 51–52), this scene illustrates the change of paradigm from a collective, traditional oral culture to the more individual-oriented world of print and reading. Traditional orality was invoked at the beginning of the novel—when Richard was exposed as a young child to campfire singing and storytelling—and it is present in the quoted scene only through the modified version that Walter J. Ong called "secondary orality."<sup>10</sup> In the case of many Mexican American and immigrant families (like Richard's), that change of paradigm also entailed the shift from a world in which the elderly would teach values and beliefs to the younger to one in which the latter frequently became cultural brokers for the former. In that context, the episode just quoted presents not only a fascinating example of a form of alternative literacy (i.e. the process by which formally illiterate individuals may acquire literary cultural capital) but it also implies that the traditional norms of Mexican patriarchy represented by Juan Rubio (Richard's father) are negated, and that an uncertain new set of values opens up for the Rubio family as they see themselves, their culture and their experiences reflected or, better perhaps, refracted in those of *Crime and Punishment's* characters and society.

The intertextual reference to *Crime and Punishment*, however, creates an additional level of complication for the reader of *Pocho*: while in the fictional world of the novel the Rubio family gets to enjoy Dostoyevsky's masterpiece first hand through Richard's reading, Villarreal's readers do not. His reference to the Russian nineteenth-century classic is even more ambiguous and reticent than Rousseau's allusion to Rabelais, since Villarreal does not mention which passages from Dostoyevsky the family found *so true*. Instead of references to the contents of the hypotext, all that we find in *Pocho* is an account of the act of reading itself. Even the reader who is already familiar with Dostoyevsky's novel would be at a loss to figure out what in that hypotext might be motivating Richard's family to exclaim "That is so true!" or simply "Oh!"

In consequence, for the reader of *Pocho* forming an image of the family scene quoted above should pose only minor problems, if any, but negotiating the Russian hypotext remains an extraordinary challenge. At best, the reader familiar with *Crime and Punishment* must be contented with inferring from that knowledge what might

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<sup>10</sup>Ong proposed this term to differentiate the technological oral/aural (television, film, the radio and other similar media) from the traditional oral culture which entails a set of norms and values, as well as an agonistic participative atmosphere that secondary orality no longer possesses (108).

be applicable to the Rubio family's sense-making operations about the life of certain Russians "in another time," all the while knowing that whatever hypotheses s/he formulates in that regard would be impossible to verify beyond doubt, and that they may be completely different from alternative hypotheses formulated by other readers.

In the case of readers *not* familiar with *Crime and Punishment*, ancillary sources are unlikely to be of much assistance either. If they were to look up *Crime and Punishment* in Wikipedia, to name a commonly used reference source, they would find out that it gives a (somewhat loaded) summary of the plot of the novel, emphasizing its protagonist's mental anguish and moral dilemmas. The Wikipedia entry also discusses the plot, characters, structure, symbolism, themes, and reception of *Crime and Punishment*, but how can that help the unfamiliar reader negotiate the intertextual blank in *Pocho*? The temptation to leave it unaddressed would be even greater than in any of my other examples, since the difficulties involved in making sense of the intertext may suggest it to be an impossible task.

### 3 Toward an Intertextually-Based Account of Reader Experience

Making sense of this type of hypotext, then, may require both a modification of Iser's understanding of sense-making and situation-building in reading, and a different approach to the conceptualization of reading itself, one that thinks of it as an *intertextually*- rather than just a *textually*-based endeavor, to which I will return at the end of this chapter. For Iser, who analyzes reading at an abstract level,<sup>11</sup> concepts like that of the implied reader, the ideal reader, or the superreader, among others he discusses (1987, 27–34), make it possible to postulate a theoretical more or less perfect match between the text and the reader as far as the repertoire is concerned. The implied reader, which he defines as a textual presence that "embodies all those predispositions for a literary work to exercise its effect" (1987, 34) would thus be able to easily make sense of any and all intertextual references present. But, as the examples above should have demonstrated (especially in the case of Rousseau's allusions to the work of Rabelais), we do not read as abstract readers, but as situated, concrete readers with personal, social, and cultural baggage that differentiates us from other real readers. That is why Rousseau, in trying to describe the sardonic smile of someone in his own world ended up imagining a similar one in one of Rabelais's characters; Rousseau's consciousness imposed on the Rabelaisian

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<sup>11</sup> Iser explained why he chose a theoretical approach in these terms: "I have tried to establish my idealized model of text-processing along phenomenological lines. I have done so mainly for two reasons: (1) a phenomenological description allows us to focus on processes of constitution that occur not only in reading but also in our basic relations to the world in general; and (2) an idealized model that allows description of constitutive processes bears within itself a hermeneutic implication" (1993, 49).

hypotext a non-existent element that other readers of *Pantagruel* could never see, because it is not in the text but is, rather, the result of an actual reader's ideation.

Because of these limitations of the *implied reader* as a concept, Iser's reliance on a purely theoretical model was challenged by other scholars more inclined toward empirical research, such as Norman N. Holland, for whom "one can only arrive at a theory of response by induction from actual responses" (in Iser, 1993, 43).<sup>12</sup> I concur with Holland's views on the limited applicability of the Iserian model to the study of actual acts of reading, and thus in my own scholarship on reading and intertextuality, I have switched from the more theoretical study of *reading* that I offered in *Life in Search of Readers* (2003), to a multi-branched, empirical study of *readers*.<sup>13</sup> Empirical research in this area works from the ground up, replacing deduction with induction in order to see how actual readers make sense of actual texts, rather than predicting or assuming what they do with a priori hypotheses. From that perspective, the final part of this chapter will concentrate on how some real-life readers have negotiated the intertextual relationship between *Pocho* and *Crime and Punishment*, as an example of strategies for working around intertextual blanks and for making sense of unknown texts.

My data and anecdotal evidence is taken from three cohorts of students in my upper-division seminar "Reading (from) the Margin," which I have taught at the University of California, Merced on only three occasions: in 2012, in 2016, and in 2018. The course requires an amount of reading significantly higher than other upper-division courses in my department, which results in somewhat lower enrollments; this, in turn, facilitates discussion and observation of students' progress in making sense of readings. Though some students in some of these three cohorts were familiar with some of the other texts in the syllabus, none of the forty-four individuals who have taken the class thus far had ever read *Pocho* or *Crime and Punishment* beforehand, which proved to be essential for observing reactions as they read them for the first time.

For many of my students, *Pocho* (the first book they had to read for the class) was a particularly interesting novel, since the plot takes place in geographical areas not far from Merced, California. Moreover, many of the students in the three cohorts under discussion were of Mexican or Latino descent, as is a large percentage of the overall undergraduate student body of the school (55.5% as of this writing).<sup>14</sup> Therefore, negotiating cultural values and situations lived by Villarreal's characters was, for the most part, easy for them, since they could rely on personal experiences (in many cases) and/or on textual and contextual clues that made the text quite readable. Perhaps the most difficult textual element to deal with for these three cohorts of readers was the somewhat distorted syntax that Villarreal uses on occasion, writing in English but maintaining Spanish-language syntactical patterns, a technique

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<sup>12</sup>Chapter 3 of Iser (1993) consists of a written interview in which Iser answered questions from three leading response and reception scholars, including Holland.

<sup>13</sup>For more information on that empirical study, see Martín-Rodríguez (2015).

<sup>14</sup>"Fast Facts 2019–2020" (2020).

that Ernest Hemingway had popularized before Villarreal but that was unfamiliar to my students.

By the time we arrived to the episode of Richard reading out loud to his family,<sup>15</sup> class discussions had been fruitful in relating previous textual passages to social norms pertaining to gender and sexual violence. Though the novel is set in a period roughly ranging from the 1920s to the 1940s, students were reading it from a twenty-first century context, which allowed for a smooth ideation of incidents that are only alluded to in the novel, as in the case of João Pete's Manoel's alleged sexual transgressions. From that same sociohistorical vantage point, students (mostly female in all three sections) were quick to recognize and discuss the portrayal of women in *Pocho* as overtly traditional and even stereotypical, which resulted in some animated debates on gender and culture, with key concepts like *machismo* and *marianismo* taking center stage at those times.<sup>16</sup> Beyond gender, aspects of the migrant/diasporic experience, social class, folklore, literacy, and discrimination, among others, were discussed and analyzed. Some students also mentioned identifying with Richard because they, too, were passionate book lovers on their way to becoming college graduates and bettering their station in life, in several cases as members of partially illiterate families. From a reception-studies perspective, it soon became obvious that my students' reactions to Villarreal's text were both conditioned by and representative of their particular "horizon of expectations" (Jauss, 1982, 184–185), in which *Pocho* answered questions that it had not had to answer for earlier generations of readers.

In all of our class discussions, my students demonstrated a keen ability to negotiate thematic blanks and sociocultural negotiations, but they seemed befuddled when I asked them to try to make sense of the Dostoyevsky hypotext. This assignment might have been more confusing to them, at least at first, because I had not required that they think about other hypotexts encountered earlier in *Pocho* (e.g. *Don Quixote*, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, or Voltaire's *Candide*, among others). As I later explained to my students (when we got to discuss and analyze *all* intertexts) those previous hypotexts were easier to negotiate, being closer to the referential type exemplified by the first quote from Rousseau, above;<sup>17</sup> but *Crime and Punishment* promised to be not only more difficult to handle but also a much more significant intertext for our understanding of the novel, while still refusing to hint to us exactly why or how.

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<sup>15</sup>For the sake of a clearer exposition, I will be subsuming all three classes into one, since there were no major significant peculiarities in how each of those cohorts (or individuals within them) made sense of that intertext.

<sup>16</sup>Marianismo refers to particular expectations defining womanhood and femininity in Latin/o cultures, including self-sacrifice toward children and family. For more on machismo and marianismo, see Sanabria (2016, 152ff).

<sup>17</sup>The following quote from *Pocho* should substantiate that statement: "With determination, he followed Tom Jones and Dr. Pangloss through their various complicated adventures" (Villarreal, 1959, 103).

The first problem stemmed from the fact that, in this case, my students' hermeneutical skills were unable to find something familiar with which to connect Villarreal's enigmatic reference. When further pressed, the more daring students hypothesized that the linkage between both books might be related to violence (a concept explicit in *Crime and Punishment's* title and a common occurrence in *Pocho*), war (the plot in *Pocho* is framed by the Mexican Revolution, at its beginning, and World War II, at its ending, and they figured that a similar war or pre-war context could be conducive to violence and murder in the Russian novel as well), or to suffering or similar emotions they could see the Rubio family sympathizing with across time and distance. Family itself was another potential link they explored, especially because in the reading guides with questions that I sent to students before each class I had asked them to think about changes in family life/structure as the novel (*Pocho*) progresses. In all instances, therefore, these real readers attempted to negotiate the intertextual blank as if it were a thematic one.

Building on that set of skills and on that accumulated body of hypotheses, when we started reading *Crime and Punishment* (immediately after finishing *Pocho*) I told my students to keep thinking about the Rubio family as they read about Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment's* protagonist) and his world, to see if particular passages in *Crime and Punishment* would appear to be the ones that triggered reactions from the Rubio family, or at least to see what similarities they could find between both novels and/or both worlds.

Since these were the first two interconnected books that we read for class, students struggled much more than they did with other book pairings later in the semester, since by then they had developed stronger comparative abilities. As a consequence, in this case, I was forced to be much more active in identifying most of the potential connections myself and in lecturing on them. Though present space and topic would not permit me to give too many details in that regard,<sup>18</sup> I can advance that once I explained the historical context for *Crime and Punishment*, including the recent abolition of serfdom (thanks to the Emancipation Reform of 1861) and the ensuing migratory movements from the countryside to the cities, for example, students quickly began to see both novels in a different light. Something similar occurred when I shared with them a table comparing Richard and Raskolnikov by using nine different parameters. While both characters remained distinct and disconnected in their minds, they had no trouble seeing the deeper structures that made them (and, as a result, their relationship with their families) very similar.

Students were also fascinated by the fact that many intellectual discussions within *Crime and Punishment* revolved around the so-called "Woman Question," then a major element of social anxiety in Russia. Since we had discussed gender extensively in our consideration of *Pocho*, this generated much interest in trying to figure out how different members of the Rubio household might have reacted to

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<sup>18</sup>I intend to give a fuller account of these practices and experiences on a forthcoming monograph on the intertextual history of Chicano literature.

learning about this fact as well, should some of those passages had been the segments of the novel read out loud by Richard.

But, perhaps, the most eye-opening finding in their reading of *Crime and Punishment* was realizing that Dostoyevsky's novel was also full of intertextual references to earlier hypotexts. This was eye-opening not in the sense that they had failed to notice before that literary texts contain many such references but, rather, because this was the first time they encountered hypotextual references after being asked to reflect on their significance. Though most students kept on reading *Crime and Punishment* when they found those other citations (largely due to the intensive reading aspect of the class), many acknowledged that they felt uneasy about doing so, and others mentioned that they could not help but look up the references to get a better sense of why those hypotexts might had been invoked.

What my students seemed to have learned about the role of intertextual blanks was that (unlike other types of blanks) they could not be dealt with by resorting to contextual clues, personal experience of the world and of other books, or even narratorial guidance. What they also learned from the class design and methodology was the fact that intertextuality produces a most radical breakdown of linearity, in the sense that any hypotextual reference inevitably takes the reader outside of the hypertext, while at the same time the hypertext demands that the reader continues reading through. Such a clash of centrifugal and centripetal forces will prove essential for my closing remarks on intertextually-based reading, because if Iser is right and consistency building is a central aspect of the reader's ability to process a text by providing "good continuation" between textual segments (1993, 53), then it should be apparent that intertextual references pose a potentially major challenge to such a "continuation," especially those references of the types I have called phenomenological and aesthetic citations.

While in a different reading context most (if not all) of my students would have probably disregarded the reference to *Crime and Punishment* in *Pocho*, or they would have limited themselves to searching for some second-hand information about it, the fact that they were required to read Dostoyevsky's novel for class meant that they were able to see that, unlike what happens in the examples of Faulkner's flag and blooming tree, the strategies needed to make sense of an intertextual blank did not involve an ideation of worldly objects from the verbal signs that represented them in the text, but rather the much more complex task of perceiving (to paraphrase Dufrenne) the work as a whole as an aesthetic object in all of its sensuous aspects (Dufrenne, 1973, lii).

With some lecturing and guidance, they were able to understand as well the rhetorical power of Villarreal's strategy of not quoting or citing specific passages from *Crime and Punishment*. In doing so, *Pocho* succeeds in transcending a simple matter of highlighting thematic, social, and other external-world connections with its Russian hypotext. In their stead, what *Pocho* celebrates is the act of reading itself, the actual delight felt by its characters in constituting the aesthetic object that for them becomes *Crime and Punishment*. This particular hypotextual citation, therefore, is of the most open kind, one that invites readers to *read* (or *re-read*) the hypotext, and not so much to *recall* their prior knowledge of it. Even if a reader is already



familiar with Dostoyevsky's novel, finding it so ambiguously referenced by Villarreal's characters forces her/him to think not so much about her/his previous knowledge of *Crime and Punishment* but about what *Crime and Punishment* means when it is read by people such as the Rubios.

This brings us back to the question of what an *intertextually-based* rather than a *textually-based* analysis of reading might offer. In essence, it entails moving away not only from Ingarden's author-reader intersubjective communication model but also, to a certain extent, from Iser's phenomenological one, which focuses on the interactions between text and reader while privileging the sense of closure resulting from considering the book being read as a self-contained unity. If, as Kristeva suggested, "the notion of intertextuality replaces the notion of intersubjectivity" (1980, 66), for the very same reasons it must also challenge the possibility of making sense of any one text in itself.

Breaking away from notions of closure, then, an intertextually-based model of reading offers centrifugal opportunities not unlike the lines of flight and the rhizome, as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>19</sup> Rather than seeing the act of reading as the process by which a reader makes sense of *one* book, all the while assuming that the reader will have prior knowledge of all that is needed in order to do so, this alternative model conceives the book being read as a knot in a web of potentially infinite connections from which readers depart to explore (parts of) the rest of that web, potentially returning at some juncture in time to the original point of entrance to find its meaning altered because of their accumulated knowledge of the other knots on the web, *and* because the reader will have developed in the process an understanding of the connections between books as essential to their ever-changing meaning.<sup>20</sup>

At a time when (at least younger) readers have become increasingly familiar with the practice of clicking on and following hyperlinks on the world wide web, jumping from webpage to webpage rather than reading them sequentially from top to bottom, I argue that embracing a comparable model for reading literary works would offer readers a more organic understanding of the history of literature than the one currently available to them from educational and other cultural institutions. The formation of readers in K-12-College (and their equivalent stages in other countries) focuses on teaching them about their national letters, first and foremost, and about the chronological succession of literary movements within countries or at an international scale. Most academic courses are still centered on specific time periods (or literary movements) and/or on geographical areas, with some others adopting thematic approaches that do little to challenge the underlying ethnocentric model. A consequence of these practices is that students end up being exposed to arbitrary groupings of texts (because they were all written during the Renaissance, for example, or because they were all published in the United States) that fail to

<sup>19</sup>On the possibility of a rhizomatic history of Chicano literature, see Martín-Rodríguez (2003).

<sup>20</sup>Though presented here as an alternative model of reading, it is important to make clear that the theory behind this model (studies on intertextuality) has a long history of its own, going all the way back to Kristeva (1980) and Barthes (1973).



explain why and how actual books connect to other books through lines of affinity and affiliation, instead of through the preordained chronological and national lines of filiation.

Intertextually-based reading, of the kind we practiced in my class and I minimally hinted at here, brings the study of linkages between books to the forefront by embracing the world wide web hyperlink model. I contend that this type of reading is much more effective than traditional practices when it comes to consistency-building, sense-making, and even in dealing with issues of “continuity.” While intertextual reading could never erase the blanks and negations involved in the multiplicity of intertextual references from book to book, at least it enables and empowers readers to perceive *actual* linkages between texts and to understand them as springboards for building additional cultural reading capital. In the process, this practice becomes effective in blurring the differences between the center (the canon) and the literary margins, which was also a main goal in my course.

As George P. Landow has aptly suggested, discussing web hypertexts:

Hypertext linking situates the present text at the center of the textual universe, thus creating a new kind of hierarchy, in which the power of the center dominates that of the infinite periphery. But because in hypertext that center is always a transient, decenterable virtual center—one created, in other words, only by one’s act of reading that particular text—it never tyrannizes other aspects of the network in the way a printed text does. (2006, 120)

Notwithstanding Landow’s reservations on printed texts, I argue that when literary texts are conceived as part of a web of citations (rather than as self-contained, complete objects), a similar debunking of hierarchies can be achieved. The title of my class, “Reading (from) the Margin” points in that direction by privileging non-canonical texts (we begin the class by reading *Pocho*) and by exploring how those *marginal* texts actually “read” other texts, thereby allowing their readers to make sense of other books, including those in the canon. In fact, students in my class acted throughout the semester more like the so-called *wreaders* of the world wide web (Landow, 2006, 20), jumping from text to text, than like Iser’s implied reader. By placing *marginal* texts as temporary centers in the textual universe of our class, we were able to debunk preexisting hierarchies while acquiring a much-needed sense of how those pecking orders are constructed. Finally, we found that the most significant element of *continuity* in the history of literature is born out of the discontinuity generated when texts forego their self-contained worlds to open up to other preexisting literary universes. In that sense, the act of reading a book must always entail the act of reading its intertexts.

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# Phenomenology and Architecture: Examining Embodied Experience and Graphic Representations of the Built Environment



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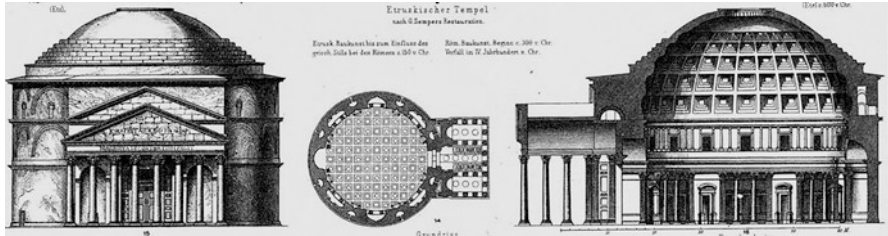
...the task of architecture extends beyond its material, functional, and measurable properties – and even beyond aesthetics – into the mental and existential sphere of life. (Juhani Pallasmaa, Architect, 2015)

We can describe a work of architecture by its objective characteristics – descriptors that are independent of an occupant or viewer. These characteristics include location, physical context, style, age, dimensions, proportions, and materiality. An objective description is quickly exhausted as dependent qualities come into view. These include the function or use, and the meaning or symbolism found in the design. These dependent qualities are notable not only because of their subjectivity but because of their variability. Meaning or symbolism intended by the architect at the time of a building's construction may be lost or transformed over time. Architecture may take on new meaning to future occupants. The Pantheon in Rome was valued as a temple to the Roman gods by the ancient Romans, as a Christian church by medieval Romans, and as a mausoleum beginning in the Renaissance. Architects and engineers today admire it as an early concrete structure, which remains the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world (Fig. 1).

The independent and dependent characteristics of a work of architecture indicate the distinction between the objective world and the world as an individual being experiences and understands it. Edmund Husserl described these two worlds in *Thing and Space: Lectures of 1907*. Here he says that there is a spatial and temporal world around us, but that we are the “centers of reference” for this world. “The environing objects [Objekten], with their properties, changes, and relations, are what they are for themselves, but they have a position relative to us, initially a spatio-temporal position and then also a ‘spiritual’ [= cultural] one” (cited in Woodruff Smith, 2013, 219). Similarly, Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes this duality in his course notes from the Collège de France in the 1950s, building on biologist

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**Fig. 1** Pantheon elevation, plan, and cross-section drawings, 1885, Meyers Konversationslexikon, Vierte Auflage, author unknown. (Public domain)

Jacob von Uexküll’s 1930s concept of the *Umwelt*. “The *Umwelt* marks the difference between the world such as it exists in itself, and the world of a living being. It is an intermediary reality between the world as it exists for an absolute observer and a purely subjective domain” (Merleau-Ponty & Ségald, 2003, 167).

The intersection between the objective and subjective defined here becomes even more dynamic with the inclusion of graphic representations. Graphic representations of the built environment include drawings, renderings, and photographs, among other media. Architects sometimes use *graphic representation* and *image* interchangeably, but we understand that there are different meanings and connotations by discipline. French philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes multiple meanings of the term *image*: “...the word *image*, in the works of psychologists, is surrounded with confusion: we see images, we reproduce images, we retain images in our memory” (Bachelard et al., 1994, xxxiv). These internal and external images are part of a feedback loop between our perceptions and representations. As author Italo Calvino declared in 1985, well before the ubiquity of social media, “We live in an unending rainfall of images” (Calvino, 1988, 57). Our exposure to external images has increased exponentially. This rainfall of images includes many representations of the built environment. Some are published by design professionals, but the vast majority of images are produced and proliferated through Instagram and other social media platforms. Our experience of the world is mediated through the framed, cropped, and filtered photos we see on a daily basis. These images act as a mediator between the individual and the built environment, further shaping our *Umwelt*.

Von Uexküll uses the metaphor of intersecting soap bubbles to visualize the relationship between each organism’s *Umwelt*. He describes a meadow in order to understand the myriad worlds of humans and animals.

...we must first blow, in fancy, a soap bubble around each creature to represent its own world, filled with the perceptions which it alone knows. When we ourselves then step into one of these bubbles, the familiar meadow is transformed. Many of its colorful features disappear, others no longer belong together but appear in new relationships. A new world comes into being. Through the bubble we see the world of the burrowing worm, of the butterfly, or of the field mouse; the world as it appears to the animals themselves, not as it appears to us. This we may call the *phenomenal world or the self-world of the animal*... We thus unlock the gates that lead to other realms, for all that a subject perceives becomes his *perceptual world* and all that he does, his *effector world*. Perceptual and effector worlds together form a closed unit, the *Umwelt*. (Von Uexküll, 1992, 319–320)

For humans, the delimitation of our phenomenal world based on *perceptual* and *effector* tools is not a complete description – images are a filter between the individual and the world, altering both what we perceive and what we do. As architects, we create images for different purposes and audiences, including envisioning how people might experience and use a space. We produce drawings to work out a design, but also to convince clients and future users of the viability of our proposal. As authors not just of the architecture but also of some of its representations, it is critical to understand the implications in representing architecture in different graphic modes. René Magritte called attention to the subjectivity of graphic representations in 1948 in his painting entitled *The Treachery of Images*. The painting shows a pipe, beneath which it says “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (“This is not a pipe”). With this graphic and text, Magritte is pointing out that what he painted is not an actual pipe, but only his interpretation or representation of a pipe. All modes of graphic representation in architecture are abstractions of physical space and form, and so they are subject to interpretation.

This chapter will draw on theories and studies from a range of disciplines to describe the relationship between architecture and embodied experience, and how graphic representations mediate our experience of the built environment. Part 1 will discuss characteristics of our embodied experience and graphic representations of the built environment, while Part 2 will present processes of visual perception and how our visual perception of both the built environment and its representations have been empirically studied (Fig. 2).

## 1 Part 1

### 1.1 *The Built Environment: Embodied Experience and Graphic Representation*

Our environment, be it built or natural, offers more stimuli than we can process or even perceive. Our selective attention to the vast array of stimuli defines our *Umwelt*. Our individual experience of the built environment is bound by our *effector* capacities and our *perceptual* capacities, to use von Uexküll’s subsets of the *Umwelt*. What we do is shaped by affordances, and what we perceive is shaped by multi-sensory perception and memory. Part 1 will break down these capacities as well as the roles and modes of graphic representation.

### 1.2 *Affordances*

Affordance theory, developed by psychologist James J. Gibson, describes the relationship between the world and the occupant in a similar way to von Uexküll’s *effector* world of the *Umwelt*. Gibson says: “The affordances of the environment are what

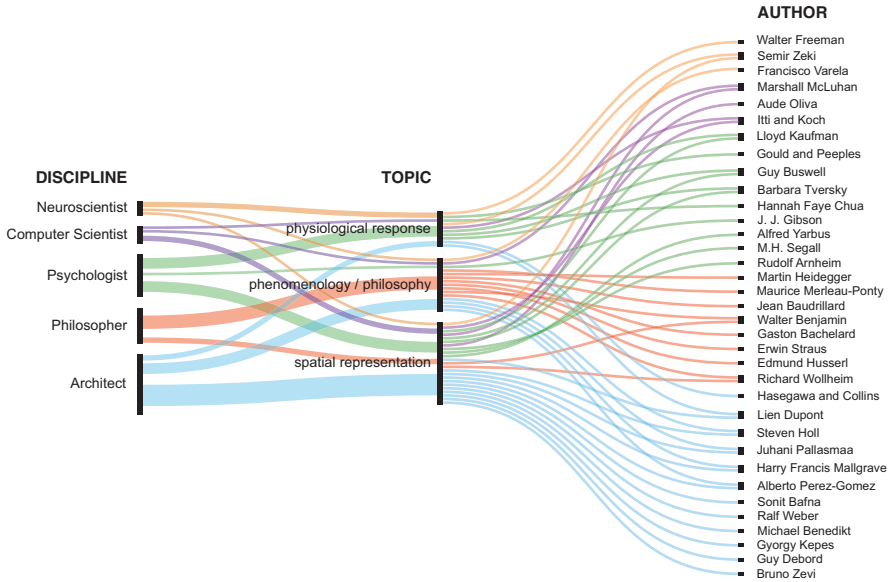


Fig. 2 Interdisciplinary research diagram. (By author)

it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill. The verb *to afford* is found in the dictionary, the noun *affordance* is not. I have made it up” (1979, 127). From this definition, we see that while the built environment has objective characteristics, the perception and use of it changes depending on our age, culture, abilities, and needs. The affordances that we identify in our environment extend in part from what is sometimes called our “sixth sense” – proprioception. Proprioception is the term for our understanding of our body in space. “Proprioception, or kinesthesia, is the sense that lets us perceive the location, movement, and action of parts of the body...It combines with other senses to locate external objects relative to the body...” (Taylor, 2009, 1143). Our ability to judge the position of our body in space can only develop through practice – we have to move in the world and interact with it for our bodies to understand and make sense of it. This is also true for our bodies and tools for movement, such as bicycles, skateboards, and wheelchairs. In 1911, neurologists Henry Head and Gordon Morgan Holmes developed the concept of the *body schema*, which is related to proprioception. Body schema refers to: “the body’s relations to immediately surrounding space. The body schema includes the brain and sensory processes that register the posture of one’s body in space. The body schema is plastic, amenable to constant revision, extends beyond the envelope of the skin, and has important implications for tool use” (Robinson, 2015, 138). The body schema incorporates *effector* tools, like bicycles and wheelchairs, which become extensions of our bodies. Due to the variety of ways we can interact with the built environment, at different speeds, with different footprints, the designer has to anticipate many types of possible actions in the designed space.



Our own understanding of our body in space and how it relates to the built environment is shaped by proprioception, but also by cultural norms and expectations. For example, a chair affords sitting for an adult, while it affords climbing, standing, and jumping for a child. These expectations include how we engage with the physical structures of the built environment, as well as how we interact with each other in these spaces. Proxemics, a concept developed by anthropologist Edward Hall in the 1960s, describes the study of the spatial separation between people, depending on the type of interaction. “If the spatial experience is different by virtue of different patterning of the senses and selective attention and inattention to specific aspects of the environment, it would follow what crowds one people does not necessarily crowd another” (Hall et al., 1968, 84). The comfort level for various types of interactions varies culturally, and can also be transformed by external forces such as the coronavirus and expectations of social distancing, which impact the distance at which we feel comfortable standing from one another. Our *effector* world – what we do – is impacted by the affordances we perceive.

### 1.3 *Multi-sensory Perception*

Bridging affordances and multi-sensory perception – the *effector* and *perceptual* worlds – is philosopher Walter Benjamin’s theory (first published in 1935) of a twofold appropriation of architecture. Benjamin (1968) states,

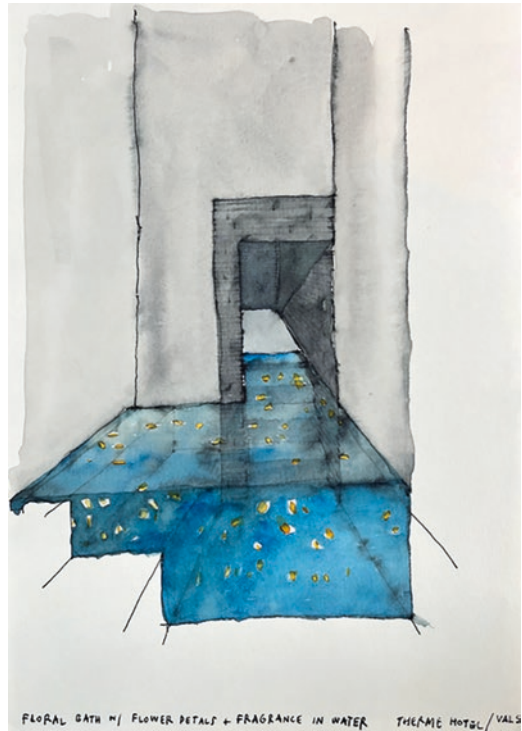
Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction... Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception – or rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building. On the tactile side there is no counterpart to contemplation on the optical side. Tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit. As regards architecture, habit determines to a large extent even optical reception. The latter, too, occurs much less through rapt attention than by noticing the object in incidental fashion. This mode of appropriation, developed with reference to architecture, in certain circumstances acquires canonical value. For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation. (339–340)

As an occupant of a work of architecture, particularly a building we inhabit regularly, our perception of it is dominated by our use of and interaction with the space. The tactile sense supersedes the visual. The overwhelming amount of sensory data in our environment – new or familiar – means that we must pay attention to some things while ignoring others, known as selective attention. Novel stimuli attract our attention. Thus a familiar place causes habituation, the diminishing of a physiological response due to repeated stimuli. Through this process, we no longer ‘see’ the building: we instead develop a muscle memory for our physical interactions with it.

Juhani Pallasmaa, a Finnish architect who advocates for multi-sensory experience in architectural design, published a seminal book on the topic in 1996 called

*The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. In it, he says: “Every touching experience of architecture is multi-sensory; qualities of space, matter and scale are measured equally by the eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton and muscle. Architecture strengthens the existential experience, one’s sense of being in the world...” (Pallasmaa, 2012, 45). Pallasmaa proposes that the sense of alienation and isolation often felt in contemporary architecture and urban spaces is a result of a lack of engagement of the senses. The dominance of the visual (driven in part by our image-saturated society) positions us as observers rather than participants in the world. Pallasmaa holds as exemplary the work of Swiss architect Peter Zumthor, who approaches his designs through a phenomenological lens. Zumthor describes the importance of material selection and detailing to provide a multi-sensory experience. “The sense that I try to instill into materials is beyond all rules of composition, and their tangibility, smell, and acoustic qualities are merely elements of the language that we are obliged to use. Sense emerges when I succeed in bringing out the specific meanings of certain materials in my buildings, meanings that can only be perceived in just this way in this one building” (Zumthor, 2010, 10). In Zumthor’s thermal baths in Vals, Switzerland, the dim lighting in the interior augments other sensory experiences, including the thermal and tactile qualities of the water and stone, and the subtle light and shadow migrating through the space (Fig. 3).

**Fig. 3** Peter Zumthor, Therme Vals, Switzerland, 1996. (Watercolor of the floral bath by Thomas di Santo, 2004)



## 1.4 Memory

Sensory perception cannot be separated from memory. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, perception is defined as: “physical sensation interpreted in the light of experience” (2011). The intertwining of direct perceptual experience with memory is highlighted in Zumthor’s written and built work. While Zumthor values the direct sensory impact of architecture, he also describes the importance of memory on his design process. In his reflections, he recalls specific childhood sensory experiences, like the feel of a smooth metal door handle. He states: “Memories like these contain the deepest architectural experience that I know. They are the reservoirs of the architectural atmospheres and images that I explore in my work as an architect” (Zumthor, 2010, 8). Zumthor’s work, while inspired by his personal experiences and memories of architecture, is intended to provide space for the occupant’s own memories to surface. While Zumthor describes architecture as potentially offering space for reflection and reminiscence, Bachelard describes the inverse in his treatise on architecture and phenomenology, *The Poetics of Space*. Architecture can provoke the recollection of memories, but architectural space can also help us to form new memories. He says: “Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are” (Bachelard et al., 1994, 9). There is a long history of tying memory to place, going back to the memory palace (method of loci) of the Greeks and Romans. This mnemonic device works by first visualizing a familiar place (your home, for example), and then picturing the items or topics you want to remember in a series of rooms. The great orator Cicero used this technique to memorize speeches.

While individual memories color our personal perceptions of architectural space, collective memory also plays a role. In Victor Hugo’s novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, first published in 1831, he presents the idea of architecture as a repository for a society’s collective memory. “In fact, from the origin of things up to the fifteenth century of the Christian era inclusive [when the printing press was invented], architecture was the great book of mankind, the principal expression of man at his different stages of development, whether as strength or as intelligence” (Hugo et al., 1999, 193). Hugo describes the invention of the printing press as a turning point in history, transforming the way cultures record and transmit their knowledge and values. Before this point, “...the human race never had an important thought which it did not write down in stone” (Hugo et al., 1999, 199). As described in the introduction to this chapter, however, the meaning communicated by a work of architecture can change over time. The transformation of meaning over time applies to both the work of architecture itself, as well as its images. Bachelard describes the overlay of individual and collective memory in our understanding of images. “Great images have both a history and a prehistory; they are always a blend of memory and legend, with the result that we never experience an image directly. Indeed, every great image has an unfathomable oneiric depth to which the personal past adds special color” (Bachelard et al., 1994, 33). Architectural images include mental images produced through an embodied experience of a place or in reading written imagery, as well as external images including drawings, renderings, and photographs (which can then produce mental images). In the next section, these external images – graphic representations – are described.

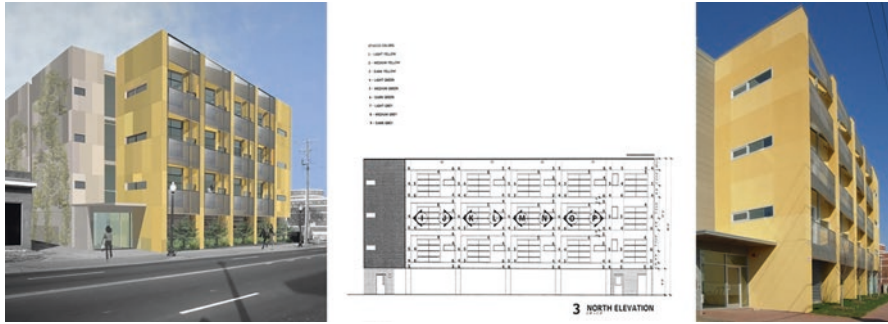
## 1.5 *Graphic Representation*

Our individual embodied experience of the built environment is shaped by affordances, multi-sensory perceptions, and memory, as described in the previous sections. These describe a direct relationship between our bodies and the environment. External architectural images that we come into contact with create an additional mediation between ourselves and our world, interceding and transforming our *Umwelt*.

Architects utilize a variety of modes of graphic representation in their design process and to communicate their ideas to clients and future occupants. (Architects also use three-dimensional representations like physical models, but this chapter focuses on two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional space, as those are the most ubiquitous and far reaching.) Additionally, print and social media deliver numerous images of the built environment by authors ranging from developers to real estate agents to vacationers. These authors have differing agendas, and thus produce media with differing messages. Calvino's statement that "We live in an unending rainfall of images" continues: "The most powerful media transform the world into images and multiply it by means of the phantasmagoric play of mirrors. These are images stripped of the inner inevitability that ought to mark every image as form and as meaning, as a claim on the attention and as a source of possible meanings" (Calvino, 1988, 57). Our oblique perception of these images, generally not given our focused attention or thoughtful evaluation, impacts our experiences and expectations of the built environment nonetheless. Our perceptual and effector capacities as they affect our experience of the embodied environment were described in the previous sections; here we will consider how we experience two-dimensional images. The very act of flattening three-dimensional space into a two-dimensional image requires abstraction and interpretation by the author, thus opening it up to multiple interpretations. There are two broad conceptions of architectural images that must be unpacked: the twofold perception of images as described by Richard Wollheim, and the "provocative" versus "instructional" drawing as defined by Sonit Bafna.

We all understand architectural drawings as referential, representing something besides themselves – architectural space and form. Philosopher Richard Wollheim describes the perception of drawings as twofold (1973). We see the drawing as an object, but also as a representation of something else. Wollheim describes the viewer's interaction with an image as "seeing-in," which involves an awareness of the marks on the surface, the drawing as an object, and an awareness of some absent object – the item depicted.

Wollheim's observations speak to drawings in general, but there are many types of drawings within the practice of architecture. Architectural theorist Sonit Bafna talks about two types of drawings. The "drawing-as-provocation" is imaginative, a tool to explore possible forms and spaces. The "drawing-as-instruction" is notational, serving to communicate how a building is to be constructed (2008). The imaginative drawing might lead to the notational drawing, and then the actual



**Fig. 4** Central 27 rendering, elevation, and photograph – the rendering on the left shows the stucco façade as having panels of different color shades – a result of the rendering software. The client liked this look, unintended by the architect, and so we produced a ‘color-by-number’ elevation drawing for the contractor to create this effect in the finished building. (Images by author)

building. Or we might stop with the imaginative drawing, either because a project isn’t built, or because the image was intended for a rhetorical purpose. In practice, architectural drawings fall on a spectrum with Bafna’s two types of drawings existing as the poles. Architects often develop their designs as follows: *imaginative sketches* > *hard-lined drawings* > *renderings* > *notational (construction) drawings* in order to produce a building.<sup>1</sup>

The imaginative drawing might seek to illustrate an anticipated atmosphere or experience. It is intended to explore one or more of the following: form, space, materiality, scale, light, and use, among other characteristics. The imaginative drawing can serve the client and intended users, but it is also a design tool for the architect. In contrast, a notational drawing is intended for a different audience. A notational drawing tends towards geometrical rather than experiential accuracy, providing instructions for building using discipline-specific conventions. Contractors rely on detailed, dimensioned, and annotated drawings to assemble the materials and systems called for in an architectural design. These drawings are most commonly orthographic views (plan, section, elevation), which are two-dimensional abstractions for the purpose of measuring and describing spatial and material relationships and methods of construction, rather than to evoke a space experientially. Because we do not perceive the world in orthographic, these drawings tend to require training for literacy in comprehension. Although these drawings are not produced to evoke the atmosphere or experience anticipated in a work of architecture, they are necessary to construct the building that will ultimately provide an embodied experience (Fig. 4).

<sup>1</sup>A sketch refers to a quick free-hand drawing. A hard-lined drawing refers to a measured, geometrically accurate drawing produced using a pencil and ruler or a computer-aided drafting program. A rendering is a computer-generated or hand-drawn perspectival view of a building or space that is intended to show what a space will look like, including light and shadow, materials, and an understanding of human scale.

Now that we've looked at how the built environment is experienced and graphically represented, Part 2 will look more specifically at our visual perception of the world and its images, as empirically studied.

## 2 Part 2

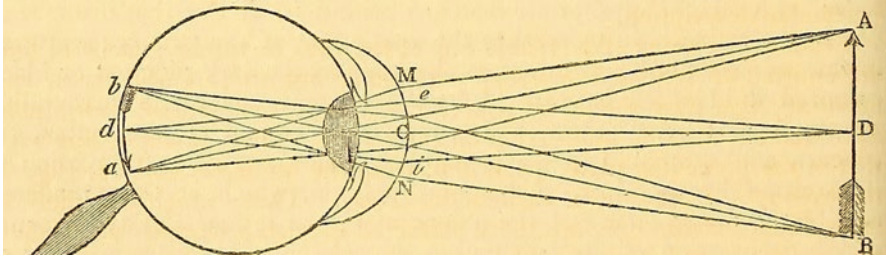
### 2.1 *Visual Perception of the Built Environment*

The difference between the world as experienced in the flesh and the world as experienced through images describes a variation on Merleau-Ponty's definition of *Umwelt*. Each situation balances objective data with subjective understanding. Part 2 of this chapter will address the visual perception of the built environment and its representations in two-dimensional images. While the engagement of other senses contributes to our perception of the built environment, images lie in the realm of the visual, and so visual perception provides an appropriate mode of comparison. Part 2 will cover the basics of visual perception of three-dimensional space, the visual perception of two-dimensional representations of space, eye-tracking as a tool for quantitatively measuring our visual perception, and empirical studies investigating these topics, including the author's own studies.

In the study of visual perception, it is understood that "Both the physical world and the perceptual world have structure" and can be defined geometrically (Hershenson, 1999, 2). While the physical world can be described by Euclidean geometry (Hershenson, 1999), the geometry of the perceptual world, which is viewer-dependent, changes based on the location and orientation of the viewer. In the perceptual world, object attributes such as size, shape, movement, direction, and position vary (Hershenson, 1999). The world we inhabit is three-dimensional – yet visual information about our world is interpreted by the brain through two-dimensional images, projected onto our retinas. The single image resulting from synthesizing two different monocular images is called binocular fusion. The disparity between the two retinal images is what gives us cues about depth perception, or three-dimensional relationships between things. Thus objects that are closer appear larger, while objects in the distance appear smaller (Fig. 5).

With more stimuli in the environment than we are capable of processing, our perceptual system relies on two levels of processing to acquire the information we need. "*Top-down and bottom-up processing* refers to the integration of information from one's own cognitive system (top-down) and from the world (bottom-up) to facilitate perception" (Carlson, 2010, 1011). *Top-down processing* relies on our prior knowledge and expectations, influencing our perception. Perceiving the environment with a specific task in mind is an example of this. *Bottom-up processing* refers to information we receive from direct sensory input. Aude Oliva, a professor at MIT, bridges human perception/cognition, computer vision, and cognitive neuroscience in her studies of visual perception. Her research investigates the processes





**Fig. 5** diagram of visual perception by Joseph Chitty, in *A practical treatise on medical jurisprudence*, 1834. (Public domain)

by which we view a scene or place. In a first glance at a scene, “the visual system forms a spatial representation of the outside world that is rich enough to grasp the meaning of the scene, recognizing a few objects and other salient information in the image, to facilitate object detection and the deployment of attention” (Oliva, 2005, 251). She calls this the *gist* of a scene. Additionally, she describes the role of memory in this assessment:

“...people rely on their previous experience and knowledge of the world to rapidly process the vast amount of detail in a real world scene. One’s current view of a scene is automatically incorporated into a “scene schema,” which includes stored memories of similar places which have been viewed in the past, as well as expectations about what is likely to be seen next. Although we aren’t aware of it, viewing a scene is an active process, in which images are combined with memory and experience to create an internal reconstruction of the visual world.” (Oliva, 2010, 1113)

In every perceptual experience, both levels of processing are at work. Top-down processing can be tied to von Uexküll’s effector world, while bottom-up processing relates to the perceptual world. We employ top-down processing to a greater extent when we are in a familiar place, and we rely more on bottom-up processing when we are in an unfamiliar setting.

## 2.2 Visual Perception of 3D Space in 2D Representations

Top-down and bottom-up processing are also deployed as we look at two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional space. While architects and designers have graphic conventions for representation that are intended to communicate with others in related fields (like orthographic drawings, as mentioned earlier), we commonly use perspectival drawings and renderings to communicate with clients, future users, and the general public. Perspectival drawings are intended to approximate how a three-dimensional space would be visually perceived by the human eye – the perceptual world as opposed to the physical world as defined by Hershenson. These drawings place the viewer into the imagined space. Rudolf Arnheim, in his book *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*,

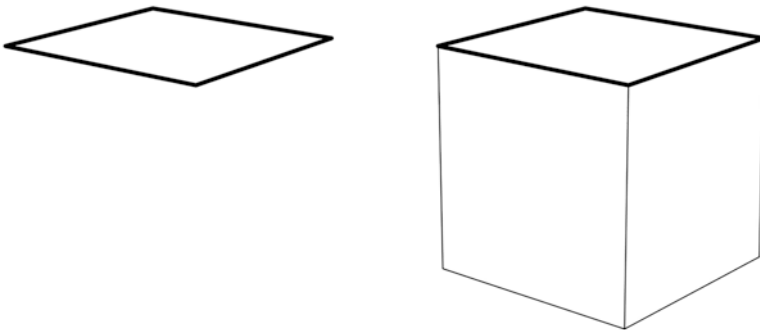


describes how we understand depth in a two-dimensional image. Perspective representation acknowledges a viewer: the distortion of the built environment occurs because there is a viewer and direction of view. “This explicit acknowledgment of the viewer is at the same time a violent imposition upon the world represented in the picture. The perspective distortions are not caused by forces inherent in the represented world itself. They are the visual expression of the fact that this world is being sighted” (Arnheim, 1956, 294). Here, the measurable geometry of the world is transformed, in order to approximate a visual experience.

He goes on to say: “Although the rules of central perspective produce pictures that closely resemble the mechanical projections yielded by the lenses of eyes and cameras, there are significant differences. Even in this more realistic mode of spatial representation, the rule prevails that no feature of the visual image will be deformed unless the task of representing depth requires it” (Arnheim, 1956, 285–286). We look for geometric simplicity to reconcile two- and three-dimensions. Arnheim defines the law of simplicity as our perceptual desire to find the simplest structure. In the diagram below, we could see the left figure as an irregular quadrilateral shape, but it makes more sense (it is formally simpler) as a square in perspective (Arnheim, 1956) (Fig. 6).

The interpretation of a two-dimensional line drawing intended to represent a view of three-dimensional space adheres to Arnheim’s principles. However, many designers use renderings – perspectival drawings with light and shadow, color, and materiality – to more closely approximate an embodied experience. Little research has been done on our visual perception of architectural space in renderings. Renderings offer less room for interpretation and imagination by the viewer than perspectival line drawings because more attributes have been assigned within the rendered image. Yet even in seemingly realistic renderings, the correlation between the perception of the attributes of the rendering and the attributes of the built work is unknown.

Although we recognize drawings and renderings as an artist’s or architect’s depiction of space, with photography, there tends to be an assumption that it is an



**Fig. 6** Interpretation of a form in two and three dimensions, based on Arnheim’s law of simplicity. (Diagram by author)

unbiased presentation of the space. Yet understanding the content and spatial implications of a photograph is a learned ability, and the photograph is, like a drawing, an abstraction of the architectural space. Studies comparing different cultures have found no difference in perceptual organization; however, these studies have shown that photographs are interpreted differently by different cultural groups (Weber, 1995). For example, African aborigines – who had never seen a photograph before – could not recognize anything in photographs they were shown, which depicted spaces familiar to them. Two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional space require interpretation which “relies on acquired visual conventions that may be as arbitrary as linguistic conventions” (Weber, 1995, 62). Photographs are authored and abstracted depictions of architectural space in the same manner as drawings. The photographer chooses the lens (which may or may not be similar to the lens of the human eye, and so may show more or less of the space), the direction of view, and what to include in or exclude from the frame. In some visual perception studies, a photograph serves as a stand-in for the real space, but the bias of the photograph is acknowledged. In order to better understand our visual perception of two-dimensional images, researchers often measure visual activity using eye tracking devices.

### 2.3 *Visual Attention and Eye Tracking in Art and Architecture*

Eye tracking is a valuable tool to quantitatively and spatially document a person’s visual experience. Eye tracking data includes fixations and saccades, based on movement of the fovea, the area of the retina where eyesight is sharpest. The fovea represents less than 2 degrees of the visual field, so the eye must move, or *foveate*, in order to take in detailed information (for example, in complex areas of the visual field). When the eye stops to take in information, this is called a *fixation*. The rapid movement of the eye from one fixation to another is called a *saccade*. During saccades, the eye is effectively blind: visual information obtained by the eye occurs during fixations, thus making fixations the most valuable data collected through eye tracking (Holmqvist et al., 2015).

As early as the 1930s, psychologists were interested in how the eye moves and fixates when focused on a work of art, both with and without a given task. Guy Buswell, a psychologist who invented the first non-intrusive eye tracker, found that the eyes do not follow edges, but tend to scan and focus on central concave areas (1935). More recent studies confirm that fixations are likely to occur in concave and enclosed areas of a figure, rather than in what is perceived as negative space (Weber et al., 2002). Alfred Yarbus, another pioneer in eye tracking research, found that eye movements vary when looking at an image depending on the task the observer was asked to complete (1973). His most famous study asked participants to look at a painting called *The Unexpected Visitor* seven times, first without a prompt and then six more times based on prompts. Questions included details of the painting like remembering the position of people and objects in the room, as well as narrative

questions like estimating how long the visitor had been away from the family. The selective attention process caused participants to attend to certain aspects of the image while ignoring others. When asked to remember the position of people and objects in the room, participants viewed more of the painting with less attention to any one element, while when they were asked to estimate how long the visitor had been away from the family, participants predominantly looked at the faces of the people. Elina Pihko's 2011 eye tracking study compared how laypeople and experts look at paintings, determining that in a perspectival painting, the laypeople tend to fixate on the center of the space while the experts view more of the painting. These studies demonstrate the impact of top-down processing on the visual perception of images.

While the visual perception of artworks has been investigated, there has been little study on the role of eye movement in the perception of three-dimensional architectural space. One of the few studies on this topic was conducted by Weber et al. (2002) in which they collected eye tracking data as participants were asked to look at either scaled three-dimensional models or photographs of models of architectural spaces. The research focused on comparing different arrangements of objects within a space. The results of this study show that without a given task (dominated by bottom-up processing), the eye is drawn to visual centers and distinct objects rather than tracing contours. "Elements indicating spatial depth, such as vistas, receive special attention... [and] vertically and horizontally oriented objects are explored less than obliquely oriented shapes" (Weber et al., 2002, 57). This confirms the 'law of simplicity' proposed by Arnheim (1977), as we need time to process the meaning of angled lines in an image – do they indicate an irregular two-dimensional object, or a perspectival three-dimensional object? The results also confirm Buswell's conclusion that fixations are likely to occur in concave and enclosed areas of a figure, rather than in what is perceived as negative space (Weber et al., 2002). The study found that fixations did not vary significantly when viewing the three-dimensional model compared with a photograph of the model, with the exception of the foreground, which attracted greater attention in the physical model. This study shows that, when looking at representations of three-dimensional space, we attend to the features of the image that convey depth rather than to features of the image, like contours, that convey the two-dimensional composition of the image.

As mentioned earlier, the built environment provides substantially more sensory stimuli than we can attend to. In primates, visual information is carried along the optic nerve at a rate of approximately  $10^8$  bits per second. This, however, is too much for the brain to process into consciousness, so it has adapted by selecting certain parts of the image to process preferentially. This allows the brain to register different areas of interest in a serial manner and shift from one to another depending on the importance that the brain allots. *Saliency mapping* is a technique first conceived by neuroscientists Laurent Itti, Christof Koch, and Ernst Niebur at the California Institute of Technology in 1998. It is a method of computationally analyzing unique features in any given photograph and processing them to highlight the anticipated foci of attention. This visual attention system was created to simulate "the neuronal architecture of the early primate visual system" (Itti et al., 1998).

Saliency maps are created through learning algorithms that consider color, intensity and orientation. These saliency maps were originally created from a bottom-up perspective, and were subsequently modified by Torralba to take into account top-down processing (Torralba, 2005). A study by Torralba et al. (2006) considered the role of a given task in viewing an image. This study proposed visual attentional guidance through an experimental search task. Results of their study suggest that context plays an important role in object detection and observation. For example, if you are asked to look for a person in a scene of a busy urban street, you will likely look at street level, assuming a person would be there and not floating in mid-air. "...the scene priors constitute an effective shortcut for object detection as it provides priors for the object's presence/absence before scanning the image" (Torralba, 2005, 591). When studying visual perception, bottom-up and top-down processing cannot be easily isolated.

Lien Dupont et al. (2016) studied saliency maps in the context of landscape architecture. Landscape architects often conduct a *visual impact assessment* when proposing changes to a landscape. For example, this is required to minimize visual impact for changes along Route 1 on California's coast. With accurate computer-generated saliency mapping, landscape architects could determine whether their proposed design would significantly impact the visual perception and attention to a given landscape. In this study, computer-generated saliency maps were compared to human focus maps – obtained by collecting eye tracking data as participants viewed images – to test the accuracy of predicting the human viewing pattern. Seventy-four landscape photographs were shown, ranging from rural to urban scenes, for 10 s each. An eye tracking device recorded the results in the form of a focus map, which was then compared to the saliency map for each photograph. A relatively high correlation was found, demonstrating that saliency maps can be a reliable prediction of human's observation patterns. However, the correlation between the saliency map and focus map was found to be greater in rural landscapes, showing that human viewing behavior can be more easily predicted in these settings, as opposed to urban landscapes.

## ***2.4 Eye Tracking to Compare Modes of Architectural Representation***

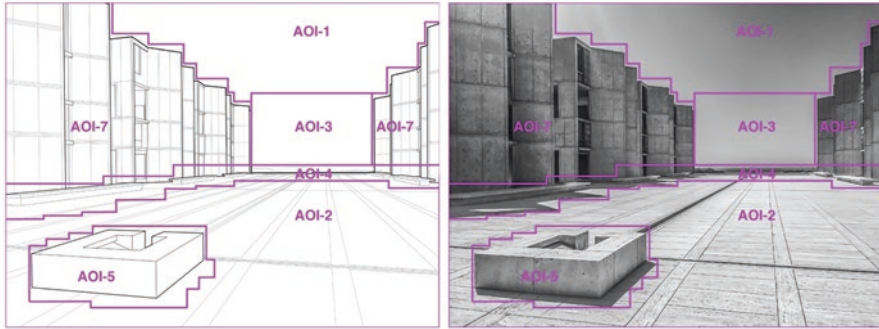
The range of physiological responses evoked by both embodied experiences and the perception of architectural images demands a deeper investigation into their associations. Architects design with various modes of representation, and others outside the design professions represent the built environment through drawings and photography. As the audience varies, so does the way we represent things. What can the perception of images of architecture and cities tell us about the actual experience – or potential experience – of the places depicted? The long-term goal of the author's own empirical research attempts to relate physiological responses – like what we

focus on and what emotions we experience – in real spaces with the responses evoked when looking at architectural representations. The significance of this is that if architects can anticipate how people will experience a space based on how they respond to images of it, we could design better schools, hospitals, etc. (There will never be a perfect correlation, of course.) The following studies sit at the intersection of Architecture, Cognitive Science, and Phenomenology, where: “Phenomenology can also enrich our understanding of empirical results by embedding them in a coherent theoretical framework... In this mode, the phenomenologist is a kind of higher-level meta-theorist, drawing both on phenomenological and non-phenomenological sources in putting together an account of some kind of experiential process or pattern” (Yoshimi, 2016, 297).

In a pair of pilot studies conducted with architecture students in North Carolina, China, and California, we collected eye tracking data to test our preliminary hypothesis: that visual attention varies with representational mode (Shields et al., 2016). We compared eye tracking data for two different modes of representation – a perspectival line drawing and a matching photograph of the same space. We chose a space that did not have an obvious function associated with it and that had some spatial complexity. In order to analyze the eye tracking data, we identified seven Areas of Interest (AOIs) in the visual scene. Both studies found differences in how participants viewed the drawing compared with the photo. We interpreted the difference in visual attention as a distinction between spatial complexity and graphic complexity: our attention is drawn to more graphically complex areas (more lines) in a drawing but more spatially complex areas in a photo. This prompts the question: do we also look for spatial complexity in an embodied experience?

In a larger-scale study of the visual perception of architectural spaces, we were interested in both the mode of representation (comparing drawing to photograph) and the audience (comparing architecture student to preschool student). Through the collection of eye tracking data, our aim was to test our preliminary hypotheses: that salient features differ by representation mode, and by participant group. We used two different modes of representation, like the previous studies – a perspectival line drawing and a matching photograph of the Salk Institute in La Jolla, CA, by the architect Louis Kahn. In order to compare salient features, we set up Areas of Interest (AOIs), and collected eye movement data for each AOI. The participants were not given any instructions other than to look at the image, in order to privilege bottom-up processing (Fig. 7).

The results showed that architecture students’ visual attention differed between the drawing and the photograph, while the attention of the preschool students did not. The results suggest that the trained eye (that of the architecture student) will focus on the architecture in an image, but to a greater degree in a drawing. Additionally, the eye movements of the architecture students support the architect’s intent for the Salk Institute – that the architecture frame the sky and horizon, drawing the eye towards the ocean beyond. This is an interesting result given that the participants were not there in person but were looking at a photograph, in which the ocean is barely visible.



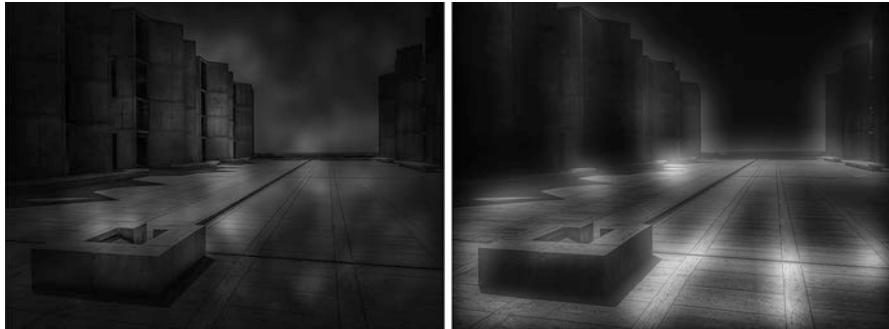
**Fig. 7** Salk Institute drawing (L) and photo (R) with AOIs. (Images by author)

We also wanted to investigate whether a computer-generated saliency map could predict the areas of a photograph where most attention would be drawn. At first glance we could see that the saliency map predicts the ground as attracting attention, while the focus map from the participants shows the horizon and sky to be of greater interest. We would anticipate that a quantitative comparison would show the saliency map to differ from the focus map. Using Dupont et al.'s (2016) method for comparing a saliency map to a focus map, we arrived at a correlation coefficient of 0.3564, which indicates that while the two maps are somewhat similar, there is nonetheless a weak positive correlation between the two. From this, we can gather that the saliency map is only mildly reliable at predicting areas of interest, and cannot replace a focus map. This confirms Dupont et al.'s conclusion that the saliency map was more accurate for predicting attention in a rural landscape than an urban one.<sup>2</sup> The results suggest that the visuospatial literacy of the participant – the ability for the participant to perceive three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional image, rather than only two-dimensional characteristics – plays a role in what aspects of the photo are attended to. It could be possible for Artificial Intelligence to more closely approximate a human viewing pattern, with enough human eye tracking data to support machine learning (Fig. 8).

### 3 Conclusion

Through these experiments, we've found that both the mode of representation and the audience affect how architectural spaces are visually perceived, even without a task. There are additional types of physiological data we could collect – heart rate,

<sup>2</sup>The larger research project of which this study is a part is a cross-disciplinary investigation involving researchers in computer science, cognitive science, and architecture. This particular study was completed in consultation with Dr. Jeffrey Sklar, Statistics, and Dr. Laura Cacciamani, Psychology, with Research Assistants Wood Cheng, Gabriella Ojalvo, Melina van Oers.



**Fig. 8** Salk Institute focus map (L) and saliency map (R). (Images by author)

galvanic skin response, EEG – and many modes of representation to investigate, like renderings and virtual reality. Additionally, we could collect phenomenological data from the participants, asking them what they notice in an image. According to Francisco J. Varela in “Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for the Hard Problem,” “One of the originalities of the phenomenological attitude is that it does not seek to oppose the subjective to the objective, but to move beyond the split into their fundamental correlation” (1996, 339). Varela’s statement suggests that the subjective and objective can be correlated. Varela’s conclusions in this essay have been criticized by Tim Bayne, but Bayne does propose that participant responses can “guide the analysis” of the quantitative data (2004).

An additional challenge is the measurement of physiological responses in an embodied experience. Photography, perhaps, more closely approximates the real space, but eliminates peripheral visual data and other sensory information and does not address the role of time in our experience of architecture. Since a static photograph is not a sufficient analog for the embodied experience, it would be valuable to collect physiological data from participants as they inhabit a work of architecture.

The empirical studies described here reinforce von Uexküll’s claim (and the claims of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, J.J. Gibson, and others) that we experience the world through the lenses of what we are able to perceive and what we are able to do in that world. In visual perception alone, our *Umwelt* is crafted by bottom-up (external stimuli) and top-down (internally motivated) processes, allowing us to ‘see’ some aspects of the world and be blind to others. Additionally, graphic representations of the world shape what we do and do not notice.

Calvino asks, “Will the power of evoking images of things that are *not there* continue to develop in a human race increasingly inundated by a flood of prefabricated images?” (1988, 91). While architects may not be able to stem the flood of images of the built environment proliferating across social media, we do have authorship over the drawings, renderings, and photographs we produce and share. The ostensible authority we have as designers of the built environment gives us a responsibility to critically consider our modes of representation and our audiences, and how one impacts the other. Perhaps Bachelard’s suggestion can guide us. “Only



phenomenology – that is to say, consideration of the *onset of the image* in an individual consciousness – can help us to restore the subjectivity of image and to measure their fullness, their strength and their transsubjectivity” (Bachelard et al., 1994, xix).

While these philosophers note the individual and idiosyncratic nature of perception, the empirical research does bear out commonalities amongst test subjects. A valuable next step would be to expand both the objective measurement of physiological responses and the collection of phenomenological responses to embodied experience and graphic representations. Further research can employ both objective and subjective data in seeking to anticipate how people will respond to works of architecture. If we could anticipate how spaces will affect the occupant’s phenomenological experience by how they respond to images of it, we could design a better built environment.

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**Part IV**  
**External Horizons: Archaeology**  
**and Anthropology**

# The Life and Afterlife of Phenomenology in Archaeological Theory and Practice



Holley Moyes

From the onset, phenomenological perspectives in archaeological interpretation have been fraught with controversy. Early reactions to a phenomenological approach did a great deal to thwart these studies and to discourage archaeologists from embracing phenomenology in both method and theory. Has the phenomenological critique been wholly warranted and is there a place for a phenomenological approach in archaeology? My goal in this paper is to create a space for phenomenology that functions as a guide for archaeological inquiry and accounts for shared human experience that transcends time and space without compromising the importance of contextual analyses.

This chapter begins with a review of how explicitly phenomenological as well as sensorial approaches have been employed in archaeological interpretations and how they have been received by the archaeological community. This is followed by a discussion of assumptions that underpin the adoption or rejection of phenomenological methods. Here I problematize the distinction between past and present, the historical and the evolutionary, arguing that the past does in fact reside in the present. I also argue that from an evolutionary perspective, as modern humans we share a cognitive architecture that interacts with the physical world that can provide a basis or structure of phenomenological experience. Bearing this in mind, two ways forward are suggested for bolstering phenomenology in archaeological practice. First, following Julian Thomas (2012), I argue that phenomenology can be treated as an analogy that may function as a line of evidence to help establish explanations, understandings, and meanings in archaeological interpretations, as elaborated by Alison Wylie in her “cables and tacking” metaphor (1989a), according to which scientific theories are slowly strengthened by many lines of evidence over time, with phenomenology as one among several sources of evidence. Second, phenomenological studies in archaeology can be extended by taking a “naturalized” approach

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in which these studies may be used to develop testable hypotheses to be investigated methodologically using quantitative instrumentation. This is illustrated in a case study about the experience of darkness in caves derived from patterns in the archaeological record, indicating that dark zones of caves were primarily used as sacred or special places, not for habitation. A laboratory experiment is presented which demonstrates that darkness may affect not only the choice of dark caves as ritual venues, but human cognition itself, therefore extending phenomenological archaeology to other fields and using it to answer broader questions.

## 1 A Phenomenology of Landscape

The adoption of a phenomenological approach in archaeological interpretations was initially reserved for studies of place or landscapes. The concept of landscape has a long history in Europe dating from at least the seventeenth century in studies of natural features and human modifications to the land (Thomas, 2012, 167). In its inception, landscape archaeology was conceived as an objective enterprise. Archaeologists studied landscape features and investigated chronological developments, processes, and modifications, often producing descriptive works. However, in the 1990s the focus of landscape studies shifted to a “post-processual landscape archaeology” (Fleming, 2006, 208) that engaged “perspectives on human nature, perception, experience, and meaning” (Thomas, 2012, 168). One of the first offerings to fully address this was Christopher Tilley’s (1994) book-length treatise, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments*, a study of archaeological monuments in landscape settings, which drew on phenomenology as a means for interpretation of the archaeological record. Taking a post-processualist (humanist) approach in which he rejected explanations using scientific and quantitative methods such as maps, categorization, statistics, and computer modelling on the grounds that they were dehumanizing, Tilley adopted new methods geared toward understanding the relationships between people and meaningful places. Invoking Heidegger, Tilley argued that his own bodily experience provided a “privileged vantage point” for apprehending the world (13) and drawing on Merleau-Ponty, he contended that the body constituted “a way of relating to, perceiving and understanding the world” (14). Tilley reminds us that “the human body itself provides the starting point for knowledge of the world, and all human modern beings (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) have the same kinds of bodies and perceive the experience of the world in similar human ways at a basic biological level” (Tilley, 2005a, 202) thereby serving to link the past to the present. Throughout his career, Tilley has maintained that it is through the mediation with the body that archaeologists perceive the world so that they may rest archaeological interpretations on their own perceptions. His field methods included walking the landscape, observing views, making detailed notes, taking photographs and videos, filling out forms, using checklists, and producing narratives of his own experiences as means to understanding the landscape from a human (subjective) perspective rather than

taking a scientific (objective) stance. For Tilley, it was through the researcher's own subjective experience that a traditional objectification of the landscape in archaeological practice could be mitigated.

Tilley's methods met with harsh criticism among many scholars within the archaeological community (e.g., Barrett & Ko, 2009; Brück, 2005; Edmonds, 2006; Fleming, 2005, 2006; Hamilakis, 2014; Johnson, 2012; Thomas, 1993). By employing his own experience, Tilley's method was considered to be excessively subjective, favoring a solitary individual, in this case one with male Western sensibilities, considered to be Colonialist and gender-centric. Julian Thomas (1993, 22–23) criticized Tilley for other reasons, arguing that visual modes of perception have been overemphasized in landscape studies attributing the primacy of vision to a mode of appropriation in the modern Western world (also see Goodwin & Lecari, chapter "Reconstructing Past Phenomenology Using Virtual Reality", this volume). It was also noted that phenomenological interpretations suffered from equifinality. As Brück (2005, 51) pointed out, "it is often impossible for the reader to judge whether the relationships identified by the archaeologist in the present were indeed considered significant in the past," suggesting that multiple interpretations should be evaluated, and that phenomenological studies such as Tilley's simply present assertions about experiences without bolstering evidence. Additionally, by describing the past in terms of his present embodied encounter of the landscape, he was "essentializing" the experience of people in the past and obliterating potential differences between modern and past subjects.

Barrett and Ko (2009, 280) discussed Tilley's use and understanding of the roots of phenomenology in philosophy and offered the following synopsis based on his underlying assumptions:

1. The archaeological record cannot be understood without a human presence. Meaning arises in a human engagement with material conditions
2. The body is the medium through which this engagement occurs.
3. By using his or her own body as the medium of engagement, the archaeologist can encounter a past Being-in-the-world, and, in doing so, grasp the meaning of the archaeological record.

They argued that assumptions 1 and 2 are consistent with the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, which they find plausible, but find statement 3 to be problematic. The argument is that, via the first person encounter we produce a meaning, but it is a contemporary meaning, not the thoughts of a past person. This is consistent with Heidegger's ideas about the historical situatedness of perception.

Tim Ingold (2005) is particularly critical of Tilley's (2004) work. Here he points out an example of what he refers to as "hyper-interpretation":

When not expounding on the actuality of the world, Tilley is eagerly speculating on what people might have believed it all meant! To take just one example, the solution basins created by erosion on a standing-stone 'were perhaps regarded as carvings created by the ancestors' (2004, 51). Perhaps they were; perhaps they were not. Tilley has a penchant for wheeling in the ancestors, whenever needed, to lend an air of ethnographic authenticity to

his conjectures. But if his concern is really with experience, why do these conjectures deal so exclusively with what people might have believed? (2005, 123).

To others, Tilley's hyper-interpretive methods lacked rigor and had the problem of imposing one's own feelings and observations onto the people of the past without considering the cultural contexts and symbolic meanings imbued in past perceptions of landscapes.

However, though fellow archaeologist Julian Thomas agrees that modern archaeologists cannot really know the experience of ancient people, he sees value in using the phenomenological approach. According to Thomas, "I can only encounter the world through the body of a male, twenty-first-century academic, and I cannot occupy anyone else's body. This need not render the project of an experiential archaeology invalid" (Thomas, 2004, 32). For Thomas, objects or artifacts such as monuments must be not only historically and culturally situated but contextualized within the landscape itself. Because they had meaning for past people, they represent more than an extinct social pattern; therefore, phenomenology becomes a means by which to establish a more holistic understanding of the past serving "as an analogy for past worlds" (2012, 182). In this sense he and critic Matthew Johnson (2012) concur that phenomenology cannot be used a stand-alone approach (as proposed by Tilley), but is informative when coupled with other methodological approaches to produce more complex and nuanced interpretations of the archaeological record.

## 2 The Sensorial Turn

Despite heavy criticism, Tilley's work prompted numerous revisions of his ideas and generated more nuanced approaches to phenomenological archaeology, which were later employed in the "archaeology of the senses," an approach that rests heavily on idealist constructions and the role of memory in sensorial experience. Many archaeologists have embraced "the sensory turn" (Skeates & Day, 2020, 1), although the investigator's own embodied experience paired with an element of self-reflexivity remains the most important methodological tool for interpretation (Brück, 2005, 50).

In *Archaeology of the Senses*, Yannis Hamilakis (2013) criticizes Tilley for his emphasis on visual fields at the expense of other sensory modalities, and for the subjectivity of his approach arguing that his analyses are "ahistorical, universalist and homogenising" (100). As a remedy to this critique, sensory studies emphasize investigations of the multisensorial experience avoiding the traditional primacy of ocularity, including not only the five senses of western thought, but others as well such as "sense of place" (168–170). Hamilakis supports the use of visualization techniques and virtual reality but reminds us that these techniques are primarily based on visual experience, and envisions a future in which virtual reenactments will be immersive to include other senses such as sound, smell, touch, etc. But, in



his own case studies, Hamilakis, makes use of traditional 2-dimensional maps and black and white photographs. He relies heavily on description and use of his own imagination in recreating the sensory experiences of what people “would” have seen and heard (187). In this sense, the work lacks rigor in much the same way as Tilley’s highly criticized subjective observations of landscapes and unreconstructed archaeological sites.

A critique of the archaeology of the senses is that it is just doing phenomenology under a different name, and so many of its critiques of phenomenology could equally be applied to sensorial studies. Though it is rarely made explicit in these studies, out of necessity phenomenological assumptions are employed in all sensorial investigations. Because phenomenology works at the level of the individual and is experiential in its very nature, no matter how many biases or assumptions we acknowledge, we cannot infer humanistic understandings without using a highly subjective method. Sensorial archaeologists argue that reflexivity helps to mitigate this subjective approach, yet there is no accepted methodology for producing self-reflexive observations and these typically aim at acknowledging biases, though we know that these are often unconscious and therefore difficult to access. Husserl’s bracketing would be instructive, but it is never invoked. Sensorial archaeology also invites us to engage with the experience of people that interact with their environments in special ways such as hunters, farmers, craftsmen, etc., which is reminiscent of Collingwood’s epistemology for establishing historical knowledge in which the researcher uses knowledge of the historical context in the modern imagination to attain a better understanding the thought and meaning underlying human action in historical texts in what he terms “re-enactment” (1946, 282–302).

Re-enactments or reconstructions in virtual reality offer a promising approach to sensorial archaeology and phenomenology. Developing and refining virtual reality (as well as archaeological models of past environments and cultures, may go a long way in better approximating our understandings of past people) (See Goodwin & Lercari, chapter “[Reconstructing Past Phenomenology Using Virtual Reality](#)”, this volume), but the problem of “subjectivity epistemology” (Barrett & Ko, 2009) remains though it is based on virtual realities. It will continue to do so unless we develop new avenues for understanding human feeling, thought, and meaning. Tilley (2005a, b, 203) himself reminds us that “...as human beings, we can only study things as we experience them. All such studies are necessarily limited and therefore can be criticised.” Is this true or has the use of subjective experience been prematurely dismissed due to lack of clear methodologies? It may be that it is simply undertheorized.

Arguably all archaeologists are phenomenologists at some level. As Mathew Johnson points out:

It is also certainly the case that behind the often rather dry and impersonal top-down maps and plans produced by traditional landscape archaeology there lies a practice of field craft that is engaged, empathetic, emotive, and based on lively dissent and discussion (a tradition in which the author of this article was raised in the 1980s). However, it is equally true that prior to the reflections on field practice of the last decade or so, this lively practice rarely emerged onto the printed page. (2012, 278–279).

In other words, field archaeologists are immersed in the landscape, we experience the environment, we imagine what it would be like to live in a pithouse in the desert or on top of a pyramid in the jungle. We touch and handle the objects made by people of the past and imagine owning them and discerning their use in our phenomenological theorizing (Tilley, 2019). These imaginings are what generate many of our ideas, models, and hypotheses. But, the question remains, what is the role of phenomenology in archaeological practice and can it be considered a viable stand-alone interpretive method?

### 3 Underlying Tenets of Phenomenological Approaches

The extent to which archaeologists accept or reject phenomenological approaches rests primarily on their stance on the question as to whether we can replicate the experiences of others. I will argue three points (1) that the proposition is based on basic belief systems or assumptions held by the archaeologist concerning their perspective on the existence and viability of the psychic unity of mankind (Johnson, 2012, 277), (2) how much influence the “real world” (environment or material world) exerts on human perception and conceptualizations, and (3) whether they envision the latter as an all or nothing position or a matter of degree. If one assumes a unity of thought coupled with similar external realities such as environment, it is then theoretically possible to transcend time and space to infer human experience. On the external reality side of the equation, the more stable or unchanging the environment or the better the reconstruction, the higher probability of correlating past and present experiences (this is the basic premise of virtual or physical reconstructions, experimental archaeology, and other analogical arguments). No archaeologist argues that their subjective personal experience exactly replicates the experience of a person from the past, but that it *approximates* or has commonalities that are a matter of degree or probability.

Psychic unity is a concept that originated in Greek philosophy and was introduced into the anthropological literature by Adolf Bastion (1881), then taken up by Frans Boas (1911/1938) to combat biological racism inherent in Classical Evolutionist theories. Psychic unity contends that all humans have the same mental capacities that are universally shared and grounded in their common biology (Shore, 2000; Facoetti & Gontier, 2020). There is a “unity” between all humans beings, past and present, insofar as they share a common set of cognitive structures. This sets the stage for the phenomenologists’ argument that the human body itself (Tilley, 1994; Thomas, 2002) provides “a starting point for knowledge of the world, and all modern human beings (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) have the same kinds of bodies and perceive and experience the world in similar human ways at a basic biological level” (in Tilley, 2005a). Phenomenologists in archaeology likely refer to the embodiment of thought and its relationship to the environment, but psychic unity is thereby inferred because their argument collapses without it. Some anthropologists (See e.g., Shore, 1996) contend that culture structures and organizes thought to the

degree that psychic unity is no longer a viable, yet this remains to be seen and none has successfully refuted the basic premise.

Postprocessualists that adopt Franz Boas' historical particularism, a theory which contends that everything from culture to human experience is historically contingent, adhere to a Heideggerian phenomenology that is consistent with an emphasis on history as a primary constituent of phenomenological experience. This has led critics to dismiss phenomenological approaches on the grounds that we cannot understand the experiences of past people because they are too different from our own. Phenomenologists mitigate this by introducing self-reflexivity into their observations and by considering the cultural context of past people in an effort to render a more viable and less subjective interpretation. Other researchers that adhere to evolutionary and cognitive approaches envision a synergy and co-evolution between the brain/body, culture, and the material world that does not privilege one over the other and recognizes biological constraints and endowments on which cultural practices are constructed, which recursively contribute to shaping human cognitive capacity over long periods of time (Cosmides et al., 1992; Hutchins, 2008; Renfrew et al., 2008).

From an historic perspective, if we are indeed "thrown" into the world and its historic contexts in the Heideggerian sense, we are influenced by not only the present but taken to a logical extreme, the sum total of human history that is carried into the present from the distant past. Is not deep history in some sense embedded within our psyches and cultures and does this not provide yet another link to our past that is rendered in our world view, practices, and phenomenological experience? While we may be historically situated in the present, does that not entail that we are also historically situated in the deep past? This perspective argues for connections between modern people and their ancestral roots, building yet another bridge from the present to the past.

Evolutionary psychology as well as neuroscience would support such a premise. Not only is recent historical content part of our makeup, but long-term historic knowledge, as well as cultural and biological adaptations play a role. The brain itself is a product of neurological adaptations shaped by a long evolutionary history. In this sense, we may think of history as working on multiple scales- the immediate and the recent variations and the long-term and evolutionary- shaping both cultural content and biological processes. So, we may recognize short-term cultural variations as resting on deep histories and adaptations brought forth by a nexus of the brain/body, culture, and the material world. In a phenomenological approach, that considers the complexity of experience, a space opens for the contemplation of experiences that are remnants of ancient practices, beliefs, or evolutionary processes. This is not to suggest that there are social memories, but rather deep accepted knowledge and embodied responses, many of which are taken for granted as the way things are or may operate at a subconscious level. To recognize our relationship to our past dissolves the gap between the past and present in that the past literally still exists in the present in the body and within culture writ large.

In philosophical circles, the role of the physical world in perception is highly debated. This is an old issue that dichotomizes realism vs. idealism. For instance,

realism posits that the real world is external to us and the things in it exist independently of ourselves and our sensibilities, whereas Kant's transcendental idealism argues that seemingly external objects come into being as representations. Kant argues that our cognitive apprehension of reality is not so much mirroring a pre-existing world as a construction from our cognitive capacities. Should archaeologists take a radical idealist stance and deny the existence of a "real" external world, arguing that reality consists exclusively of minds and their ideas with a lack of realist grounding, it becomes more challenging to understand not only people of the past but people of the present.

One must ask, are we in fact so different from one another and do we live in such radically different mental worlds that there can be no real understandings between us? Can we not have an empathetic understanding of each other, modern people from other cultures, or people of the past? We intuitively know that this is not true. In order to appreciate the use of phenomenology in inferences about past people, we need to accept the importance of the physical world external to ourselves as an important element influencing perceptions and concepts, even if one does not fully accept a "pure" perception, that is, one without theoretical constructions. As Yoshimi (2015, 300) notes, "the idea that all being is a correlate of consciousness is unsupported." This is also addressed by Smith (1995) in his discussion regarding Husserl's *epoché*. He argues that according to Husserl, regarding a physical thing there can be an infinite variety of appearances "of all men," that suggests that everyone's reality will differ. He goes on to note that the world outside of ourselves not only has physicality, but agreed upon social components. An example of this would be descriptions of colors. Physical light waves within a spectrum produce different wavelengths that manifest as colors. What we call these affects (the phenomenon) are agreed upon social norms such as "red." According to Smith:

...the problem with all transcendental idealist views is of course the problem with *intersubjectivity*—of accounting for the existence of harmony among the different worlds which arise when "world" is relativized to your and my subjective appearances and of accounting for the possibility of a single universal science which would govern the modes and manners of such appearing (429).

From this standpoint, the physical world has the potential to provide a basis for the common or "psychically unified" structure of phenomenological experience, that transcends time and space in instances where physical things remain relatively consistent or recognizable in both the past and present. This is a basic underlying assumption that Tilley makes in his phenomenological arguments that overlay the past and present, essentially compressing time.

So where does this leave phenomenology in archaeological practice? Clearly there are debates regarding the underlying assumptions about how perception works and how modern human experience may be used as a tool to better understand the past. Unfortunately, this is the only tool we have available. All we have are the subjective experiences of modern people (archaeologists or otherwise) to use as data in phenomenologically-based inferences, be they sensorial experiences or those that attempt to establish meaning. Unless archaeologists abandon the pursuit of

understanding past experience, we must work with the only tools we have, ourselves and other humans. I envision two paths forward. The first is to strengthen and develop current methodologies. The second is to adopt a “naturalized” phenomenology in which phenomena provide data to be explained using scientific approaches.

#### 4 Ways Forward: Phenomenology as Analogy

Following Julian Thomas, phenomenology may be thought of as a special kind of analogy. This suggests a way of strengthening phenomenological arguments. The use of analogy was much debated and discussed in archaeological circles in the 1960s–1980s, particularly in New World archaeology where there has been a great deal of cultural continuity. In archaeological interpretation, analogy has been variously defined, but its broadest definition is probably that of Ascher (1961, 317), who states “In its most general sense interpreting by analogy is assaying any belief about non-observed behavior by referral to observed behavior which is thought to be relevant.” It is one of archaeology’s most widely used tools, traditionally employed to link ethnographic, experimental, or other known data to the archaeological record and may be utilized in model building. However, within the discipline there is a fundamental epistemological debate concerning the use of analogy as a form of evidence (Binford, 1967, 1968; Gould & Watson, 1982; Wylie, 1989a, b).

The question is whether it is possible for archaeologists to understand the past solely from analogic reasoning or whether analogs should function only as testable hypotheses. Archaeology is always concerned with the unknown (and to some the unknowable), and therefore has an affinity with predictive methods. Studies of human behavior require special methodologies and statistical inferences, but studies of past human behavior are even more demanding. How does one deal with phenomena that produce patterns, especially those that are never completely identical except to varying degrees? Due to the lack of uniformitarian principles or laws that are the foundation of the natural sciences, many archaeologists use pattern recognition and analogs to interpret data. But the variability in human behavior renders ethnographic analogy (and pattern recognition) both attractive and risky. On one hand, archaeologists are reliant on analogy to provide models of human behavior. Grahame Clark (1951, 50) observes that all sciences that deal with the remote past must “...interpret evidence about the past to some degree in terms of what may be observed in the present.” On the other hand, archaeologists know that even in similar or identical circumstances high behavioral variability exists preventing the archaeologist from putting total faith in analogs (See Watson, 1979, 1980; Watson et al., 1984, 259–269). The strength of the analogy will also depend heavily upon the question(s) asked and the type of inference sought.

Archaeologists recognize two types of analogies, formal and relational. Formal analogies refer to similarities in form or “formal” attributes between archaeological and ethnographic objects or features. Similar forms may be separated in time and may come from different cultures. For example, we recognize ancient projectile

points or pottery vessels because people still use those objects today and they have similar characteristics. A cup fits easily in the hand and has a large enough rim diameter so that one may put it to the lips and easily drink from it and may be recognized for its form that follows its function.

In order to reduce uncertainty, formal analogies can be strengthened on the ethnographic (modern) side (Ascher, 1961, 322), such as when there are many ethnographic cases. For instance, take the example of the cup. Cups are used today and have been used historically in a large number of cultures throughout the world. By providing multiple instances, archaeologists can build up strong inductively reasoned cases. The modern analog is so statistically common that we would expect it in the archaeological record thereby reducing uncertainty. When we consider phenomenological experiential observations, the more people that have similar experiences, the stronger the argument for the plausibility of the phenomenological analogy. Additionally, experimental archaeology provides a vehicle for exploring human experience in circumstances (or form) that simulate the past. Experimental archaeology creates controllable imitative experiments to replicate past phenomena that may be used to test hypotheses or strengthen analogs (Mathieu, 2002, 1). An elaborate case of an experimental project is Lejre, a reconstructed Iron Age village in Denmark (Rasmussen & Gronnow, 1999). Here, archaeologists as well as the general public can experience living in a reconstructed Iron Age house and conduct domestic routines that might be expected of an Iron Age person. In this way the experiment attempts to recreate the past so that a modern person could have simulated a past experience. While it is beyond the project goals to know exactly how past people established meaning in their social relationships, in the Lejre experiment they may physically embody the Iron Age experience comparing that experience to their own, which may lead to additional insights or help bolster analogical arguments about past people. Recreating past environments is what drives virtual reality, 3D modeling, GIS and other computer simulations. Currently, simulations typically lack the total immersive sensorial experience that can be achieved in a full-blown reconstruction, but may still produce useful analogical information that could be crowd sourced, possibly statistically strengthening the sensorial analogy on the ethnographic or modern side.

In relational analogies there is close cultural continuity between the archaeological and ethnographic records or a similar adaptation-function. In other words, the best analogies are from closely “related” groups. Some groups are related by their adaptations. For instance, there are particular adaptations that people living in very cold environments might share such as dressing in furs. Desert-dwelling societies are best used as analogs for prehistoric communities that lived similar environments. The use of pit-houses that retain heat are a common desert technology throughout the world for staying warm in an environment that is very hot during the day and very cold at night. Around the equator people grow food in jungle environments using a technique called “slash and burn” farming. This same technique is used widely today and was employed by the ancient Maya thousands of years ago.

If it can be demonstrated that a group has continuously occupied the same geographical area for many years strong analogical arguments can be drawn between



modern people and archaeological cultures. Relational analogies are exemplified by the Direct Historic Approach (or Folk-Culture approach in Europe) (Wedel, 1938). Inferences are produced by working back in time from the ethnographically known to the archaeologically unknown using ethnographic, historical and archaeological data. While the approach is not directly applicable for use in phenomenology, considering the experiences of descendent communities makes for stronger experiential analogies, particularly if there are demonstrated continuities in ideologies and world views (ontologies). Working with native interlocuters regarding landscapes of the American southwest, Fowles (2010) noted that it would be impossible to infer meanings in the archaeological record without the benefit of modern people's special knowledge.

In order to understand phenomenological meanings of analogs would require a much more complex process that would necessarily involve contextualizing subjective or intersubjective experiences (Thomas, 1996, 2012). Philosopher of archaeology Alison Wylie (1989a) suggested a methodological approach to analogs using a "cables and tacking" model of archaeological inquiry. This concept is derived from Gadamer's hermeneutic circle and Peirce's argument that scientific theories are more like cables than chains. Rather than a linear chain of single studies that can produce broken links, in the cable metaphor, no one scientific study is sufficient for the development of knowledge, but multiple studies over time are necessary for establishing a knowledge base. Truth is not absolute but is a never-ending social inquiry based on a multitude of arguments (Preucel & Hodder, 1996, 250–254; Gamble, 2015, 113–115). It is by way of Richard Bernstein's (1983) arguments that mitigate scientific objectivism and relativity that Wylie envisions a grounding for archaeological knowledge. She argues that in the archaeological record there is an underlying "determining structure" that is causal, functional, structural, and intentional.

In the cables and tacking model, not only does the archaeological record itself, but multiple independent studies, often cross-disciplinary, serve to constrain and enrich archaeological interpretations so that accepted knowledge is the result of their convergence. Archaeologists "tack" between experience-near and experience-distant concepts in a type of dialog that evolves over time and with the addition of new data leading to new concepts, models, and archaeological reconstructions. Wylie argues that this method of knowledge-building also helps to avoid biases because it is unlikely that all strands of evidence would incorporate the same pre-understandings and/or bias. The cables and tacking model would be useful in phenomenological studies that hope to uncover underlying meanings in the natural or built environments by including multiple forms of data that help to contextualize the human experience. In this model, analogies may be strengthened on both the modern and archaeological sides, opening a space to include not only phenomenological experience, but also archaeological contexts, epigraphy, iconography, ethnohistoric or historic data, scientific studies, experimentation, and cross-cultural comparisons to create complex and nuanced arguments.



## 5 Another Way Forward—A Naturalized Phenomenology

New Archaeology advocated for a scientific approach to archaeological epistemology. Lewis Binford, its most vocal proponent, argued for the incorporation of analogy as a method for the creation of testable hypotheses. This was illustrated in Binford's classic article, "Smudge Pits and Hide Smoking: The Use of Analogy in Archaeological Reasoning" (1967), a case study used to demonstrate Binford's proposed use of analogy. At the core of Binford's Middle Range Theory is the replacement of uniformitarian laws with low-level theories by conducting studies that link the archaeological record with the ethnographic present by means of experimental or ethnoarchaeological studies. Therefore, the use of experiential data fits well with Binford's program. One might envision using either subjective or intersubjective observations in directing archaeological research and providing hypothetical data to be explained. As an example, in conducting studies involving sound or light in the archaeological record, modern observations would be pertinent to the development of hypotheses that could be tested using methods of quantitative instrumentation.

This is complimentary to a "naturalized" phenomenology, which comes out of the Husserlian rejection of naturalism (the philosophical belief that everything arises from natural properties and causes), in other words, an orientation towards natural science (Varela, 1996; Gallagher, 2010; Yoshimi, 2015; Zahavi, 2010). Husserl envisioned phenomenology as having methodological priority over other sciences, yet in a naturalized phenomenology, it becomes an equal partner with the empirical sciences such as cognitive science or neuroscience. As Yoshimi (2015, 9) argues phenomenology can influence other sciences by providing data to be explained. Gallagher (2010, 27) refers to this as "front loading phenomenology," where phenomenological insights may be used to inform the design of experiments. In other words, empirical studies can test and verify phenomenological descriptions and can extend its application (32). In the following, I offer a case study in which the archaeological record demonstrates an intersubjective human experience that is then studied empirically, thereby extending both archaeology and phenomenology.

## 6 An Archaeological Case Study Employing a Naturalized Phenomenology

In the world of landscape and sensorial experiences, caves occupy a distinctive place due to the special properties of their morphology. To begin, what exactly is a cave? Caves are somewhat difficult to define scientifically because what constitutes a cave depends on the perspective of human investigators. In the *Encyclopedia of Caves, Third Edition*, they are defined as "openings in the Earth, large enough for human exploration" (White et al., 2019, 255). As a non-specific term "cave" has come to mean any cavity in the earth. Rockshelters are a subset of caves, but for archaeologists it is important to distinguish the two because they have very different affordances due to the sense of enclosure and the quality of light available.

The quality of light may be divided into three zones: light, twilight, and dark (Faulkner, 1988). Superficial hollows such as open rockshelters include light and twilight zones but not dark zones. Although rockshelters have often been used for habitation, these same sites may also contain ritual deposits. Caves with proper dark zones may contain a rockshelter at the entrance that may have been used as domestic habitational space, but the use of cave dark zones as living space is extremely rare and usually only occurs when people are under threat (Moyes, 2012, 5–7). Along with my colleague environmental psychologist Dan Montello, I have argued elsewhere that cave dark zones do not offer high-quality affordance for habitation but do offer high-quality affordance for hiding and secrecy (Montello & Moyes, 2012). Due to sensory deprivation brought on by darkness and silence, dark zones of caves can help to produce meditative states or stimulate otherworldly experiences; a type of affordance is not discussed by Gibson in his visual theory (Gibson, 1979). Therefore, we suggested the term “transcendental affordance” in keeping with Gibsonian ideas that affordances straddle the material world and the world of the mind, arguing that the human/cave interaction works reciprocally to facilitate and encourage symbolic or ritual behaviors. Interestingly, what we find archaeologically is that cave dark zones are used almost solely as ritual or special function places (such as venues for producing images) from as early in human development as the Middle Paleolithic period (Hoffman et al., 2018). This argument is bolstered by the many instances exhibited by cave dark zone ritual traditions that have temporal depth across regions in both the Old and New Worlds (See for examples Moyes, 2012; Büster et al., 2019; Machause-Lopez et al., 2022).

Archaeological research on ancient cave sites brings into focus implicit and explicit uses of phenomenology in interpreting the archaeological record perhaps more than any other subfield of archaeology because of properties within the cave environment that cannot be overlooked. Caves are dark, enclosed, often dank, stunningly quiet or full of reverberation. Bats often inhabit caves and the smell of guano is pungent and unmistakable. Speleothem formations decorate many caves partitioning space. Caves may be labyrinthic and notoriously difficult to navigate because in shadowy darkness the environment appears undifferentiated and landmarks are difficult to recognize.

Despite their various morphologies and special characteristics, the one property that perhaps most impacts human experience and behavior in caves is darkness. Caves are some of the darkest natural places on earth and only in the depths of the ocean can we find such total lack of light. The question becomes, can darkness influence human thought and sensibilities? Several lines of research suggest that it can. Seasonal affective disorders (SAD) are a well-studied form of depression caused by the lack of natural daylight during autumn or winter months suggesting that the quality of light can disrupt circadian rhythms and that this likely has genetic components (See for reviews Lam & Levitan, 2000; Magnusson & Boivin, 2003; Targum & Rosenthal, 2008). Additionally, a recent study has suggested that lighting conditions affect a number of different emotional and perceptual experiences (Xu et al., 2014). Cognitive changes were also observed in studies of sensory deprivation from the mid-twentieth century (See for e.g. Schultz, 1965, 169–194; Suefeld, 1969; Zuckerman, 1969). Researchers noted that sight deprivation effected the

visual cortex producing hallucinations or visual imagery. Also reported were “deficiencies in visual-motor coordination, changes in size and shape constancies, color perception, apparent movement, loss of accuracy in tactual, spatial, and time orientation and a variety of other changes” (Kubzansky & Leiderman, 1965, 228–229).

While it is possible to experience total darkness in caves, archaeological evidence demonstrates that prehistoric people using dark caves had various types of lighting technologies such as tiny oil lamps and wood torches. These sources all produced dim flickering light highlighting the shadowy environment (Pettitt et al., 2017). Could short-term low light conditions produce cognitive effects? Partnering with cognitive scientists Michael Spivey and Teenie Matlock, Daniel Montello, and students Lilly Rigoli and Stephanie Huette, a study run at the University of California, Merced suggests that a darkened environment does produce cognitive change (Moyes et al., 2017). In the study there were two conditions, a light room and a dark room. Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire on magical or supernatural thinking while sitting in one room or the other. Both rooms were small 1.2 m × 1.8 m laboratory spaces. In the light condition, the room had a large picture window that let in a great deal of natural light during the day when we collected data. The dark condition was presented in a windowless room dimly illuminated only by a reading light attached to the questionnaire clipboard. The dark room was otherwise identical to the light room. The reading light provided just enough light to read the questionnaire. The 104 participants were evenly divided and randomly assigned one of the conditions. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first included fifteen questions asking to what degree participants believe (on a 0–10 scale) in a wide variety of types of supernatural thinking, including extrasensory perception, ghosts, reincarnation, a deity that listens to one’s prayers, etc. The second part included 10 short vignettes describing anomalous events in everyday situations, offering multiple-choice responses for how the participant might interpret and explain the event. Two of the alternative responses involved supernatural explanations, while the other two offered common scientific explanations.

The results were suggestive. The participants in the dark room condition rated their beliefs in supernatural thinking on the first part of the questionnaire as two-thirds of a point higher on average than those in the light room. Although this effect is subtle, it is sufficiently reliable across participants that the difference is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). In a two-sample  $t$ -test, the effect of lighting condition obtained a  $t$  value of 4.74, with degrees of freedom of 102, and a  $p$  value of 0.032 (which indicates the probability that the difference in these conditions resulted from pure chance). This difference was replicated on the second part of the questionnaire. Compared to participants in the light room, those in the dark room were 11% more likely to select a multiple-choice response that was associated with supernatural thinking. This difference was also statistically significant in a two-sample  $t$ -test, where the effect of lighting condition obtained a  $t$  value of 4.57, with degrees of freedom of 102, and a  $p$  value of 0.035. Our data suggest that environments can in fact effect thought processes and encourage “magical thinking.”

While these data are preliminary, this is an example of how phenomenology can be extended to address both archaeological questions and questions about the

relationship between the environment and human thought. If we are correct, the implications for not only archaeological interpretation but for environmental studies, architectural design and urban planning are myriad and clearly demonstrate the considerable influence of environment on the human psyche at a group level, which is compatible with archaeological findings. These data also legitimize the use of phenomenology in archaeology supporting the value of virtual or physical reconstructions to aid in bridging the years between past peoples and ourselves. Developing rigorous scientific methods to evaluate shared human experience, also aids in addressing criticisms of ahistorical, homogenizing, and Western modernist universalist interpretations of the archaeological record, and provides a way forward in creating grounded intersubjective phenomenological approaches.

## 7 Conclusion

This paper has examined the use of phenomenology in archaeology and its critique. Although it has come under heavy criticism primarily because of its subjective methodology, there are ways to mitigate this and create a phenomenology that is strengthened by turning to practices used in bolstering analogies between the ethnographic present and the archaeological past. It is unlikely that a stand-alone phenomenological approach will ever enable archaeologists to infer meaning in the archaeological record, but by taking a contextual approach using multiple data streams, some inferences can be brought forward using Wylie's "cables and tacking" approach. The ethnographic side of analogies may be bolstered by experimentation, reported common experiences, and crowd sourcing, as well as relational analogies from modern cultures.

Where phenomenology can have a major impact on other fields is in suggesting hypotheses to be tested based on patterns explored in the archaeological record. This naturalized approach mitigates the issue of subjectivity on both the ethnographic and archaeological sides of the analogy. One could also employ such an approach using multiple participants in archaeological experimentations and in reactions to simulations. Caves are prime subjects for such exploration because they are such exotic environments and produce such profound phenomenological experiences based on their morphological characteristics. In this sense, cave studies are viable candidates as "proofs of concept" for demonstrating these ideas.

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# Reconstructing Past Experience Using Virtual Reality



Graham Goodwin and Nicola Lercari

## 1 Introduction

In this paper we review digital technologies that can be used to study what the experiences of past peoples might have been. We focus on the use of immersive virtual reality (VR) systems to frame hypotheses about the visual and auditory experiences of past individuals, based on available archeological evidence. These reconstructions of past places and landscapes are often focused on visual data. We argue that we should move beyond this ocularcentric focus by integrating sound and other modalities into VR. However, even those that emphasize sound in archaeology—as in archaeoacoustics (Scarre & Lawson, 2006; Diaz-Andreu & Mattioli, 2015; Suárez et al., 2016)—often retain a unimodal emphasis that limits how much we can understand of past peoples’ sensory experience. We argue that it is important to emphasize the importance of seeing and hearing *at the same time* (i.e. multi-modal sensory integration) in phenomenological archaeology. This is possible using immersive virtual reality systems that can engage users with both sight and sound simultaneously.

Phenomenological approaches to archaeology originate as critical engagements with archaeology and its objectivist, positivist assumptions (Brück, 2005). Objectivism and positivism are manifested in a range of empirical methods that archaeologists rely on in order to conduct their research. These range widely from field excavations and surveys of sites, to absolute dating of artifacts, to computational reconstructions using GIS. However, we see no reason to reject these methods on phenomenological grounds (cf. Moyes, Chapter “[The Life and Afterlife of](#)

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[Phenomenology in Archaeological Theory and Practice](#)”, this volume). Empirical methods and objective data are necessary for archaeological research to be conducted because the interpretations archaeologists make about the past are in many ways based on what is observable. Empirical methods and objective data enable present and future archaeologists to make what they excavate, survey, and observe in the field presentable to others in support of their interpretations about the past. Due to the often destructive nature of excavations, surveys, and other methods, empirical methods and objective approaches ensure that later researchers can continue to study a site or feature that has already been excavated or surveyed.

These objective methods for reconstructing the past are usefully supplemented by phenomenological and embodied descriptions of sites, landscapes, and artifacts. These range from identifying visibility between places and spaces on the landscape (Gillings, 2012) as well as what could be seen, heard (Primeau & Witt, 2018), touched (MacGregor, 1999) or otherwise engaged with through the senses. It may also assist in understanding the meaning of use of an artifact or landscape from the perspective of a particular studied culture, such as how people responded to them emotionally (Houston et al., 2006). The classic examples come from British pre-history and are exemplified by Christopher Tilley’s solitary strolls through the landscape (Tilley, 1994). Subsequent work was in some ways critical of Tilley but added many more dimensions of phenomenological description (Thomas, 2001). However, subjective experience for its part is subject to distortion, storytelling, and biases. Thus, following (Moyes, Chapter [“The Life and Afterlife of Phenomenology in Archaeological Theory and Practice”](#), this volume) and others, we believe that a combination of approaches is the best way to reconstruct past experience.

In this paper we specifically focus on possibilities of phenomenological reconstruction afforded by emerging technologies that allow a present day subject to experience a scientifically reconstructed multi-modal experience of what life might have been like at a past site. We focus on three technologies: GIS, 3d Mapping, and VR/AR. Within the last category, of VR/AR, we focus on four examples that demonstrate how these technologies can advance an understanding of experience in the past through VR and AR. (1) Lercari and Busacca use VR to produce immersive visualizations of the archaeological site known Catalhöyük in order to interpret and better understand the complex spatial relationships among its structures (N. Lercari & Busacca, 2020). (2) Graham et al. show how AR can enhance the *in-situ* experience of archaeological landscapes through the introduction of sound, which may offer a more immersive experience when integrated with vision (Graham et al., 2019) (3) The Mayacitybuilder project illustrates how sound in combination with vision can enhance VR and move us closer towards a more synesthetic experience of the past (Goodwin & Richards-Rissetto, 2020). (4) Barreau et al. show how the simulation of an eighteenth century merchant ship is significantly more immersive when visual elements are enhanced by the introduction of sonic elements and a soundscape (Barreau et al., 2015).

The next generation of immersive VR/AR is evident in the powerful WAVE which has the potential to integrate sight and sound in an affective and—experience (Lercari et al., 2016). Digital representation methods offer a path forward for

enhancing experiences of artifacts and landscapes by allowing for rich and immersive engagement with objects (Di Franco et al., 2015). Though it is important to recognize that they have a lack of authenticity as they impose their creators particular interpretation of the world (Gillings, 2005). For instance, by expanding our body's sensorial capabilities, digital reconstructions can still produce sensorial experiences and act as an extension of our bodies, allowing for a better understanding of the sensory experience of past people (Hamilakis, 2014). We argue that archaeological visualizations are important, but we need to move beyond the ocularcentrism typical of digital reconstructions through the addition of sound and by consideration of hearing. However, rather than create a dichotomy between hearing and seeing, we need to emphasize the importance of seeing and hearing at the same time. The emphasis on one sensory modality at the expense of others is not an effective means to conduct research. Many archaeological reconstructions of past places and landscapes are silent, and there is room to improve upon on this absence through immersive virtual reality systems that can engage users with both sight and sound. We also contend that the introduction of virtual reality into archaeological phenomenology has the potential to counter criticism of ocularcentrism by incorporation of multiple sensory modalities within reconstructions beyond just the visual.

## 2 Survey of Methods Used to Reconstruct Past Experiences

Three methodologies currently use digital technology to reconstruct past sensory experiences: (1) Geographic Information Systems (GIS); (2) 3D mapping technology, (3) Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR and AR). After a brief review of each technology, we consider how these methods have been critiqued on phenomenological grounds, then describe how phenomenological descriptions can actually supplement work in these areas, rather than undermining or replacing traditional methodologies. We especially emphasize the potential of VR and AR as methods which facilitate multi-sensory integration in reconstructed past experience.

GIS is the use of integrated computer systems to analyze landscapes and other artifacts to create a comprehensive picture of an environment. It can be used to analyze spatial patterns of movement, visibility, and even sound propagation; it can also be used to analyze environmental factors such as vegetation (Kosiba & Bauer, 2013; Gillings, 2012; Primeau & Witt, 2018; Landau, 2015). Patterns identified with a GIS can be then be compared between sites in order to find regularities in sensory effects within sites (Brück, 2005). For example, viewsheds can analyze what can or cannot be seen between two fixed points on the landscape (Howey & Brouwer, 2017). Another example is least cost path (LCP) modeling, which determines the optimal path between two points on the landscape through an understanding of topography and features that potentially impede movement.

A phenomenological critique of GIS is that it assumes an objectivist, Cartesian model of space. Additionally, a peoples' experience of landscape is not solely determined by material culture. Also, GIS struggles to deal with imprecision and

uncertainty, it is perhaps better suited to physical measurements rather than the intangible social world (Bodenhamer et al., 2010).

While we agree that GIS has these features, it would be hard for archaeologists to replace well-established GIS-based spatial methodologies, which can integrate, analyze, and visualize vast amounts of data from differing formats. In archaeology, the ability to integrate and analyze data is fundamental for the discovery of spatial patterns hidden within the landscape. For this reason, Brück (2005) thinks GIS and 3D mapping cannot be dismissed because of their value in identifying symbolic patterns on the landscape. GIS can be viewed as a supplement to rather than a replacement for phenomenology. Geospatial techniques can be used to assist phenomenological approaches that emphasize the creation of space through navigation. Therefore phenomenological approaches are grounded in observation and description of the archaeologist's experiences of places, as experience is facilitated by our universal physiology enabling a better understanding of past peoples experience (Primeau & Witt, 2018).

A second digital technology used to reconstruct past experience is 3D mapping technology. Typically a visualization of 3D models on a bidimensional screen, 3D mapping technologies can supplement the abstract perspective of 2D maps, allowing researchers to understand movement, visibility and acoustics within an environment, but with the advantage of a three-dimensional framework, which better resembles the physical characteristics of a real environment. 3D mapping methods like structure-from-motion digital photogrammetry and laser scanning are effective for replicating the visual elements of an object such as size and shape (Eve, 2018). Digital methodologies for the creation of 3D models not only enable new means of interpreting artifacts but also enable the study of artifacts and things as multidimensional rather than mere images (Papadopoulos et al., 2019). Conventional representations obfuscate the three-dimensional qualities of artifacts that enable embodied, multisensorial experience of those artifacts. Digital methods can foreground three-dimensional properties of artifacts as well as evoke embodied, multisensorial affective experience.

Here critics have charged that the emphasis of 3d mapping is ocularcentric. A 3D model in a bidimensional screen continue to focus strictly on the visual. There is a propensity to focus on what things looked like, rather than *how* they were used and experienced. Similarly, 3D printed material fails to replicate the actual texture, color, and weight of the original. The smells, sounds, and feel of an object are lost in these 3D reconstructions. Stuart Eve (2018) argues that 2D and 3D representations leave out vast amounts of multi-sensory information about objects.

However, as with GIS, 3D mapping retains its importance as a means of providing objective data that can be used to supplement and constrain phenomenological descriptions. 3D mapping produces objective representations that can then be subjectively observed and experienced. They can be enriched by phenomenological descriptions, and phenomenological descriptions can be strengthened by interaction with a 3d map. Neither approach fully captures the richness of artifacts, sites, and landscapes but instead they supplement one another in a mutually constitutive manner. Objective 3D maps would be sterile and lifeless without the supplementation of

phenomenological approaches, and phenomenological approaches would be merely subjective reports without the support of objective data such as 3D mapping.

A final pair of technologies that can be used to reconstruct past experiences are Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR). Virtual reality produces an immersive experience using virtual objects inside a virtual environment (such as video games), while augmented reality produces virtual objects inside a physical environment (like Snapchat lenses). Both make use of virtual objects, but augmented reality adds overlays these virtual objects on a real physical environment. Virtual environments and objects can be engaged with through web browser plugins such as Cortona3D, game engines like Unity3D, or even viewed in stereo 3D in a CAVE (Sanders, 2014). Cave Automated Virtual Environments (CAVE) are immersive VR systems that utilize a number of screens to produce a stereo images (Knabb et al., 2014). Polarized glasses worn by the user produce a 3D stereoscopic perspective that mimics how people see in 3D in the real world. A CAVE system can display a number of different data types ranging from laser scanned models to LiDAR point clouds.

Augmented Reality enhances a real world environment through the addition of computer generated sensory input like sound and visuals (Di Franco et al., 2015). It is enhancing one's perspective of reality with specific virtual items rather than attempting to reproduce a completely virtual reality. Augment Reality offers new means of visualization, data analysis, and human engagement with material objects. It offers a new means of interaction and engagement that help in creating rich and immersive experiences. As a means of presenting the past it improves the sensorial experience people have with the past. These are also known as mixed-reality, which exist in a continuum from reality itself to AR to VR or it can be a hybrid combination of virtual reality (virtual objects in a virtual world) and augmented reality (virtual objects in a physical world), where users can physically interact with virtual objects.

A critique of mixed reality systems is that they produce experiences that fail to correspond to any existing reality, e.g. "a landscape that has never actually existed (Cummings, 2010)". They often represent a person's subjective mental interpretation of place or object rather than an objective recreation. In addition it is not yet possible to produce representations or reconstructions that offer people the same sensory experience as the real thing (Galeazzi, 2018). However VR and AR provide essential value (Gillings, 2005). We should accept their creative aspects but find ways to integrate them into phenomenology and other established methods of archaeology. Integration of VR and AR will require critical examination of where they fit or do not fit into already established methods and theory. This may require revamping of existing methods and theory to better accommodate new and emerging technology like VR and AR. Like the introduction of photography which required modifications in methods and theory to and the development of new knowledge accommodate its use, VR creates a particular way of seeing upon the viewer that requires culturally specific knowledge to understand. It is important to consider nontraditional ways of landscape representation that offer new approaches to experiencing and dwelling in landscapes (Cummings, 2010).

VR, AR, as well as GIS and 3D mapping can provide immersive engagement with the past through reconstructions that engage multiple senses rather than just one. Sight and sound are important to perception (Díaz-Andreu et al., 2017), and we cannot consider the senses as separate from each other. In order to understand the experiences of people in the past, digital technology can be used to integrate multiple senses together into a more immersive experience that will help in understanding how people in the past engaged with the world through their senses. A framework of multi-sensorial experience expands the world of material things and can better connect things to experience (Hamilakis, 2014). Even digital reconstructions can expand as well as extend our bodies sensorial capabilities to better understand sensory experiences of past people. New technologies are one such approach as they offer an alternative to traditional text-based narratives. The more experiences one enables through representations, the more possibility of alternative interpretations emerges.

### 3 Examples of Virtual and Augmented Reality Research in Archaeology

In this section we describe a number of examples that show how VR and AR systems can be used to produce rich simulations that can facilitate phenomenological reconstruction. VR and AR can produce immersive simulations because they can integrate multiple sensory modalities into a singular virtual environment. VR and AR systems also integrate multiple datasets, finds and artifacts for reconstructions that account for change over time in a site. Lercari and Busacca (2020) show how VR and AR can be utilized to provide reliable reconstructions of archaeological sites that are grounded in datasets produced with scientific rigor. This means that VR and AR can be used to understand the experiences of past people within a space, because the reconstructions are based on accurate archaeological data rather than conjecture or guesswork. These reconstructions reflect what past people in those spaces experienced, and how that experience changed over time. Graham et al. (2019) illustrate how AR can utilize sound and the auditory perceptions of those sounds as a means of producing an more immersive experience of archaeological sites, and landscapes that go beyond unimodal reconstructions based solely on visual information. Goodwin and Richards-Rissetto (2020) demonstrate how VR and other digital approaches can enhance our understanding of sight and sound in the past through novel approaches to data analysis, integration, visualization, and interaction. Virtual environments act as a catalyst for interpretation of past peoples' experience, and interactive 3D visualizations embedded with sounds of the past allow for multi-sensory representation. Shemek et al. (2018) show how immersive VR technology enables meaningful embodied engagement with virtual reconstructions of cultural heritage that has been altered over time. They show how a multi-sensory interactive environment can integrate multiple multimodal data sources

within a single virtual environment for an immersive and affective experience of a past place, in this case the Renaissance era studiolo (study) of Isabella d'Este's. Barreau et al. (2015) brings together historical documents, and archaeological knowledge to produce a scale 3D model of an eighteenth century ship. Not only do these 3D models offer an immersive visual experience, but the authors integrate a soundscape into the reconstruction that helps in understanding what life was like onboard the ship when it actually sailed the ocean.

Lercari and Busacca (2020) utilize immersive VR to create archaeological visualizations, that assist in interpretation of behavior and a better understanding of site chronology. The 3D reconstructions they produced of the Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük offer a multi-temporal look at the sequence of construction over time. These reconstructions provide visual representations of a complex archaeological record and enable a better understanding of the history of buildings at Çatalhöyük. Lercari and Busacca produce archaeological visualizations that successfully reconstruct multiple phases of construction at the site in order to better understand the links between the different areas of the site. Their interactive virtual reconstructions visualize patterns of continuity and change evident in the archaeological features excavated at the site. This fits into the cyber-archaeology paradigm proposed by Forte (2016) by utilizing archaeological visualizations to help contextualize subtle spatial continuity and history making at Çatalhöyük. These visualizations assist in stimulating both discussion and interpretation by enabling the visualization of multiple strata, finds, and datasets. Connections that were not identifiable in a standard 2D plan or photograph are now made visible in 3D reconstructions utilizing the game engine Unity 3D or through interpretative infographics. Visualizations assist in the rendering and reconstruction of past places. They provide a clear representation of a complex construction sequence at Çatalhöyük by showing how building practices are replicated or modified across the entirety of the site's stratigraphy.

Immersive virtual reality can also incorporate hearing whenever possible using sonifications and auralizations. The benefits of incorporating other sensory modalities is also evident in Augmented Reality, according to Graham et al. (2019).

Graham et al. (2019) explore how seeing the past goes beyond just the sense of sight (Graham et al., 2019). They consider how AR can help bring the past to life through interaction with the present. However, they call attention to a key issue with many current AR approaches that are ocularcentric and exclude or underutilize sound. Graham et al. (2019) argue that the existing visual focused AR approaches create a break in presence that cancels out an immersion AR offers. Therefore, in order to prevent a break in immersion, focusing on hearing the past is more effective and affective for immersion than a singular focus on sight. Their work illustrates how past worlds can often be better heard than seen, but unfortunately sound and hearing are underexplored in comparison to sight and seeing. While the introduction of past sounds into the present produces an anachronistic space that could potentially disrupt an immersive experience, at the same time the use of these sounds in AR prompts more in-depth cognitive examination by the person experiencing the sounds.



Historical sounds evoke emotional response in people that alter their understanding and memory of past events. Sound plays a major role in how memories are recollected and how they can potentially be altered through new experiences. Graham et al. (2019) demonstrate the importance of paying attention to sound in the present as much as the past. In order to truly understand the experience of sound in the past, we have to consider how people in the present experience those same sounds. This will require additional research that challenges vision as the primary sense in our research and reconstructions of the past. The three projects listed below demonstrate the importance of going beyond vision as our primary sense in reconstructions using immersive virtual reality.

The MayaCityBuilder project uses an immersive VR headset to incorporate vision with sound to facilitate an embodied experience in order to examine potential locations of ritual performance, and determine the placement of participants in these events (Goodwin & Richards-Rissetto, 2020). GIS and 3D technology were utilized to measure sound propagation and reverberation the urban core of ancient Copán as a case study with the goal of creating a synesthetic experience in ancient Maya cities. The Ancient Maya culture and architecture provide an excellent opportunity to investigate the potential of GIS and VR modeling to better understand of the built environment in producing multi-sensory experiences (Houston et al., 2006).

This case study from Copan illustrates the powerful role digital technologies can play in understanding Classic Maya views of the body, sensations, and experiences. While the exact experiences of the ancient Maya are impossible to replicate, we can investigate the variables that affected their sensory experience to begin to move forward in our phenomenological understanding of the past. These variables are evident in places, architecture, and material culture of the ancient Maya that archaeologists' study. By understanding these variables the reconstructions archaeologists produce can be made even more affective and immersive.

One of the projects that is part of IDEA (Isabella d'Este Archive) is called the *Virtual Studiolo* (Shemek et al., 2018). This project produced an immersive VR reconstruction of the many rooms that make up the Italian Reissuance- era Palazzo Ducale of Mantua, which housed Isabella d'Este's courtly collection of instruments, antiquities, and artwork. Extensive cultural heritage is made accessible in an immersive experience through museum or CAVE spaces Photogrammetry, 3D technology, and digital animation are used to create an immersive VR experience by reuniting a collection of artifacts that are dispersed across museums. The creators allowed users to interact with the *Virtual Studiolo* in both analytical and creative ways by calling attention to scholarly understanding of the studiolo, yet also allowing for interaction, experimentation and other forms of engagement to create a meaningful learning experience that is a mix of research and game.

In addition to visual elements, acoustic elements were recreated according to the historical record. Though they recognize their project is a hypothetical and engaging remix, it alters and deviates from the original but in a way that promotes new ways of understanding d'Este and the broader Renaissance culture she was a part of. A 3D virtual reconstruction can be connected to datasets of documents and vice versa. While it is not an exact reconstruction of the original, the immersive

experience it offers enables one to test a variety of hypothesis's about display and curation during the Renaissance.

Another project demonstrates how researchers produced an immersive VR reconstruction of *Le Boulogne* an eighteenth century French merchant ship (Barreau et al., 2015). In order to understand daily life and experience aboard the vessel, Barreau et al. utilized historical documents, naval architecture plans, and archaeological data to produce a 1:1 scale 3D model of the ship. This model was then employed within a VR simulation of a ship sailing on the ocean. Beyond the animated buoyancy of waves, there was also an emphasis on reconstructing a sonic environment that mixed spatial audio such as birds flying by with a global soundscape of ocean and wind noises. Through this immersive visualization life on board the vessel can be better understood by historians.

Static and strictly visual VR reconstructions should no longer be the end point for archaeologists. Mixed reality allows reconstructions that can visualize the past in a manner that is both immersive and interactive creating new experiences that offer new ways to interpret and analyze data. Barreau et al. (2015) argue that immersion within a 1:1 scale interactive environment enables better evaluation of the role of material culture in past societies. They have produced a model and simulation that enables the use of historical sources in a virtual reality environment. The architecture of the ship, and the spaces within it can be assessed by researchers own movement and perception, therefore creating a more immersive expansive overall.

## 4 Future Directions

A full multi-sensory archaeological record is impossible. We are coming closer to that ideal than ever before, but there is still a great deal more to be done. Researchers need to acquire further knowledge of tools and technologies, sensory capture techniques, and ways of providing necessary computing infrastructure to store and share sensory digital objects (Eve, 2018). Standards and policies need to be developed for sharing and production of multi-sensory information. Virtual Reality has the potential to produce powerful visualizations but in order to reconstruct past phenomenology this method must go beyond visual experience. The examples in this paper have demonstrated that immersive VR works most effectively when it integrates multiple lines of sensory data that are not strictly visual. Immersive VR will be more engaging and affective when it is a multi-modal experience rather than an experience of just one sensory modality. It enables a means of engagement that manifests the complexity, multidimensionality, and multi-sensorial nature of the material world. The past is not meant to be merely seen or heard, but rather seen *and* heard (and felt, etc.). An appropriate balance and integration between the various senses should be the goal of future reconstructions.

One area where the potential of VR is especially evident is in the UC Merced WAVE (Wide Area Visualization Environment) system, an immersive VR setup that can be used to integrate available information from a variety of sources to produce

new knowledge about cultural heritage and past phenomenology. The WAVE is made up of 20 55" OLED TVs forming a halfpipe (Nicola Lercari et al., 2016), which allows for immersive virtual simulations of “the 3D, topology, volume, texture, materials, and context of a monument or heritage site” which “fosters collaborative analysis and interpretation when used in a virtual reality platform” (Lercari et al. p. 4). These powerful visualizations and virtual reality devices can be integrated with analytical tools for spatial analysis. Future work will focus on integrating sound with immersive VR. The WAVE will be able integrate multiple datasets into a singular immersive environment that is an ideal system for demonstration. 3D imagery can be viewed without distortion from any point in the room (Knabb et al., 2014).

Augmented reality systems enable a richer combination of real world and digital elements than VR alone does. Virtual models can be merged together into create an integrated experience that brings users away from the computer and almost directly into the field. This means that a computational approach can be combined with a phenomenological one of embodied experience in the field (Eve, 2012).

To conclude, an embodied reconstruction of past experience can be more than just a visual or even an audio-visual experience. It can include multiple sensory modalities that are more reflective of how people past and present engage with the world around them. People do not experience the world solely through sight or hearing, but rather through a multi-modal integration of all the senses. More of these sensory modalities need to be considered and integrated when creating AR experiences. Archaeologists must do more than just describe what they study, they must also represent it. Yet these representations are primarily visual and/or verbal. In order to enhance peoples’ understanding and engagement with the past, digital tools and methods such as VR or AR are needed in order to represent it in a manner that engages multiple senses. Using digital tools and methods we can extend our own sensory capabilities, and develop an ability to understand the past through multi-modal and affective engagement with it.

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# Anthropological Phenomenology and the Eventive Ground



Christopher Stephan and C. Jason Throop

## 1 Introduction

This chapter theorizes the phenomenological potential of anthropology through an examination of what we will call the “eventive ground” of ethnographic knowledge. Though anthropologists and phenomenologists have reacted to one another’s work, including the now famous early correspondence between Husserl and Levy Bruhl (see Sato, 2014; Throop, 2018), it has only been over the past few decades that some anthropologists began to distinguish a genre of a distinctively ‘phenomenological anthropology’<sup>1</sup> (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011; Katz & Csordas, 2003; Ram & Houston, 2015). Anthropologists have applied and extended phenomenological theory in several respects. By attending to the cultural and social contexts—the conditions of possibility—within which phenomena variously disclose themselves, anthropologists have significantly contributed to research in intersubjectivity and genetic phenomenology. Likewise, anthropologists have frequently drawn from and contributed to the phenomenology of perception, the senses, self-experience, embodiment, emotion, affect, mood, politics, and ethics.

Yet beyond a mere extension or application of philosophical phenomenology, anthropological phenomenology offers a reconfiguration. As an empirical field, anthropological analyses are grounded by the particulars of singular events. Whether drawn from naturalistic observation, interviews, or direct participation, the

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<sup>1</sup>We use the terms “phenomenological anthropology” and “anthropological phenomenology” interchangeably.

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phenomena anthropologists encounter and seek to understand are necessarily distinct not only to the moment of their unfolding, but also in the unique way each event draws together and makes discernible its socio-historical context. In the event—a touch, a turn in conversation, recapitulations of ritual, a silence—something flairs up, and a world (as well as a style of being in it) begins to become discernible (cf. Meacham, 2013; Romano, 2009). Something excessive is also disclosed in such moments, however. Holding both together—variously shared conditions of possibility *and* that which exceeds and potentially transforms such conditions—is a call that the very best of phenomenological anthropological interventions heed. Understanding a conditioned world of potentiality and possibility means proceeding from the event and directing our thinking through it (see Mattingly, 2019; Zigon, 2018). If even in a moment of phenomenological reduction, as Husserl (2002) argued, we never take leave of the phenomenal ground, it is important to consider the contributions of the eventive ground to what anthropological phenomenology is enabled to become.

In this paper, we take up the following questions: What is distinctive about the event as grounds for anthropological understanding and phenomenological reflection? How do the socio-cultural particulars of ethnographic engagements positively contribute to phenomenology? And what might philosophical phenomenologists draw from the anthropological approach to phenomenological research?

In singling out the eventive-ness of anthropological phenomenology we are querying a condition of possibility. Even as an event is disruptive in its excessiveness, it is nonetheless always possible to abstract away from the event or laminate it with concerns that have their origins elsewhere. We are thus self-consciously taking up an aspirational stance. Anthropology is at its best, we maintain, when it holds close to the event in the context of its efforts at description, analysis, and theorization. Our objective is not to argue for what anthropological efforts at phenomenology always accomplish. Rather, by reflecting on the relationship to events that phenomenological anthropology must always entail, we aim to invoke what makes the anthropological approach to phenomenology distinctive as well as how it can be better at being what it aspires to be.

## 2 Ethnographic Encounters

In “Being There”, the opening essay to his book examining representational tactics in anthropological writing, Clifford Geertz (1988) introduces as his motivating problematic the uniqueness of the events which give rise to any fieldworker’s observations. He writes,

The highly situated nature of ethnographic description—this ethnographer, in this time, in this place, with these informants, these commitments, and these experiences, a representative of a particular culture, a member of a certain class—gives to the bulk of what is said a rather take-it-or-leave-it quality. [5]



Geertz is directing the reader's attention to the problem of ethnographic authority. Why do we believe some anthropologists more than others? All things being equal, Geertz suggests, the difference comes down to rhetoric:

The ability of anthropologists to get us to take what they say seriously has less to do with either a factual look or an air of conceptual elegance than it has with their capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life, of having, one way or another, truly 'been there.' [4–5]

“And that,” he concludes, “persuading us that this offstage miracle has occurred, is where the writing comes in.” His objective with this *ceteris paribus* supposition is to motivate a serious inquiry into authorial voice in ethnographic writing. To be sure, representations of “the field,” particularly through what Max Gluckman (1961) termed “apt illustrations”, have important rhetorical functions. The most invariable of these is, in fact, an implicit claim to authority through having experienced the events firsthand (see Clifford, 1983).

But it might be worth reevaluating the arc of Geertz' argument, because as certainly as it makes something visible from 30,000 feet up, it also never alights on the ground of “being there” itself. In problematizing the work of representing ethnographic findings, Geertz exposes, while passing over, a more fundamental tenet: that ethnographic understanding is grounded in and saturated by events.

Anthropologists often use “apt illustrations” to initiate crucial shifts in perspective. Consider the phenomenological anthropologist Thomas Csordas' description of a moment of insight whilst studying chanting in traditional Navajo healing practices. Csordas (2008: 117) reports that when he learned from his Navajo research participants that tape recording was an unacceptable substitute for in-person apprenticeship, his initial interpretation was, “in terms of the textuality of the songs and their appropriate treatment. It was a violent taking out of context, an *arrachement*, both tearing the song out of its setting within a moment of performance and wresting it away from its legitimate owner.” “Then”, he says,

the chanter told me something that changed my understanding of his objection. He said that the way it used to be, and the way it should be, was for the person learning the songs to be sitting close enough to the chanter to see his lips move as he sang. With the invocation of moving lips, the song emanating from the bodily portal, power passing by force of breath through the gap of the lips, the apprentice focusing on the action required to bring the chant into intersubjective being, my understanding shifted ground from textuality to embodiment. It careened from context and technological medium to lived spatiality and physical proximity.

In Csordas' narrative, we are given a transformative event: a moment of dialogue between anthropologist and chanter potentiates a shift in thinking which carries on in the production of an ethnographic account. Our concern with the role of events as such in making possible and directing anthropological phenomenology requires that we ask what has happened here.

Looking beyond the matter of representational choices, we want to bring attention to this role of events as a ground for phenomenological reflection. Preceding and undergirding their theorizing and writing, anthropologists are first and foremost

exposed to events and challenged to think with them (Jackson, 1995). If anthropology is capable of making a distinctive contribution to phenomenology, it is only by way of this proneness to events. It is thus, in other words, our attuned responsiveness to worldly happenings that potentiate possibilities for thinking that can be said to define one of the major contributions of phenomenological anthropological research. Drawing from the insights of David Bidney (1973), we can view such efforts as part and parcel of a distinctively ethnographically grounded enactment of the *epoché*; what one of us has termed in previous writings, “the ethnographic *epoché*” (see Throop, 2010, 2012, 2018; see below). The ethnographic *epoché* differs from Husserl’s phenomenological rendering of the *epoché*—even in terms of its later historically oriented articulations—precisely because of its participatory, situational, intersubjective, intercorporeal, and worldly underpinnings. Where the phenomenological *epoché* is an active and willed achievement, the ethnographic *epoché* is a passive and responsive one—one that arises from, and makes discernible, some of our most deeply sedimented and taken-for-granted assumptions, orientations, habits, and dispositions (Throop, 2018: 205).

### 3 Event as Ground

To begin, we need to distinguish our sense of an event from a mere empirical happening. Not to do so would, on the one hand, risk reversion to the mundane observation that the documentary function of cultural anthropology must always take precedence over the interpretive enterprise. On the other, the reduction of events to their empirical aspects risks depicting the anthropologist as a sovereign subject who impassively surveys and compares data extracted from empirical happenings. What such a view occludes is what makes an anthropologist capable of seeing something *as something* (even of seeing something as data): her involvement in an event.<sup>2</sup> To counter this misleading sense of the event as something reducible to the empirical givens, we introduce a reconceptualization of events that is developed in the phenomenologist Claude Romano’s *Event and World* (2009 [1998]).

A central contribution of *Event and World* is an ontological and existential critique through which Romano asserts both the irreducibility of events to beings and the primacy of events over structures of meaning. Romano distinguishes between events understood as “innerworldly facts” and events understood in their proper, “evential” sense. Innerworldly facts are events comprehended only in the sense of empirical happenings. There is, necessarily, a subject to whom these events

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<sup>2</sup>Throop (2018) offers the example of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1935) realization of the essential role of language in carrying out collective action when once, in the Trobriand Islands, he witnessed his party’s canoes navigate a narrow passage in the darkness relying on instructions shouted from the shore. This experience prompted for Malinowski a theorization of speech as social action that predates and prefigures theories of force in philosophy and linguistics.

manifest, but this subject is essentially substitutable. With respect purely to the empirical givens, it makes no difference from the standpoint of the innerworldly fact who undergoes and who witnesses. When it comes to explicating events as facts there is also a temporal orientation which comes into play. Understanding events only as innerworldly facts means, for Romano (§4–6, *passim*), taking a backward glance that attempts to demonstrate their causal determination from antecedent conditions (cf. Schutz, 1967).

In contrast, for Romano, events in the proper “evential” sense are always revealed as addressed. In their “evential” sense, events must be understood as instigations which are “unsubstitutably” personal, opening horizons of possibility which it is up to me to “appropriate.” The *ur*-event is our birth—an immemorial origin of our possibilities. As with our births, all events affect us prior to any personalness, assignation of meaning, or projection of possibility. As with innerworldly facts, there is—with events in their proper “evential” sense—a temporal dimension. Corresponding to the event’s anteceding all possibility and personalness there is, in Romano’s terms, a “structural delay” in all understanding: we live from events, responding to and formulating our projects and ourselves from them.<sup>3</sup> Positioning all experience as an undergoing of that which is always already underway, Romano thus belongs to a lineage of phenomenologists (e.g. Levinas and Waldenfehls) whose theoretical edifices place an ontological and epistemic priority on passivity and responsiveness.<sup>4</sup>

The selfsame happening can be understood as an “innerworldly fact” and as an “event” in the proper sense. (The example of a birth makes this evident.) Yet it is only with respect to the addressed quality of events and a subject’s subsequent transformation of possibilities (including altered understandings) that, for Romano, the true phenomenality of events is manifested. The priority of events, and thus a full appreciation of our relations to them go missing in the explanatory reduction of events to object-like “innerworldly facts.” Romano’s distinction is articulated along with a critique of the social sciences. Anthropology is his prime example. He illustrates his critique by way of a description of the interpersonal encounter. Interpreted from an evential phenomenology, each of us has a singular history and,

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<sup>3</sup>There are clear implications here for what temporal perspective could give us access to the subject as undergoing and appropriating possibilities from events (in Romano’s terms, as “advenant” -- the one who becomes herself by “advening” to what happens to her). While setting its own distinctive course, Romano’s parsing bears a family resemblance to phenomenological critiques of a social scientists’ liability to mischaracterize the meaning-structures operative in lived experience. Alfred Schutz (1967), for instance, famously argued that the temporal vantage of the social scientist observer tended to produce a mischaracterization goal-oriented action as an effect of prior causes (so-called “because motives”) rather than an ever-adjusting directedness to end-states envisaged in the future perfect (“in-order-to motives”).

<sup>4</sup>By “responsiveness” we have in mind an approach to phenomenology that runs through Husserl (passive synthesis) to Merleau-Ponty (2012) to Levinas (1969) to Waldenfehls (2011) to Wentzer (2014). Responsive phenomenology has also recently gained traction within phenomenological anthropology in the work of Leistle (2016), Grøne (Grøne & Mattingly, 2018), and Mattingly et al. (2018).

correspondingly, a singular range of possibilities. The encounter with another opens us to the world in light of the other's singularizing way of meeting with and realizing her possibilities (ibid Sec. 17[b]). This does not mean that we grasp the other fully. Rather, as Romano himself observes, it is only on the condition that another radically exceeds me and my understanding that I can have the experience of coming to know her better. This project is, in principle, infinite. To know her (however well, however long) has altered my course in the world. It is precisely this sort of dynamic which Romano cautions cannot be captured from the standpoint of inner-worldly facts: "For a genuine encounter can never be reduced to its actualization as a fact; it always happens in the secret and suspense of its latency such that we are never contemporary with it and never realize it until later, 'too late' [...] when the event of an encounter has already happened, has already reconfigured our possibilities and the world" (123). In kind, the phenomenality of the event of an interpersonal encounter can never be grasped as the intersection of customary modes of interaction, the participant's social roles, personal biographies and motives, recollected first impressions, *et cetera*.

We draw on Romano's work not because we think it offers a definitive division of phenomenological labor between anthropologists and philosophers, but because it highlights a particular reading of anthropology—one sometimes espoused by anthropologists themselves—that we believe papers over the generative role of the event in anthropological thinking.

A simplified account of anthropological insight, for instance, might suggest that events (extraordinary and mundane, alike) give way to anthropological understanding only once subjected to rigorous methods which precede and configure them; observable gristful happenings are put through the methodological mill, becoming data which have natural patterns the anthropologist may interpret by applications and innovations of theory (e.g. so-called "grounded theory"). To give another take, one might argue that the ethnographer's own subjectivity (including personal and professional motives) intersects with the lives of others at variable angles of determination: any knowledge which results is the product of each actor's positionality and the entanglement of foregoing frames of reference.

Neither view can offer any meaningful place to events in Romano's sense. To different extents, both of the perspectives just depicted (in admittedly simplified form) suggest a mute genericism to events. Yet, we also think it is important to point out that neither view could characterize the phenomenality and compulsion adumbrated by Geertz' suggestion that "being there" involves a "offstage miracle" or Csordas' account of a sudden shift in perspective. Rather, events, both authors imply, transform us.

It seems to us that anthropology is not as limited to "innerworldly facts" as Romano's characterization suggests. Consider, for instance, the resonance between Romano's description of the event of an interpersonal encounter and phenomenological anthropologist Michael Jackson's description of the intersubjective conditions of possibility for ethnography. As Jackson (2009) reminds us, this is quite distinct from a mere abstract comparative view of facts and philosophies from across the world. Rather, Jackson (2009: 241) writes,

As an ethnographer, I question this view on the grounds that this distant ‘axis of world history’ gives us only worldviews to engage with, not lifeworlds in which to sojourn. If one is to actually put oneself in the position of others it is never enough simply to think one’s thoughts by way of theirs; one must, at all costs, access and experience directly the lives that others live in their own place.

Anthropology’s proneness to events is first and foremost a matter of taking up an intersubjective ground. This intersubjectivity/intercorporeality entails a kind of dislocation of interest which is central to ethnography. Particularly in the context of phenomenological anthropology, the objective is not first and foremost to query the event’s meaning for ourselves, or to putatively distill the facts of culture and place, still less to abstract to generalities which conceivably transcend the event. Rather, the objective for a distinctively anthropological phenomenology, at least, when we hold the event close in the way that we should, is to draw each of these threads in a movement toward what’s happening within the world that a singular event initiates and makes evident. The eventive ground of anthropology—those singular happenings into which the ethnographer is incorporated and from and through which they are opened to the possibility of new thinking—is thus generative of an ability to think anew in the context of a dynamic and ever changing in-between.

It is precisely in this intersubjective and worldly in-between that what one of us (Throop, 2012, 2018) has termed the “ethnographic *epoché*” can arise. Unlike Husserl’s method of bracketing, the ethnographic *epoché* is unwilling; it is not a project of the anthropologist. Rather, the modification that arises and the new horizon of understanding which flairs up along with it is a product of an intersubjective encounter in which one’s own mode of existence is at its limit and out of place. At the pith, the ethnographic *epoché* occurs when we are “compelled by another to interrupt our tendency to assimilate experience to the self-sameness of our being, we thus become opened to possibilities for seeing other ways of being that are not, and yet may never be, our own” (Throop, 2012: 282). This ethnographic *epoché* (whether or not it is undergone with a phenomenological attitude) is an essential moment in experiences of ethnographic insight that so often anchor our descriptions of “being there.”

We caution against thinking of the ethnographic *epoché* as a moment of sudden and total comprehension, however. With regard to “totality,” what opens in such moments is instead a glimmer of potentiality that discloses an excessive otherwise that is non-totalizable and indeterminate. In other words, we can always see another aspect or side to what has happened. With regard to the experience of “suddenness,” while such moments may seemingly disclose insight all at once, it is often the case that there has been a gradual gathering attunement to constitutive conditions within which events unfold. Yet, further, in many cases we anthropologists feel ourselves persistently drawn toward something or struggling to understand something through an event. Accordingly, we often return again and again to rethink events and to reconsider what they have disclosed. In such instances, we are saturated by a sense of temporality, of how long it takes to understand and how necessarily incomplete and incremental such forms of understanding are. The temporality opened up by events is a key dimension of the ethnographic *epoché*, and the variable *durée* of

coming to see otherwise points up yet another reason why we should be careful not to enframe events within the limits of our explanations of what happened. Accordingly, even the most epiphanic moments are products of an ongoing passive affection (Husserl, 2001) that is responsive to unfolding events that always in part exceed our efforts to grasp them.

From the start, affection is integral to events becoming a part of the ethnographic record; writing a field note, taking a photograph, or deploying any other methodological tool depends on a salience which is often inexplicable in the moment. Indeed, the passivity through which the ethnographic ground operates is probably most visible not in those moments where everything clicks, but through events that exhibit a lasting pull on our attention (see Throop & Duranti, 2015) despite our failure to form a satisfying or lasting grip on their meaning. It has a pull because it is still open. This event that strikes us can become the ground of our thinking because of the horizon of possibility it makes visible in its excess. As the anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly (2019) has recently argued, ethnographic experiences retain “perplexing particulars.” Mattingly goes on to show that while the function of social theoretical concepts is to present a constant, the act of exemplifying those concepts through phenomenological description reveals destabilizing particulars.

In time, the struggle to think with an event which has strongly affected us may itself give rise to a search for an altered frame of reference. The anthropologist Paul Stoller’s (2013) essay “Religion and the Truth of Being” highlights the place of more opaque events in instigating thinking—even without resolution. Stoller recounts how, years into his apprenticeship in Songhay sorcery, he hubristically undertook a ritual suited only to a much more advanced practicante. Shortly after bungling the entailed sacrifice, Stoller experienced a rapid succession of misfortunes, culminating in intensive illness. In the wake of these calamities, a mentor in sorcery convinced Stoller that the anthropologist must have been ensorcelled by an enemy—an attack made possible by Stoller’s amateur attempt at the sacrificial rite. Unable to explain nor dismiss his bodily ailments, the event outstripped Stoller’s own socialized capacities to produce any answer; it could be only the response of another, his mentor, that sufficed to lend sense to the event. Reflecting on the significance of having his own capacity to provide answers exhausted, Stoller (2013:164) offers that,

It is important to describe ritual practices and beliefs and compare and contrast them to [...] refine our comprehension of the human condition. Anthropologies of religion, however, can also document practices and events that challenge our fundamental being in the world, practices and events that, despite our best efforts, cannot be reduced to a set of logically coherent propositions that explain the here and now. Knowledge of these events can expand our imaginative capacity and enable us to refine our thinking about and representation of social worlds.

These extraordinary events reveal an inherent limitation in undertaking an account of the human by backtracking from events to their putatively determinate structures. Stoller’s suggestion that there is another mode in which anthropology may operate is linked to the eventive nature of anthropological understanding. Happenings that defy rational explanation open us to the possibility that we might “push ourselves

beyond the analytical world... and move into the narrative worlds in which we can explore the sinuous paths of experience that take us toward a truth of being” (166). Here we feel Stoller is nudging us a step closer toward the productivity of that exposure and the inherent excess that events present. Perhaps it’s the extraordinariness of *this* experience that has moved Stoller to advocate for a more open, experiential focus—but as phenomenology carefully maintains, *all* experience has this kind of excessive dimensionality. As Jackson (2009: 236) observes,

To fully recognize the eventfulness of being is to discover that what emerges in the course of any human interaction overflows, confounds and goes beyond the forms that initially frame the interaction as well as the reflections and rationalizations that follow from it.

The indeterminacy of events means that, in thinking with them, we are often confronted with the limitations of our conceptual grasp. Potentiating all ethnographic accounts, singularizing their details, and extending beyond all methodological and epistemological stances and debates, are the events of fieldwork themselves. Once it is made a part of an anthropological account, what counts as a part of an event certainly entails a constitutive recognition of some determinative difference (boundary) between what was part of the event and what was not. But this delimitation is subsequent to (and dependent upon) the sense of some coherence indissoluble from the event itself—what it was that people were ‘wrapped up in’. It is thus fundamental to the ethnographic way into phenomenology that we work from within those contours of involvement.

#### 4 A Handshake (or Staying with Events)

In the sections above we emphasized the way ethnographic events function as a ground in their eventing as otherwise than the anthropologist’s own way of being. From the start, anthropologists are involved in the opening of a world by and with others. Yet, in practice, the ethnographic “all at once” is never all and always. Events are inexhaustible, pulling out attention again and again to consider and reconsider what it is they have to tell us. To appreciate anthropology’s potential as a phenomenology, consideration must extend to the manner in which anthropological thinking doubles back on the contours of that involvement in order to explicate the socio-cultural context the event draws into relation: proceeding to think events from events.

By way of proceeding, we would like to introduce an ethnographic example that will give readers a relatively backstage glimpse. There is not a terminal conclusion to make about the ethnographic context from which we draw this example; we don’t intend to systematically examine a particular aspect of culture, for instance. Instead, as an illustration of the eventive condition of possibility for our thinking, we want to demonstrate how events, even ones which retain a salient opacity, still form the horizon of our inquiry—drawing the anthropologist’s phenomenological investigation beyond the questions she brings to the research.



Several years ago, one of us (Christopher) conducted an ethnographic study of converts to the “charismatic Christian” movement (see Stephan, 2017). A product of the Pentecostal movement that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, charismatic Christianity is named for the *charisms* (loosely, “spiritual gifts”) that form a distinctive rhizome of theologies and bodily practices running throughout otherwise discrete Christian denominations. The titular spiritual gifts include, among a variable range of practices, forms of prophecy, faith healing, and speaking in tongues. It was during this research that Debra was interviewed. Debra had joined a charismatic church about four years prior to the interview discussed here. Willing to share what had initially drawn her to the congregation, she also reflected on how her experience of the sacred had changed in the process of joining the group.

Throughout their interview, Debra spoke slowly and deliberately, choosing her words with care to ensure that they captured as best as possible what she took to be the essence of her practice, her experience, and her faith. What she spoke of was of great importance to her and she seemed concerned throughout to ensure that she was making herself properly understood. And yet, she had, it seemed, reason to think that her experiences would not be readily grasped by others. Indeed, she made it clear that her former self would not have been able to relate to what she was currently recounting. Several times during the early parts of the interview, Debra suggests that despite her Christian upbringing, she had never experienced God so “completely” before joining the charismatic movement. When she was asked what had changed, Debra offered an account of the events leading up to her first charismatic experience. At times, as she narratively probed the contours of these significant life events and searched for the right words, it appeared that the meanings of Debra’s experiences were still unfolding. In the years since the interview, particular moments where the indeterminacy of the encounter have stood out and continued to raise questions and inspire repeated examination. So much so, that an account of what exactly transpired in the unfolding interaction seemed difficult to pin down. It is upon one of these segments, an 11-min stretch of the interview, that we focus our attention below.

Four or five years before she joined her current church Debra had been in and out of psychiatric hospitals for issues related to drug use. Following these episodes, she moved in with her parents to convalesce. Throughout that time, she had recurring nightmares and panic attacks. She recalls being awakened every night by the visceral feeling of being choked. Though she elides any specific details about the “really dark stuff” appearing in her dreams, let alone to the waking horrors to which they may have corresponded, she offered a detailed account of her solace. Waking every night in terror she would retreat to her parents’ bedroom. To comfort her, Debra’s father would eventually walk her back to her own room, sit at the side of her bed, pray with her, and ask her to confess and to accept God’s forgiveness for anything she was feeling guilty about. He would then tell her the story of Jesus until, at last, she fell asleep. Sometimes they would have to do this multiple times a night. This routine carried on for a year.

As Debra tells it, she started a new chapter in her life only with an extraordinary event. Her brother had been drawn to charismatic Christian spirituality and traveled to attend a number of special events at different churches. One weekend, when

Debra was staying with him, he told her he wanted to share a video recording of one of these special services. The video was playing a pastor's prayer when Debra recalls that she "suddenly" began feeling... Her words trail off. Laughing with her face in her hands, she asks "How do you explain? How do you explain experiences? That's what you're asking me to do!"

When she resumes her story, Debra reports having felt waves of something she settles on describing as "heat" coming out of the TV and "filling up the room." She laughs again trying to recap the scene that unfolded: her brother, laying his hand on her in prayer; the pastor in the television continuing her prayer as "stuff" radiated out from the screen; her own reaction: praising God like she never had before. As she felt these waves wash over her, a mental picture, a montage of episodes from her life, like so many jumbled puzzle pieces, merged to form a clear gestalt-like image. She felt in that moment such heights of happiness as she witnessed an emerging coherence, depicting a subtle but pervasive sequence of divine interventions, gradually revealing a purpose behind her suffering. She says she began yelling, laughing and crying all at once, repeatedly calling out "God, you are faithful!"

Since that time, she has repeatedly had experiences where God's guiding hand and His character were revealed in the patterns of her life. While it seemed like she was just about to continue elaborating this point, she stopped her story suddenly to ask, "Are you interested?" The question comes as a surprise to Christopher, who assures her of his genuine curiosity. Following these assurances, however, Debra doesn't continue on this topic. Instead, there's a brief silence.

Given that this was an event she was holding out as a turning point, it felt appropriate to ask whether she "felt like she understood what was happening at the time." Debra was rightfully concerned about her experiences being misconstrued, brushed aside, or explained away. So, when asked about whether she "understood" what was happening at the time, Debra went to remarkable lengths to be precise in her response about the sense in which an experience such as hers could be understood. We offer a transcription of the next few minutes of conversation that followed upon Debra's reflective pause.<sup>5</sup>

### **Shaking Hands (Transcription)**

Chris: Did you? Did you feel like you understood what was happening at the time? Or were you a little bit like, not sure what it is but I'm going to go with it?

Debra: Yeah there's an understanding that I have. But it's an internal, like, experiential understanding? Like. Hhh ((sigh)). Like? (9 sec)

Ok. (2.5 sec)

<sup>5</sup>Loosely following common transcription conventions, we punctuate based on the delivery of utterances rather than grammatical rules. Italics mark emphatic intonation. Double parentheses mark notes on significant extra-linguistic communication. Time in single parentheses denotes significant pauses in speech. If you are unfamiliar with transcripts, try getting a feel for the dialogue by reading a passage out loud, using the punctuation and pauses as a guide to pacing.

When you read a book? Or you um. (1 sec)

How do I do this? Ok. (3.5 sec)

What kind of an understanding is it? (11 sec)

Ok. (6.5 sec)

Like. (2.5 sec)

Let's say, ok. Let's shake hands.

Chris: Ok.

((Shaking hands briefly))

Debra: We have an understanding. We shook hands. You understand the way I understand. It's an experiential understanding because it's an action?

Chris: Right.

Debra: You know. But there's a different kind of understanding that I think that you're asking me. Is like, a knowledge understanding. A book understanding. That's a different type of, like, *understanding* ((gestures and tone mark out word)).

Chris: hmm

Debra: You don't always *understand* your experiences. And being able to explain them. In words that. And that's why this is hard. Is because I'm trying to explain to you so that people can understand. But if you haven't experienced it you don't know what that's like. But once you've experienced it, like the shaking of hands

Chris: mhmm

Debra: you have an understanding of it and you know what that's like. You have an understanding of that. Umm. You may not know what that's going to mean for you? What that's going to look like? How that's going to open up. How it's gonna change your life. You don't know that. You don't know what it's going to be like. Um. You don't always know those kinds of things. Like, wow. How is this experience? You know that it has changed your life. You know that you've experienced something that you can never. You're never gonna forget that.

Chris: mhmm

Debra: But you don't know how it's gonna change the rest of your life. You don't have an understanding of that probably.

Chris: hmmm

Debra's interview, especially the portions recounted here, stood out amongst the stories and observations gathered over the course of the ethnographic project. Emerging from the interview, Debra's juxtaposition of "experiential" and "book" knowledge was notable. Certainly one way to proceed in analyzing what happened would be to examine this distinction as an idiom of charismatic experience. One might, for instance, think of these categories as corresponding to cultural sensibilities loosely parallel to the distinction between "knowing how" and "knowing that"

(Ryle, 1945) or related psychological distinctions (various iterations of which can be traced back at least as far as the Aristotelian dichotomy of *techne* and *episteme*). Articulated as much through the haptics and *hexis* of the handshake as through her words, Debra seemed to offer an idiom through which to exhibit the prioritization of cultural modalities of embodiment over theological categories evidenced throughout much of charismatic Christian practice (see Csordas, 1994). Such a project, demonstrating how epistemic styles complement cultural ontologies, would contribute to a long-running current in anthropology (e.g. Csordas, 1994, 2002; Goulet, 1998; Luhrmann, 2012).

Even in this first impression, we can see a pattern of the anthropologist's affection by events: the emergence of a theme for thinking that at once challenges the ethnographer's assumptions—on display, for instance, in what retroactively appears as an equivocal question—and draws around itself a host of prior experiences which the ethnographer may now see in a different light. Nevertheless, despite exemplifying several of the most distinguishing traits of charismatic Christian ecstasy, the encounter has yet to yield a straightforward explanation. That is, this ethnographic scene has always appeared as much more, even perplexingly more, than an apt illustration of a cultural phenomenon. Debra tells her story as a response to a question about what instigated a shift in the style of her religious experience—she cannot speak to the transformation without recounting the event, even though it is difficult to do so. Rather than merely seeking to abstract from and elaborate the culturally generalizable significance of her distinction, we might also ask how the salient particulars of an ethnographically motivated encounter with Debra impacted her distinction between “book” and “experiential” knowledge to clarify what is going on when she deploys this dichotomy in the course of narrating a transformational process in her life. How does this show forth in the event of the unfolding ethnographic scene, such that the distinction could subsequently appear as a vital theme for further thought? To answer this question, we must return our attention to the eventive ground of the interview.

Even before Christopher's question concerning what she understood at the time of her supernatural encounter, Debra wrestles with the ineffability of her experience. All through the narrative she hesitates in a search for words. When she settles on one, she sometimes marks it with a questioning intonation. (It's not exactly “heat” that comes out of the television in waves but “heat?”) Her laughter, too, draws attention to the exasperation she feels at subjecting this lived experience to language. “How do you explain experiences?” she asks as she laughs, “That's what you're asking me to do!” When she is asked to qualify her understanding of the event at the time of its occurrence, her caesura lengthen dramatically—as long as 9 and 11 s (for those not accustomed to working with interview data we recommend setting a timer for 11 s to experience firsthand how long such a pause can be, especially in the midst of an unfolding turn of talk).

Debra's long silences make this inchoateness intersubjectively felt. Linked together by false starts and moments where she openly expresses her struggle even to begin to describe her “understanding,” the pauses generate suspense. By conversational standards, these lapses are incredibly long. There is nothing to do but await

her words. The search for words speaks to Debra's own grappling with excess and is thus disclosive of the real-time unfolding of her struggle to think through and articulate her experience. The lived duration of such pauses also reveals something of what the anthropologist must undergo with her. The pauses turn listening into waiting—drawing out the tempo of their interactions long enough for the anthropologist to consciously speculate (sometimes multiple times) as to what she might be trying to express. Each utterance, when it arrives, comes as an explicit reminder that such speculative flights are inadequate to the task of understanding her. Every such pause eludes a clear determination and thus calls for a return to focus again upon the excessiveness of another's experience. Returning to the video recording to transcribe and analyze the conversation, we again watch and feel her struggling to put words to her experience. As Debra gropes for language, we witness the inchoateness she finally finds a means (partly non-verbal) to express.

The intercorporeality of the handshake, each reaching out for and taking hold of the other's hand in a reciprocal gesture, instigates a shift from explanation to demonstration, from a telling to a showing. Acting together seeks to anchor a mutuality of experience. "We have an understanding. We shook hands. You understand the way I understand," she says. The necessity of analogizing from bodily experience, however, also underscores the ineffability of Debra's supernatural encounter. The reversion to touch thus works contrapuntally: reinforcing the mutuality of the interlocutors' bodily rootedness in the world while underscoring the distance between Debra's experience and the two interlocutors' rudimentary common ground. The anthropologist would have to start from the primal certainty of the body (such as it is) just like she had. The handshake also entails a palpable alterity, evoking at once the intimacy and otherness of Debra's experience. To stake their mutual understanding on the intercorporeality of touch is, in this sense, to reject equating her experience to whatever might already be familiar.

For Debra, then, the revelatory event she manages to describe so vividly is riddled with opacities. And yet it is she who directs her story through this event, though she struggles to formulate a satisfying description even before she is asked to qualify her understanding. She cannot ignore this event. The silences, exasperation, and handshake each punctuate and make palpable the hold of her spiritual experience, even as they are themselves manifested in a new encounter with the anthropologist. It was from these extraordinary manifestations that the event of the interview kept Christopher's encounter with Debra from ever becoming a simple example, a token of a type of charismatic experience. Her caesura, the handshake, and the notion of "experiential understanding" that emerge from it, are not simply the extension of an idiom that draws attention to an aspect of charismatic embodiment. They are part and parcel of a transformational process; a process that also reveals something of her distinctive way of being in, and responding to, the world.

As we follow Debra's distinctions we should consider that the ultimate significance of the event may be uncovered not through an appeal to explanatory factors or categories of experience but through the new configuration of world and possibility brought into being by her ecstatic experience. Debra doesn't offer a final conclusion. She insists on the evolving meaning of her experiences and her faith. The

distinctions she draws (e.g. between book understanding and experiential understanding) are aimed toward this end—not resisting a determinative understanding so much, perhaps, as trying to evoke the feeling of having undergone an event (or series of events) which has instigated a shift and still exhibits a bearing on her life. The kind of understanding she has isn't like a definition or citable fact; it doesn't exhibit the closure of book knowledge. Instead, she emphasizes these events as an origin. The ritual of the handshake evokes a beginning as much as it demonstrates the bodily conditions of possibility for understanding. "Since that time," she remarks, "God has continued to reveal himself to me in lots of ways." Again, stressing the transformative dimension, she muses that, "You may not know what that's going to mean for you? What that's going to look like? How that's going to open up. How it's gonna change your life." Debra's "experiential understanding" is, in this sense, also an adventure.

Debra's long stretches of silence, false starts, expressions of exasperation, and, finally, inspiration when she seizes upon a modality of experience through which to express the ineffable are all relived in a transposed modality each time the anthropologist returns to transcribe and analyze the interview. Returning from this ethnographic encounter to it (now in the form of videographic images and sounds) the interaction anchors the horizon from within which we as anthropologists must think. It is inevitable, then, that we are re-immersed in the daunting density of sensations, acts, images, and people Debra's story holds in relation. In that respect, Debra's own terms render dissonant any effort to encapsulate her epiphany as a mere exemplar or product of beliefs, practices, and psychological processes at play in charismatic communities. When a new aspect of the unfolding scene catches our eye we are again confronted with the richness of the original encounter and challenged to think again. These alternating ways of thinking from the encounter may unfold along uneven timelines, some meanings appearing suddenly and others disclosed slowly over numerous returns to the video inscribed and now transcribed scene. As these moments sediment, an expanding sense of the eventive ground can simultaneously disclose social conditions or cultural subjectivities, and singularizing biographies, while evincing excesses which elude our present meaning. In Debra's case, we can learn something about what mystical experience entails from a charismatic Christian standpoint and something of her unique style of being a charismatic Christian in light of her history and self-experience, all without ever exhausting the event. This is not simply an argument for anthropologists, at least insofar as they aim to make phenomenological analyses, to consequently aim for multivocality. A surfeit of themes and details are not the event as such. Instead, what we hope to show in this analysis are the ways to stretch to imagine how anthropological phenomenology can conduct its thinking and writing in ways that invoke their eventive grounds. We're *bound to*—caught up in and directed toward—specific events and the horizons those events make visible. The eventive ground of anthropology thus functions in a way that is quite distinct from (while maintaining a family resemblance to) the phenomenological methods at the disposal of our philosophical counterparts.

## 5 Writing from and Towards the Event

The eventiveness of phenomenological anthropology gives us a different perspective from which to think about the relationship between the anthropological and philosophical traditions. Classical phenomenology was notoriously skeptical of anthropology as a regional science. Partly, this skepticism stemmed from Husserl's rejection of empiricism. Husserl himself seems to have softened his view toward anthropology late in his career—coming to believe that facts about another way of being could help enrich phenomenological probes into issues of generativity and the lifeworld (see Throop, 2018). Merleau-Ponty's relationship with Claude Lévi-Strauss's thinking is the most notable of all such exceptions—suggesting, even, a new model (e.g. Merleau-Ponty's concept of the “Lateral Universal”) (see Sato, 2014). Nevertheless, some skepticism seems to remain.<sup>6</sup> The most topical example is Claude Romano's claims in *Event and World* that anthropology misses the event as such, and merely probes for explanatory mechanisms that treat the event as if an object, reducible to the empirical givens. Our modest rebuttal has been that the way phenomenologically-inclined anthropologists regard events as a ground for thinking suggests a different, more “evential” sensibility. In concluding, we offer brief remarks on the promise of anthropological philosophy.

We have described a perspective from which to rethink the importance of “being there” in ethnographic research. Even outside phenomenological applications, anthropology is generated through events. It is a lived experience of singularizing events that grounds their meaning even when the eventness of their showing is absent from description. What these instances show is that anthropology—including phenomenological anthropology—does not always succeed in holding those events close. Even these lapses can be useful, but they don't make the most of or hold true to the events that make them possible. The events in which ethnographers are enfolded will always give more than we can speak to. This excess is clearly evident even from the snippet of ethnographic description and transcript we have shared. It is worth noting that this exposure to excess is always operative in the genre of ethnographic writing: we expose, to some extent, the event that we're treating as our “data.” Readers always get something we didn't intend to foreground or had even seen within the data presented. It is entailed in this glimpse of excess, it seems, that everyone has their take. Sometimes these are useful. Sometimes they involve a lot of fantasy. Either way, we are exposed through others' own responses to the eventive horizons of what we have treated as data. We are confronted with the excess. The events that we're mostly likely to write about are those that exhibit and “pull” on our attention. We continue to live from these events, and to think in return

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<sup>6</sup>For their own part, anthropologists have often expressed skepticism about the universalizability of philosophy—a reception that stems, in part, from anthropology's natal criticism of armchair theory. In the context of a volume devoted to the place of philosophical theory in anthropology, we have articulated our own rebuttal to reactionary rejections of philosophy and our own way of approaching a partnership (Throop & Stephan, 2023).



to them. Inevitably only a fragment of this eventive ground can find its way into our writing.

In this respect, philosophical phenomenology, historically, has gotten anthropology wrong—at least, it has often been wrong about anthropology's possibilities (and, in so doing, overlooked its eventive conditions of possibility). The best anthropology holds the event close in its analysis—even while it cannot gather the event up in any totalizing way. The worst makes believe that what has been gathered is captured without remainder. Our point is not just to claim that anthropology is inherently concerned with making events manifest in their eventness, but to inquire into why it is able to do so. It's not because of anthropological methods and theories; it's not inherent to anthropology that events show through: it is instead because the events themselves make anthropology possible. As we have articulated elsewhere (Throop and Stephan, 2023): philosophy can help return us to the open horizon of the event.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, phenomenology can also help anthropology to break out from its recurring impulse to present a totalizing account of events. At the same time, what anthropological method inevitably does is expose phenomenological methods and concepts to the eventive ground of ethnography. And it is owing to this ever-present eventive ground of potentiality that we submit that anthropology's relationship to phenomenological philosophy should neither simply be that of offering up potentially mind-expanding curiosities about the world outside of Western academia, nor that we should be aiming to replicate the project of phenomenological philosophy (of which Romano's critique is a part). Rather, anthropology's genuine responsivity to singular events is one of an in-between-ness, made possible in the first instance by the intersubjective space opened by the events of fieldwork, and further realized by the anthropological phenomenologist's return and fidelity to the event in analysis and writing: It unfolded at this time, this place, with these fellow beings; here, now, and together we are singularly and asymmetrically situated—and it will never be in the same way again.

The position we stake out here is an admittedly aspirational one. Yet it seeks to show what a phenomenological anthropology is capable of being, based on the eventness that makes it possible in the first place. Anthropology, so long as it holds the event close, cannot just be an accumulation of comparative information about lives elsewhere. It has to tap into something different—a unique ground from which to think. We would have nothing to say (that philosophers could not say and say better) if it were not for this relationship to the events of fieldwork. By the same token, phenomenology could not reach us and inspire if we were not already attuned to events. Phenomenological anthropology offers an in-between which aims to think phenomenologically from an eventive ground that always exceeds and transforms the grasp of the familiar.

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<sup>7</sup>There's a natural partnership here, in our minds: the singular ethnographic event has an open horizon, but so does the phenomenological method.

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