

Phenomenological Anthropology Philosophical Concepts for Ethnographic Use

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Abstract: As a philosophical discipline, phenomenology is interested in *how* and *as what* things appear to a subject from the first-person perspective. Phenomenological analyses can be applied to objects, others, the self, feelings and much more. Yet, how do they appear? Within experience! While this is also accepted in anthropology, I show how we can benefit from some of the theoretical concepts that phenomenology has developed, including *intentionality*, *being-in-the-world*, *embodiment*, *empathy*, *responsivity* and *atmosphere*, to explore specific experiences more thoroughly. To demonstrate this, I introduce the foundations of these concepts: of-ness (Husserl), in-ness (Heidegger), embodied-ness (Merleau-Ponty), with-ness (Stein), responsive-ness (Waldenfels) and between-ness phenomenology (Schmitz). Then I discuss how these ideas have been mobilized in anthropology before applying them to a single ethnographic scene about the weather in Namibia. This allows a phenomenological anthropology to be developed positing that *as what* a thing appears for the subject depends on *how* it appears. This *how* encompasses transcendental structures of experience and the social contexts that shape what people live through, including the normative views they face when acting in the public sphere. By tracing entanglements between first-person perspectives and social, material and normative structures, phenomenological anthropology can make visible what otherwise remains obscured. In concluding, I carve out the unique critical potential that emerges from such an analysis and show the potential it offers for imagining a possible otherwise, two salient components of my version of a future phenomenological anthropology.

[phenomenological anthropology, experience, mind-word relationship, critical theory]

I. Introduction

As a philosophical discipline, phenomenology is first and foremost interested in the relationship between the subject and the world. It explores the various modes in which subjects relate to objects as well as *how* and *as what* such objects appear from a first-person perspective. In analysing these processes, phenomenology is *not* interested in the particular experiences I, Michael, have while writing this text, but in the *structures of experience* that make my writing and my experience of it possible. These structures include, among other things, that I am an *embodied* agent and can relate to the world only through my body. It furthermore includes the *atmosphere* in which I write, which shapes how I feel when writing and possibly how I proceed. But why should we, as anthropologists, become aware of this? Consider the following example.

Before writing this paragraph, I poured water over my tea leaves. While filling the kettle with tap water, I thought about the difference it would make if this was bottled water. Would it be the same to me? Then, sipping my tea, I remembered that in the Catholic Church the water was holy for the priest and frightening to the baptized child, who cried at being made to feel wet. And how, when helping my nephew with a chemistry experiment, we learned that salt dissolves in water by getting ‘in between’ the water molecules.

But how and in what circumstances can water become a substance to quench thirst, be holy, frighten with wetness, or be a bunch of molecules for me? Through my experiences. To describe the processes that underlie my experience, phenomenologists have developed a wealth of concepts ranging from Edmund Husserl’s *intentional* perception of water to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *embodied* experience of water and to the *atmosphere* constituted in the network of relationships surrounding water of Hermann Schmitz. They shed light on specific aspects of how things appear *as something*, as water in this case. In brief, the ‘as’ is what phenomenology is about.

When analysing this as-structure, phenomenologists typically claim that there is no dichotomy between sensorial perception and categorical thought, but that perceptual experience itself is already cognitive (in that the knowledge we have about, say, water influences the ways we ‘see’ it). On the other hand, categories can be formed by abstraction from experience. For example, water is only experienced as ‘holy’ if one has acquired a certain knowledge about it in contexts of religious teaching and learning. The other way around, many abstract concepts can only be properly ‘understood’ if one has an appropriate experience of them. For example, the concept of hunger is grasped in a different – and more existential – way if one has not eaten in a while and has suffered a period of great hunger. In other words, the ‘as’ of experience is shaped by factors ranging from elementary bodily states to higher-order cognitive information (Gallagher and Zahavi 2021:8).

My *first aim* with this text is to introduce the *concepts* phenomenologists have developed to explore this as-structure and thus the relationship between the subject and the world. I do this to show how these concepts can become useful for anthropologists when interpreting *specific ethnographic situations*. One might now object that many of these concepts, including *epoché*, *Einfühlung* and *being-in-the-world*, match ideas developed or already adopted by anthropologists, such as *reflexivity*, *empathy* and *emplacement*. In my view, however, anthropology can still profit from engaging with the originals. This allows us to develop further a language with which to describe, theorize and compare experience. Furthermore, re-reading the originals also leads us to discover new aspects and concepts that have not been recognized in the anthropological literature. The *second aim* of this text is to address the fact that experiences leave traces in our bodies and in our consciousness. Tracing these inscriptions and making them visible become the basis for a *critical phenomenological anthropology*.

But this use of phenomenological concepts in anthropology is not a one-way street. The use of these concepts in a wide range of ethnographic situations can lead to the

kind of wondering that is an important driver of scientific debates. This is because these concepts will come back differently from their encounter with anthropology and 'the field' (Bubandt and Wentzer 2022). Through this, ethnography becomes a means to destabilize, broaden and diversify phenomenological concepts and thus to develop them further. Ideally, this collaboration could be mutually illuminating for both disciplines (Bubandt and Wentzer 2022; Mattingly 2019; Pedersen 2020; Schnegg and Breyer 2022).

Let us start with some history to get a feel for where this journey might lead.

Phenomenology Entering Anthropology

Phenomenology developed in Germany at the turn of the 20th century through the works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Edith Stein, Max Scheler and others.¹ It emerged when, as Edmund Husserl observed, the sciences had successfully established the understanding that there was an objectified 'reality' that only they could describe adequately. In this world of science, heat, for example, was now defined as energy crossing the boundary of a thermodynamic system. Defining heat in this way, scientists disconnected the phenomenon from heat sensations and anything a subject could feel: that is, they disconnected the phenomenon from the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld), as Husserl says (Fuchs 2018: xiv; Husserl 1976c). Because scientists were successful in controlling phenomena like heat in this way, they became increasingly convinced that they could describe the world objectively, while all others only had 'feelings' and 'beliefs'.

Husserl, who is credited with beginning the phenomenological train of thought, replied that a scientist, like anyone else, has a particular attitude towards a phenomenon in the moment of studying it (Husserl 1976c). In making this claim, he was not opposing science (he held a Ph.D. in mathematics) but rather arguing that it operates within the same limits that circumscribe all other knowing. According to Husserl, natural scientists, for example, assume that the world exists 'outside' and 'independently' of us, which is a common 'belief' of the modern era that is not challenged but adopted. In his view, the sciences are also biased and should acknowledge this to improve through becoming more self-reflective.

The critical and self-reflective thinking these writings stimulated entered anthropology through Franz Boas.² Boas was influenced by the German historic tradition and claimed that there was a stark difference between what he coined the 'cosmographer' (like himself, referencing Humboldt's idea of the 'cosmos') and 'physicists/naturalists/scientists' (Boas 1887). In his view, a 'cosmographer' is motivated by 'personal feelings'

1 Comparable thinking also developed in American pragmatism.

2 I focus on the US-American tradition because the phenomenological anthropology I discuss largely emerged there. I am very much indebted to Byron Good for sharing his knowledge with me and for correcting some of my initial readings of this history. Developments in France, Britain and Germany were different. A more complete, albeit somewhat divergent analysis is provided by Ingold (Ingold 2000:157).

and is subjectively ‘affected’ by the world, wanting to discover the ‘truth of every phenomenon’. This distinguishes her from the naturalists who subordinate phenomena to laws (ibid.:139). Referencing Goethe and Humboldt, in searching for ‘totality in the individuality’ (ibid.:140) Boas roots anthropology in the study of the particular, while deeply acknowledging the subjective relationship between the knower and the known. This thinking shaped the generations of American anthropologists that followed, including Hallowell, Sapir, Whorf, Mead and Benedict.

In the sixties, Clifford Geertz furthered this line of thinking by introducing a more explicit focus on experience (Throop 2003). Strongly opposing Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism and the emerging cognitivism – the ‘cerebral savage’, as he tellingly called it (Geertz 1967) – Geertz was among the first to use the term ‘phenomenology’ when calling for a ‘scientific phenomenology of culture’ that allows ‘describing and analysing the meaningful structure of experience (here, the experience of persons) as it is apprehended by representative members of a particular society at a particular point in time’ (Geertz 1973:364).³ This included exploring how distinct perspectives (i.e., religious, scientific, etc.) frame experience. With this, Geertz continued a salient interest of American anthropology, which was to show how language and categories shape the experiences of time, space, etc. Geertz also drew methodologically on phenomenology by analysing culture as public symbols borrowed from the hermeneutical tradition in phenomenology, especially that attributed to Ricoeur (Breyer 2013; Geertz 1974).

Next to Geertz, Victor Turner made significant use of this early continental philosophy. Although he is rarely considered a phenomenologist, his theory of experience, and especially his distinction between *Erleben* and *Erlebnis*, built on Wilhelm Dilthey (Bräunlein 2012; Turner and Bruner 1986). Whereas Geertz, in the tradition of Boasian cultural anthropology, had argued that ‘perspectives’ (religious, scientific, etc.) shape what we can experience, Turner turned the arrow around. In his view, the categories these perspectives entail are themselves the result of reflections (*Erlebnis*) of what we have lived through (*erlebt*) unconsciously in the first place (Schneegg 2022; Throop 2003; Turner and Bruner 1986).

The motivation for exploring subjective experiences grew with the ‘crisis of representation’, which further fuelled distrust in both objectivism and culture as collective representations. The study of subjective experience seemed a promising way to overcome both problems (Katz and Csordas 2003:277).

However, while studying first-person experiences is necessary for doing phenomenological anthropology, the potential of this approach goes further. Phenomenology offers a wealth of concepts that have not been fully explored. The potential for anthropology was first realized by a group of scholars at Harvard under the mentorship of

³ Other prominent early engagements include Hallowell’s work on the self. Hallowell talks about his study as a phenomenological analysis of self-awareness, albeit ‘for want of a better term but without implying too many theoretical implications’ (Hallowell 1955:79). Other early engagements include the works of Bidney (1973) and Kultgen (1975).

Arthur Kleinman and Byron Good and by Michael D. Jackson (then at the University of Indiana, Bloomington). The Harvard group had detailed knowledge of continental philosophy, partly through working with Geertz. Their pioneering works on illness and disease (Kleinman 1988; Kleinman and Kleinman 1991) and on medical rationality and experience (Good 1994) apply phenomenological thinking effectively to theorize the relationship between the subjective experience of being ill and the objectified description of having a disease. While these authors had been laying the foundations since the 1990s, the full potential of putting phenomenological concepts to ethnographic use is only now being realized by pioneering anthropologists like Csordas, Desjarlais, Ingold, Jackson, Mattingly, Throop and Zigon.

Many anthropologists apply phenomenological thinking to understanding how our interlocutors experience the world in which they dwell. However, with the crisis of representation, and partly even before that (as my reference to Boas and the affected ‘cosmographer’ indicate), it became more and more evident that there was another relationship to be explored phenomenologically (Bidney 1973).⁴ This was to reflect on how we as anthropologists experience ‘the field’ we write about. In his seminal works, Jackson began to demonstrate how the notion of ‘lived experience’ can become a concept with which to theorize the relationship between how we know others and how they know themselves and us (Jackson 1989, 1996). While most of my text is explicitly about the former relationship, anthropology cannot escape the latter; phenomenology provides a framework for analysing both experiences under one umbrella. That is, we do not have to make different assumptions about how we as anthropologists and our interlocutors experience. In my view, this is a significant advantage for theorizing the relationship between both the knowers and the known.

To learn about phenomenological anthropology, several texts exist. The first and canonical overview was written by Desjarlais and Throop, who identify four phenomenological schools (Desjarlais and Throop 2011). Pedersen discusses this classification, as well as showing how the ontological turn provides an extension of it (Pedersen 2020). Leistle (2022a) places special emphasis on the philosophical foundations (Leistle 2022a). Similarly, Zigon and Throop focus on the intersection between philosophy and anthropology and the most recent developments (Zigon and Throop 2021). Finally, Hahn offers a German introduction, showing how phenomenology has become a source of innovative developments in anthropology (Hahn 2023:353). Others have reviewed specific research fields, including morality, embodiment, the self, the relationship between phenomenology and psychoanalysis, and science (Brandel and Motta

⁴ Heidegger made this point long ago, when he argued that it is unlikely that the ‘psychological’ ‘sociological’ or ‘lay’ understanding of humans that anthropologists adopt is a suitable basis for describing people outside the Western context. Applying such a Eurocentric model will not bring scientific advancement (*Fortschritt*, literally, a step forward) but rather repetition (*Wiederholung*)! Coincidentally, Heidegger’s development of this argument was inspired by a discussion with Cassirer in 1923, a hundred years ago in Hamburg (Heidegger 2006:51).

2021; Cargonja 2013; Csordas 1994, 2012; Good 2012; Jackson 1996; Jackson and Piette 2015; Mattingly et al. 2018; Ram and Houston 2015).

What do I still have to add? Phenomenology is a theory of experience. To explore its use for anthropology, I introduce its concepts in more detail than existing texts. But these concepts are not sufficient for anthropology, as I will argue. *What* things appear *as* in a situation is a combination of *how* they appear and the social context. Tracing these entanglements between structures of experience (the *how* question) and the context allows us to make visible processes that would otherwise remain obscured. To demonstrate this and to develop the unique critical potential that lies therein is the main intention of this article.

II. Mind-World Relationships

I used the word ‘phenomenon’ several times. But how does one define a phenomenon? It helps to consider how the relationship between mind and world was construed when phenomenologists started asking these questions. René Descartes famously distinguished between the material world (*res extensa*) and the mind (*res cogitans*). In this view, which later became known as the representational model of cognition, the world exists twice: once out there in reality, and once as a representation in the mind. When we see, think, or feel something, our consciousness is triggered by our senses to retrieve a representation we have stored. Thus, what we perceive in that moment is not the world but the representation we have of it. But how does the representation get there? According to Descartes, representations are built mostly by capturing information through our senses, like pouring water into a container through a funnel (our senses).

This conceptualization of the mind–world relationship began to change with Immanuel Kant, who introduced the term ‘phenomenon’ (*Erscheinung*) into the debate. For Kant, the epistemological focus became the phenomenon; that is, what appears, not what is ‘out there’. Things became more relational. Kant argued that phenomena are co-constituted through a combination of given *a priori* forms of perception (*Formen der Anschauungen*) of time and space, concepts (*Begriffe*) and universal categories of pure reason (*Kategorien der reinen Vernunft*) and the sensual impressions of the thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*).

Husserl picked up on this idea when he famously said that we must get *zurück zu den Sachen selbst!*, ‘back to the things themselves’ thereby moving from Descartes’ representations, which are encapsulated in the mind, to the world! While he agreed with Kant that phenomena are shaped by both the mind and the world, he went beyond Kant in two important ways. First, he rejected the idea of a thing-in-itself and argued that even if such a ‘real world’ exists it does not matter as such. We should rather ask how it is accessible due to the abilities of our conscious engagement with it. For Husserl, mind and world are *relationally intertwined* in constituting what appears phenome-

nally. Consequently, Husserl described what phenomenologists study as ‘*Nicht Wirklichkeit, sondern erscheinende Wirklichkeit*’, ‘not reality, but appearing as reality’ (my translation) (Husserl 1976d:100).⁵ Second, Husserl developed detailed understandings of *how phenomena appear*. In so doing, he overcomes Kant’s rather static categories. Pushing philosophy to explore the relationality between mind and world is the main innovation of his analysis, and the concepts I discuss below are largely a result of these kinds of analyses.

Phenomenology and Social Constructivism

Although this might sound like social constructivism, there is a significant difference. Social constructivism is a theoretical framework that suggests that individuals’ understandings of the world are shaped through interactions within their social environment. It posits that knowledge is not objectively given, but constructed through experience, interpretation and agreement. Social constructivism emphasizes the role of language, culture and communication in shaping individual beliefs, values and understanding, and stresses the importance of context and perspective in creating knowledge. In a radical constructivist account, nothing at all is naturally pre-given or self-evident, but everything – including our subjective perspective of the world and our sense of self – is a product of social practices, negotiations and conventions. In brief, social constructivists emphasize the priority of language over experience. Phenomenologists, conversely, would typically claim that there is an irreducible mine-ness of experience, a first-person perspective on the world, others and ourselves, which is not precisely a construct of social practices, but feeds into them.

In a nutshell, then, the direction of the question differs: while constructivists ask how socially constructed discourses shape experience and the self, phenomenologists take the self as a starting point and want to learn how an embodied first-person perspective contributes to the shared constructions we have. But what are the basic characteristics of such experiences?

The Basic Principle of Experience

Phenomenologists make a basic distinction concerning experience. In their view, we are mostly so immersed in thinking and doing that we hardly recognize what we are up to. We just think; we just do. Husserl refers to this as pre-phenomenal (*präphänomenal*) (Husserl 1966b:484). This kind of habitual thinking and doing is our usual routine, but phenomenology recognizes two ways of escaping it, which Husserl describes as an

⁵ Whereas Husserl thus argued that all there is, is reality as it appears, some of his followers (i.e., Adolf Reinach, Max Scheler and Moritz Geiger) have proposed a ‘realist phenomenology’ that tries to get to the things in and of themselves.

active and reflective ‘turning towards’ (*reflektive Zuwendung*) the experience (Husserl 1966b:484).

The first way to ‘turn towards’ an experience is often unbidden. Sometimes we are disturbed or torn out of the groove. Imagine a glass on the edge of a table. The three-year-old sitting next to it moves her arm and, at this very moment, you experience the scene differently, almost as if it is frozen: the glass is full, it might be hot, the arm has some length and can reach some places, and so forth. These perceptions, which were in the background while we were in the groove of sitting, talking, playing at the table, are now foregrounded in a moment of rupture and worry. In this moment, we turn our consciousness to the experience itself! Reflections also arise when language comes in to categorize experiences that were previously unreflected, such as when we say, ‘Watch out, the glass!’ The second way to get to the *reflektive Zuwendung*, the ‘turning towards,’ is a phenomenological method, the *epoché*, which I discuss in the methodological section below.

With this, I define phenomena as things as they appear in experience. This experience is structured and contains an interplay between a habitual doing, coping and thinking, and those moments in which we turn our consciousness to the experience itself.

What are Phenomena in Ethnography?

Basically, anything that appears can be a phenomenon. In anthropology, topics that have been studied phenomenologically include the environment, time, illness, spirits, the body, emotions, values and much more. But what is special about the approach, and how does it differ from other ways of studying these topics?

In exploring this, let us consider the experience of time. We all know about an ‘objective’ time that we count in days, hours and minutes. The intervals between days, hours and minutes are the same; time moves at a given speed. By contrast, there is a subjective experience of time in which an hour can feel awfully long, for example, when waiting for a train, or very short, as when trying to finish an exam. The experience is embedded in a complex set of circumstances, including aspirations, feelings and an atmosphere that contributes to the subjective experience of time as running fast or slow.

The questions phenomenological anthropologists ask typically start with ‘How does it feel to be X’ where X might be ‘bored’, ‘not at home’, ‘in love’, ‘ashamed’ or ‘right.’ Or the questions address how material or social phenomena are experienced by asking, for example, ‘How do you experience X’, where X could be ‘the coronavirus’, ‘the changing weather’, ‘your family life’ and so forth. If a research question is compatible with these, a phenomenological approach might be a productive entry point. But how would one do this methodologically?

III. Methodological Approaches

To give an idea of how phenomenological anthropology can be done, I now briefly discuss three methodological approaches from philosophy – *epoché*, *free imaginative variation* and *Gelassenheit* – before showing how to access experiences others have through phenomenological interviews.

Epoché, or Suspension of Judgment

The basic idea of the *epoché* (from Greek *ἐποχή*, ‘suspension of judgment’) is that our everyday perceptions as well as scientific knowledge are laden with more or less implicit presuppositions concerning the being of everything that appears.⁶ The most fundamental of these assumptions is the belief in the existence of the world outside of consciousness. But how can we actually be sure about this? How do we know that the world we perceive is not merely an illusion? For Husserl, in order to attain any certainty in these questions and to see things clearly as they appear using experiential evidence, we need to bracket (i.e., to radically question, make explicit, and eventually suspend) all of our beliefs and presuppositions, whether they stem from our own experience, from communication with others, from religion, and so forth (Husserl 1991). In a sense, it is a way of defamiliarizing the familiar.

Introducing the term ‘ethnographic *epoché*’, Bidney was the first to interrogate critically the assumptions we make when doing and writing ethnography (Bidney 1973:137). Starting with the work of Jackson (1989), the approach was fully developed in anthropology. Desjarlais, for example, showed how the uses of the concept of ‘experience’ often contain a ‘fundamental’ and ‘romantic’ understanding, and that we need to ‘bracket’ those understandings to see how people establish meaningful relationships to the world (Desjarlais 1994:887). As a result, he finds ‘struggling along’ to be a much more fitting term to describe the forms of life his fascinating ethnography reveals. Whereas these reflections are a deliberate process, as in Husserl’s *epoché*, they can also occur unbidden, triggered by some other event during fieldwork, as Throop has shown using examples from Malinowski’s work (Throop 2018:206).

These *epochés* remind us to reflect on how we as anthropologists experience the world we describe in our writings. But is this what Husserl had in mind? Zahavi denies this, arguing that the *epoché* is so closely tied to his transcendental philosophy that it is hard to use in the social sciences (Zahavi 2018b, 2019). What he proposes instead, and I follow his suggestion, is to apply the knowledge the *epoché* generates about the

⁶ The *epoché* draws on the Ancient Greek Sceptics and further develops Descartes’ project of doubt. However, unlike Descartes, Husserl does not attempt to doubt the existence of everything and hence the world universally. Instead, he aims to doubt and neutralize the worldly assumptions on which our thinking is unconsciously based.

structure of experiences (including concepts like *embodiment*, *being-in-the-world* and *Einfühlung*) as a guide for empirical analyses.

Free Imaginative Variation

Husserl questions whether we can access the world as ‘real.’ But how do we then get to the things as they appear? To do so, Husserl introduces the German term *Wesen* or ‘essence’. This essence might be conceptualized as the common denominator of the diverse variants of a phenomenon, as well as a variety of perspectives on that phenomenon. In his view, if we look at the phenomenon from all possible perspectives and take into account all possible appearances, some basic characteristics remain unchanged; these constitute its essence or core of identity. Free imaginative variation (*imaginative Variation*) is a way to approach such essences gradually while acknowledging that this process is never complete.

Thinking about the water from the opening page, the philosopher imagines variations of the phenomenon to find out how much she can change her perspective on it in her mind without losing the sense of ‘water’. It is the search for the water-ness, or water if you will. While free imaginative variation is primarily a tool to think variations thought in the researcher’s mind, it can extend to observations as well. Gallagher called this as a ‘factual variation’, arguing that it can overcome the philosopher’s prejudices (Gallagher 2012:308). This means adding others’ perspectives on what water is, if you will.

In this way, as anthropologists we want to ask what kinds of water (or love, or freedom, etc.) exist in a particular context and what its specific historically situated essence is. Acknowledging this situatedness helps avoid problematic essentializations, while recognizing that water shares some characteristics in particular contexts. Without them, it would not be water anymore. Think of how water becomes wine in some religious narratives.

Gelassenheit (Release), or Opening Up

While Husserl’s techniques are laborious practices for getting rid of assumptions (*epoché*) and working towards the essence of things (*free imaginative variation*), Heidegger proposes a more relaxed methodology (Wehrle 2022:87).

In his view, phenomenologists should ‘open up’ to allow themselves to notice the phenomenon as ‘*das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende, das Offenbare*’, or ‘that which shows itself from itself, the obvious’ (Heidegger 2006:§7). Heidegger offers some related characterizations to describe this opening up, including ‘*Sich einlassen*’ (getting involved) and ‘*Mitgehen*’ (to go along with). With this, he proposes that phenomenologists should strive for an attunement with the world he calls *Gelassenheit* (often translated as ‘release’) – a leap into a region of letting-be. But why do we need to open up, to let-be? His basic idea, and concern, is that in today’s world the true meaning of things

is typically hidden and concealed. In his view, we need to become open to see more clearly (again).

Sometimes this requires work too, for example, tracing the etymological meaning words have, and allowing one to arrive at an understanding of what things mean or are. To get an idea of what Heidegger has in mind, think of the word 'culture'. What does it mean? What do we realize when we learn that the word comes from Latin *colere* 'tend', in the sense of 'cultivate'? Heidegger's answer can be found in the famous essay on *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken* (Building, Dwelling, Thinking) (Heidegger 2000).

Fortunately, in Heidegger's view, there are other expressions in which meaning is much less concealed, artwork, including poetry, being the most important one. Here, we can see things more clearly. In anthropology, Weiner (2001) has shown convincingly how this approach can be mobilized to explore meaning among her Foi interlocutors in Papua New Guinea through rituals, poetry and skilled crafting (Weiner 2001).

Phenomenological Interviews and 'Go Alongs'

But how can we know how the world appears to others through ethnography? Anthropologists mostly rely on a specific kind of qualitative interview that puts the subjective perspective centre stage.⁷ With others, I refer to such interviews as *phenomenological interviews* (Bitbol and Petitmengin 2013; Petitmengin 2006; Sholokhova et al. 2022). Other names for overlapping techniques include person-centred interviews (Levine 1982; Levy and Hollan 1998) and lived-experience descriptions (Van Manen 2016). The main characteristic of a phenomenological interview is to guide the interlocutor to recall a concrete experience with as few reflections about the experience as possible.

To imagine such an interview, it helps to picture its opposite. Asking interlocutors how Germans feel when their team lost an important soccer match would not be a phenomenological interview. This question encourages the person to give a third-person description how others (the Germans who are experiencing a defeat) feel. By contrast, a phenomenological interview on the same theme takes a number of steps to capture a person's subjective experience, that is, how it feels for her to be part of a group that felt defeat in a concrete moment. Those steps include the following:

First, encourage the interlocutor to remember a situation when she last felt or experienced this feeling by asking, for example, to remember an important match that was lost. Second, try to direct the person to live through that experience again by asking them to describe the place, the social constellation, the things that happened before, the things that triggered the experience, the situation and the atmosphere when the feeling occurred. That is, where were you when the game was played? Who was there? And so forth. And third, encourage the interlocutor to describe how it felt to be losing in this moment using as little interpretation and reflection as possible, focusing

⁷ Another approach in phenomenological anthropology that I will not be able to discuss is autoethnography.

on the interlocutor's relations to the world, to the self, to others, and so forth. Finally, and optionally, one might ask the interlocutor to interpret these descriptions and experiences, for example, later, now it has become obvious that the championship is now over for one's own team.

In addition, a phenomenological interview can be informed by the knowledge phenomenology provides about the experience of a certain field, for example, time. To learn how the experience of time varies between people or situations, we can draw on Husserl's general model of temporal experience as a fading in and fading out and see how this varies if, for example, I hope that the redeeming goal will be scored in the final minutes.

In similar ways, other phenomenological concepts can inform the interview too. When I am interested in experiences where breakdowns (Heidegger's *Störungen*) are important, for example, it might be advisable to make this an explicit component of the interview by, for example, asking how it felt when one realized something oneself ('We are out!') or when someone confronted one with the evaluation ('Germany lost so badly – we thought you were good!'). In both cases, the pre-reflective feeling is thematized and becomes something we must relate to.

In addition to the phenomenological interview, an effective way on capturing information in a phenomenological, e.g., embedded way are 'go alongs'. Kusenbach introduced this approach as a way of 'walking and talking' with interlocutors through 'their' environment (e.g., their urban neighbourhood in her case) that captures knowing as it is embedded and emplaced in specific contexts. Although she does not cite Heidegger and his idea of *Mitgehen* (go along with; see above), there are obvious parallels. The methodological proposition for doing 'go alongs' is that knowledge comes to exist only in the context in which it is embedded, enacted and emplaced. Therefore, it can only – or most validly – be verbalized by our interlocutors and to some extent co-experienced by the researcher in that very situation (Kusenbach 2003; von Poser and Willamowski 2020).

A Note on Didactics

Having introduced these basics, I will now show how anthropology can benefit from phenomenology. To do so, I follow a three-step didactic approach. First, I introduce the philosophical concepts. Second, I show how anthropologists have applied these concepts. Third, I apply these concepts to one scene from my ethnographic fieldwork in Namibia to show how the different perspectives can contribute to theorizing ethnographic observations. Let me take you to Namibia to introduce this scene, to which I will come back again and again in the analysis.

IV. A Phenomenon: |*Nanus* (Rain) on ||*Gamo!nâb*

Following my interest in understanding how Damara pastoralists (≠*Nūkhoen*) get to know the environment in which they dwell, my ethnography in arid northwestern Namibia also explores the rain, the most distressing weather-related phenomenon in their world (Schnegg 2021b, a, c). During one of my stays, I was sitting with my long-term research partner and friend Charles a little way uphill, where we could see deep into the sky across the flat savannah landscape. It had been an extremely hot day, and the sea wind had been blowing since the early morning. People in the area say that this wind is female and that it seeks its male counterpart far inland, and the two winds return to the area together with the rain (Schnegg 2019). By now they were on their way, and we were enjoying a cold breeze on our sweaty skin.

As we sat there, thunder and lightning approaching on the horizon, I told Charles that our neighbours in the Rockies region would be happy since they were about to receive some rain. ‘No, Michael’, he replied; ‘the rain is much further away’. I wondered if I would ever learn how to align the pictures of clouds in the sky with the landscape beneath. Then Charles said in Khoekhoegowab, the language spoken by most people in the area, ‘|*gurukupu nanub* is bad’ (literally translated, ‘the rain which darkens the soil’). ‘|*Gurukupu nanub* kills our animals’, he added. I responded by asking how rainfall, which is essential for survival, could be bad? Charles explained that the livestock could sense the rain from far away. When rain fell at the end of a long spell of dry winter months, they would instinctively run in that direction and continue – sometimes for days on end – until they reached the damp spots, where the soil is dark and keeps the smell of the wetness. However, since the first rain did not bring an immediate change in vegetation, they would find very little grazing when they arrived at their destination. ‘In the end’, Charles continued, ‘because they are exhausted by then, some will even die. Therefore, |*gurukupu nanub* is bad’.

On another occasion, Charles and I saw clouds forming again. I remembered our previous conversation and mentioned the different context, and more specifically that this time it could not be |*gurukupu nanub* because the rainy season had already started some time ago. He confirmed this and yet chose a different explanation: ‘You know, Oupa Carl passed away, and they are burying him today. This is |*hó!nanub*, the rain that comes after the funeral of a well-known person to wash away the footsteps of the deceased. Only then can he enter the sky peacefully’. In German I would have called both rain events *Wolkenbruch* (cloudbursts) based on their intensity, but Charles had two different names and explanations for them.

I will return to this ethnographic vignette later to explore why and how the rain appeared this way to Charles, and in ways that separated me from him (Schnegg 2021c). I will show how analysing the structure of knowing and experiencing (the *how we know* questions) through notions of *intentionality*, *being-in-the-world*, *embodiment*, *empathy*, *responsivity* and *atmospheres* provides us with effective tools for understanding *what we know* and how that differs between people and in different situations.

I have selected these scenes because similar observations inspired me to engage with phenomenology. I had observed that both scientists and Damara explain the arrival of the rains as an interplay between two winds. However, their ways of making this meaningful could hardly be more different. While the Damara refer to love and care, scientists talk about convection zones (Schnegg 2019). In search of a paradigm to theorize this, phenomenology seemed to provide the resources to explore how similar observations turn into different experiences and ultimately meaningful entities. While I first found Heidegger's notion of *being-in-the-world* particularly useful (Schnegg 2019), I soon realized that other concepts were productive for making sense of some of the related observations I made, including the way people name and categorize these rains (Schnegg 2021c), the ways the weather is changing (Schnegg 2021d, 2021a) and the social construction of the multispecies world in which all this takes place (Schnegg and Breyer 2022). Above, I cite the works in which I explored these topics because they embed the experience of something in the wider socio-political framework, including, importantly, coloniality and rural marginalization, which is more than I can offer in this text.

V. How Things Appear – Six Phenomenologies

Phenomenologists have developed a wide range of concepts, which I group into six approaches. In so doing, and by naming them, I emphasize specific aspects of their work that I find especially relevant for anthropology, knowing that their philosophies are much broader and more complex than I can touch upon (or comprehend). Husserl makes us aware that how we relate to the world affects how it appears to us. He calls this *intentionality*. I refer to his work as *of-ness* phenomenology. His student Martin Heidegger finds this notion too 'intellectualized' and argues that the connection between mind and world is established through *use* and *being-in-the-world*. I call his approach *in-ness* phenomenology. Maurice Merleau-Ponty adds that our *lived body* establishes this link, which is why I refer to his approach as *embodied-ness* phenomenology. His student Bernhard Waldenfels emphasizes that phenomena emerge in response to the demands that situations articulate. I refer to his approach as *responsive-ness* phenomenology. His contemporary Herman Schmitz proposes that all situations in which we interact are characterized by some atmosphere that affects us emotionally. Because this atmosphere develops between people, places and practices, I refer to his philosophy as *between-ness* phenomenology. Finally, Edith Stein (also Husserl's student) explains the social construction of reality through *empathy* leading to *intersubjectivity*. I refer to her work as *with-ness* phenomenology. This line up shows a development. The primary source of experience – its impetus, if you will – continuously moves towards the world on the subject – world continuum. It shifts from Husserl's consciousness via Heidegger's practices to Merleau-Ponty's body, Waldenfels demands of the alien,

Schmitz' atmospheres and Stein's intersubjectivity from the subject to the material and social world in which it acts.

As I will show, all six approaches emphasize something different when answering the question of *how things appear*. They partly overlap and partly contradict each other. I will not be able to engage with these incommensurabilities and the arguments for or against particular approaches in detail. I will, however, attempt to understand for which kinds of phenomena certain approaches can be especially suitable, given the aspects of experience they bring to the fore. In the end, it is up to the ethnographer to decide which of these concepts if any are productive for theorizing the particular experiences at stake.

Of-ness Phenomenology (Edmund Husserl)

Edmund Husserl argued that our consciousness is characterized by the essential structure of a relationality he calls *intentionality*. Perceiving does not mean retrieving a representation I have stored somewhere in the mind, as it does for Descartes, but rather it is relational. We always see *something*, remember *someone*, desire *something*, and so on. Going back to the '*Sachen selbst*' means recognizing that our consciousness relates to entities by constituting them and itself. But how? According to Husserl, there are six (or seven) different kinds of intentional structures, including perception, memory, fantasy and empathy (Zahavi 2018a). His main aim was to identify the structure of these intentionalities, and to do so, he applied the *epoché*.

The example of perception illustrates how this works and what the results are. Let us consider, with Husserl, the perception of an object like a table first. Catching sight of a table, we know what it is, even if just in its typicality (e.g., as an object to put something on to). We recognize the table as something complete, even though our perspective captures only a fraction of it at any given moment. Critically reflecting on this process of perception, Husserl concludes that there is a process guiding this, which he refers to as *Abschattung* (adumbration) (Husserl 1966a:3). What is this? Typically, most of the table – its underside, its back, its interior and its base – is hidden from our view, yet we 'intend' the table as a whole thing. From our embodied situatedness, we only ever have one *Abschattung* (adumbration), one particular side of the table, at a time. How, then, does it become a complete table in our mind? Husserl argues that we 'co-intend' (*mitmeinen*) aspects based on having seen similar objects or the same object in the past. Plus, we integrate the potential perspectives of others who could at the same moment see the table from other angles. The (partial) presence prompts us to include those other perspectives and utilize them to complete the partial sensory impression we have (Husserl 1966a). With this, Husserl shows that we *do* see or perceive that table as one complete thing on the basis of a complex synthetic process that includes *Abschattung* and *mitmeinen*.

Let us consider the experience of time as another example. A naïve conception of time is that we experience an encounter as a stringing together of many small impres-

sions. Instead, Husserl argues that it is a unity across a succession of ‘nows’. Put differently, there is no gap between these ‘nows’ because the impressions blend together. Even in the very moment one recognizes something, one already anticipates something that might come next. Husserl calls this ‘*protention*.’ Then, once we have experienced an object, this experience does not disappear but remains present as something that has left an impression. Husserl calls this process ‘*retention*’. In short, the presence is not just the single moment in which we consciously recognize something, but it co-intends perceptions of a before and an after that we link it to. This intersection constructs what we experience as ‘now’ as a whole (Husserl 1966b).

Whereas Husserl applied his analysis of time perception to short moments, I have extended the length of these intervals to understand how environmental concepts are created (Schnegg 2021c). In the situation I described, Charles and I watched the weather change but interpreted the scene differently. To me, it seemed a promising afternoon that would bring rain. In German, I would have called this a *Wolkenbruch* (literally, a cracking of clouds), referencing the intensity and duration of the precipitation, its physical properties. I further assumed that rain was a good thing in the arid environment, bringing wealth and life. Charles had a different way of seeing the rain – as something that could cause harm, even death. But how do these concepts come about? Charles weaves entities that happened before and that he expects to come again into the present moment. By doing so, he makes it a particular rain. For him, those entities include the past drought, the lack of rain, the anticipation that it would rain somewhere else, the expectation that the animals might run to their deaths. They are, importantly, embedded and circumscribed by larger social and political structures, including coloniality, marginalization and the aspirations for a better future. Without this context, *lgurukupu nanub* would not be deadly; most likely, it would not even exist. In sum, these moments that fade in the particular experience, and that are expected to come next, constitute what this particular rain becomes. For me, as a person who does not know this but who connects something else, the rain becomes something different (Schnegg 2021c).

However, different intentionalities co-exist. The ‘switching’ between them, sometimes called phenomenological modification (Duranti 2009; Throop 2015), indicates how entities like the rain appear differently depending on how we relate to them, like the famous *Gestalt* figures or Escher’s art that seems to ‘flip’ the moment we look at it differently. The physical object, the figure or the rain, remains the ‘same’ and yet appears differently through our way of relating to it. This is intentionality, the rationality that creates the consciousness of something. Throop’s analysis of suffering on Yap mobilizes this idea to show how suffering is experienced and how pain sometimes becomes sacred and sometimes profane. With this he shows not only how intentional modifications transform pain, but also how historical and political relations produce the possibility for those modifications and how the phenomenon is created through these switches (Throop 2015:84). In a similar manner, Duranti analyses how different ways of relating to the world are taught in everyday language (Duranti 2009). Through forms of com-

munication, cultural models of sharing and morality are established, linking language, cognition and experience. This framing in early childhood establishes trajectories for modifying the world and is one reason why it is difficult to learn new models when we are older (Duranti 2009).

How do phenomena appear with Husserl? They always appear *in consciousness*. We apply a particular perspective to *see something as something*. Because the focus is on consciousness and the mind, phenomena that are to a significant degree ‘seen’, ‘thought’ or ‘read’ are most easily accessible through this approach, including the perception of material objects, things in the environment and partly feelings like pain, as we have seen.

In-ness Phenomenology (Martin Heidegger)

Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger, is a founding philosopher of the European tradition of practice theories. His personal involvement with the National Socialist Party in Germany and his anti-Semitism made him a highly controversial figure (Trawny 2014). Critics claim that his political inclinations reveal inherent problems in his philosophy, whereas supporters argue that his political and philosophical engagements can be separated. Keeping in mind the problematic aspects of his thinking, I nevertheless wish to critically engage and develop another aspect of his work, namely our being-in-the-world.

For Heidegger, the relationship between mind and world is less about an of-something link (Husserl’s intentionality) and more about an overlap. For him, Husserl was still caught within the Cartesian divides and was too ‘intellectualized’. To capture the in-between more adequately, Heidegger coined the term *In-der-Welt-sein*, ‘being-in-the-world’. The three hyphens are the essence of his phenomenology, indicating that subject and world are always already intertwined. Therefore, I describe his approach as *in-ness* phenomenology. But how does this *in-ness* emerge, and what are its consequences?

To theorize this, Heidegger develops the term *Dasein* (lit. ‘there-being’ [*Da*=there, *sein*=being]) that replaces humans as the analytic category. Heidegger’s aim is to show what characterizes *Dasein*, and hence what human existence is fundamentally about (Heidegger 2006; Schwarz Wentzer 2013). If one reads Heidegger’s project as a social scientist, one can understand it as an attempt to formulate a basic theory of conduct that seeks to answer how human beings are situated in the world, what moves them, and how meaningful relations with the world emerge.

To understand this, we need to consider what distinguishes us humans from other living beings. We know that we will die. As a result, we always live in the face of our own death and can also envisage what we want to accomplish before that. We imagine how we want things to be – for example, we want to be married and to have a storybook Cinderella home. Imagining our future structures today’s actions and forms our relationships in the world – in this case with potential partners or with economic

activities (Bryant and Knight 2019; Schatzki 2010; Schnegg 2023a). Because we want a Cinderella home, we start looking at things differently, including our job, money and the materials we need for building. All these things become something *for* something – equipment (*Zeug*), as Heidegger says. They are good to accomplish some project and aim with.

This relationship of uses also determines what the things become. Heidegger illustrates this through his example of a hammer: how do we get to know the thing composed of wood and steel lying in front of us as a hammer? There are two ways:

The first is hammering. Accordingly, our everyday practice of using things with a specific future-oriented purpose is one way to constitute the nature of things. Through the act of hammering, we are so immersed with the thing that the Cartesian separation between the object and the subject is overcome and an I-hammer entity emerges. Without the act of hammering to put the nails into the wall, we have no hammers! Without bicycling to get from here to there, we have no bicycles! Heidegger refers to this way of being in the world as *Zuhandenheit*, an ‘in-order-to’, or briefly ‘ready-to-hand’. This is why Heidegger has been the inspiration for practice theory.

However, there are also ways of experiencing the hammer, that are much more reflective. Heidegger calls this *Vorhandenheit* (‘present-at-hand’). In these moments, we look at the hammer and recognize it through the properties it has, such as its size, colour or shape, and we co-constitute it with our minds. A common way to look at the hammer or any other entity in this reflective mode is scientific thinking. Here, we deliberately isolate entities from the daily uses they have and look at them in an objectified sense, describing what material the hammer consists of, how much it weighs, how old it is, and so forth. Besides scientific thinking, there are also other moments in which we perceive things in a detached mode. One such reflective moment occurs when we miss the nail and now look at the hammer differently: ‘You damn thing!’ In this moment, the hammer becomes something different, and the immersed relationship between subject and object that is established in the activity is disconnected, lost.

To theorize these switches between pre-reflective and reflective knowing, Heidegger identifies three moments, or *Störungen* (breakdowns): (1) malfunction (conspicuousness, *Unverwendbarkeit*, *Auffallen*) occurs when something is broken and/or does not work anymore; (2) total breakdowns (obtrusiveness, *Aufdringlichkeit*, *Fehlen*) happen in situations in which we urgently register the lack of something that is usually there; and (3) temporary breakdowns (obstinacy, *Aufsässigkeit*) are situations in which we miss something when we omit a habitual activity. According to Heidegger, in these moments of *Störung* we see the world more clearly because routines are broken that usually cover its authenticity (Dreyfus 1991:71; Heidegger 2006:72; Zigon 2007).

In anthropology, the idea of the breakdown was developed by Zigon (2007) in his seminal essay on ‘moral breakdowns’. In his outline for an anthropology of morality, Zigon shows how morality is a constitutive part of our being-in-the-world. We are just moral. However, as Zigon also shows, moral breakdowns occur at moments when we

recognize that our way of being-moral-in-the-world no longer applies to the situation we face. Then we switch to a more reflective mode and actively rethink how to respond to the demands the situation creates (Zigon 2007, 2008, 2018). With this, Zigon significantly shaped the development of the anthropology of morality – his intervention became a breakdown for the discipline, if you will.

In addition to the anthropology of ethics, the emphasis on being-in-the-world has been mobilized very effectively in the study of the environment. In his pioneering book *The Perception of the Environment*, Tim Ingold (2000) combines a Heideggerian analysis of being-in-the-world with other philosophical concepts to come up with a genuine understanding of how people co-create knowledge and the environment through skilful practical activities. The ‘dwelling perspective’ he proposes has inspired an entire generation of environmental anthropologists (Anderson et al. 2017; Gieser 2008; Habeck 2006; including, Ingold and Kurttila 2000).⁸

But how does the in-ness perspective add to understanding the situation with *ǁgamol'náb*? First, without the practice of pastoralism there would be no *ǁgurukupu ǁnanub* (the first rain I described that makes the animals run, often to their deaths). Many of the other ten rains I have described elsewhere would also not exist (Schnegg 2021a). All these rains have different uses for something within the pastoral domain: some rains kill livestock, others make the grass grow, some hurt it, and others care for insects. At the same time, this pastoral being-in-the-world takes place within historical, political and economic contexts. The rain is so salient because the colonial powers seized most of the land and relocated the Damara people to areas too small for subsistence farming. This is also why the goats run away to their deaths. Hence, without land scarcity, there would also be no *ǁgurukupu ǁnanub*.

Whereas the focus on being-in-the-world-as-pastoralists can explain how the rain appears to Charles, it also makes intelligible why it is something different for me, an anthropologist with a regular salary – even though I own some livestock too. Or, for the shop owner in Fransfontein who does not possess any livestock at all, or for the scientists who measure precipitation from afar by looking at the quantity and intensity with which water falls from the sky. I would even go so far as to say that these practices, these different ways of being-in-the-world, can create the rain as different ontological entities, depending on how we enact them (Schnegg 2019, 2021d). If the rain becomes something different by enacting it, it also makes sense that people have very different explanations for the lack of rain they observe with climate change. Some make CO² responsible, others coloniality or social decay (Schnegg 2021d, 2021a).

How, then, do things appear for Heidegger? They largely appear *through practices*; we always *use things for something*. This practical use determines what things become, what they are. Because the focus is on practices, phenomena that are to a significant

⁸ Moreover, Heidegger's phenomenology has proved productive in migration studies (Lems 2016), in exploring corruption (Tidey 2022) and in many other fields (Weiner 2001).

degree 'made' through skilful activities are accessible through this approach, including things that appear in crafts, sports, physical work and other activities.

Embodied-ness Phenomenology (Maurice Merleau-Ponty)

Merleau-Ponty initiated a train of arguments that differentiated between what we know through the lived body (*corps propre*, sometimes also translated as feeling body) and what we know in the mind and that we can – more or less easily – articulate linguistically (Merleau-Ponty 2012:139). How does the body – or the mind – 'know'? When I raise a cup of tea to my mouth, for example, I direct my consciousness towards the cup. Merleau-Ponty says that this intentionality is not performed through my mind, as Husserl has it, but largely mediated through the acting body. My body knows the cup because I learned as a child to use cups without spilling their contents. The habitual aspect of knowing manifests itself in the body – 'it is the body that "understands" in the acquisition of habit' (Merleau-Ponty 2012:144).

Importantly, Merleau-Ponty works out how the body has a dual character. We are both *having a body* and *being a body*. That is to say that we are, for one, in the world through our bodies. This active role is what Merleau-Ponty refers to, drawing on Husserl (and Helmuth Plessner), as the *corps propre* (the lived body). Moreover, while the body is the only means of being in the world, it is also the object of my observation and that of others, for example, when I touch my arm that just lifted the cup or someone else touches me. The touched-arm is what Merleau-Ponty calls the *corps objectif* (sensed body). The *corps objectif* is the objectification of the *corps propre* through me and others.

In anthropology, Thomas Csordas must be credited for developing the embodiment paradigm. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, he argued famously that the lived body is the 'existential ground of culture and self,' and that this had not been adequately recognized in cultural theory at the time (Csordas 1990:6). Gesa Lindemann wrote that, before the body-turn, the social sciences engaged in the study of angles (Lindemann 2005:114). In this view, culture is not only manifested in symbols and representations, as Geertz, Boas and others would have it, but also in the body (Csordas 2011, 2015; Desjarlais 1992, 1997; Jackson 1983).

Many uses of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology ask how culture, biology and experiences interact. Perhaps most famously, the phenomenological feminist Iris Young (1980) investigated why girls throw differently than boys of the same age in the US. To understand this she points out that in the patriarchal and sexist US American society, the female body is not only a subject, but an object evaluated by others who are more powerful and often male (Young 1980:148). Furthermore, girls are told during socialization to 'close' their legs while they sit, not to stick out their chests, and the like. As this becomes inscribed into the body's habitus, it makes movements like throwing, in which one must expose oneself, difficult. Moreover, because their bodies are objectified under the gaze of others, girls often find themselves in a position where they ask themselves, 'How do I look throwing this ball?' This hinders a free unfolding of the body,

which does not get into the pre-reflective mode of ‘just doing’. Young shows how this hinders the female body from connecting to the world in the way of ‘being a body’, a way Merleau-Ponty assumed was universal (Young 1980).⁹

In a related manner, Downey’s ethnography of the Brazilian *capoeira*, a martial art that combines elements of dance, finds considerable differences between male and female athletes in Brazil. However, the degree of difference between them is minimal in comparison to the performance of students in the US. This points to a larger issue, namely that even the masculine, uninhibited way of being-in-the-world differs largely with training and skills acquisition, and also partly by class membership (Downey 2015:132).

How does embodied-ness add to our understanding of the *ḡamo!nāb* situation?

The Damara people with whom I work make two winds responsible for the arrival of the rain, the female *huri#oab* and the male *tū#oab*. During the morning, the female *huri#oab* seeks out the male *tū#oab* in love and care, and people watch as the two meet in the sky east of Fransfontein, where clouds begin to form. Typically, it is very hot, and the *huri#oab* blows strongly until early afternoon. ‘Knowing the weather’ includes feeling the heat and the hot air on the skin. Before it rains the wind direction changes, and it gets colder. The coldness and moisture in the air makes people anticipate the rain bodily. This became especially clear to me when I picked up an old man hitchhiking who had spent his life in the hinterlands. It was a hot summer’s day and, without him noticing, I turned the air-conditioning on. At the time, there was not a single cloud in the sky and the rainy season was still ahead. Feeling the aircon, the elderly man, who had not experienced this ‘wind’ before, said, ‘Michael, this is strange, it feels as if the rain is coming, but I cannot even see any clouds.’ The body knows. And it can also be wrong.

How do things appear with Merleau-Ponty? Phenomena appear *through the body*. Therefore, any subjective position must be an embodied position, and the analysis of knowing must include this too. Phenomena that are to a significant degree ‘enacted’, such as illness, dance, physical work and ritual, are accessible through this embodied-ness phenomenology.

In my view, three important directions emerge from this. The first is the overall recognition that we are only in the world through the *lived body* and that we must acknowledge this embodiment if we want to understand how our interlocutors experience the world. ‘4E-cognition’ is a recent development along this line of thinking. It acknowledges that all knowing is *embodied, embedded, enacted* and *extended* (Fuchs 2018; Gallagher and Zahavi 2021; Varela et al. 2016). Second, acknowledging the saliency of the body implies that we must take *all* sensual experiences into account, including seeing, tasting, hearing, smelling, feeling and orienting, if we want to under-

9 Young later distanced herself from some of her earlier analyses because she felt that she had defined the female body as a liability that expresses female experience through a sense of victimization and thus becomes subject to the male norm (Young 1990:14).

stand world-making. This has been a salient claim in recent years, and Merleau-Ponty provided the theoretical foundations for it (Geurts 2002; Pink 2015; Spittler 2001; Stoller 1989). Third, the body is not only the medium through which we are in the world but also the repository where traces are stored. This happens through practices as in the case of throwing (Young) and the *capoeira* (Downey), but also through oppression and related suffering (Bourgeois and Schonberg 2007; Scheper-Hughes 1992). While it is evident that knowledge is stored in the lived body, the question of ‘where exactly’ is much less settled. Accordingly, some researchers have proposed the term *Leibgedächtnis* (‘body memory’) to explore this (Breyer 2021; Fuchs 2012).

Responsive-ness Phenomenology (Bernhard Waldenfels)

In Husserl’s view, perception is a process that connects consciousness with the world in an a priori correlation to *see something as something* (Husserl 1968, 1976b, 1976a). Where mind and world meet, phenomena emerge. Bernhard Waldenfels gave the world-mind relationship a different direction. The innovation of his phenomenology was to turn the arrow around. Building on *Gestalt* psychologists like Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Lewin and their notion of an *Aufforderungscharakter* (demand character) or *Geford-ertheit* (requirement), which James Gibson later rendered as ‘affordance’, Waldenfels argued that the mind does not reach out to ask *What is this?* Rather, the phenomenon asks us *What am I?* It affects us.

The things we encounter pose demands (*Ansprüche*) on us (Waldenfels 2011:63): the laptop on which I am writing this text, the bicycle I rode to get to my office, the atmosphere in the room, my friend. When experiencing these things, something happens to us, affects us, reaches out to us, or, to say it in German, something *widerfährt* (befalls) us (Waldenfels 2011:87). But what is happening, and why? Waldenfels argues that all phenomena are to a certain degree alien (*fremd*) to us. This is the case for the computer I use, my bicycle, the atmosphere and my friend, and it includes myself too. This alien-ness develops a *Zugkraft* (traction) that demands an answer from us. At the same time, it withdraws itself continuously, leaving aspects *unzugänglich* (inaccessible).

In this view, meaning is an attempt to get a grip on the alien, the insecure and the chaotic that irritate us. Therefore, meaning is not primarily a process of framing, of co-constituting a phenomenon through the mind, as Husserl says. Instead, intentionality comes second. It is the response to the demands a situation makes. Or, as Waldenfels says, ‘it is only in responding to what we are struck by that what strikes us emerges as such’ (my translation of *Erst im Antworten auf das, wovon wir getroffen sind, tritt das, was uns trifft, als solches zutage*) (Waldenfels 2002:59).

In responding, we rely on answer registers (*Antwortregister*) that belong to some larger order. When registers fit a situation well, we respond habitually, pre-reflectively. However, in some situations this is not so easy, such as one in which we are exposed to multiple and contradicting demands. Should I finish this plate? I feel I should not, otherwise I might feel bad. My friend talks about the climate and how much she hates

throwing food away. The food can be taken home, but will it go bad? What will the waiter say if I ask for a doggie bag? Because demands are heterogeneous and contradictory, I must switch to a more reflective mode to respond to them. Reflective responses also become necessary when a demand is especially alien, and we do not have an appropriate answer at hand. One particularly useful characteristic of the responsivity approach is that it radically *decentres* the process of meaning-making. It starts with the world to which the subject must respond.

Waldenfels' phenomenology is new in anthropology. Among those who have engaged with his work, Leistle's contribution stands out. For one thing, Leistle has provided well-written introductions in which he focuses on Waldenfels' notion of alterity (Leistle 2016, 2020a, 2020b, 2022b). For another, Leistle effectively applies these conceptions to the analysis of rituals, possession and other ethnographic fields (Leistle 2014, 2017). Moreover, Grøn offers a rich ethnographic analysis of obesity in which she renders Waldenfels' notion of responsivity into a responsive self to analyse how her informant frames her body (Grøn 2017b, 2017a, 2022) and Mattingly (2018) provides a fascinating investigation of the structures of ethical experience among African American families which also builds on Waldenfels' phenomenology. Other uses of the responsive approach include the works of Hepach and Hartz (2023) Louw (2019) and Meinert and Whyte (2017), and Schwarz Wentzer (2018). How does Waldenfels' responsive-ness add to our understanding of the situation regarding the rain on *lgamo'nâb*? With Waldenfels, the focus is on how the world is alien and demands answers from us. The weather situation affects me. While we are sitting there, the clouds, the wind and the sun are alien, and we cannot understand them, as they continuously withdraw themselves. They ask, *Where are we?* and Charles and I answer in significantly different ways. Or they ask Charles, *Am I lgurukupu nanub or any of the more than ten rains you know?* As the clouds shift their colours and shapes, they withdraw from his attempt to order them. They remain alien. *Will it even rain?* To answer these demands, we need to consider the wind. Is the west wind still fighting, not letting the east wind in? Will the two agree and bring rain? Was it hot enough during the day for the rain to come? The environment poses provocations, dangers, all of which contain some elements of alienness, and we respond.

The situation regarding *lgamo'nâb* also shows different demands articulated through the distinct entities the situation contains: the clouds, the behaviour of the animals, our intentions as pastoralists, and the condition of the pastures here and elsewhere. The meaning we give is an attempt to come to grips with the alien they contain. This principle can also help explain the differences between what Charles knows and what I know, and between different rains on different days. Linking the alien to different orders (pastoral, religious, scientific), the phenomenon emerges as something different. Taken together, then, one of the great advantages of Waldenfels' approach is that it allows us to explain how we know situationally and how this differs between different people and at different times.

To conclude, with Waldenfels and the responsive-ness phenomenology, a phenomenon appears through the response to the demands *articulated in the situations* themselves. The idea is still relatively new but provides an especially good framework for understanding experiences that are perceived as radically *fremd*, including intercultural experiences, one's own body and illnesses, religious experiences like possession and healing, and the like.

Between-ness Phenomenology (Hermann Schmitz)

Most lay and scientific perspectives view emotion as an affective framing of the world through the psyche. This reading is already inscribed in the meaning of the Latin *emovere*, combining *e-* 'out' and *movere* 'move'. As we have seen, this is also Husserl's train of thought, according to which I, the subject, perceive (or feel) the world *as something*.

Hermann Schmitz argues that it is a misconception to theorize emotion as a process in which the psyche reaches out to the world. According to him, this prejudice is 'new' and Eurocentric. It emerged in Greece around the second half of the fifth century BC, sometime between Heraclitus and Sophocles. At that time, Schmitz finds, a fatal splitting of the world (*schicksalhafte Weltspaltung*) occurred (Schmitz 2016:19). The world, which used to be one, was divided into inner and outer worlds.

In this process, emotions became part of the inner world. Only they were encapsulated in the mind, and only reason, which became salient in Western philosophy and thinking, could control them! From then on, the realm of experience was dissected by ascribing to each subject a private sphere containing their entire experience (Schmitz et al. 2011:247). Whether one fully agrees with his historical analysis or not, it is hard to deny that in the modern era emotions are predominantly viewed as something inside, in the mind (see also, Rosaldo 1983). Schmitz paves the way for theorizing emotions in a less psychologistic way and taking them out of the 'box' into which they were put, he thinks, 2,400 years ago.

To theorize emotions in the space between people, objects and practices, Schmitz uses the term *atmosphere*. According to Schmitz, any situation has an atmosphere that is created through the entities that constitute it and the ways in which we relate to them. Accordingly, he defines emotions as atmospheres that are 'poured out' in space from where they grip and retune humans through the lived body (*Leib*) (Schmitz 2016:19). The space itself is occupied through feelings and experiences, allowing the *Leib* to receive them and the mind to cognitively frame them. Because emotions (as atmospheres) are intangible and in between, he calls them *Halbdinge* (half-entities). Let me provide an example to illustrate this.

Imagine it is Monday morning and you are entering the coffee kitchen at work. You join your colleagues in their chat about things that happened over the weekend. Coffee is running slowly through the machine. The atmosphere of the coffee kitchen lingers between weekend reflections and some heaviness of the working week ahead. As you chat, your boss comes in. The talk stops. The atmosphere changes. It touches you, and

you feel uncomfortable, looking at the coffee machine, hoping that it will run through faster so that you can return to your desk without an excuse.

To theorize the shared affectivity this situation contains and its sudden shift, I propose – following Schmitz – to consider the affect as an atmosphere. This atmosphere is constituted in the network of relationships that includes people, furniture, the space of the kitchen, narrations, aims, the burdens of the working week ahead, the tiredness of a Monday morning, the smell of the coffee and much more. As you enter the situation, it touches you. As your boss enters, it changes, affecting you, soliciting your lived body (*Leib*) in such a way that you must develop an attitude towards it. One of the attractive aspects of Schmitz's conceptualization of emotions as atmosphere is that every situation has an atmosphere. But why might entering the room feel different for you and for me? According to Schmitz, past experiences and the disposition we have can explain these differences. We have, so to speak, socially learned ways of attuning to an atmosphere.

This conception of emotions as atmospheres is new to anthropology. It has mostly been used to study collective situations and their affective layer. Wellgraf (2017), for example, shows how boredom is experienced as an atmosphere in a German secondary school (*Hauptschule*) and how it is shaped by historical, material and political processes (Wellgraf 2017), while I explore rural boredom as an atmosphere of feeling blocked in post-colonial Namibia (Schnegg forthcoming b). In a related manner, Bens (2018, 2022), in his ethnography of the trial of a commander of the Lord's Resistance Army in the International Criminal Court (ICC), explores how atmosphere becomes important in courtrooms (Bens 2018, 2022). Another line of research emerges around music, aesthetics and rituals, where Eisenlohr (2018a, b) offers a fascinating analysis of *na't khwan* recitations as a Muslim devotional practice (Eisenlohr 2018a, 2018b), Heidemann (2021) explores the atmosphere in a South Indian temple festival, and Bille (2015, 2020) analyses the role light plays in home-making and aesthetics in Denmark. Most recently, Keil has used Schmitz's conceptual tools to study pig-dogging (a collective hunt) and its atmosphere in Australia (Keil 2021).¹⁰

But how does the between-ness perspective add to our understanding of the situation around the rain on *lgamo'náb*? In my reading, the feelings Charles develops – being worried, frightened, fearful – are best described as an atmosphere that affects him. This atmosphere is produced in between the nodes of a network that constitute the situation in which he finds himself. These nodes include the view of the sky that opens a window to perceiving what might happen soon; the rain that will come, with its many effects; the sky that grows dark; and the wetness of the wind, which begins

¹⁰ While the term 'atmosphere' is comparably new in the anthropological debate, two other terms have been used to analyze similar phenomena: mood (Throop 2014) and *Stimmung* (Borneman and Ghassem-Fachandi 2017). All three terms have been used in various contexts, and their meanings overlap. In addition to these uses, anthropological classics, especially Turner and Geertz, mobilize similar ideas to explain how rituals, spaces, music and repetition inspire people and groups.

touching our skin. Something is in the air! †*Oab!ná*, ‘under the wind’, as people say. The way an atmosphere touches us and can lead to worry and fear is a process Schmitz describes as a narrowing of the emotional space. We close up emotionally. The scene also reveals how different atmospheres can surround two or more people, even if they are at the same place at the same time. My body is not receptive to the atmosphere he feels, partly because I have not felt it repeatedly before and because I do not have the knowledge about what will come next. Charles’ reaction, to be worried and to take action to protect the animals, can be explained to a certain extent through the atmosphere that characterizes the situation and that touches him emotionally.

So how, then, does the world appear to us with Schmitz and in light of a *between-ness phenomenology*? One salient focus Schmitz develops is atmospheres. To understand them, we must recognize how they are formed between people, entities and practices. Being there, they befall us, shaping what we (can) feel, think and do. This offers a sophisticated tool for exploring emotions, especially those that are felt collaboratively and in situations like boredom, loneliness, exuberance or grief (Schnegg forthcoming a, b). In addition to that, I find that *between-ness phenomenology* has great potential because many situations we analyse – think of the ‘the bridge’ or ‘the cockfight’ – have an atmosphere. However, the affective layer and the potentialities and constraints it creates for individual and collective behaviours have rarely been explicitly theorized. The notion of atmospheres provides a means for doing this. Finally, the interest in shared affectivity that *between-ness phenomenology* expresses also resonates well with the affective turn (Berlant 2011; Mazzarella 2009; Stewart 2007; Schnegg 2023c, von Poser and Willamowski 2020).

With-ness Phenomenology (Edith Stein)

Edith Stein asks, if we compare a person to an object such as a table, do we make sense of a person as ‘a whole’ in the same way? The answer is obviously ‘no’. When we see a person, we realize that she has a subjective body (*Leib*) and a genuine perspective too. Therefore, we want to understand what her consciousness points to, what her intentionality is. Husserl calls this process of trying to understand another person’s intentionality *Einfühlung* (empathy) (Flatscher 2013; Husserl 1973a: 187).

His student Stein explains *Einfühlung* as a three-step process of experiencing another person’s experience (Schnegg and Breyer 2022). First, I experience that another person has an experience (e.g., an emotion) which may be different from mine, for example, when I see the pain in a person’s face when she hits her thumb with a hammer (perceiving expression). Then, because I realize that her body is similar to mine, I am pulled into her position to follow the experience through and to imagine what the experience is like for her (following through). Finally, I come to an understanding of what meaning the experience has for her by using this understanding to interpret her behaviour, for example, when she shakes her hand to counter the pain of having been struck (understanding the other anew) (Stein 2008: 18-19; Svenaeus 2018). In brief, I

recognize an expression (Step One), I am pulled in to follow through (Step Two), and I understand the other anew (Step Three).

One of the interesting aspects of Stein's theory is that it describes empathy as a multilayered process in which we could also stop after Step One or Two when, for example, I cannot imagine how the other might feel. This happens, Stein says, in the case of a plant. We interpret the expressive behaviour – its look indicates that it is feeling unhappy (e.g. a wilted houseplant that needs water) – but we still do not easily follow through because only with great difficulty can we imagine what the world is like for a plant. An expert gardener, however, who spends more time with plants, might find it easier to imagine a plant's world (Stein 2008:§5 i).

Early phenomenologists like Stein and Husserl engaged with empathy to explore the foundation of the intersubjective and intercorporeal (Merleau-Ponty) construction of reality. In this perspective, reality results from an interpretation of the world through empathic relations (*Einfühlungszusammenhänge*) (Husserl 2002:195). Building on Husserl, Merleau-Ponty further develops this view when he shows how an object (like a table) changes its significance when someone else sees it, too. Because the other's view is added to mine and because I am aware of this, the world becomes something different (and properly shared) (Merleau-Ponty 2012:369; Throop and Zahavi 2020:286). But how does combining perspectives work?

Since I realize that the other is a subject too, and different from me, I can use her perspective to confirm and refine mine. If the other were the same as me, a copy, she could hardly have this effect. This would, to quote Wittgenstein, add as much as reading the same story again in a duplicate copy of the morning paper to confirm that what the journalist says is really true (Wittgenstein 1997:94). Only by reading a similar story in a different newspaper (by a different journalist) does it alter my relation to reality. In the same way, the intersubjective experience is reinforced by engaging with other perspectives through empathy (Zahavi 2003:116).

Although beyond-humans are not the focus of their analyses, Stein and Husserl assume that we can have empathy with beyond-human beings too, including God, animals and plants (Stein 2008:§5 b, c, i). Stein picks a dog wagging her tail to explore this. We know that the dog has a perspective that is shaped by the sensory capacities she possesses. Therefore, if we see her wagging her tail (first step), we are equally trying to 'follow through' to put ourselves in the dog's subjective position to understand what the dog is experiencing (second step). In doing so, we imagine having the sensory capacity of a dog, which allows us to know the world from her perspective. Then, in the third step, we use this understanding to interpret the behaviour of the dog when we find her relaxed and we pet her (Stein 2008:§5, b).¹¹

Stein's analysis of empathy has proved very productive for anthropology (Hollan and Throop 2008; Throop 2008, 2010; von Poser 2011). Recently I and a colleague

11 Husserl uses the jellyfish to make a similar argument (Husserl 1973b: 118-120).

have used her model to explore the effect of non-human subjectivities for the social construction of a multispecies world (Schnegg and Breyer 2022).

So how does the with-ness perspective add to our understanding of the situation around the rain on *ǁgamo!nâb*? There are different entities involved with whom one could empathize, notably the female *huri!oab*, the male *tû!oab* and the animals. But which ones do people empathize with, and how does this change the social construction of the world? On the first day, Charles empathizes with the goats when he tries to understand what their world is like. He follows all three steps in Stein's model. The goats become something different for him than what they are for me – I do not empathize with them. In Charles' social construction of the world, not only do the goats become different, but the entire landscape becomes different from mine. A landscape that is arid for me becomes a threat for him, knowing what it might sound, smell and look like for goats searching for green pastures. While Charles fully empathizes with the animals, the empathetic process stops after Step One with the two winds. He is not pulled through; he does not try to understand what the world is like for them. Because of this, they do not add to the social construction of his world. Empathy changes not only the perspective of the individual, but also the social reality in which he finds himself. And sometimes this reality is not shared, as was the case with Charles and I.

To conclude, how does the with-ness perspective contribute to our understanding of how things appear? It adds intersubjectivity, which allows us to understand how those appearances construct shared social realities.

VI. Contextualizing the Mind

Phenomenology provides universal concepts for theorizing experience. They are not, by themselves, suitable for understanding the different experiences Charles and I have in a particular situation – such as being in the rain. To understand this, we need to add something to these transcendental structures of experience that phenomenologists have discovered and described. This is where the historical, cultural, social, political and economic contexts come in – and so does the anthropologist. Simply stated, my idea for phenomenological anthropology is that *what* we experience in a situation is a function of *how* we experience it plus the *context* in which the experience takes place.

But what does the context add, and how?

Let me return to Husserl's analysis of time to exemplify how the context adds to experience. Husserl has shown how, in moments, we connect the 'now' with past and future impressions to make experience meaningful. For Charles, then, *ǁgurukupu!nanub* links the rains to the seasonal cycle, the arid environment and the expectation that his livestock is likely to run to its death. The particular web of relationships only makes sense against the background of his pastoral being-in-the-world, colonial appropriation and the resulting land scarcity. If there was sufficient land, animals would not

run away, and *!gurukupu !nanub* would not be threatening or even exist. Thus, while Husserl's analysis provides us with a universal principle for how we experience through time, we as anthropologists must add the context to understand how this becomes a specific experience for the people with whom we work. And we must add context to explore why the experience of rain might translate differently for Charles and for myself.

Similarly, Stein's notion of empathy proposes a general principle for how we experience other subjectivities and how they impact what the world jointly becomes. Initially meant to explore relationships with humans, her three-step model can be applied to all sorts of subjectivities. But who has subjectivity, and with whom do we empathize? As we have shown, the Damara attribute subjectivity not only to humans but to animals, tricksters, winds and many other entities in their world (Schnegg and Breyer 2022). However, they empathize to different degrees with these entities. Therefore, the perspectives of tricksters and animals add to the social construction of a multispecies world, whereas that of the wind does not. This example again reveals how one can connect phenomenological concepts with the social and cultural context to understand *what* appears to a specific person.

Lastly, consider Schmitz' atmospheres. People around Fransfontein experience the time after Christmas as an atmosphere of absence they describe as *!Ūke-ai*, collective loneliness (Schnegg forthcoming a). This atmosphere is felt as something that hovers in the place and touches people, making them feel in particular ways. How does it get there? In December, most migrants return to their rural homes, filling the marginalized hinterlands with their presence, their food, their music, their cars, their noises and much more. December is *!khoe-xa*, full of everything, as people say. Then, in January, when the migrants go back, only the traces of empty food cans, car tracks and memories are left. The presence of these traces creates an absence people describe as an atmosphere of collective loneliness. However, *!Ūke-ai* does not last long. After a couple of weeks, these absences are filled in. January comes after December, but at the same time it is before the next December. Things will come again. This example again shows how a universal conception – emotions as atmospheres – can be connected to a specific context to make an experience such as loneliness intelligible (Schnegg forthcoming a).

These examples, and my analyses throughout the text, reveal that *what* we experience is a function of *how* we experience it and the context in which the experience occurs. Because of this entanglement of different aspects of experience, phenomenological anthropology, even though it starts with a first-person perspective, allows us to address society if we turn the arrow around. We can address the coloniality that shapes the meaning of rain, the Damara understanding of subjectivity that influences what the world jointly becomes, and the marginalization and migration patterns that create an atmosphere of absence in January. But can we go one step further? Can phenomenological anthropology also be used to criticize some of these processes? Can it open ways of imagining a possible otherwise? And should it? These questions are at the heart of current debates (Al-Saji 2017; Guenther 2021; Weiss et al. 2020).

VII. Critical Phenomenology

A widespread critique of phenomenology is that it neglects the political and economic structures that shape what people experience (Bedorf and Herrmann 2020; for a discussion see, Desjarlais and Throop 2011:94ff.). This critique was already voiced by the Frankfurt School, most prominently by Theodor Adorno, who felt that phenomenology ranged from an ‘uncritical’ and ‘bourgeois’ philosophy at best (Husserl) to promoting a ‘jargon of authenticity’ (Heidegger) that fitted National Socialist ideology well (cited in, Zahavi and Loidolt 2022).

Whereas its preoccupation with knowledge and authenticity is justified, I do not agree with this critique in general. Husserl’s *Krisis* (Husserl 1976c) is a critical analysis of scientific knowledge production, and Heidegger engages critically with traditions and technologies (Heidegger 2006). More importantly, phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty, Frantz Fanon, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and Hannah Arendt produced classic texts that not only reflect knowing critically but (1) engage critically with the injustices in their societies and (2) support projects for a better and more just world (Guenther 2020; Zahavi and Loidolt 2022). In so doing, many of these authors draw on Marxist thinking. Already in the late 1970s, Waldenfels edited four volumes *Phänomenologie und Marxismus* (phenomenology and Marxism) to further explore this interconnection (Waldenfels 1977).

Acknowledging these contributions, an increasing number of scholars now agree that the classics were political but not political enough. To develop these aspects of phenomenology further, a new school is emerging that calls itself *critical phenomenology*, reaching out from phenomenology to critical theory (Guenther 2020, 2021; Magri and McQueen 2023; Salamon 2018; Weiss et al. 2020). These philosophical texts share many of the concerns of earlier anthropological attempts to mobilize phenomenological thinking for social critique (especially, Desjarlais 2005; Good 1994; Willen 2007), turning *critical phenomenology* into a truly interdisciplinary arena (Mattingly et al. 2018; Zigon 2017, 2018). A first set of topics includes those social fields in which oppression or suffering is especially present, such as solitary confinement (Guenther 2013), Whiteness and racialization (Ahmed 2007; Yancy 2016), White policing (Guenther 2019), being-queer (Ahmed 2006), transgender and transphobia (Salamon 2010, 219), migrant lives at the margins (Willen 2007; Willen 2021), care (Aulino 2019; Mattingly 2014, 2017), dementia (Dyring and Grøn 2021), homelessness (Desjarlais 1994, 1997), loneliness (Schnegg forthcoming a, b), the war on people (Zigon 2018) and related themes. In addition to this, a second field of research broadens Heidegger’s notion of *being-in-the-world* to a *being-in-worlds*, *being-between-worlds* and *world travelling*, to fully acknowledge the multiplicity of worlds people often inhabit (Lugones 1987; Ortega 2016).

But what does critical phenomenology criticize? And how?

In my understanding, there are several approaches. I use a first approach here when I refer to the social, economic and material contexts (i.e., structures) that circumscribe

what a subject experiences. A large number of phenomenological anthropologists have argued along similar lines and shown convincingly how the analysis of first-person experiences – often suffering – allows us to point critically to the injustices in which the experience is rooted (Biehl 2013; Desjarlais 1997; Good 1994; Mattingly 2010; Schepher-Hughes 1992; Willen 2021). In a highly inspiring recent article, Mattingly called this ‘critical phenomenology 1.0’. She proposes moving to 2.0, in which anthropology’s *perplexing particulars* allow ‘defrosting’ the concepts we, as anthropologists, use. In this sense, ethnographic observations, and the concepts our interlocutors use, help to destabilize and eventually strengthen the theories we have (Mattingly 2019:433).

The Gaze: Entangling First- and Third-Person Perspectives

In this article, I have foregrounded an approach that highlights the relationship between the first- and the third-person perspectives. What do I mean by that? For Jean-Paul Sartre, subjective experience (a first-person perspective) is confronted with objectifications from a third-person perspective, something which he refers to as the ‘gaze’ of others (Sartre 2001). These perspectives limit how we can experience ourselves and the world. For example, if you call me old, lonely, or male, these categorizations have a normative dimension that interacts with what and how I (can) experience myself, others and the world. Striving to transcend the limiting determinations of this kind is freedom, Sartre says (Sartre 1992).

While Sartre developed the idea of the ‘gaze’, Frantz Fanon and Simone de Beauvoir must be credited with fully – and critically – developing his argument for the purpose of articulating social critique. Their main intervention was to add that some gazes have more power to restrict than others. In addition, they argue that some people are better equipped to ‘look back’. When the Martinique-born philosopher and psychiatrist Fanon describes being looked at as ‘Black’ in France in the 1920s and de Beauvoir as ‘woman’ or ‘old’, they both show vividly how the gazes of powerful groups (e.g., ‘white’, ‘men’, ‘young’) destroy subjectivity and make a free becoming impossible (De Beauvoir 1974, 1996; Fanon 2008). To explore such exclusionary processes, both authors ask which social and political conditions make possible and legitimate these gazes, and how people can shield themselves from them and resist them.

Recent philosophical works that further develops this thinking include Alcoff’s (2005) analysis of racialized identity, Yancy’s *Black Bodies, White Gazes* (Yancy 2016) and Ortega’s (2016) work on *Mestizaje* and *Latinidad* (Alcoff 2006; Ortega 2016). In anthropology, scholarship in postcolonial studies pushes in a similar direction, adding that categories like race are not (only) in the eye of the beholder but in the practice of violence, superordination and exploitation, demarcating the rule of Europe over non-Europe (Afolayan 2018; Hesse 2016; Rosa and Bonilla 2017). With this, they further explore the power relations that make some views (‘gazes’) more dominant and others less so.

Some phenomenologists now refer to this as the analysis of normativity, seen as a set of quasi-transcendental structures (Guenther 2021). They are quasi-transcendental because they shape the possibilities of experiences in *specific social and historical contexts*. Quasi-transcendental structures are also referred to as ‘ways of seeing’, ‘ways of feeling’ and even ‘ways of making the world’, as Guenther (2020:12) says, including, for example, the patriarchy, white supremacy and heteronormativity that permeate thinking in ways that go beneath a particular thought (ibid.). We might also call them prejudices, acknowledging that all humans have prejudices. But where do these ‘ways of seeing’ come from? To address this, Zigon proposes the idea of a situation and shows how shared but distributed ‘conditions’ provide a basis for ‘possible ways of being, doing, speaking and thinking within that situation’ (Zigon 2015; 2018:38). To decipher these normalization processes and the consequences they have is the task critical phenomenology assigns itself.

But how can we do that?

Among Damara pastoralists, it is a common practice to demand food from one’s neighbours, usually once or twice a day (Schneegg 2015, 2021b). Sharing is initiated by the recipient and applies to goods that are either so abundant or so essential that one can hardly deny others access to them. Sharing and the dependency it shows has long been a valued social practice that expresses belonging by allowing others to show how they care. Recently, however, this practice has begun to change, as those who make such demands increasingly feel ashamed. Let me exemplify this.

When I talked to Sarah about shame, she remembered one situation especially well. She had approached her uncle’s house to demand some sugar and tea late one afternoon. As she was about to leave again, unexpected visitors appeared. ‘Immediately I tried to hide the cup he had given to me’, she said, ‘but it was too late!’ ‘The tree has fallen (*Hais ge go !gauhe*)’, meaning that the secret has been revealed. In this moment, when she thought that people had realized the intention of her visit, she felt the striking gaze of the visitor first, then her shame. But why? And how did this experience come about?

In this moment, an atmosphere of exclusion emerged, singling her out from the rest of the group. To theorize her feelings, I argue with other phenomenologists that shame is felt when the taken for granted social being-in-the-world is disrupted (Rukgaber 2018). Now, the gaze of others makes us painfully aware of our body, our position and our relation to them. In the moment the visitors see her, this breakdown leads to an atmosphere of exclusion in which she is singled out, resulting in the feelings she has.

But when does this rupture occur? And how does this allow us to critique the underlying social processes? With food-sharing, people increasingly fear that asking displays a dependency on others that could become a ‘story’ (*#hòab*) in the community. But how has dependency, which was a sign of belonging, become bad? It has to do with neoliberal and Pentecostal discourses that changed the conception of the self. The self has now become *responsible for itself*. At the same time, the structural transformations

brought about by neoliberalism also imply that a large number of people are being increasingly marginalized and cannot take care of themselves.

To shield oneself from the potential shamefulness of the neoliberal gaze, people like Sarah maintain some reciprocal relationships in which they have revealed their vulnerabilities. Beyond these relationships people aim to hide their dependencies, which have become bad.

This example reveals how discourses and institutions, including neoliberal and partly Christian ideologies of the self, change what is 'normal' and, with this, the 'gazes' the subject must face. These discourses and institutions can be conceptualized as a quasi-transcendental structure that circumscribes the possibilities of experience. This structure is expressed as a third-person perspective and creates situations in which demanding, for example, a valued social relationship in the past, can become shameful.

The example also shows why I wrote so many pages on the fundamental phenomenological concepts before getting to the potential for a critical analysis, which may be the most appealing part to anthropologists. The traces these structures leave on Sarah's feelings have been carved out through the application of phenomenological concepts, including (1) the basic distinction between reflectivity and pre-reflectivity, (2) atmospheres and (3) the gaze in combination with the ethnographic context in which feeling exists. Only in combination do they allow us to make visible what the neoliberal transformation of the self does to a particular self, Sarah in this case.

This intersection is something other theoretical models, including Foucault, cannot cope with. Especially in his earlier works, he is mostly interested in understanding how a subject comes to understand itself as a subject. He puts a great deal of emphasis on the power relations that shape discourses and discipline the self. This view leaves much less room for the self as someone who is experiencing, responding creatively and resisting. Maybe even more than Foucault, Latour's Actor-Network-Theory devalues the role of human subjects that become 'one among millions', an unprivileged node in a constantly shifting network of more-than-human relationships.

Another major advantage of critical phenomenology over other approaches is that it conceptualizes knowing as irreversibly embodied. The gaze is part of my *Leib* that does not 'end' at my skin, as Schmitz says. Sarah feels it painfully before she experiences shame, an emotion deeply intertwined with body processes itself (Casimir and Schnegg 2002).

Future Directions

A generative future potential of critical phenomenological anthropology lies in further exploring the embodied relationships between self, others, categorizations and norms. The study of norms (rules, institutions, regimes) and categorizations (of others, things, etc.) has long been a concern in anthropology. And yet, I know of no *experience-based* theory that can explain how such categories emerge (and change), to which norms they are tied, and to which experiences they lead.

In my view, anthropology is in a privileged position to contribute to this aspect. More than any other approach, ethnography allows space for showing how norms and categorizations emerge in collectives where power is always distributed unequally. To theorize these processes, Marxist theories offer effective resources that spell out the link between norms, power and economic structures (Neveling 2019). While Marxism enters critical phenomenology through French Existentialism, I find that a more direct engagement with Karl Marx would be promising. Based on such an analysis of norm formation, phenomenology provides a sensitive means of studying – through the first-person perspective – how categorizations and norms shape what people *must*, *can* and *want* to experience and what their world becomes. To describe these linkages between subjects and the world, the phenomenological concepts I introduced (i.e., embodiment, being-in-the-world, atmospheres) provide a theoretical guide.

The focus in critical phenomenology is mostly on the exclusionary aspects of normativity and the gaze. It would, in my view, be enormously fruitful to explore its liberating and empowering potential, too. This includes, for one, the emergence of inclusionary norms, such as the appreciation of ‘diversity’ that undermines the exclusionary potential of the gaze. For another, it includes recognizing that gazes can empower, support, encourage, or enchant. They can make one feel welcome, attracted and hot. Adequately theorizing the empowering potential of the gaze and the larger atmospheric situations gazes create remains a key challenge for phenomenological anthropology (Ahmed 2007).

What is more, the focus on the empowering potential opens up a path towards imagining the potentialities of living otherwise – phenomenology not only *as critique* but *as hope*, if you will. This is what some scholars have in mind when they began to explore how phenomenology allows us to envision a ‘being-together-otherwise’ (Zigon 2018; 2021:80). In addition to scientific reflections and analyses, another way to do this is through collaborations with artists in what is becoming known as ‘imagistic anthropology’ (Mattingly and Grøn 2022). Yet another way is to engage with activism. Both are promising paths for not only thinking about but also initiating change (Guenther 2020, 2022).

VIII. Conclusion

There is another serious criticism of phenomenology. How can a philosophy developed in Europe and largely by men serve as a blueprint for exploring experience globally? What do *they* know? I see three promising ways to respond to this important critique. First, a growing philosophical literature is being written in other world regions, extending the vocabulary accordingly (Anzaldúa 2007; Lugones 1987). As the Latina feminist phenomenologist Ortega puts it, to her this means philosophizing not with a hammer but with a keen attunement to justice (Ortega 2016:xi). These philosophies are part

of the emerging critical phenomenology I have described. Second, some authors have begun to show how basic phenomenological ideas (e.g., the duality of reflectivity and pre-reflectivity) are salient in other world views as well, including Buddhism, Taoism and ancient Chinese philosophy (Hepach 2018; Krummel 2017; Ogawa 1998; Varela et al. 2016). If so, this would strengthen the universal claim the phenomenological program makes. Third, anthropologists can contribute to destabilizing and broadening phenomenological concepts when using them in ethnographic contexts that are significantly different. In so doing, anthropologists help to test the limits of these concepts and/or to develop them in ways that allow them to capture a broader range of experiences (Bubandt and Wentzer 2022; Mattingly 2019).

To conclude, I see three ways in which phenomenological anthropology contributes to theorizing beyond what other approaches have to offer. First, phenomenology provides a *theory of experience* that starts with the embodied first-person perspective. This allows the relationship between the knower and the known to be studied in nuanced ways. In so doing, phenomenological anthropology connects universal phenomenological concepts (some of which I have introduced) with the specific social and historical contexts in which the experience takes place. Second, by separating *how we know* from the context that frames specific experience, we can carve out the roles that material, social and normative structures play in constituting a phenomenon. This allows us to track the traces these particular structures leave in our bodies and our consciousness. No other theoretical approach has such a powerful theoretical vocabulary to describe this interaction between structures and embodied experience. Singling out structures in this way and making them visible opens up a unique opportunity for reflecting on social processes critically. Third, phenomenological anthropology applies the same concepts to the ways our interlocutors dwell in their worlds and to how we, as anthropologists, experience their world-making. With this, we do not need to make different assumptions about how we as scientists and others experience.

Jointly, then, phenomenology and anthropology can provide a sophisticated, reflexive and critical way of understanding *how* and *as what* things appear *in* consciousness *for* a subject, and thus a way of studying how worlds emerge in between ours and the other's point of view.

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