

I N T R O D U C T I O N



PHENOMENOLOGY AND PLACE

Memory as a place, as a building, as a sequence of columns, cornices, porticoes. The body inside the mind, as if we were moving around in there, going from one place to the next, and the sound of our footsteps as we walk, moving from one place to the next.

—Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*

This book is about places. More specifically, it is about the memory of places that human beings inhabit and pass through. As bodily subjects, we necessarily have a relationship with the places that surround us. At any given moment, we are located within a place, be it in the hallways of universities, the cockpits of airplanes, or lost in the forest at night. Over time, those places define and structure our sense of self, such that being dis-placed can have a dramatic consequence on our experience of who we are, and even leave us with a feeling of being homeless in the world. Equally, the memories we acquire of the places we inhabit assume a value that is both immeasurable and vital. Without the memory of places, memory itself would no longer have a role to play in our conscious lives.

Yet, despite its central role in our everyday lives, coming to terms with the nature of our relationship with place is decidedly less straightforward. Consider the following thoughts. Place is all around us and yet not always fully thematized. Place is at the heart not only of who we are, but also of the culture in which we find ourselves. As invested with cultural, ecological, and political ramifications, place does not simply designate a patch of land without value. As proof, humans tend not to be indifferent to the effect place has upon them. At the same time, the question of what constitutes place

brings us into a realm in which the complexity of human values are secondary. Although we fundamentally shape our surroundings, ultimately place exists independently of human life in turn shaping us. Returning to a place after a long period of absence, we are often shocked by both the small and the vast changes, effectively alerting us to the radical indifference places have to the sentiment we apply to them. Here, our own selves can become the site of an internal quarrel as to how a place once was; by claiming to cognitively remember the feel of a place, our bodies can provide a different history of the past. The result is that a place can take on a life of its own, quite apart from the way it is experienced or remembered.

In naturalistic terms, place is taken to be so familiar as to evade all conceptual analysis. We are already in place. Not simply the room I currently write in, but the condition of there being a place at all. How does this room envelop me? How do I hold myself in this room? To what extent will this room become a significant aspect of my future memories? At which point did I cease feeling a visitor in this room and more a fundamental part of it? Such questions for the most part remain dormant, rising to the surface only when places either lose their familiarity or are otherwise destroyed and lost.

The complexity surrounding the topic of place is vast, and the aim of this book is to offer a contribution to the body of phenomenological work contending with the idiosyncrasies of memory and materiality, of which an impressive library is already in existence (Backhaus and Murungi 2005; Behnke 1997; Brown and Toadvine 2003; Carr 1991; Casey 1993, 2000b, 2007; Cresswell 2004; Entrikin 1991; Hayden 1997; Kolb 2008; Light and Smith 1998; Malpas 2007, 2008; Massey 2005; Mugerauer 1994; Steeves 2006; Steinbock 1995; Tengelyi 2004; Tuan 1977).

But before this contribution can begin, the methodology of the book needs to be spelled out. In particular, the relation between phenomenology and place requires our immediate attention. After all, to think in terms of a phenomenology of place, we must in the first instance think of a place for phenomenology. The reason is clear: Just as phenomenology, in its appeal to lived experience, would emerge as abstracted, partial, and disembodied without being situated in place, so the term “place” would be vague and cryptic without being thematized through phenomenology.

Given this hermeneutical circularity between place and phenomenology, in this book the familiar idea that definition precedes exposition will prove impossible. I point this out now, because the impossibility of this approach will be implicated from the outset. Rather than bludgeoning the reader with

a fixed definition of “memory,” “place,” and other such key terms at the beginning, and then insisting that the reader remain heedful of those definitions throughout, I believe these themes must be returned to, forever exploring their formations and recessions. The advantage of this approach is that we move from a strictly analytical mode of accumulating static concepts and expose ourselves to the possibility that these concepts evolve of their own accord. Not tying things down in advance means allowing those things to speak for themselves.

Luckily, the refutation of fixed definitions does not entail either a post-modernist retreat into the “multiplicity of meanings” or an orientation without guidance. Rather, we must begin to work through the knots that concepts create through several different angles. As some of the knots prove permanently bound, so our task will be to redirect the emphasis, assessing indirect ways to chart the relation between phenomenology and place. First of all, then, having admitted that “place” and “phenomenology” refuse unambiguous definitions, my concession to pairing these terms is also a tacit admission that “phenomenology” as a method and “place” as a concept have potential to encounter each other in a meaningful manner. Let us explore these parts.

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF PLACE

Philosophical thinking on the topic of place tends to adopt one of two perspectives. First, place is thought of as an empirical idea, which has a reality independent of human life. Such a view tends to be marked by a scientific outlook on the environment, in which the totality of place is reduced to its parts. For these thinkers, the coherence and identity of place have a reality quite apart from the way in which it is experienced by human beings. Second, place is thought of as a constructive product of human experience, such that without human involvement, place would lose definition. In this model, place is basically reducible to a set of contingent sociopolitical circumstances.

Both of these approaches to place have their value. They each identify the subtle and complex way in which a place straddles multiple divisions. On the one hand, places can be valued by individuals, sometimes culminating in a nostalgic attachment to especially important environments. At the same time, the places we attach ourselves to are themselves spatially extended into the world. A place is not simply a cluster of discernible memories held within the core of an individual. Rather, a place unfolds in the world, and does so

against a backdrop of manifold influences, not all of which contribute to an individual's attachment to that place. But neither is a place simply an isolated beacon in a mass of homogeneous space. True, both space and place are fundamentally extended. But this does not mean that a place comes into existence simply through a conversion between space and place. Place is not, after all, colonized from raw space. Such a negative definition fails to grasp the enigmatic dimension of place.

Neither of these approaches—the realist or the constructivist—is complete in itself. Experiencing place is not reducible to a set of objective properties. But nor does the experience of place depend wholly on a sociopolitical context. Instead, a third way can be mapped out, in which attention is drawn to the existential significance of place. It is such an approach that phenomenology broadly advocates in its treatment of place.

For all its internal differences, one of the features that defines phenomenology's treatment of place is a commitment to the belief that lived spatiality is not a container that can be measured in objective terms, but an expression of our being-in-the-world. For Merleau-Ponty, we find "organic relations between subject and space" (2006, 293). Spatiality is not something we are inserted into, as though it has existed all along and awaits the subject's arrival. The world does not, that is to say, constitute a series of concurrent markers placed in the earth's landscape. Rather, being-in-the-world means being *placed*. At all times, we find ourselves located in a particular place, specific to the bodily subject experiencing that place. We are forever in the *here*, and it is from that *here* that our experiences take place.

If our bodies place us in the here, then our orientation and experience of place is never truly epistemic in character but fundamentally affective. When Merleau-Ponty finds himself journeying through Paris—"the cafés, people's faces, the poplars along the quays, the bends of the Seine"—then what he experiences is united in the "city's whole being [which] Paris possesses" (2006, 328). For him, the identity of Paris is not reducible to the parts that objectively constitute the city. Rather, "There is present a latent significance, diffused throughout the landscape or the city" (328). Placed in the world of Parisian life, Merleau-Ponty discovers a texture of continuity from one place to another that is grounded in a "certain style" that all places partake of. The reason for this is that the perception of lived space

is not a particular class of "state of consciousness" or acts. Its modalities are always an expression of the total life of the subject, the

energy with which he tends toward a future through his body and his world. (330)

This is a critical passage. In it, Merleau-Ponty draws our attention to the relation between a human's experience of place and the values, memories, dreams, anxieties, and other such affective states that sculpt that experience. Places are defined in their relationship with the particular subject who experiences them. To think, for example, alongside the agoraphobic's experience of public space as anxiety-making is to recognize that anxiety is relational, a shared communication that takes place neither in the body of the agoraphobe nor in the materiality of the city, but in the spark ignited between the two (Trigg 2012). In such a case, the body is the vehicle of expression for a relation with the world, thus the life of the city fundamentally manifests in the nuances of the bodily self.

In experiential terms, the affectivity of place means that establishing distance in space can be taken up only with an analysis of our embodied relationship with the world. If I am on a train and in a rush to get home in order to walk the dogs, then during that episode, home seems much farther away. Conversely, if I am under the impression that someone else is walking the dogs, then the distance diminishes. In this experience, things that prevent me from getting home, such as leaves and snow falling on the train track, are amplified in their intrusiveness, such that for every obstacle that appears, I feel my destination receding into the distance. The feeling of my home as being farther away testifies to my attachment to it, and my responsibility to ensure the dogs are walked. On the train, I place myself in the world of the dogs and seem to experience their waiting by proxy. In the desire to bypass the journey, the distance is thus accentuated. I cannot get home soon enough. Such an urgency has very little to do with measureable space. The journeys we repeat daily alter in their felt spatiotemporality owing to the mood and objects of intentionality we find ourselves immersed in. And the same is true of our relationship to nearness. When I am required to return to the train station in order to meet a friend, then the train station becomes more foreground in my field of perception. Even before it is in my visual line of sight, the station is already being perceived by my body, whereupon my body extends into the world of the train station long before the train station is a visual object for me. The feeling of the train station as being near is not an objective property of the world, not something that can be mapped out in advance. Rather, it is a dynamic relationship that varies in and through time. Lacking a reason to

be at the train station, it withdraws from my bodily perception, sinks into the quiet indifference of the surrounding world.

Given its complexity, we might want to ask, What *kind* of concept is “place”? Despite the difficulty of responding to this question in a coherent fashion, a series of themes marking place’s critical features can be detected. First, place is to be understood *experientially*. While it is true that we cannot reduce place to a “construct” simply imposed upon raw space, without an experiential focus and direction, place would lose what is common to the very concept: its affectivity. Thus, we experience place in an *affective* way. Our bodies orient us in place, and in doing so become the primary source of how we apprehend a given environment. Finally, because of this corporeal emphasis, place emerges as being temporally and spatially singular. We are situated in the world, inasmuch as we occupy a *particular* place. Not only is the body highly specific to a particular place—we are seldom in two places simultaneously—but the relation we have to any given place is unique and irreducible.

Experience, affectivity, and particularity are at the heart of place. Conceptually, where does this leave the term “place”? Splicing the three themes together, what emerges is a sense of place as belonging to neither the subject’s constructs nor the world’s reality. That places have the power to disarm our memories and electrify our imaginations is due not only to the supposed centrality of human experience. Indeed, places really *do* exist, and they do so quite independently (although no doubt differently) from the human values that are coated upon the world. At the same time, through coming into contact with the world, place becomes more than inert materiality by assuming an emblematic role in our understanding of self. Yet the hold places have on us is never absolute, and however much we attend to the world, the universe’s cosmic indifference to human experience can never be fully overlooked.

In this way, place emerges as neither a realist nor an idealist concept, but rather somewhere *in between*. In situating place “in between” the world and the subject, I am implicitly acknowledging the work of J. Nicholas Entrikin (1991, 6–23), who argues that place must be understood between a detached and a lived stance. Entrikin’s perspective in this relation is valuable, and his mediation between subjective and objective realms is laudable. This in-between status can be seen on a number of different levels. As Entrikin has it, the tension between “external” and “internal” vision “represents a basic polarity of human consciousness,” in which each aspect is perceived as being either “real” or “unreal” (9). Consequently, Entrikin is especially strong at describing how each of these aspects informs the other, thus producing an

ambiguity at the core of place, which he reconciles by bridging together seemingly contradictory claims.

However, in what follows, I want to dissent from Entrikin's account of betweenness. Ultimately, I will argue that betweenness is a concept that is fundamentally problematized by the role of body memory. As I will suggest, the cognitive space between place and world is disturbed by the independence of the flesh, which, in its intelligibility, manages to defamiliarize our experiential, affective, and particular placement—the three discernible features that contribute to place broadly. In turn, what this will mean is that the privileged observer of place standing between self and world will lose his or her bearings due to the primacy of embodiment. At such a point, understanding place between subject and object will be undermined through the observer's being torn asunder in multiple directions.

Along with space and place, time and place form another dovetailing pair. Indeed, it is only through materializing itself in place that the felt experience of time gains its powers. This experience has diverse manifestations, but the two most apparent factors are *movement* and *stasis*. Moving in place, be it from the car park to the elevator or from one planet to another, we experience time in and through place. The “in and through” motif here is essential. The movement of the body does not reconstitute itself with each new place to which it attends. Rather, moving through place means tracing an arc of time. For this reason, the felt temporal experience of a given day is inextricably bound with the movements of the body, such that the same day can diminish or expand in time according to the level of spatial activity.

Habits in place, too, can nullify or illuminate our experience of time. Consider how the habitual movement through a place can appear to swallow up lived time, such that we can never be sure of how we spent any given period of our lives in a particular place. All that we know is objective data: We occupied a certain place from one year to another. But within that time, our actions fall by the wayside through becoming assimilated into a pregiven routine. Does habit rob us of time? We may not go that far, but a habitualized routine certainly suppresses the sensitivity toward our surroundings, both spatial and temporal. In a word, we become overly adjusted to our surroundings, in the process taking for granted the very facticity of those surroundings.

At the same time, being surprised by our surroundings, especially when that environment was previously overly familiar, marks a breakage in our experience of time, such that place itself comes to the foreground. When we are locked out of our homes due to mislaying the key, then not only is our

relation to the home altered in terms of being inaccessible, but the condition of attempting to resolve the situation places us, literally, in a different time-scale. Suddenly, the overlooked dimensions of the house assume a different tone, the exterior now becoming a surrogate for the interior that has become remote. This position of being on the outside of the house causes a lag in time to develop. But the drawn temporality of waiting has less to do with the objective status of the environment, and more to do with a projection toward the future. The projection has its basis in a composite of how we anticipate place and time to interact.

Here, an analogous experience takes place between the sun and the moon. As our bodies align with the movement of the earth, so the temporality of the day becomes more than an unfolding process understandable in objective terms. Instead, the temporal “distance” of the day dwells in our bodies. From the light of morning to the darkness of night, and then during the blackness of sleep, our bodies become the vehicle for the reality of the earth’s movement. Without exposure to this shift in shadow and light, the experience of time would undergo massive augmentation. Think here of the movement of journeying along the horizon of the earth while aboard a plane. Forever remaining beyond touch, the endless twilight that accumulates as the sun fails to return beyond the earth sanctions a unique experience. Indeed, what can the measure of time mean when time itself, already stationed between the sun and the earth, slips away from our bodies? True, the body can gesture toward a state of tiredness, but the tiredness is now in an altered zone, at once awake and fatigued. Can we ever really trust the vague drone of a confused corporeal state independently of the visual closure of day and night? Here, too, the usual aural cues that beckon the passing of time—above all, the quieting of the world—are absent. In the cabin of a plane, with its artificially regulated air, the same hum is fixed, ever disrupted only by announcements from the cockpit.

This homogenized environment of being above the earth appears to flatten out time. But is this so? After all, our bodies are not atomic entities situated in any given place, but are exposed to the massive stream of lived time and memory. If place has the ability to shape time, diminishing and expanding it in equal measure, then it also holds the power to seize time in its tracks. One way this seizure is most viscerally and manifestly potent is through places’ becoming the foreground canvas in which our memories embed themselves—the very topic of this book.

Places do this in innumerable ways. Above all, consider how it is possible to develop a relation with the places you inhabit, such that the materiality of

the environment—the peeling wallpaper, reflection in the window, rustle in the branches, groan of the house creaking in the wind—becomes constitutive of who you are. Places achieve this thanks to the extension of our bodies. As our bodies reach out into the world, so a mimetic interplay arises, in which our sense of self becomes fundamentally entwined with the fabric of the world. Here, the very things that make up a given place lose their status as “objects” in the world and become an extension of the formal structure of personal identity. Being attached to a place means allowing memories to be *held* by that place. In turn, being held by a place means being able to return to that place through its role as a reserve of memories. Not only do places hold memories in a material sense—as the archive of our experiences—but those same places crystallize the experiences that occurred there. Being in place is not temporally static. Rather, our memories pursue us as we pursue place, both forming an ambiguous zone somewhere in between.

Alongside this twofold movement from memory to place and from place to memory, particular types of experience can be singled out. In nominal terms, it is the “home” that has been cited as the locus for our place memories. While we cannot dispute the origin and force of the image of the home (however real that image is), in this book, the memories we have of places do not end with the intimacy and familiarity of the home. Quite the opposite. Places can, for instance, become singular in the library of our memories through their very *unfamiliarity*. Indeed, precisely through their strangeness, places become memorable by disturbing patterns of regularity and habit. In doing so, a given narrative is broken while another one begins. Such moments tend to impart significance into our lives, even if that significance is realized only belatedly. To this extent, places become the stage setting for profound events in the life of an individual. In turn, the places where those events occurred form a union with the very environment, whether those events are strange, pleasurable, or traumatic.

BODY MEMORY

From place, we return to body. As we recall from the preface, our thematic focus concerns *how personal identity and embodiment are shaped through being touched by the past*. Having clarified the terms “personal identity” and “being touched” in the preface, it falls to the word *embodiment*, a word emblematically phenomenological in tone and yet no less problematic because

of that status. As indicated above, finding ourselves in place, we discover that our bodies confer a radical specificity to the environment. We are “in” place in the particular sense that our bodies are a first point of contact for the world. This has two major implications. First, being a body means occupying a particular location in place. “Above” and “below” exist only in terms of where I am currently placed. With my bodily self as the determining force, I draw whatever is around me into my body. However, as I draw nearer to that which is above and below me, so another horizon of distinctions is established. Neither static nor absolute, these distinctions rotate and evolve in accordance with the movement of the body.

Likewise, being “here” while you are “there” is not an abstract formulation posited without regard to embodiment. We are “here” inasmuch as our bodies place us in the world. This center of orientation provides a locus for all movements, carrying with it a rich arc of sensation. In this way, the totality of experience of place begins and ends with the body. But the body is also a center in a figurative sense. Just as certain aspects of the body are more prevalent in guiding us through place, so those same features manifest themselves in the built environment. Thus, it is no coincidence that the phrase “heart of the city” adopts a bodily metaphor (Bloomer and Moore 1977, 39). The heart of the body and the heart of the city refer in both instances to a dynamic center, which has to do less with geometry and more with a gathering of force and energy.

Second, the role of the body as a center of orientation is coupled with its position as prober of material sensations. As I move through place, so my body opens itself to a thick world of sensations, all received haptically. And this haptic genesis is a source of both well-being and discomfort. My eyes, hands, ears, mouth, and nose do not simply compute the world around me, but provide the basis for how a place is received on an affective and emotional level.

When an elevator opens its doors on the world of a modern office, it is not only my eyes that feel the strain as the halogen lights greet me. Rather, the discomfort begins with my eyes but soon moves to the muscles in my arms and legs, before manifesting in a tightness in my chest. The result of this contact is anxiety. Dizziness soon follows, such that I must grip the walls in order to retain my balance. My body is unable to withstand this environment, despite attempting to reassure myself that this experience is simply a question of reacclimating myself to the light. When I move from such an environment and find repose in a dark room, then once more it is

not only my eyes that are eased. An entire shift in mood takes over. The heaviness of my body is alleviated by a decrease in the temperature. Yet the temperature is not an objective property of the world, but a result of escaping from the world of light to the world of shadows. My whole body is “lightened” by the darkness, such that by feeling more rooted, the aligning reality of my body is heightened.

The body activates place. But the same is true in reverse: *Place activates the body*. Consider in this light the logical impossibility of being *no-where*. The possibility of experiencing a voided space presupposes having a body to survey that absence. Similarly, the notion of being displaced from one location requires that we are already in another place to observe that movement. We do not, therefore, encounter place as disembodied subjects, occupying an incidental relation to our surroundings. At all times, our bodies are instrumental in placing us.

This twofold motion between place and body thematizes the centrality of place in our reflective conception of self. *We carry places with us*. How can we understand this important claim? One approach would be to suggest that places habituate themselves in our bodies. Just as we become accustomed to certain patterns in the world—hiding beneath the bed when scared, gazing toward the ceiling when thinking, snarling when angry—so part of our experience of place is solidified by repetition and regularity. If I have become accustomed to writing at this desk and in this chair, then over time the surroundings of this environment will gain a normative quality for me, such that without them, my practices are disturbed. Yet the disturbance is not simply a case of finding another place at which to work. Rather, the disturbance is grounded in the residual sediment of my regular place no longer being there, despite its occupancy in my body.

This residue of a familiar place stored in the body hints at another dimension of the body’s relation to its environment: Place becomes profoundly constitutive of our sense of self. In this respect, the statement “We carry places with us” gains a primordial significance greater than that indicated by habit alone. By carrying places with us, we open ourselves to a mode of embodiment that has less to do with habit and more to do with the continuity of one’s sense of self. Such a mode of embodiment offers a more sustained and deeper commitment to the body’s role as retriever of the past. Here, we are talking about not simply the mechanical repetition of routines, such that they orient us in an environment, but the *very facticity of the world existing through the porous retention of our bodies*.

Consider provisionally: Not only do our bodies retain habitualized patterns, but they also reproduce pleasurable, traumatic, and indifferent experiences that we have undergone in the past, all of which conspire to reinforce or undermine our conception of selfhood. Save for Proust, nowhere is this intimacy between embodiment and memory better articulated than in Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. Indeed, in Bachelard's overwhelmingly topophilic account of intimate places, everything from the "house's entire being" to the "feel of the tiniest latch" remains in and with us (1994, 15). The "passionate liaison of our bodies" that makes this retention possible manages to govern the unity of our lives through giving life a corporeal core. Our bodies not only orient us, but also serve as the basis for an entire history, at all times producing a self that strives toward continuity through retaining and returning to places. In a highly significant passage, Bachelard states the following:

The finest specimens of fossilized duration concretized as a result of long sojourn, are to be found in and through space. The unconscious abides. *Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are.* (9; emphasis added)

In this passage we have the whole of Bachelard's project distilled. Bachelard's faith in the power of place is unrivaled. By freeing materiality from the unconscious, lived place is presented as having inherent unity of its own. The implication is striking: Time loses its privileged intimacy with memory, as place proves itself the more effective absorber of our past. Indeed, for Bachelard, the retention of memory loses none of its vibrancy, precisely thanks to the holding power of place. Time, on the other hand, is that through which memory is dispersed.

Memories may well be motionless for Bachelard, but their dependence on the body is nevertheless pivotal, as he writes evocatively: "When I relive dynamically the road that 'climbed' the hill, I am quite sure that the road itself has muscles, or, rather, counter-muscles" (1994, 11). Place and body form a hybrid, each glancing toward the other for their identity and animation. Note that this is quite different from remembering my body as an object in the world. How I remember reaching out to touch the cupboard as a child is structurally different from reexperiencing the manner in which a place has become part of my bodily matrix. In the first case, I position my body as something anterior to myself. In the second case, an event appears

through my lived-body in the present. In this way, my body acts as the necessary ground for the past to reappear. Only through there being a body in the first instance is the felt density of place, in its sensuality and texture, to be relived.

EMBODIMENT AND PHENOMENOLOGY

With this provisional account of place and embodiment sketched out, it will be helpful to venture into the historical context of these ideas. With a view of assessing phenomenology's agility, let us consider how both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty have thematized the body as a center of experience, each in their own singular way.

One of Husserl's (1970) central contributions to the phenomenology of embodiment is to establish a distinction between the physical body (*Körper*) and the living body (*Leib*). In making a distinction between the physical body and the living body, Husserl thematizes the peculiarity of the body as intimate and foreign to the ego simultaneously. Thanks to its anchoring role in the world, the body is experienced experientially as a "thing" but also as a living entity reflecting on that status as a "thing," a doubling gesture that Merleau-Ponty (1968) will later rephrase in terms of the body's "reversibility" between being touched and touching. The difference between these categories is that only through the living body, "which is actually given [to me as such] in perception," are we able to "hold sway" in the world, an expression referring to the control we develop via our bodies toward the world (Husserl 1970, 107). Being able to "hold sway" means being able to orient ourselves in a kinesthetic and richly sensual way, conferring a unity upon the world that would be fragmented were the body taken as simply an anonymous and physical unit. For Husserl (103–5), the significance of the living body is that it returns us to the "life-world," a surrounding and taken-for-granted world, considered in a state of pretheoretical apprehension.

I shall have more to say on the life-world and its relationship to spatiality shortly. What I want to draw presently from Husserl in a preparatory way is the focus he places on embodiment as an active engagement with the world, such that the body becomes indispensable in the formation of the spatiality of the world, rather than simply running alongside the world. Not only does the body become constitutive of the world, but the world itself is possible only through the experience of embodiment. Because of this close alignment

between world and body, Husserl comes to recognize the body as the center of experience, perception, and, above all, the kinesthetic sensation of moving in place. Only because the body occupies a specific location is the dimensionality of spatiality possible as such.

Phenomenologically, this inextricable bond between place and the embodied subject moving in that place underscores the intentionality of the body, a gesture that achieves nothing less than the vibrancy of external space. Even at this preparatory level, it is clear that Husserl's privileging of the body means that the experience of the world would be impossible through the (non)experience of a disincarnated subject. By emphasizing its active dynamic, Husserl elicits the uniqueness of the body among other things in the world; through it, we discover the constitution of the world, which in turn mirrors the constitution of the self.

If the centrality of the living body is established in Husserl, then it is in Merleau-Ponty that the implications of this role become clear. Indeed, it is precisely with Merleau-Ponty that Husserl's conception of the living body becomes *em*-bodied. This occurs through the development of a self that not only is expressed through having a body, but is fundamentally constituted by *being* a body.

Merleau-Ponty's account of body begins where Husserl's ends: with the idea of the body as being both the "bearer of sensations" and the locus of movement. Yet Merleau-Ponty dissents from Husserl in positing the body as more primary than Husserl's transcendental ego. Against the Husserlian idea that the phenomenological reduction leads us toward a transcendental consciousness, Merleau-Ponty places the body not only at the center of all things, but also at the origin of things, thus elevating the bodily self prior to cognition. In this way, being able to posit the idea of a transcendental ego, for Merleau-Ponty, already presupposes the experience of embodiment, which itself attests to the singular relationship between the "I" and the body. Given this reversal of priority in Merleau-Ponty, the consequences for the unity of experience in the life-world are pervasive. Indeed, time and again, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that the unity of the body supersedes causal accounts provided by psychology and physiology, and instead becomes profoundly constitutive of selfhood.

Consider his discussion of "phantom limbs" as an example (Merleau-Ponty 2006, 88–102). The problem of the phantom limb is formally simple: How do we account for the illusive "feel" of a limb that is now physically absent? Three options present themselves. One is to assign an error of judgment

to the belief that a limb still exists despite the empirical evidence that it is in fact absent. Yet this is clearly misleading, given that “the awareness of the amputated arm as present . . . is not of the kind: ‘I think that . . .’” (94). But this does not imply, second, that the feel of the limb is simply a side effect of the body’s raw sensation, a system of “blind processes” (91). Nor, finally, is the emergence of a phantom limb simply a case of the imaginary limb “substituting” the missing one in a strictly mechanical manner. In all of these instances, what is missing is the existential meaning of the limb so far as it defines our being-in-the-world. Merleau-Ponty states:

The phantom limb is not the mere outcome of objective causality; no more is it a *cogitatio*. It could be a mixture of the two only if we could find a means of linking the “psychic” and the “physiological,” the “for-itself” and the “in-itself,” to each other to form an articulate whole, and to contrive some meeting-point for them. (2006, 89)

Thus, the persistence of the limb’s presence pushes us in the direction of “un-Cartesian terms,” in the process forming “the idea of an organic thought through which the relation of the ‘psychic’ and the ‘physiological’ becomes conceivable” (Merleau-Ponty 2006, 89). This organic idea turns out to be the body’s reflexes as being able to “adjust themselves to a ‘direction’ of the situation” (93). The implication of this immanent direction is that all bodily actions turn out as already being involved in a “*pre-objective* view which is what we call *being-in-the-world*” (92; emphasis added). Far from a chaotic response to random stimuli, bodily movement and orientation are forever with reference to the preservation of any given world. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty is entitled to declare: “Some subjects can come near to blindness without changing their ‘world’” (92). This is a telling claim. With it, the objectivity of the world as having a certain number of properties and things is dwarfed by the conduct of the embodied subject in relation to that world. Thanks to this relation, a consistency is established despite the discontinuity of the body itself. As such, something more than the materiality of the body enables the self to endure through time, asserting a fundamental “hybrid” between the physiological and the psychological.

The hybrid force between the physiological and the psychological that enables the world to retain a consistency is secured through what Merleau-Ponty terms the “intentional arc” (2006, 157). By this, he refers to the manner in which all bodily action is inherently temporal, at once projecting an

orientation toward the world while simultaneously retaining the past. Because of the “intentional arc,” the “unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility” is maintained (157). Applied to the phenomenology of the phantom limb, what this means is that the felt experience of an absent limb is to be viewed as a form of knowledge sedimented into the habitual body. Taking the “intentional arc” as that which gives a particular life its singularity and meaning, the body’s role in achieving this end is unparalleled. Nothing less than a complete mode of intelligence is at stake, enveloping the discontinuous breaks in life with a thread of consistency quite distinct from abstract knowledge.

This distinction between embodied knowledge and reflective knowledge sets in a place an incipient tension between what survives bodily change and what falls from that flux despite retaining a presence in the schema of selfhood. This is viscerally clear in the case of the phantom limb. For what we are contending with is, on the one hand, the cognitive knowledge that a particular article of the human body is missing, and on the other, the retention of a life-world that no longer exists, objectively speaking. In the darkness of mutability and mutilation, the body clings to a temporal framework established in the past but projected toward the unmapped future. As a “thing” in the world, but also as the locus of all orientation and identity, the body retains an ambiguity that refuses conceptual determination. Neither solely a memory bound in the past nor simply a stimulus-response in the present, the phantom limb establishes itself as a spectral agency working between the psychological and the physiological, overlapping each domain in a confused and complex way. In Merleau-Ponty’s (2006, 93) words, the realm occupies a “middle term between presence and absence.”

Central to Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the phantom limb is a view that reaches far beyond the mutilation of the physical body and drops us into a thick narrative, structured by the “intentional arc.” Because of this temporal context, the drama of selfhood continues toward a unity that, objectively speaking, no longer exists, as he states: “What it is in us which refuses mutilation and disablement is an *I* committed to a certain physical and inter-human world” (2006, 94). The repression of time is stipulated on a sedimented body memory that affords the mutilated subject a retrieval of a previous unity, as he writes tersely: “Impersonal time continues its course, but personal time is arrested” (96). Furthermore, this process is neither bound to the psychoanalytic unconsciousness nor ascribed to an act of volition. Rather, repression is taken to be a modification of being-in-the-world, such that we are faced with

an “abstraction of [first person] existence, which lives on a former experience, or rather on the memory of having had the memory, and so on, until finally only the essential form remains” (96).

The refusal of the past to slip into oblivion is possible only on account of the tremendous intelligibility of the body. What is involved in this intelligibility transcends the Bergsonian idea of habit memory (a motorized memory obtained through the repetition of mechanical actions) and orients us toward a past that is reenacted through the body. It is this relation of memory and reenactment that is vital: It not only renders the body the center of experience, but also implicates the body’s retrieval of the past as being deeply emblematic of the specificity of the self, giving the self a temporal density that would be ultimately fragmented were memory a solely cognitive affair.

PLACING PHENOMENOLOGY

With this overview of the book’s themes established, our methodological pathway resumes. Here, our critical question must concern how thinking and writing can approach the topic of place and memory. More specifically, how will phenomenology, as the method employed in this book, find its place within this dynamic network of other places? So far, I have suggested that place is fundamentally a porous concept, falling between idealism and realism. What this means is that any given place is never autonomous in its unity, but forever bleeding and seeping into other places, both those of the past and those of the future. This movement of seepage is what gives a place its ambiguous character. We are never truly “in” place without already having been in another place, and that other place is never merely left behind within a history of forgotten places. Rather, coming into a place means inserting that lived history into the present. At the mercy of our bodies, judging where one place begins and another ends is thus an artificial distinction enforced by rational abstraction.

The ambiguity of place extends also to the theory that contends with the concept. A system of thought is never alone in its quest. Rather, it enters the scene of thought within the context of an already-established arrangement of ideas and schools of thought. Just as a material place defines itself against the plastic borders of other places, so thinking opens itself to a swarm of influences, some of which strengthen the original position, while others seek to displace it.

How would we go about “placing” phenomenology? The very fact of posing this question suggests that phenomenology’s placement was either taken-for-granted or otherwise in risk of becoming displaced. If phenomenology has been displaced by other factors—not least by subsequent modes of thought—then does putting it in place mean committing it to a static position? This need not be the case. Instead, to place phenomenology we would have to recognize, first, how the identity of phenomenology has been sculpted historically; and, second, what defines phenomenology as a discrete mode of thinking about place. Such is the task of the remainder of the introduction. We shall set out to discern phenomenology’s special relationship with spatiality, and in the process provide an overview of the methodology as a whole. The result of this close-knit bond between phenomenology and place will be the placement of phenomenology itself.

The suggestion that phenomenology has become displaced, as though reduced to a static point within an ongoing narrative, or even pushed beyond that narrative, is a legitimate way to begin placing phenomenology. By 1963, Heidegger was already in a position to question the legacy of phenomenology: “The age of phenomenological philosophy,” he writes lamently, “seems to be over. It is already taken as something past which is only recorded historically along other schools of philosophy” (1975a, 241). Of course, the history of phenomenology, in addition to being a history of French and German philosophy, is also a history of modifications and erasures. What I mean by this is that phenomenology in the strict Husserlian sense largely (though not exclusively) survives through critical engagement with the works of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and to a lesser extent Derrida. More recently, and perhaps more tellingly, Jean-Luc Marion’s (1998, 2002) engagement with phenomenology exemplifies an engagement with series of pressing issues not limited to Derrida’s (1998) much cited “metaphysics of presence” criticism. The modification of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology is evident, however, in Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty’s alteration of the *epoché*, an indispensable component of the Husserlian framework.

For Husserl (1970, 135–41), the *epoché* would mark a fundamental rupture with naturalistic (i.e., objective) philosophy, promising a philosophy in which all existing beliefs and validities concerning the world are suspended or bracketed (*Einklammerung*). The result of this, Husserl argues, would be a radical revision of the pre-given assumptions about the world. Husserl’s emphasis on what is immediately given to consciousness as an appearance

testifies to the concerns of phenomenology. In its classical formulation, phenomenology is an attitude (rather than a system) framed, above all, by the primacy of *things*. As such, the epoché does not designate a denial of the reality of the objective world, but simply a suspension from, in Husserl's words, "any critical position-taking which is interested in their truth or falsity, even any position on their guiding idea of an objective knowledge of the world" (135). In effect, the world continues as it did prior to the application of the epoché; only now, theoretical judgments are reserved in advance.

The eventual result of the phenomenological epoché is Husserl's celebrated *transcendental reduction*. Reduction refers to the thematization between subjective experience and the life-world, which Husserl describes as "the world constantly given to us as actual in our concrete world-life" (1970, 51). Thus, whereas the epoché is the methodological procedure by which assumptions about the world are bracketed, the reduction—and let us note there are several reductions—leads to a recognition of the life-world *as* a phenomenon. The implication is that the life-world comes to be seen as transcendently constituted, a condition of experience by which "transcendental subjectivity [is shown to be] always functioning ultimately and is thus 'absolute'" (153). In other words, for Husserl, the phenomenological reduction leaves open the transcendental ego that renders givenness possible in the first instance. With this move, givenness is acknowledged as being constitutive of empirical experience. The importance of this thought is that through the phenomenological reduction, appearances are shown to be appropriated by consciousness, rather than isolated in a world above or beyond experience.

Given the demands of Husserl's task (it is telling that Husserl himself would describe the commitment to phenomenology as comparable to nothing less than a "religious conversion" [1970, 137]), Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger altered the Husserlian epoché and primacy of the transcendental ego respectively, and instead turned their attention toward an existential and hermeneutic phenomenology, in which Husserl's emphasis on cognition is replaced by a concern with how the body and its moods bridge humans and their world.

For Heidegger, the centrality of Husserl's account of the transcendental ego is a shortcoming. Thus, his modification of Husserlian phenomenology has two aims. First, to prioritize Being as ontologically primary. Second, to overcome Husserl's Cartesian methodology and terminology (Heidegger's [1996, 23–34] omission of Husserl in the description of phenomenology in *Being and Time* is a clear illustration of this distance from his former mentor).

Of the first aim, Heidegger's account of the "forgetting of Being" carries with it a metaphysical distinction between the ontological and the ontic: *ontological* referring to the Being of being, and *ontic* referring to the being of Being; namely, entities, things, and humans. The distinction is important in that Heidegger's polemical stance against Western philosophy assumes a focus on the primacy of the ontic over the ontological. Since Husserl takes phenomena to be the main concern of transcendental phenomenology, Heidegger is obliged to assimilate Husserl's phenomenology within this tradition of ontic primacy, stating: "*For us* phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehension of a being, whatever may be the character of that apprehension, to the understanding of the being of this being (projecting upon the way it is unconcealed)" (1982, 21; italics in original).

Despite Heidegger's divergence from Husserl, in the opening to his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty would cite Heidegger's *Being and Time* as "no more than an explicit account of the 'natürlicher Weltbegriff' or the 'Lebenswelt' which Husserl, towards the end of his life, identified as the central theme of phenomenology" (2006, viii). If Merleau-Ponty is correct to suggest that Heidegger's descriptions of everydayness are indeed a furtherance of the ontological precedent Husserl established with the life-world, then where does this leave the phenomenological epoché?

Merleau-Ponty's own position to the epoché and the phenomenological reduction in *Phenomenology of Perception* is seemingly clear: "The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction" (2006, xv). Should we take this to indicate a dissent from Husserl? To do so would risk misunderstanding Merleau-Ponty's position. The impossibility of the reduction does not warrant its failure. Instead, the impossibility of the reduction testifies to its multifarious nature and endless potential. Thus, Merleau-Ponty is led to conclude that "there is no thought which embraces all our thought" (xv). Indeed, it is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty understands Husserl's return to the reduction as "constantly re-examining the possibility of the reduction" (xv). Phenomenology's incisive dynamism means resisting the determination of fixed concepts, leaving the phenomenologist as the "perpetual beginner" (xv).

Given that Merleau-Ponty recognizes both the limits and the potential of the reduction, then where does this leave the methodological epoché? Despite Merleau-Ponty's apparently receptive stance toward the reduction, in the same passage we also read:

Philosophy itself must not take itself for granted, in so far as it may have managed to say something true; that it is an ever-renewed experiment in making its own beginning; that it consists wholly in the description of this beginning, and finally, that radical reflection amounts to a consciousness of its own dependence on an unreflective life which is its initial situation, unchanging, given once and for all. (2006, xv–xvi)

This is a startling passage. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty claims that the impossibility of the complete reduction is itself constitutive of phenomenology's resistance to dogma. On the other hand, we are now told that any such attempt at rupturing natural consciousness through attending to a perpetual beginning is itself a mode of presuppositioned engagement. It might seem that if Merleau-Ponty is correct, then the beginning of Husserlian phenomenology becomes untenable. But should we read the passage as a directive or as a warning? If we are to take Merleau-Ponty as saying that radical reflection consists in a mode of dependent reflection, then does this wholly undermine the potential of the epoché? This answer is clearly not, given that complete abeyance from the natural world does not negate gradients of suspension being involved. Merleau-Ponty's argument for the dependence on an unreflective life is not, therefore, filtered out through the phenomenological epoché. Instead, he seems to be saying that unreflective life acts as a residuum that renders the distance between experience and reflection ambiguous, and not, as Husserl would have it, transparent.

The impossibility of a complete reduction confers a pervasive ambiguity upon phenomenology. As Merleau-Ponty points out elsewhere in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, "Ambiguity is of the essence of human existence, and everything we live or think has always several meanings" (2006, 196). But not only does the world present different meanings, those same meanings emerge as both transitional and reversible. Phenomenology's intimacy with the genetic patterns of emergence means that this transitional formation can be captured without undermining the ambiguity peculiar to the appearance of things *between* other things. Further, surrounding this internal ambiguity is a broader ambiguity caused by the tension between phenomenology's concurrent focus on a theoretical and abstracted environment. As I will go on to state, it is precisely this receptivity toward ambiguity that marks phenomenology's force.

The transition from Husserl to Heidegger and then to Merleau-Ponty is telling: Despite the differences between these thinkers, the movement reveals a

thematic unity. Together, both Heidegger's subtraction of the transcendental ego from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's alteration of the phenomenological epoché carry a commitment to second seeing, the primacy of the life-world, and an emphasis on description. What I propose to do now is to survey these salient features.

1. Second Seeing

As we have seen, Husserl's emphasis on the unity of the pregiven world, accessed via the epoché, leads to a renewed apprehension of the appearance of things. The result of this renewal is not a denial of the objective world, but an increased attention toward the world. Husserl's celebrated dictum, "to the things themselves!" is thus simultaneously a *return* to those things. The twofold motion between coming-into and inquiring-back-to is central to Husserl's methodology, establishing, as it does, a simultaneous motion, to put it in Heideggerian terms, from concealment to disclosure. What Husserl tells us is that things are *immanent*; that is, the world of appearances is always "below" pregiven experience. It is precisely the immanence-of-thought-as-concealed that Husserl (1970, 113–18) reproaches Kant for ignoring. Indeed, as far as this truth remains "hidden" from Kant, then seeing things renewed becomes impossible.

The hidden immanence of things can also be said, as indeed Merleau-Ponty does, of phenomenology itself, claiming that "phenomenology can be practised and identified as a manner or style of thinking, that it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as a philosophy" (2006, viii). Here, too, we discover an ambiguous relation from the pregiven world to the world bracketed. Phenomenology becomes formed *as* phenomenology through disjoining from its previously unaware mode, simultaneously incorporating that unformed modality within phenomenology itself. In this way, the second seeing of things does not dispense with the pregiven world, as though the epoché somehow superseded that world. Instead, it is through the pregiven world that the second seeing of that world becomes possible. As such, the relation between the epoché and the natural attitude is fundamentally dynamic, reminding us of Husserl's emphasis on the twofold motion between coming-into and inquiring-back-to.

The phenomenological renewal of things is not limited to the visual realm. Rather, the term "second seeing" refers to the totality of sensual experience, incorporating, above all, a haptic sensibility that establishes itself

in distinction to the ocularcentrism of Western philosophy (Casey 2007; Merleau-Ponty 2006; Pallasmaa 2007). Because of this openness to the smell, touch, taste, and sound of appearances, the detachment of the gaze is countered by the embodied spatiotemporality of the other senses, each of which works in tandem with vision. In the opening of *Being Given*, Jean-Luc Marion presents us with the following thought:

The primacy of one of the senses (vision, but also any other) is important only if perception finally determines appearance, therefore only if appearance itself in the final analysis falls under the jurisdiction of perception—in short, only if appearance refers at the outset to the apparition of the thing itself, where, as in trial by fire, the apparatus of appearance and even of perception is consumed in order to let arise what is at issue. (2002, 7)

Marion's remark on the primacy of the senses underscores the demand for phenomenology to remain open to the "thing itself at the heart of its . . . appearance" (2002, 8). By privileging appearances, the dominance of vision becomes less problematic, insofar as appearances become "the sole truly decisive matter" (8). Above all, then, phenomenology as a method is marked by its reliance on things taking course, giving full weight, not to the perception of things in advance, but, in Marion's words, to the work of "travel[ing] in tandem with the phenomenon, as if protecting it and clearing a path for it by eliminating roadblocks" (9).

2. The Life-World

I have mentioned the life-world in passing. But let us consider the importance of this idea for our inquiry as a whole. In order to assess the importance of the life-world, it is important to familiarize ourselves with the theoretical background, against which Husserl's position emerges. Early on in the *Crisis*, Husserl situates the life-world as "the forgotten meaning-fundament of natural science" (1970, 48). Husserl's point is that scientific discourse, personified through Galileo's pure geometry, has replaced the real world with a "world of idealities" (48). The result of this substitution is an abstraction from "the sources of truly immediate intuition," which are transmitted into the "art of surveying" without any explicit knowledge of its idealistic constitution (49). Galileo's failure, preempting Kant's, was to overlook the

“meaning-giving achievement” (49) from which geometry arose; namely, the intuited world. Husserl’s claim is that the origin of geometry occurs by way of inexact shapes, which are then replaced with their ideal counterparts. This failure to attend to origins leads to the “illusion” of geometry as being an intuitive inquiry.

All this seems pertinent in theoretical terms, but does this warning against geometry have any broader significance? Husserl’s rationale for this account of origins is to intervene in the “crisis,” which has divorced science from life, resulting in a project without an ethical basis (a crisis Heidegger [1977] will later pursue through his striking analysis of “the Nothing,” of which science excludes). In order to restore this crevice, Husserl is proposing that we perform the epoché, marking a return to the formation of the scientific method through “everyday induction” (1970, 50). In this way, the idealistic dimension of natural science will become profoundly related to the indeterminacy and vagueness encountered in daily life. Husserl’s injunction to return to the things themselves, therefore, is as much a return to the transcendental significance of the givenness of those things as it is to amend the supposedly objective rationalism, which lays claim to comprehending objects.

Husserl’s project in *The Crisis* is to open the life-world to an ontologically situated study, in which the static conception of abstract idealities is countered by the genetic dynamism of experience. The emphasis on genesis here is vital. Given Husserl’s emphasis on the transcendental and eidetic core of phenomenology, how can this be reconciled with the mutable domain of the life-world? Indeed, for Husserl this conflict, materialized in the anthropological relativity of different life-worlds, outwardly constitutes an “embarrassment” (1970, 139). Husserl’s response is to posit “a general structure” which redeems the life-world of its relativity and aligns it with the “the ‘same’ structures [of] the objective sciences” (139); namely, its spatiotemporal existence. Such a structure is said to occupy an “invariant” relationship with the life-world (173).

To understand how invariance can coexist with the indeterminacy of the life-world, we need to turn to §74 of *Ideas*, where we find Husserl discussing the notion of “morphological concepts” (1990, 166). Prior to Husserl’s criticism of Galileo, already in *Ideas* we find a critique of “the geometer” (166). As with the critique of the abstractedness of science, Husserl wants to address the dynamic relationality inherent in ideal structures. As such, the “morphological concepts” that the geometer veers away from become “conceptually or terminologically fixed” (166). Through giving a place and a time

to a concept, the emphasis on morphology presents a distinct challenge to the ideal essence, in which the seeing of things is lost. For Husserl, this is the mark of the ideal: its invisibility. In turn, the transition from the morphological to the ideal entails a qualitative loss of the thingness of the object. The discontent with the vagueness and relativity of appearances leads science to deliver appearances of their imperfections, evident in Husserl's claim that morphological essences only "approximate" their ideal counterpart, a point we will return to in the third chapter (166).

3. The Uncanny

A final but no less important reason for the centrality of the life-world is that it provides fertile ground for disturbing the familiarity of what has been taken-for-granted. The importance of this disturbance is such that strangeness and uncanniness become emblematic of second seeing, a point I briefly alluded to in my prefatory remark concerning photography and phenomenology. We will go on to explore this uncanny terrain in the following chapters, but for now let me mention how this relation between everydayness and uncanniness is thematically central to the book as a whole.

We have already sensed how the everyday world establishes itself in a pre-given way. What this means in experiential terms is that things are taken in a unified way. The world *just is*, and in it, things find their place. Without having to think about it, I am already involved in a relationship with the world, my body cojoining me with a world that is as much a part of me as I am a part of it. Here, in this human world, certain things that are valued and hold meaning stand before other things in an interchangeable relationship. Hungry, the smell of croissants assails my senses. Thirsty, the absence of water becomes a significant part of my being. In modes of melancholy and joy, the world alters, its tone and atmosphere shifting in a reciprocal exchange to my own being. But the place of things in the world is not fixed, and when experience is interrupted, then we become aware of their nothingness as a presence, a point both Sartre and Heidegger labor repeatedly. In such a moment, the world's texture undergoes change, its mood shifting. Above all else, the disruption or absence of things in the world draws our attention to the facticity of those things in the first place. This arc of facticity can range from the banality of being locked out of one's home to the trauma of losing a limb. In each case, the entrenched familiarity threatens to overthrow our expectations of how things ought to be. Such an estrangement from

the natural world is, I would argue, at the heart of phenomenology. One of this book's main claims is that phenomenology's overarching achievement is to draw our attention to the strangeness of things. Phenomenology does this through attending to the natural world in an unnatural manner. In other words, through bracketing our pregiven understanding of things, those same things persist in the world in a synthesis of both familiarity and unfamiliarity. In order to render this claim clear, let us consult a passage from Merleau-Ponty, which deserves to be cited at length. In it, he is discussing the destabilizing motion of Cézanne's painting:

We live in the midst of man-made objects, among tools, in houses, streets, cities, and most of the time we see them only through the human actions which put them to use. We become used to thinking that all of this exists necessarily and unshakably. Cézanne's painting suspends these habits of thought and reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself. This is why Cézanne's people are strange, as if viewed by a creature of another species. Nature itself is stripped of the attributes which make it ready for animistic communions: there is no wind in the landscape, no movement on the Lac d'Annecy; the frozen objects hesitate at the beginning of the world. It is an unfamiliar world in which one is uncomfortable and which forbids all human effusiveness. (1993, 66)

There are at least five central points in this incisive passage to consider: (1) Due to its familiarity, the everyday surrounding world assumes the impression of being unshakable. (2) Yet this impression is essentially a superimposition of value upon an "inhuman nature." (3) In the suspension of this superimposition, familiarity is effectively dislodged. (4) The result of this suspension is the strange emergence of a frozen world. (5) Finally, the reversal of the inhuman being superimposed upon the human induces the experience of discomfort.

The relation between aesthetic experience and ontological disruption is not incidental. As an aesthetic gesture in itself, the freezing of the life-world means that, what is taken-for-granted is thus shown in its transcendental givenness. This, indeed, constitutes a necessary estrangement from the world, insofar as it is precisely the everyday world in its familiar assurance that is most susceptible to sudden reversal. The "creature of another species," which stares down upon the world, does so having arisen from that world. By its very strangeness,

the otherness of Merleau-Ponty's creature is an inhabitant of the world prior to its being dismantled. In this way, the reversal of the creature's perspective comes to incarnate the dialectical conflict between human and inhuman nature, so far absorbed into pregiven experience. As this intimacy between the unthinking domain of habitual thought and the orientation of familiarity is suspended, the suspension does not entail a breakage. Instead, we discover a transparency in which the otherness of being-in-the-world is amplified.

Taken in a broad light, phenomenology's perceptive relation to "creature[s] of another species" can be seen as a defining characteristic of its positive contribution to our understanding of human experience. Indeed, inasmuch as phenomenology calls our attention to the fact that there are *things* in the first instance, then its fundamental movement is oriented toward the strange and the uncanny.

Here, my usage of "uncanny" takes as its point of departure the description that emerges from Freud's famous essay on the topic: namely, a "species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had been long familiar" (2003, 124). With this definition, a set of disjointed thoughts arrive. Above all, we are drawn to the fact that the uncanny is to be understood fundamentally as an effect, a felt experience that disturbs the body, resulting in a departure from the everyday. Yet no less a displacement from the everyday, the uncanny simultaneously places us in the midst of the familiar. Here a disturbance occurs: The uncanny refuses to concede to stillness, and instead presents us with something genuinely novel: *an augmented familiarity*, thus (un)familiar to the core (*unheimlich*). Close enough to be recognized as broadly familiar, the world of the uncanny nevertheless subtly manipulates that familiar screen, thus engineering a shiver down the spine of anyone caught in its rays. At the heart of this shiver is the sense that what has so far been thought of as inconspicuous in its being is, in fact, charged with a creeping strangeness.

This creeping gesture points to one of the uncanny's enduring characteristics: The term resists unequivocal definition, leading not only to experiential anxiety, but to conceptual doubt, too. Based in the *disjunction of opposed twins*—*familiar/unfamiliar, near/far, homely/unhomely*—the uncanny *circumvents laws of logic, yet at the same time frees itself from the need to be resolved of its paradoxical status. At its genesis, the uncanny takes up residence in the manifold space between experience and thought, perfectly at ease with its ability to invoke repulsion and allure in the subject experiencing the uncanny.*

The result of this disturbance: Things that are assumed present are now witnessed as absent, things hitherto thought to be homely emerge as un-homely, and entities we once thought dead materialize as being quite undead. In this way, the uncanny is a “species of the frightening” that lurks within the kernel of our epistemic desires, dismantling the very foundations of “truth” and leaving us with a porous divide between the real and the unreal. Without the certainty that familiarity is immune to its own defamiliarization, the uncanny resists domestication, forever seeping through our clutches as it prepares to bleed into each and every domain of familiar life.

Experientially, the fright constitutes a moment of apprehension rather than outright terror. The uncanny is strange rather than shocking, weird rather than annihilating. Often, we fail to recognize the power of the uncanny, its workings registered only belatedly and in parched fragments. At that time, we turn to ourselves in order to ask the following question: *What just happened to me?* A feeling of disempowerment occurs. The unity of self-identity becomes vulnerable. No longer do we feel at ease within ourselves. The uncanny leaves us in a state of disquiet, unnerved precisely because we lack the conceptual scheme to put the uncanny in its rightful “place.”

And no places are more conducive to the uncanny than the places that we cherish, that we hold dear to us, be it the places in which we dwell or the places of our own bodies. Both the human home and the human body breed and engender themselves toward a series of mysterious encounters, with which the following pages will begin to contend.

But how do things become effectively transformed from everyday objects placed in the world to entities shimmering with an otherworldly halo, transplanted to Merleau-Ponty’s “beginning of the world” (1993, 66)? Let us recall how Husserl has spoken of the truth of things being “hidden” (1970, 103–18). If things in the world are hidden, then they nevertheless remain present, spatially and temporally. Only now, once returned to phenomenologically, a modification occurs, such that how we previously apprehended an object becomes a space of distortion and incursion. Such is the power of this movement that for philosopher Graham Harman, nothing less than a philosophy of “weird realism” is at stake. Justifiably positioning Husserl within the same sphere as H. P. Lovecraft, Harman writes: “Just as Lovecraft turns prosaic New England towns into the battleground of extradimensional fiends, Husserl’s phenomenology converts simple chairs and mailboxes into elusive units that emit partial, contorted surfaces” (2008, 336).

Although the premise that Husserl “converts” objects is somewhat contentious—since it is surely the case that the elusive dimension of those objects is there all along—Harman touches on a fruitful relation between the prosaic and the otherworldly, which is implicit in the environment of the life-world itself, and in many ways finds special fruition within the writings of Lovecraft. As Harman goes on to argue, unlike the enigma of the Kantian noumenal realm—which fundamentally precludes human understanding—Lovecraft’s world is terrifying precisely because of the incursion of “finite malignant beings” in a finite world (2008, 342). The reversal from a rational infinity to an irrational finitude draws Lovecraft’s own creatures into the everyday world, conferring upon them a spatiotemporal existence lacking in Kant’s noumenal sphere. The result of this invasion, for Harman, is that “[h]umans cease to be masters in their own house” (342), while phenomenology itself becomes the breeding ground for horror.

Harman’s claim for phenomenology *as* horror hinges upon the inextricable bind between the reality of phenomenal objects and their aligning weirdness. As irreducible to a fixed set of properties, “phenomenal things” are thus constantly evading definition, and instead give way to the yawning abyss that separates the phenomenality of things from their totality. Prising apart this unity is the enigmatic structure of intentionality, which, although firmly placing us in the world, nevertheless stands upon a precarious interplay between absence and presence (Harman 2008, 362). Citing Lovecraft, Harman writes:

Intentional object are everywhere and nowhere; they “bubble and blaspheme mindlessly” at every point in the cosmos. Although vividly present as soon as we acknowledge them, intentional objects express their reality only by drawing neighbouring objects into their orbit, and these things in turn are only present by enslaving others. (362)

Because of this excess in phenomenality, things in the world remain both elusive and insufficient, calling into question all modes of apprehending those things in an intelligible way. Harman’s own contribution to this abyss is to redirect the emphasis toward the “existential threat” at the heart of intentionality. In conferring an affective quality upon intentionality, Harman thematizes the brute weirdness unmasked through the phenomenological method.

If there was any doubt as to the visceral relation between phenomenology and the strange and weird, then consider Lovecraft’s (1985) own richly

philosophical tale, “From Beyond,” which, taken with the seriousness it deserves, presents a compelling contribution to the phenomenological corpus. As with several of Lovecraft’s tales, the story is one of a maligned enlightenment. The protagonist and victim, Crawford Tillinghast, is a scientist attempting to gain access to “strange, inaccessible worlds” (90). But in doing so, Lovecraft sounds an ominous warning:

That Crawford Tillinghast should ever have studied science and philosophy was a mistake. These things should be left to the frigid and impersonal investigator for they offer two equally tragic alternatives to the man of feeling and action; despair if he fail in his quest, and terrors unutterable and unimaginable if he succeed. (89–90)

Unheeded, the warning does nothing to prevent Tillinghast from questioning the reality of his surroundings, chiding in particular the limitation of the five senses, all of which fail to capture reality in absolute terms. With a belief that untouched worlds exist at “our very elbows,” Tillinghast proceeds to describe the plans he has made for gaining access to those worlds: “Within twenty-four hours that machine near the table will generate waves acting on unrecognised sense-organs that exist in us as atrophied or rudimentary vestiges” (Lovecraft 1985, 90). Following this confession, Tillinghast then goes on to state that what has so far been deemed invisible—“that at which cats prick up their ears after midnight”—will become visible (90). And so in an attic laboratory the experiment dawns: Ultraviolet is cast, resulting in such a radical shift in sensory impressions that the pineal gland—celebrated for confounding Descartes—becomes an object of scientific scrutiny: “That gland is the great sense-organ of organs—I *have found out*. It is like sight in the end, and transmits visual pictures to the brain. If you are normal, that is the way you ought to get most of it . . . I mean get most of the evidence from *beyond*” (92, italics in original).

Thereafter, the narrator of the tale is overwhelmed with immemorial scenes of dead gods and black columns, eventually giving rise to “sightless, soundless space,” pockmarked by the distorted face of Crawford Tillinghast, while all around him the familiar world becomes impregnated with “indescribable shapes both alive and otherwise . . . mixed in disgusting disarray, and close to every known thing were whole worlds of alien, unknown entities” (93–95). Worse still, even within this reversal of homely and alien objects, an overlapping is said to occur, such that a “semi-fluid” form emerges, leaving no room

for borders and boundaries. Yet, despite this disorder, Tillinghast retains his enthusiasm for the project, stating notably: “Space belongs to me, do you hear?” (96). As is typical of Lovecraft, by the end, the events have resulted in death, madness, and a fundamental lack of narrative resolution.

Does the manner with which the world is uncovered in this short story bear anything more than a passing resemblance to the phenomenological method? That Lovecraft points us toward a hidden world already proximate to our own, and yet blocked by a fault in our sensory apparatus, orients us in the right direction. Along with this, a transition from the invisible to the visible takes place, such that “sight in the end” opens up. Lovecraft’s alternative description of the “sight in the end” is “augmented sight” (1985, 95). In both cases, what is being captured is the rediscovery of appearances, which I previously termed “second seeing.”

Consistent with Husserl, the “beyond” in Lovecraft’s story is far from a noumenal realm, transcendental to appearances. Although strange and inaccessible, the world remains “at our very elbows,” now revealed through the destruction of sensory inhibition and sedimentation. Only, in Lovecraft, what has been revealed in this second seeing is basically abject. Devoid of all form, what lies beyond comes toward the finite world with piercing clarity, distorting our accepted categories of experience. But what is singularly phenomenological about this movement is not the incursion of a malign force—which may or may not be a factor—but the modulation of the everyday world in accordance with “unnatural prying into the unthinkable” (Lovecraft 1985, 91). *Unnatural prying into the unthinkable*. With this, Lovecraft returns us to Merleau-Ponty’s vision of an “inhuman nature,” in which “nature itself is stripped of the attributes which make it ready for animistic communions” (Merleau-Ponty 1993, 66). We are witnessing something that remains “unthinkable” precisely because for the most part that thing is layered in the thick patina of human experience.

More broadly, therefore, what is being summoned in this prying is a parallel to Husserl’s natural attitude, taking the natural attitude to mean “straightforwardly living toward whatever objects are given” (Husserl 1970, 144). By putting this mode into question, “a completely different sort of waking life” becomes possible, consisting of a “transformation of the thematic consciousness of the world” (144). It is especially in the late Husserl, where this emphasis on transformation becomes a recurring theme, that the correspondence with Lovecraft strengthens. Just as Lovecraft accounts the creation of a new world, composed initially from a sound, the quality of

which is of “surpassing wildness,” before moving toward an intense coldness (recalling here Merleau-Ponty’s “frozen objects”), and then arriving finally at a series of “confused pictures,” in which “huge animate things” roam (Lovecraft 1985, 94). Just as Lovecraft accounts this, so Husserl (1970, 145) places us in a world of “never thematically investigated types,” all of which serve to constitute the natural attitude and yet at the same time remain wholly obscured to that pregiven experience.

The synthesis between the natural and the unnatural is at the core of both Lovecraft’s and phenomenology’s relation to the strange and weird. Above all, what is “weird” is less a matter of content, and more the position we as human subjects adopt in relation to that content, leading Husserl to conclude thus: “Clearly, only through a *total change* of the natural attitude, such that we no longer live, as heretofore, as human beings within natural existence, constantly effecting the validity of the pregiven world; rather, we must constantly deny ourselves this” (148, italics in original).

Having ensnared a “strange, inaccessible world,” the remainder of Lovecraft’s work retains an additional phenomenological dimension through the author’s sober and clinical descriptions of decidedly otherworldly entities. The conflation of the poetic and scientific, a union prized in Bachelard’s reveries, establishes a tension between that which refuses to give itself over to human experience and the singularly human response in the face of that unnameable thing. In his penetrating book on Lovecraft, Michel Houellebecq formulates the following claim: “*The more monstrous and inconceivable the events and entities described, the more precise and clinical the description. A scalpel is needed to dissect the unnameable*” (2008, 79; italics in original). Houellebecq’s identification of the unnameable with the clinical creates a mood of detachment, no longer bound by an agitated rhetoric. Mirroring this fixed gaze toward alien phenomenon, Lovecraft’s unnerving attention on the details of those strange things only heightens their distance from our everyday conception of things.

In a corresponding way, Lovecraft’s methodology gestures toward Husserl’s emphasis on returning to the strangeness of things through descriptive precision, a motif that would later reach its literary summit in Sartre’s (1969, 126) celebrated account of the root of a chestnut tree. In Husserl, this literary expression gains its origin in the philosopher’s commitment to unraveling the facticity of things in their preconceptual wilderness. Yet despite this commitment, seldom, as Harman (2008, 354) correctly points out, do we find an extensive library of descriptions within Husserl’s work. All that arises is the

allusion to these descriptions via Husserl's construction of the phenomenological reduction. Accordingly, in *The Crisis*, Husserl (1970, 120) charts the structural relation between the "old familiar field of life" and the life-world in terms of the former haunting the latter. "Nowhere else," so he writes, "is it so frequent that the explorer is met by logical ghosts emerging out of the dark, formed in the old familiar and effective conceptual patterns, as paradoxical antinomies, logical absurdities" (120). Thus, while the ingredients are established in Husserl, it falls to later phenomenologists—especially Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Bachelard—to apply those ingredients to everyday phenomenon: a connection that returns us, finally, to Merleau-Ponty's evocation of a "creature of another species" (1993, 66).

Why have I gone to this length to place strangeness and uncanniness at the heart of phenomenology? More than an arbitrary discursion, what is at stake in this relation between the uncanny and phenomenology is the essence of memory itself. Even a glance at its overall structure reveals a set of striking phenomenon. After all, what can be fused with a greater intensity of strangeness than the experience of remembering, which by dint of its structure, invites a no-longer-existing world, fundamentally absent in its structure and discolored in its content, into the experience of the still-unfolding present? What, furthermore, can be stranger than the sudden re-experiencing of a place, so far consigned to darkness, which reappears in the present without so much as a moment's warning, less even a memento to stimulate such a return, in the process splitting identity into several often conflicting fractions?

Precisely because it comes to us without warning, we can thus speak of memory in terms of its being as much bound with subjectivity as it is the materiality of objects in the world. In a word, *the places in which we live, live in us*. More precisely, those places live in our bodies, instilling an eerie sense of our own embodied selves as being the sites of a spatial history that is visible and invisible, present and absent.

This doubling of experience—a theme that shall be returned to pervasively—points back to Freud's idea of the uncanny as involving an essential ambivalence. After all, for Freud (2003, 132), the conjunction of "*heimlich*" and "*unheimlich*" does not result in a Hegelian synthesis, but instead profits from a free-floating oscillation. Quoting Gutzkow's line "We call that *unheimlich*; you call it *heimlich*," Freud writes: "This reminds us that this word '*heimlich*' is not unambiguous but belongs to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other—the one relating

to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and kept hidden” (132).

The uncanny’s dual nature of being hidden and familiar concurrently points to the singularly peculiar quality of the memory of place in particular. Three distinct features, all of which will be developed in turn, can be provisionally spelled out in this respect.

First, with its origins in the body, the materialization of memory can often assume an automatic appearance, thus being “hidden behind the familiar image of a living person” (135). Here, “automatic” refers to instances of recall, in which the body’s recollection of experience explicitly manifests itself to the subject as a “thing” in the world, rather than an interwoven aspect of that subject’s history. Faced, as we will be in later chapters, with a set of memories that submit to their own occult teleology—“occult” in the sense of hidden—each marking their presence through a set of symptomatic manifestations, the body as doing the work of memory takes on the form of an automaton. In such cases, the body begins to articulate things from the past that we ourselves as self-conscious subjects are privy to only in passing. But this symptomatic appearance of the past is not limited to instances of traumatic memory (although, to be sure, nowhere is the automated teleology of body memory clearer than in traumatic memory). Rather, the strange experience of the body’s temporal workings spilling over into self-consciousness can be sensed even at the most prosaic level.

A chance encounter with an unfamiliar place can invoke a manifold response in the lived-body, the origin of which is not solely traceable to the objective features of the place, such as light, heat, and atmosphere. The place arouses something in the body, an intermingling of different sensations. Unaware of the precise orientation of the body’s stirrings, the visitor to the place is left with only a vague sense of uncertainty if not anxiety. In the conjunction of body and place, something of the past is invoked, but it is not quite clear what and whose past is at stake. At such a point, the only conclusion we can make is that the body has sensed an invisible agency, of which cognition has yet to conceptualize.

Central to this anxiety is the uncertainty masking the body’s work. Ernst Jentsch, of whom Freud’s paper on the uncanny is indebted, writes thus: “The unpleasant impression is well known that readily arises in many people when they visit collections of wax figures, panopticons, and panoramas. In semi-darkness it is often especially difficult to distinguish a life-size wax or similar figure from a human person” (1996, 12). The emphasis here on

“semi-darkness” parallels the movement of uncertainty, as our bodies creak and groan in their expression of a past not yet fully lived. The chimerical effect of this internal creaking is the experience of a life, neither present nor absent, haunting the caverns of inner experience.

Throughout this experience, the body’s work is involuntary and largely noncognitive. Notably, throughout Freud’s text, we read of both “unintentional returns” and “involuntary repetitions.” In both cases, an agency other than our strict self-awareness is being guided by a motive concealed to the visible eye. This undercurrent of a hidden agency sets in place a menacing tone to the embodied uncanny, such that we can never be sure that the body’s motivations align with “our” own. Does the body lead us astray in its desire for a unity that has since been ravished through time? Such a question will be of central concern to us. What will emerge in this body-centered study of memory is a challenge to the centrality of human experience, where that experience has so far been defined in terms of rationality and cognition. By putting in place (literally) a distinctly noncognitive mode of memory, the inanimate world of materiality will be shown as being constituted by a dormant force of alien influences, some of which are retained in the world while others situate themselves in the human body.

Second, in light of the automated emergence of body memory, the shift from the *heimlich* to the *unheimlich* can be understood as a movement of becoming conscious of the body as thing having its own independent history and experiences. This complex claim will be unpacked in chapter 3. Note at the outset, however, that alongside the uncanny quality of the body as an automaton, the relationship we ourselves have to our bodies can become one of radical estrangement. If the body operates with its own teleology, then how should “we,” the self-conscious subject, be situated vis-à-vis the body’s own intentionality? The question hints at a tension between different ideas of identity and otherness. Unveiled is the prospect of coming into conflict with the body as being distinctly “other” to the “I.” Indeed, overarching the broad arc of the uncanny is the uncertainty of whether or not “I” am truly identifiable with my body itself.

The third mark in this tripartite relation culminates in the archetypal experience of the uncanny: returning to a place, so far held as a familiar memory. At the heart of this tension is the conflict between the body’s lived retention of a place and the prepersonal, anonymous existence of that place, which, as I will argue, undercuts our human attachment to things in this world. As experience shows us repeatedly, when returning to a place from

our past, the effect is invariably alienating rather than reassuring. The reason for this *verfremdungseffekt* is complex and resistant to conclusive definitions, not least because the formations of our memories of place largely comprise opaque forces working behind the scenes. As such, encountering a place from our past in the material world establishes itself in a relationship of difference and otherness to that of our memories.

Here, Freud is instructive. Discussing the “neurotic [man]’s” relationship to the female genitals, Freud offers us a rich illustration:

A jocular saying has it that “love is a longing for home,” and if someone dreams of a certain place or a certain landscape and, while dreaming, thinks to himself, “I know this place, I’ve been here before,” this place can be interpreted as representing his mother’s genitals or her womb. Here too, then, the uncanny (the “unhomely”) is what was once familiar (“homely,” “homey”). The negative prefix *un-* is the indicator of repression. (2003, 151)

Placing the psychosexual dynamic of Freud’s study in the background, this description of the relationship between memory, place, and desire remains edifying in several respects. Reminding us that the phrase “I have seen this place before” is in fact far from a simple declaration of empirical evidence, but rather a covert doubling of memory and imagination, Freud thus locates the familiarity of returning to a place in the midst of a repressed network of unregistered desires. Even without attaching ourselves to the sexual orientation of the interpretation, Freud’s passage brings to the light that our memories of place are guided more broadly by an overarching homesickness, which ties together the most disparate strands of experience into a fragmented whole. It is this tension of a fragmented whole that touches upon the prefix “*un-*,” which Freud aligns with repression. A whole that is fragmented is held together only through inserting matter into the spaces that have been reduced to nothingness. In such a case, memory is not alone sufficient to confer unity upon the subject or to preserve the appearance of “home.” As such, constant work modifying memory is required in order to fend off the unhomely shadow that lurks within the longing for home.

As though to prove the existence of this subterranean homesickness at the heart of memory, when returning to a place after a prolonged absence, especially that of the childhood home, the result seldom coincides with our expectations. Instead, a dreamscape tends to transpire comprising a deformed

arrangement of familiar objects. Thus, things that we cherished as assuming a particular appearance—warm, imposing, intricate—tend to materialize as malformed, unsettled, overrun, and, in a word: *alien*. The world to which we had previously accustomed ourselves through memories and dreams now adopts a sinister presence, forever sliding in and out of our temporal frame. And yet, there forever remains a tension forcing the house back on its own otherness. This inevitable “and yet,” thus attests to the ambiguity and allure interwoven into the uncanny house. On the one hand, a place stands before us, attesting to a material reality, which, in some broad sense, remains the same as it ever was. On the other hand, this something same is also an inverse phenomenon, now sufficiently discontinuous to exclude us from its realm. With expectations of spatial and temporal renewal, we are instead met with indifference, an inanimate and anonymous murmuring in the banality of daylight. Something remains buried beneath the house, an eerie genius loci protruding through the brick and mortar masking the house’s hidden spirit. Only in the conflation between memory and experience is this strange place peculiar to the uncanny rendered explicit.

In this book, Freud’s emphasis on wombs and genitals will be replaced with the prepersonal anonymity and muffled silence that haunt place, of which the body is the first to establish contact. As I shall argue from several different angles, the notion that human “value” somehow ought to be antecedent to our experience of the world is not only antiphenomenological in tone, but emblematic of a failure to speak on behalf of the specificity of things themselves. Thus, to what end a place displeases our cultural and aesthetic sensibilities is one thing among many, and not the focus of this book. Cultivating a pejorative stance toward, say, the suburban landscape, or otherwise feeling a level of affection toward a little “corner” of the world, immerses us in a community of shared values, which is subject to contestation. Such second-order judgments about how we “favor” places contribute little to the primacy of the body, which, in its appeal to an alien world, amasses a pool of data in advance of cognition.

As a rule, therefore, we would do better to counter this tendency toward “humanizing” things for the sake of preserving familiarity, and instead retain a heedfulness to the prereflective unfolding of things in their raw and strange phenomenality. In what follows, this arc of tension that I signaled above will be accompanied by an arc of strangeness and increasing anonymity. The journey from childhood home to site of trauma will be met with escalating opposition from our predisposed tendency to attach ourselves to the places

that continue to reinforce our sense of self. While our treatment of monuments and trains will be relatively unaffected by the phantoms spooking place, as everyday memory is replaced by transitional and traumatic memory, a new light will creep in, increasingly at odds with our pregiven experience of the environment. We will discover that the appearance of certain places articulates the motion of a “creature of another species” fusing with the present. Along the way, the necessity of prising our cultural values apart will be determined by the intelligibility of the body, in both its humanity its and inhumanity. In turn, this conflict between the order of human experience and the (dis)order of anonymous inhumanity residing beneath that appearance will play a central role.

4. Descriptiveness

How does phenomenology begin to account for the strange and uncanny things that the life-world comprises? As we have seen, the phenomenological epoché urges that judgments regarding the causality, reality, or truth-value of things in the world be bracketed. To encourage this act, first-person descriptions of appearances and experiences occupy a pivotal position within the phenomenological framework, as Husserl writes: “[Phenomenology] aims at being a *descriptive* theory of the essence of pure transcendental experiences from the phenomenological standpoint” (1967b, 209; italics in original). Thus, what is being described is concerned neither with reality nor with the causality of an object. Description is central to the phenomenological method, since description brings together the presuppositionless starting point with the return to the things themselves. To return to a thing, we must be able to set our assumptions aside. Setting aside our assumptions means resisting making inferences in advance. For this reason, the notion of pure description is also a notion of encountering things in their given immediacy, thus elevating the role of descriptive examples to an important status. Treated with rigor, descriptive examples come to be seen as manifold appearances that disturb our pregiven apprehension of things.

One important misunderstanding of phenomenology that arises from the centrality of descriptiveness suggests that it entails an introspective description of the contents of consciousness. Whereas subjective experience indeed plays an essential role in the phenomenological method, what is being described is not a passive meditation on the affectivity of an object for its own sake, but rather how the objective world is known *through* experience. The

word *through* is of central importance. In distinction to the Cartesian split between subject and object, phenomenology understands knowledge as being constituted by subjective experience. Objectivity thus stands in a peculiar relation to subjectivity, whereby subjective experience becomes the “clearing” (to use a Heideggerian term) for the disclosure of appearances. As such, the synthesis between being and world denotes an outward-looking mode of descriptiveness, rather than an invocation of subjective introspection.

So, while illustrations and examples are frequently employed in this book, their deployment is meant in more than anecdotal terms. True, we can follow Nietzsche in claiming that all philosophy is biography, and we would be no worse for doing so. Indeed, the examples and descriptions included in this book are not incidental. To be sure, their development is a result of a crystallization of fixations and possessions. But this covert expression of one’s own life history is not an end in itself. Rather, by beginning with the inspection of one’s own bodily and mental contents, an invitation is sent out to the reader to think alongside these illustrations and thoughts. This invitation means that the examples are not closed portals that claim to speak in absolute terms about memory and place. Instead, the gesture is meant as a spark of enthusiasm for the reader to reflect upon his or her own experiences.

In this way, I wholeheartedly follow the spirit (if not the “felicitous” content) of Bachelard’s (1994) methodological “oneirism.” The method can be characterized in positive terms as privileging a creative mode of reverie. For Bachelard, oneirism is the result of memory and imagination forming a hybrid. The power of this fusion is that it allows the “oneiric house”—the archetypal figure of dwelling—to superimpose itself on the spatiality of the present. In this book, archetypes fall by the wayside. But what remains in place is a commitment to the idea of “poetic image” as a guide. By “poetic image,” Bachelard (1994, xvi) has in mind an autonomous and unified object, spontaneous in its appearance and causing a disturbance in a broader temporal narrative—in a word, “the flare-up of being in the imagination” (xviii).

Refusing to take the poetic image as a second-order “aesthetic” judgment, I thus agree with Bachelard that attending to things requires nothing less than an “excess of the imagination” (1994, 112). The memories that inhabit themselves in both the materiality of our bodies and in the places of the world require more than their objective and empirical standing to be brought to life. In the absence of an excess in imagination, the assimilation of the world falls to a formal mode of gathering data. “In order to surpass,” so Bachelard

writes, “one must first enlarge” (112). This is a telling and significant remark. Against naturalistic causality, against sociopolitical constructivism, and against psychoanalytic reduction, the poetic image establishes a dynamic of “reverberation.” In Bachelard’s (xvi) terms, “reverberation” becomes the figure of transportation, guiding disparate images from one place to another. The advantage of this method is that it displaces a linear account of causality connecting one object to another. Replacing linearity, objects appear in different parts of a given world, all contributing to the “sonority of being” (xvi) through arriving in between different states. But in between what?

In this work, we shall follow the passage of memory as it reverberates between memory and imagination, materiality and flesh, and spectrality and trauma, each dyad signaling a division in the book. In all three of these instances, causal agency between each pair is undermined by a separate force reverberating in between. This emphasis on being *between* different places employs the motif of reverberation as a channeling device. Thus, examining what has been ensnared by the affective hold of the poetic image means being surprised by what comes to light, and in so doing, also discovering a strange undercurrent to the appearance of things.

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

The aim of this introduction has been to outline a broad methodological and thematic approach to the book. Given this aim, how is this objective possible without determining the contents in advance? How, that is, can the phenomenological method proceed without tying itself down at the outset? Here, the problem of writing becomes a problem of contending with what is taken-for-granted in experience; namely, what is intuitively given to consciousness in its sensuous totality. The question of the sensitivity of language—amounting to nothing less than style of writing—is of particular concern. Appearances alter; some things become more present than other things. In the attempt to let things speak for themselves, we will have to stand guard against the temptation to place language where appearances belong. To bring appearances and speech together means tending to the way writing sculpts thinking. Every language is deliberate, and this deliberation needs careful attention where phenomenology is concerned.

Faced with these difficulties, a passage from Heidegger offers us some guidance: “Every questioning is a seeking. Every seeking takes its direction

beforehand from what is sought. Questioning is a knowing search for beings in their thatness and whatness” (1996, 3). Heidegger’s correlation between questioning and seeking returns us to the being who takes up the question. Inquiry is also an instant of intentionality, whereby empty intentions—points of absence—become embodied as the object becomes perceived. With this intentional relation, there is a teleology to what is being sought, marked, above all, by the transition from empty to filled intentions. To speak here of emptiness does not mean lack or simple absence. Instead, an empty intention is already anticipated as a filled and present intention.

Let us take an immediate example: writing this introduction. In writing this introduction, I stand in relation to an imagined future, in which empty intentions become fulfilled as the horizon of writing unfolds. Similarly, the territory already covered in the introduction designates a partial recession of presence: partial because what has been covered is already taken up in the present. The emergence of the empty and filled intentions brings us back to phenomenology’s sensitivity toward interstitial and morphological states. As intentions become filled, so other intentions subside. At the same time, we must also admit that not all phenomenology proceeds from one point and ends at another without retrospection along the way. To again take the example of writing this introduction, the fact that its formation consists of a process of writing, editing, rewriting, and further editing undermines the idea that phenomenology is an unmediated description of things. Rather, ideas are augmented, structures altered. All of this occurs retroactively, and in time. Intervals of years separate some sections of the introduction from other parts and some of those sections did not form sequentially. This retroaction appears to dissent from the supposed ideal of a “pure” phenomenology, inasmuch as it embodies a “touching-up” of content.

But can the phenomenological method ever really free itself from presuppositions? It is tempting to doubt such aspirations. But those doubts do not stand in the way of striving toward a place in which objects can speak for themselves. Merleau-Ponty offers some hope: “Since . . . we are in the world, since indeed our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux on the which we are trying to seize . . . there is no thought which embraces all our thought” (2006, xv). This movement of perpetual beginnings is one of phenomenology’s great strengths. By leaving the world exposed to uncertainty, dynamism is maintained and our own place in that tension is amplified.

We can think, too, of Merleau-Ponty’s earlier claim that “the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete

reduction” (2006, xv). Thinking through this claim in light of the act of writing phenomenology, the passage can be seen as an invitation toward a horizon that is forever proving elusive. Precisely because the world proves “strange and paradoxical” is its allure secured (xv). The world to which phenomenology attends is neither static nor indifferent to the viewer. Rather, when I begin to survey the world around me, when I reflect upon how my body stretches out into the world, a dialectic forms between myself as a conductor of phenomenology and myself as a living human, with a history that trails through my body. In this respect, *I follow myself*. My past and my un-lived future converge in the present, outweighing the notion of the phenomenologist as being an impersonal bystander in the world.

The structure of intentionality is thus a direct result of attending to the primacy of things. In a very real sense, the appearance of a thing—a Martian fossil, a haunted forest, a burning house—guides us in terms of what is both absent and present. We see less, but this seeing-less does not mean we are obscured by what is missing. Instead, things are contained by a potentiality, the result of which means that intentionality carries onward through a demarcated territory of absence. In this context, Heidegger’s “knowing search” is a search with a direction, motivated by what was already there, but now brought to the fore. To breathe a “strange and paradoxical” life into our understanding of things is, finally, to see them anew, restored from their suspended disappearance. Let us make a first foray into those strange appearances.