

Understanding Others' Experience: Phenomenology and/beyond Violence

Joshua Freistadt

University of Alberta

Abstract: This paper asks how criminologists can understand the experiences of others and how phenomenology might contribute to this understanding. To answer these questions I explicate two phenomenological traditions – transcendental phenomenology and existential phenomenology – and consider previous work on the phenomenology of violence. I critically evaluate claims that phenomenology cannot account for others' experiences. On the one hand, I sympathize with Levinasian-inspired arguments that phenomenology oftentimes accounts for others' experiences by dissolving difference and interpreting the other's experience as the same as one's own. I argue that much of the scholarship on the phenomenology of violence is guilty of this charge. On the other hand, I demonstrate that these criticisms result largely from misaligned methodologies and apply most directly to those (mainly Schutzian) phenomenologies that aim for apodictic certainty and utilize ideal-typical analysis, ignore temporality, employ non-participatory methods, and ignore researcher reflexivity. I further contend that writing off all phenomenology as unable to account for the different experiences of "the other" risks overstating those differences and potentially leads to an indifference that would undercut research and ethical engagement with others. Instead of viewing others as either the same or wholly other, I couple certain phenomenological conclusions with central themes in Merleau-Ponty's work to sketch a research program and ethical practice that can aid in understanding others' experiences as both similar and different. I summarize this approach as "sharing".

Key words:

Phenomenology, Ethics, Methodology, Violence, Understanding, Alterity

How can we understand the everyday lives of those we study in criminology?

Although the difficulties of capturing and analyzing another person's lived experiences are not unique to criminology, the gaps between the worlds of the criminological scholar and the officers, victims, or offenders he or she studies seem particularly broad. How, if at all, can we bridge these gaps? Ought we to seek such a bridging? If so, to what degree and how might this be possible?

These questions concern a longstanding debate about understanding "the other" as an experiencing individual. By stressing everyday experience, these questions contend that peoples' lived realities contain more than what the statistical or textual data used in most criminological research convey (see Katz, 1988, 2002; Ferrell 2004, 2009). Although statistics and texts are important means individuals employ to represent and guide some actions, many activities remain beyond linguistic and numerical transcription. Of all the philosophical perspectives, phenomenology most explicitly claims to tap this broader experiential realm. Yet phenomenology has faced some severe critiques concerning its ability to tap other's experiences and the ethics of so doing. In this paper I take up these debates: I question what, if anything, phenomenology has to offer criminology's understanding of others.

Argument and approach

My response to this question involves explicating two phenomenological traditions: (i) the transcendental phenomenology created by Edmund Husserl and applied to the social world by Alfred Schutz, and (ii) the existential phenomenology found in authors like Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. On the one hand, I sympathize with arguments that phenomenology largely accounts for others' experiences by violently interpreting them as the same as ones' own (Levinas, 1969, 1985). I argue that this charge resonates with scholarship on the phenomenology of violence. On the other hand, I argue that these criticisms apply most directly to (mainly Schutzian) phenomenologies that aim for apodictic

certainty and utilize ideal types, ignore temporality, proceed by indirect (non-participatory) methodologies, and ignore researcher reflexivity. Further, following Jack Reynolds (2004), I contend that writing off all phenomenology as unable to account for the different experiences of “the other” risks overstating those differences and thereby undercuts ethical engagement and research with others. Instead of viewing others as either the same or wholly-other, I stress particular conclusions of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in order to sketch the tenets of a possible research program and ethical practice that can aid in understanding others’ experiences as both similar and different. I summarize this practice as “sharing”; it emphasizes working together longitudinally in a shared lifeworld to arrive at a partial understanding of one another that allows for ambiguity and difference, while simultaneously recognizing similarity and necessitating mutual change.

These arguments unfold in three parts. First, I describe the phenomenological camps that concern this paper and outline some existing critiques. Second, I overview attempts to apply phenomenology to the topic of violence. I use these examples to give the discussion more criminological relevance and to demonstrate some difficulties involved in phenomenological analyses of intersubjective activities. Third, I attempt to learn from these challenges and argue against a wholesale rejection of phenomenology. Here I sketch an alternative practice for understanding “the other” that retains certain phenomenological conclusions about the shared lifeworld and utilizes many elements of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. I then briefly contrast the nuances of this approach to the previous phenomenologies of violence and to similar approaches in cultural criminology.

Experience and phenomenology

Husserl and Schutz: Experience and consciousness

Many authors credit Husserl as the founder of phenomenology (Moran, 2005; Psathas, 1989; Schutz, 1967, 1971). Husserl’s (1982) driving concern was that scientific and everyday practices take the things around them for granted or conceive of them

according to causal accounts that place the understanding of the thing outside of the thing itself. In place of this "natural attitude," Husserl (1982) argued that in order to secure proper foundations for understanding we needed to return "back to the things themselves." Husserl's aim, then, was to reflect on how our consciousness grasps individual objects (Long, 1979; Russell, 2006; Moran, 2005). Husserl (1982, p. 20) termed the *modus operandi* for arriving at the thing itself the "phenomenological *epoché*." This method involves suspending or bracketing the natural attitude in order to bring one's conscious experience to the forefront of reflection. In this process, one doubts all prior understanding of an object and describes both (i) the object as one's consciousness experiences it and (ii) the conscious operations used to experience the object.

Husserl (1982) makes great efforts to emphasize that doubting the natural attitude is not nihilistic skepticism. The phenomenological *epoché* does not doubt that things exist. Rather the existence of things external to the mind is simply taken for granted (Polizzi, 2010; Schutz, 1967) and the phenomenological task is to unpack how these things present themselves as phenomenon to one's consciousness (Husserl, 1982, p. 20). Therefore, unlike Rene Descartes' (1952) "cogito ergo sum", which gives one certainty only of oneself as a thinking being, Husserl's position is that the phenomenological *epoché* demonstrates that we are beings experiencing other things. Consciousness, for Husserl (1982, p.33), is always "consciousness of something." Therefore, the doubting and reflexive attitude demonstrates the existence of *both* an experiencing subject and things experienced.

Husserl (1982, p.33) used the term "intentionality" to describe the relation between the conscious subject and the object of consciousness (see also Dreyfus, 1993; Polizzi, 2010; Psathas, 1989). Intentionality describes the particular conscious act (e.g., perceiving, remembering, wishing, etc.) by which we direct our attention toward an object. This intentional act (i) selects an object in the world from the flow of experience and brings it into consciousness (Russell, 2006; Schutz, 1967) and (ii) constitutes the object insofar as it imbues the object with specific qualities, characteristics, and meanings (Polizzi, 2010).

Intentionality orients the person to an object in a specific way and so carries an "interpretive sense" or "meaning-context" that is dependent on the person's particular perspective and the temporal referent with which he or she views the object – e.g., if the individual imagined the object in the context of a future project or if the individual remember the object in the context of a completed act (Russell, 2006; Schutz, 1967). Consequently, the same object can be given different interpretations because its meaning is dependent on the type of act in which the object was intended (Russell, 2006, p. 85; Polizzi, 2010).

Husserl (1982), however, often sought to provide a stable grounding for the sciences within consciousness (see Marion, 1998, ch. 1), and so further argued that these different interpretations could be overcome to arrive at a certain essential understanding of the thing itself. He argued that phenomenological reflection allowed consideration of prior cognitive processes which could be synthesized to "intuitively grasp" the unchanging characteristics of an object uncovered in each situated intentional act. That is, according to Husserl (1982, esp. mediation 4), one can grasp the central characteristics of an object through an "eidetic method" whereby one considers all the variations of an object experienced in prior perceptions, imaginings, and remembrances, and then determines what remains constant throughout these previous cognitions. This constant is the element without which the object of consciousness would cease to be experienced in any fashion; it is its essential structure (Russell, 2006; Psathas, 1989).

Husserl (1982, p. 41) also demonstrated that this understanding of objects unfolds in "internal time" whereby, based on prior experiences, we anticipate an object as having certain characteristics and then find that anticipation given in full "evidence" as it is fulfilled in current experience (see also Best, 1975, Schutz, 1967). This temporal character reveals that our experiences meld into a unified stream, the individual ego (Husserl, 1982, p. 66). Phenomenological description thus demonstrates how we experience an exterior objects' essence as immanent to our consciousness. As Jean-Luc Marion (1998, ch. 1) and Hubert

Dreyfus (1993) explain, Husserl's account of phenomenon is largely mentalistic. For Husserl, phenomenon are only those things given under the gaze of consciousness (Marion, 1998, ch. 1) and action requires a cognitive intentionality wherein a person must represent the goal of the action to themselves to complete the activity (Dreyfus, 1993).

This approach gives a detailed and intriguing description of a single reflexive individual's experience, but does not *yet* address our concern with understanding *another* person's experiences. Husserl (1982, esp. meditation 5) extends his phenomenology beyond the individual ego to an intersubjective realm. He argues that consciousness not only experiences transcendent objects but also experiences other individuals. Husserl (1982, p. 109) notes that the limits of human consciousness mean that "neither the other Ego himself, nor his subjective processes or his appearances themselves, nor anything else belonging to his own essence, becomes given in our experience originally" - this is precisely what demonstrates that the other individual is in fact an other and not one's self (Russell, 2006, p. 173). Nonetheless, we do observe the bodies of others and can use our self-awareness of our own embodiment "as the motivational basis for the "analogizing" apprehension of [an other's] body as another animate organism" (Husserl, 1982, p. 111). In other words, the other's body appresents the awareness that, like one's own body, it is not simply an object but contains an intentional consciousness capable of manipulating objects in the world. We can therefore conclude that "the other" is like ourselves and that we are like "the other" (see also Schutz, 1967, p. 101). Moreover, each consciousness, according to Husserl (1982, p. 129), exists "in an intentional community" with other persons (see also Russell, 2006; Polizzi, 2010). Through these intentional relations with other individuals the objective existence of the objects of our consciousness and the meaning we give to our experiences of them is confirmed. As Matheson Russell (2006, p. 165) explains, "A solitary ego's intentional arc can provide 'evidence'...but an object can only be posited as a really transcendent Object thanks to the mediated experience of that object as also given 'evidently' to others." On the basis of this formulation of intersubjectivity, Husserl (1982)

concludes that the phenomenological *epoché* reveals both one's own and others' experience of a common world; there necessarily exists, in Husserl's opinion, both transcendent objects and a transcendent ego (Long, 1979; Russell, 2006, ch. 10).

Social scientists influenced by Husserl have made reflecting on life in the everyday "natural attitude" and intersubjective realm, not on consciousness narrowed by the phenomenological *epoché*, their primary task (e.g., Schutz, 1964, 1967, 1971). According to Schutz (1967), in this natural attitude persons do not aspire to apodictic certainty through eidetic analysis, but simply to an understanding that is sufficient to pragmatic ends. As such, in everyday life persons intend toward an object or another individual at any moment with a singular intentional act that considers others' interpretations and presence in the shared lifeworld (Schutz, 1967; see also Polizzi, 2010). Singular intentional acts, unlike eidetic analysis, cannot fully perceive an object from all of its possible perspectives and moments (see Marion, 1998). Rather, the situated-singularity of an intentional act explains why persons can give different accounts of the same thing and demonstrates that the world is "always open to multiple interpretations that are not exclusive to any single perceiving subject" (Polizzi, 2010, p. 7). The central task, then, is to explicate how coherently meaningful action is created in reference to, and in conjunction with, those who intersubjectively shape the person's lifeworld (see also Crotty, 1998, ch. 4).

Schutz (1964, 1967) attempted to explain social action and intersubjective meaning constitution by following Husserl's conclusion that intentionality drove humans' conscious experiences. Schutz argued that mutual understanding was a constantly negotiated achievement between persons (Katz, 2002), not a transcendent property of intersubjectivity as Husserl argued. According to Schutz (1967), mutual understanding unfolded as persons oriented pragmatically to their everyday world as projects imagined in Husserlian "inner time." Schutz (1964, 1967) argued that persons pursue these projects through interaction wherein an individual's actions would cause other persons to act in ways that would aid in achieving the desired end. In his language, one person's "in-order-to motives" would

become another's "because motives," and vice versa, in a process whereby parties arrive at a mutual understanding and engage in individual intentional projects. Understanding the experience of another person or a group of interacting others, then, requires a grasp of the motives that form their intentional acts and meaning-contexts (Schutz, 1964, 1967).

Schutz (1967) was very aware that grasping the inner motive of another person presented significant difficulties and he sought to give a detailed explanation of how this understanding was possible. For Schutz (1967), a central problem was that in order to know the intended meaning another person imparts on experience in everyday life, one must know the epistemic attitude and temporal reference with which the actor views the experience. That is, we must know from what perspective actors situate their intentional act. We must also determine whether the behaviour they are exhibiting is in fact guided by a conscious goal (an in-order-to motive) or seen as a conscious response to prior actions (a genuine because motive). Further complicating this determination is the fact that the temporality of experience and reflection means that the situated meaning changes over time – thus one's in-order-to motives are later seen as because motives and the relevant meaning-context shifts. We must, then, know the entire unfolding temporal project of the other.

Following Husserl, Schutz (1967, p. 99; 1971, p. 134) argued that this required knowledge is not directly accessible since it is necessarily confined in the other's consciousness. However, Schutz (1967) did not feel that observation of the other's body was enough to determine, with adequate certainty, the inner conscious state of another. Schutz (1967, ch. 1) noted the limits of observation as a means of understanding; for a person could appear to be doing one thing (e.g., aiming a rifle to shoot) when in fact they had another goal in mind when completing the action (e.g., simply looking at an individual through the scope). Schutz (1967) concluded, then, that observation and self-reflection on one's own experience of the other only gives us the objective content of meaning. We must, instead, observe the other's actions and place them into a larger context of meaning that

includes the individual's subjective perspective. In accurately determining this subjective meaning-context, the type of social relationship one has with the other – what Schutz (1967, ch. 4) calls the structure of the social world – plays a determinate role. Schutz (1971, p. 134) observed that interactions contained "various degrees of intimacy and anonymity" that determined our level of "familiarity and strangeness" with others' behaviour. Our understanding of another person, then, changes form depending on the level of givenness of the other.

Schutz (1967) divided our relationship to others into four levels: consociates (those we share a common perceptual field and can interact with), contemporaries (those we share a temporal existence with), successors (those who will come after us), and predecessors (those who came before us). According to Schutz (1967, 1971, p. 134), we are in a better position to understand consociates' lives because we directly share a lifeworld with them. These "we-relationships" enable "genuine understanding" of the other because the parties involved exist within one another's subjective meaning-contexts. Through social interaction with one another our consciousnesses become simultaneously unfolding and we can seek verification of one another's meaning (Schutz, 1967, ch. 4; Walsh, 1967, p. xxv). The realm of contemporaries, on the other hand, entails significant spatial distancing which precludes direct participation and necessitates indirect knowledge. Consequently, our basis of understanding transforms such that we must resort to inferential processes and ideal typical analyses. In such analyses we view the other in terms of an anonymous actor and assume that either (i) the other's meaning-context would be the same as our own if we were in the situation, (ii) the other's completed act serves as the inherent goal and thus the other's in-order-to motive, or (iii) the other's meaning-context (i.e. motive) resembles that customarily held by persons we are familiar with and who have been in that situation. In the realm of predecessors we are further disadvantaged in that we do not share a temporal similarity. Consequently, our ideal types must assume that the past context is the same as the one we have come to experience, or they must be informed by what we know generally

about the historical context and the typical people therein. We are disadvantaged still more when it comes to the realm of successors for we have no knowledge of what the future will be like and so our ideal types must be based on the assumption that the future will remain the same. When our goal is to understand social action among two or more persons, these same different bases of understanding apply depending on our relationship to each person involved (Schutz, 1967, ch. 4).

While Schutz (1967) showed direct participation to be essential to all understanding of other persons, he (1964, 1969, 1971) did not feel that ideal typical analysis was a significant problem. Ideal-typical analyses simply reflected a limitation imposed by the structure of the social world. In fact, according to Schutz (1967, p. 223), proper social scientific understanding operated through ideal-types because social science always involved understanding contemporaries through indirect knowledge. Scientific rigor, however, demanded that a social scientist's ideal types demonstrate (i) meaning-adequacy that confirms the subjective meaning-context assumed of the actor is likely accurate inasmuch as it does not contradict what is known about the actor and others in general, and (ii) causal adequacy insofar as the meanings attributed to actors are logically consistent and do not contradict established scientific conclusions (Schutz, 1967, ch. 5; see also Best, 1975). Consequently, the proper purview of social science was instrumentally rational action that could be easily viewed in terms of typical motives (Schutz, 1967, ch. 5).

Heidegger's existential turn: Being-in-the-world and phenomenology beyond consciousness

Heidegger (1962) similarly followed Husserl's conclusions into everyday life. However, instead of investigating cognitive intentional acts within the natural attitude, Heidegger took Husserl's demonstration of the givenness of phenomenon as a starting place for ontological investigation (Marion, 1998, ch. 2). That is, rather than reflecting on the nature of beings (individual objects), Heidegger sought to think phenomenologically about the experience of phenomenality – or Being – itself (Marion, 1998, ch. 2; Polizzi, 2010; Werkmeister, 1941). In so doing, Heidegger does not reduce phenomenon to consciousness

(Marion, 1998, ch, 2; Dreyfus, 1993). In fact, Heidegger (1962) demonstrates that everyday existence largely involves absorbed coping with the world around us. Within this mode of existence individuals can act without having a mental representation of the purpose or goal of the action; although action remains guided by intentionality in the sense that it involves an embodied person responding pre-reflexively to the situation. Intentionality is thus released from its cognitive moorings and made more practical, allowing the doing -- not simply thinking -- subject to emerge (Dreyfus, 1993; Werkmeister, 1941).

According to Heidegger (1962), then, if we do not bracket out the world through the phenomenological *epoché* we find our lives involve a being-in-the-world (*Dasein*) that experiences subjects and objects as indistinguishable and acts pre-reflexively in response to a world already familiar (Dreyfus, 1993; Werkmeister, 1941). Consequently, the ontological question of being-as-such can only be understood in terms of one's interaction with the social world. This world is something that we are always-already thrown into; it comes with pre-existing relations and expectations that guide our interpretations and actions. Being-in-the-world, then, is intersubjectively determined. While there is room for creativity and choice in how *Dasein* orients its existence, each person exists in particular "they-self" relations which enable actions to be given some element of shared meaning. Our experiences and understanding are therefore always worked out in relation with others from a specific socio-historical context. In working through these interactions we continually make sense of ourselves and our world as ongoing, never-complete, projects that orient our existence (Polizzi, 2010). Understanding others, then, requires an awareness that individuals can act pre-reflexively and are continually attempting to form an identity that imbues the entire world with meaning.

Merleau-Ponty: Ambiguous experience of body-subjects

Merleau-Ponty's (2002, 2004) work both extends and criticizes the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger. Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. ix) sought to reflect on our experience of "things themselves" without reference to exterior causes. To do so, however,

Merleau-Ponty advanced phenomenology's brief foray into embodiment. Merleau-Ponty's central argument was that our embodiment structures our perceptual and reflective experience (Baldwin, 2004). Extending Heidegger's "non-mentalistic phenomenology of perception" (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 26), Merleau-Ponty's (2002) account of experience maintained that we are our bodies and that the mind and body are one. The body is not a separate object of reflection, but a tool we use to perceive and act in the world (see also Reynolds, 2004). In many cases these actions are, as Heidegger demonstrated, pre-reflexive bodily reactions to the situations that appear before us. Merleau-Ponty (2002, pp. 164-168) termed these automatic and non-cognitive processes "habits." Habit "gives our life the form of generality and prolongs our personal acts into stable dispositions" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 146). Yet, at the same time, Merleau-Ponty left room for interpretation and creativity in human action through what he called the "creative receptivity" of perception (Reynolds, 2004). As such, our relation to the world is one of "I can" and not "I think"; we relate to the world through what our bodies can do with objects in the world and through the sensory data those objects impart on our bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 137).

For Merleau-Ponty (2002), experience is much more ambiguous than Husserl's (1982) or Schutz's (1964, 1967, 1971) reflective accounts attest. Our pre-reflexive habitual experiences deny that we perceive things at one moment, interpret them the next, and then decide the correct course of action. Instead, according to Merleau-Ponty (2002), our actions have a collapsed temporality where past and future conjoin in the present. That is, the cognitive processes accompanying pre-reflexive (yet intentional) acts often unfold simultaneously, not sequentially (Reynolds, 2004).

Merleau-Ponty (2002) further argues that a similar ambiguity haunts the very project of phenomenological reflection. He suggests that we cannot easily bracket certain objects from the flow of experience to make them the object of reflection. On the contrary, for Merleau-Ponty, every attempt at reduction is incomplete as perception occurs within an ambiguous context of foreground and background. We only perceive an object in relation to

its background. Similar to Heidegger's (1962) position, the background is a context that shapes our perception of the thing itself and is not something we can simply forget. Moreover, our body's motility means that we often perceive an object from ever-changing vantage points which then constitute new and fluid relations between foreground and background. Our perceptual experience, then, is not a holistic encompassment of all objects in relation to a singular horizontal viewpoint, but an overlapping engagement with singular objects against a background that somehow forms these various perceptions into one world. How this occurs is not immediately clear to people in their everyday lives (Baldwin, 2004; Merleau-Ponty, 2004). Nonetheless, Merleau-Ponty (2002) asserts that although the ambiguity of perception means that we can never have certainty "of anything in particular," "[t]here is the absolute certitude of the world in general" (p. 344).

Merleau-Ponty (2002) also agreed with Heidegger's (1962) dissolution of the subject-object distinction. However, he further situated this ambiguity between subject and object within embodied pre-reflexive practice. Specifically, when we are acting pre-reflexively and our bodies are automatically responding to the situation before us, there is, Merleau-Ponty argues, a reversibility or intertwining between subject and object. The person and the worldly situation they find themselves in become indistinct and mutually constituting (Reynolds, 2004). This ambiguity between subject and object is also apparent in our reflexive actions. Merleau-Ponty (2002) demonstrates that when we reflect on sensory experience, like touching, there is an ambiguity as to what is the subject, that doing the touching, and what is the object, the thing touched. Merleau-Ponty does not try to resolve this distinction. Instead, he concludes that our sensory perception makes our bodies both subject and object. Finally, Merleau-Ponty's analysis of illusions also demonstrates the ambiguity between the boundaries of individual perception. The illusions Merleau-Ponty discusses demonstrate that "what we literally see or notice is...not simply the objective world, but is conditioned by a myriad of factors that ensures the relationship between perceiving subject and the object perceived is not one of exclusion. Rather each term exists

only through its dialectical relation to the other" (Reynolds, 2004, p. 9). Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. 407) therefore concludes "inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself." Throughout his philosophy, Merleau-Ponty uses the term "body-subject" to emphasize this ambiguity between body and mind, self and object (Reynolds, 2004).

This ambiguity between subject and object has deep implications for Merleau-Ponty's analysis of intersubjectivity and our understanding of others. His opinion, like Husserl's (1982), was that our perception of others is enough to assure ourselves of their existence as other body-subjects. We can know people, according to Merleau-Ponty (2002; 2004), by our perceptions of their behaviour, which they manifest on their bodies through action and speech (see also Baldwin, 2004; Reynolds, 2004). Additionally, Merleau-Ponty's idea of intersubjectivity held that we are aware of ourselves only through our awareness of others' behaviour and speech. We do not fully perceive ourselves, and so it is through the other that we obtain self-awareness. Moreover, our bodies respond to the world and in responding to others we constitute our individual selves (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 122). In this process of mutual constitution, self and other intertwine. Within this intertwining both parties learn the specific cultural patterns, bodily habits and common language required to continue interaction (see also Baldwin, 2004; Reynolds, 2004).

We see here, then, the same basic phenomenological conclusion that the world is experienced and made meaningful from a particular perspective that is shaped by its relations with others. Of course, this is not to say that seeing the other and sharing a world with them equals being them and understanding them fully. Our embodiment and perceptual ambiguity preclude such certainty. Nonetheless, Merleau-Ponty's point is that the other is not inaccessible, but is part of the self and the world the body-subject moves within. As Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. xiii) succinctly summarized, "the Alter and the Ego are one and the same in the true world which is the unifier of minds" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. xiii). "In reality, the other is not shut up inside my perspective of the world, because this

perspective itself has no definite limits, because it slips spontaneously into the other's, and because both are brought together in the one single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 411).

Criticism of phenomenology: "Imperialism of the same"

As a reflection on *experience* in and of itself, phenomenology adequately deals with one element of our question about understanding others' experiences. However, the most vocal criticisms of phenomenology revolve around its ideas of intersubjectivity and its claims to understand *others*. That is, although phenomenology reflects on experience, many argue that it leaves much to be desired when it comes to understanding others' experience. Critics often claim phenomenology is solipsistic: only able to account for the experiences of the individual doing the reflection (e.g., Best, 1975; Levinas, 1969, 1985; Pivcevic, 1972). However, these charges assume that phenomenology demands an understanding of the other that could access the others' consciousness. None of the above phenomenologists make this claim. Rather, each concludes that reflection demonstrates there is an external reality that presents itself to the self's consciousness and reveals a shared world containing subjects (others) with similar embodied and conscious capabilities.

Critics like Emmanuel Levinas (1985, 1969), however, further argue phenomenology's ability to grasp the other always occurs through its reduction of the other to an entity that is the same as one's self. According to Levinas (1985) and Ron Best (1975), this is evident in Husserl's (1982) account of the other as, by analogy, like the self. Edo Pivcevic (1972) argues Schutz's (1964, 1967) use of "typical" models to understand behaviour similarly reduces any person to what one would expect that person to do based on one's own experiences (see also Long, 1979). Levinas even argues that Merleau-Ponty's transfer of one's experience of the ambiguity between sentient and sensible to the experience of another person reduces the other to the same (see Reynolds, 2004). Although I will return to this question of similarity below, especially as it relates to Merleau-Ponty's work, it is obvious that the main critique of phenomenology is its possible transfer of one's

own experience onto the other. According to Levinas (1969, 1985), this form of analysis means that others exist only insofar as they are not other, but the same as one's self. This leads to the dissolution of the otherness of the other, and what Levinas calls an "imperialism of the same" (Levinas, 1969; see Reynolds, 2004). Critics like Levinas argue that the proper and ethical thing to do when encountering the other is resist viewing them as one's self and respect their complete alterity (see Derrida, 1995; Couzens-Hoy, 2005; Dutta, 2004).

Phenomenology applied: Violence

Violence

The above review of how phenomenology accounts, or does not account, for the experiences of oneself and others is admittedly abstract. To clarify and to demonstrate the difficulties of applying phenomenology to intersubjective criminological problems I offer a summary of some of the literature that claims to approach violence from a phenomenological perspective. Violence is a particularly apposite topic to review here because it has criminological relevance, is intersubjective, and, under the auspices of cultural criminology, is witnessing renewed attempts to analyze it using a phenomenological framework (e.g., Jackson-Jacobs, 2004; Lyng, 2004). Three general themes guide the five studies that I will review here: violence as interaction, violence as an emotional existential project, and embodiment. After reviewing these studies, I will reflect on what these applications of phenomenology demonstrate about phenomenology's ability to explain others' experiences.

Denzin and Jackson-Jacobs: Violent interaction

Norman Denzin's (1984) work on domestic violence marks an early attempt to apply phenomenology to interpersonal violence, while Curtis Jackson-Jacobs's (2004) work provides a more recent effort at a "dramaturgical phenomenology of street brawling as collective action" (Ferrell, Hayward, Morrison & Presdee, 2004, pp. 6-7). Although both are looking at violence in radically different settings, both view violence as "situated, interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive activity" (Denzin, 1984, p. 484).

Denzin (1984, p. 485) describes his method as "phenomenological, dialectical, interpretive, and interactionist." He primarily uses previous literature "to examine the phenomenon of domestic violence from within, as lived experience" (Denzin, 1984, p. 485). His main argument is that domestic violence unfolds according to a process of self-destructing "negative symbolic interaction." He argues that domestic violence erupts when a family member disappoints the cultural expectation that men are the dominant household figures. For Denzin (1984, p. 487), although economic, legal, and cultural processes structure violence, what is important is that violence's meaning is "filtered and woven through the lives of interacting individuals."

Violence's meaning, then, unfolds as an intentional project between parties. Denzin (1984) argues that for the perpetrator of domestic violence, the man, violence is an attempt to use physical or emotional force to regain hegemonic status and the respect of other family members. The perpetrator interprets the actions of the victim as an attack to his identity and thus as a cause of his violence. In turn the violent actor is overcome with emotional rage and suspends the moral value of the victim. This justifies the intent to harm and narrows any alternative views of the situation (Denzin, 1984, pp. 500-501). Violence therefore imposes one interpretive framework and destroys the victim's interpretive framework. In so doing it can temporarily achieve its desired end of control over the other. However, Denzin suggests that this rupture leads victims to view the act and the perpetrator negatively; the violent act cannot permanently impart the interpretation of control and respect that the perpetrator aims at. Consequently, the violence destroys the very respect and control it seeks to attain and leads to a self-perpetuating violent spiral. As Denzin (1984, p. 484) writes of the perpetrator's experience:

He has the flesh of the other in his grip, while the other's will and freedom slips from his grasp. The goal of the violent act eludes the man of violence. He is drawn over and over again into the cycle of violence. He can never succeed in establishing his dominance and will over the will of the other.

Denzin (1984, pp. 490-491) further argues that household members experience the cycle of violence along the following pathway:

(1) denial of the violence; (2) pleasure derived from violence; (3) the building of mutual hostility between spouses and other family members; (4) the development of misunderstandings; (5) jealousy, especially sexual; (6) increased violence; and either (7) eventual collapse of the system or (8) resolution of violence into an unsteady, yet somewhat stable state of recurring violence.

Denzin concludes from his phenomenology of domestic violence, that violent interaction necessarily sets this cyclical pattern in motion and that the only means of breaking free from domestic violence is to remove oneself from the situation and begin a process of self-restructuring.

Like Denzin (1984), Jackson-Jacobs' (2004) account of violence presents it as an intentional pragmatic act. Jackson-Jacob describes his approach as inspired by symbolic interactionism and phenomenological sociologies which aim to give situated and descriptive explanations of why people do things. He describes his overall project as relying on observation and interviews to "trace the experience of participation in a brawl as it progresses" (Jackson-Jacobs, 2004, p. 232). However, this essay analyzes one particular brawl, which the author did not witness, but was told about shortly afterwards in two interviews and one written account. Jackson-Jacobs also took one of the participants back to the site of the brawl four years later to tape-record the fighter's recollection of the event. In analyzing the experiences of three individuals who fought and lost in the encounter, Jackson-Jacobs' central argument is that brawlers fight in order to illicit dramatic and entertaining narrative accounts that allow them to build reputations as charismatic, exciting, and tough figures. In his words, "Fighters intend their brawls to make good stories that reveal themselves as charismatic. And so they enact storylines that they expect will both test their character and be applauded by audiences" (Jackson-Jacobs, 2004, p. 232).

Similar to Denzin (1984), Jackson-Jacobs (2004) uses his participants' stories to document the typical stages a fight passes through: entering a public space, staging a character context, fighting, and telling the story of the fight. Among these stages, the most

important for fighters' intentional projects are the character contest and the narrative reconstruction. Jackson-Jacobs' "dramaturgical phenomenology" focuses on these two stages and the importance of the presentation of self in the character contest. The character contest is, according to Jackson-Jacobs, an effort to construct a favorable narrative of the fight regardless of the future outcome.

Jackson-Jacobs (2004) argues that "shit talking" is an important element of the interactive character contest. In this process, actors verbally attempt to provoke another person to fight while simultaneously attempting to present themselves as charismatic and tough men to the audience watching the interaction. This interaction is the process whereby participants constitute the experience as violent. Jackson-Jacob argues that "shit talking" structures the experience as violent by: (i) signaling the potentiality of violence, (ii) enticing the object of verbal aggression to strike, (iii) moving the body into the emotions needed to erupt violently, and (iv) providing a memorable narrative that participants can reconstruct more easily than the physical altercation itself. Once this character contest becomes physical, Jackson-Jacobs argues that the men involved escalate the level of violence in an attempt to save face and appear as the more hegemonic figure. Others' experience of street fighting is, for Jackson-Jacobs, thus phenomenologically understood as an intentional action aimed at building a masculine reputation.

Katz, Lyng, and Staudigl: Violence as existential, embodied experience

Denzin (1984) and Jackson-Jacobs (2004) focus on the interactive meaning-constitution of violent experience as a rationally calculated performance. In so doing, their accounts fit most readily within Husserl's and Schutz's work. In contrast, Jack Katz, (1988), Stephen Lyng (2004) and Michael Staudigl (2007) stress the embodied features of violent experience.

Katz's (1988) effort to connect phenomenology and criminology demonstrates the seductive emotional content that inheres within various criminal transgressions. Like Denzin (1984), Katz (1988) argues violent actors use physical force to respond to actions they feel

are humiliating. Violence is thus an attempt to reassert a particular identity. However, Katz more clearly demonstrates that the emotional and experiential features of the violent act itself serve as a motive for the violent actor. The rage and pre-reflexive embodiment involved in violent action demonstrates a transcendent personality that refuses to kneel to reason or context. Reflecting Heidegger's (1962) existential phenomenology, Katz argues that the hardened violent actor orients himself existentially to a transcendent bad-ass identity (see Polizzi, 2010).

Lyng's (2004) work is an attempt to provide a "criminology of the skin" that discusses crime as an embodied practice and does not over-emphasize its rational motivations (see Ferrell & Sanders, 1995, p. 316). Lyng's (2004, p. 364) overall project explores "the ontological status of embodied consciousness." In this particular essay he draws parallels between criminal activities and his research on voluntary risk-taking, or what he calls "edgework." He argues that crime is a seductive form of edgework because, like high-risk sports, it frequently pushes the body into the pre-reflexive and ambiguous realm. Within this realm, notions of linear time and Euclidean space collapse while "the 'voice of society' is silenced and the 'me' is annihilated. What is left in place of these elements is a residual, 'acting' self that responds without reflective consciousness" (Lyng, 2004, p. 362). The extraordinary character of this experience, argues Lyng, makes it seductive. He argues that persons' bodies are increasingly attracted to the erotic sensuality of edgework because late capitalism's monotonous tasks disembody our everyday lifeworlds.

Lyng (2004) is quick to point out, however, that our responses to this disembodiment must negotiate the fact that our bodies are susceptible to illness, injury, or death, and are therefore contingent, vulnerable, and unpredictable. In part, this uncertainty is what makes reasserting embodiment through edgework so appealing; by pushing our bodies to the limit to re-embodiment ourselves, we are literally living on the edge of existence. Lyng argues there are four typical ways we respond to disembodiment and negotiate bodily

contingency. Among these is the "dominating body" as a violent response. According to Lyng, dominating bodies fear their own contingency, yet seek this in others. "[T]he dominating body is actually *attracted* to the contingency of the other because terminating other-contingency is the means by which it extinguishes its own indeterminacy" (Lyng, 2004, p. 369). In dominating others, violent bodies disguise their own objective uncertainty and extinguish all forms of intersubjective understanding that place limits on the self. This experience, according to Lyng (2004, p, 369), creates a transcendent reality that "consists of an extreme subjectivity that is maintained by drawing on the body's contingent power to create havoc." In dominating others, the body becomes not an object, but a "becoming-body," "consumed by its own capacity for chaos" (Lyng, 2004, p. 370).

Staudigl (2007) deals even more explicitly with the theme of violence in his attempt to build a phenomenological theory. He sees "the methodological center of phenomenology as the attempt to purely describe our experiences of objective givens in terms of the ways we make sense of them" (Staudigl, 2007: 233-234). He does not reference any data from persons who have experienced violence; rather his arguments involve self-reflections even though he is not clear on the extent to which he has experienced violence.

Staudigl's (2007) theorization adopts elements of both Merleau-Ponty and Schutz. Staudigl draws on Merleau-Ponty to argue that our embodiment structures our understanding of the world and leads us to form pre-reflexive habits. He conceives of our relation to the world as one of "I can" whereby we intend certain physical actions and decide among particular pragmatic projects. However, like Lyng (2004), Staudigl (2007) argues that our embodied selves have an inherent vulnerability that we must negotiate in determining our intentional projects. According to Staudigl (2007. P. 240), violence destroys our "bodily "I can," its collective forms, and the sense structures founded upon them." It is a restriction of the "I can" because, using the terminology of Schutz, it limits the "relevancies" that persons can consider in creating intentional pragmatic projects (Staudigl, 2007, p. 244). Further reflecting Schutz, Staudigl utilizes conceptions of cognitive

intentional and motive to argue that violent actors consciously aim to destroy intersubjectivity by inflicting pain on the body of the other. Violence closes victims' intentional openness to the world and forces them consider a body typically taken for granted in immersed activity. Violence demands that the victim intentionally orient him or herself toward only one course of action: that which ends the violence and guarantees their continued bodily existence (Staudigl, 2007, p. 240).

The loss of the body's "I can" is not simply a reduction in one's physical function, but also a loss of one's ability to make sense of the world since the body is central to sense-making. That is, like Denzin (1984), Staudigl (2007) concludes that violence ruptures our existing interpretive frameworks. With this conception of violence as a restriction of intentional projects, Staudigl (2007, p. 245) argues that all victims experience violence as a social "contraction of the basic reciprocity of perspectives which reduces interaction to an asymmetrically determined relation."

Conclusions from review: "Imperialism of the same" as a methodological problem

These phenomenologies are remarkably different from the reflections on consciousness that appear in the philosophical accounts of phenomenology. With the apparent exceptions of Staudigl (2007) and Lyng (2004), these scholars take other's experience as their primary data and do not operate within the strict confines of a phenomenological *epoché* that focuses on self-reflection. We might take this as a clue to the tension between the philosophical phenomenological project and social science's aim to describe and analyze the lived world of others (see Best, 1975; Pivcevic, 1972). None of these studies attempts to bracket out consideration of all other factors and consider what, if anything, violence is in and of itself. This, I argue, demonstrates (i) that pure description is seldom the aim of social science and (ii) that it is extremely difficult to single out an object as an item of reflection when it is not immediately before us. Authors like Denzin (1984) are correct to assume that violence occurs in cultural contexts that influence how, where, and between whom these actions unfold. By definition, a Husserlian phenomenological *epoché*

cannot consider these external factors of experience. That the authors do not *fully* employ the phenomenological *epoché* confirms the general phenomenological conclusion that self-conscious reflection cannot directly access others' experiences.

Intersubjectively remains both a central theme and problem in these analyses of violence. Each scholar holds the phenomenological conclusion that the shared or subjective-existential meaning of violence is co-created interactionally. Theoretically we see this conclusion in testaments that individuals complete their violent projects (i) by using the other as the foil for their attempts to engage in pre-reflexive embodied action (Lyng, 2004; Katz, 1988; Staudigl, 2007), (ii) by responding to victims' apparent challenges to their desired identities (Denzin, 1984; Katz, 1988), or (iii) by imaging audiences' interpretations of their actions (Jackson-Jacobs, 2004). Uniquely, we find that although violence is intersubjectively constituted and enacted, its meaning is frequently conceptualized as an activity that restricts intersubjective meaning and imposes the violent actors' unilateral interpretation (Staudigl, 2007; Denzin, 1984; Katz, 1988). These conclusions are insightful, yet the major difficulty here is that it is unclear how the phenomenological premise of intersubjective meaning-constitution is reflected in each authors' methodology. How are these conclusions arrived at? If an understanding of events is constituted intersubjectively, how is the researcher in each of these analyses privy to that interactionally-constituted meaning?

The answers to these questions are unclear. Staudigl (2007, p. 248) proclaims that "[i]n order to avoid mystifying explanations, violence must not be reified or essentialized, but has to be accounted for from the (inter)acting subject's point of view," yet his analysis does not make use of anyone else's view on the matter. Lyng (2004) is similarly opaque about how he experienced crime and violence or how he accessed others who had such experiences. Katz (1988) draws on secondary data to conclude that the act of violence is itself the central motive for violent actors who existentially desire to be bad-asses. Denzin (1984) likewise relies mainly on secondary data for his analysis, ambiguously integrating

two interviews that were potentially his own. Jackson-Jacobs (2004) interacts with his interviewees, but largely fails to demonstrate how his conclusions about violent others are informed by those others' experiences. For instance, although "shit talking" is central to his argument that violent actors aim to construct favorable narrative accounts, he does not integrate any dialogue from his interviewees to demonstrate this process or confirm that they view their actions along these lines.

Without significantly demonstrating their direct participation with others, the authors are left to reconstruct the intersubjective meaning of violence on their own terms. This makes it difficult to differentiate the researchers' interpretations, from those of the participants, or from those co-constructed between researcher and participant. All authors claim that they are conveying the experience as understood by those involved in violent actions, yet their approach leaves room for their interpretation of the experience to replace that of the other. Of course, Schutz (1967, p. 223) sees this as a necessary scholarly practice – social science, being a practice involving contemporaries or predecessors, must rely on inferential process, indirect analysis, and ideal types. This is precisely the route these scholars take. Each author develops some sort of ideal-typical model that they contend captures any violent experience. Denzin (1984) and Jackson-Jacobs (2004) provide accounts of the stages of violence that all experience. Lyng (2004) develops a typology of all bodily reactions to disembodiment. Staudigl (2007) draws on Schutz's belief that we can know the typical "relevancies" persons will/must consider in interpersonal exchange. Katz (1988) posits – as Schutz (1967, p. 130, 190) demonstrates one must when not in direct contact with participants – a personal ideal type that assumes that the completed action (violent crime) is itself the in-order-to motive of the participant. Although these typical models might be useful heuristic tools, they interestingly do not contain a category of "other" that might allow for different experiences that remain inaccessible to the researcher. In fact, since these authors develop an all-encompassing interpretative rubric of violent experience through their ideal-typical analyses, they undercut the claims of

phenomenological authors, like Denzin (1984, p. 487 – emphasis added), who assert that “meanings are filtered and woven through the lives of interacting individuals, *each of whom is understood to be a universal singular.*”

Insomuch as these analyses claim to fully capture every others’ experience of violence, we could charge these phenomenologies of violence with supporting an “imperialism of the same” and ignoring the alterity of “the other.” How the interpretations and typologies set forth reflect and respect others’ experience is never clearly stated by the authors. We are left with an understanding of violent experience that appears to be made primarily by the author, not the other.

Indeed, Schutz (1967, p. 205), despite seeing ideal-typical analysis as central to social science, explicitly stated that such analysis risked replacing the other’s experience with that of the analyst.

Observation of the social behaviour of another involves the very real danger that the observer will naively substitute his own ideal types for those his subject. The danger becomes more acute when the observer, instead of being directly attentive to the person observed, thinks of the latter as a “case history” of such and such an abstractly defined type of conduct. Here not only may the observer be using the wrong ideal type to understand his subject’s behaviour, but he may never discover his error because he never confronts his subject as a real person.

Although Schutz (1967) felt that indirect observation was the proper purview of social science, he sowed the seeds of his own critique because he was not clear how forcing ideal-types to be consistent with scientific conclusions would save these ideal-typical analyses from substituting the analysts view for that of the participant. On the one hand, he explicitly placed direct participatory face-to-face relationships as the basis of knowledge (see Walsh, 1967). On the other hand, he held that scientific knowledge, which was allegedly never directly acquired from others, could ensure meaning-adequacy by generalizing from the researcher’s past experience (Schutz, 1967, ch. 5). This inferential scientific thought process, however, seems to slide away from “being directly attentive to the person observed” and thus possesses the same “very real danger that the observer will naively

substitute his own ideal types for those of his subject" (Schutz, 1967, p. 205). More damaging, it is not clear why Schutz (1967), having prioritized knowledge gained through direct participation, excludes those research methods that utilized these relationships from the realm of proper social science. Indeed, under the auspices of phenomenology, understanding others seems to demand involvement with them. Unfortunately, the above phenomenologies of violence are unclear as to how each researcher is implicated intersubjectively in the meaning attributed to others.

Consequently, the authors frequently confuse whose subjective understanding is actually being presented. Understandings of one actor are replaced by those of the author or other actors, dissolving the potentially alternative accounts of those ignored or spoken for. For example, Jackson-Jacobs (2004) uses the reconstructed account of someone who was not the instigator of fight to discuss how an actor interactionally generates a fight. At a minimum, if he wants to claim that he captures the understanding of the instigator, Jackson-Jacobs ought to demonstrate how the third party's interpretation is likely an accurate reflection of the initial actor's. Similarly, Denzin (1984) largely uses evidence integrated from studies of victimized wives to discuss how violent actors understand the encounter and how the meaning of violence is co-constructed. In fact, although each study claims to capture the intersubjective experience of violence, each account actually tends toward viewing violence from either the perpetrators' or victims' perspectives. In Jackson-Jacobs (2004), Lyng (2004), Katz (1988), and Denzin (1984), the suggestion that individuals derive satisfaction from violence demonstrates that they are only describing batterers' experiences. The fact that persons might be both perpetrators and victims in the same altercation only highlights their failure to capture participants' full experience; these authors devote few words to describing what receiving violence is like. Staudigl's (2007) account of contingency and restriction, on the other hand, focuses on victims' experience. Here too, however, he does not integrate the particulars of victims' experiences and so overlooks potential differences. His argument that we all experience our bodies as

contingent and unpredictable, for instance, does not consider that there are levels of bodily contingency. An athlete is unlikely to feel that his or her body is as contingent and unpredictable as a quadriplegic with chronic muscle spasms or an arthritic whose pain levels vary according to something as erratic as the weather. Finally, the assertion in all five studies that violence ruptures people's everyday worlds overlooks the likelihood that for some unfortunate people violence is a normalized aspect of their day-to-day lives.

In an effort to posit a stable understanding of how others experience violence these phenomenologies of violence also deny alterity inasmuch as they overlook how temporality continually creates different understandings. The temporal nature of all experience and understanding is a central concept for each of the above philosophers but does not figure prominently in these accounts where the methodology does not embed the researcher in the unfolding and never-completed flow of participants' experiences.

Jackson-Jacobs (2004) and Katz (1988) provide the most lucid examples of this oversight. All the accounts used by Jackson-Jacobs (2004) are recollections of the event. He claims that persons go into fights with a cognitive intentionality that aims at presenting themselves as masculine heroes standing up to challenges bigger than them. But this claim fails to consider that the accounts he analyzes are oriented by intentional acts that grasp the brawl as an already-completed (and failed) project. In fact, the temporal nature of understanding reveals itself in Jackson-Jacobs' (2004) contradictory claims that, on the one hand, no one can ever know the outcome of a fight until it is over, and on the other hand, the brawlers he talked to knew they would lose. To take the heroic underdog narrative created after-the-fact and recast it as the motive orienting fighters before the encounter is unjustified unless verified by the participants themselves before the act. If the fighters had won the brawl, Jackson-Jacobs (2004) would have heard radically different accounts and would have had to presumably present a different motive as guiding the fighters. A different outcome would significantly change the fighters' understandings and would curtail Jackson-Jacobs (2004, p. 231) claims that the possibility of generating stories motivates fighters

"more so than the physical risks and appeals." Katz (1988) likewise overlooks how temporality determines his analysis. Katz abstracts the criminal act from the ongoing temporal experience of the actor and then projects the act back in time as the motivation for the crime. Consequently, the process becomes tautological (see Schutz, 1967, ch. 4). Although the criminal event itself might play a role in orienting the bad-ass, if we looked past the completion of the act we might find that a person completed the act less for its own sake than for the bragging rights that come with completion, as Jackson-Jacobs (2004) suggests. While Katz (1988) brilliantly defends his focus on theoretical grounds, his choice is also necessitated by the data he analyzes and the indirect relationship he has with those he seeks to explain. Without data that captures a larger duration of the temporal experience of others, the analysts is forced to abstract a moment from the flow of experience and posit it as the primarily meaningful act.

As Schutz (1967, p. 65) reflected, "The meaning of an action is different depending on the point in time from which it is observed." He further cautioned, but ultimately failed to reconcile, that, in any experience:

[e]ach component stage can be regarded as a new unity. It is up to the observer, be he the actor's partner or a sociologist, to decide arbitrarily where the total act begins and ends. The paradox is insoluble. Of what use is it to talk about the intended meaning of an action if one ignores that phase of the action which is relevant to the actor and situates for it as the interpretation an arbitrarily chosen segment of the observed performance – "the facts"? (Schutz, 1967, p. 62)

Over time, and with each temporal orientation, the activity one is concerned with contains a completely different subjective meaning for the acting person. In these phenomenologies of violence the researchers suggest a co-constituted but nevertheless stable understanding of violence. This denies the ever-shifting and unfolding nature of phenomenon. The researcher must always be aware of these different and unfolding interpretations. Each claim about how an individual experiences a phenomenon "requires a date index specifying the moment of the meaning-interpretation" and the temporal reference point of the individual (Schutz, 1967: 65). Such specificity would help curtail assertions that a certain and stable

understanding of the others' experience could be achieved. Instead explicit reference to the temporal-situatedness of one's experience would remain true to phenomenological conclusions that demonstrate the open-endedness of meaning and the social world (see Schutz, 1967; Polizzi, 2010). Attention to temporality, then, would demand attention to difference and change as experienced by the participant. This focus would help protect against any attempt to replace the participants' unfolding understanding with the allegedly stable understanding of a detached researcher.

Engagement with participants could also aid in determining the specific form of intentionality – cognitive or practical – that guides their experience. All these studies maintain that perpetrators experience violent actions as intentional projects, although the degree to which one is cognitively aware of what he or she intends varies. Demonstrating the form of intentionality, however, remains a difficulty for each of the above authors. Although Jackson-Jacobs (2004) and Denzin (1984) provide the strongest emphasis on the cognitive intentionality of violent actors, they do not, as we have already discussed, provide evidence that prior to its occurrence participants experience violence as a consciously pursued goal. A similar problem strikes Lyng (2004) and Staudigl (2007), who stress practical intentionality and the unreflective embodied responses of violent actors. If embodied actions are pre-reflexive, how, then, could we assert that a person's violence intends toward the enchantment found in dissolving the distinction between self and world? By virtue of the action being pre-reflexive, another individual could not convey his or her experience to another individual at the moment violence erupts. How can Lyng (2004) or Staudigl (2007) arrive at conclusions about the embodied experience of violence without converting certain behaviours of the other into clues of embodied practices or without going through the embodied experiences themselves? How can any of these authors verify that either cognitive or practical intentionality drives actors without connecting themselves to those actors?

Interestingly, despite the fact that some of these authors stress that violence involves embodied, practical intentionality and blurred self-other distinctions, none report participating in violence alongside others in an embodied fashion. Rather, from mainly indirect encounters, they form conclusions about others' experiences. As such, clear distinctions between self (researcher) and other remain in their work. Indeed, in most cases the author's own work operates within the confines of a cognitive intentionality where actions of the other are taken as, or reduced to, a representation of some larger project (see Dreyfus, 1993; Schutz, 1967), without confirmation by the other that this project is in fact the aim or desire. One might suggest, then, that these authors orient toward the other with a cognitive intentionality that, like their violent actors, reduces the other to their own end as they aim to impart an understanding on the other's actions.

All these critiques considered, then, we could conclude that these phenomenological applications do not sufficiently account for differences in the experience of violence. In many cases it appears as though it is the researcher's interpretation that prevails over that of the other. Perhaps the greatest irony in this is that since these studies restrict the possible experiences of others by reducing them to a particular coherent account developed mainly by the author, they are, according to Staudigl's (2007), Lyng's (2004), and Denzin's (1984) vision of violence as restricting an intending person, themselves violent. In fact, restricting "the other" by representing their experience in one's own terms is exactly the violence that Levinas (1985) deplors and accuses phenomenology of (see Reynolds, 2004; Dutta, 2004).

Beyond violence: Sharing as ethics and research practice

Critique of others as wholly-other

This conclusion, however, should not lead us to reject all phenomenological insights. Nor should it cause us, like Levinas (1985), to assert that the only proper task is to venerate others' complete alterity. Problems definitely arise when phenomenologists claim to capture others' experiences based on solitary reflection without demonstrating the

intersubjective nature of this reflection. However, to assert that the other cannot be known “verges on becoming “agnosticism” in regard to the other” (Reynolds, 2004, p. xvii). Such agnosticism does not assist us in our quest to determine how we can understand others’ experiences. In fact, it asserts that this quest is impossible. The problem here, as Reynolds (2004) points out, is if we cannot know the other in any fashion, then the solipsism that critics (inaccurately) attribute to phenomenology actually “seems to have returned through the back door” (p. 137).

In truth, the phenomenological conclusion that we experience and share a world with others does not necessitate that we must, or can, know those others in their entirety without any remaining difference. While eidetic analysis and reliance on ideal-types and typologies might post an essentialized coherent understanding of others, these do not have to be the core features of a phenomenology. In fact, these analytical tools arguably reflect Husserl’s (1982) and Schutz’s (1967) efforts to find secure foundations for science more than they reflect necessary elements of phenomenological analysis (see Marion, 1998; Heidegger, 1962). Phenomenology often demonstrates the partiality of knowledge and so leaves space for difference without assuming an unbridgeable gap between self and other. In particular, Merleau-Ponty’s ideas of ambiguity and intertwining rail against accounts of the other as completely the same or as wholly-other (Reynolds, 2004). In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty argues claims that we cannot know the other amount to a negative positivism that ignores the complexity of human experience. As he eloquently writes, “a negativist thought is identical to a positivist thought, and in this reversal remains the same in that, whether considering the void of nothingness or the absolute fullness of being, it in every case ignores density, depth, the plurality of planes, the background worlds” (p. 68 – quoted in Reynolds, 2004, p. 121).

Claims that the other is inaccessible seem to accept that apodictic self-awareness is the standard of knowledge. Allegedly, since we cannot know another’s consciousness, we cannot know the other. This account holds a split between mind and body, and self and

other, wherein we apparently only find true selves within the mind and not on the visible actions of bodies or within pre-reflexive responses to one another. Levinas (1969,1985) account of the other as wholly-other is correct, then, only if we (i) think of the other as completely distinct from one's self, and (ii) maintain that the other's true self is contained within the inaccessible mind. Levinas' position thus seemingly adopts a strict cognitive intentionality and is too Cartesian and too absolutist.

Phenomenological possibilities for understanding others

As suggested in my review of the phenomenologies of violence, I argue that we can use some phenomenological insights, particularly Merleau-Ponty's, to sketch a research program of how to understand others without reducing the other's experience to our own, as the above phenomenologies of violence seem to do. I further argue that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy allows us to escape any "agnosticism toward the other" (Reynolds, 2004) that stems from assuming the other's experiences are completely different, as Levinas's (1969, 1985) position and similar "ethics of alterity" seem to do (Couzens-Hoy, 2005). This entails accepting Merleau-Ponty's position on intertwining and ambiguity, while retaining a number of other conclusions shared among phenomenological descriptions of experience.

Foremost among the phenomenological conclusions that we must start with is the conclusion of Merleau-Ponty (2002), Husserl (1982), Heidegger (1962), and Schutz (1967), that conscious reflection demonstrates we *share* a world with other beings. Because we share a world with others we can, on the basis of this sharing, make efforts to understand them. We must couple this position on sharing, however, with Merleau-Ponty's (2002, 2004) conclusions about intertwining and ambiguity. These concepts demonstrate that we are never fully aware of our selves or others. Thus expecting to have absolute clarity in our experience of "the other" is absurd; there are degrees of understanding such that some components of the other are accessible to us and others are not (Reynolds, 2004). Merleau-Ponty's philosophy demonstrates that our bodily experience rejects understanding objects or others according to a dichotomy of presence or absence, similarity or difference, self or

other. The final phenomenological conclusion we should carry with us – one that is confirmed from Husserl onward – is that understanding unfolds as a temporal experience. This suggests that our understandings of others must involve longitudinal efforts. Although we might not understand another person at one moment, we can, overtime, gain a partial understanding of them by sharing in their experiences. Understanding is a process of learning entailing anticipation, experience, fulfillment, and revision.

As an ethics

Starting from a position that we daily engage in “we-relationships” (Schutz, 1967) with other body-subjects (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) or beings-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962) rallies against Levinas’ (1969, 1985) “ethics of alterity” based on the other as wholly-other. In fact, as Merleau-Ponty (1968) argues, “agnosticism in regard to the other’s being for himself, which appeared to guarantee his alterity, suddenly appears as the worst of infringements upon it” (p. 70 – quoted in Reynolds, 2004, p. 120). As Reynolds (2004) explains, “For Merleau-Ponty, a responsible treatment of alterity consists in recognizing that alterity is always intertwined with subjectivity, rather than obscuring this fact by projecting...an alterity that is inaccessible and beyond comprehension” (p. 137). Merleau-Ponty’s position is about using our shared existence to engage in experiences of intertwining that alter understandings of self and other. “This ethic of mutual transformation is not an imperialism of the same, as the sanctity of the self must be breached in any meaningful interaction with alterity” (Reynolds, 2004, p. 138). Moreover, as separate embodied persons we cannot, and should not, expect to achieve an account of experience that completely corresponds with another person’s. We are always in the position of viewing the world from our embodied perspective, and no matter how intensely bodies might come together, they can never occupy the same point and ensure themselves the same biography (Katz, 2002). As Reynolds (2004, p. 138) perceptively summarizes,

We do not encounter difference by preserving it untouched, like a specimen in a jar. Rather, difference and alterity are truly experienced only through an openness that recognizes that despite all of the undoubted differences that we encounter, there is

always something shared that allows difference to be conceivable at all. This is not an effort to reintegrate difference into sameness, but an insistence on the importance of transforming the notions of self and other in any attempt to behave responsibly towards the alterity of the other.

Unlike the "ethics of alterity" which would have us forever negotiating and awaiting the impossible arrival of the wholly-other (e.g., Derrida, 1995), an ethics that starts from the position that we share a world and experience others as both similar and different would have us work towards transformation and understanding *with* others.

Research as sharing, "being-with" others

As alluded to in the above critical discussion of the phenomenologies of violence, working with a phenomenology that starts from conclusions about shared existence and recognizes others experience as both similar and different requires a particular methodological stance. To a large degree the above phenomenologies of violence ignored difference and contended that self-reflections could account for others' experiences. At the very least, these studies did not demonstrate that their conclusions resulted from sharing temporal experiences in the lifeworld of others. This criticism is not a polemic against researchers theorizing their material. Nor is it meant to deny the valuable contributions of these studies. Rather, it is a proclamation that our accounts about others' experiences ought to demonstrate that (i) we formed conclusions in partnership with research subjects, and (ii) despite working together in shared experience, elements of the experience remain unresolved, ambiguous, and different for the parties involved. These proclamations echo the properties of understanding revealed by Merleau-Ponty's (2002) phenomenology: it is intersubjectively formed by sharing a world with others over time, and it contains elements of similarity and difference and so is always partial.

Understanding others' experiences, then, requires a research method that allows us to share experiences and work with others over time. Sharing experience, of course, occurs in multiple ways. Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. 413) documents that as we share the world we develop a shared language that helps us develop understanding and mutual cultural habits.

However, our embodiment and pre-reflexivity ought to demonstrate that reducing experience to language limits our accounts (Katz, 2002; Long, 1979). Ethnographic involvement offers a potentially fuller, although never complete, picture of experience by tapping the extra-discursive. Husserl's (1982), Schutz's (1967), Heidegger's (1962) and Merleau-Ponty's (2002) phenomenologies show that understanding unfolds in relations, in verification between self and other. Ethnography inserts us into these relationships and, unlike textual analyses, which freeze the other's testimony in time, ethnography allows relationships and understanding to exhibit their temporal character. Moreover, it is only in participating in the worlds of others that we might ourselves experience Merleau-Ponty's (2002) idea of the intertwining of self and other that presents the ambiguity and fullness of shared experience. Of course, texts are required to represent many experiences. However, when such texts are used, they ought to elicit deep narratives, and analysts ought to focus on the particularities and ambiguities that these narratives convey (Katz, 2002).

Ideally, we would try as much as possible to share the lifeworld of others; to work with them toward partial understanding and transformation of both self and research subject. This transformative element does not require "going native" and reducing the self to the same as the other, but it does require a constant reflexivity on the part of the researcher. This reflexivity would display the output of research to be a co-production achieved through a partial intertwining of researcher and participants. It would document the (not-necessarily-equivalent) changes in the researcher and subjects while highlighting the remaining differences among parties. Indeed, theoretical explanations would primarily aim to provide multiple accounts of these differences. As Katz (2002, p. 260) declares, explanation "is always an attempt to understand difference." We must share in the world of others to describe that world and the different experiences persons have of it, and then use those differences to form our theoretical reflections. Phenomenological description can document what we share, while theory can explain differences within that shared world and

recognize those differences as “nevertheless a coherent and conceivable mode of existence” (Reynolds, 2004, p. 145).

The research process I am advocating here is, therefore, about “being-with” others and working together toward partial understanding that respects difference. This is not something completely foreign. A considerable amount of formidable criminological scholarship has proceeded without formal and strict methodological principles, opting instead to simply live among those researched (Ferrell, 2009). Moreover, as Katz (2002) argues, we already have programs to deal with the possibility of non-understanding in our daily lives. We need to treat “the other” as we do the “significant others” that we work with daily to achieve understanding. We need to make the processes of our everyday lives not only the topic of investigation, but also the guidelines for method. As Schutz (1967, p. 171) initially noted, we must engage with others to understand their experience: talking with them and giving them the opportunity to verify our interpretations of their aims, embodiment, reflections, and absorbed actions. We must hear their stories (e.g., Polizzi, 2010) and experience what their bodies do to the best of our abilities (e.g., Ferrell, 2006). We must allow others to verify and change our understanding, and we must remain forever cognizant that significant differences remain between us and others despite this living together and interaction. In short, to understand others’ experiences, we must share in those experiences.

The experience of sharing (and its nuances)

I am certainly not the first to advocate for embedded research methodologies like ethnography. Cultural criminologists have made similar insights (see Ferrell, 2004, 2007). Jeff Ferrell’s (1997) Weberian-inspired approach, in particular, argues embedded participant observation that taps the immediate embodied experience of transgression is necessary to adequate *criminological verstehen*. I follow this tradition; however, underpinning criminological research practices with the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (2002, 2004) more strongly emphasizes ambiguity and remaining differences. If criminologists rely strictly on

Weber to make the case for sympathetic understanding and immersion (Ferrell, 1997), they risk thinking they can fully “become the subject matter” (Ferrell, 2007) or risk slipping – as Schutz (1964, 1967, 1971) and the above phenomenologists of violence did – into ideal-typical analyses. These approaches usually ignore remaining differences and place less emphasis on temporal change, ambiguity, intertwining, and mutual transformation.

A brief phenomenologically-inspired reflection on the experience of sharing perhaps best demonstrates the central features and nuances of the approach that I am advocating. When sharing occurs, people meet over something they agree exists and is worth while. Persons then take parts of this shared object into their own experience, but these parts cannot be the same and individual experiences of each part might be wildly different. Sharing thus involves working together through similarity and difference. For instance, we cannot share the same bite of pie, and our experiences of the pie might be different; nevertheless, by sharing the experience we are in a better position to work out a description and explanation of the differences than if we ate entirely different pies. Sharing something is not reducing it to the same. Moreover, the act of sharing transforms both the object shared and the persons involved. While sharing, neither party can claim ownership to the object nor lay full claim to its essence.

Criminology, however, is not as “easy as pie”; criminologists are oftentimes concerned with understanding people and things that are far less pleasant, things like violence. The same guidelines for understanding nonetheless apply. To understand violent others we would do best to venture into a shared lifeworld with them. We would have to take up the fight and document how we are transformed with others (e.g., Wacquant, 2004), which could very well mean we would have to push the boundaries of ethics and legality to gain a sense of the embodied experience and when persons are operating with cognitive intentionality or practical intentionality (see Ferrell, 1997). Nevertheless, in entering a specific violent lifeworld, we must remain cognizant of the fact that our embodiment, social position, and personal biography mean that we could never experience

violence in exactly the same way as others. These differences must be respected and must become the subject of theorization and explanation (Katz, 2002). To hash out these difference and make sense of them, however, we must share our experiences with others – first sharing in others’ daily routines, and then sharing our experiences of that lifeworld with those others to illuminate differences.

Conclusion: From Violence toward Sharing

This paper began with the question: What, if anything, can phenomenology offer criminology’s understanding of others? In responding to this question, I considered phenomenology’s relation to violence. My discussion moved from violence toward sharing. I did this in two senses. First, in making my argument, I considered a phenomenology of violence and then a phenomenology of sharing. Second, I argued that using a phenomenology inspired by Merleau-Ponty we can move from a violent understanding of others that dissolves their alterity toward an understanding built on the practice of sharing lifeworlds. This approach accounts for both similarity and difference in our attempt to understand others. It avoids the overstatement of difference found in accounts of others as wholly-other and inaccessible. As an ethical practice, this approach encourages mutual transformation and acceptance that difference is necessary. As a research practice, it encourages (i) sharing experiences with others in an ethnographic attempt to work toward partial understanding, (ii) reflexivity about mutual transformation, and (iii) theoretical accounts that explain and respect differences. My overall conclusion is that although some phenomenological analyses might dissolve alterity by replacing others’ experiences with those of the analyst, this is not a necessary outcome of phenomenological reflection. Rather, it is largely a consequence of misaligned methodologies and a (misguided) continued quest for apodictic certainty in social research. Many phenomenological conclusions remain good starting points for criminological research. By coupling conclusions about the shared lifeworld and the temporality of experience with Merleau-Ponty’s (2002, 2004) ideas about the ambiguity of perception and intertwining of body-subjects, we can

have a phenomenology that demonstrates the uncertainty we live in with others, never completely sure of who they are or how they experience, but, under a principle of sharing, trudging forward *with* them nonetheless.

Works Cited

- Baldwin, T. (2004). Introduction. In M. Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception* (pp. 1-30). New York: Routledge.
- Best, R. (1975). New directions in sociological theory? A critical note on phenomenological sociology and its antecedents. *British Journal of Sociology*, 26(2), 133-143.
- Couzens-Hoy, D. (2005). Levinas and Derrida: "Ethical resistance." In *Critical Resistance: From Post-Structuralism to Post-Critique* (pp. 149-140). Michigan: The MIT Press.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. California: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. (1984). Toward a phenomenology of domestic, family violence. *American Journal of Sociology*, 90(3), 483-513
- Derrida, J. (1995). *The Gift of Death* (D. Wills, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Descartes, R. (1952). *Discourse on Method and Mediations* (L. Lafleur, Trans.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Dreyfus, H. (1993). Heidegger's critique of the Husserl/Searle account of intentionality. *Social Research*, 60 (1), 17-38.
- Dutta, N. (2004). The face of the other: Terror and the return of binarism. *Interventions*, 6(3), 431-450.
- Ferrell, J. (2009). Kill method: A provocation. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Criminology*, 1(1), 1-22.
- Ferrell, J. (2007). Cultural Criminology, In George Ritzer (Ed.), *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Blackwell Publishing Online. Last accessed 10 January 2011
<http://www.sociologyencyclopedia.com/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9781405124331_chunk_g97814051243319_ss1-172>.
- Ferrell, (2006). *Empire of Scrounge*. New York: New York University Press.
- Ferrell, J. (2004). Boredom, crime, and criminology. *Theoretical Criminology*, 8(3), 287-302.
- Ferrell, J. (1997). Criminological *verstehen*: Inside the immediacy of crime. *Justice Quarterly*, 14(1), 3-23.
- Ferrell, J., & Sanders, C. (1995). Toward a cultural criminology. In J. Ferrell & C. Sanders (Eds.), *Cultural Criminology* (pp. 297-326). Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Ferrell, J., Hayward, K., Morrison, W., & Presdee, M. (2004). Fragments of a Manifesto: Introducing *Cultural Criminology Unleashed*. In J. Ferrell, K. Hayward, W. Morrison, & M. Presdee (Eds.). *Cultural Criminology Unleashed* (pp. 1-9). Portland, Oregon: Cavendish Publishing Ltd.

- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). New York, NY: Harper-Collins.
- Husserl, E. (1982). *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. (D. Casirns, Trans.). Hauge: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Jackson-Jacobs, C. (2004). Taking a beating: The narrative gratifications of fighting as an underdog. In J. Ferrell, K. Hayward, W. Morrison, & M. Presdee (Eds.), *Cultural Criminology* (pp. 231-244). Portland, Oregon: Cavendish Publishing Ltd.
- Katz, J. (2002). Start here: Social ontology and research strategy. *Theoretical Criminology*, 6(3), 255-278.
- Katz, J. (1988). *Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions of Doing Evil*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Levinas, E. (1985). *Ethics and Infinity* (R. Cohen, Trans). Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press.
- Levinas, E. (1969). *Infinity and Totality: An Essay on Exteriority* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press.
- Long, M. (1979). Hindess and the *Critique of Social Phenomenology*. *Economy and Society*, 8(1), 59-98
- Lyng, S. (2004). Crime, edgework and corporeal transaction. *Theoretical Criminology*, 8(3), 359-375.
- Marion, J.L. (1998). *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology* (T. A. Carlson, Trans.). Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2004). *The World of Perception* (O. Davis, Trans.). New York: Routledge.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). *Phenomenology of Perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). New York: Routledge.
- Moran, D. (2005). *Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology*. Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press.
- Pivcevic, E. (1972). Can there be a phenomenological sociology? *Sociology*, 6(3), 335-349.
- Pollizi, D. (2010 – Online First). Agnew's general strain theory reconsidered: A phenomenological perspective. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, XX(X), 1-21.
- Psathas, G. (1989). *Phenomenology and Sociology: Theory and Research*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America.
- Reynolds, J. (2004). *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- Russell, M. (2006). *Husserl: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Continuum.

- Schutz, A. (1971). *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality* (3rd ed.). (M. Natanson, Ed.). Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Schutz, A. (1967). *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. (George Walsh & Frederick Lehnert, Trans.). Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Schutz, A. (1964). *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*. (A. Brodersen, Ed.). Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Staudigl, M. (2007). Towards a phenomenological theory of violence: Reflections following Merleau-Ponty and Schutz. *Human Studies*, 30, 233-253.
- Wacquant, L. (2004). *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Walsh, G. (1967). Introduction. In A. Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, (G. Walsh & F. Lehnert, Trans.). Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Werkmeister, W. H. (1941). An introduction to Heidegger's "existential philosophy". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2(1), 79-87.