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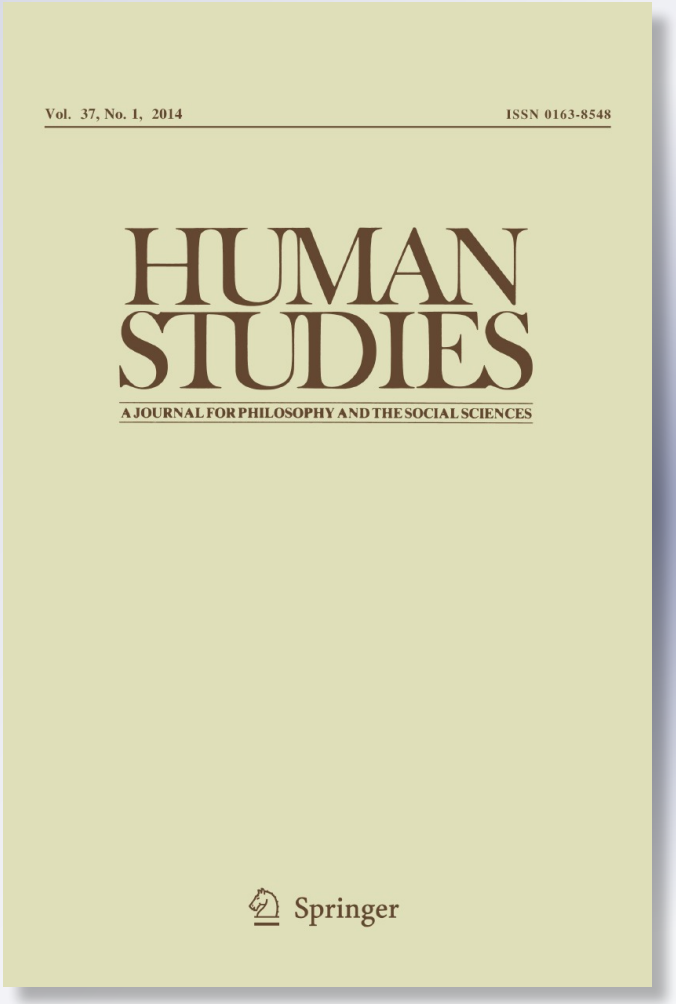

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Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the Ethics of Body and Place: Critical Methodological Reflections

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Abstract This article is a critical methodological reflection on the use of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) initiated in the context of a qualitative research project on the experience of seclusion in a psychiatric setting. It addresses an explicit gap in the IPA literature to explore the ways that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can extend the remit of IPA for noncognitivist qualitative research projects beyond the field of health psychology. In particular, the article develops Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the lived-body, language, and embodied speech, with specific attention to the ethical implications of body and place. It concludes with a discussion on phenomenological reflexivity and prompts a reconsideration of phenomenological methods across a wide range of qualitative research projects concerned with subjectivity and ethical practice, including critical health studies, critical bioethics, and cultural studies that employ a qualitative empirical research design.

Keywords Critical methods · Embodiment · Ethics · Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) · Lived body · Merleau-Ponty · Phenomenology · Qualitative research

> Place is not founded *on* subjectivity but that *on which* the notion of subjectivity is founded. Thus one does not first have a subject who apprehends certain features of the world in terms of the idea of place; instead the structure

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> of subjectivity is given in and through the structure of place. (Malpas 1998: 35)

This article is a critical methodological and theoretical reflection on the use and limits of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) in the context of a qualitative research project on the experience of seclusion in a psychiatric setting. Addressing a gap in the literature, it problematizes the mainstream understanding and practice of IPA by using Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body and place, as well as his related treatment of language and embodied speech. In so doing, we extend the functionality of IPA both intellectually and methodologically. Rather than presuming a coherent subject, as IPA tends to do as its methodological starting point, we claim that subjectivity is founded upon a dynamic relation built in and through embodied place and speech. Ethical analysis ought to begin here, we argue, through an investigation into the ways that subjectivity is constituted. We turn to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of *parole parlante* (speaking speech) in order to reorient ethics as a matter of bodies that speak, where speech represents the struggle to make sense of experience and to communicate that experience to oneself self-reflexively as well as to others. It is in this context, we suggest, that the subject can appear as the bearer of an ethical claim, whether that claim is situated in the actions of a body or as a vocalization. Implicit here is a critique of cognitivist psychological approaches to phenomenology, biomedicine, and (bio)ethics, which often figure bodies as problematically lifeless and abstract.

These reflections were initiated following a qualitative study guided by two interrelated questions: What bearing does the 'structure of place'—as opposed to 'space' (Casey 1997, 2003)—have on mental health patients subject to the practice of seclusion? And, if 'space' implies the reductive understanding of bodies as biophysiological objects, can the body's social and interpretive experience of 'place' form the basis of ethical subjectivity and ethical healthcare practice? Through the phenomenological analysis of seclusion room experience, our research project hoped to explore an alternative approach to ethics that would take account of the lived-body and the relational, intersubjective dimensions of 'place'—particularly in an age dominated by reductive 'best-practices' and the biomedical 'recalcitrance of space' (Malpas 2003) that conceives of the body 'objectively'. We were interested in ways that "place seems always to resist the imposition of any purely 'spatial' logic and [seems] constantly to re-assert itself" (Malpas 2003: 2343). To this end, non-directed, semi-structured phenomenological interviews with patients ($n = 12$) and nursing staff ($n = 12$) were conducted to better understand the seclusion room experience as a lived and relational place. Although the use of seclusion is a contested management strategy (Holmes et al. 2004; Muir-Cochrane 1995; Muir-Cochrane and Holmes 2001; Taxis 2002), it should be stated up front that it was never our intention to make an ethical judgment on the practice of seclusion in the psychiatric setting or to evaluate nursing practice. In broad terms, the purpose of the study was to shift the terms of ethical discourse in a manner that would be more commensurable with the embodied, lived experience of patients and nurses. From a methodological perspective, then, the potential impact of our findings extends beyond the effects of seclusion on patients' health to prompt a

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reconsideration of phenomenology across a wide range of qualitative research projects concerned with subjectivity and ethical practice more generally.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Phenomenology

IPA is a qualitative method originally developed for studies in health psychology (Benner 1994; Giorgi 1985, 1992b, 1994; Kvale 1983; Smith 1996, 2004). While it is a relatively new methodological approach, in recent years it has become increasingly popular in the human, social, and health sciences (Larkin et al. 2006; Smith et al. 2009). The goal of a phenomenological study is to understand the ways in which individuals perceive the world around them and make sense of their lived experiences. IPA thus offers an alternative to quantitative research in health psychology, "by looking in detail at how individuals talk about the stressful situations they face, and how they deal with them, and by close consideration of the meanings they attach to them" (Smith 1996: 270). Using a phenomenological research design to study seclusion in psychiatric settings, Holmes et al. (2004) conclude that not only do patients experience seclusion as a punitive measure, but patient narratives also highlight their intersubjectivity, suggesting that the lack of patient–nurse contact negatively impacts their experience. And in their phenomenological study of physical restraint, Bigwood and Crowe (2008) conclude that nurses may be conflicted about its use, but nevertheless perceive seclusion and restraint as 'part of the job'. What was missing from the literature, however, was an *ethical* analysis of bodily perceptions and interpersonal relationships in the seclusion room setting, and an appropriate methodological approach for such a study. It is the purpose of this paper to explore some of the methods that might make possible the ethical analysis of bodily perceptions and interpersonal relationships. While it is correct to regard the body as a site of ethical concern, the question remains how to address such a body, and how to understand that body as addressing us, as researchers and as healthcare providers—in brief, to study the conditions that will enable these bodies to speak and to stake an ethical claim.

Our research project adopts IPA, adapting methodologies described in the detailed handbooks available (e.g., Benner 1994; Chan et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2009). As Smith et al. (2009) suggest, IPA can complement traditional methodologies (which measure 'objective' or 'quantitative' variables) because it affords insight into a subject's intimate experience of body and illness, psychological distress, personal identity, and the effects on these of treatments such as restraint and seclusion: "the IPA researcher is engaged in a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith et al. 2009: 3). To this end, our in-depth semi-structured, non-directed interviews were designed [1] to gain access to the bodily phenomenon of being placed in seclusion; [2] to 'give voice to' (Larkin et al. 2006) the intimate experiential understanding and elaboration of this experience through words and bodily gestures; and [3] through phenomenological interpretation, to understand the subjective processes and meaning-making of this experience, a feature that is underdeveloped in the literature (Brocki and Wearden 2006; Larkin et al. 2006,

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2011)—and that is rarely discussed in the context of ethics (with a few notable exceptions: Greenfield and Jensen 2010a, b; Guenther 2011, 2013; Häggman-Laitila 1999; Murray and Holmes 2013; Usher and Holmes 1997).

After a thorough review of the IPA literature, however, we discovered that the task of appropriately adopting and adapting IPA would be a greater challenge than we imagined. We found ourselves in the middle of a debate concerning embodiment and language, or speech. Because language is central both to the ways a subject makes meaning of his/her bodily experiences and to the intersubjective, communicative context of the interview itself, we had expected a more nuanced discussion in the literature. Indeed, it is precisely this that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology gives us: for him, body and language—speech—are intimately connected, inseparable. And yet our impression of the IPA literature was that the body itself is often absent, or simply presumed to exist behind straightforward descriptions (or spoken testimony) from research participants, as if these descriptions straightforwardly conveyed what is called the lived-experience of the subject, his/her body, and his/her intersubjective relations with others. This bias is captured well in Giorgi's formulation: "whatever presents itself can be described according to how it presents itself" (1992a: 122). In other words, what troubled us was that IPA seems to presume a coherent subject from the start—a subject who is tasked with the straightforward description of an experience, but who does not seem to question the 'how' of his/her descriptions or experience. In contradistinction, we understand subjectivity as arising in and through embodied experience, as the struggle to make sense of that experience, and the struggle to communicate it to oneself and to others. Thus, it seemed to us that IPA was insufficiently radical, and missed the opportunity to critically take account of subject formation and of the context within which the subject might appear as the bearer of an ethical claim.

For us, there is a problematic disconnect between IPA and studies informed by discourse analysis (DA) as Potter (1996) defines it (e.g., Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008; Giorgi 1992a, 2010, 2011; Smith 1996, 2010). As Biggerstaff and Thompson write, "[a] prime distinction between IPA and DA is that DA examines the role of language in describing the person's experience, for example, while IPA explores how people ascribe meaning to their experiences in their interactions with the environment" (2008: 216). If language is both constitutive of the experience and that which tethers the subject to the environment or world, then IPA and DA ought to be complementary. We might even say it is impossible to do one without the other. But the rather narrow definitions of IPA and DA are historical and disciplinary. While DA has emerged from Foucault and poststructuralist analyses of individual texts, IPA is taken as "an epistemological stance whereby, through careful and explicit interpretative methodology, it becomes possible to access an individual's cognitive inner world" (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008: 216). With its cognitivist bias, we risk losing those elements that make a phenomenological analysis *phenomenological*; consequently, IPA's adherence to the description of cognitive 'contents' is ultimately faith-based, for, while there are certainly better and worse descriptions, to judge better from worse we must appeal to something beyond the contents themselves. Chapman and Smith's gloss on the conventional distinction between IPA and DA is worth citing at length:

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> While IPA shares with DA (e.g., Potter and Wetherell 1987) a commitment to the importance of language and qualitative analysis, IPA differs from DA in its perception of the status of cognition. Discourse analysis as conceived in contemporary social psychology is generally sceptical of the possibility of mapping verbal reports onto underlying cognitions and attempts, rather, to elucidate the interactive tasks being performed by verbal statements, how those tasks are accomplished and the linguistic resources drawn on. IPA, by contrast, is concerned with understanding what the respondent thinks or believes about the topic under discussion. (2002: 126; also see: Smith 2011: 10)

Thus, IPA focuses on thoughts and beliefs—cognition or mentation—while DA is concerned, on this account, with the (interview) texts themselves. Both seem to overlook the body, and the manner in which bodies are involved in meaning-making, through thoughts and beliefs as much as through language, speech, and gesture as bodies are dynamically situated in and express themselves through an intersubjective world of others. Even qualitative psychological studies that acknowledge the body as an under-studied site tend to resort to a cognitivst frame, where the body itself is replaced by the notion of "embodied, active, situated cognition," or EASC (e.g., Larkin et al. 2011). But as Merleau-Ponty makes clear in his excoriation of 'psychologism,' the link between the phenomenology of the body-subject and verbal expression cannot be so readily severed: "feelings and passional conduct are invented like words" (1962: 189). Phenomenological analysis must therefore comprise a study of the subject's speech—which is not a study of disembodied language or abstract text, and certainly not a matter of cognition. When we speak here of *speech*, we emphasize both its corporeal dimensions and the rhetorical situation within which it takes place, linking the body-subject to the meaningful and shared world of others. We therefore found ourselves in agreement with Brocki and Wearden (2006), who assert that many IPA researchers are unable to give sufficient attention to the interpretive dimensions of their work, and with Larkin, Watts, and Clifton, who claim that "the subtlety and complexity of phenomenology's aims and origins are often overlooked" (2006: 103; also see: Larkin et al. 2011).

Phenomenology and the Lived-Body (*Leib*)

Historically, the phenomenological project sought to critically challenge and overcome the Cartesian dualisms that underpin much cognitivist and bio-psycho-social (positivist) research: experience/expression, mind/body. Husserl (1970) argues that such dualistic thinking fosters a dangerously abstract form of 'reason' and underpins the moral concept of rational autonomy, which is properly derivative and which cannot form the basis of ethical subjectivity in any straightforward sense. Such rationalism is dangerous because it conceives of bodies and life itself as mere physiology—bodies conceived reductively as *Körper* in the geometric or material sense, and life conceived as bare biophysiology.

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Against this atomistic and one-dimensional understanding of bodies as 'objective' *Körper*, Husserl distinguishes the body as *Leib* (1970: 107). *Leib* is translated as the 'lived-body,' a body that is situated in the 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*), a bodily life in which bodies coexist through empathy (*Einfühlung*), in meaningful community with others, and in intimate proximity with the world (1970: 255, 1989: 170–180). The *Lebenswelt* is the prereflective, prepredicative 'ground'—the pregiven and shared condition of possibility—in which all meaning takes root. In other words, the concepts of 'lived-body' and 'life-world' represent a critique of the Enlightenment worldview, i.e., a critique of the Cartesian perspective that privileges the rational agency of the mind and mentation over the materiality of the body. Husserl argued that the *Lebenswelt* has been forgotten, and has been supplanted by the naïve objectivism of the life sciences; what is more, he claimed that such objectivism systematically covers over the fact that its 'objects' are constructions, and so science itself will deceptively seem to be immediate, prepredicative and pregiven, or simply 'natural' (see: Murray 2012).

Following Husserl and the ways his work was developed by Merleau-Ponty, our phenomenological analysis starts with the lived-body that exists in a spatiotemporal relation with others and with its environment or *place*. For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is reflection 'upon an unreflective experience' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: x), upon original or 'primordial' experiences which meaningfully anchor our bodies in the world. We analyze the subject's speech as a struggle to make meaning of his/her experience and as a site of ethical relationality. Problematizing the relation between a subject's experience and expression is an ethical matter because there is no such thing as a pure language (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 4), which means that phenomenological analysis cannot be a matter of straightforward description. The body and its speech are located on the same existential plane.

> Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, and as long as we do not describe the action which breaks this silence. The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 184)

Our research attends, then, to the silence, the gesture, the world that makes meaningful speech possible. Our phenomenological approach takes the lived-body and its relation to place as a *condition* of subjectivity, and therefore as the necessary ground upon which ethical relationality makes sense.

In other words, lived-body and place *produce* a mode of subjectivity without which ethics is reduced to codes, moral abstractions, and (often punitive) injunctions. In the words of Malpas, we are interested in "the making of persons through place and, more particularly, the way in which human persons are determined in their character as persons, or, indeed, as non-persons, through the institutional places in which they are located" (2003: 2343). With this in mind, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology holds the potential to correct a lacuna in IPA and to extend it in important new directions. We propose a more phenomenologically nuanced perspective, with a reflection on salient theoretical and methodological concerns as a guide to a wider application of IPA. Unsurprisingly, in the IPA

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literature Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology has received relatively little attention because it is difficult to render in cognitivist terms (with some noncognitivist exceptions, e.g., Sadala and Adorno 2002; Thomas 2005; Todres 2011; Wilde 1999; Wynn 1997, 2002). Instead, researchers selectively focus on the epistemological and hermeneutic dimensions of Husserl's and Heidegger's body of work; however, the extent to which this work is amenable to cognitivist approaches (e.g., Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1991) is itself debatable. Indeed, Husserl's (1970; also see: Murray 2012) late work focuses on culture and largely abandons the cognitions of a transcendental ego, while Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962) is so suspicious of language that he notoriously resorts to neologisms before turning to a study of language and poetry in later years (1975, 1982).

In a nutshell, we ask: how does one conduct research in the gap between bodily experience and discourse *on* that experience? Our task is not to collapse the two or to seek more 'adequate' or 'accurate' descriptions of the experiences to which they purportedly correspond; rather, we seek to dwell in and understand the relational space between them, where the subject struggles to bring meaning to his/her experience, both self-reflexively and in dialogue with others. Ultimately, then, phenomenological theory and method have direct implications for ethics, since a phenomenological analysis should attend, we argue, to the relational dimensions of a subject's experience and speech as these unfold in an ethical, intersubjective scene. This article stands, then, as a preliminary contribution to critical methods in bioethics, for it turns its gaze to the conditions of possibility under which ethical relationality takes place, and to those conditions that enable the subject to stake an ethical claim. To Heidegger's famous phrase that "Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible" (1962: 60), we suggest, more radically, that only as phenomenology is ethics possible. That is, only through a methodological understanding of the existential or lived conditions of subjectivity can we grasp the critical and necessary conditions for ethics and ethical care, because these are the conditions that will allow for a subject to appear *as* an ethical being, and as the bearer of an ethical claim, whether that claim is expressed in the body or whether it is vocalized.

Phenomenological Theory and Method: A Critique

> My body is not only an object among all other objects, a nexus of sensible qualities among all others, but an object which is *sensitive to* all the rest, which reverberates to all sounds, vibrates to all colours, and provides words with their primordial significance through the way in which it receives them. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 236)

While it is conventional for health researchers to distinguish between the theoretical and methodological components of a research project, we contend that the distinction between theory and method is untenable when these terms are rendered straightforwardly as thought and practice, respectively. Such a distinction supports a host of Cartesian dualisms that characterize the naïve (scientific) attitude: mind/body, thinking/feeling, discourse/experience, and so on—all of which have been

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thoroughly problematized by phenomenological philosophy since the early 1900s. In reality, empirical practices are themselves shot through with theory: theoretical underpinnings, prejudices, ways of observing that operate clandestinely, and which often cover their tracks to appear as immediate, unreconstructed, or 'natural'. Conversely, theory emerges from and responds dialogically to the world in which it figures. In our view, a phenomenological analysis ought to start with this problematization and take this phenomenon as its 'object' of inquiry as much as the phenomena that are generated and 'appear' in and through this context. But as Brocki and Wearden remark in their thorough review of IPA literature, "authors do not always explicitly recognise either the theoretical preconceptions they bring to the data or their own role in interpretation and this is a vital facet of IPA and one which ensures its accessibility and clarity" (2006: 101). Smith, for example, writes that his IPA of interview data is:

> based on a close reading of what is already in the passage, helped by analysis of what the participant said elsewhere in the interview and informed by a general psychological interest but without being influenced by a specific pre-existing formal theoretical position. (2004: 45)

Once again, however, it is the context that is lost and it is presumed here that the texts speak for themselves, 'without being influenced' by theoretical underpinnings. Thus, Smith claims to maintain a distinction between theory and method, while his analysis remains, in vague terms, "informed by a general psychological interest". How, we wonder, can a researcher truly suspend his or her theoretical commitments (or 'interests'), rather than begin with them, avow them, and explicate them? Here we might recall the phenomenological interdependence of figure and ground as they are understood in Gestalt psychology. The observable, empirical 'figure' appears by virtue of the 'ground' that supports it, lends it form, and meaning; the ground is the world, the environment or place, the necessary context without which meaningful phenomena cannot appear. The participant's text is always embedded in the experience, its original context(s), and in the context of the intersubjective interview itself. The 'border' between the figure and the ground is marked by ambiguity (one of Merleau-Ponty's central terms), just as body-subject and text represent a porous and vacillating 'limit' in relation to the world and to others.

To be sure, it is a significant challenge if we hope to 'translate' a phenomenological worldview which would theoretically inform and methodologically operationalize a qualitative research project. The phenomenological approach essentially resists operationalization or 'translation' into discrete methods, and while this poses a challenge, it can offer IPA researchers greater creativity and freedom (Willig 2001: 69). The challenge is hermeneutic, a matter of interpretations that are themselves situated dynamically: how are we to interpret interview 'data,' for instance? Speech is narrative and takes place within a scene of address; language is not simply a tool, it is not simply a means to an end.

> As soon as man [*sic*] uses language to establish a living relation with himself or with his fellows, language is no longer an instrument, *no longer a means; it is a manifestation, a revelation of intimate being and of the psychic link which*

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> *unites us to the world and our fellow men*. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 196; original emphasis)

The researcher must therefore attend to *how* ideas are communicated in the dialogue. Here we might draw on interpretive strategies from the human sciences: the significance of gestures, lacunae, hesitations, word choice, and figures of speech (tropes) such as metaphor, metonymy, and catachresis—the misuse of terms. The misuse or purposive abuse of conventional figures of speech, for example, might lend insight into the subject's difficult experience of meaning-making, of seeking or even reinventing stylistically and situationally appropriate terms for communication. In relation to ethical studies, catachresis is a figure of speech wherein an abuse gets played precisely so as to expose the context or the scene in which conventional norms as such are upheld. This occasions a shift in ethical perspective towards the lived-world and thus towards those conditions of possibility that ultimately uphold—or critique—or undermine—the conventional terms by which the subject relates to him/herself, by which he/she is bound to others, and in which these relations can be expressed. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "[i]n dialogue, narrative, plays on words, trust, promise, prayer, eloquence, literature, we possess a second-order language in which we do not speak of objects and ideas except to reach some person" (1973: 3). This calls for an ethics that can take account of the body phenomenologically, with critical readings informed by narrative and literary studies, semiotics, rhetorical studies, and critical studies in health and beyond (e.g., Bryson and Stacey 2013; Chambers 1999; Diedrich 2007; Elliott 1999, 2010; Heifferon and Brown 2008; Lupton 2003; Murray 2009, forthcoming; Murray et al. 2008; Murray and Holmes 2009, 2013; Segal 2005).

Critical interdisciplinary, phenomenological studies seek to unearth the immediacy of 'lived experience' and the struggle 'to reach some person'; phenomenology is not simply directed towards the analysis of a 'second-order language,' such as narrative descriptions or reports. Some IPA researchers qualify the 'description,' as Cohen, Kahn, and Steeves do when they ask participants "to describe an experience they had lived, not a vicarious experience or a reflection on their experience" (2000: 3). But it is not quite as straightforward as this: it is not sufficient to ask participants 'to direct their attention,' nonvicariously, because intentionality is implicated in the body's purpose or *sens*, in French, which signifies both direction and meaning, whether this is exigent or is as-yet inchoate, unexpressed, and still seeking meaningful expression or dialogical validation. As Lyotard writes, "[o]ne must not confuse intentionality with attention, as there is inattentive, or implicit, intentionality" (1991: 55). After all, every description is remediated, vicariously, by memory and by language, often in ways that are too complex to attend to, to describe, or to faithfully reproduce and analyze. An experience that is called to mind is in some sense *always* 'vicarious' and 'reflected': it is transformed by the sands of time, it takes place in language, and we must assume that the subject is no longer exactly who he/she was when he/she underwent that experience. Moreover, if the experience was difficult to endure or traumatic, we might well assume that the experience has been re-worked and digested in the interim, narrativized by the subject—self-reflexively and to others—so that simply asking a subject to recount

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the event may result in him/her telling the story as it has subsequently been revised or domesticated, unwittingly. One significant challenge, then, will be to devise strategies to bring to light the prereflective, unreflective, prepredicative experience of the event—and to bear witness and 'give voice' (Larkin et al. 2006) to the subject's struggle to make sense of that experience *in* language, *in* dialogue with the researcher.

Phenomenology and Ethics

In our study concerning the experience of seclusion, simply asking the patient to describe the experience of seclusion invites a stock response in the kind of second-order terminology that is frequently used by patients themselves or by the institution (typical of what linguists call a speech community)—a conventional vocabulary that further distances the participant from the immediate experience he/she is communicating. In some respects, this subjugation to the norms and expectations of language use will confirm the extent to which he/she has been 'disciplined' (Foucault 1977) by his/her peer group, by the institution, and by the perception of the research project itself—encouraged to take on the 'role' of the secluded patient, the inmate, the healthcare provider, and/or the research subject. We might consider these roles as a forced and enforced subjectivation. But asking, instead, if he/she remembers the first time he/she was placed in seclusion might engender a different response: What is it like to have this experience? Do you remember how that felt? Can you recall any particular bodily sensations? What were the features of the seclusion room? Do any particular smells or sounds come to mind? What was the colour of the walls? The researcher should elicit as much detail as possible about the subject's individual experience. The subject's body language, tone, and gesture are equally important; they should be noted where possible. For authenticity of interpretation, the interview should be "transcribed with meticulous accuracy, often including, for example, indications of pauses, mis-hearings, apparent mistakes, and even speech dynamics where these are in any way remarkable" (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008: 217). These, too, must be subject to analysis in order to arrive at a more complete picture. The goal is to have the patient recall his/her bodily orientation and the sensations that were immediately experienced. In this respect, phenomenology hopes to grasp the act, the event, of a subject who strives to bring order and meaning to experiences that are sometimes not easily comprehended or digested.

In phenomenological parlance, the researcher leads the participant on a phenomenological 'reduction' or *epoché*: putting the world in 'parentheses' or 'brackets,' as Husserl (1970: 240; 1982: 59–62) describes it—as much as possible suspending judgement in order to dwell in the lived immediacy of the experience before it was subject to subsequent revisions. More commonly, bracketing is discussed in the literature as a reflexive research practice on the part of the researcher only (see: Gearing 2004; Häggman-Laitila 1999). Certainly, the bracketing of second-order language and judgements will always be incomplete: there is no wholesale return to the event. But the goal is to invoke the experience in

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such a way as to provoke a response to the memory and to the experience of bringing those events to language, both self-reflexively and in order to communicate them to others. While one never steps into the same river twice, we are suggesting that the scene of the research interview might itself act as an intersubjective correlate or metaphor for the event that was *originally* experienced as individual: in telling his/her story to another, the subject struggles with analogous efforts to make the event meaningful, for him/herself and for the other—and through the other for him/herself, as part of a history to be shared. Thus, the interviewer is necessarily a participant-observer, and the research scene a site of ethical intersubjectivity. The subject tells his/her story to be heard, which is to say, felt, understood, and cared about; the story must matter. For this reason, Husserl (1989: 170–180) characterizes intersubjectivity as *Einfühlung*—empathy—and Heidegger (1962: 153–163) writes of an ontological or prepredicative *Mit-sein*—'being-with' others—a hyphenated formulation that points to the prereflective experiential inseparability of these terms. "He [*sic*] who speaks enters into a system of relations which presuppose his presence and at the same time make him open and vulnerable" (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 17). Speech itself presumes an ethical scene of address (Butler 2005), relations that are marked—often scarred—by the imbalance of power and violence just as much as they are by care and by empathy.

Merleau-Ponty's distinction between *parole parlée* and *parole parlante* (see 1962: 197) is crucial here if we are to understand the imbrication of speech, the body's dynamic 'place,' and their ethical import. *Parole parlée* (spoken speech) is "the language the reader brings with him, the stock of accepted relations between signs and familiar significations without which he could never have begun to read" (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 13). *Parole parlée* (spoken speech) is 'sedimented language': stock responses, second-order terminology, the institutionalized vocabulary that is readily available to the speaker. It says nothing new; it is speech that has already been spoken, that has already been received and interpreted according to the usual conventions—and ethical analysis is irreducible to the application of such principles, rules, or concepts. On the other hand, *parole parlante* (speaking speech) is language that is active, that is being uttered in the moment, the living struggle that breaks the spell of the stock response: language that has not yet been fixed or sedimented by the usual conventions. In this sense, *parole parlante* (speaking speech) is speech proper, it is "the operation through which a certain arrangement of already available signs and significations alters and then transfigures each of them, so that in the end a new signification is secreted" (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 13). 'Speaking speech,' in a nutshell, is the kind of speech that phenomenological inquiry hopes to evoke: the subject's efforts to bring to meaning his/her experience, to occupy the place of meaning-making, and, in the face-to-face with the researcher-other, to communicate, and to make that experience meaningful, communicable, valuable.

To be sure, Merleau-Ponty's understanding of speech presumes quite a different notion of subjectivity than convention would hold. The subject is *in* language, and this is where speech occurs, much in the way that the body is situated in a place, within a significative world, and not within a neutral Euclidian space (or time). Speech is not, then, the expression of some abstract cognitive or psychological

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content (a position Merleau-Ponty designates as 'intellectualism' or 'psychologism'), nor is speech the effect of mechanical stimuli obeying neurological laws (which he designates as materialist 'empiricism'). Both positions fail, Merleau-Ponty argues, to account for the significance and agency of the words themselves. They render the word meaningless, a 'passive shell,' and make of language no more than a tool: "Thus we refute both intellectualism and empiricism by simply saying that *the word has a meaning*" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 177). The subject cannot simply be considered a ghostly interiority or 'mind'; rather, the subject inhabits the world of language, just as the lived-body inhabits a place that is charged with the constitution of that subject, both enabling and foreclosing certain relations, significations, and experiences. On this view, then, ethics cannot be indifferent to those scenes of address that call the subject into being, and allow him/her to speak, to be seen, to take place, and to matter in a world of others (something that seclusion forcibly undoes, we might say). Indeed, ethics is nothing if it is not a concernful attention to these conditions of possibility for subjectivity. To treat the subject, the 'inner person,' as the source of ethical subjectivity—as the ethics of reason and autonomy maintains—is akin to treating the symptom as the cause. It inverts the order of things, an inversion under which it will make a kind of perverse sense to speak of treatment plans as 'ethical' in themselves.

Although our phenomenological perspective has been critical of Cartesianism and has taken aim at cognitivist approaches which are prevalent in IPA, it could be argued that we nevertheless re-install Cartesian principles by relying too heavily on the body—the body over *against* the mind, mentation, or cognition. The risk of this approach, one might say, is a kind of irrationalism, subjectivism, or *jouissance*, depending on one's perspective. But such a view fails to see the ways in which the body appears as prior to the Cartesian mind/body binary; it privileges cognition as a mental event and mistakenly conceives the body as the lifeless and abstract counterpart to mentation. While the phenomenological tradition has variously addressed this error, our approach has more practically turned to the ways that speech undermines such a binary. In particular, we have argued that Merleau-Ponty's understanding of *parole parlante* (speaking speech) is a kind of original 'embodied-cognition'; in other words, the experience of embodied place and the struggle to make meaning of our experience—for oneself and for others—through speech, appears prior to the a Cartesian understanding of minds and bodies, which are (cognitively) derivative of the body's original experience. *Parole parlante* is dynamic and embodied, opening us onto a rhetorical scene of address within which it takes place, and this, we have argued, is the condition of a meaningful ethical claim in a shared world of others.

Conclusion

The radical implication for a research methodology is that only as phenomenology is ethical analysis possible. For ethical responsibility must shift its gaze toward the context in which a subject finds him/herself, the scene that is constitutive of his/her subjectivity. We must attend to the intersubjective and corporeal context within

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which communication occurs. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "the word, far from being the mere sign of objects and meanings, inhabits things and is the vehicle of meaning. Thus speech, in the speaker, does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it" (1962: 178). Meaning is bound up with the scene of address, "the listener receives thought from speech itself" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 178), and it is the speech—its scene and style, rather than its word-contents—that must be studied if we hope to understand the meaning of an experience, or if we hope to explore the ethical import of the experience that speech follows. "Here the meaning of words must be finally induced by the words themselves, or more exactly, their conceptual meaning must be formed by a kind of deduction from a *gestural meaning*, which is immanent in speech" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 179; emphasis in original). Thus, phenomenology is both a methodological consideration, informing the interview itself, and a theoretical one, when it comes to analyzing the 'data'.

Immediately above, we wrote that speech 'follows' the experience. Temporally, this is true: in an obvious sense speech comes after the event, as the subject seeks to bring meaning to an experience through inner dialogue and through communication with others. But speech also draws on and modifies an existing vocabulary, words and phrases are refashioned, we might say, in dialogue with the experience itself. Thus, speech also 'follows' stylistically, which is to say that speech bears a relation to the original event as the subject struggles to make sense of and communicate the experience. Just as there is no such thing as a pure language of description, similarly, there is no experience that is free of language and the meaningful world it carries in its wake—a world in which experience takes place, a world without which experience would lack all meaning. In other words, the aesthetic and figurative dimensions of the speech—not just *what* it says, but *how*—will yield insight into the experience of the event and the subject's efforts to make it meaningful. The research interview is yet another iteration of the experience (or the experience of that experience, however it is addressed), and the scene of the interview itself—its speech—will resonate with the original scene(s), even as these will be marked by vital differences of power, authority, class, and culture, for example. Attending to the aesthetic components allows us to glimpse the prereflective, prepredicative world of the body-subject; what are expressed here are not inner 'thoughts'. "What then does language express, if it does not express thoughts? It presents or rather it *is* the subject's taking up of a position in the world of his meanings" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 193). Through a phenomenological approach to language, then, we gain insight into the subject's *position* in the world—foremost as a body in relation to its lived environment or *place*, and concurrently, as a social subject, a relational subject, in a world where places carry significance, and bodies are significant in the ways that they take place. When we take to heart the stylistic and aesthetic dimensions of the body-subject's speech, we gain insight into the subject's intentionality. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> my body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task. And indeed its spatiality is not, like that of external objects or like that of 'spatial sensations,' a *spatiality of position*, but a *spatiality of situation*. (1962: 100; original emphasis)

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The task is part of the subject's existential project, a way of engaging in the world across space and time. It is thus highly reductive to think of space in an abstract Euclidean sense, or time as a series of contiguous 'now' moments—as a series of coordinates in which abstract and lifeless bodies (*Körper*) have a particular location. Rather, we must re-think space and time as *place*, and we must listen to the subject's struggle to make meaning of this place, for it is here that we will find the context and conditions within which the subject can voice an ethical claim, within which that voice can be heard.

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