

Kaleidoscope
A Phenomenological-Empirical Study of Beauty

by

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Abstract

This doctoral project describes beauty as it is lived. It is an exploration of beauty's experiential qualities as well as an investigation of its structural characteristics. Beauty has an eidetic structure that is morphological (rather than exact), which means that its essence has properties that are more or less characteristic (rather than necessary and sufficient) and that its phenomenal instantiations are similar in some ways (rather than being the same in all ways). Consequently, imaginative variation—a method that may be successfully employed when investigating exact essences—does not suffice when one seeks to uncover systematically the various meanings that may form part of a morphological essence. Instead it is more appropriate to: (1) consider multiple lived instances; (2) identify for each instance the lived understanding (i.e., sense of the whole) and lived meanings (i.e., parts) that played a role in that instance being experienced as an instantiation of its kind (or type); (3) examine in a dialectical manner instances that are relatively similar; and (4) combine insights obtained through the preceding whole-part analysis and dialectical explorations. It then becomes possible to describe a phenomenon in a way that is mindful of the different experiential-eidetic manifestations that may typify its nature. Following these procedural steps in the analysis of 471 personal experiences with beauty as recounted by first year psychology students has resulted in the description of the following lived variations of beauty:

- A variation called *objective beauty* in which the experiencing individual responds to a thing of beauty that is experienced as distinctly separate from herself;

- An *affective-noetic variation* in which beauty is lived in terms of a feeling or a certain state of mind;
- A *non-dualistic variation* of beauty in which beauty is lived as a unified sense of the experienced and the way in which it is experienced; and
- A variation called *situative beauty* in which beauty is experienced as involving all aspects of the situation that the experiencer finds herself in.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Cathelein Aaftink. The research project, of which this dissertation is a part, received research ethics approval from the Arts, Science & Law Research Ethics Board of the University of Alberta on October 23rd 2008 (ASL REB member: 1898 [KAN-08-10-012]).

To my grandmother, mijn Kleine Oma, who *knows* beauty.

But surely if one merely tries for the beautiful,
to put up with what it takes is beautiful too.

Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274b, 61, Rowe

There is life; and there, a step away, is death.
There is the only kind of beauty there ever was.
There is the old human struggle and its fruits together.
There is the text and the sermon, the real and the ideal in one.

William James, *On Some of Life's Ideals*, 32

en toch is het leven schoon, altijd weer opnieuw schoon

Etty Hillesum, *Het Werk 1941-1943*, 321

Acknowledgments

This project allowed me to engage with a large number of experiential narratives that describe a personal moment of beauty. The fourth chapter of this dissertation presents a selection of insights obtained about the nature of lived beauty. To all who have shared an experience of beauty with me, I express my sincerest gratitude.

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Introduction

1.1. Description of the Research Problem

*“Some beauty will be born of this,”*¹ Kate’s mother says in the first line of Julie Bruck’s poem “Cafeteria” (24-25).² *“I don’t know about beauty,”* the speaker replies twice in the following five strophes. For what to think of beauty when Kate, her beloved friend, is waiting to die in a hospital bed? Wanting to pretend that beauty is not there, the speaker cannot help but perceive it everywhere, speaking through the poem’s every strophe: in taking Kate’s hand and experiencing her mother’s faith; in the kindness of the women at the cafeteria; in the feel of Sibelius and a poster placed just right, right *there*. That she questions beauty attests to its presence. Despite her grief, she cannot help but appreciate: “We ate our egg salads on whole wheat as though we’d never tasted real food”; “I loved Kate’s mother’s lined, outdoor face, the loose wisps of white hair framing her fine bones”; “I loved the terra cotta walls around us, freshly painted by people who’d done their job adequately.” Confronted with the fact that her friend is passing away, having to face the inevitability of mortality, seems to have introduced a heightened sensitivity and openness to what is, here, now, in this moment of life. At this time beauty is apparent in things whose presence is

¹ Author’s italics. Throughout the thesis italization in quotes copies the text that is quoted, unless it is indicated explicitly that the italization is mine.

² This is a link to a YouTube video in which Julie Bruck recites “Cafeteria”:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpEsU5reVEg>

normally taken for granted. In that sense “*Some beauty will be born of this*” has already shown itself to be true.

At this time of loss, that beauty distracts and consoles and even evokes moments of appreciation is received with gratitude. Confronted with loss, even the very mundane seems to have the potential to become beautiful. Sometimes beauty and loss exist in harmony, sometimes the presence of one implies the presence of the other, and sometimes they seem to be contradictory. This last experiential possibility, this tension, is gestured towards when the speaker expresses her uncertainty about beauty. Yet by saying that she does not know about beauty, she does not just wonder whether it is appropriate for beauty to appear in this moment of grief, but she also seems to question its nature. For what is beauty, *really*? She says she does not know. The poem begs to differ, however, as an understanding of beauty speaks from those moments that are experienced as its instantiations. The beauty that is present involves being attentive to details and sensations not usually noticed; it has to do with individuals being themselves, authentically; and it concerns acknowledging and appreciating things simply for what they are and for being here. This is a beauty that recognizes and honors people’s care and competence; that implies loving something very much; and that entails being fully present with what is right in front of you, not being distracted by anything that does not form part of one’s direct experience. Although lightly touched upon, sketched in a few words only, beauty discloses itself in this poem through meanings such as attentiveness, authenticity, appreciation, care, competence, love, and being in the moment. The overall sense of beauty

resonating through the poem may perhaps be captured by a phrase such as ‘being lovingly aware and appreciative of this very moment.’

That the speaker understands these moments as instances of beauty reveals an implicit sense of what beauty is. She knows beauty through the knowing involved in direct experiencing, also if she were to feel that she does not have the words to articulate explicitly what she already knows. Knowledge of this tacit kind is distinctly different from the knowledge that one might have of what is said about beauty in theoretical discussions of its nature. Moreover, it is not necessary to consult beauty theories to get a sense of the speaker’s lived understanding of beauty: by engaging with the poem and the situations it portrays, the meanings characterizing the lived understanding of beauty can become apparent and it is possible to begin articulation of its nature. In fact we might wonder whether Oscar Wilde has a point when he writes: “[B]eauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins” (9). It appears that theoretical knowledge of beauty is not a condition for an experiential understanding of beauty. Moreover, we might consider whether the former can ever be truly enlightening when not originating from the latter.

Beauty concretely experienced in lived moments is of central interest in this thesis. The main research question reads thus as follows: *What is beauty understood to be when it is being experienced?* Put differently: *What meanings enable a particular experience to be understood as an instance of beauty?* And also: *What sort of experiential content does an experience have when it is lived as an experience of beauty?*

The structure of this introductory chapter follows the three notions that together form the word ‘kaleidoscope,’ the primary title of this dissertation: *kalos* (καλός), ‘beautiful,’ *kallos* (καλλός) ‘beauty,’ or *to kalon* (τό καλόν); ‘the beautiful’; *eidōs* (εἶδος), ‘essence’; and *scopeo* (σκοπέω), ‘I behold, contemplate, examine’ (LSJ). In the first and longest section of this introduction (1.2.1-1.2.3), I outline a few different understandings of beauty and I identify various kinds of meanings that play a role in the theorization of beauty. This overview of conceptualizations and aspects of beauty provides an anthological impression of the diverse identities ascribed to beauty. Furthermore, touching upon a variety of theoretical characterizations of beauty allows me to begin to elucidate the kind of beauty understanding that is of primary interest in the current project: beauty’s lived sense, experienced in moments of beauty as they are unfolding. Exploring lived experiences, meanings, and understandings characterizes research projects that are phenomenological in nature. Phenomenology is introduced in the *eidōs* section (1.3) and here it is explained that phenomenologists do not just attempt to describe lived understandings and meanings: they try to do so in an *eidetic* manner, which means that they aim to identify structures that are essential to particular phenomena or to phenomena in general. In the *scopeo*-part (1.4) I touch upon the way in which I have decided to work to disclose the eidetic and lived identity of beauty: 471 experiential narratives were collected that articulate memorable moments of beauty (as experienced by those who wrote the accounts). I described the understandings and meanings of beauty as they appeared to have been lived in the experiences and I identified regularities in beauty’s eidetic-

experiential structure. In this section I also indicate in what ways the research presented in this dissertation is distinctly different from other studies of beauty, whether phenomenological, empirical, or aesthetic. That the primary materials worked with solely are first-person reports describing a personal experience of beauty is crucial in this regard. I conclude this chapter with a brief impression of the content of the chapters that follow (1.5).

As for terminology, a few notions are of particular importance. To orient the reader, I briefly characterize them here but their meanings continue to be fleshed out in other parts of the thesis (most notably in 2.2). *Lived experience* is used to refer to a particular kind of phenomenon (e.g., the phenomenon that is beauty, or laughing, or traveling), to an experiential instance of such a kind, and to the phenomenon of *experiencing*, that is, the pre-reflective consciousness of experiential content. Experiential content consists of *lived meanings* that are spontaneously present in the course of experience. Lived meanings are not generated in a reflective or retrospective act; they are not refigured in or mediated through language; they are not the outcome of reflection, choice or judgment; and they are not projected upon the experienced in hindsight. Instead, they are non-inferential and given and found directly in first personal experience. Lived meanings are the interdependent parts of experience that is lived. In that capacity they are also the experiential qualities that together constitute *lived understanding*. Lived understanding is the pre-reflective, and thus implicit and immediate, knowing that is inherent to all experiencing. Forming part of a lived experience as it unfolds, lived understanding affords that an experience is lived as an instance of

a particular phenomenal kind (such as beauty).³ As for beauty specifically, *lived (experience of) beauty* refers to beauty as it is given in experience. *Lived understanding of beauty* refers to the implicit knowledge of beauty that forms part of a beauty experience as it is taking place. This sense of beauty consists of the understanding that beauty is being lived and as such it implies an understanding of beauty in some general sense as well.⁴ *Lived meanings of beauty* are the interdependent parts that feature as experiential qualities in lived experiences and understandings of beauty (e.g., a sense of joy is a lived meaning of beauty).

1.2.1. *Kalos*: Understandings and Meanings of Beauty

This thesis is technically an exercise in aesthetics, the philosophical and empirical home for the study of *kalos*, that which is found to be beautiful. The word ‘aesthetics’ is derived from the Greek *αἴσθησις*, which means ‘sense-perception’ or ‘sensation’ (LSJ). Baumgarten (1714-1762) was the first to employ the word in its Latin variation, *aisthesis*, in his two-volume work titled *Aesthetica* (1750; 1758). In this text aesthetics is conceived as the science or systematic study of the perception of art and the inquiry into those conditions that are most likely to result

³ Lived understanding is meaning that is lived. Also, lived meaning and lived experience may be used synonymously, that is, they may refer to experiencing in general and also to the profile of a particular experiential kind (e.g., ‘the lived meaning of beauty’). In discussions about the lived sense of beauty, I use ‘lived meanings’ to refer to experiential properties of a lived experience or understanding of beauty and ‘lived understanding’ to refer to the experiential knowing and knowledge that equals the holistic sense of beauty in which experiential properties feature interdependently (see 2.2).

⁴ In what way beauty features as a general category in individual lived instances of beauty is central to the discussion presented in 2.8.

in beauty being perceived (Allen, “Beautiful” n. pag.; Parret 11). While aesthetics may be an 18th century invention, beauty has occupied thinkers’ minds from the very beginning of philosophical thought. The oldest extant fragments containing ideas about beauty are ascribed to Pythagoras (6th century BCE), who has been said to have embraced the idea that contemplating beauty is crucial to living philosophically (Riegel 54) and to Sappho (c. 630-570 BCE), who held, inter alia, that even though different people may find different things beautiful, finding that something is beautiful, regardless of what it is, always means that the thing is loved (16/13.2; Dillon and Garland 429). The oldest extant and complete piece of writing that explores beauty’s nature is the *Hippias Major* (c. 390 BCE), a text written in all probability by Plato (c. 427 – 347 BCE).⁵ In the dialogue’s concluding paragraph, Socrates endorses the saying ‘*χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*’ (ed. Burnet; *chalepa ta kala*), ‘beautiful things are difficult’ (304e; 37), because it is one thing to indicate what one finds to be beautiful, yet quite another to say what the beautiful is in itself.⁶ Thus the first work of philosophy that has beauty for a

⁵ Most critics are of the opinion that the *Hippias Major* is indeed by Plato’s hand (e.g., Woodruff, “Essay” 94), but there also are some others who doubt that to be true (e.g., Tarrant x-xvii). For an overview of the discussion see Ludlam (11-21) and Woodruff (Introduction xi-xii).

⁶ Plato addresses the nature of beauty in many of his works (e.g., *Gorgias* 474d-475a; 50-51; *Republic* 509a; 236; *Timaeus* 64a-b; 87c-e; n. pag.; *Philebus* 51d; 64e-65a; n. pag.), yet the most elaborate explorations are found in the middle dialogue *Symposium* (c. 385 BCE) and in the late-middle dialogue *Phaedrus* (c. 365 BCE). In the *Symposium*, it is suggested that a continuous engaging with things found to be beautiful—an engaging that is first experiential and then intellectual—may deepen one’s understanding of beauty to the extent that eventually the Idea of Beauty may be beheld, beauty’s single and immutable essence, animating each variation of beauty (*Symposium* 210a-211d; 53-55). Since this dissertation pivots on the exploration of beauty as we know it from

theoretical topic—a text that in the tradition of Plato’s early dialogues ends in aporetic inconclusiveness—is already concerned with the challenge that all those who wonder about beauty face: identifying and articulating what beauty is, as a concept and as it is manifested in that which is experienced as being beautiful (Armstrong 3-4).⁷ Irrespective of that challenge, the experiencing individual

experience, it could be said that Plato’s advice is followed. Plato himself also made an experiential turn, albeit in the context of his theory of Ideas. In the *Phaedrus* he gestures toward the Idea of Beauty by describing what experiencing beauty may be like and by presenting readers/listeners with opportunities to experience beauty (i.e., we might find the poetic language of the text, the myth of the gods or the story of the lovers, or the ideas that are proposed to be beautiful). It is not directly said what Beauty is—most importantly because Beauty can only be seen in *noesis* and that pre-reflective pure vision of truth, in which something is seen exactly *as is*, defies being captured or multiplied in words (Hyland 58)—yet the suggestive nature of the dialogue encourages us to find out for ourselves how the being of Beauty gestured toward in the text might be understood (and may be articulated, in however flawed a fashion). Although too multifaceted to describe here, I would like to mention one crucial aspect of the vision of Beauty that Plato seems to propose in the *Phaedrus*: the intimate relationship between beauty and being called upon, which for the philosophical lover equals being called by truth (cf. Evans and Evans 350; Kierkegaard 562; Pseudo-Dionysius 138). That in ancient Greek *καλέω* (*kaleo*), to call, to summon, to call by name and to be called, is etymologically related to *κάλλος* (*kallos*; beauty) is clearly telling in this regard. For the Socrates of the *Phaedrus*, seeing Beauty means that one is called to be one’s true self, which, for a philosopher, means to exist at the service of truth, the truth of the Ideas, and the truth of self, both as a thinker and as a mentor of a pupil (in preparation).

⁷ Calling gods, people and things beautiful occurs in mythological, religious and literary texts that are much older than the *Hippias Major*. For example, the Pyramid texts (c. 2378-2348 BCE) of *Unas*, a Pharaoh of Ancient Egypt who is believed to have ruled between 2375 BCE and 2345, entail the recitation “‘How beautiful is the sight, how pleasing the vision,’ say the gods” (Allen, *Ancient* 57). The sixth poem of the *Song of Songs* (c. 900 BCE) contains lines reading: “You are beautiful, my darling. / You are beautiful; / your eyes are doves” (Longman 107). And Homer’s *Odyssey* (8th century BCE) holds many references to beauty including the line: “How often their [that is, of Nausicaa’s parents] hearts must warm with joy to see you [Nausicaa] striding into the dances—such a bloom of beauty” (Book VI.170-72; 361). This last quote describes how Odysseus addresses Nausicaa and his words entail a description of the feelings and

knows when she finds something to be beautiful (idem.; Scarry 28-29). Also, ‘beauty’ and ‘beautiful’ form part of many a person’s everyday language. Yet rather than that being illuminating, this colloquial presence may be perceived as obscuring the meanings of ‘beauty’ and ‘beautiful,’ because they at times are used in ways that are not particularly meaningful—at least not self-evidently so (cf. Elkins 35). Just because a word can be used mindlessly or vaguely does not mean that it is so used in all cases. Moreover, that ‘beauty’ comes to mind in many different situations should not lead to the conclusion that its presence is thus insignificant. Fluidity and applicability might in fact reflect a dimension that is crucial to beauty’s identity (cf. Sokolowski 175).

All this does not lessen the challenge of articulating beauty’s nature, on the contrary. Mothersill writes in fact that “[f]ew would deny [beauty’s] importance, and yet the mere suggestion that it be defined drives intelligent people to witless babble” (166; cf. Etcoff 8-10; Ishizu and Zeki 8; Santayana 11).⁸

sensations experienced when witnessing beauty—“I look at you and a sense of wonder takes me” (177; 362); “I marvel at *you*, my lady: rapt, enthralled, too struck with awe to grasp you by the knees” (184-85)—and that experiential characterization is arguably the oldest of its kind in world writing. But the *Hippias Major* is the earliest text to present a reflection on beauty, trying to articulate its nature, independent of context and the kind of thing that is found to be beautiful. It is important to observe, however, that before beauty was theorized, it already featured in poetry and narratives, gesturing towards its experiential presence in life.

⁸ In the *Confessions* Saint Augustine of Hippo gestures towards a similar challenge when he contemplates the phenomenon of time:

For what is time? Who could find any quick or easy answer to that? Who could even grasp it in his thought clearly enough to put the matter into words? Yet is there anything to which we refer in conversation with more familiarity, any matter of more experience, than time? And we know perfectly well what we mean when we

And Emily Dickinson poeticizes that “The Definition of Beauty is/That Definition is none—” (355). If anything, beauty appears to resist being defined in a way that allows for its nature to be captured definitively, precisely, and succinctly. Perhaps describing beauty is more a matter of gesturing toward (some of) its properties. Emerson writes he is “warned by the ill fate of many philosophers not to attempt a definition of Beauty” (89). He does feel he can point to “a few of its qualities”:

“We ascribe beauty to that which is simple; which has no superfluous parts; which exactly answers its end; which stands related to all things; which is the mean of many extremes. It is the most enduring quality, and the most ascending quality” (idem.). Emerson might not perceive this enumeration as an attempt to define beauty, it nevertheless presents an overview of the meanings that the essayist apparently understands to be some of beauty’s most prevalent characteristics. Sartwell makes a similar move when he first states in *Six Names of Beauty* (2004) that “[t]hough ‘beauty’ has been defined very frequently and variously, it is also famous as a word that should not be, and perhaps cannot be, defined” (3). He then proposes in the very next sentence that “[n]evertheless, *beauty is the object of longing*” (idem.). Questioning beauty’s definability, Sartwell is convinced that all instances are the same in (at least) one way: the experiencer always relates to that which is beautiful desiringly.

 speak of it, and understand just as well when we hear someone else refer to it. What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I want to explain it to someone who asks me, I do not know. (343; bk. IX; ch. 14)

That beauty is not easily articulated—one of the few insights about beauty that is met with consensus by beauty thinkers—has arguably contributed to many a person’s strong motivation to do so. This has led to a rich history of attempts to describe beauty’s nature and to just as many efforts, if not more, to challenge and improve proposed formulations (cf. Alexander 287). As a result, we are left not just with a diverse collection of different conceptualizations of beauty, but also with a rich variety of meanings associated with its nature. Here I first touch upon five understandings of beauty to give an impression of the diversity of conceptualizations proposed in beauty theories. Next I identify various kinds of meanings involved in discussions of beauty and I consider the difference between meanings that are lived and meanings or themes that are concerned with beauty, but not specifically with its lived nature. This difference is crucial, because phenomenological endeavors are above all geared toward exploring experiences as they are lived rather than with the ways in which phenomena have already been characterized in theoretical accounts.

1.2.2. Understandings of Beauty

The neo-Platonist and Christian theologian who calls himself Pseudo-Dionysius or Dionysius the Areopagite (6th century CE) understands beauty in *The Divine Names* as one of God’s names and natures, with others being, inter alia, the Cause, Being, the Good, and the One (107-16). God is endlessly, unvaryingly and eternally beautiful and within Him there is no difference between the beautiful in itself and what is beautiful (139-40). Beauty is the “[s]ource of all” (139), which

means that everything is a matter of beauty to some degree. God is Cause and Goal, “it calls [καλουν] all to itself, whence it is called beauty [κάλλος]” (138; cf. Kierkegaard 562).

The enlightenment philosopher Hutcheson (1694-1746) proposes a very different understanding of beauty. In *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), beauty is characterized as the Idea or sensation of pleasure and also as the internal sense, power, or faculty that is exclusively geared toward raising the Idea of beauty within us (19, 22, 23, 25, 27). Human beings are wired to perceive beauty: “[W]ere there no Mind with a Sense of Beauty to contemplate Objects, I see not how they could be call’d beautiful” (27). The pleasure that is beauty arises immediately (25) when an object is perceived that displays unity amidst variety: “The Figures which excite in us the Ideas of Beauty, seem to be those in which there is Uniformity amidst Variety” (28).

In *Aesthetic Order: A Philosophy of Order, Beauty and Art* (2000), Lorand understands beauty as pivoting on the experience of order. Something that is found to be beautiful is characterized by “high order and necessity” (243). The order involved in beauty is “lawless” (5), however, because there are no general or a priori rules or principles that can stipulate or explain the beauty of a thing. The order found in something beautiful is a matter of its elements complementing and interpreting one another in a way that is specific to the thing in question (96, 114).

In *Aesthetic Experience: Beauty, Creativity, and the Search for the Ideal* (2005), Hagman views beauty “through the psychoanalytic lens” and “see[s] in it

man's search for perfection, transcendence, and hope" (101). He offers the following definition: "Beauty is an aspect of the experience of idealization in which an object(s), sound(s), or concept(s) is (or are) believed to possess qualities of formal perfection" (87). 'Formal perfection' here does not just refer to the "shape or structure" of the beautiful thing: the "essence, the mode in which a thing exists, acts, or manifests itself" is also considered to be ideal when something is found to be an instance of beauty (87).

Nehamas proposes yet another way to understand beauty. Near the end of his book titled *Only a Promise of Happiness* (2007), he comes to endorse Stendhal's famous dictum that "[b]eauty is only the promise of happiness" (Stendhal, *Love* 66). By being only a promise there is no guarantee, however, that happiness is actually attained as there is no assurance that life will be enriched indeed through engaging with the thing of beauty (Nehamas 63; 52; 127). Nevertheless by letting ourselves be captured by beauty's promise and concerning ourselves with its manifestations, we assure ourselves that there continues to be beauty in our lives (132). Beauty is "its own reward," Nehamas writes, as "only the promise of happiness is happiness itself" (138).

This short anthology thus presents conceptualizations of beauty as the name and nature of God (Pseudo-Dionysius), the sense and faculty of pleasure (Hutcheson), the instantiation and experience of lawless order (Lorand), an aspect of the experience of idealization and formal perfection (Hagman), and the experience of (the promise of) happiness (Nehamas). The diversity of these and other characterizations of beauty not only makes it difficult to come to terms with

beauty's nature on the basis of these proposals, but it is also a testimony to the challenge that is understanding beauty per se.

That it is not evident what beauty is exactly played a role in beauty being denounced by a number of critics in the second half of the 20th century. Beauty became looked upon with suspicion and was understood as a repressive force in ideological, gender-related, and artistic domains (Alberro 66-67; Beech 12; Boylan 143; Devereaux 236, 240-41; Danto, "Aesthetics" 60-61; "Beauty and Morality" 37; "Kalliphobia" 25; De Kesel 50-51, 53, 57; De Schutter 42; Den Hartog Jager 69-79; Hickey 23-30; Higgins 34; Hillman 261-62; Johnson 10-11; Mao 191; Mather 288-89; Ostrow 59; Parret 12-13, 24, 26-28; Sontag 5-6, 8-9; Verminck 9; Verschaffel 76, 81-82; Wolf 12). Because those criticisms hardly ever include explorations of the nature of beauty in any substantial manner, their critical agenda could appropriate beauty as necessarily being concerned with meanings such as competitiveness, blatant spectatorship, unnatural thinness, hierarchy, elitism, distortion of the truth, inequality, conservatism, violence, oppression, and the pursuit of profit. But do these meanings really characterize beauty? Or do they merely gesture towards phenomena and notions that beauty may be affiliated with?

The origin of the distrust of beauty appears to be primarily rooted in the notion that meanings of the beautiful and the good are always somehow intertwined (e.g., Kant 227-28; par. 59; Plato, *Phaedrus* 256b; 37; *Philebus* 64e-65a; n. pag.; *Symposium* 212a; 56; Pseudo-Dionysius 140, 142; Sontag 11-12). This interconnection is problematic when beauty makes the bad look good and as

such succeeds in luring innocent onlookers into thinking that something bad is actually something good. But does beauty necessarily do that? Is it true that if I find fascist architecture beautiful I am more inclined to appreciate Il Duce's ideology in general? Or that the orchestration of lightning and alignment of a fight scene in a film may make me change my mind about wreaking physical harm upon others? And does finding the slim bodies of fashion models to be beautiful automatically mean that one endorses eating disorders, unnatural thinness, and low self-esteem in girls and women? When, in an interview with Coetzee about beauty and consolation, Kayzer points to the paradox of rendering the abominations of South-African reality in a way that is stylistically beautiful, the author responds:

It is incorrect to think that the formal representation of abhorrent reality ought to be abhorrent also. If that were to be correct, there would be no room for artists in this world. Then we would only need specialists that construct or reconstruct the abhorrent. And such a world I cannot imagine. (311; my trans.)

Even if "[t]he beautiful is that which we cannot wish to change" (Weil 65; cf. Dufrenne 83) and even if beauty is experienced as something that befalls us, rather than that its presence can be willed, that does not mean that the object that is found to be beautiful should be immune to questioning: that the presence of beauty impresses, pleases or distracts is no excuse for critical or political inertia, unethical conduct, or unhealthy behavior (cf. Etcoff 24). Further, because that which is found to be beautiful tends to be experienced as striking and as standing

out, it may draw attention not only to the beauty experienced, but also to other meanings that are involved in the experience in question. Hence, beauty may inspire us to carefully consider its instantiations. Then it may be determined whether the ideology, the violence, or unnatural thinness is what is found to be beautiful, or whether it is in fact classical symmetry and clarity, the cinematography, and a body that is toned and slender. That beauty may (be made to) be present in condemnable situations—as may many other complex phenomena such as knowledge, god, and truth—does not mean that beauty—or any of those other phenomena—is in fact the cause of the abuse that is noted. It also does not mean that beauty takes on the qualities of the situations in which it appears. Hence, the wave of critique has reinforced the importance of trying to distinguish between what beauty is lived to be, what meanings constitute its identity, what exactly is found to be beautiful, and what the circumstances are that accommodate the occurrence of beauty. Being mindful of those distinctions (also when they are not that absolute and clear) helps us identify what may be changed and what should be different. If human beings cannot help but crave for and gravitate toward experiences that involve a sense of beauty, they might not just want to indulge in their ‘taste,’ but also educate themselves on the characteristics, conditions, causes, circumstances and consequences of their values and preferences, such that they too become beautiful.⁹

⁹ The last 2 decades have seen a reintroduction of beauty in the theoretical domain with discussions that aim to depict the nature of beauty in a way that is more comprehensive than merely considering its oppressive potential. Publications that embody this new wave of interest in beauty include the anthologies

From outlining just a few theories, it already becomes apparent that a wide variety of themes are affiliated with beauty's nature. Meanings forming part of the beauty theories characterized earlier include the divine, unity amidst variety, perfection, hope, form, ideal, happiness, enrichment, and a sense of promise. In addition meanings such as existential significance, truth, virtue, humanity, love, desire, and consolation are often attributed to beauty. Despite that diversity of beauty meanings, proposals conceptualizing beauty say in effect: this is how beauty *ought* to be understood or this is the (experiential) profile that constitutes the phenomenon that beauty is. Yet is every instance of beauty a matter of formal perfection? Does beauty always necessarily instantiate unity amidst variety? And does each moment of beauty hold the promise of happiness? Moreover, given the diversity of ways in which beauty appears to have been thought about, we should

Uncontrollable Beauty, edited by Beckley with Shapiro (1998); *Het Boek van de Schoonheid en de Troost* (The Book of Beauty and Consolation; 2006) edited by Kayzer; *Over Schoonheid: Hedendaagse Beschouwingen bij een Klassiek Begrip* (About Beauty: Today's Reflections on a Classical Concept; 2008) edited by Verminck and the monographs *The Secret Power of Beauty: What Happiness Is in the Eye of the Beholder* (2004) by Armstrong, *The Good, the True and the Beautiful* (2008) by Boylan; *The Way of Beauty: Five Meditations for Spiritual Transformation* by Cheng (2006); *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (2003) by Danto; *Speaking of Beauty* (2003) by Donoghue; *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* by Etcoff (1999); *Aesthetic Experience: Beauty, Creativity, and the Search for the Ideal* (2005) by Hagman; *Beauty* by Kirwan (1999); *Aesthetic order: A Philosophy of Order, Beauty and Art* (2000) by Lorand; *A History of Human Beauty* (2004) by Marwick; *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (2007) by Nehamas; *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (2004) by O'Donoghue; *Six Names of Beauty* (2004) by Sartwell; *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999) by Scarry; *Beauty* (2009) by Scruton; *Schoonheid en Betrokkenheid: Kort Begrip van de Theorie der Vier Niveaus in the Esthetische Waardering* (Beauty and Involvement: Short Explanation of the Theory of Four Levels in Aesthetic Appreciation; 2004) by Weber; and *Real Beauty* by Zemach (1997).

wonder to what extent any one characterization of beauty that aims to capture beauty in a singular fashion may succeed in describing beauty essentially and distinctively while at the same time providing an impression of the variety of its meanings.

1.2.3. Meanings of Beauty

Different beauty theories not only present different conceptualizations of beauty, they may also approach beauty from a variety of different thematic perspectives.

In fact, any individual beauty theory tends to mention a collection of different themes in its discussion of beauty. In what follows I touch upon twelve meaning categories and give examples of each kind. The categories present meanings that:

1. Specify conditions that constitute a particular kind of beauty;
2. Describe the role and purpose of beauty in and for our lives;
3. Address attitudinal or personality features that are most likely to lead to beauty being experienced or that correlate with someone's ability to accurately determine whether something is beautiful;
4. Identify what the encounter with beauty brings about;
5. Explain why something is beautiful and indicate where beauty may be found;
6. Consider the semantics of 'beauty' and 'beautiful';
7. Describe psychological, sociological, or evolutionary patterns related to beauty;
8. Relate beauty to other phenomena and concepts (e.g., truth, goodness, social status);
9. Critique beauty;
10. Sketch the historical development of beauty's conceptualizations;
11. Identify the kind of thing that beauty is; and
12. Meta-theorize, interpret or evaluate beauty theories.

Discussing these different kinds of meanings allows me to develop a sketch of the theoretical territory of beauty, an endeavor already begun when introducing different conceptualizations of beauty's nature. In doing so I further develop the argument that theorizations of beauty, when comparatively considered, paint a picture of beauty that knows many faces and facets. Moreover, some meanings of this overview aim to characterize beauty from a lived perspective, whereas others discuss beauty from a perspective that is not specifically concerned with the experiential identity of beauty.¹⁰

The first group consists of meanings that indicate *conditions that constitute a particular kind of beauty*. An important part of the argument about beauty that Kant (1724-1804) presents in his *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790) pertains to conditions that are to be met for an instance of beauty to be pure or free. For beauty to be free, it cannot presuppose concepts or knowledge regarding, for instance, “what the object ought to be” (114; par. 16; cf. 104; par. 9), the actual existence of the object, or the nature of beauty (112; par. 15). Beauty is also not to entail any interests of, for instance, a moral, practical, theoretical or

¹⁰ A few comments are in order. First, meanings and themes are used interchangeably here. Second, the meanings presented here do not cover all different kinds of meanings that beauty theories may be concerned with. Third, the examples given should not be understood as covering the full extent of a particular meaning category; they simply provide an impression of the thematic possibilities of a certain grouping. Fourth, themes that are presented as examples of a particular category sometimes also fit other categories. Fifth, the themes discussed tend to form part of theories that combine different kinds of meanings, which are related to one another in a particular characterization of beauty. I thus do not mean to suggest that the meanings mentioned in this text represent the theories comprehensively. Meanings here refer to aspects of conceptualizations and theorizations of beauty. Often these meanings are aspects of highly multifaceted theories.

egotistical nature (90; par. 2) or be affected by “charm and emotions” (103; par. 13). By not involving any concepts, interests, and emotions, pure beauty involves the free, harmonious and reciprocal interplay of imagination (which “a given object bring[s] into activity for the synthesis of a manifold” of impressions) and understanding (which is activated by the imagination “for the unification of the manifold into concepts” [123; par. 21]). Being sensory form (sound, visuals; 116; par. 16), pure beauty is pleasing solely for its own sake, having the appearance of purposiveness yet without implicating any distinct purpose (as that would mean that conceptual content plays a role in the experience; 106; par. 11; 109; par. 14; 111; par. 15; 116, 120; par. 17).

In the second category of themes, the origin of beauty is approached from a different angle: here one is not concerned with the conditions that constitute a particular kind of beauty, but one tries to *explain why beauty forms part of human existence*. Etcoff discusses, for example, the argument that our attraction to human beauty is “a biological adaptation” that contributes to “the survival of our genes”:

Our extreme sensitivity to beauty is hard-wired, that is, governed by circuits in the brain shaped by natural selection. We love to look at smooth skin, thick shiny hair, curved waists, and symmetrical bodies because in the course of evolution the people who noticed these signals and desire their possessors had more reproductive success. We are their descendants. (26)

Hence, this theory holds that we are physically, emotionally and mentally equipped to experience beauty, because that benefits our ability to choose the right mating partner. That which affords the experience of beauty is thus intimately intertwined with the purpose that beauty has in our existence. Other proposals regarding the purpose of beauty are not distinctly evolutionary. Lakoff and Scherr, for example, argue that “[w]ithout beauty, or without the ability to love it, we would be isolated and sad in a bleak and unforgiving world” (283; cf. Parret 28) and Hickey sees in beauty a tool for cultural transformation: “Yet the vernacular of beauty, in its democratic appeal, remains a potent instrument for change in this civilization. Mapplethorpe uses it, as does Warhol, as does Ruscha, to engage individuals within and without the cultural ghetto in arguments about what is good and what is beautiful” (30).

Then there are meanings that aim to point out *what attitudinal or personality features are most likely to lead to beauty being experienced or correlate with someone’s ability to reliably determine whether something is beautiful*. De Schutter writes that “[e]ven though beauty happens out of the blue, beauty’s favor is not unconditional: she is bound to the condition of susceptibility; she befalls the human being who takes on the position of the indirect object” (45; my trans.). And Hume, the 18th century empiricist, proposes in “Of the Standard of Taste” that a “true judge in the finer arts,” that is, he who is “qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish [his] own sentiment as the standard of beauty,” is a person who has a “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice” (17).

Another category of meanings has to do *with what the experience of beauty brings about*. In following Plato's vision for beauty to a considerable extent, Nehamas observes that the beautiful object inspires us to engage in the exploration of its being, because we desire to understand the thing's beauty and distinctiveness as well as its capability to make us love it so (84, 100, 125-26, 131,133). As Nehamas writes about his experience of Manet's *Olympia*, a painting he perceives as being very beautiful: "I literally want to devote part of my life to it—not just to look at it (although that will certainly be part of it) but also to come to know it better, to understand it and see what it accomplishes" (105-106). In our quest we come into contact with ideas and insights that we would not have encountered had we not found the thing to be beautiful: "Every new path we follow is bound to lead to ideas, feeling, and actions, to people and places, we could have never anticipated" (126). That which we find to be beautiful always holds something that is yet to be disclosed and explained: the beautiful thing escapes our understanding and that is one of the reasons it continues to be so fascinating to us (70, 72). In fact, once we feel we understand a thing entirely, we no longer experience it as an instance of beauty (105, 123).

Hagman presents an alternative with regard to what experiencing beauty effectuates. In his psychoanalytical vision of beauty, Hagman attributes a healing power to beauty. Beauty is found to have a "transitional quality" (94), which means that it "is never experienced as fully external or internal; we feel aroused, drawn in, fascinated by the beautiful—inner and outer experience is unified" (95). The polarization between self and world is thus dissolved. This also holds for the

person who is experiencing beauty: she is viewer and creator at the same time (96). In engaging with the beautiful object, the individual “satisfies a fundamental, healthy need to be in relation to something or someone that is felt to be ideal” (96). By sharing in the object’s formal perfection, an invigorated and more integrated and harmonious sense of self is brought into existence (99). There remains however the awareness that beauty is “fragile, often transitory, and can never be possessed.” Therefore in beauty “[f]ulfillment and failure, presence and absence, are intertwined” (96).

The fifth group of beauty-meanings describes *where beauty may be found and explains why things that are found to be beautiful are beautiful indeed*. Loci of beauty may be defined according to kind of experience (e.g., moral, intellectual, mathematical, formal, physical, sexual, natural, visual, auditory, olfactory, human-made beauty), type of object (e.g., works of art, landscapes, deeds of kindness, buildings, texts, paintings, songs, situations, other people, ourselves, clothes, the human body, utilitarian objects, the weather), or kind of quality (e.g., symmetry, balance, originality, perfection). This category holds meanings that are descriptive, indicating what is found to be beautiful, but also normative, pointing to what should be (or should not be) considered as being beautiful. Zangwill, for example, argues that “a performance of a piece of music is delicate *because of* a certain arrangement of sounds, and an abstract painting is brash or beautiful *because of* a certain spatial arrangement of colours” (329). Thagard characterizes the beauty that may be experienced when engaging with mathematical theories as follows:

Beauty is the feeling that emerges to consciousness when a theory is very strongly coherent with respect to explaining the evidence *and* being consistent with other beliefs *and* possessing simplicity, symmetry, and other kinds of analogies. Psychologically, the beauty of a theory does not arise from affective inductions connecting aesthetic features with empirical success, but rather from the coherence of the theory that intrinsically includes those features. (368)

Broek understands the foundation of beauty's presence to be of an existential and creative nature:

What is Beautiful is so because it participates in the fundamental struggle of our humanness, the struggle to overcome our own mortality, to emancipate ourselves from the dying self, and it does this through a process of seeking out new perceptions, new metaphors of understanding. (108)

This category also holds proposals for where beauty cannot or can no longer be found. In explicitly demarcating beauty's territory, Stace argues, for instance, that "[m]athematical proofs and theorems cannot—*pace* Mr Bertrand Russell—be strictly called beautiful. No pure abstractions are beautiful" (13). Similarly, there are contemporary thinkers who wonder whether beauty may still be found in works of art (De Kesel 47; Verminck 9).

It is not difficult to find contradicting opinions in this category of meanings. Whereas Danto holds that "Picasso's *Guernica*, for example, is not

elegiac. It expresses shock and outrage. It too is black and white, but it would be false to call it beautiful” (*Abuse* 111), Vaillancourt shares a personal experience of beauty that involves the very same painting: “A recent writer on beauty, Jennifer A. McMahon, describes well what I experience with *Guernica*: ‘The feeling of beauty is a feeling of clarity as if one had found a solution to a problem... a deeply satisfying and pleasurable feeling’” (Vaillancourt et al. 23).

Then there are meanings that are concerned with *the semantics of the words ‘beauty’ and ‘beautiful.’* Steiner writes that “[w]e often say that something or someone is beautiful, in fact, when what we mean is that they have value for us” (48). And in his *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, Wittgenstein states that:

We are concentrating, not on the words ‘good’ or ‘beautiful,’ which are entirely uncharacteristic, generally just subject and predicate (‘This is beautiful’), but on the occasions on which they are said—on the enormously complicated situation in which the aesthetic expression has a place, in which the expression itself has almost a negligible place. (2)

Other meanings describe *psychological, sociological or evolutionary patterns involving beauty.* Mao points out “[t]hat the beautiful have it better is hardly a secret. Common wisdom has long held this truth to be self-evident, and study after study has confirmed that more attractive people make more money, win more esteem from their peers, even inspire more evident affection in infants” (190). Observations concerning the societal status of beauty form part of this category as

well. In a debate with design critic Stephen Bayley, writer Germaine Greer, and broadcaster David Starkey, Roger Scruton is quoted as saying: “Beauty is no longer honoured as it should be in my country. Yet my country was built by people who revered beauty. It was, for them, a joy forever and not something to be trashed and brought down to the level of our crudest appetites and our basest needs” (Bayley n. pag.). There are also meanings that address the universal or humanistic dimension of beauty. Many thinkers understand our human need and ability to experience beauty as part of all cultures and times (Etcoff 24; Hagman 101-102; Nehamas 82; Parret 28; Santayana 5; Scarry 108-109; Scruton 10; Verminck 7; Winston 4). Sontag claims: “the capacity to be overwhelmed by the beautiful is astonishingly sturdy and survives amidst the harshest distractions. Even war, even the prospect of certain death, cannot expunge it” (12-13).

Yet another type of meaning is explicitly concerned with *relating beauty to other phenomena and notions* (e.g., truth, goodness, society, politics, virtue, social status). Higgins argues, for example, that:

Beauty seems at odds with political activism because it is not a directly practical response to the world. It inspires contemplation, not storm and fury. But politically motivated artists, I submit, have much to gain from beauty. Beauty encourages a perspective from which our ordinary priorities are up for grabs. True, our political commitments are among these priorities. But the condition of contemplating beauty is essential to the total economy of political ‘engagement.’ (34)

Meanings of critique involving beauty are either directed at beauty itself and/ or employ beauty as a filter to describe and evaluate (certain domains or aspects of) society and corresponding values (see 1.2.2). Schjeldahl argues, for instance, that “[t]here is something crazy about a culture in which the value of beauty becomes controversial. It is crazy not to celebrate whatever reconciles us to life” (55). And Hickey explains how Mapplethorpe’s photographs challenge conventions concerning beauty as well as those associated with the portrayal of male homoeroticism:

So, it was not that men were making it in Mapplethorpe’s images. At that time they were regularly portrayed doing so on the walls of private galleries and publicly funded ‘alternative’ spaces all over the country. On account of the cult of plain honesty and sincere appearance, however, they were not portrayed as doing so *persuasively*. It was not that men were making it, then, but that Mapplethorpe was ‘making it beautiful.’ More precisely, he was appropriating a baroque vernacular of beauty that predated and, clearly, outperformed the puritanical canon of visual appeal espoused by the therapeutic institution. (28-29)

Meanings pointing to the *development of beauty’s conceptualizations over time* constitute another important component of beauty theories. De Kesel observes, for instance, that “[n]o era has been more adorned with beauty than ours, but this beauty has ceased to refer to the good and the truthful” (53; my trans.). And Jay claims that “it was perhaps not until the nineteenth century that the center of

gravity in aesthetic discourse decisively shifted from the idea of beauty assumed to reside in objects in the world to the experiences of the humans who responded to them” (5).

Then there are themes that *specify the kind of thing that beauty is or identify the kind of meaning category that it belongs to*. For example, Morgan characterizes beauty as follows: “Beauty is fundamentally a sensory experience even if that experience is instigated through a conceptual form. It is possible to feel a coherent concept on a profound and intimate level whether or not the work exists in the form of an object” (80). Danto holds a different opinion: “[B]eauty is the only one of the aesthetic qualities that is also a value, like truth and goodness. It is not simply among the values we live by, but one of the values that defines what a folly [sic.] human life means” (“Aesthetics” 65). This meaning-category also involves proposals which argue that beauty should be envisioned as something subjective (i.e., something is found to be beautiful because of the response it evokes in the experiencing individual), as something objective (i.e., beauty is a quality of that which is found to be beautiful), or as something interactionist (i.e., beauty characterizes the interaction between the experiencing individual and a certain object). An example of a subjective conceptualization is Hume’s understanding: “Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty” (6). A functionalist understanding of beauty is objective in nature: “According to functionalism, the integrity of an object resides in the perfect interplay between form and function [as in purpose]: the beauty of an object

correlates with the extent to which its form is determined by its function” (Parret 16; my trans.). An interactionist perception of beauty is proposed by Alexander:

The intimacy of connection between subjective and objective elements in beauty, as contrasted with the relative detachment of them in truth and goodness, seems to give beauty a special and distinctive character.... [I]n beauty, try as we may to exclude the mind from the object felt to be beautiful, we cannot separate them because one part of the beauty comes from the mind, and one part from the external thing. (295-96).

Lastly, I would like to mention themes that have to do with the *meta-theorization of the study and philosophy of beauty, including the interpretation or evaluation of theoretical conceptualizations of beauty*. Morgan observes, for instance, that “beauty—as it arrives through the language of form and concept—is still the crown of aesthetics” (82). Gadamer endorses Hegel’s insight about the relation between natural and artistic beauty when he writes: “Hegel rightly grasped that natural beauty is a reflection of artistic beauty, so that we learn how to perceive beauty in nature under the guidance of the artist’s eye and his works” (“Relevance” 31). And Lorand argues that “Kant’s distinction between free and dependent beauty is based on an incorrect assumption. No type of beauty can be free of concepts, although no concept determines a formula for beauty” (249).

Most meanings listed here approach beauty from a perspective external to the experience of beauty. This means that they present insights *about* beauty, from a viewpoint shaped by a particular research tradition, a conceptual framework, or

an ideology. Often a combination of observation and assumption, theoretical considerations tend to try to explain and interpret the topic in question. Rather than examining theoretical meanings of beauty, the current project explores meanings that are experienced when one lives a moment of beauty. Those meanings are not reasoned towards, they are not the outcome of an interpretive analysis, but they are evidenced in direct experience. Those meanings constitute lived understanding, the immediate and implicit knowing that beauty is being experienced. That experiential kind of knowing affords that beauty may become the topic of our theoretical considerations: because we are familiar with beauty through our experiences of beauty, beauty may be contemplated and addressed in general terms (Marshall 55). Moreover, endeavors such as describing sociological or evolutionary structures of beauty, indicating where beauty may be found, or identifying features that engender its presence only make sense if it is clear what beauty is presumed to be. Discussions concerned with external, reflective depictions of beauty are not often very explicit, however, about what conceptualization of beauty is being entertained (e.g., Beek 20-29; Boylan 142-208; Mao 190-229). The absence of a characterizing description of beauty can be bewildering, for how does one gauge theoretical insights when the phenomenon in question is not being properly addressed? At the same time, because we already have some (implicit) understanding of beauty, theories that do not characterize beauty carefully may still seem to make sense. Especially when there is no tension between the insights presented and our implicit sense of beauty's nature, it is easy

to forget to inquire after the understanding of beauty supposed by a certain theoretical discussion of its identity.

Whereas our experience with beauty makes it possible for us to meaningfully engage with beauty in a theoretical manner, we do not need theoretical insights to be able to experience beauty. In fact, a lived moment of beauty does not include thoughts about beauty's sociological patterns, concerns about the semantics of the concepts 'beauty' or 'beautiful,' or reflection about beauty's evolutionary origin or conceptual history.¹¹ That does not mean, however, that knowledge about beauty cannot affect whether we find something to be beautiful or to what extent: for example, background information about a painting may make us more aware of the meaning of the work which may further affect how attuned we are to the beauty that may be found there. Yet in a moment of beauty, lived meanings of beauty, and not theoretical or reflective meanings, afford that the moment experienced is an instance of beauty (cf. Husserl, *Ideas II* 9; par. 4; see 2.2). Of the meanings discussed above, the following are among those that address aspects of beauty as it is lived: that we love what we find to be beautiful (Nehamas 62); that when we find something to be beautiful we want to explore its being, that is, we feel the urge understand why it is so beautiful and why it makes us love it so, because we do not fully grasp either of these characteristics (125-26); that when we are experiencing beauty we are relating "to something or someone that is felt to be ideal" (Hagman 96); that we then

¹¹ Unless of course those very activities are experienced as being beautiful. See 2.2.

experience the unification of inner and outer experience (95); that the beautiful excites and fascinates us and draws us in (95) and that it is valuable to us (Steiner 48); and that the experience of beauty is one that is sensory in nature (Morgan 80).¹² Meanings that are lived constitute the lived understanding that beauty is being experienced. To entertain, explore and explicate those meanings is to engage in phenomenological research. Both in theory and practice, phenomenology is a mode of inquiry whose insights follow from the contemplation of lived experience from the perspective of its livedness. It describes and investigates structures that characterize lived experience in general and those of different experiential kinds in particular through engaging with lived experience directly. In the next part of this chapter, which revolves around the notion of *eidos*, I turn to the discipline of phenomenology.

To conclude this section on *kalos* I return to aesthetics. No longer exclusively considered to be the contemplation of the beautiful, aesthetics has become the study of many phenomena and notions, including the aesthetic, the sublime, taste, evaluation, art, judgment, and expression. Hence, we should wonder whether it is particularly informative to call a research project that is exclusively concerned with articulating lived experiences of beauty an exercise in aesthetics. Having said that, in a study by Jacobsen et al. (2004) in which 310 German undergraduate students were asked to write down adjectives that came to

¹² Beauty theories are not always that clear about whether meanings discussed are meanings that are lived when beauty is being experienced. For example, Hagman indicates that she who is experiencing beauty is both viewer and creator of beauty (96). Whether an experience of beauty includes awareness of this dual role is not apparent from Hagman's text.

mind when engaging with the notion of ‘the aesthetics of objects’ (1254), it was found that 91.6% of participants wrote down ‘beautiful,’ followed by ‘ugly’ (42%), ‘pretty’ (27%), ‘elegant’ (23%), ‘small’ (18%), ‘repulsive’ (12%), ‘wonderful’ (12%), ‘stylish’ (10%), and ‘fascinating’ (10%; 1265). These findings suggest that aesthetics and beauty continue to be closely associated—the researchers speak of “a clear primacy of beauty” in the diversified semantic field of aesthetics (1259)—even or perhaps especially for those who are not academically informed about either concept. Nevertheless, because the current research is exclusively concerned with beauty,¹³ characterizing this project as *kallistic*¹⁴ instead of calling it an exercise in aesthetics is both more appropriate and precise.

¹³ This project does not include a comparative exploration of the phenomenon and notion of beauty with those of, for instance, the sublime or the aesthetic.

¹⁴ Hegel was the first to work with the term ‘kallistic.’ At the beginning of his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, he wonders whether the work he has set out to do—interpreting different forms of art as representing various stages in the history of human artistic activity, with beauty being understood as truth manifested in the particulars of sensuous form (cf. Dufrenne 81)—may be called ‘kallistic.’ Hegel deems the term “unsatisfactory, for the science to be designated does not treat of beauty in general, but merely of artistic beauty” (3). He therefore decides to work with the notion of ‘aesthetics,’ even though aesthetics “means more precisely the science of sensation or feeling” (3) and “the proper expression ... for our science is the ‘Philosophy of Art,’ or, more definitely, the ‘Philosophy of Fine Art’” (3). ‘Kallistic’ works well for the current project, however, as this study does not limit itself to a particular beauty object; instead, every experience that is lived as a moment of beauty is of interest, regardless of what is found to be beautiful, be it a painting (high brow or other), the face of another human being, a situation, a nature scene, or someone’s personality.

1.3. *Eidos*: Exploring Beauty Phenomenologically

This project pivots on the exploration of lived understandings instantiating moments of beauty and the meanings that characterize those understandings. This then is a phenomenological effort as phenomenology is the *logos of phainomena*, the truthful wording of that which shows itself as itself in lived experience (cf. Sokolowski 13). In addition to referring to the practice of articulation, the notion of *logos* reflects a commitment to capture the ‘truth’ of “the ‘original’ presence of things to us” (Burch, “Phenomenology and Human Science” 39). The first truth of things of their original presence is that they are lived (instead of, for example, thought about). Phenomenological efforts aim to articulate that which is pre-reflectively experienced. The second truth of things as lived is that they are experienced as instances of a particular kind (e.g., a tree, dreaming, confusion, hurt, beauty). That truth is captured by the notion of *eidos*, the second concept forming part of ‘kaleidoscope.’ *Eidos* refers to, inter alia, ‘that which is seen,’ ‘the act of perception,’ and also ‘essence,’ ‘form,’ ‘shape,’ ‘figure,’ as well as ‘species,’ ‘type,’ ‘kind,’ and ‘class’ (Novak 2-5). In other words, meanings of *eidos* include the perceived, the perceiving, that which constitutes a thing’s identity, and a grouping of things that are similar or the same. The *logos of phainomena* is thus the practice of identifying and describing the lived and eidetic nature of experiences. Phenomena are explored in order to identify the essential structures (i.e., the understandings, meanings and their interrelationships) that characterize the ways in which lived experience appears to consciousness. Moreover, specific phenomena are examined so that the eidetic profile that

affords that a particular lived experience is given as an instance of a particular kind (e.g., a triangle, friendship, a memory, something real or imagined) may become apparent. Eidetic structures inform, but also form part of experiences, that is to say, eidetic intuition is not just a crucial component of phenomenological investigations, but it also features in our daily experiencing as the kind of awareness that enables us to understand an experience as an instance of a particular kind. Hence, phenomenology aims to disclose essential identities that we are already experientially familiar with and that we may come to know in a more defined manner through a phenomenological effort.

The objective of a phenomenological study of beauty is thus to describe the identity of beauty as it is lived and to do so in an eidetic fashion. Rather than exact (i.e., invariant), the eidetic structure that characterizes beauty is inexact or morphological, which means that its *eidos* is inherently characterized by a certain variation (Kuiken, Schopflocher and Wild 378). This type of eidetic structure is discussed in some detail in the second half of the second chapter. There I also investigate the methodological options available when investigating phenomena that have such an essence. That beauty's essence is inherently characterized by some diversity has implications for the articulation of beauty's identity: describing beauty as if it concerns a singular structure is simply not appropriate. This possibility was already gestured toward when, in the discussion of the five conceptualizations of beauty in the previous section, the question was raised whether any one of these proposals—which all claim to capture beauty's nature comprehensively—indeed describe beauty in a way that does justice to the variety

of meanings that may be crucial to different manifestations of beauty. If beauty has a structure that is typified by a certain variety, it cannot be assumed that every experience of beauty is a matter of—following the examples of 1.2.2—formal perfection (Hagman), the presence of unity amidst variety (Hutcheson), or a sense or promise of experienced happiness (Nehamas). Beauty theories tend to present a particular understanding of beauty as *the* way to understand beauty, however, almost as if beauty may be captured conclusively and comprehensively, if only for a particular era or culture. At the same time, beauty theorists seem hesitant to call the meanings that they identify as forming part of beauty *essential* to beauty's nature, even though a singular and determinate conception of the beautiful more or less implies that the meanings identified are indeed (tacitly) ascribed such a status. Lorand observes in this context that “[a]voiding ‘essences’ has resulted in a confusing situation in which it is unacceptable to inquire into the essence of art or beauty, but it is acceptable to discuss the different implications of these concepts” (*Aesthetic* 2). Resistance to calling properties essential to beauty might have something to do with the opinion that evoking the notion of essence implies that definiteness is imposed upon a phenomenon or concept. To do so is untenable if meaning is in flux. But as Mohanty points out: “[E]xperience bears witness to both change and permanence of forms, structures, types, and patterns, even of the simplest qualia” (*Phenomenology* 89). If phenomena are characterized by both structure and change, by change within structure, and also structure within change (idem.), then careful descriptions of phenomena and concepts are to provide characterizing impressions that acknowledge and include room for variation (90).

Morphological essences as touched upon by Husserl—albeit not explored in much detail in his writings—embody a distinct combination of identity and fluidity and as such they provide an excellent framework for coming to terms with the structure(s) of complex phenomena such as beauty (cf. Husserl, *Ideas I*, 166; par. 74).¹⁵ The essential should thus not just be perceived as a matter of necessary and sufficient properties: essential meanings may also point to meaning possibilities that may (but not necessarily) characterize a moment of a particular experiential category distinctively (cf. Kuiken and Miall 18; Uidhir and Magnus 88-92; Weitz 30).

We should in fact wonder to what extent trying to capture beauty as if it has a particular, definite, singular identity—even though its eidetic identity is one that is more likely to be a matter of a variety of characteristic and characterizing structures—has intensified the challenge of articulating beauty’s nature. Beauty speaks through that which is beautiful, but that does not mean that all of beauty makes itself heard (or is being heard) in any particular instance of its appearance.

¹⁵ In addition to not being explicit about whether a particular quality should be understood as essential to beauty’s being, another kind of ambiguity appears to be recurrent in beauty theories: it is often unclear whether a particular meaning forms part of beauty or is an effect caused by beauty’s presence (without being an aspect of beauty’s being). Does the devotion that Nehamas observes to explore the thing found to be beautiful form part of beauty or is it an effect of experiencing beauty (84, 100, 125-26, 131, 133)? Are “unexpected pleasure, awe and admiration” (*Aesthetic* 249) that Lorand writes about aspects of beauty’s nature? Or are they effects of beauty being experienced? Effects that do not belong to beauty per se? Or are we supposed to think of beauty as being what it does? The texts do not provide clear answers to these kinds of questions. In the experiential variant of ‘objective beauty’ (i.e., one of the beauty understandings identified in the study discussed in the current text) some experiential meanings indeed appear to be a matter of being and doing simultaneously (see 4.3.5).

Conceptualizations of beauty that present a singular impression of its identity should therefore not to be replaced by a different (supposedly better) singular impression, but by a description that aims to accommodate the variety typical of the kind of eidetic profile that characterizes beauty's nature. In that context it is helpful to endorse a morphological-eidetic model, which is something beauty theories do not do. Furthermore, rather than implying that the meanings disclosed are essential in all instances of beauty as is suggested in absolute statements such as "[b]eauty is quiet, serene, harmonious, and only leads to contemplation" (Parret 13; my trans.); "[b]eauty is pleasure objectified, involving either sensation, pattern, meaning, or [a] combination of these, and involving some degree of organic unity (Bahm 582); "[b]eauty inspires love and thus acquires its power as an element of motivation" (Mothersill 167), it is important to explicitly acknowledge that the meanings of beauty that are discussed are meaning *possibilities*: they may be but are not necessarily essential in lived experiences of beauty. Perhaps some (maybe most) beauty theories should in fact be understood as presenting eidetic meaning *possibilities* rather than *conditions* for the presence of beauty. If that is indeed the case, it remains problematic that they do not state explicitly that that is what they are doing. Four different lived understandings of beauty and a variety of the meaning possibilities that form part of the morphological identity of beauty are presented in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

1.4. *Scopeo*: Exploring Beauty Empirically

Scopeo is the third term that forms part of the notion of ‘kaleidoscope’ and it means ‘I behold, I contemplate, I examine.’ How are we to go about investigating and explicating lived meanings and understandings that characterize experiences of beauty in an eidetic manner? I chose to ask individuals to describe a personal moment of beauty. This resulted in a corpus of 471 experiential accounts of beauty as articulated by first year psychology students. That experiential narratives constitute the primary source of information worked with and that the respondents’ own lived understandings are of pivotal interest make this project distinctly different from all other studies of beauty, irrespective of whether they are phenomenological, empirical or aesthetic in orientation. Here I will first touch upon some aspects concerning the choice of materials and then I discuss a few different kinds of studies in which beauty is also explored in an empirical fashion.

Instead of examining fresh materials (i.e., materials especially collected for a research project), I could have worked with texts that are already available, most notably, autobiographical¹⁶ and literary texts. There is an interesting

¹⁶ Interesting autobiographical impressions of personal experiences with beauty include Stendhal’s experience of Volterrano’s Sybils in Venice (*Rome* 302) and Sylvia Plath’s experience of the beach (75-76). An extraordinary source when it comes to personal experiences with beauty is Wim Kayzer’s documentary series *Beauty and Consolation* (original title in Dutch: *Van de Schoonheid en de Troost*; 2000). In the series, Kayzer, a Dutch filmmaker, interviews 26 philosophers, thinkers, scientists, musicians and artists (amongst them Freeman Dyson, Jane Goodall, Stephen Jay Gould, György Konrád, Martha Nussbaum, Richard Rorty, Simon Schama, George Steiner, Wole Soyinka, Steven Weinberg, Edward Witten) about beauty, in terms of both their personal experiences and their professional observations, and in relation to consolation. The series has 26 episodes of an hour each, plus a finale episode in which the participants (with the

development with respect to autobiographical texts: the revival in the last two decades of beauty as a topic for theoretical reflection has been accompanied by a strong experiential orientation, especially with regard to the kind of experience that is evoked when beauty is beheld. Theorists often describe their own experiences with beauty to elucidate the kind of experience they have in mind (e.g., Kirwan 4; Nehamas 105-38; Scarry 16-20). These autobiographical examples tend to correspond flawlessly with the ideas proposed about beauty, which raises the question to what extent a theoretical agenda has played a decisive role in selecting the experiences that are described. Also, we may wonder whether the implication is that all moments of beauty mirror the scenario outlined or whether there is also room for experiential variety.¹⁷

As to beauty and works of art and literature, Marwick states the following:

“There is scarcely a creative work [novels, plays, poems, stories, operas and films] which does not, even if only negatively, comment on [human] beauty”

exception of the late Yehudi Menuhin) come together in Amsterdam for a round-table discussion about their insights. In addition, there is *The Book of Beauty and Consolation* that contains essays written by the participants.

¹⁷ Kirwan openly addresses the autobiographical origin of his understanding of beauty:

It is always possible, of course, that different people may in fact be referring to different states or sensations when they use the word ‘beautiful.’ I admit that at times in writing this book I have been so flabbergasted by some of the things I have read about beauty *per se* (rather than what is beautiful) that I have thought that this might be the case. However, I still do not subscribe to this counsel of despair; I still feel that what has been written about beauty, even when I disagree with it, is in some way related to my experience of beauty, is trying to describe or account for something I am familiar with. Ultimately I can only present my own account and leave it to you to decide if it is solipsistic. (4)

(263).¹⁸ Yet saying who or what is beautiful and describing the responses to beauty does not necessarily provide insight into the meanings that characterize the phenomenon that is beauty. As for the latter, there are few texts that are informative enough to be of interest.¹⁹ I therefore chose to concern myself exclusively with fresh materials.

In focusing on ‘new’ experiential descriptions, it could be said that this project resembles to some extent other phenomenological explorations of beauty: phenomenologists work with a sense, a “prereflective understanding” of the nature of a particular phenomenon and through phenomenological consideration of that phenomenon, pivoting on their own lived experiences, they try to explicate its distinctive identity (Mohanty, *Transcendental* 36; cf. *Phenomenology* 92). An important advantage of working with one’s own experiences is that it is easier to further examine and expand upon those themes that appear to be of particular importance. On the other hand, it can also be argued that some phenomena, including the experiential category that is beauty, appears characterized by such richness and complexity that the diversity of its meaning possibilities may not be covered by (information-rich) autobiographical experiences, possibly also because

¹⁸ In *Speaking of Beauty*, Donoghue touches upon a wide variety of passages from literary texts that feature beauty. An appendix (179-87) provides additional quotations.

¹⁹ Examples of passages that go beyond merely calling people and things beautiful and provide some insight into the nature of beauty experience include Odyssee seeing Nausica in the Sixth Book of Homer’s *Odyssee* (lines 162-86; 362; see footnote 7), Aschenbach’s musings about the divine beauty of Tadzio in Mann’s “Death in Venice” (1855, 1858, 1868) and Peter, Clarissa, and Muller experiencing urban environments in, respectively, Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (144-45), Cunningham’s *The Hours* (10, 199) and Miller’s *Tropic of Capricorn* (90).

certain meanings and understandings may be favored to the exclusion of other options (Føllesdal, “Lebenswelt” 30; Giorgi, *Descriptive* 96; “Phenomenological Psychology” 48). The full range of a phenomenon’s meaning field might simply not be represented when one only considers one’s own personal experiences. As a result certain themes of importance might not end up being discussed.

The study central to this dissertation presents insights found not by exploring the researcher’s own personal experiences,²⁰ but by systematically analyzing lived understandings of beauty described by respondents. This study is empirical in an experiential sense, but also in an experimental sense: it derives its findings from the methodical collection and examination of experiential descriptions of beauty. Procedures of the data analysis are described in the third chapter of this dissertation. The project is thus empirical as the investigation is systematic and verifiable and also because it is comparative in nature: an important component of the analysis is concerned with comparing materials and identifying convergences in the experiential structures found in the descriptive accounts (cf. Hein and Austin 8; Petitmengin and Bitbol 395).

Most phenomenological studies do not pivot exclusively on an inductive consideration of empirical materials, that is, experiential accounts of researcher or

²⁰ Even though I do not work with beauty experiences of my own and even though the analysis involves explicating respondents’ lived understandings of beauty (instead of exploring my own), there is of course a subjective component to the work, especially because I am the sole researcher of this project. In fact, it is a researcher’s ability to envision and describe the livedness depicted in experiential accounts that are crucial in the phenomenological analyses of materials provided by others (cf. Petitmengin and Bitbol 397). Whether my reading of the materials does justice to beauty as it may be lived is to be determined by other investigators (cf. Mohanty, *Transcendental* 38).

others. Instead phenomenologists tend to purposely imagine variations of instances of the experiential kind of interest in order to identify the phenomenon's eidetic parameters. We will see in the second half of the second chapter that this approach is untenable when a phenomenon is characterized by an essence that is morphological, as is the case with beauty.

By examining experiential materials other than literary sources or the researcher's personal experiences, this project differs not only from studies in phenomenology but also from other studies in aesthetics. Moreover, the latter tend to centralize (critical) discussions of theorized and canonical understandings of (the experience of) beauty. To date there is no empirical research of beauty available that pivots on the examination of experiential accounts of lived moments of beauty. To provide an impression of the kind of work that is being done, I will briefly describe three different types of empirical studies concerned with beauty, outlining the research tasks and addressing the way in which beauty appears to have been operationalized.

A number of empirical studies ask participants to evaluate certain pre-selected stimuli and indicate to what degree they find them to be beautiful. Participants rate on a 5- or 7-point scale the perceived beauty of, for instance, visual patterns, including two or three colored circular or square objects and pictures of animals (Berlyne 177-78), drawings of house facades (Imamoglu 7) or paintings of a particular topic (e.g., behavior depiction, landscape), style (Rococo, Post-Impressionist), or images that are more or less complex (Berlyne 178; Polzella 252). In these tasks 'beautiful' or 'very beautiful' feature as one pole of a

semantic differential scale of which the other adjective is 'ugly' or 'very ugly.' Crucial in the analysis of these data is determining which sub-scales appear to correlate with one another. Berlyne found, for instance, a high correlation between beauty and pleasingness in the ratings of visual patterns (181-82). Researchers also relate scale results to other variables so that, for instance, beauty ratings provided by women and those provided by men can be compared (Polzella 254-58). It is clear that by opposing beauty to ugliness, the way in which beauty should be understood is steered into a particular direction, namely as the opposite of that which is unattractive and unpleasant, which makes beautiful that which is attractive and pleasant. In that regard it is not surprising that beauty and pleasingness are found to correlate with one another. On the other hand, opposing beauty and ugliness to one another does not mean that it is made explicit how beauty should be understood exactly. In fact, respondents are not asked to articulate their (lived) understanding of beauty. It is simply assumed that respondents understand beauty in a similar fashion and, consequently, scores may be treated as concerning meanings that are the same. Endorsement of assumptions of this kind is found when the same semantic differential scales coalesce with the beauty-scale across a significant number of participants.

In another type of empirical research, researchers aim to map an individual's 'beauty behavior,' that is, they try to determine how likely it is for someone to find and appreciate beauty in her life. Participants fill out a self-report measure and rate each item on a 5- or 7-point rating scale, ranging from 'very unlike me' or 'unlike me' to 'like me' or 'very like me,' indicating the degree to

which a statement reflects her or his own behavior or beliefs. Diessner et al., for example, have developed a questionnaire called the Engagement with Beauty scale (EBS). The EBS consists of 14 items organized according to three kinds of beauty—natural, artistic and moral beauty. Questionnaire items include: “When perceiving beauty in nature [or beauty in a work of art or an act of moral beauty] I feel changes in my body, such as a lump in my throat, an expansion in my chest, faster heartbeat, or other bodily responses” and “When perceiving beauty in nature [or beauty in a work of art or an act of moral beauty] I feel emotional, it ‘moves me,’ such as feeling a sense of awe, or wonder or excitement or admiration or upliftment” (329).²¹ All items are exclusively concerned with “the feelings aroused in the beauty experience” (309). Because this study only entails closed items, it is predetermined what participants may share about the way in which they live with beauty. It thus remains unclear to what extent these items describe beauty as it is in fact experienced.

Peterson, Park, and Seligman were also interested in determining to what extent and in what ways beauty appeared to play a role in participants’ lives. They conducted a retrospective web-based study with 2087 adults in which “the association between strengths of character and previous episodes of serious physical illness or psychological disorder” was investigated (17). The VIA-IS (Values in Action-Inventory of Strengths) was the first questionnaire that participants were asked to complete (18). This self-report measure also works

²¹ The moral scale entails two extra items including “When perceiving an act of moral beauty I find that I desire to become a better person” (Diessner et al., “Beauty” 329).

with 5-point ratings to measure the degree to which respondents endorse 240 statements reflecting 24 valued character strengths (16; Peterson and Seligman 627). These character strengths are categorized according to “six broad virtue classes (wisdom, courage, justice, humanity, temperance, and transcendence)” (Peterson, Park, and Seligman 18). Together with ‘gratitude’ and ‘hope,’ ‘appreciation of beauty and excellence’ constitutes the virtue class of ‘transcendence,’ that is, “strengths that forge connection to the larger universe and provide meaning” (idem.). VIA-IS-items that aim to gauge to what extent participants appear to have the capacity to appreciate beauty include “It is important to me that I live in a world of beauty,” “I see beauty that other people pass by without noticing,” and “I have created something of beauty in the last year.”²² Peterson et al. found, inter alia, that those who recovered from a psychological disorder appreciate beauty more than those do not have such a history (21). Also, individuals who recovered from a psychological disorder and who reported that they appreciate beauty and they love learning are not nearly as likely to experience diminished life satisfaction as those who did not appear to have those particular character strengths (17). In the discussion of the results it becomes clear that the researchers understand beauty as a “cognitive and intellectual” strength (25). It is assumed that participants who rated the beauty-items entertained a similar understanding. Whether that assumption is in fact

²² These items were retrieved when completing the VIA-IS questionnaire. This questionnaire can be found on the website of the Authentic Happiness Testing Center of the University of Pennsylvania: <http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu>

correct is not empirically verified. Also, it is the presence of a general sense of beauty (i.e., beauty as a cognitive and intellectual strength) that is investigated for its presence in an individual's life. This holds also for the study by Diessner et al. discussed earlier.

The last type of research I would like to mention is neuro-scientific in nature. Studies of this kind investigate what cerebral regions show a significant and consistent increase in activity when an individual is presented with stimuli that she experiences as beautiful. Pioneering in this field is an imaging study by Kawabata and Zeki (2003). Ten subjects were asked to rate 300 paintings of different kinds (portraits, landscapes, still lives, abstract compositions) as 'beautiful,' 'neutral,' or 'ugly.' In a separate research session, 3 to 6 days later, subjects viewed and reviewed 192 of those paintings again—making a total of 384 presentations—while in a functional MRI scanner (i.e., functional magnetic resonance imaging scanner; 1699-1700). In addition to those cerebral areas specialized in processing and perceiving a certain kind of stimulus (e.g., painting, portrait; 1702), the following brain structures were found to be implicated in the experience of beauty, irrespective of the kind of painting that was being viewed: (1) the medial orbito-frontal cortex; (2) the motor cortex; (3) the anterior cingulate gyrus; and (4) the parietal cortex (1701-1703). Rather than acting in isolation, these regions are believed to work together, forming a circuit that allows for the experience of beauty to take place (1703). At the same time, these cerebral areas are also activated in other kinds of experiences: the orbito-frontal cortex is found to be activated in the experience of reward, pleasure, desire, judgment, and value

(1702; Ishizu and Zeki 6, 7, 9); the motor cortex is engaged when experiencing anger or fear-inducing stimuli as well as visual stimuli in general (Kawabata and Zeki 1704); the anterior cingulate gyrus is mobilized during the experience of a variety of emotional states, including romantic love, the pleasurable experience of music, and viewing of sexual content (1703), as well as the perception of facial attractiveness and moral goodness (Ishizu and Zeki 7); and the parietal cortex is associated with spatial attention (Kawabata and Zeki 1703).

Kawabata and Zeki's findings were reinforced and refined by a study conducted by Ishizu and Zeki (2011). Twenty-one subjects were placed in an fMRI scanner and exposed to 30 visual stimuli (pictures of painted portraits, landscapes and still lifes) and 30 auditory stimuli (i.e., brief excerpts of both classical and modern music). After the presentation of each stimulus, respondents indicated whether they found it to be beautiful, whether they were indifferent to it, or whether they perceived it to be ugly (2). This study also found that, in addition to the specialized sensory and perceptive cerebral areas, the medial orbito-frontal cortex is mobilized when beauty is being experienced, regardless of whether auditory or visual stimuli were experienced as beautiful (3, 4). In addition, the researchers managed to locate more precisely the area activated in the orbital-frontal cortex when experiencing beauty, a locus that they refer to as subdivision or field A1 (3, 7). Field A1 was activated to a degree that was proportional to the intensity of the declared experience of beauty (4, 8). This locus is also mobilized when an individual experiences desire and makes positive value judgments that are strongly related to reward and pleasure (7). Lastly, the researchers found that

the caudate nucleus was co-active with field A1 of the medial orbital-frontal cortex, but only in cases of visual beauty and not when experiencing musical beauty (7, 9). The change observed in this cerebral area, which is also mobilized in emotional states such as romantic love, is proportional to the reported intensity of the experience of beauty (4, 7, 8).

The brain regions found to be activated in the experience of beauty are thus at work in other types of experiences as well. At the same time there is evidence that in the concomitant workings of multiple cerebral brain areas a fairly distinctive beauty circuit is established. Yet even though experiencing beauty might be neurologically traced, knowing what cerebral areas are activated only give us a global sense of the kinds of meanings that an individual may be experiencing when she perceives beauty (e.g., meanings likely to be affiliated with experiential states such as reward, pleasure, and romantic love). Moreover, an individual is not aware of the cerebral activities that are taking place when she encounters beauty in direct experience. Instead she is consciously concerned with those meanings that signify that it is beauty that she is experiencing. To gain insight into those meanings we have no choice but to ask her to try to articulate her experience.²³ The research reported in this dissertation pivots on that very request: I have asked a large number of individuals to share a moment of beauty

²³ Neurophenomenological research combines insights obtained through the analysis of phenomenal accounts with neuroscientific findings in order to advance understanding of both the experiential and the physiological aspects of a certain state of consciousness (Lutz and Thompson 33, 42; Petitmengin and Bitbol 397-99). When it comes to the experience of beauty, this investigative avenue has not yet been explored.

with me. In doing so this project stands out from other empirical studies of beauty because they bypass inquiring after beauty as it may be pre-reflectively given and, when working with closed items, they are predisposed to certain conceptualizations of beauty. The study whose findings are presented in the fourth chapter was especially designed to identify and explicate those meanings that appear to be pivotal in understanding an unfolding experience to be one of beauty. It could be said, therefore, that by addressing lived beauty it is concerned with that which is presupposed by all beauty research, including the different studies just mentioned: the state of consciousness that involves the awareness that beauty is being experienced.

1.5. Outline of What Is to Come

Summa summarum, the beautiful (*kalos*) in its essential identity (*eidos*) is investigated (*scopeo*) in the phenomenological-empirical research that constitutes the heart of this dissertation. The second chapter concentrates on phenomenology, the field of study concerned with exploring lived experiences, lived experiences of particular kinds, and the conditions that afford that experiences are lived.

Discussed here are various notions central to the phenomenological body of thought (including lived meaning, noema and noesis, essence, intentionality, life-world, and the phenomenological and eidetic reduction) as originally proposed by Husserl, phenomenology's founding father. The last section presents an elaborate exploration of the morphological essence as beauty is characterized by that kind of eidetic structure. Here I also consider which methodological possibilities may

be appropriate for investigating phenomena that have that type of essence. The third chapter delineates how I have worked with the 471 experiential accounts describing a memorable moment of beauty. I describe, inter alia, the nature of the research materials, the demographic specifics of the respondents, the way in which various phenomenological methodological strategies are adapted to fit the research project, and the various steps of the data-analysis, including grouping of narratives that appeared to feature a similar beauty understandings and dialectical explication of lived understandings of beauty. In the fourth chapter I discuss the findings of the phenomenological analysis of the research materials, that is, I present the experiential profiles of the four different lived understandings of beauty: objective beauty, affective-noetic beauty, nondual beauty, and situative beauty. In the fifth and last chapter, I present a brief recapitulation of the findings and I suggest that we should understand beauty in a manner that accommodates lived understandings such as the ones disclosed in this project. Lastly, I touch upon some additional ways in which the materials of the study reported might also be examined and I propose a few ways in which the current project might be carried forward.

Phenomenology

2.1. Introduction

Phenomenology is not a uniform philosophical discipline (Cerbone, “Methods” 277; Crowell 9, 19; Giorgi, *Descriptive* 8, 94; “Phenomenological Psychology” 23-24; Moran, *Introduction* xiv, 3; Spiegelberg 69). Yet, irrespective of varying and competing perspectives, phenomenological thought is united in recognizing the primordially of meaning as lived. Phenomenologists hold that meaning originates in experience that is lived (e.g., Burch, “Phenomenology and Human Science” 38; “Phenomenology, Lived Experience” 147; Eckhartsberg 78). Husserl was the first to centralize the notion of lived experience in philosophical thought, proclaiming and developing phenomenology as a distinct way of exploring (the interplay between) experiencing, consciousness and world. Other phenomenologists continue to relate their own conceptualization of phenomenology and their phenomenological insights to Husserl’s (Cerbone, “Methods” 277).²⁴ Yet those who share with Husserl interest in the phenomenal and phenomenological do not necessarily agree with the way in which he

²⁴ The strand in phenomenology that is best known is the existential one. Existential phenomenologists explore all kinds of facets of human existence (e.g., embodiment, relationship with the other, moral pathos, personal freedom and responsibility, alienation, authenticity, dread, boredom, beings and the being of beings) in their lived distinctiveness (Kaufman 37). Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre are among its most important proponents. Instead of ‘existential,’ Heidegger preferred to call his work ‘hermeneutic,’ however (Cerbone, “Methods” 276).

approaches topics of interest: his work has often been judged as too intellectualist, epistemological or stratified to be able to provide meaningful insight into the livedness of experience and human engagement in and with the world. Common topics in critical accounts of Husserlian phenomenology include the notion that (1) his conception of consciousness is too solipsistic and presupposes (a residue of) subjective-objective duality; (2) his understanding of experiences is too interior and not grounded enough in a world understood as the entirety of situations in which individuals may find themselves; (3) his conception of the transcendental ego is too abstract, cognitive, and disembodied to further insight into the historical, emotive, practical and situated self; (4) his vision for phenomenological description as free from prejudice is an impossibility; and (5) the proposed methodological move of ‘bracketing’ the world is not feasible (Ashworth 28; Crowell 9-10, 20-21; Moran, “Heidegger’s” 39, 48, 56; *Introduction* 15; Sheehan par. 1). Discussing whether these points of criticism do justice to the richness and sophistication of Husserl’s thinking goes beyond the objectives of the current text (cf. Moran “Heidegger’s” 40, 43, 48, 58). That some of Husserl’s proposals have encountered resistance does highlight, however, that, even though Husserl formally initiated the phenomenological domain of research, his work does not define phenomenology exclusively and conclusively. Instead, it presents *a* perspective on how to engage with (aspects of) the world in a phenomenological fashion. It is in that spirit that the current research project works with Husserlian phenomenology, including its methodological suggestions:

as a rich source of ideas and as an insightful and inspiring guideline to phenomenological research practice.

In addition to considering the Husserlian notions of lived meaning (2.2), noema, and noesis (2.3), the current chapter touches upon inter alia intentionality, world, transcendental consciousness (2.4), (morphological) essence (2.5), and methodological principles including the phenomenological and eidetic reduction (2.6). Throughout these sections I mention ways in which the topics discussed are relevant in a phenomenological exploration of beauty. In the latter part of this chapter (2.7 – 2.14.3), I return to morphological essences to consider what method may be adopted when articulating eidetic structures of that kind. To explore this issue in some detail is important, because beauty is a phenomenon that has an essence that is morphological in nature. I conclude this chapter by briefly indicating what procedural choices have been made in light of the preceding discussions (2.15).

It is important to note that throughout his career Husserl continued to revisit, develop and re-define concepts central to his philosophy. After all, to begin anew over and over again is vital to the praxis that is philosophizing (e.g., Husserl, *Crisis* 43; par. 154). As Walsh notes: “Perhaps, also, that is why Husserl's *Ideas*, *Cartesian Meditations*, and *The Crisis* are all subtitled ‘*Introductions*’ to phenomenological philosophy. Had Husserl lived longer, one wonders how many more ‘Introductions’ there might have been” (214). Re-exploration of notions has led to conceptualizations occasionally varying from one text to the next. Instead of making those divergences a focal point in the

discussion presented here—another endeavor that goes beyond the scope of the current project—this chapter offers a reading of a selection of those concepts, not with the pretense that the discussion is exhaustive, but simply to convey the gist of a number of Husserl’s insights. Grounded in both primary works (e.g., *Ideas I* [1913],²⁵ *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* [1936], *Experience and Judgment* [1939]) and secondary readings of Husserl’s proposals (e.g., Crowell, Mohanty, Moran, Spiegelberg), the current text may be understood as an introductory overview of some recurrent topics in Husserlian phenomenological thought. Furthermore, it provides an impression of the phenomenological and methodological options that played a role when designing the research project reported in this text.

2.2. Lived Meaning, Experience, and Understanding

Husserl inaugurated phenomenology at the turn of the 20th century with the publication of the first book of his *Logical Investigations* (1900). One particular statement in the foreword of the second German edition would become Husserl’s and phenomenology’s most famous dictum: “Wir wollen auf die ‘Sachen selbst’ zurückgehen” (Kersten, *Phenomenological Method* 4-5; cf. Smith, *Routledge* 102).²⁶ To enable ourselves to become attuned to ‘the things themselves’ so that

²⁵ The original title of this text is *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* and it was first published in 1913. I also work with the second work of this trilogy, *Ideen II: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, first published in 1952. These texts tend to be referred to as *Ideas I* and *Ideas II*. I follow this tradition here.

²⁶ The passage that holds this statement reads in Findlay’s translation as follows:

we may explore their nature, we have to abandon the way in which we are ‘normally’ involved in our experiences. That ‘ordinary’ way of relating to our experiences Husserl calls “*the natural attitude*” (*Ideas I* 51; par. 27). When immersed in this stance we are concerned with the ‘what’ of our experiences, which means that we *posit* their content (Gurwitsch 38). In order to relate to experience in a phenomenological fashion, that positing way of relating is replaced with a different kind of stance: attention is shifted from the ‘what’ toward meanings in terms of which the ‘what’ is lived. That latter kind of meaning is taken for granted in the natural attitude (Moran, *Introduction* 108). When we are in that ‘natural’ stance while, for instance, listening to a piece of music, we may try to remember the name of the composer, we might wonder why we like the piece or not, or perhaps we listen in order to identify the work’s different parts. When considering the music phenomenologically, we ask instead: What are the meanings by virtue of which this particular experience is understood as a piece of music? What are the meanings that afford that I experience this piece of music as being beautiful? Questioning an experience in a phenomenological manner means that one tries to identify the meanings that play a role in an experience being lived as an instance of a particular generic kind. In principle,

For if these Investigations are to prove helpful to those interested in phenomenology, this will be because they do not offer us a mere programme (certainly not one of the high-flying sort which so encumber philosophy) but that they are attempts at genuinely executed fundamental work on the immediately envisaged and seized things themselves. Even when they proceed critically, they do not lose themselves in discussions of standpoint, but rather leave the last word to the things themselves, and to one’s work upon such things. (*Logical I* 4)

experiences of any kind (e.g., feeling regret, solving a mathematical problem, being in love, being self-conscious, having a dream, perceiving something that is unique) may become the focus of phenomenological inquiry (Cerbone, *Understanding* 17; Gurwitsch 38; Husserl, *Ideas I* 57-58; par. 31; Kersten, “Intentionality” 354; Mohanty, “Philosophical” 39; Moran, *Introduction* 157; Sowa 262).

Meanings as we live them (and as they are addressed in phenomenological inquiries) are not apprehended as a formless collection of sensations or impressions, but they are experienced as patterns that are processed as meaningful and more or less coherent. For example, we do not hear random sounds, but we hear a car driving by, a coffee machine grinding coffee beans, or some sound that we may not recognize although we do understand it as nothing important or threatening (Gendlin, “Experiential” 287; Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 55; Moran, *Introduction* 116-17; Heidegger, *Being* 145; par. 32; 158; par. 34). The integral *understanding* assures that the lived experience “is not reducible to fleeting impressions in the transience of awareness” but is rather experienced as a “*unity of meaning*” (Burch, “Phenomenology, Lived Experience” 133; cf. Spiegelberg 97-98). That sense is not generated, but is “given from the side of the object” (Moran, “Heidegger’s” 56). Differentiations and meanings that are experienced (e.g., trees or books) well up spontaneously when involved in a particular situation (e.g., walking through the park or sitting in the library) and the experiencing individual is presented with those meanings. Also, meanings are lived as being meaningful because they are lived by an experiencing individual.

“[T]he meaning of my experience is essentially something *constituted*,” therefore, “it lies in what is made of what is lived through” (Burch, “Phenomenology, Lived Experience” 134). Constitution is then the interrelated process in which meaning is both received and bestowed by the experiencer (Spiegelberg 130).

Meanings as lived are essentially “unthematic, unthought, unpredicated.” They are not extricated from experience, they take place “before any thinking” (57), and they are not conceptualized in language (Husserl, *Ideas I* 58; par. 31; cf. Van Kaam 32). The understanding that is inherent to meaning as lived is directly experienced, which means that it is lived in a tacit manner rather than that it is explicit and reflective of experience (cf. Gendlin, “Experiential” 283). Following the Latin *reflectere*, which means ‘turning around’ and ‘tracing one’s steps’ (OED), reflective understanding involves standing back from experience and engaging in practices such as singling out aspects of an experience, thinking about the nature of a particular kind of experiential category, defining notions, explaining causal connections and developing a theory. In the following passage Lingis elucidates poignantly the difference between living an experience and relating to an experience in a reflective-theoretical manner:

Explicit consciousness of my postures and movements or of my emotions, desires, beliefs, and decisions can interrupt their continuity and interfere with their course. Attention to the position of my fingers interferes with the typing; attention to my postures and moves disrupts the kinetic melody of the dance; attention to the succession and unfolding of my thought processes muddles the

problem-solving or creative operation of thought. When there is no cause for deliberation or review of them, the explicit consciousness fades, leaving only the consciousness intrinsic to postures and movements that are occupied with tasks in the environment, and intrinsic to emotions and desires absorbed in outlying things or events. An important and urgent task can absorb our attention; an intriguing puzzle or a musical composition can hold us in thrall; a vast and serene vista or a vibrant sky can effect (affect?) any center such that self-consciousness is dissolved in them. (Lingis, *First* 93; cf. Kasulis 31; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* 262-64; Smith, “Merleau-Ponty” 563)

Lived experience is full of understanding that is not reflective or theoretical, but pre-reflective, immediate and spontaneous (Husserl, *Ideas II* 9; par. 4).²⁷ Lived understanding is the awareness through which experiential content is lived as being of a certain kind (e.g., of something being beautiful, of that individual being your friend John, of this being a dangerous situation). Furthermore, it is the

²⁷ ‘Pre-reflective’ is somewhat of a peculiar notion as it implies that whatever is pre-reflectively experienced awaits the fate of being addressed in reflection (cf. Petitmengin Editorial 9). Furthermore, to say that lived meanings are ‘pre-reflective’ also suggests that their nature derives from the perspective of reflection. Yet some meanings of the experiences we live may never be retrospectively and reflectively considered. All in all, it could be said that ‘irreflective’ or ‘un-reflective’ is clearer in content. Yet ‘pre-reflective’ is more commonly employed in phenomenological literature and therefore that term is used in this dissertation.

implicit knowing that is inherent to experiencing in general.²⁸ That lived understanding is pre-reflective in nature means that it is not retrospectively generated, that is, it is not brought into being when revisiting one's experience and addressing the experience in hindsight, but it is lived in the moment as it is occurring. Another way to say that lived understanding forms part of experiencing is to call lived experience not reflective but *reflexive*: lived experience is inherently meaningful as constituted in the individual's consciousness while the experience is unfolding (Burch, "Phenomenology, Lived Experience" 135).

Living beauty means that one knows that beauty is being experienced and such knowing is a lived understanding of beauty. That lived understanding is essentially non-linguistic, as is experiencing, does not mean that a lived experience cannot entail a linguistic expression of the understanding that is being lived. For example, a moment of beauty may include a verbalization that gives expression to the 'givenness' that something is found to be beautiful: "Ah!" or "How beautiful." Words like these simply express the implicit understanding that an experience of beauty is lived, without necessarily changing its (pre-reflective) course (Moran, "Heidegger's" 56-57).

²⁸ 'Lived understanding' is not a Husserlian notion. Yet by working with the phrase, the distinction between a more holistic sense that is lived when experiencing a moment of a particular kind, on the one hand, and interdependent components of a lived experience or understanding, on the other, may be made more apparent as 'lived meanings' is used for the former and 'lived understanding' for the latter. In principle, 'lived understanding' is a variation of 'lived meaning,' but by employing two terms rather than one, it is clear when parts (i.e., lived meanings) are referred to and when a sense of the whole (i.e., lived understanding) is meant. This distinction is especially helpful when discussing the phenomenon of beauty and the ways in which we might consider investigating and describing its nature (from 2.7 onwards).

Meanings as we live them in experience can never be different from what they are already understood to be in their experiential presence (Husserl, *Ideas I* 57; par. 31; cf. Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 8). In that sense it could be said that lived experience knows no irony. This also holds for situations in which what one thought something was turns out to be actually something else. For example, one may discover that which was first understood to be an open door is actually a glass window, yet that does not take away from the fact that the lived content of the first experience consisted of a door that was perceived to be open (Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology* 44, 46; cf. Føllesdal, “Lebenswelt” 31). The experience as lived included the expectation of being able to walk through it to enter the yard. When one walks into the window, that expectation is not fulfilled, but frustrated instead (Moran, “Heidegger’s” 46, 50-51).

Although it is possible, in principle, to have experiences that do not hold reflective or predicative content, it is impossible to live an experience that knows no lived meanings: we are always involved in the practice of ‘meaning’ in a lived manner (Husserl, *Ideas II* 6-7; par. 4). Also when we are theorizing, thinking about a certain topic, or considering whether a thing is an instance of X or Y, we are simultaneously involved in the practice of living meanings. A passage from Husserl’s *Ideas II* is helpful here:

We can look at a picture ‘with delight.’ Then again, we can judge the picture, with the eyes of the art critic or art historian, as ‘beautiful.’ Now we are living in the performance of the theoretical or judgmental attitude and no longer in the appreciation or

pleasure-taking. If by ‘valuing’ or ‘appreciating’ we understand an act of feeling and precisely *one in which we live*, then it is not a theoretical act. But if we understand these terms, as so often happens by equivocation, as an evaluation in the form of a judgment, possibly even predicating about value, then we would be expressing a theoretical act and not an act of feeling. (10; par. 4)

Both experiences are lived, albeit in distinctly different ways. The first experience pivots on being immersed in the pleasure of looking at the picture. In the second experience the picture is posited and objectified which leads to the understanding that the picture is beautiful (cf. *Ideas II* 6; par. 3). In the first scenario we ‘live’ the perception of the picture and in the second we ‘live’ thinking about the picture. Reflection is thus a lived experience: when we are contemplating something (e.g., a painting, the activity of reflection, beauty), we are pre-reflectively and pre-theoretically involved in the experiential practice of, for example, considering what something is.

Thus regardless of what we are experiencing and irrespective of the activity that we are involved in, we are always engaged in living meanings, that is, every act of consciousness entails meanings that are being lived. That lived experience underlies our every experience implies that lived understanding holds epistemological primacy over all other variations of experience and knowledge, whether practical, conceptual or theoretical (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* ix). Ergo, the meanings and understandings we live enable the possibility of becoming concerned with a certain something in a reflective manner (Husserl, *Ideas II* 7-9;

par. 4). Before we try to solve a mathematical problem, for example, our consciousness is already involved with that problem in a lived manner. Through that involvement, the problem is identified as being of a mathematical nature and that identification moderates looking for our calculator, getting pen and paper, and trying to remember the formulas that may apply to this question (rather than putting on a hat and getting the lawnmower). Because we have that lived sense, we come to engage with the mathematical problem by immersing ourselves in finding its solution or thinking about the nature of the question we are presented with.²⁹

Every experience may potentially be related to in a reflective-theoretical manner (Husserl, *Ideas II* 13; par. 4). But what may be reflected upon or theoretically apprehended depends on the meanings and understandings that are being lived. Reflective meanings may also affect lived experiencing and the identities it assumes. By reading descriptions of flowers, for instance, we may be

²⁹ All things that consciousness registers at one point or another first introduce themselves as lived presence. This holds for beauty as well. Because we experience beauty in a lived way, that is, we find an individual, an object, or a particular situation to be beautiful, beauty can become a topic of reflection. However, as touched upon in the introduction, many texts that discuss beauty do not include a careful exploration of beauty's lived identity or aspects thereof. Instead they either assume that (aspects of) its nature are already known or propose a definition that does not do justice to the richness and diversity of meanings that may be play a role in lived experiences of beauty. Furthermore, it may be argued that discussions of beauty that are not concerned with (investigating) the nature of lived beauty are first and foremost exercises in logic, creative thought, and ideological criticism. Only theoretical considerations of beauty that incorporate and consider beauty's lived sense may present observations that deepen our understanding of beauty as an experiential category. As Gelven writes: "Courage, love, wisdom, justice, piety, beauty—these are familiar. Unless we know them, and indeed know them well, they cannot be questioned" (*Asking* 74).

made aware of the differences between what before might have seemed to be flowers of the same kind. We may subsequently come to perceive those differences spontaneously in our immediate experiencing. By engaging with characterizations of phenomenal identities our lived understandings may change, that is, reflective meanings may leave an experiential imprint on experiencing following reflective practice (cf. Van Manen, *Researching* 10).

That reflective practices concerned with experience as lived may attune us more acutely to lived understandings and meanings and as such make us more aware of their nature is in fact one of the main premises of phenomenological research (Husserl, *Ideas II* 8; par. 8; Petitmengin and Bitbol 380-84). Through carefully exploring experiential content, phenomenologists try to refine our consciousness of what may be lived and what was lived, including that which was not noticed at the time of experiencing. In doing so, they try to capture in words that which is essentially non-verbal. As challenging as this practice may be, Husserl holds the conviction that whatever is given in experience may in principle also be described (Giorgi, *Descriptive* 106; Husserl, *Ideas I* 57-58; par. 31; 295; par. 124; Maso, Andringa, and Heusèrr 41). In other words, the lived is always potentially articulated. At the same, confronting that which is given in livedness, be it in phenomenological description or in everyday recollection or narration, means that the lived is being transformed. A lived experience is singular and non-reproducible, non-verbal, un-inferred, and spontaneously understood in the moment, forming part of the continuous and concrete course of consciousness of an experiencing individual. Conversely, a description of a lived experience (and

its experiential category) presents a verbal externalization and reflective expression of the experiential that is retrospectively addressed and as such it is being made available to the understanding of others (Gendlin, “Experiential” 297; Giorgi, *Descriptive* 21; Petitmengin and Bitbol 377-90; Van Manen, *Researching* xiii, 6, 10, 50, 54). Thus on the one hand all that is lived may be articulated, as Husserl holds, but on the other hand, once the lived is articulated its livedness is lost. This transformation may be perceived as compromising the richness, texture, and unique character of lived experience (Eckhartsberg 77; Gendlin, *Experiencing* 28-29; “Experiential” 297; Van Manen, *Researching* 54, 128).

Aware of these challenges, a phenomenologist carefully explores lived experience and tries to honor its characteristics as precisely as possible. In fact, she tries to describe lived understandings and meanings in a way that is more complete and defined than what can be gathered from experiencing alone. This means *inter alia* that those properties that characterize a phenomenon essentially are fleshed out such that the identity of a particular phenomenon is made more apparent than it might be in an instance of its kind. It can be said, therefore, that the recreative effort of phenomenological descriptions holds a creative dimension. As Burch writes: “In this sense, every description is also an ‘inscription,’ not an exact mirror image, but an original writing of the phenomenon” (“Phenomenology and Its Practices” 206; cf. Van Manen, *Researching* 54).

2.3. Noema, Noesis, and the Intended Object

From 1907 onwards, Husserl sophisticates his discussion of lived meaning by working with the notions of *noema* and *noesis* (Drummond, “Noema” 495; Moran, *Introduction* 155-56). Every act of consciousness is characterized by a noetic-noematic structure. The noetic act is an act of consciousness of a particular kind (e.g., perception, thought, imagination) that takes place in real space-time and in that act an object or state of affairs is apprehended in terms of the lived meanings (Cerbone, *Understanding* 29-30; Drummond, *Historical* 146; Mohanty, *Transcendental* 152; Moran, *Introduction* 156-57). Noemata are “all those features of the act in virtue of which it has the object it has” (Føllesdal, “Noema” 266; cf. Cerbone, *Understanding* 29; Giorgi, *Descriptive* 119; Gurwitsch 40; Zahavi 675) and that object can be anything that may be experienced: a vision of world-peace, a car-accident, something being beautiful, etc. Føllesdal characterizes the *full* noema as follows:

The noema corresponds to the set all the various determinations we attribute to the object and the way in which we see it: the various properties of the object, the relation it bears to other things and to our own body, the orientation of the object relative to us, the clarity with which its various features are experienced by us, and on thethetic side, the determinations that concern the way in which the object is experienced, whether it is perceived, remembered, imagined, etc. (“Noema” 267)

Not all determinations form part of the noema's basic structure, however. The manner of givenness, as presented in the *thetic* components, do not belong to the noematic nucleus and neither do determinations such as 'interesting,' 'ugly,' and 'beautiful,' which may further qualify a thing experienced (Moran, *Introduction* 158-60). Yet regardless of whether, for instance, a chair is imagined or perceived, whether it is appreciated or not, the noematic nucleus of 'chair' as it is experienced may be the same (Drummond, *Historical* 146; Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 46).

The noema tends to consist of different meaning-components of which each has the meaning it has by virtue of its reciprocal relationship with other meaning components (Gurwitsch 41, 42). Not often, however, does a singular experience of a particular noema involve the direct experience of all noematic meaning-components. When a three-dimensional house is perceived, for example, we may see its front side, likely a part of the roof and perhaps a part of one of its sides. Yet the noematic sense in terms of which we are experiencing a house entails the understanding that the house that we are seeing has a rear side even though it is currently not seen. The rear side is in that situation "anticipated as possibly being given" (Gurwitsch 41).

There are features of a noema that are non-given (i.e., not directly experienced), yet still present in our experience of that noema and in that capacity they co-determine its nature implicitly. As Gurwitsch puts it: "We see a thing from a certain side; however, as Husserl remarks, were it not for the unseen sides, the side seen would not have the sense it actually has in perception" (41). When

we aim to describe the totality of a particular noema, those non-given and thus empty, yet co-present and co-determining meaning components have to be addressed as well (e.g., the non-visible rear side of a non-transparent three dimensional object in an act of perception; Crowell 15; Giorgi, *Descriptive* 166; Lewis and Staehler 24; Spiegelberg 117).

Husserl calls the “absence-within-presence” (Ihde 63), which is implicitly given in our experience of a noema, a *horizon*. Husserl differentiates between the internal or inner horizon, which concerns the latent sense of the noema itself, and the external horizon, which has to do with the relationship of the noema to other noemata (Føllesdal, “Lebenswelt” 34; Ihde 63; Kuiken and Wild 192). The internal horizon of a house includes a sense of the rear side of the house, which due to the perspectival nature of perception is not actually seen (Crowell 20). External horizontal meanings of ‘house’ may include, for example, the presence of a garden and the process of its construction. A noema is characterized by both manifest and horizontal meanings, which means that a phenomenological description of a particular noema entails both kinds of meanings (Giorgi, “Phenomenology and Experimental Psychology: II” 21). In practice, however, it appears that phenomenal characterizations of noematic sense are above all concerned with the horizontal meanings that are internal (Kuiken and Wild 193).

The noetic act is real as it is “spatiotemporally individuated” (Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 46). An actual experience of finding something to be beautiful, for instance, is a concrete occurrence, forming part of someone’s stream of consciousness and experience of the world. On the other hand, noemata are ideal,

which means that they are not tied to a particular act of consciousness and that they may be experienced and communicated over and over again (Mohanty, “Meaning” 443; Moran, *Introduction* 111). The noema of beauty may form part of experiences that are my own or someone else’s. Also, beauty may be experienced while being in the mountains and taking in the view, when listening to that one particular song, or while meditating on the notion of compassion.

Every act of consciousness knows a structure that is always both noetic and noematic. The temporal and subjective act of experiencing and its ideal, atemporal, and objective meanings are “irreducible correlatives that mutually ‘imply’ one another” (Kersten, “Intentionality” 351; cf. Drummond, “Noema” 494; Gurwitsch 40; Moran, *Introduction* 156). It may be helpful to reflect on either noeses or noemata to try to understand the structure of experience, but in any act of consciousness they are always correlationally intertwined (Kersten, “Intentionality” 352; Spiegelberg 93-94)

As mentioned earlier, experiences lived in the natural attitude are concerned with the ‘what’ of experience and not with the meanings that cause the ‘what’ to appear (see 2.2). Similarly, consciousness is not concerned with noematic sense or intentional object, but with what Husserl calls the *intended*, *transcendent* or *pure* object. This object is experienced as having a particular and distinctive intrinsic identity, integrity, and intelligibility that shows itself in our experience of its being (Moran, *Introduction* 94; Sokolowski 4; cf. Burch, “On Phenomenology and Its Practices” 208). The intended object may be “a real spatiotemporally individuated entity or an unreal identity (an essence or a number,

for example) or even non-existent” (Mohanty, “Meaning” 443; cf. Giorgi, *Descriptive* 67; Moran, *Introduction* 100). Although the intended and intentional objects are distinctly different from a phenomenological perspective, they are experienced as being one and the same in an act of consciousness taking place in the natural attitude (Crowell 13, 16). In such an act, consciousness is directed toward the intended object, but in actuality “there is no direct access to an object, save through a sense” (Mohanty, “Meaning” 444). As such “the identity of the object becomes a function of the various senses through which it may be referred to” (idem.).

Noematic meaning possibilities constitute what the intended object is experienced as being, but the specifics of the intended object guide the noematic possibilities of the experiential act as well. After all, the meanings we live are “limited by those capacities and potentialities in beings themselves that we do not simply create” (Burch, “On Phenomenology and Its Practices” 208). The *hylé* of the intended object are crucial in this regard (Smith, *Routledge* 85). *Hylé*, which is Greek for matter or ‘stuff,’ are impressions that affect our sensory organs and as such “put restrictions on what noemata we can have when we are perceiving in a given situation” (Føllesdal, “Noema” 267; cf. Spiegelberg 130-31). *Hylé* involve sensory perceptions such as visual stimuli, touch, smell, and sound, and sensations, including pain and pleasure. When witnessing a campfire, for example, we perceive the sensory elements of heat, movement, and yellow-reddish colours, rather than experiencing cold, stasis, and the color green. *Hylé* are thus parameters or “boundary conditions,” because they affect what noemata

may be experienced (and also what cannot) in a particular situation (Føllesdal, “Noema” 267). It is in the noetic act that the hylé or sensuous moments are made meaning-ful as here they become a matter of sense (Husserl, *Ideas I* 203; par. 85; Moran, “Heideggers’s” 52; Smith, *Routledge* 85-86, 90, 100).

That hylé guide the content of our experiences is not to say that an intended object is always experienced in terms of the same meanings. The perceptual focus in acts of consciousness may vary, for instance, and so may the ways in which things matter to us. When two people are looking at the same painting, both might perceive the work’s vibrant colors, the paint thickly applied on the canvas, creating lines that structure the space through circular movements. Yet one of them holds the work to be a beautiful creation, while the other finds it to be an amateurish piece of rubbish. That the object is a painting, that it is colorful, and that circular shapes are distinctively present are meanings that are shared, whereas there is variation in the axiological experience of the work (Burch, “Phenomenology and Human Science” 35-36; Giorgi, “Theory” 237; Føllesdal, “Lebenswelt” 30-31; Kersten, “Intentionality” 354).

2.4. Intentionality, World, and Transcendental consciousness

That acts of consciousness are always noetically directed toward objects that are noematically experienced is a structural characteristic of consciousness that Husserl calls *intentionality*. The intentional nature of consciousness thus affords the possibility of all experience, all understanding, all knowledge, lived or theoretical, and as such it is a *transcendental* characteristic of all acts of

consciousness (Cerbone, *Understanding* 5; “Phenomenology” 659; Moran, *Introduction* 114, 144, 155; Zahavi 686; cf. 671, 673).³⁰

Because consciousness is intentional, it is also inherently characterized by being caught up in (some aspect of) the world. World here should be phenomenologically understood as the reservoir of all phenomena and meanings that have been and may be experienced. In holding all actual and possible lived meanings, world is the “basic, constitutive dimension” of experience that leads to experiences being meaning-ful (Burch, “Phenomenology, Lived Experience” 149; cf. Carr, “Husserl’s” 205; Giorgi, *Descriptive* 188; Moran, *Introduction* 139, 178). Consciousness discloses the phenomena of the world—and thus relates to the world understandingly—and the world entails the meanings in terms of which consciousness reaches understandings (Burch, “Phenomenology and Its Practices”

³⁰ Hylé are intrinsically non-intentional and non-conceptual. “It is only the intentional content of a perceptual experience that ‘forms’ its underlying hylé *so* as to yield a conceptual representation of the perceptual object” (Beyer par. 9.; cf. Spiegelberg 98). As Husserl explains:

[W]e find those sensuous moments overlaid by a stratum which, as it were, ‘animates,’ which *bestows sense* (or essentially involves a bestowing of sense)—a stratum by which precisely the concrete intensive mental process arises from the *sensuous, which has in itself nothing pertaining to intentionality*. (*Ideas I* 204; par. 85)

When it comes to the workings of intentionality, moods (e.g., anxiety, depression, restlessness) constitute an interesting case as well. Moods do involve an intentional object, albeit an indeterminate one: “although we may not be able to put our finger on the object of our anxiety, this does not mean that anxiety is some blank, self-enclosed state” (Smith, *Routledge* 74). In fact, the intentional directedness of a mood involves the experiential overall sense of the world or reality as lived by an individual. A mood may therefore be understood as “a unity of feeling that lends a colour to all that appears” (Husserl qtd. in Smith, *Routledge* 74), “an *attunement* to one’s environment” or “the tenor of our life as a whole” (Smith, *Routledge* 74).

208-209; Moran, *Introduction* 144; Sokolowski 4). Hence, like noemata and noesis, consciousness and world are involved in a continuous interplay.

In understanding the relationship between consciousness and world as one characterized by ‘double relativity,’ Husserl distances himself from the dualism underlying the philosophy of thinkers such as Descartes. The Cartesian project has been met with methodic skepticism, because it envisions consciousness and world as fundamentally separate. If that is so, how might one explain that one knows things that are external to oneself if the only thing one can ever be completely certain of is one’s own consciousness? By contrast, consciousness and world are understood to imply each other in Husserlian phenomenology. In fact that intentional correlation is recognized as an experiential given: having experiences means being involved in the world (Moran, *Introduction* 5-6, 139). As Merleau-Ponty puts it: “We must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must say instead: the world is what we perceive” (*Phenomenology* xvi; cf. Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 50).

World, or life-world, is the englobing and integral context of all meanings and meaning structures, whether linguistic, cultural, social, natural or historical. Holding all possible and actual phenomena, world precedes as well as enables all acts of consciousness (Burch, “Phenomenology and Human Science” 46; “Phenomenology, Lived Experience” 148-50; Lewis and Staehler 15; Spiegelberg 146). Hence, the world is “not occasionally but always and necessarily ... the universal field of all actual and possible praxis” (Husserl, *Crisis* 142; par. 37). In

Ideas I Husserl relates the experience of our situated embeddedness in the world as follows:

In my waking consciousness I find myself in this manner at all times, and without ever being able to alter the fact, in relation to the world which remains one and the same, through changing with respect to the composition of its contents. It is continually ‘on hand’ for me and I myself am a member of it. Moreover, this world is there for me not only as a world of mere thing, but also with the same immediacy as *a world of objects with values, a world of goods, a practical world*. (53; par. 27)

Mohanty characterizes the world in the following fashion:

prior to all scientific thinking, prior to all theorizing—thus, prior to even philosophy as phenomenology—there is the world as lived by us in our everyday life, the world of perception and interest, valuations and actions, which has not yet been transformed by our thoughts and theories into the objective world amendable to scientific precision and theoretical idealization. (*Phenomenology 2*)

Husserl entertains two different notions of world, both of which are referred to in the passage by Mohanty that was just quoted. The first is the perceptual life-world, which pertains to immediate, perceptual experience preceding any conceptualization, and the other is the cultural life-world; one is the “foundation of everyday life” and the other “everyday life itself” (Dorfman 296). Together these worlds “form the horizon of ‘natural’ or primordial conscious life with its

pre-theoretical attitude,” meaning that our experiences are always shaped by both the perceptual and the cultural world (Carr, “Husserl’s” 211).

The perceptual world and cultural world do vary in distinctive ways, however. The perceptual life-world involves lived meanings that are pre-predicative, immediate, a-historical, and universal rather than culturally diversified. It concerns meanings such as motion, causality, embodiment and space (Carr, “Husserl’s” 209; Moran, *Introduction* 12). It is the world that grounds all knowing, “serving as a foundation and ground for any subsequent technique, invention, or idealization” (Dorfman 296).

We also always experience cultural meanings. The cultural world differs from the perceptual world in that it is “laden with linguistic tradition,” with language originating and influencing meanings that are being lived (Carr, Translator’s xl-xlvi; cf. “Husserl’s” 208). This “world of practice (of action, making and doing)” is historically distinctive and culturally diversified with “religious, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions,” which are exemplified by lived and shared meanings that form part of the identity, values, and beliefs of a particular community (Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 60). “It is in this connection that Husserl often uses the term ‘life-world’ in the plural, such that different historical periods and social groupings have different life-worlds” (Carr, “Husserl’s” 208).³¹

³¹ Beauty is a cultural rather than a perceptual meaning. That beauty is often referred to as a universal phenomenon (e.g., Cheng 97; Hagman 101-102; Parret 28-29; Scruton x; Verminck Geleide 7) suggests that despite there being aspects to beauty that may be culturally specific, there are also ways in which beauty crosses and dissolves cultural dimensions. That trans-cultural level of meaning may perhaps be envisioned as an additional stratum.

Whereas the perceptual world is free from cultural meanings, the cultural world includes the perceptual world and in fact depends on it. The perceptual and cultural worlds together form “a necessary ground (*Boden*) of conscious life,” because it presupposes all lived meanings and all activity, including that of theorization (Carr, “Husserl’s” 211). On these two worlds or *strata*, a third one is seated, which is the scientific realm (210). Scientific observations may alter cultural meanings, but they cannot affect perceptual ones, as the parameters of the latter are set by the structural characteristics of human consciousness and perceptual possibilities of the human body. Husserl points out that although the perceptual and cultural strata ground the scientific level, its paradigm (including its quantitative research methods) has nevertheless become the model to dominate all other approaches for the accumulation of knowledge (Van Manen, *Researching* 4). The scientific hegemony includes the conviction that when phenomena are investigated through the analytical perspective of the sciences, insights are as neutral and objective as they can be. Hence, scientific findings should be understood as the most reliable when it comes to what may be accepted as real or a matter of the truth (Moran, *Introduction* 142). Husserl does not challenge the usefulness of science, as it is clear that the scientific attitude generates much knowledge of great value. He does question however whether the scientific perspective is able to provide insight into, for example, the personal significance of experiences (Lewis and Staehler 42; Spiegelberg 74). For example, a brain scan may help identify which parts of my brain are active when I experience empathy or when I am engaged in analytical thinking, but such a

representation does not provide insight into what I am actually aware of during experience of such kinds and whether what I am experiencing feels more or less meaningful to me. Also, the ability of neuroradiologists to read a brain scan is based in experiencing the hyletic characters of the image and engaging in the kind of analytical thinking that understands hyletic characters as indicating particular kinds of brain activity. Meanings that are lived thus enable that neurological interpretations may be generated. Sciences might have claimed the throne of truth, but their insights are still based on meanings as they are lived. In fact, from a phenomenological point of view, the scientific perspective is only one way of perceiving the world and, in fact, presents “nothing but a distillate, as it were, from the fuller life-world” (Spiegelberg 146). This holds for all theorizations and philosophies: they all attempt to come to terms with reality from one angle or another. Yet by positing experiential content and doing so from a particular perspective (e.g., a scientific, political, logical), ‘things themselves’ are not taken into consideration. Without exploring lived meanings, only a false sense of clarity may be reached (Marshall 55). Phenomenology as envisioned by Husserl has the task of investigating those perceptual and cultural meanings that constitute tacitly the epistemological foundation of scientific and theoretical meanings (Dorfman 299-300). In other words, phenomenologists aim to articulate the ground that is assumed by all other kinds of inquiries. In that sense, the phenomenological project is characterized by ambitions that are essentially ontological in nature (Moran, *Introduction* 109; Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 3-4; “Philosophical” 54; Spiegelberg 74; cf. Luft 245).

According to Husserl, “the ultimate source of all the formations of knowledge” is not the intentional correlation between consciousness and world, however (*Crisis* 97; par. 26). That role is reserved for the *transcendental* (or *pure*) *ego* (or *subjectivity* or consciousness). The transcendental ego is that which remains when the empirical ego (i.e., the consciousness of an individual being who is living experiences in spatiotemporal reality) is purified from all contingent specifics. It is thus not some sort of extra ego, added to the empirical one, but it is the ego that all empirical egos assume and share, because it is that which cannot be eliminated without at the same time losing the possibility of experiencing (Cerbone, *Understanding* 33; Husserl, *Ideas I* 63-66; par. 33; Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 13; Sokolowski 113). That possibility is a matter of subjectivity: for an experience to occur, there needs to be a perspective that discloses the given, that is, there needs to be a subject to whom phenomena appear (Crowell 24; Moran, *Introduction* 11; Sokolowski 4, 112). This ego is an embodied subject, as the body houses and affords subjective awareness, and in that capacity the body plays a crucial role in our lived understanding of the world (Crowell 26; Burch, “Phenomenology, Lived Experience” 140-41; Drummond, *Historical* 46).

Every experience thus assumes an ego that is both empirical and transcendental (Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 13; *Transcendental* 50-51). Hence, working with the notion of the transcendental consciousness does not mean that the existence of the empirical ego, the subjectivity that is spatially-temporally situated, pragmatically engaged, and historically and culturally determined, is denied. It just means that one becomes attuned to the most primordial and

characteristic dimension of the ego. This subjectivity is “the intentional center of all conscious life” and in that capacity it affords all “objectifying experiences, all affects, all valuations, and all volitions and actions,” including the “disclos[ure of] itself as a psychological ego in the world,” that is, oneself as an empirical ego (Drummond, *Historical* 205). To put it differently, the transcendental ego is “the (reflective) source” that assures that our experiences are filled with meanings (Mohanty, *Transcendental* 153).

That transcendental consciousness enables the experience of meaning means that our knowledge cannot exist independently from a stream of consciousness that is essentially subjective in nature (Husserl, *Ideas II* 6-13; par. 4). Hence, from a phenomenological point of view, the differentiation between subjectivity and objectivity cannot be maintained in any absolute sense. That consciousness and world assume one another challenges the division so commonly adopted by non-phenomenological conceptions of the world. As Moran argues:

The whole point of phenomenology is that we cannot split off the subjective domain from the domain of the natural world as scientific naturalism has done. Subjectivity must be understood as inextricably involved in the process of constituting objectivity. Thus, for Husserl, the central mystery of all philosophy, the ‘mystery of mysteries’ is the question: *how does objectivity get constituted in and for consciousness?* There is only objectivity-for-subjectivity. (*Introduction* 15)

That consciousness is fundamentally subjective and simultaneously permanently involved in the world not only presents an alternative to naturalistic theories that are in denial of the subjectivity of objectivity (and the role that mental structures play in our experience of reality), but also to idealistic theories that do not acknowledge the objectivity of subjectivity (and mind-independent, objective realities).³²

Another implication of consciousness being caught up in the world is that its subjectivity is essentially intersubjective (Mohanty, *Transcendental* 158-59; Lewis and Staehler 45, 54). This implies that the world is a collective of meanings that are first and foremost shared and situated and only in the second instance idiosyncratic (Husserl, *Ideas I* 108-109; par. 48; Luft 250). As Burch explains: “what in any individual case is actually realized privately, idiomatically as one's own meaning presupposes at its origin, since this is presupposed in the very origin of selfhood, a *common world of possible meanings*” (“Phenomenology and Human Science” 46; cf. 60). In fact the conviction that things may be understood in an objective or impartial manner is indicative of a tacit understanding of the world not as a solipsistic creation but as shared with others (Lewis and Staehler 45). Moreover, because meanings are first and foremost communal, our communication with one another may be meaningful. Also the ‘inner,’

³² The phenomenological project neither simply embraces realism nor merely advocates idealism. It rather aims to hold a delicate middle ground between those two philosophies. The insight that features of transcendent objects guide our lived understanding of them corresponds with the notion of realism that the world exists independently from our consciousness. That we understand our experiences in terms of the intersubjective meanings of the world seems more suggestive of idealism.

‘subjective’ feelings and sensations that we experience, playing out in our individual bodies, are meaning-ful because of meanings that form part of the world. In other words, (the structures of) our human consciousness and body, our history, culture, and communities are fundamental to our feelings and sensations having the content that they have (Luft 250). For example, when someone tells me she loves someone, that experience, as it is lived by that other person, is obviously not directly known to me. On the other hand, the very fact that the individual understands her experience to be an instance of love is suggestive of a framework of meanings that enable the possibility of an experience to be understood as an instance of love (Burch, “Phenomenology and Human Science” 40). When I participate in the same context of meanings I am likely to understand love in a manner that is more or less similar. Although a particular noetic act is tied to the individual who is having the experience, the *noemata* or ideal meanings in terms of which the experience is understood as an experience of a particular kind form part of the possibilities constituting a world that is shared with (a community of) other human beings.

To recapitulate, Husserlian phenomenology reveals that at the root of every experience there is a subjective origin that is always intentionally and understandingly involved in a world whose intersubjective meaning possibilities it discloses. Hence, subjectivity, intentionality, and involvement in the world are structural characteristics of consciousness and the experiences that pass through

it.³³ In addition, we have seen that phenomena are shaped by the characteristics of intended objects, which include its hyletic parameters. Meanings we live thus follow from the interplay between the patterns (i.e., structures, possibilities and limitations) of consciousness, world, and objects.

2.5. Essence

So far we have seen that Husserl identifies the intentionality of consciousness and the intersubjective subjectivity of the pure ego as fundamental in affording the possibility of living meanings (and thus gathering knowledge of any kind), but the question of affordance has not yet been raised in relation to the kinds of experiences that may be lived. In other words, how a particular experience comes to be lived as an experience of conflict, of a number, of beauty, has not yet been addressed. For Husserl, answers to these kinds of questions are to be found in the phenomenon and notion of *eidos* or *essence*. Everything intended involves lived meanings that are unique, but also ones that are essential: “An individual object is not merely an individual object as such, a ‘This here,’ an object never repeatable; as qualified ‘*in itself*’ thus and so, it has its *own specific character*, its stock of *essential* predicables which must belong to it” (Husserl, *Ideas I* 7; par. 2). In fact, it is by virtue of essential qualities that an object has unique qualities. As Mohanty explains:

³³ Husserl investigates many more structural characteristics of consciousness. This chapter touches upon a selection of his insights only.

A material thing must, for example, have the property of being extended so that it can have any specific shape or size. Likewise, it must have color in general, so that it can be either red or blue or green. Thus, it exemplifies such essences as materiality, extension, rectangularity, color in general, and redness (possibly).

(Phenomenology 4-5)

‘Essential predicables’ are *a priori* meanings in the sense that they are *essential* for a phenomenon to be an experience of a particular kind. A priori here does not refer to the notion that meaning precedes appearance, as, for instance, a literal reading of Plato’s *eide* may suggest (*Experience* 341; par. 87). Instead a priori points to the structure of meanings that *enables* that something is understood as a thing with its own particular integrity and as an instance of X (rather than Y or Z).

A particular empirical experience is only one of many possible instances of a certain essence: “*Everything belonging to the essence of the individuum, another individuum can have too*” (*Ideas I* 8; par. 2). But whereas there may be an endless multiplicity to empirical variants as “*arbitrary particularizations of the one eidos*” (*Experience* 341; par. 87), the essential features of the *eidos* “must appear ‘again and again’” (342; cf. “Phenomenology” 660). A priori meanings or essences transcend experiences (as do intentionality and the transcendental ego) as they “*prescribe rules to all empirical particulars*” (*Experience* 340; par. 86). In affording that an experience may be understood as an instance of a particular kind, essences play a crucial role in the possibility of intelligibility. The eidetic question is therefore more primordial than the empirical one, as an eidetic inquiry

is interested in those conditions or meanings that enable what may be, without it being necessary that those possibilities have been or will be empirically actualized. In that sense the eidetic orientation may be understood as much broader than the empirical one.

In order to uncover the essential “whatness” of phenomena (Spiegelberg 743), one needs to engage in what Husserl calls *Wesensschau* or *eidetic intuition*, a kind of phenomenological seeing in which the eidetic identity of a phenomenon becomes the object of experience. This is not to say that essences only become apparent after entities have been considered phenomenologically: given that they afford that a particular object or state of affairs may be recognized as an instance of a particular kind or ‘what,’ they are integrated in our experience of the world (Husserl, *Ideas I* 9; par. 3; Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 11; Moran, *Introduction* 100-101). When we understand something as a something of a particular kind, we are already eidetically involved. Thus, when I find something to be beautiful, that categorial understanding relates the experience that I am having to the conceptual generality ‘beautiful’ or ‘beauty’ (Sowa 261-63). That does not mean, however, that I am explicitly concerned with the concept of ‘beauty’ or that I project that concept onto the situation. Instead I am simply experiencing a state of affairs and part of that state of affairs is an instance of the experiential category that is known as the conceptual category that is ‘beauty.’

Eidetic intuition thus forms part of the lived understanding that tells the experiencing individual that the objects that are lived are instances of particular experiential kinds. Essences are thus not abstract entities disconnected from

experience, but like noemata they are characteristic features of experiences as we live them (Husserl, *Ideas I* 141; par. 61; Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 11-12; Moran, *Introduction* 134). Our everyday eidetic involvement reveals only so much of the essence of a particular phenomenon, however. By engaging in eidetic intuiting on a phenomenological level and by investigating noemata that appear to be instances of a certain experiential category, our sense of the essential whatness of that category may be optimized to an eidetic depiction of its nature (Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 51). This eidetic impression is a careful description of an experiential kind, or, to put it differently, it is an attempt to provide a sophisticated articulation of the nature of a particular conceptual category (Husserl, *Ideas I* 9; par. 3; Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 11; Sokolowski 31).

Husserl identifies two types of eidetic sciences, each investigating a particular kind of essence: formal (or analytic) eidetics and material (or synthetic) eidetics (Smith, *Husserl* 142). Formal eidetics includes arithmetic and formal logic, which “studies meaning-categories and argument-forms” and notions such as “proposition, subject, predicate, syllogism” (Drummond, *Historical* 76). It also entails formal ontology which describes “[c]oncepts such as likeness, difference, unity, plurality, group, whole, part, object, property — in short, *all so-called purely logical concepts*” (Husserl, *Experience* 338; par. 85; cf. Smith, *Husserl* 145).

Formal eidetics is ‘contentless,’ which means that its topics are not bound by “particular domains of objects (e.g., physical entities, psychic creatures, cultural objects)” and instead may apply to any and all kinds of objects (Sowa

255; cf. Smith, *Husserl* 142, 145, 147). Material eidetics does concern itself with the substantive nature of certain types of objects. Its research areas include geometry (i.e., “all disciplines that deal with shapes existing mathematically in pure space-time” [Husserl, “Origin” 158]), “regional ontologies (i.e., ontologies of empirical or worldly objects falling under higher-order concepts such as ‘physical thing’ or ‘person’)” and phenomenological eidetics (Sowa 255; cf. Husserl, *Experience* 338; par. 85). The latter area examines “the subjective and intersubjective sphere of world-constitution,” but only in terms of the “higher and highest universals of experience” such as “‘thing-perception,’ ‘judgment,’ ‘recollection’” and “the higher type, ‘intentional experience’ under which they fall” (Sowa 255).

The essential structures that are explored in material and formal eidetics can be described in a manner that is exact, that is, adequate (i.e., complete) and apodictic (i.e., indubitably true and without the possibility of alternatives; Crowell 16; Smith and Smith 35).³⁴ These phenomena may be described in precise terms, because the structure of exact phenomena is “invariable” (Husserl, “Phenomenology” 660), “over against the infinity of possible particulars” that may appear in actuality (*Experience* 350; par. 89). A triangle, for instance, may be eidetically characterized in a manner that captures its nature entirely and accurately: a shape with three interior angles of which the sum is always 180° .

³⁴ For a characterization to be apodictic, it has to be purified from all facticity (i.e., that is, not involving any positing spatio-temporal sense) by means of the process of imaginative variation (Levin 2). See 2.6.

This characterization of a triangle holds for every instance, regardless of whether it is spontaneously encountered or deliberately invented in the imagination.

Not all phenomena have essences that are exact, however: there are also essences that are *morphological* in nature. Eidetic structures of these phenomena are “*essentially, rather than accidentally, inexact*” (*Ideas I* 166; par. 74). In fact, the “spheres of application” of morphological essences are “fluid” (*idem.*), which appears to suggest *inter alia* that meaning profiles of instances of a particular kind of phenomenon are not necessarily exactly all the same (cf. Giorgi, “Phenomenology” 21-22). Rather than being characterized by absolute and indispensable features that function as conditions for an experiential instance of a particular kind to come into appearance, as is the case with exact essences, morphological essences harbor a certain amount of intrinsic variance. Given that it may only describe “*more or less characteristic properties*” (Kuiken, Schopflocher, and Wild 378; my emphasis) of the phenomenon in question, rather than that it presents elements that are invariably and necessarily part of a phenomenal instance, a description of a morphological essence is bound to entail a certain “*vagueness*” (Husserl, *Ideas I* 166; par. 74) and “*variability*” (Sokolowski 151).³⁵

³⁵ Because beauty is a phenomenon that has a morphological essence, I explore in 2.7 – 2.14.3 in some detail the nature of this eidetic type and consider what methodological choices should be made when investigating phenomena characterized by this kind of eidetic structure.

2.6. Methodology

A crucial aspect of phenomenology, as envisioned by Husserl, are its methodological procedures that orient the phenomenological researcher toward phenomena so that their lived and eidetic formations may be described.³⁶ Working phenomenologically demands, first of all, a shift from the natural attitude to the philosophical or phenomenological attitude. In order to establish that reorientation, the positing nature and foundational belief in existence that characterize the natural attitude must be put out of play (Lewis and Staehler 11-13). Earlier I touched upon the given that in our everyday life we are involved with the things and events that we intend in experience, rather than that we are attuned to the intentional meanings in terms of which we understand those things and events (Husserl, *Ideas I* 51-53; par. 27; Moran, *Introduction* 157; see 2.2). Since we are not attuned to the phenomenal nature of experience, we understand objects and states of affairs as independent of our lived experience (Husserl, *Ideas I* 57-60; par. 31; cf. Cerbone, *Understanding* 17; Kersten, “Intentionality” 354; Lewis and Staehler 12; Sowa 262). That unawareness of the lived dimensions of experience, in combination with the belief in objects and states of affairs as existing independently from the meanings in terms of which we live them, constitutes the “general positing which characterizes the natural attitude”

³⁶ This section is above all concerned with how these procedures afford the articulation of lived and essential meanings of phenomena characterized by a material or substantive essence—because beauty qualifies as an instance of such a phenomenon—rather than with the description of, for instance, eidetic laws, transcendental structures, categories of formal essences, or regions of material essences.

(Husserl, *Ideas I* 57; par. 31; cf. 53; par. 27). As Husserl notes: “We live naïvely in perceiving and experiencing, in these acts of positing in which unities of physical things appear and not only appear but also are given with the characteristic of things ‘on hand,’ ‘actual’” (114; par. 50). In fact, that sense of actuality characterizes the world as a whole: “I find the ‘actuality’ ... as a factually existent actuality and also accept it as it presents itself to me as factually existing. ... ‘The’ world is always there as an actuality” (57; par. 30).

Because the natural attitude is defined by an “unshakeable world belief” (Crowell 20; cf. Sokolowski 45) and the world is “the firmest and most universal of all our habitualities” (Husserl, *Experience* 350), the first step in working phenomenologically is to assume an attitude in which that very belief according to which we “live-in-certainty-of-the-world” is neutralized (*Crisis* 142; par. 14).³⁷ To do so, is to employ a procedure called the *εποχή* or *epoché*, which translates as suspension, refraining, or bracketing (*Ideas I* 60-61; par. 32; “Phenomenology” 659-60; Lewis and Staehler 14).³⁸ Employing the epoché means that the meanings of the world are neutralized: “the positing undergoes a modification: while it in

³⁷ Husserl’s epoché is a radicalization of Descartes’ variation. Descartes questions whether anything actually exists and Husserl points out that the very act of doubting the existence of things still assumes that there is a world. Descartes thus operates within a framework based on belief in the world. By ‘bracketing’ the world, Husserl takes the epoché a step further than Descartes. Here it becomes apparent that phenomenological thought aims to expose theories and assumptions by revealing structures that are even more fundamental.

³⁸ Throughout his career Husserl worked on re-articulating the *epoché* (Lewis and Staehler 11, 14). Presented here is an understanding of this phenomenological procedure that is primarily based on Husserl’s reflections in *Ideas I* and on readings presented by secondary sources (e.g., Cerbone, Luft, Moran).

itself remains what it is, *we, so to speak, 'put it out of action,' we 'exclude it,' we 'parenthesize it' (Husserl, Ideas I 59; par. 31). As Husserl elucidates:*

If I do that, as I can with complete freedom, then I am *not negating* this 'world' as though I were a sophist; I am *not doubting its factual being* as though I were a skeptic; rather I am exercising the 'phenomenological' *εποχή*, which also *completely shuts me off from any judgment about spatiotemporal factual being.* (61; par. 32)

Neither denied nor asserted, the world and the things it assumes, are no longer present in the positing manner that is typical of the natural attitude (Luft 246).

When one's belief in the existence of "world" is neutralized, one may enter "the infinite field of absolute mental processes" (*Ideas I 155; par. 50; cf. 59; par. 31*) and one can become exclusively attuned to the lived meanings through which the world and its objects are given (Luft 250).³⁹ Instead of being immersed in the positing stance, we can become aware of the meanings in terms of which we 'posit' (Moran, *Introduction 150; Zahavi 675*).

Because world belief grounds our experiences in the natural attitude, it is also the foundation for beliefs generated within that stance. Abstaining from world belief includes not being guided by those beliefs that presuppose the absolute existence of the world and its things. Thus, implementing the epoché and

³⁹ We suspend the natural attitude in order to engage in phenomenological reflection, but that does not mean that we abandon the natural attitude all together. When we are in the process of phenomenological writing, we continue to relate to the world in an everyday manner. We perceive the laptop, the coffee cup, the books as existing, as being there to be used, worked with, moved around.

‘reducing’ an experience to its phenomenological content entails “put[ting] aside our beliefs about our beliefs, as it were” (Moran, *Introduction* 146). In practice that means that when describing an experience phenomenologically, we focus exclusively on meanings that are evidenced in experience without disregarding and adding anything that is not given in experience (Aydin 8; Husserl, *Crisis* 135; par. 35; 156; par. 44; *Ideas I* 11-12; par. 4; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology* vii; Smith and Smith 9). Hence, a continuous effort is made to bracket understandings external to the experience, may they be common sense insights, psychological, religious, cultural, and scientific assumptions, logical inferences, theoretical presuppositions, hypotheses, associations, and explanations (Cerbone, *Understanding* 3; Giorgi, *Descriptive* 9; Husserl, *Investigations* 4; Mohanty, “Philosophical” 45; Sokolowski 115). This implies that phenomenological description is also not concerned with confirming or refuting hypotheses or theories (Mohanty, “Philosophical” 39-41; Giorgi, “Description” 121-22). Without pretending to free from all assumptions (or habitualized meanings), a phenomenological endeavor is in intention exclusively concerned with that which is supported by intuitive evidence (Drummond, *Historical* 84; Mohanty, “Philosophical” 45-46; Sokolowski 116). A phenomenologist should also not feel tempted therefore to resolve experiential content which seems complex, incomplete, indeterminate, ambiguous, or inconsistent: she should only describe the lived meanings that are given in their self-revealing significance and this includes articulating meanings such as vagueness, tension and doubt when those are experienced as being present (Giorgi, “Description” 125-27, 130; *Descriptive*

8). The commitment to that which is actually given in experience is to prevent the phenomenological impression from becoming interpretive, that is, that meanings are introduced that, however plausible their nature, are not evidenced and could therefore be other in experience than is now proposed (“Description” 122).

The epoché is only one aspect of the phenomenological reduction, however (Drummond, *Historical* 69; Luft 246).⁴⁰ Once one’s belief in the existence or non-existence of world and objects is neutralized (and the natural attitude is surrendered), all phenomena, including world and consciousness, become available for phenomenological exploration, that is, they may be described according to the meanings in terms of which they are manifested. Phenomenological investigation may take place on two levels (both including the epoché): a transcendental and a psychological level, each involving its own kind of reduction. The transcendental reduction is “the operation necessary to *make ‘pure’ consciousness, and subsequently the whole phenomenological region, available to us*” (Husserl, *Ideas I* 66; par. 33). In this full variation of the reduction, all that characterizes the empirical identity of the ego—being an actual, corporeal, social, cultural, psychological being living in a spatiotemporal world—is put out of action (see 2.4). When the ego is purified from all its ties to empirical actuality and the reduction is thus effected to a transcendental extent, an object may be examined exclusively as a correlate of transcendental or pure

⁴⁰ Husserl is not always strict about the distinction between the epoché and the reduction. When he does differentiate between the two, the former tends to designate the suspension of world belief and the latter concerns being oriented toward the lived meanings of experiences (Drummond, *Historical* 68; Lewis and Staehler 15).

consciousness. Once that mind-set is adopted, it becomes possible to articulate the transcendental structures and conditions that afford and determine the nature of consciousness, givenness, and world (e.g., intentionality, the natural attitude and its positing nature, the interrelatedness of consciousness and world) in a manner that is universal and thus pertains to everyone and everything, irrespective of situational, cultural and historical specifics (Giorgi, *Descriptive* 98, 190; Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 10; Moran, *Introduction* 136). At this level of phenomenological reflection, one is thus no longer empirically rooted. Hence, we “find ourselves, so to speak, in a pure world of imagination, a *world of absolutely pure possibility*” (Husserl, *Experience* 351; par. 89). It is then that essences may be described by means of concepts that are pure, that is, concepts that are fully severed from dependence on actuality.⁴¹

Not as radical as the transcendental reduction is the psychological reduction. World belief, as well as the insights that are based on that belief, are bracketed in this reduction, yet the particularities of the mental, physical, historical and cultural being of an empirical subject whose existence is intersubjectively interwoven with that of many others are maintained. Hence, it is not possible to address transcendental structures of consciousness from within a psychological stance. For Husserl the psychological reduction is only “an intermediate stage,” because he is above all interested in transcendental questions: only a full reduction helps “found a science which is concerned with everything

⁴¹ Husserl uses eidetic meanings and a priori meanings interchangeably. Technically the only ‘real’ a priori meanings are those that are disclosed in a pure context of a full reduction.

there is, and which would be capable of universal statements” (Lewis and Staehler 19). Not all phenomenological explorations set out to describe transcendental structures, however. Some investigative efforts are better served when phenomena are described from the perspective of empirical subjects, that is, actual individuals, characterized by cultural, social and psychological identities. In such cases phenomenological reflection is, from an epistemological point of view, not universal or philosophical, but *general* in nature (Giorgi, *Descriptive* 102). For example, phenomenological philosophy may describe the phenomenon of ‘learning’ as that which “always involves doing or understanding something new” (idem. 101). Although “essentially true,” this characterization is too general to provide a deepened understanding of what it means for an actual individual to experience the phenomenon of learning. As Giorgi argues:

To understand the living of a learning experience one has to relate correct performances to errors as well as the emotional reactions to the errors. He must understand the motivation to initiate the learning and whether that motivation was self-positing or not, the consequence of failing to learn (if that happens), and the satisfactions involved in succeeding to learn and their consequences, if that takes place. (101)

Regardless of whether it is at all possible to characterize ‘learning’ in a phenomenological-philosophical manner that is actually universal, it is clear that the psychological characterization is of a lower level of generality, entailing more contingencies.

When the phenomenological attitude is assumed, we can become exclusively attentive to lived meanings, as experience has now been ‘reduced’ to its phenomenal content. But Husserlian phenomenologists do not just want to describe the given, they also want to lay bare the essential or necessary structure of the given. They want to identify those meanings that determine that a particular phenomenon shows up as a phenomenon of a certain kind. In other words, they want to know what conditions and meanings make it possible that a certain experiential kind is experienced. By means of the *eidetic reduction*, one can orient oneself to the essence of a particular phenomenon and distinguish the indispensable meanings from those that are more incidentally related to the kind of phenomenon explored. In order to reduce a phenomenon to its essence, Husserl proposes that we should employ *free imaginative* or *eidetic variation*. In this method, an arbitrary yet typical and thus representative instance of a particular phenomenon is selected to function as a “guiding ‘model’” and “a point of departure for the production of an infinitely open multiplicity of variants” (Husserl, *Experience* 340; par. 87). Every property is treated as if it were a mere possibility (rather than an actuality or existent) and each possibility/property is subsequently removed or modified to determine whether it is a contingent meaning or whether it serves as a condition that assures that the instance considered is a member of the phenomenal kind in question. When modification leads to the example no longer being an instance of the kind that is being explored, the property is likely to be essential to the experiential kind and parameters of the phenomenon are revealed (Cerbone, *Understanding* 35; Husserl,

Experience 341; par. 87; Levin 9; Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 9; *Transcendental* 25-28; Moran, *Introduction* 134-35; Spiegelberg 105). By varying the ‘make-up’ of the phenomenon in this way, a certain congruent nexus or restraint, that is, “a necessity to which any variant is subject,” should eventually come into focus (Mohanty, *Transcendental* 28).

One of the examples that Husserl discusses in the context of free imaginative variation is colour. For colour to be the type of thing that it is, it demands extension in space, because colour can only exist if there is some surface on which colour can show itself. On the other hand, the appearance of colour does not depend on a particular kind of surface: flowers have colours, but so do clothes, skies, and all other kinds of spaces. Whereas extension is an essential feature of colour, as is a visual field of some kind, no essential demands are made when it comes to characteristics of the surface on which it appears (Giorgi, *Descriptive* 88-89; Mohanty, *Phenomenology* 4-5; Sowa 260).

It is important to note that because it is the essence of a phenomenon that is of interest to phenomenologists, it is irrelevant whether experiential instances are directly apprehended or invented in the imagination: either kind of instance may be worked with when one wants to investigate the lived-eidetic structure of a certain class of entities (Husserl, *Ideas I* 11; par. 4; cf. Cerbone, *Understanding* 35; Moran, *Introduction* 134-35).

All in all, phenomenologists try to describe meanings and understandings as they are lived and they try to disclose the conditions that allow the experiences that are lived. Mohanty points out that being exclusively concerned

with that which is intended within the constraints of intuitive evidence does not mean that an analytical orientation is to be shunned: a more reflective consideration may help disclose experiential-eidetic aspects that might not have been apparent in mere apprehension (“Philosophical” 39; *Transcendental* 5). Mohanty is specifically concerned with philosophical-phenomenological description, yet reflective consideration is also of importance when describing lower-level phenomena, including material concepts such as beauty. To be able to identify horizontal meanings, explicate a noematic nucleus, and articulate an eidetic structure, lived instances have to be analytically considered. Engaging in thought does not necessarily mean that one becomes interpretive: it is possible to explore the experiential through mindful reflection while remaining exclusively attuned to that which is lived (Giorgi, “Description” 122).

By presenting descriptions of the structures that are crucial in the bestowal of meanings, phenomenologists aim to deepen our understanding of those structures. In fact they try to do so by describing them in a way that is more insightful, defined, and ‘thoughtful’ than they may appear in any one experience. Our being and praxis in the world may consequently be affected by our phenomenological findings: by becoming more aware of the nature and qualities of the understandings and meanings that constitute our world, we may become more awake to the world. Being more attuned to the world may include trying to get our discourse and thinking to correspond more closely to the world’s meanings. Rather than adopting traditional and customized understandings which do not necessarily correspond with the content of our lived experiences, we may

become more attentive to the meanings that we actually experience (and this may mean that we discover that the understandings we assumed to be true are in need of correction). Our explicit expressions (discourse, theories) may become more accurate, authentic, and mindful (Bossert 63-64; Burch, “Phenomenology and Its Practices” 192, 204; Van Manen, *Researching* 128-30).

2.7. Exploring the Phenomenon of Beauty

Now that some basic aspects of phenomenology have been outlined, it is time to look at the kind of phenomenon that beauty is and consider how its nature might be best investigated. First, a few platitudes. As a phenomenon, beauty is complex because it is a composite of various interdependent parts and because it cannot be assumed that ‘this’ or ‘that’ is meant when something is found to beautiful (cf. Cohen 115). It is a cultural meaning (rather than a perceptual one) that is distinctly dependent on the act of human experience. A landscape may have qualities that might make it likely that it is experienced as beautiful, but it is by virtue of a human being perceiving that landscape that ‘beauty’ becomes one of its qualifiers.⁴² The lived experience of beauty is a noematic-noetic act in which

⁴² Gould states that “[e]thics, the good and the beautiful are thought constructions of this one [i.e., human] kind” (23; my trans.). It is a question whether only human beings experience beauty. Animals display behavior—for instance, courtship rituals—that might be interpreted as gravitating towards the beautiful. Yet it is only when those behavioral patterns are perceived by humans that they become instances of beauty (e.g., birds showing off their feathers, their vocalizations sounding like singing, their movements resembling dancing). That experiences of beauty as lived by humans resemble in some aspects (e.g., attraction, desire) and in some variations (e.g., attraction to good-looking people and preference for grassland with occasional trees [Etcoff 40]) animal behavior,

beauty is the intended object or state of affairs. By exploring the noematic meanings of lived instances of beauty, a phenomenologist tries to identify those experiential characteristics that are crucial to an experience being lived as an instance of beauty. She wonders: What constitutes the categorial understanding of beauty? How might we describe the conceptual category that features in our experience as a lived understanding of beauty?

It is the being-beauty or eidetic identity of beauty that is of central interest to phenomenological studies of beauty, including the present doctoral work.

Exploring beauty phenomenologically means describing lived understandings and meanings that afford that a particular experience is lived as an instance of beauty and providing a comprehensive and insightful description of beauty's eidetic or generic structure. As we saw in 2.5, phenomena with an exact essence include arithmetic and geometrical notions, principles of formal logic (i.e., the study of rules concerning deductive reasoning), formal-ontological concepts (e.g., whole, part, difference), and higher-level material phenomena (e.g., person, thing-perception, intentionality). All other kinds of phenomena, including beauty, have an essence that is morphological and inexact in nature (Kuiken and Miall par.

18).⁴³ In this chapter I discuss in some detail the nature of the kind of essence that

does not mean that animals experience beauty as well. It also does not mean that the human experience of beauty may not be more complex and intricate than merely a matter of survival instincts and biological needs.

⁴³ This differentiation between phenomena with an exact essence and those with a morphological essence is not undisputed. Mohanty, for example, agrees with Husserl that mathematical and geometrical phenomena have essences that are exact, yet he does not think that the other phenomena that Husserl understands as having essences that may be described in exact terms are indeed exact. Writing

has a morphological structure. In order to highlight the distinction between exact and inexact eidetic structures I use examples involving simple geometrical figures to represent exact essences.⁴⁴ Although already touched upon in 2.5 and 2.6, it is important to give the notion of morphological eidōs some more thought, above all because it is not evident how phenomena with such an essence may be investigated. After discussing the nature of this kind of essence (2.8) and the ways in which it may be described (2.9), I will examine whether imaginative variation should be employed when exploring the eidetic identity of phenomena that have a morphological structure (2.10.1 – 2.10.3). Next, the discussion turns to the investigation of beauty and I will consider what methodological steps are appropriate when trying to articulate phenomena with a morphological structure (2.11 – 2.14.3). In the last section of this chapter (2.15), I will briefly outline the procedures that follow from the insights obtained in the preceding discussions.

efforts of the phenomenological philosopher may aim at providing exact descriptions of the latter phenomena (e.g., objectivity, intentional experience, intersubjectivity, individuality, universality, perception), yet according to Mohanty descriptions of those concepts cannot help but be a matter of *meaning clarification*, in which the one “proceed[s] from a nascent, unclarified acquaintance to an explicit, clarified, well-defined formulation” (*Transcendental* 33). Hence, descriptions of those phenomena cannot be exact.

⁴⁴ It is virtually uncontested that geometrical and arithmetical phenomena may be described in an exact manner. In fact, Levin argues that they are the only phenomena that have essences that are exact as their “essence conforms precisely to conventional definitions formulated within a rigorously axiomatized system” (14).

2.8. Morphological Essences: Vagueness, Possibilities, and Variety

When an experience is lived as an instance of a particular kind of experiential category, that is, when “the concept dwells in the particular” (Husserl, *Experience* 326; par. 81), it is the instantiation of the eidōs of that experiential category that affords that an instance of that phenomenon is constituted. Instantiation thus takes place *despite* aspects of the experience that are not crucial in establishing that identity. Each experience is in some sense unique and singular, or as Husserl writes: “every single thing has its *own essence*, which, so to speak, is solipsistic” (362; par. 93) and at the same time it is an instantiation of something general, that is, something lived as an instance of a kind (319; par. 317). The meanings that lead to an experience being experienced as an instance of a particular phenomenon are the same in each instance of a phenomenon that has an exact essence. For example, the phenomenon that is a circle is based on the given that every point on the periphery is equidistant from the center regardless of whether the circle presents as a coin or an *ensō* symbol. Although the perceived circle may not be perfect, the form, as it is lived, is nevertheless understood as being an instantiation of ‘circularity’—albeit perhaps accompanied by lived non-*eidetic* meanings such as ‘crooked’ or ‘flawed’ instead of ovate or conical. The properties of an essence that is exact may be described in precise terms, that is, adequately (i.e., without any meaning being redundant or not mentioned) and apodictically (i.e., with all meanings being indisputably true; Crowell 16; Smith and Smith 35). In fact, the *eidetic* properties together function as a “rule of construction” (Mohanty, *Transcendental* 31), because their presence guarantees that an instance

of the phenomenon in question is manifest in experience. Hence, eidetic properties of an exact essence are conditions for experiential manifestations of a phenomenon and, as such, they are necessary truths that “*prescrib[e] rules to all empirical particulars*” (Husserl, *Experience* 340; par. 86).

Morphological essences have a structure that is inexact, which means that they are characterized by a particular “*vagueness*” (Husserl, *Ideas I* 166; par. 74). Husserl does not elaborate upon how to understand ‘vagueness’ in this context. Here I will begin to discuss the nature of the morphological-eidetic structure by considering three ways in which ‘vagueness’ may be interpreted: as referring to the fact that (1) eidetic meanings of a morphological essence are not absolute but may vary over time from culture to culture, and from one situation to the next; (2) a morphological essence consists of meaning possibilities rather than conditions; and (3) an eidōs of this type is characterized by both unity and variety.

Vagueness may first of all be understood as characterizing the nature of morphological essences from a historical and cultural perspective. Descriptions of phenomena with an exact essence hold necessary truths that are universal, that is, they are a-temporal and a-cultural. This means that regardless of time, place, and circumstances the eidetic make-up of such phenomena is the same. The eidetic features characterizing a triangle today at the University of Alberta in Edmonton are the same as they were 2,400 years ago in the academia of Athens. Even though it is possible that an exact essence is better understood and formulated more precisely in one time period or culture in comparison to another, the phenomenon remains the same from an eidetic perspective, because its properties

function in all circumstances as determining conditions and necessary truths.⁴⁵ In contrast, in the case of a phenomenon with a morphological essence, there is no guarantee that additional or alternative properties will not be uncovered when the phenomenon is explored from the perspective of cultural or historical circumstances. In comparison to the static profiles of exact essence, morphological-eidetic structures should be envisioned as ‘open to variety.’

Morphological essences are not only ‘vague’ because their eidetic identities may shift over time and from culture to culture, but also because their lived understandings and eidetic-experiential profiles may vary. A morphological essence is thus characterized by diversity in both a diachronic and synchronic sense. In the case of an exact essence, each eidetic property is indispensable in all of its lived instantiations. Eidetic properties of a morphological essence are meaning possibilities that *may* (but do not necessarily) play an invariant role in manifesting a certain lived instance of the phenomenon in question. In other words, the properties enabling an experience to be lived as an instance of an experiential kind with a morphological essence are not necessarily the same in every lived instance. On the one hand we have exact essences whose meanings are *conditions*, together affording a manifestation of the phenomenon in every instance. On the other hand, the meanings of morphological essences are

⁴⁵ Levin questions, with Schutz, the possibility of an essence ever being completely free from temporality:

If essences have a history, if they can be said to preserve some relativity to the temporality of consciousness, or to its facticity, and they are fundamentally just more rationally compelling and lucid articulations of typifying consciousness, then essences must be recognized to *retain* some of the properties common to types. (6)

possibilities that could be essential in constituting a lived instance of a particular phenomenon. From the perspective of lived instances of a particular phenomenon, however, eidetic qualities are possibilities that have become conditions for the categorical identity of certain experiences. From the point of view of the morphological essence as a whole, those properties will always continue to be possibilities because they play an essential role in some experiential manifestations of the phenomenon in question, but in any particular instantiation they are not necessarily present. For example, in a particular instance of love, the experiential quality of sexual desire may be indispensable, crucial to that experience being an instance of love. Yet desire cannot be considered to be a crucial property for all instances of love; in fact, some experiences of love are distinctly characterized by its absence. Similarly, a lived experience of love may pivot on a sense of the divine, but not every instance of love does. Experiencing love often includes a feeling of tenderness, but tenderness cannot be assumed to form part of all lived moments of love. Thus, whereas in a particular instance of love each one of those meanings may be crucial for that experience to be lived as a moment of love, none of them can be expected to be present in every instantiation of love.⁴⁶ In fact, when a phenomenon with a morphological essence is treated as if it has eidetic meanings that are necessary conditions (rather than

⁴⁶ Might there be phenomena that consist of necessary properties in addition to being characterized by meaning possibilities? In other words, if exact essences only consist of necessary truths and morphological essences are characterized by contingent ones, might there not be an eidetic kind that holds both kinds of truth? If so, that eidetic structure would still be considered to be inexact, regardless of there being qualities that are invariantly present in all instances, because part of its being holds possibilities instead of necessary properties.

meaning possibilities), the characterization may be found to have a dogmatic, ideological, ethical, or axiological feel: when stating, for example, that an experience cannot be a moment of love unless it entails a sense of the divine.⁴⁷

That we are able to understand quite different lived experiences as instances of the same experiential kind testifies to an (implicit) understanding of the inclusive and distinctive sense of the nature of the phenomenon running through each of its instances, while, at the same time, there appears to be an implicit understanding of the variety forms part of that unity. The eidetic intuition that assures that an experience is lived as an instance of a particular phenomenon involves only partial experiential acknowledgment of the phenomenon's *eidos*. A more comprehensive impression of the essence is thus not lived, but is rather a theoretical construct that is generated through phenomenological reflection.⁴⁸ That lived experiences of a phenomenon with a morphological essence may vary eidetically while instantiating the same categorial identity means that these experiences have both variety and unity (Giorgi, "Description" 123). This combination is another way in which the 'vagueness' typifying the nature of morphological structures may be read.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ It could be argued that because beauty is often described as if it has a definite structure and because the 'vagueness' of its *eidos* is not explicitly addressed, beauty theories may come across as being doctrinaire.

⁴⁸ Since fluidity characterizes experiential kinds with a morphological essence inherently, it cannot be assumed that everyone's implicit understanding of an experiential category is the same. Yet members of the same cultural and linguistic community tend to work with understandings that are more or less the same or similar. These kinds of assumptions are concretely addressed in comparative empirical investigations, such as the ones conducted in comparative psychology.

⁴⁹ The challenge here lies with establishing whether the diversity observed is

To recapitulate this section: the nature of morphological essences may be understood as vague, because, contrary to exact essences, their eidetic profiles do not have a definite set of qualities that, irrespective of historical and cultural specifics, characterizes each instance as it is lived. One could say that the invariant of this kind of generality is that a morphological essence is characterized by more-or-less invariance: more-or-less invariant over time, from culture to culture, and from one instantiation to the next. A particular lived instance of a phenomenon with a morphological essence features only a selection and one possible combination of eidetic meaning possibilities. A morphological essence may therefore be envisioned as a kaleidoscopic reservoir of possible experiential-eidetic meanings whose combinations constitute lived understandings of the same experiential kind that are more or less similar.⁵⁰

indicative of the fact that different phenomena are being considered or whether it testifies to the variety that is inherent in the identity of a phenomenon characterized by a morphological essence. To identify experiential categories including establishing whether differences are “intrastructural” or “interstructural” (Giorgi, *Descriptive* 166), Kuiken and Miall have developed numerically aided phenomenology, a method that involves cluster analytical methods to help differentiate between experiential categories (par. 21, 33; see 3.14).

⁵⁰ This characterization of a phenomenon’s morphological essence resembles to some extent Wittgenstein’s understanding of family resemblances concerning the multiple meanings that a word or expression may have depending on the situation in which it features (cf. Kuiken, Schopflocher, and Wild 378). As Wittgenstein writes in his *Philosophical Investigations*: “we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes of detail” (27; par. 66) and: “I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., overlap and criss-cross in the same way” (27-28; par. 67). The ‘network’ of ‘family resemblances’ is a patchwork of various meanings that may play a role in the workings of a word or an expression. This ‘structure’ is meant to replace a general definition, which attempts to describe the meanings of a word in

2.9. Describing Morphological Essences

A phenomenological exploration is an attempt to describe an eidetic structure. Whereas in case of an exact essence the lived and phenomenologically examined essence are the same, the eidetic properties of a morphological essence, once phenomenologically explored, present a different set of properties than any combination of experiential qualities that may be found to form part of a lived instance. The latter is most likely to only hold a subset of the meanings that together constitute the eidetic profile of a morphological essence. Also, the eidetic description of an exact essence is meant to be adequate and apodictic, which is to say that it articulates all those properties that are absolutely necessary and sufficient for an instance of the experiential kind to occur. A description of a morphological essence cannot be expected to capture *all* the ways in which that phenomenon may be lived. Hence, it can also not be assumed that it describes *all* lived meanings that may be pivotal for a certain lived experience to be an instance of the experiential category of interest. That eidetic profiles of experiential instances of a phenomenon with a morphological essence are not always the same implies *inter alia* that experiences that are not taken into account in the

exact terms, because such the latter type of characterization will never be able to do justice to the variety of meanings a word or an expression may have in the different situations of its use. A morphological essence knows a similar structure, but rather than describing the workings of a word, it is concerned with those lived meanings (and lived understandings) that may be directive in constituting a particular experience as an instance of a certain kind. Although Husserl and the later Wittgenstein both stress the interplay between perception and language, the insights that Wittgenstein presents tend to revolve more around the linguistic, whereas Husserl's writing appears to gravitate more towards addressing the perceptual dimension of experience.

phenomenological exploration (and that includes those that have not been experienced yet) may entail meaning possibilities that are also of characterizing importance, yet are other than the ones already gestured towards in a descriptive impression of the phenomenon. When considered from a comprehensive theoretical and hypothetical perspective, a description of its eidetic structure cannot help but be inexact. It is inevitably provisional in nature, presenting contingent instead of necessary truths; that is to say, the descriptive impression may be true for some, possibly even for most instances, but not necessarily for all. However, the intention underlying the description of a morphological essence cannot resemble the one motivating the articulation of an exact essence, namely, articulating a phenomenon as precisely as possible so that all possible instantiations are accounted for. Creating a descriptive impression that is comprehensive may be a researcher's ambition—perhaps in a long-term research project committed to the articulation of a particular phenomenon—even though reaching this goal is inherently impossible (Mohanty, *Transcendental* 29). As Husserl writes: “That ideation which yields ideal essences, as *ideal ‘limits’* which is essentially impossible to find in any sensuous intuition but which morphological essences ‘approach’ more or less closely without ever reaching them” (*Ideas* I 167; par. 74).⁵¹

A description of a morphological essence aims to capture both the generic

⁵¹ I am reminded here of the following lines in Heidegger's “The Thinker as Poet”: “To think is to confine yourself to a / single thought that one day stands / still like a star in the world's sky” (*Poetry* 4). Van Manen quotes these lines when addressing the commitment to the “abiding concern” that is to characterize all phenomenological inquiry (*Researching* 31).

identity of lived experiences that are similar to the extent that they are experienced as instances of the same phenomenon as well as the variety that is displayed by those instances. Such a descriptive effort can have different focal points: one may try to explicate eidetic meaning possibilities, lived understandings (i.e., experiential variations of eidetic structures), meaning dimensions (i.e., thematic groupings, hubs of similar meanings, or subsets of meanings), or the overall sense tacitly assumed by all lived instances. In the latter case, some specificity in the articulation of meaning possibilities is likely to be surrendered. Although the variety implied by the experiential category is acknowledged, (some of) the varying specifics are forgone. Also, rather than trying to explicate all eidetic profiles and meanings found in the materials, a phenomenologist may decide to concentrate on a selection of the findings and explore those in some detail. It may be argued that a most comprehensive and informed characterization of a morphological essence consists of a combination of these descriptive possibilities. It articulates lived understandings and meaning possibilities and it presents a conceptualization of the unity implied by the eidetic-experiential variety.

2.10.1. Investigating Morphological Essences

What approach should one take when trying to describe the morphological essence of an experiential category? First one should determine whether free imaginative variation, the method proposed by Husserl to investigate eidetic structures, is appropriate when exploring essences that are inexact. After a brief

discussion of the workings of imaginative variation (2.10.2), I investigate in what way that methodological instrument may work when investigating a phenomenon whose eidetic identity is morphological in nature (2.10.3).

2.10.2. Imaginative Variation

The methodological paradigm for eidetic exploration as proposed by Husserl pivots on employing the method of imaginative variation. Straightforward when it comes to phenomena that have an exact essence, the workings of this “thought experiment” (Mohanty, *Transcendental* 26) are slightly more complicated when a phenomenon has a morphological essence. Its original application consists of generating in the imagination variations of an arbitrary instance of the phenomenon under investigation in order to identify properties that are essential to the phenomenon’s nature (Husserl, *Experience* 340-41; par. 87; see 2.6). In other words, by “possibilizing” the properties of a phenomenon, as Mohanty calls it after Zaner, the congruence or constraint that characterizes a particular experiential category is revealed (Mohanty, *Transcendental* 27). This constraint is the phenomenon’s eidetic structure, the “*invariant*,” that is “retained as the *necessary general form*, without which an object such as this thing, as an example of its kind, would not be thinkable at all” (Husserl, *Experience* 341; par. 87). For the *eidōs* to be *pure*, a full transcendental reduction has to be employed, which means that “all connection to experience and all experiential validity” becomes bracketed (351; par. 89). Then it also no longer matters whether the example worked with was actualized in experience or is “quasi-realized” in the imagination

(329; par. 82). Only then the *a priori* identity of a phenomenon may be grasped; that is to say, meanings may be identified that enable that an experience—regardless of whether it is lived in actual experience or generated as a possibility by the imagination—to show up as an instance of a particular experiential category (340; par. 86; 350-51; par. 89).

It appears that Husserl suggests that imaginative variation may be used in the eidetic exploration of all eidetic structures, regardless of whether they are exact or inexact. He mostly works with example-phenomena that have an exact essence in his writings, yet he also refers to instances whose essence is morphological in nature. In *Experience and Judgment*, for example, Husserl mentions sound (341; par. 87), house (344-45), and tree (345) when discussing the workings of imaginative variation. Moreover, Husserl states that even though an *a priori* exploration is particularly insightful when it comes to the mathematical domain, “every *objective sphere*,” that is, “every concrete actuality, and every individual trait actually experienced in it or capable of being experienced” may be investigated by means of “*a priori* thinking” (353; par. 90). On the other hand, he also writes that “it should be emphasized that the method of mathematical thinking of essences is, as a *method of idealization*, in important points to be distinguished from the intuition of essences in other subjects, whose fluid types cannot be apprehended with exactitude; this analogy thus holds only in the most general respects” (353; par. 90). “[F]luid types,” which seems to refer to

phenomena with a morphological essence,⁵² may not be described as precisely (i.e., as adequately and apodictically) as mathematical phenomena.⁵³ That the “analogy,” that is, the likeness of the workings of imaginative variation for mathematical and non-mathematical phenomena, “holds only in the most general respects” might point to the possibility that only when non-mathematical phenomena are considered from a perspective of eidetic exactness, that is, in terms of a priori concepts or higher level regions assumed by their nature, imaginative variation may be effective and lead to apodictic and adequate findings. Another possibility is that imaginative variation is successful only *to some extent* when “fluid types” are concerned. Husserl never proposed a method to explore phenomena that have a morphological essence, however (Kuiken, Schopflocher, and Wild 378). This has led some to believe that investigations of experiential categories with a morphological structure should also pivot on the implementation of imaginative variation. The next section considers whether that

⁵² In *Ideas I* Husserl characterizes “the spheres of application” of morphological essence as being “fluid” (166; par. 66).

⁵³ As touched upon before (see footnote 44), Levin points out that only mathematical and geometrical concepts may be apodictically and adequately described (14; cf. Mohanty, *Transcendental* 30-32). Employing imaginative variation when investigating other kinds of phenomena cannot be expected to result in a characterization that is indubitable and comprehensive, capturing the eidetic identity of a phenomenon in its entirety. According to Levin, this has to do with the fact that essences are objectivities that are transcendent, which means that they are “*other than consciousness, relative to it, and not wholly present*” (4). It is for that reason that eidetic findings cannot help but be tentative, because there is no guarantee that an eidetic characterization does not contain some unidentified assumptions or that the investigation of other variants does not lead to additional or alternative findings (9-11). Hence, the “essential nexus cannot offer itself as more than a *presumptive* unity of all and only those variants truly bearing the ‘essentials’ of the essence in question” (11).

assumption is justified.

2.10.3. Imaginative Variation and Morphological Essences

As we have seen, imaginative variation is the systematic process of determining whether a property is necessary for an experience to be an instance of a particular kind. For a shape to be experienced as a triangle, for example, it has to have three angles that together add to 180 degrees. If any of those characteristics are modified, the shape changes to such an extent that it is no longer a triangle. In the practice of imaginative variation, properties of an example-experience are modified—e.g., in case of a triangle a side is added or removed—and as such the parameters of the eidetic identity of the phenomenon may be revealed. In principle, imaginative variation is a type of whole-part analysis: the categorial assessment of the experiential instance is based on the practice of varying meanings (in order to identify the ones that are eidetic) while continuously evaluating whether the newly generated meaning profile reflects the researcher's pre-understanding of the eidetic sense of the phenomenon as a whole. By means of imaginative variation, the investigator becomes more attuned to the nature of the phenomenon as it is already understood and it becomes possible to optimize the description of the phenomenon's eidetic identity and the meanings it assumes.

When a phenomenon with an exact essence is investigated by means of imaginative variation, any particularization of that particular kind will suffice (Husserl, *Experience* 341-42; par. 87). After all, each member is in principle characterized by the same essence, phenomenally (i.e., as in a lived understanding

of the categorial identity) as well as phenomenologically (i.e., the lived as it is phenomenologically explored and described). This means that the sense of a phenomenon that one already has, that pre-understanding, that is, the eidetic intuition as spontaneously experienced, already holds the eidetic recipe for each instance of that particular experiential category.

In literature about phenomenological methods, it is often assumed that imaginative variation works the same when employed in the exploration of a phenomenon with a morphological essence as when used to investigate an eidetic structure that is exact (e.g., Giorgi, *Descriptive* 199-200; Hein and Austin 16; Van Manen, *Researching* 107). This supposition is unfounded, however (Kuiken and Miall par. 20). The method cannot be expected to have the same results because in case of morphological essences the phenomenal-eidetic profile (as it is lived) and the phenomenological-eidetic profile (as it is investigated) are not the same. Yet that those profiles are the same is the basic premise underlying the process of imaginative variation. Because an arbitrary experiential instance contains all meanings that are essential for an instance of the phenomenon of interest to occur, it can function as a proxy for the phenomenon's *eidōs* as a whole. When they are indeed the same and an essential meaning is modified, the eidetic structure is violated and thus becomes apparent. When a phenomenon has a morphological structure, an experiential instantiation holds only a selection of the eidetic meaning possibilities and that selection is not necessarily the same across instances. That a morphological essence does not abide in its entirety in the eidetic profile of an experiential instance means that the full range of that eidetic

identity also cannot be revealed through the practice of meaning modification.

2.11. Phenomenological Exploration of Beauty

Varying the properties of an arbitrary instance of a phenomenon with a morphological structure cannot be expected to provide a comprehensive impression of the eidetic-experiential identity of that particular generic identity. If imaginative variation does not work, how are we to proceed if we want to describe an experiential category whose essence is morphological in nature? Or, put more specifically with regard to the topic of this dissertation: What methodological steps should be taken when trying to articulate the nature of beauty as it is lived? That I am interested in what individuals experience beauty to be in their lived experiences of beauty is crucial in this regard. This means, first of all, that this project is unlike phenomenological studies in which one works through one's own (i.e., the researchers) implicit sense to arrive at an explicit and more refined understanding of a phenomenon (cf. Mohanty, *Transcendental* 33). Instead, the current project is empirical: lived understandings of beauty experienced by individuals other than the researcher were investigated. To identify understandings of beauty as they appear to have been lived in concrete moments of beauty, I asked each experiential account of a corpus of 471 protocols: "What is beauty understood to be, in a lived sense, in this particular instance?" or "Why is this experience lived as an instance of beauty?" Accounts of real experiences were thus examined with the intent to describe the actual generality or empirical concept that is beauty (Husserl, *Experience* 330; par. 82).

In what follows I discuss three methodological steps that are suitable for a study whose objective is to describe the nature of lived beauty as it appears from empirical instances. These characteristics are: investigating multiple instantiations (2.12), performing whole-part analyses (2.13), and considering instances in a dialectical manner (2.14.1 – 2.14.3).

2.12. Multiple and Various Instances

We have seen that the eidetic profile of a particular instance of a phenomenon with a morphological essence constitutes only one possible combination of meanings constituting a lived experience of that categorial kind. Because I am interested in determining in what way(s) beauty is instantiated in individuals' lived moments of beauty, it is important that a substantial variety of such instances is collected and explored. In general, it is crucial that *multiple instances* be examined if one wants to create a description that aims to provide an overall impression of an experiential category.⁵⁴ Looking at one particular shade of blue will not provide a comprehensive impression of the variations that constitute the

⁵⁴ Imagine that an experiential instance holds all eidetic meaning possibilities of a certain categorial kind whose essence is morphological in nature. This would imply that investigating that one instance would suffice to disclose the eidos in its entirety. It is only on the basis of knowledge of other instances, however, that the conclusion may be reached that this instance holds all eidetic meanings indeed (from a synchronic perspective, that is). Also, that all meaning possibilities would be lived means that the lived understanding of such an experience would be different from all other experiential variations and in that sense it would be 'just' another experiential variation of the categorial kind in question. It may be argued that the philosopher's vision of the Idea of Beauty that Plato gestures towards in the *Symposium* (210e-212a; 54-56) and in the *Phaedrus* (250e-252c; 30-33) present a possible impression of an experience of beauty of such an inclusive eidetic-experiential kind.

phenomenon that is the colour blue. But through familiarizing ourselves with different shades of blue, a more informed understanding of its nature can be generated. This understanding may include, for instance, the ability to identify and name particular shades (e.g., celeste, cyan, sapphire) when individually experienced (i.e., without the presence of other variations).⁵⁵ Once such familiarity is established, one's sense of what blue is (and can be) may be richer, more nuanced, and more diversified than when those various shades were never considered in mindful acts of perception.⁵⁶

2.13. Whole-Part Analysis

By exploring multiple and various instances of a phenomenon with a morphological essence⁵⁷ chances are increased that the experiential and eidetic variety accommodated by that experiential category may be articulated at least to

⁵⁵ When one aims to describe a phenomenon in a way that includes providing an impression of the experiential-eidetic variety of its nature, an empirical-phenomenological approach is preferable to philosophical-phenomenological contemplation.

⁵⁶ Another way in which one may try to become more attuned to the identity of a certain experiential category is by relating instances of that kind to instances of another experiential category. Such a comparison may help raise awareness of the nature of either kind. In case of the example used in the text, this means that one's understanding of what blue is (or may be) may be facilitated by comparing instances of blue to instances of green. This comparative option is not considered in this thesis. The cluster analytical techniques forming part of Kuiken and Miall's numerically aided phenomenology do include comparison of this kind (par. 35).

⁵⁷ In addition to exploring unambiguous instances of a particular kind, one's sense of a phenomenon is also developed by considering boundary cases, that is, experiential manifestations of the phenomenon that begin to resemble instances of another experiential category.

some extent.⁵⁸ Yet how are we to determine which meanings are crucial for instantiating an instance of a morphological kind? We have seen that varying the properties of an arbitrary experiential instance cannot be expected to lead to a comprehensive impression of a morphological essence. But such procedures can be helpful when employed in a manner that entertains a more ‘local’ set of expectations. By imaginatively removing a meaning from a particular experiential instance of a phenomenon with a morphological *eidos*, it may appear that the reduced variant of that lived understanding no longer manifests the categorial kind of interest in a manner that characterizes the instance in question. What one becomes attuned to is not the eidetic identity of the phenomenon as a whole, but rather the eidetic identity of that particular instance. When in a particular experience of love, for example, the experiential quality ‘tenderness’ is removed, the identity of that particular instantiation of the generality ‘love’ might be lost. Even though love may not be a matter of tenderness in all instances, in the lived understanding of love instantiated in the moment considered, the presence of tenderness is pivotal. By carefully working in this way, variant profiles of interdependent meanings together constituting an instance of a particular kind may be made more apparent. In recognizing the potential as well as the limitations of the workings of imaginative variation when employed in the investigation of a phenomenon with a morphological essence, this proposal departs from methodological suggestions presented by phenomenologists who envision

⁵⁸ By becoming familiar with different instantiations (and their eidetic profiles) of a certain experiential kind, one tends to become more perceptive to other (possible) members of the same category (Husserl, *Experience* 332-33; par. 83).

imaginative variation to be able to reveal the phenomenon in an inclusive sense, that is, in a manner that is similar to the way the procedures can be expected to operate in case a phenomenon has an exact eidos (e.g., Giorgi, *Descriptive* 199; Van Manen, *Researching* 107; Hein and Austin 16). When referring to imaginative variation in this ‘local’ manner, I use the term ‘whole-part analysis’; when referring to the method in the traditional sense, I use the term ‘imaginative variation.’⁵⁹

To be able to conduct whole-part analyses, it is crucial to entertain the sense of the whole of a particular lived experience. By carefully exploring that holistic sense of the experience that is understood to be an instance of the experiential kind of interest, one is effectively not concerned with the generality in an inclusive or comprehensive manner—even though one uses the general term when calling an experience an instance of truth, of beauty, of friendship—but with the lived sense of that generality as it is constituted in an experience, that is, its lived understanding. An experiential category “gives itself” or “dwells in” an instance, and the instance “participates in” or “is *conceived* through” a certain generality (Husserl, *Experience* 326-27; par 81). But in case of a phenomenon with a morphological essence, not all meanings that may characterize a generality characterize a particular instance. In other words, because the eidetic identity and

⁵⁹ This process resembles the course of the hermeneutic circle as described by Heidegger and Gadamer (e.g., Gadamer, *Truth* 266; Heidegger, *Being* 147-49; par. 32; cf. Husserl, *Logical II*, 24-45; par. 14-25). They view the hermeneutic circle as the fundamental structure of understanding in which she who aims to understand (and tries to evolve her understanding) moves from whole to part, back to whole, back to part, etc.

eidetic profile of such a phenomenon are not identical, a lived experience tends to involve *some* of the meanings of a generality rather all of them. That a particular combination of meanings characterizes the way in which a certain generality is instantiated in a particular instance implies that the same combination of meanings may also constitute other lived moments of that generality. For example, a grey wall is an instantiation of greyness. At the same time the wall is a particular kind of grey and in being just that it says something about the possibilities of greyness (i.e., this being one way in which grey may be manifested and it is possible that other surfaces are characterized by this kind of grey as well). Thus, an instance being an instance of a certain kind tells us about meaning possibilities of that generality and about the eidetic meanings of this particular instance and, by extension, other instantiations. In case of beauty, we are thus to inquire after the sense of beauty that appears to have been lived in a particular instance. This means identifying the specific way in which beauty appears to be given in this particular experience and that in turn means that one is engaging with an experiential variation of beauty that may characterize other individual experiences as well.

In order to understand the generality as it occurs in a certain experience one has to look at the meanings that constitute this particular categorial instantiation. To grasp the lived understanding of a particular experiential category, one has to go back and forth between the whole that speaks from that understanding and the meanings that appear to be its interdependent and characterizing parts. Working in this way deepens insight in both whole and parts.

Pivoting on maintaining that orientation towards the lived understanding as a whole, the whole-part analysis mirrors the way in which we live our experiences: “all objects of experience are from the first experienced as known according to their type” (Husserl, *Experience* 321; par. 81). When we perceive a triangle, we do not see one side, then the next side, and then yet another side; to then notice that they add to 180 degrees; which then leads to the realization that those features together create a triangle. Instead we perceive a whole of three connected sides that together instantiate a particular kind, namely the triangle kind. Not individual parts, but a sense of the whole is the intentional object of our experience. Our understanding of that instance, of that whole, may evolve, however, when its parts are carefully considered. We have to be mindful, however, of the fact that thematization of parts (rather than concentrating on the whole central to the primary experience) does change (the retrieval or envisioning of) a lived instance. It thus makes a difference whether one focuses on beauty as a whole or on one of its parts (e.g., happiness or symmetry). As Gurwitsch explains: “singling out, or extracting a part or a constituent from a theme which has the organizational form of a Gestalt-contexture such as a melody or a drawing ... entails the emergence not only of a new theme but also, and chiefly, of a new phenomenal project” (37). When an instance of love includes the experience of tenderness and tenderness is extricated from that experiential context, it is no longer tenderness as it features in love that is being explored, but tenderness per se. It is important therefore that when one dissects the experience and addresses the parts with the intention to apprehend the whole more clearly, one continues to

stay mindful of the lived understanding in an inclusive and interdependent sense. This implies that one continues to acknowledge the interdependent identity of meanings and that one continues to see them as elements of a particular experiential-eidetic profile. After all, perceiving a triangle makes for a different experience than looking at three sides of a square.⁶⁰

When working with experiential accounts written by others (instead of by the researcher herself), it is crucial that the respondent's understanding as it was lived and then expressed in words is carefully reconstructed (by engaging with the description). How informative a narrative description is matters greatly in this regard. In addition, for a researcher to be able to engage with a descriptive account of an instance of a certain phenomenon, it is imperative that she recognizes the experience described as an instance of that generic kind (cf. Petitmengin and Bitbol 397). If, however, the researcher does not apprehend an experience as an instance of that generic kind, it is difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between meanings that are essential and those that are contingent. When the researcher is at a loss with regard to understanding the experience described as an instance of the phenomenon in question, it becomes apparent that her implicit understanding of that experiential category does not include that particular instantiation, that is, the parameters of her sense of a phenomenon are revealed. Instances that are not immediately comprehended should not be disqualified from further analysis, however. It may help in such a situation to

⁶⁰ Discussions of inductive practices tend to focus on the presence (or absence) of properties rather than impressions of the whole (Don Kuiken, personal communication, May 2013).

consult other researchers. Also, experiential accounts that were initially put aside might later be placed side by side. Then, when similar descriptions are explored, it is more likely that one becomes more attuned to the kind of understanding that appears at work in those instances.

Relating instances to one another is not only important when instances are found to be problematic: it is fruitful to perceive similar instances in light of each other, after they have been examined one by one. Creating groups of similar experiences is a function of the researcher's analytical accomplishments in conjunction with the collection of experiential narratives that is being investigated. Although groupings should be sensible, they cannot be expected to be absolute: it is possible that the same collection of accounts allows for different groupings as well. Moreover, when additional narratives are considered, new and different groupings may be appropriate.

When multiple similar instances are placed side by side, it is more likely that a clear impression of the experiential-eidetic variation, instantiated in each of those instances, will develop. For that reason it is preferable to work with a corpus of considerable size. In fact, when lived instances are diverse and numerous, it is possible to say with some confidence whether a particular instantiation appears to be idiosyncratic or unusual or seems more recurrent and common for a certain experiential kind.

So far I have argued that working with multiple experiential instances and analyzing each instance by means of a whole-part approach are important steps to take in an inductive investigation of a particular phenomenon with a

morphological essence. To deepen insight into the nature of a lived understanding, one must not work just intra-narratively, but also inter-narratively. Moreover, exploring experiential narratives by relating them to one another can be particularly insightful when performed in a dialectical fashion. That methodological possibility is discussed next. First I provide a brief impression of the dialectic as envisioned by Gadamer (2.14.1). Then I present some additional reflection on the dialectical way of thinking and working (2.14.2). These introductory sections are followed by a discussion of the way in which the phenomenological, the descriptive, the morphological, and the dialectical are interrelated in the current project. I present the argument that the convergence of these four factors in the current study is both appropriate and fruitful (2.14.3).

2.14.1. Gadamerian Dialectics

Gadamer holds the dialectical to be a crucial component in the hermeneutic process of understanding. Taking place in a space that involves both familiarity and strangeness, dialectical practice pivots on the continuous tension between that which is known already and the desire to transcend that knowledge. In the dialectical effort, different perspectives on the topic of interest are held in awareness. In doing so, a fused horizon is given the opportunity to emerge. It is important to note that the vision that is brought into existence through the exchange between dialectical partners is not one that aims to resolve differences or contradictions that may exist between dialectical partners. In that sense Gadamer's dialectics varies distinctly from Hegel's variation, as the former

“refuse[s] the overcoming suggestive of Hegelian dialectic” (Barthold xiv; cf. Risser 13-14). Instead the Gadamerian dialectical effort is an attempt to engage with the sameness or similarity of dialectical texts and concurrently to acknowledge differences that characterize the individual meaning profiles. Meaning categories introduced in the dialectical process that are more general than the meanings present in the dialectical texts are not meant to replace those ‘original’ meanings. They are, rather, meant to help further insight into the dialectical texts and their meanings, which in turn might lead to the identification of other or additional (general) meaning categories.

Through this fused perspective the topic comes to speak in “a common language,” a language that is brought into existence through the various perspectives. It is not the language of one perspective or another, but it is the language of all involved (Gadamer, *Truth* 371). Rather than being a static given, this language constitutes a dynamic and intimate space in which exploration is moved along by way of question and answer. Questioning means bringing something into the open, into that which is yet to be determined: “Questions always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing” (368). Posing a question also introduces limits, however: “It implies the explicit establishing of presuppositions, in terms of which can be seen what still remains open” (257).

Engaging with a fused horizon leads to meanings being re-created, but also creates the opportunity for fresh insights to emerge (Gadamer, *Truth* 368). Hence, the dialectical practice is potentially both re-creative and creative and in that sense it is similar to phenomenological description as characterized before

(see 2.2; cf. Burch, “Phenomenology and Its Practices” 196). By bringing perspectives together in a process of re-creative creation and creative re-creation, understandings may be reached that are more comprehensive and insightful than if only one perspective is considered (Gadamer, “Dialectic” 122; “Phenomenology, Hermeneutics” 109; Risser 15). In fact, by engaging in a dialectical exchange, one may attune oneself to meaning that transcends that which any one individual may know: “What emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors’ subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know” (Gadamer, *Truth* 361). “The labor of dialectic, in which the truth of what is finally flashes upon us, is by nature unending and infinite,” because the perspectivity of human understanding makes it inevitably finite (“Dialectic” 121; cf. Lawn and Keane 33, 35). Even though a holistic understanding of meaning that is essentially transcendent is forever unattainable, dialectic efforts, inspired by the intention to become more knowledgeable, may help broaden, deepen, and sharpen insight into the nature of such meaning and the identity of particular meaning categories (Barthold 122, 127). As a reflective and progressive practice, “[t]he art of the dialectic” equals “the art of questioning and of seeking truth” and in that capacity “[t]he art of questioning is the art of questioning even further—i.e., the art of thinking” (Gadamer, *Truth* 360).⁶¹

⁶¹ Heidegger writes that the Greeks understood ‘beauty’ as “restraint,” as it involves “*polemos*, struggle ... in the sense of the confrontation, the-setting-apart-from-each-other” and “[*o*]n and *kalon* > say the same thing for the Greeks [coming to presence is pure seeming]” (*Introduction* 140). “In contrast, for us

2.14.2. The Dialectical Perspective

Dialectics is founded on the insight that, no matter how perceptive, comprehensive, and convincing a perspective might seem, it is always worthwhile to seriously and attentively consider other perspectives. Rather than defending one's own position and opinions, undermining what the other brings to the table, or "trying to discover the weakness of what is said," a dialectical interlocutor should first and foremost listen to what is being said, because then insight is most likely to evolve (Gadamer, *Truth* 361; cf. Lawn and Keane 33). Meanings that are not shared by different perspectives should not be glanced over or reasoned away, but should be held in contemplative awareness. In fact, for a dialectical exchange to take place, it is imperative that perspectives know different meanings. Those differences are crucial in setting out the space in which one may move back and forth between horizons. When contemplating the fused perspective that is thus brought into existence, one's insight into the topic of interest is given the

today, the beautiful is the relaxing, what is restful and thus intended for enjoyment" (idem.). A dialectical consideration of these two characterizations is not oriented towards emphasizing the differences between these perspectives on beauty. Instead it tries to see how relating one to another may lead to a deepened manner of engaging with the phenomenon and notion of beauty. In other words, through opening (onto) a dialectical and united perspective it may be considered whether there is a way to understand beauty that is more inclusive and insightful than the understandings individually. It is then that we may come to consider: Is there pleasure in the struggle? Does happiness in some way relate to being in touch with being? Might calm be found when one is attuned to that which stands out in a chaos of possible meanings? Or if we were to articulate more affirmative variations of these dialectically obtained possibilities: pleasure is struggle; happiness means being in touch with being; there is calm in being attuned to that which stands out from the chaos. In engaging with these fused horizons, as allowed by bringing together different perspectives on beauty, fresh perspectives on the phenomenon of beauty might be discovered.

opportunity to broaden and become more refined.

The dialectical effort pivots on a practice of thought: it is a thinking of the experiential and conceptual category that speaks through instances that are related to one another in dialectical unison. The space that is opened up through relating the different perspectives to one another is essentially what is being explored and gestured towards in a description of the dialectical vision. The topic of common interest functions as the filter through which that space is being considered. To some extent, meaning categories that are found by setting up this space are already more or less assumed by the dialectical partners individually. In those separate instances, those categories were entertained only tacitly and partially, however. The interaction and resonance between dialectical participants allows for additional perspectives on the topic of interest to develop more readily.

As much as dialectics pivots on thinking, it also very much depends on the spoken or written word. It is by addressing the dialectical space and the perspective it opens on the topic of interest that the dialogue begun in the dialectician's mind may become shared with others partaking in the dialectical quest. Through the practice of expression, the fused perspective becomes an articulated impression of what was an experiential vision initially. Also, when wording the phenomenon or notion in question it may become clear what aspects of the dialectical vision could do with additional contemplation.

To some extent, dialectical practice appears to resemble the workings of metaphor: the world is not literally a stage or vice versa, but by perceiving the world as a stage and the stage as a world, the performative dimension of life may

become apparent, and one may become attuned to the existential truth implied and revealed by play. By relating world and stage to one another and contemplating them in light of one another, aspects of either identity—aspects that might not be evident—may be brought into the open. Moreover, insight concerning both notions may also be disclosed, namely, that human beings enact roles in life and play. In some situations we are students, in others we are teachers; sometimes we are daughters, in other moments we are maternal; we are villains and heroes; we are friends and enemies. As actors enter and exit a stage, these roles come and go, together forming the way in which we move through our lives.

A potent metaphor is meant to lead to insight. Dialectics knows a similar objective. Yet, contrary to what is perhaps the purpose of most metaphors, the primary intention of dialectics when employed in phenomenological efforts is not to invent new meanings, but, rather, to illuminate meanings that are already (tacitly) assumed by the lived instances that are dialectically addressed. A sense of ‘swanness’ was already present when a black swan and a white swan were individually perceived, but the nature of ‘swanness’ may be brought more clearly into focus when the two are viewed in light of each other.

Touching the fused perspective that occurs through dialectical practice takes a particular kind of seeing. It is a kind of seeing that resembles the intuiting that Husserl indicates is involved in “the actively comparative overlapping of congruence” (*Experience* 348; par. 88). This type of seeing takes place in “every kind of intuitive apprehension of commonalities [*Gemeinsamkeiten*] and generalities” (348-349). When forming part of free imaginative variation,

‘intuiting’ is given a “special methodological form” and it is then that an object may become engaged with as “a pure *eidōs*” (348-49). Dialectical intuition resembles this kind of intuiting to a great extent, but there is also a difference. It is similar in that the dialectical aims to disclose the meaning category that is in some way instantiated in each dialectical partner. The resonance brought about through engaging with the dialectical partners is examined to see whether there is a way to understand and articulate that resonance. At the same time, the dialectical project in its Gadamerian variation does not try to dissolve differences, but it tries to honour them in light of the sameness or similarity through which they may be perceived as well. A dialectical effort is not just oriented towards detecting meanings that different instances have in common. Neither does it consist of simply aggregating meanings or uniting generalizations. Instead, it is an attempt to envision a category, territory or reservoir of meaning. The ‘seeing’ that is dialectical holds on to diversity while perceiving sameness or similarity. That the perspective is fused does not mean that its sources have been dissolved. Dialectical space may therefore be understood as a *crossing* of plurality and oneness, the universal and the individual: it is not one or the other, but it involves and encompasses both.

That the topic of interest appears is first of all a function of the specific identities of dialectical instances. It is also a function of the dialectical approach: because the instances are considered in a dialectical fashion, a fused perspective on their identity is brought into existence. One could say therefore that dialectical insights are *found*, in both a passive and an active sense. The dialectical practice is

active, because it pivots on a deliberately staged experiment which aims to articulate (certain variations of) an experiential category. In that sense the category is found *because* it is perceived in a dialectical context; that is, it comes into being because the situation is orchestrated for it to emerge. On the other hand the category appears already assumed by the texts considered. Dialectical insights are thus not invented, but they concern that which may be discovered when the texts that are being worked with are approached in a dialectical manner. At the same time there is a creative component to working dialectically and it is that generative dimension that affords that meanings may emerge. Yet how might it be justified that one works dialectically, and thus creatively in that specific dialectical sense, when one aims to do phenomenological research that is meant to be descriptive, rather than interpretive? Moreover, the current study is concerned with an experiential category that has an eidetic structure that is morphological in nature. What does it mean to work dialectically when addressing a phenomenon that is characterized by an essence of this kind? In the following section I reflect upon the interrelationships between the phenomenological-descriptive, the morphological and the dialectical and I propose that their convergence should be understood as both appropriate and fruitful.

2.14.3. The Phenomenological, the Descriptive, the Morphological, and the Dialectical

First of all, it is useful to recall that the phenomenological practice is itself not only re-creative, trying to give words to the lived, but also creative in that it aims to articulate the nature of phenomena in a manner that makes their nature more apparent than might be gathered from lived experience (Burch, “Phenomenology and Its Practices” 196). In other words, a phenomenologist does not try to ‘just’ replicate, but her work is an attempt to bring about a deepened understanding, an understanding that might change the ways in which certain phenomena are experienced. Dialectics knows a similar objective as it works towards evolving the understanding of the meaning possibilities of experiential categories. It tries to do so by exploring instances interactively, rather than individually, lending a more extensive perspective on the topic of interest (Gadamer, “Dialectic” 122; “Phenomenology, Hermeneutics” 109; Risser 15). Further, as already gestured towards when the dialectical way of working was compared to the workings of metaphor, a dialectical set-up may inspire thinking that goes beyond the space opened up by the textual evidence. It is also an option to remain within the parameters of that space and stay exclusively attuned to what the dialectical interlocutors bring to the table. In a descriptive-phenomenological study it is the latter option that is implemented. This means that only meanings and understandings that may be accounted for in lived experience constitute the dialectical playground.

In addition to phenomenology having a creative dimension and a

dialectical exploration having the option of upholding the phenomenological reduction, it appears that dialectics, and that includes the ‘creative move’ of contemplating the experiential and conceptual resonance between lived instances, should in fact be understood as particularly valuable when investigating phenomena with a morphological structure. It is particularly fruitful to work dialectically when one wants to come to grips with complex and versatile human constructs such as beauty (or truth, love, conflict, nature, gender, etc.), because it provides an excellent opportunity to think about how we might articulate their nature both in terms of their distinctive generality as well as their richness and multidimensionality. To discuss this supposed compatibility between the dialectical practice and experiential categories with a morphological essence, I will briefly revisit a few features that characterize this eidetic structure. Next I will indicate in what ways the space created and explored in the dialectical practice mirrors phenomena with such an essence and I will explain how dialectical investigation works well when an *eidos* of this kind is the topic of interest.

As explained before, eidetic profiles of instances of a phenomenon with a morphological essence are not identical or exactly the same, but they are somewhat alike or alike to a certain extent. It is this similarity, rather than sameness, that enables all instances to be members of the same experiential category. Furthermore, that a morphologic structure is not absolute means that it is not possible to provide a fully determinate impression of its nature. As Husserl writes (and I have quoted before): “That ideation which yields ideal essences, as

ideal 'limits' which is essentially impossible to find in any sensuous intuition but which morphological essences 'approach' more or less closely without ever reaching them" (*Ideas* I 167; par. 74). This means that no matter how large the corpus of instances investigated, a phenomenological research project in which a phenomenon with a morphological essence is the topic of interest may only result in a possible impression of a phenomenon's eidetic identity, holding some but not all meaning possibilities and lived understandings. In other words, a description cannot be expected to capture a phenomenon comprehensively, demarcating it in an absolute manner, presenting a precise and indisputable characterization of its nature. In fact, if other instances would have been considered (or if other instances are considered in addition), a different impression of the phenomenon's nature might have been (or may be) generated. That a description of a phenomenon with a morphological essence is always inevitably limited in its characterization is only problematic if that inevitability is not explicitly recognized and the impression presented is (tacitly) accredited with a universal status.⁶²

That a description of a morphological structure may always only be a tentative approximation of its identity as 'a whole' ties in with the fact that the

⁶² Not often do beauty theorists explicitly acknowledge the inevitable cultural embeddedness and perspectivity of their conceptualizations of beauty. In *Six Names of Beauty* Sartwell shows that what beauty is understood to be varies in different cultures. He presents a reading of 'beauty' in English as the object of longing; in Hebrew, 'yapha,' as referring to glow or bloom; in Sanskrit, as 'sundara,' as a matter of holiness; in Greek, as 'to kalon,' as having to do with idea or ideal; in Japanese, as 'wabi-sabi,' as referring to humility and imperfection; and in Navajo, as 'hozho,' as describing health and harmony. Note how each of these meanings could form part of moments of beauty that they may be experienced in a world in which English features as the primary language.

instances considered in a phenomenological-descriptive endeavor can never be more than only a selection of possible instances. They present examples of ways in which, in the case of the current project, beauty may be lived and as such they do not exclude the possibility of there being other insightful possibilities that illuminate other dimensions of beauty's being. This means that, even when a large number of instances is explored, the phenomenological-morphological investigation cannot help but remain inadequate, i.e., incomplete.

Lived instances may constitute the primary materials for a phenomenological endeavor, yet those instances themselves are not of primary interest. Of primary interest is the morphological eidetic structure of the phenomenon. The instances examined were those that were available when one tried to apprehend the phenomenon and create an informed description of its nature. That those instances can never be expected to represent the phenomenon fully implies that they are not 'sacred,' that is, the instances explored are not necessarily the only ones that could have been examined. That does not mean that one should deny the specifics that characterize the instances that are being worked with. It does suggest, however, that there is some freedom when it comes to the instances investigated. Being creative with those instances in the sense of relating them to one another and exploring the space that they bring into being, in addition to acknowledging their individual identities, seems, therefore, a reasonable analytical move to make in this investigative context.

That phenomena with a morphological essence are characterized by similarity does not only mean that there is 'flexibility' with regard to the identities

of their lived instances, but it also implies that freedom, space and movement are intrinsic to the structure of phenomena of this kind. Because of those qualities, instances may vary eidetically, while being members of the same experiential category. The diversity that characterizes the very nature of a phenomenon with a morphological essence should thus be understood as including the possibility of diversity. This means, *inter alia*, that different (combinations of) meaning possibilities may characterize and constitute instantiations and eidetic meanings forming part of an experiential category with a morphological structure are not always necessarily the same. In other words, a morphological essence entails room for meanings shifting, coming and going.

When a morphological structure is understood as involving content/meaning, space and movement, the dialectical practice may be envisioned as a way in which those characteristics are concretized, enacted, and formalized in a local manner. Lived instances that share certain specifics are related to one another and engaged with dynamically. Through moving back and forth between those instances, a space of meaning may be opened up, which is then explored to disclose the experiential category that each of the dialectical participants seems to assume in some way. The space as brought and kept into being by the dialectical participants—and in that capacity it thus also includes them—becomes the playground of the dialectical effort. That space mirrors the (potential for and process of) variation inherent to a phenomenon with a morphological essence and it does so by addressing (miniature) variations that emerge in deliberately staged dialectical encounters. Dialectics when employed in a phenomenological-

descriptive project is creative in the sense of purposefully creating a situation that allows disclosure of the essential identity of a phenomenon with a morphological *eidos*. At the same time, because such a situation echoes characteristics of a structure that is morphological in nature, it could be said also that the act of dialectical thought is re-creative rather than that it is necessarily creative. All considered, it appears that dialectical investigations that take place within the confines of experience as it was (reported as being) lived do not take liberties uncalled for by the eidetic nature of a phenomenon with a morphological essence.

I have already established that because the experiential-eidetic profile of a lived instance does not reflect a morphological-eidetic structure in any comprehensive sense, it is crucial that various instances are examined when one wants to gesture towards a phenomenon of this type in some extensive manner. When, in addition, such a generality is approached from at least two perspectives and thus becomes illuminated from different angles at the same time, the identity as it appears manifest in phenomenal instances may appear more readily. By orchestrating multiple dialectical encounters and contemplating various dialectical perspectives, a more sophisticated perspective on the theme of interest is given a chance to develop.

Furthermore, the diversity that characterizes a morphological essence so distinctly may itself become thematized in dialectical explorations by pointing to different instantiations of a particular kind of *eidos*. Especially when the goal is to address different ways in which instances of the same experiential category might appear, dialectical encounters should evolve around instances whose experiential-

eidetic profiles are similar instead of being very different. When the dialectical process concentrates on instances that are different, the dialectical spaces that are opened up become very broad. This means that the practice is likely to lead to a rather general impression of the phenomenon's nature (cf. Giorgi, *Descriptive* 101). Working in this matter is not conducive to facilitating insight into the diversity intrinsic to a morphological essence, because the inclusive categories found in the process are characterized by a high level generality. In fact, it is possible that the distance between the inclusive (i.e., the encapsulating categories) and individual (i.e., the experiential-eidetic specifics) might be too broad to be particularly insightful. Moreover, to begin by exploring similar instances and then gradually working towards considering categories that are more and more inclusive and comprehensive may in fact lead to a much more reliable impression of a phenomenon than when one tries to entertain a more extensive category by trying to relate and marry two very different instances. The former scenario is much more likely to be sensitive and reflective of the specifics that characterize the lived and eidetic diversity typical of the phenomenon of interest.

When starting by exploring small dialectical spaces, it becomes possible to create dialectical descriptions that gesture towards a morphological essence as an experiential category consisting of different (and differing) meaning possibilities. This implies that the descriptive impression of the experiential-eidetic variation or category in question contains experiential-eidetic meanings that only play a role in one or some dialectical partners (i.e., the meanings do not have to feature in each partner). The dialectical impression when envisioned in this manner is thus

prototypic, characterizing more or less comprehensively the variety of meaning possibilities by means of which a phenomenon or concept may manifest itself.

If one desires to address the structure and meaning potential of a phenomenon with a morphological essence in any comprehensive sense, which includes incorporating a variety of meaning possibilities, numerous phenomenal instances have to be studied. Yet even when multiple instances are investigated, the phenomenon or a sub-part thereof can only be disclosed to some extent. That descriptions of phenomena with a morphological essence are always incomplete, as there may always be additional and alternative meaning possibilities of importance, is something for which working dialectically cannot compensate. In fact, as mentioned earlier as well, the practice of dialectics acknowledges similar limitations: although its descriptive efforts aim to say what something *is*, dialectical projects cannot help but remain works in progress (Gadamer, “Dialectic” 121). Without a determinate outcome, we are always left with additional questions. Even though they might be different than the ones we started with, they nevertheless remind us that neither the dialectical practice nor phenomenological work is ever completely finished.

2.15. The Current Project

As a complex phenomenon with a morphological essence, beauty is an experiential category whose eidetic identity accommodates eidetic profiles (i.e., with different meanings and combinations thereof) that are different and that are also the same, because each one of those profiles is affiliated with experiences

that are lived as instances of beauty. From the perspective of beauty as ‘a whole,’ those different lived understandings and corresponding eidetic-experiential profiles are thus intimately related and together they constitute the phenomenon in an inclusive sense. Definitive and unidimensional definitions of beauty do not acknowledge the variety that inherently characterizes beauty’s eidetic nature. Rather than a definite concept, beauty is better envisioned as a kaleidoscopic reservoir of lived understandings and eidetic meanings or as a multi-potent concept that describes possible ways in which beauty appears in concrete instances. Because the eidetic profile of a lived experience of beauty features only a selection of the meaning possibilities that form part of beauty’s essence as a whole, multiple instances have to be examined if we desire to capture an impression of the eidetic ‘scope’ of the phenomenon that is beauty. Even when a large number of instances are examined—as is the case in this project—beauty’s full meaning potential is bound to remain out of reach, which means that an eidetic impression of beauty’s phenomenal nature cannot help but be forever incomplete. Beauty’s rich and varied conceptual history attests to that fact. In addition, because beauty is a concept and phenomenon whose structure is morphological in nature, the structure of its lived variations—which in this project are called beauty understandings—is morphological in nature as well. This implies *inter alia* that a particular instance of lived beauty constitutes only one possible variant of the ways in which beauty understanding may be manifested.

Chapter 3 describes the procedures, working with examples from the research materials that were analyzed. Here I will briefly touch upon the steps that

were decided upon after experimenting with several procedural possibilities and contemplating the structural issues outlined in this chapter. Having assumed the phenomenological attitude, each of the experiential narratives collected for this study was individually considered for its lived understanding of beauty. I asked: What is the lived understanding that the respondent appears to have experienced in the moment described in this experiential account? What experiential qualities are essential for constituting the sense of beauty that is at work here? By means of recurrent whole-part analyses, beauty understandings that seemed to have been lived were articulated and meanings that appeared to have been essential in the instantiation of moments of beauty were identified and described. Narratives that were found to feature a similar beauty understanding were grouped together. Of each group, narratives that seemed particularly similar were put side by side such that their understandings could be dialectically addressed. These dialectically obtained insights informed the descriptions created for the four variations of lived beauty that were identified in the experiential materials (see chapter 4).

Procedures

3.1. Introduction

In the empirical study conducted for this doctoral project, respondents were invited to describe a personal moment that they experienced as an instance of beauty. A total of 471 descriptions were collected and the analysis of these self-reports was oriented towards disclosing what appeared to have been the understanding of beauty that was lived as the experience was unfolding. This chapter describes the procedures in general (e.g., demographic specifics, experimental setting; 3.2 – 3.5), in addition to providing some reflection on the research materials (3.6) and touching upon a few characteristics and limitations of narrative accounts that articulate past experiences (3.7). Next I outline the various procedural steps that were employed in the analysis of the materials (3.8 – 3.13).

3.2. Participants

Participants in this study were students of the University of Alberta enrolled in an introductory course of psychology. Research-participation formed part of the course curriculum. Students who signed up for the current study did not know that they were going to participate in a study concerned with beauty until they were briefed at the beginning of the research session. A total of 471 respondents (59.3% women; 40.7% men) took part in the study. The average age was 19.5 (19.3 for women; 19.8 for the men). 375 respondents (79.6%) indicated that

English was their primary language, meaning that for 96 respondents (20.4%) English was a second language and possibly even a third or fourth. A total of 186 participants were self-identified Euro-North American (39.5 %); 115 were East-Asian (24.4 %); 72 were European (15.3%); 35 were South-Asian (7.4%); 11 were Middle Eastern (2.3%); 9 were African (1.9%); 6 were Hispanic/Latin-American (1.3%); 3 were Aboriginal/first nation (0.6%); 1 person self-identified as a Pacific Islander (0.2%); 25 indicated that they had a different ethnicity than the ones mentioned before (5.3%); and 8 individuals did not answer the question (1.7%).

The purpose of this study was to gather insight into what beauty is lived to be when it is experienced in concrete moments. Rather than focusing on ways in which beauty may be thought about, the analysis was thus oriented towards identifying descriptive indicators that provide an impression of beauty as lived. When participants are knowledgeable about a topic, their knowledge may guide them in their description of their personal experiences. That participants could be familiar with beauty theory was a possibility that was considered in the analysis of the experiential narratives. No indications were found, however, that suggested that familiarity with aesthetics might have affected the description of the experiences that were shared. Recurrent notions in beauty theories, such as “disinterestedness” or “pleasure,” were not used once in any of the narratives. In fifteen different protocols the word “aesthetic” was used, but in none of them it was employed in a manner that suggested knowledge of aesthetic theory. It appeared that those mentions simply referred to the way in which something

looked and the appreciation it inspired. Also, no beauty theorist was mentioned in any of the 471 experiential narratives. Relevant here is that courses in aesthetics tend to be taught on upper undergraduate and on a graduate level and the age of the participants suggests that most of them were not that advanced in their studies yet. Further, the sayings “beauty is in the eye of beholder” and “beauty is only skin-deep” were cited eight times in the corpus as a whole. In three of those cases the content of the experience described and the sense of the saying quoted had rather little to do with one another. It appeared that those proverbs had come to mind because beauty was the topic of the study and not because their meanings were particularly relevant to the experience described. In general, with respect to being knowledgeable of beauty’s theoretical identities, I believe it is safe to assume that this study’s participants were “naïve subjects” (Giorgi, “Phenomenological Psychology” 64). Being ‘naïve’ from a theoretical point of view does not diminish the possibility, however, of being a connoisseur of the beauty that was lived.

3.3. Experimental Setting

The study was conducted in a classroom setting with 20 to 30 students. Before distributing the materials, the experimenter gave a brief introductory talk. In this talk respondents were informed that beauty was going to be topic of the study and that the research tasks consisted of completing open questions and rating questionnaire items. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured and participants were presented with the possibility of completing an alternative educational

activity (without loss of credit) in case they did not want to participate.

Respondents were then asked to open their research package, sign the consent form and complete the research questions or ask for an alternative educational activity. Two hours were scheduled for version A and one hour for version B.⁶³

Duration of research participation averaged approximately 90 minutes for completing the A-materials and 50 minutes for completing the B-materials. Upon returning the research materials to the experimenter, respondents were asked to sign a second consent form, after which they were given a written debriefing that explained the purpose of the study.⁶⁴

3.4. Research Materials

The research materials consisted of both open-ended questions and questionnaire items, all of which were meant to invite respondents to share their experience in as informative and comprehensive a manner as possible. The open-ended questions asked respondents to write freely about a personal experience of beauty.

The questionnaire consisted of 93 items reflecting experiential qualities mentioned in beauty theories (e.g., Armstrong; Dufrenne, "The Beautiful"; Kant, *Critique*; Kirwan; Lorand, *Aesthetic*; Nehamas, *Only a Promise*; Santayana;

⁶³ Two versions of this study were run. In version A respondents completed the beauty questionnaire twice and in version B they did so only once. The materials of version A are rendered in the first appendix. Added footnotes indicate how the materials of version B were different from the ones of version A. Version A of the study was run during the Fall term (October-November) of 2008 and version B of the study was run during the Winter term (January-March) of 2009. I express my gratitude to Paul Campbell for running multiple research-sessions for this study.

⁶⁴ I thank Don Kuiken, Paul Sopcak and Paul Campbell for helping with the wording of the materials.

Sartwell; Scarry; Schopenhauer; Scruton). Respondents were asked to rate items in such a manner that the ratings would reflect the extent to which the experiential quality gestured towards in the statement featured in the experience that they chose to describe. The answers to the first three open questions were investigated in the phenomenological analysis. Only those research tasks are therefore discussed next.⁶⁵ Notions such as ‘experiential narrative,’ ‘protocol,’ ‘narrative account,’ and ‘phenomenal account’ are used to refer to answers of these three questions together.

After being asked to share demographic information, participants were presented with an open question that invited them to describe a distinct and memorable personal moment of beauty.⁶⁶ They were encouraged to describe the experience in their own words and express in as much detail as possible all aspects of their experience: feelings, thoughts, what was happening, etc. The next two questions were follow-up questions that were meant to inspire participants to elaborate upon their experience. The first of these two questions asked after what gave the experience described its distinctive identity as an instance of beauty. The second question inquired after the unique character of the experience in a more general sense.

⁶⁵ In future research endeavors, I plan to work with the data that is not considered in the analysis presented in this text.

⁶⁶ I suspect that this format could not have been implemented had aesthetic experience been the topic of inquiry. Theorists might be clear on the nature of aesthetic experience, but I do not think that many non-academics understand spontaneously experienced moments to be aesthetic encounters.

3.5. Ethics Approval

The Arts, Science & Law Research Ethics Board of the University of Alberta gave approval to conduct this study on October 23rd 2008 (ASL REB member: 1898 [KAN-08-10-012]).

3.6. Comments Regarding the Research Tasks

I would like to make two remarks about the research materials: the first having to do with the extent to which the formulation of the instructions might have been guiding regarding the kinds of beauty experiences that were recalled and described; and the second addressing the fact that it was assumed that participants were familiar with the phenomenon of beauty.

Because the purpose of the study was to get a sense of the ways in which beauty was lived in experience, I have tried to make sure that the instructions did not direct the participants towards a particular way of understanding beauty. The instructions contained neutral and ‘open’ phrases, therefore, such as “a lived experience of beauty,” instead of containing expressions that might be more guiding such as ‘the experience of a beautiful object,’ ‘the experience of a beautiful event,’ or ‘beauty as a way of experiencing.’ In the same vein, the neutral verb of ‘have’ was used in the phrase “a moment of distinct, memorable beauty that you have *had* in the past” (added italics) instead of verbs such as ‘find’ (e.g., ‘finding something to be beautiful’) or ‘enjoy’ (e.g., ‘enjoying beauty’) as the latter suggest ways in which beauty can be but not necessarily is given in experience. At the same time it may be argued that the expression ‘a

lived experience of beauty' is not entirely neutral. First of all, the phrase is suggestive of a certain memorability, which implies that not any experience of beauty qualifies, but only experiences that hold some special significance. That notion is in fact explicitly endorsed by another phrase in the instructions, one that invites participants to write about "a moment of distinct, memorable beauty." Rather than describing an experience in which something was 'just' found to be beautiful, participants were thus encouraged to share an experience that had made a striking impression. As a result, the instances of beauty that were shared might have been lived in a way that was relatively defined, that is, the experiential presence of beauty likely stood out. This means that experiences in which beauty was, for instance, 'just' observed, without many emotional or cognitive implications, may be under-represented in the corpus.

Further, participants might have conflated "an experience of beauty" and "a beautiful experience." For example, one respondent wrote that "[i]n all of [his] athletic career [he] had never had such a beautiful experience" (53b). That an experience is appraised as being beautiful does not mean that the experience described entailed a lived moment of beauty when it was unfolding. In other words, that an experience is found to be beautiful does not mean that beauty was lived when the experience was taking place. Descriptions of 'beautiful experiences' that did not describe a lived moment of beauty were excluded from the analysis (see 3.9).

Further, the phenomenological phrase 'a lived experience of beauty' might have led participants to believe that they were asked to share an experience in

which the experience itself (or a certain situation) was lived as an instance of beauty. Moments of beauty in which beauty was lived as characterizing a certain object or a particular state of mind might not have resonated as readily with the expression ‘a lived experience of beauty.’ Nonetheless, 103 instances were found in which beauty was experienced as being a matter of an object and 54 descriptions gestured towards beauty having been experienced as a particular kind of affective and cognitive processing (see 4.3 and 4.4 for characterizations of objective beauty and affective-noetic beauty respectively).⁶⁷ In comparison, 128 instances of nondual beauty were identified, that is, moments in which beauty appeared to have been lived as concerning both what was experienced and the way in which it was experienced (see 4.5), and 95 protocols described moments of beauty in which beauty was lived as having to do with the lived situation as a whole (see 4.6). It could be argued that the instructions might have led to nondual beauty and situative beauty being over-represented.⁶⁸ Despite the possibility that the instructions might have been somewhat guiding, the materials thus displayed lived understandings of beauty other than the ones that might have been favored.

⁶⁷ In moments that were identified as instances of affective-noetic beauty, beauty was lived as having to do with a certain emotional and mental state of being exclusively. Lived experiences of nondual and situative beauty tend to include beauty being experienced in an affective-noetic manner. The number of ‘pure’ affective-noetic instances is lower than of the other kinds of beauty that were identified, yet the experience of affective-noetic beauty is assumed by two other kinds of lived beauty.

⁶⁸ Situative beauty is a kind of lived beauty that is not addressed in other beauty theories. It could be argued therefore that if the instructions indeed favored a situational understanding of beauty—which is a question that could be taken up in an empirical study in which different sets of instructions are experimented with—they did create an opportunity for this particular beauty variation to be examined in some detail.

In that sense then this study's objective—examining in what way(s) beauty is lived—has not been compromised. It would have been a different story if the study objective had been to predict how likely it is that beauty is experienced in a particular manner, i.e., in an objective, affective-noetic, nondual or situative manner.

Another aspect of the research tasks that is worth addressing is that the request to share an experience of beauty has the assumption built in that participants have some sense of what is meant by '(experience of) beauty.' The instructions stated explicitly in fact that the respondent's understanding of beauty was of primary interest to the study:

In this study, we are not explaining what is understood by "beauty." This is deliberate, because we are interested in what beauty means to you; what you perceive beauty to be; in what way you have experienced beauty; and how beauty made you think and feel in that particular moment.

On a total of 471 participants only 4 individuals expressed some uncertainty about how to relate to beauty.⁶⁹ Moreover, not one of the respondents requested to do

⁶⁹ One respondent answered the study's very last question, which enquired after beauty changed because of participating in this study) as follows: "I'm not sure it did → still confused about what 'beauty' is to even describe how my views of it has changed" (240a). Despite that confusion, the respondent selected an experience of "walking through the river valley in the Spring" as an instance of beauty and revisiting that experience allowed him to complete all open and closed questions. When asked why this experience is an experience of beauty to him, he wrote: "The fact that my 5 senses were positively stimulated during the experience. The experience has taught me to think of beauty in terms of the way it activates my senses." The respondent thus appears to understand beauty when

the alternative educational activity. This suggests that respondents seemed to have been at ease with taking part in the study and this is a significant finding in itself. Even though respondents might not have given the nature of their beauty experiences much consideration before participating in the study, when asked to describe a personal moment of beauty, many were able to describe a personal experience rather effortlessly.⁷⁰ There were also respondents who, instead of describing a personal moment of beauty, provided a reflective impression of its nature (see 3.9). Respondents might have been unsure about what to make of “a

forming part of a concrete lived instance despite his uncertainty about how to understand the nature of beauty in general. Something similar seems to have happened with the two other respondents (326a; 381a): they managed to select and describe an instance of beauty, while also indicating that they were confused about beauty as such. As one of the two wrote in response to the last question: “I realized that I do not know what beauty really is. But what I experienced was beautiful” (326a). The uncertainty expressed by these respondents touches upon an issue which, as was mentioned in the first chapter, is already gestured towards in the oldest complete text concerned with beauty’s nature, the *Hippias Major* (around 390 BCE): it is one thing to indicate what is beautiful, but it is quite another to say what beauty is. To be clear about what is beautiful while at the same time being unsure about how to understand beauty in general may be a characteristic of beauty as a phenomenon.

⁷⁰ Some respondents commented upon how difficult it was for them to select one experience of beauty among the many that had come to mind. The following musings gestured towards a struggle of that kind:

I’ve sat here for 20 minutes trying to select one moment of pure beauty in my life, and I can’t do [it]. Images are flashing through my head; images of immense emotion and memories that will hold forever. It is the collection of these experiences that create my life and make me the happy and grateful person I am. I’m sorry I can’t pick just one, but isn’t that beauty in itself? I see my grandma’s house, X’s face, the hours spent and crying with and soothing my friends, the mountains, falling asleep in Central Park, I hear my favorite songs and remember from [X] favorite characters from books. I experience beauty on a daily basis and I’m sorry if this paper is useless but every moment is so singular in brilliantly unique ways that I cannot possibly compete them against and one another. (453a)

lived experience” and as a consequence they resorted to describing beauty in general. Another possibility is that uncertainty about what to make of beauty led respondents to think about its nature rather than trusting that describing a personal experience of beauty would have been sufficient. On the one hand it thus appears that beauty being a complex phenomenon does not eliminate the possibility of engaging with one of its lived instances. On the other hand, because beauty is acknowledged as being difficult, its nature is likely to become a topic of reflection, which means that the possibility of engaging with its nature through revisiting a personal lived moment of beauty is being overlooked.

In addition to the possibility that participants might have been puzzled by the phrase ‘lived experience’ or that they simply got caught up in musing about beauty’s nature, it is also not unthinkable that the phrases “what beauty means to you” and “what you perceive beauty to be” has given respondents the impression that the study in fact enquired after their ideas *about* beauty instead of inviting them to share a lived instance of beauty. All in all, it is clear that future investigative endeavors pivoting on written self-reports should involve instructions that guide respondents even more specifically and mindfully to the lived nature of the experience that is described (see chapter 5).

3.7. Comments Regarding the Experiential Narratives

Phenomenological-empirical research depends heavily on the quality of the narrative impressions describing lived instances of the experiential category of interest. According to Barbro Giorgi, “[a] good description is one that describes

what took place, what happened, and that includes the intellectual and emotional context in which the event took place in as rich a detail as possible” (80). It is not that easy, however, to touch on the specifics of an experience and articulate the various experiential properties in a manner that is insightful and conveys the particular feel and identity of a moment that was experienced (cf. Hein and Austin 14; Petitmengin and Bitbol 396). In fact, it might be particularly challenging to articulate what it is like to experience a moment of beauty (cf. Mothersill 351).⁷¹ Also, not every attempt to give words to a lived moment is found to be equally successful. A description may be felt to be a watered-down reflection of the uniqueness and richness that characterized the experience as it was originally lived (Eckhartsberg 77). On the other hand, by carefully addressing an experience that was lived in the past, it is possible that its distinctive (pre-reflective) identity becomes more evident than if the experience would not have been considered in hindsight (cf. Lingis, *First* 37; Maso, Andringa and Heusèrr 18).

There are other factors that play a role in the extent to which a narrative account can be expected to describe a lived experience effectively. First of all, it is inevitable that when one tries to articulate an experience that took place weeks, months and sometimes years ago, some aspects of what was lived might have simply been forgotten (Giorgi, *Descriptive* 117; Kuiken, Schopflocher, and Wild

⁷¹ A few respondents mentioned that they found it challenging to put their experience into words. As one individual wrote: “To me what made this experience unique is that it can only be described as indescribable. It was so beautiful that I cannot possibly begin to express what it was like. It was unique in the sense that it was not simply pretty or admirable, it was truly beautiful. It took my breath away” (420a).

377). Secondly, the fact that the experience is being articulated as a life *story* may also lead to changes being introduced (Giorgi, *Descriptive* 117). Compared to the experience as it originally took place, experiences in their told variation tend to have a more dramatic flow, have a clearer beginning, middle and end, are less fragmented than the original experience, and feature a protagonist whose role and experience might be more defined than was actually the case (e.g., she obtained an insight of some kind that sums up the experience as a whole; she managed to find some resolution; she cast herself as a victor; cf. Ellis and Bochner 98). That meanings and logic are introduced through our recollections is to some extent inevitable, because rather than working reproductively (like a video camera) our memory appears to work in a constructive manner, creating a more or less complete picture of the retrieved sensory, emotional and cognitive memories. Even though the instructions encouraged the participants not to worry about writing “a good story,” they nevertheless might have succumbed to the temptation to provide an interesting and appealing anecdote.⁷² Lastly, experiential narratives might have been adapted or even invented with an eye on the research task: personal life stories might have been made to fit the description of ‘an experience of beauty’ and scenarios might have even been made up and then presented as if lived in actuality. That with the exception of one individual, participants seemed to have no difficulties describing an experience of beauty suggests, however, that

⁷² Part of the instructions preceding the first writing task read: “Write freely. Do not worry about grammar, spelling, or sentence structure. And do not worry about your experience making a good story. Just describe what it was like.”

it is not that likely that many participants had to resort to inventing experiences.⁷³ Also, that respondents seemed to have been theoretically naïve suggests that they could not have had based their experiential descriptions of beauty on theoretical conceptualizations of beauty.

That experiences may have been partially or inaccurately remembered, that constructive memory and self-imposed standards of story telling may have affected how accurately a narrative reflects an experience how it was originally lived, and that experiences might have been modified or imagined to suit the research task are not necessarily reasons to disqualify narrative accounts from being explored in phenomenological studies. Even when a narrative account does not accurately describe a moment of beauty as it was experienced in actuality, it may still provide an impression of what it may be like to have an experience of beauty and in that sense the experiential narrative may be of interest (cf. Giorgi, *Descriptive* 117; Petitmengin and Bitbol 390; Van Manen, *Researching* 65).

Although invented stories can be informative as to the lived ways of beauty, the goal of the current, empirical project was to work exclusively with

⁷³ As mentioned before, some respondents engaged with beauty in a reflective or generalizing manner and they did not describe a distinct moment in which they had experienced beauty. One respondent indicated he did not see any of his life experiences as instances of beauty. He wrote:

I feel this question is very philosophical and I'm not a very philosophical person. The situation of 'beauty' that you are probably looking for... just isn't happening for me. I'm a casual, fairly easy-going person and I don't recall any moments of standing in awe of beauty. I suppose there are multiple kinds of beauty including: other people, art, nature, etc., but nothing stands out for me. I could make something up, but that wouldn't really help your study... (139a)

accounts that tried to articulate beauty experiences that had been lived in actuality. When working with narrative accounts of the kind explored in the current project, there is never any absolute guarantee that accounts describe what was indeed lived in actuality (cf. Kasulis 33). That there is no guarantee does not mean that it is therefore superfluous to pay attention to textual indications that might suggest that narratives have been made up (e.g., inconsistencies, contradictions, fantastical elements). The experiential accounts investigated in the current project did not contain such indications, however. Hence, no protocols were excluded on this basis (see 3.9).

3.8. Introduction to the Analytical Procedures

In the sections that follow I describe the way in which I have worked with the corpus of 471 experiential narratives in order to describe their particular instantiations of lived beauty. The procedures delineated here are not the only ones that were explored. They are rather the analytical steps that were eventually considered the most appropriate in light of the time constraints imposed upon the research project and the study's objective of explicating lived beauty.

Experimentation with method is part of the phenomenological research process. Rather than simply applying a predetermined set of analytical procedures, one is to mindfully decide upon the components of the analytical recipe in accordance with the phenomenon that is being investigated, the nature of the research materials, and the research skills of the researcher (Applebaum 12; Burch, "Phenomenology and Human Science" 50, 52; Giorgi, Introduction 3-4, 6; Hein

and Austin 3; Van Manen, *Researching* 28-30). Openness to how the data might be investigated is thus also a kind of reduction that is meant to form part of a phenomenological way of working (Van Manen, “Reductio” n. pag.).

In the latter part of the second chapter it was proposed that the investigation of a phenomenon with a morphological essence should include careful consideration of a variety of its instances by means of a whole-part analysis and through the practice of dialectics (2.11 – 2.14.3). These proposals were the outcome of a crucial phase in the research process in which I experimented with various procedural sets and steps, while thinking through the eidetic structure that characterizes the phenomenon that is beauty. This process resulted in an analytical recipe consisting of the following 4 main steps:

1. Familiarizing myself with the corpus of experiential narratives and excluding those accounts that did not provide a description of a lived moment of beauty (3.9);
2. Articulating the lived understanding and meanings of beauty for each experiential narrative by going back and forth between whole (i.e., lived understanding of beauty) and its parts (i.e., lived meanings of beauty; 3.10.1 – 3.10.5);
3. Grouping those experiential narratives that appeared to feature a similar lived understanding of beauty (3.11);
4. Exploring various beauty understandings in a dialectical fashion in order to describe their nature in a general manner as well as in a way that provides insight into the different meaning possibilities

that may feature in concrete instantiations of a particular variation of lived beauty (3.12.1 – 3.12.6).

I would like to make a few comments about the spirit in which the analysis was performed. The experiential narratives provided by the research participants were written from the perspective of the natural attitude. During the analysis, I assumed the phenomenological attitude and ‘reduced’ the meanings described by the respondent to those that appeared to have been lived as the experience was unfolding (Giorgi, *Descriptive* 96). Furthermore, the analysis was geared towards identifying those meanings among those that were lived that seemed to have been crucial in establishing a lived sense of beauty. Even though identifying lived and eidetic meanings was one of the main tasks of the second phase of the procedures, attunement to the experiential-essential defined the analytical attitude throughout the analytical practice in its entirety. In light of the epoché, I made a conscious and continuous effort to not let my own sense of beauty blind myself to understandings of beauty that might initially differ from my own (cf. Gadamer, *Truth* 268). Ergo, I approached each experiential narrative as a guide and a source of insight that could teach me about the ways in beauty which might show up in experience (Giorgi, *Descriptive* 112; cf. Kasulis 31). Furthermore, I tried to work in a phenomenological manner by being a researcher who, in Fischer’s words, “attempts to put himself in the subject’s shoes and to live through the experience from the inside so that he is not a mere spectator but achieves a grasp of the meanings the subject has expressed precisely as intended by the subject” (164). At the same time, however, my understanding of each description was informed by

my own conditioned and situated perspective and foreunderstanding of beauty (cf. Hein and Austin 15). In fact, to be able to grasp the lived understanding of beauty as expressed in an experiential narrative, the understanding had to somehow resonate with my own implicit sense of beauty. That resonance allowed me to determine what lived meanings mattered essentially and which seemed to be contingent to a particular instantiation of beauty. Thus on the one hand a foreunderstanding of beauty enabled me to comprehend the lived understandings gestured towards in the experiential narratives explored, on the other hand it is possible that such a precomprehension might have kept me from understanding what the respondent experienced beauty to be. Whether my reading of the protocols presented in this text does justice to meanings expressed in the narrative accounts is a question that may be addressed in future research endeavors, preferably undertaken by other enquirers (cf. Giorgi, *Descriptive* 140; Petitmengin and Bitbol 393).⁷⁴

3.9. Step 1: Familiarizing and Excluding

The respondents wrote the answers to the open questions with a pencil. I first typed out the narrative accounts, also because not all handwriting was that easy to read. Each word in the handwritten answers that I could not decipher I marked with an “[X]” in the transcripts.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Although not all experiential narratives were found to be equally informative with regard to how beauty appeared to have been lived, none of them held an understanding of beauty that I found to be incomprehensible.

⁷⁵ Names of individuals were replaced with “X”s (thus without square brackets).

After transcribing the protocols, I reread each narrative numerous times to familiarize myself with the experiential narratives. Next I examined each protocol with the sole purpose of identifying and then excluding any experiential narrative that did not describe a distinct moment in which beauty was experienced.

Excluded from further analysis were materials that: (1) were incomplete, that is, they did not provide a description of beauty or did not answer one or both of the first open questions; (2) provided an experiential description that was ambiguous with regard to what was experienced as being beautiful; (3) recounted an experience that was called beautiful (e.g., “That was a beautiful experience”) without it being clear whether the experience described was in fact lived as an instance of beauty as the experience was unfolding;⁷⁶ (4) described an experience that was found to have been invented for the occasion of the study, that is, the experience of beauty shared was not lived in actuality but purposefully made up (see 3.7); (5) presented a description that was too short to be able to get some idea of beauty’s experiential identity;⁷⁷ or (6) did not articulate a lived moment of beauty, but instead provided: (a) a reflective overall impression of one’s own

⁷⁶ Some respondents indicated that they found a past experience to be beautiful. They thus retrospectively appraised or judged an experience as being beautiful, which suggests that beauty was being experienced as they were revisiting the experience during research participation. One respondent wrote, for example: “I had worked hard for years trying to become the best basketball player I could be. On that night, I feel I had reached the upper level of my potential. It was beautiful in that I created an athletic performance I probably will never be able to reach again” (53b). When there was no evidence to suggest that beauty was also lived when the experience described was taking place, the protocol was excluded from further analysis.

⁷⁷ An example of a protocol that was excluded, because too short to be informative is the following: “Seeing the Vatican for the first time in Rome, Italy” (904a).

understanding of beauty (characterizing it, for instance, as something that may be found anywhere); (b) an impression of how one tends to experience beauty in general; (c) a description of a moment in which beauty was reflected upon rather than lived through; (d) a characterization of something being beautiful in general (e.g., a certain city, the evolution of a relationship, a particular people);⁷⁸ or (e) a description of how one used to find oneself or how someone else used to be beautiful but not any longer (because of, for instance, weight gain or scarring). A total of 94 protocols were ruled out for further analysis, leaving 377 narratives to be explored further.

3.10. Step 2: Identifying Lived Understandings and Meanings of Beauty

After the first procedural step of familiarization and exclusion, I listed for each experiential narrative the occasion of beauty, that is, that which was described as being beautiful (e.g., “playing with cousins”; “walking through the ravine”; “reading a comic strip and listening to music”; “watching the stars”). In the fourth

⁷⁸ There were also protocols that described a particular *class* of experience. For example, one respondent wrote about walking home from school: “every year, during springtime, I loved that part of my day” (286a). During those walks she was particularly aware of her surroundings: “on the Spring days where I noticed how everything looked and smelled “ and “those days I just felt to relaxed and content, simply because I enjoyed my walks home.” Rather than describing a singular distinct concrete moment of beauty, descriptions of this nature refer to a group of experiences. That set is characterized, however, by a number of properties shared by each of its instances (namely, in case of the example, inter alia, a heightened sensory awareness and a feeling of relaxation and contentment). As such, this group represents for the respondent a particular family of concrete experiential instances. Thus, although the protocol describes an experience in general terms, that description is nevertheless based on concrete and particular instances of lived beauty. It is the latter that made me decide *not* to exclude narratives of this kind.

phase of the analytical process, after experiential narratives had been grouped according to different kinds of beauty understandings, those indicators were helpful to get an impression of the different situations in which beauty was experienced (e.g., nature experience; interpersonal event; experience of an artifact).

After noting the occasion of beauty for all 377 protocols, I began the process of identifying the lived understanding and meanings of beauty of each experiential narrative. To determine those experiential factors a whole-part analysis was employed (see 2.13). To be able to perform the analysis, the experience as articulated in a descriptive impression had to be engaged with to the fullest extent. Awakening to the moment described, trying to be as sensitive as possible to its nature, I tried to get a sense of the lived experience in a vicarious manner and as such develop a feel for the sense of beauty that appeared to have been lived (cf. Giorgi, *Descriptive* 112). Each experiential narrative was considered at least three times. The first time observations and impressions as to lived understandings and meanings were written in the margins of hardcopies of the protocols. In the second round, I added short characterizations of lived meanings and impressions of the lived understandings to the word-files of the protocols and I used an excel-file to list the lived meanings of the experiential narratives. Findings of this second round were checked against those of the first round. In the third round I worked through all experiential narratives again, trying to refine and optimize each narrative's beauty description. It was not always that easy, however, to get a handle on the understandings and meanings of beauty as

they appeared to have been lived. Experiential narratives were re-explored as often as needed, that is to say, until I was reasonably happy with the characterization of their beauty understandings and the listings of their lived meanings of beauty.

In what follows I first discuss the nature of the whole-part analysis in general (3.10.2). Then I address some aspects concerning lived and eidetic meanings (3.10.3). Next I demonstrate the whole-part analysis (3.10.4) and in the last section I touch upon a few choices made with regard to listing lived-eidetic meanings (3.10.5).

3.10.2. Whole-Part Analysis in General

The primary purpose of the repeated whole-part analyses was to deepen my comprehension of the sense of beauty as it appeared to have been lived by the respondent and to fine-tune my description of that sense as I managed to understand it. It was crucial to make sure that the characterization honored the beauty as it appeared to have been lived. The experiences articulated were considered most carefully so that the lived sense of beauty could be ‘lifted out’ and described as precisely as possible. To be able to comprehend beauty as lived, meanings that were crucial in its instantiation had to be identified. It is possible that the experience contained moments in which lived meanings or aspects of beauty were the objects intended. I was primarily interested, however, in those moments in which beauty was experienced in a holistic and inclusive manner, that is, as an experiential totality in which experiential meanings featured as parts

enabling beauty's presence (see 2.13 on the thematization of experiential qualities), meanings that could be categorized according to different kinds (e.g., bodily, sensory, emotional, cognitive, volitional).⁷⁹

In order to generate an informed sense of a lived instance of beauty of a particular experience, it was essential that its meanings were carefully considered. Moreover, meanings had to be identified that appeared to have been instrumental in making the experience an instance that was lived as a moment of beauty. Those meanings could only be identified, however, if a sense of beauty as a whole was simultaneously engaged with. Hence, a lived understanding of beauty could only be contemplated through holding its constituting meanings in awareness and beauty's lived meanings could only be identified when engaging with a sense of beauty as a whole.

Although the primary objective of this study was articulating the inclusive sense of beauty that appeared to have been experienced, rather than identifying lived meanings of beauty, those two tasks cannot be separated in the analytical

⁷⁹ It could be said that disentanglement of that inclusive sense already began when describing the experience as it was lived: the experience of beauty became gestured towards in those meanings that a respondent managed to recall and express into words (and, subsequently, the meanings that the researcher has been able to identify in an experiential account). Describing an experience is in that sense an analytical practice, in which 'analyzing' is to be understood in terms of its ancient Greek meaning: "breaking down (or literally, the 'loosening-up') of anything into its component parts" (Smith, *Experiencing* 65; cf. Langer 22-23; Petitmengin and Bitbol 370). Also, even if beauty's lived meanings were acknowledged as aspects of beauty as the experience was unfolding—which is a question that could be addressed empirically—it is unlikely that beauty was experienced in as disentangled a manner as might be suggested by listings of lived meanings or sets thereof. It is important therefore that beauty's nature is not understood in a dissected manner, even if an exploration of its nature involves identifying parts that are crucial for beauty to show up in lived experience.

research practice. Whole-part analysis involves both activities and performing them in light of another, repeatedly and mindfully. The analytical process is therefore best understood as a dynamic interplay in which parts and whole were perceived as informing each other reciprocally. The identification and listing of lived meanings of a particular experience of beauty thus took place in direct exchange with the articulation of that experience's lived understanding of beauty. Characterizations of lived instances of beauty were revisited and worked on throughout the analytical process, with insights into their nature often shifting and developing as the exploration progressed. In this regard also the current procedures differ radically from other phenomenological methods: in those alternative approaches describing instances of the experiential category of interest in a holistic manner tend to be postponed until the very final stages of the analytical process (e.g., Giorgi, *Descriptive* 132-37; see 3.14).

The analytical process thus resembled a cyclical endeavor in which I moved back and forth between describing the lived sense of beauty and listing the meanings that appeared to have played a role in constituting that sense of beauty. In doing so I tried to optimize both the descriptive impression and the listing, while making sure that each was firmly based in the other. As such lived meanings of beauty were both means and fruit of the analytic process. The same held for lived understanding of beauty: gaining insight into lived understandings was the objective of the analysis, but the analysis could only take place when there was already some understanding of the whole. The cycle created through moving back and forth between whole and parts became a spiral through which

insight into both meant to evolve. This process involved identifying meanings that were lived (instead of being reflective) and that had played a crucial role in constituting beauty's presence.⁸⁰ Clearly not all meanings of an experiential account answered to that profile. In the next section I will address the nature of meanings that were of interest in the current project.

3.10.3. Experiential-Eidetic Meanings

To be able to understand in what way beauty appeared to have been lived in a particular instance, it was important to be exclusively attuned to those meanings that were experienced in a lived manner. This meant that from the described meanings those that were lived had to be extracted. Reflective meanings added after the experience took place, possibly while describing the experience during research participation, were thus not supposed to guide identification and articulation of an instance of lived beauty. For example, in a protocol recounting "a visit to Lake Minnetanka," the respondent remarked: "Growing up means

⁸⁰ Contrary to Giorgi's phenomenological method (*Descriptive* 134-35, 188-94; "Sketch" 11-12, 17-18), no particular discipline was followed in the identification of beauty's lived meanings: whatever appeared to have been lived from the respondent's perspective and seemed to have been crucial for beauty to have been constituted was described and listed. In that sense this study's procedures resembled Kuiken and Miall's numerically aided phenomenology. They write about the explication of interdependent parts that:

in contrast with Giorgi's suggestions, it is unnecessary to provide constituent descriptions that reflect a selected discipline, such as psychology or anthropology. The similarities in meaning among recurrent expressions may, in fact, cross these somewhat arbitrary disciplinary boundaries. (31)

It could be argued that in adopting a disciplinary orientation Giorgi violates the openness that is to characterize the phenomenological reduction.

taking on a more global perspective and losing the naïveté of youth. Beauty to me equates with stress-free joyous living that is harder to come by as we mature” (313a). The notions of ‘taking on a more global perspective,’ ‘losing the naïveté of youth,’ and ‘stress-free joyous living being harder to experience when one matures’ were not lived as the experience was unfolding. Instead they are insights that were added in hindsight. Meanings such as these are external to the experience in a lived sense, because rather than forming part of the concrete profile of a lived instance of a certain experiential category, they reflect upon the nature of that category in general, they provide explanations for what transpired, they speculate about the future consequences of the event, etc. Instead of being descriptive, such meanings are interpretive and they were thus not listed as lived meanings of beauty (Giorgi, “Description” 122).

Just like only a selection of meanings described refer to ones that were lived, only a selection of lived meanings that were described were essential to the beauty instantiated in a lived experience. This respondent, for example, indicated that she experienced beauty while others did not:

To me, viewing the historical buildings was beautiful because I was able to view what life may have been like at a certain time and experience a different more rich culture. In comparison to others who were there that complained about being in a castle, because it was drafty and cold. While I was there I soaked it all in, I viewed my surroundings with curiosity and awe at how beautifully built the castle was and the castle at the time. Similarly, while viewing

paintings, what I found to be beautiful in the painting and the emotions conveyed in it, my friend found bland. (143a)

That the experience of the other people differed from the respondent's played a role in her experience, yet that being so did not seem to affect her experience of beauty, that is, it did not change what she experienced beauty to be. It could be that the opinions of the other people made her even more receptive to the possibility of beauty being experienced and that their criticism inspired her to make a conscious effort not to be negative. That still does not mean, however, that the attitude and views of the people she was with affected the beauty she experienced. It is possible that her seeing the beauty of things that left others uninterested gave her experience of beauty a certain sense of exclusivity or specialness, yet the protocol provided no evidence of meanings of this kind. Hence, others being critical or the experience of beauty being characterized by a sense of uniqueness were thus not listed as eidetic-experiential meanings of this particular instance of beauty.

3.10.4. Whole-Part Analysis in Practice

In this section I will try to illuminate the interplay between articulating beauty as it was lived and identifying its experiential-eidetic meanings, the two activities that together constitute the whole-part analysis that was employed in this research project. In the actual practice of the analytical process, those two tasks almost became as one, with articulations of understandings and listings of meanings continuously being adjusted in light of new insights of one, the other, or both.

Each experiential account was asked the same question at the beginning of the whole-part analysis: What is beauty lived to be in the experience that is described in this narrative account? Or: What lived understanding of beauty speaks from this protocol? As soon as some impression of the respondent's lived sense of beauty emerged, I would try to describe that initial sense, a sense that was grounded in an implicit understanding of what meanings appeared to have played a role in its constitution. The specificity of that first understanding varied per account, with certain narratives initially giving rise to vague impressions, while others instantly led to concrete characterizations. Next I reread the narrative and tried to identify those lived meanings that appeared to have been instrumental in establishing the lived sense of beauty as I had managed to understand it. What were those implicit meanings? Does it appear that they were lived? At times the understanding of beauty that I had acquired up until that point had to be adjusted and re-articulated in light of insights gathered once I turned to the meanings and began to investigate them more directly. Sometimes re-articulation would give rise to the detection of experiential-eidetic meanings that had not been recognized until then. I would then add those meanings to the protocol's list of lived meanings. Also, in some cases meanings that before had been identified as lived and crucial to an instantiation of beauty were no longer understood as such. The revised understanding (which then thus functioned as the new foreconception) would guide the subsequent reconsideration of beauty's lived meanings. And so on.

This circular process was repeated until the lived meanings of a narrative were perceived as being profiled exhaustively and the characterization of beauty as a whole was found to be clarified to a satisfactory extent. One way to sum up this process is to perceive it as an exploratory examination of lived understandings and meanings, with meanings considered from the perspective of understanding and understanding considered from the perspective of meanings, all the while keeping track of evolving insight into both.

In comparison to, for instance, transcriptions of open interviews, which may be up to 15 to 20 pages long of single-spaced typed writing, the experiential narratives worked with in this project were short as they were all between 120 and 600 words. In that sense it was relatively easy to get an impression of beauty as lived in a holistic sense. On the other hand, because the descriptions were this short, many were rather plot-oriented, that is to say, they were mostly concerned with 'just' telling the story of the experience, simply mentioning a few key components. It was not always that easy therefore to get a sense of what beauty was experienced to be. As mentioned before, sometimes it took numerous readings to gain some understanding. I only described and listed those observations that I felt reflected the lived experience accurately.

The description of an experiential eidetic profile can be seen as a workspace in which I tried to get a handle on the lived understanding of beauty in question. As the understanding of a particular instance of lived beauty often evolved through repeated consideration of its nature, I experimented in this workspace with ways in which that sense might be best captured in words.

Insights emerging from engaging with a narrative's empirical particularities were registered, modified and deepened and the general understanding of beauty that appeared to speak from those specifics was explicated and developed. A description of the beauty that appeared to have been lived in a particular experience thus referred to aspects having to do with the distinct situation of that lived experience but it also provided a more general impression of the lived understanding beauty that seemed to have been lived in that moment.

Here is an example of a characterization of a lived understanding of beauty of a respondent who described an occasion of beauty in which he drove through the city during a warm day with the window down:

Beauty is a matter of the feel of the moment, that is, of the feelings that are being experienced and the state of mind that the respondent finds himself to be in. Everything characterizing that the situation is felt to be in-sync; it is a situation defined by harmony. The respondent has a vast understanding of where he is at in his life. He is profoundly and excitedly happy in this moment, also about his life. He is in an emotional place in which regrets do not play a role. He is at peace and he does not want the experience to end. (172a; see 4.4.4 for the protocol in its entirety)

At the end of the second phase of the analytical process, each protocol had been profiled, that is, its lived understanding of beauty had been articulated and its experiential-eidetic meanings of beauty identified.

3.10.5. Comments Regarding the Listing of Meanings

So far the analysis honored an intra-narrative focus, which means that protocols were investigated individually, without being compared to other experiential narratives. The third and fourth stages of the procedures pivoted on relating protocols to one another and this practice was facilitated by work done in the second phase of the analysis. In this section, in which I outline the way in which lived meanings of beauty were listed, I also touch upon choices made regarding the listings of experiential-eidetic meanings that were motivated by the possibility of doing comparative work.

The lived meanings of beauty identified were named using short descriptors (e.g., gratitude; sense of future; hope; calming; being in the moment) and if deemed illuminating they were accompanied by short impressions describing the nature of the experiential property in question. Most descriptors simply copied the experiential expression employed in the narrative. For example, one respondent wrote that the sunset “[t]ook away all stress and worry and took me away to a place in my mind of isolation but also of serenity/blissfulness” (198a). Lived meanings listed include: no stress—taking away stress; no worry—taking away worry; isolation; serenity; bliss.

Lived meanings of beauty were recorded singularly (e.g., happiness, diversity, and harmony), but also, when considered appropriate, as sets of multiple meanings. For instance, a phenomenal account noting that the lived experience of beauty entailed a striking combination of happiness and sadness was captured by means of the following descriptors: (1) happiness; (2) sadness; and (3) happiness

and sadness, with the latter being understood as the distinct experiential quality that holds and unites both feeling qualities.

There were other ways in which meanings were recounted as being interrelated, in addition to showing up in striking togetherness (e.g., happiness *and* sadness). Indications of meanings constellating in a particular fashion, which turned out to be mostly a matter of a causal or a chronological relation, were listed as separate lived meanings. One respondent wrote, for example: “A burst of wind surprised me and made me pay attention to everything around me” (914a). This was listed as ‘surprise initiated becoming attentive to surroundings.’ Another respondent wrote the following about her sister’s wedding: “Just seeing two people who I care about being so happy, it made me very happy as well” (262a). This was listed as ‘seeing happiness of others brings about happiness in oneself.’

Most descriptions, however, appeared to ‘just’ identify meanings that were experienced without saying much about how meanings were interrelated. That respondents found it perhaps challenging to describe an experience of beauty might have played a role here: maybe they were simply not able to put into words the ways in which beauty’s lived meanings were interrelated in their experience. On the other hand, that meanings were described as ‘sitting side by side’ might also be indicative of the way in which meanings ‘work together’ in experiences of beauty. It could be, for example, that beauty was often experienced as an accumulation of meanings that were all given as present simultaneously. Qualities were disentangled for the purpose of this study, but in the moment as it was lived meaning diversity was experienced as an experiential unity. A few narratives in

fact explicitly articulated this sense of unity, for instance: “Everything about it was beautiful, the trees, the water, the sky, the smell, the people passing me by, how fast I was going, how peaceful I felt” (366a) and: “It’s the combination of things I came to enjoy the most in my life. The weather, the Nature, the time of the year, the feeling of being on vacation, the company of a loved person” (429a). Most narratives, however, listed meanings without providing much insight into how experiential qualities were connected.

Some aspects of narratives were not listed by means of the wordings used in or derived from the descriptions, but were described instead in a slightly more general or abstract manner. Generalized descriptors are helpful when different experiential narratives are related to one another, which was central to the work being done in the consecutive third and fourth phase of the analytical process. In that sense generalizing can be seen as an anticipatory one, one that is already oriented towards the practice of considering accounts in light of one another. Moreover, it acknowledges the possibility of experiential narratives presenting a unique collage of meanings on one level, which gives it its distinct plot and ‘feel,’ while being like other narratives on a slightly more general level (cf. Giorgi, *Descriptive* 132). For example, one respondent recounted a moment of beauty experienced with his sister whom he believed had a similar experience. Instead ‘experience is lived with sister’ and ‘sister is believed to have experienced the same,’ descriptors worked with were: ‘experience is lived with a significant other (family member, partner, close friend)’ and ‘co-experiencer is believed to experience the same.’ Other descriptions talking about a beauty experience that

was meaningfully shared with, for instance, a father or a close friend were then coded by means of the same descriptors. Thus, rather than listing specific classes of others—sisters, fathers, friends—a more inclusive category was created, one that includes all kinds of others important to the respondent in a personal way. Higher-level descriptors are thus more accommodating than more specific lower ones. To formulate experiential properties so their more general meaning becomes apparent anticipates the possibility of disclosing across experiences meanings that may turn out to be characteristic for a beauty variant and possibly even for the phenomenon of beauty in general. For example, when considering narratives comparatively, it is more likely that the presence of *a* significant other, whether a family member, a partner, or a close friend, plays a role than that the other is a sister or a friend per se. Ergo, the process of meaning identification was oriented towards identifying the specifics of a particular moment of beauty, while also being attuned to the possibility of there being similarities between different lived instances of beauty. The number of lived meanings identified in experiential narratives varied from 5 to 38.

3.11. Step 3: Grouping Similar Beauty Understandings

After having explored (and repeatedly re-explored) each narrative for its lived understanding and meanings of beauty, it became apparent that different kinds of lived understandings of beauty had been reported. Careful (and repeated) consideration of all beauty characterizations revealed that it was possible to group those understandings according to four different kinds, variants that I ended up

calling objective beauty, affective-noetic beauty, nondual beauty, and situative beauty (see chapter 4). Not all narratives were equally clear as to what beauty was experienced to be. Consequently, beauty characterizations varied in clarity as well. I therefore first grouped those narratives whose beauty understandings were clear and appeared to be similar. Once those groups of clear and similar cases were available, it became possible to assign protocols whose beauty understanding had been more challenging to get a handle on to one of those groupings. Furthermore, many of the protocols whose beauty understanding I had struggled with before turned out to involve more than one of the beauty variants that the analysis had revealed. In case of the latter, the experiential narrative was grouped according to the kind that appeared to be described most insightfully.

By grouping narratives according to their lived understanding of beauty, a beginning was made with the systematic investigation of the experiential accounts in an inter-narrative fashion rather than just exploring them in an intra-narrative manner. Naturally my implicit understanding of the meaning possibilities of beauty had played a role in the analysis as performed so far—an understanding that had evolved as I examined and re-examined more and more experiential narratives. Yet up until this point experiential accounts had not yet been put side by side and investigated systematically in direct relation to one another. By grouping instances with similar beauty understandings, that opportunity was now created. In the next phase of the procedures, I explored those experiences whose lived understanding of beauty appeared to be particularly similar in a dialectical manner (see 2.14.1 – 2.14.3).

3.12.1. Step 4: Exploring Beauty Understandings Dialectically

The fourth phase of the analytical procedures entailed the investigation of protocols of each beauty-group in sets of two and considering them in a way that was inspired by Gadamerian dialectics (see 2.14.1). In the sections that follow I discuss the dialectical practice as it featured in the analysis of this project's materials. By trying to provide insight into the concrete practice of the dialectical research process, this text departs from other texts that have dialectics among their concerns: dialectical thinkers tend to reflect upon the nature of dialectics in general or share the outcome of their dialectical work, yet hardly ever do they try to provide insight into the workings of the dialectical process as it unfolds in actuality (e.g., Barthold; Van Manen⁸¹). In the sections below I first describe (some of the pragmatics of) the dialectical process as it was implemented in the current project (3.12.2). Then I briefly indicate some of specifics of the dialectical descriptions that were generated (3.12.3). Next I try to provide concrete insight into the practice of dialectics as it formed part of the analytic procedures (3.12.4 and 3.12.5). Lastly, I touch upon some of the aspects concerning the selection of experiential narratives that ended up being dialectically considered and I address how multiple dialectical descriptions were integrated into a descriptive impression of the same kind of lived beauty (3.12.6).

⁸¹ Van Manen calls his hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry “dialectical” (e.g., “By the Light” 239, 242; “Practicing” 51, 68), yet he does not demonstrate the workings of dialectics concretely.

3.12.2. Beauty Understandings and the Dialectical Practice

So far it was found that there seemed to be particular variations of ways in which beauty could be experienced. The generalities that had been tentatively identified in the second phase of the procedures were dialectically worked with in the fourth phase. The protocols whose beauty understandings were found to be similar were grouped together in this third phase of the analysis. Those experiential narratives within a particular grouping whose lived instances of beauty seemed particularly similar were paired up with the intention to explore what perspective onto beauty simultaneous consideration of both instances would reveal. By holding the beauty understandings of both experiences into contemplative awareness, horizons were given the opportunity to fuse. That fused horizon of beauty was touched into and an effort was made to articulate the insights it gave rise to. On the one hand, the vision emerging may be perceived as being familiar because it was afforded by instances whose beauty understandings were already identified in the analytical phases preceding the dialectical process. On the other hand, this perspective was fresh because two beauty understandings were perceived in light of one another and this practice had not been undertaken before. Through engaging with that fused perspective, as brought about by attentively exploring the resonance between two lived instances of beauty, I investigated whether their interaction gave rise to a way of envisioning beauty that held both instantiations into readiness. As was explained before (see 2.14.2), the dialectical effort did not simply consist of identifying the meanings that the two instances appeared to have in common or adding up meanings of the two experiences. Instead it was an

attempt to entertain a meaning category that appeared instantiated in both moments described. The attunement to a sense of the whole, as a field of meaning of some kind, was thus honored in this phase of the procedures as well. The dialectical process often led to a better understanding of the nature of individual instantiations and beauty characterizations were adjusted accordingly. I arranged multiple dialectical encounters for each beauty grouping. In doing so I worked towards empirically addressing the diversity inherent to beauty's morphological identity.

The dialectical encounters orchestrated pivoted on the fused perspective of two experiential narratives. It would have been possible in possible if dialogues had been arranged that involved more than two interlocutors, yet working with more than two texts does increase the chance of diminishing the clarity of the dialectical exchange. As will become clear in 3.12.4, to hold two horizons in awareness such that the perspective that that simultaneity affords may be contemplated, questioned, and articulated, is a rather challenging and labor-intensive activity. It would have been even more so in case of more than two perspectives had been considered. Dialectical encounters in this project involved two texts only therefore.

In order to hold both narratives in simultaneous awareness so that a fused perspective onto beauty could appear, some preparation was required. I began with re-assessing whether the beauty experiences that were set up dialectically appeared to instantiate a similar kind of beauty understanding indeed. When confirmed I re-explored each experience individually, which included revisiting

and at times modifying the beauty characterizations that were already articulated. It was important to do this work because increased familiarity led to a dialectical perspective coming into view more easily. The previous three stages of the analytical process (i.e., exclusion, part-whole analysis resulting in articulating beauty characterizations and listings of lived meanings, and creating groups of similar beauty understandings) had already paved the way for the level of familiarity necessary for this phase of the analysis. I also compared narratives selected for dialectical pairings and I determined in what ways the experiences described were similar and in what ways they were not. Although comparison was not an objective of the dialectical process as such, having a good sense of the narratives' similarities and differences of narratives made it easier for a fused perspective onto beauty to come into appearance.

Dialectical encounters revolved around two experiential narratives written by respondents. Beauty characterizations and lists of lived meanings were consulted in addition, because awareness of those 'findings' helped with remaining attuned to beauty as it was lived, that is, the topic of dialectical interest. By moving back and forth between the two narratives, a vision onto the nature beauty as it spoke through these two instances was given the opportunity to emerge. In effect three dialectical partners (and horizons) were thus involved in this arrangement: the two texts and myself as the dialectical researcher. Each text conveyed a particular perspective onto the meaning possibilities of lived beauty. I already had an implicit, situated, conditioned understanding of beauty's meaning potential. At this stage in the analytical process, after having already examined

(and repeatedly re-examined) 471 beauty protocols, my understanding of beauty had already been sensitized to the diversity of meanings that may play a role in instantiating beauty. Moreover, I had become practiced in detecting understandings of beauty as they appeared to have been lived (cf. Kasulis 50). The dialectical perspective onto beauty thus took place in my own horizon of beauty and in that sense it enabled a dialectical understanding of beauty to come into appearance. At the same time I made a conscious effort to let the fused perspective speak for itself, instead of projecting preconceived notions onto its nature (see 3.8).

The cyclical structure of dialectical processing took place in the following manner. After having become well acquainted with the particularities of the narratives, including having noted their similarities and differences, the experiences described would be perceived in light of one another with an eye on the understanding of beauty afforded by their joint perspective. Often a general and somewhat vague sense of beauty would emerge and I would try to put that vision into words. Then I would determine whether the impression of beauty as articulated appeared to do justice to the lived beauty as described in each experiential narrative. If not, the articulation would be revisited. When the description was perceived as reflecting the beauty understanding as gestured towards in the individual narratives, awareness was brought back to the dialectic perspective. I then considered whether additional aspects of beauty as projected through these narratives could be described and whether meanings that were already articulated had to be refined or elaborated upon. By oscillating attention

between the fused perspective onto beauty and the individual instantiations described in the narratives, the dialectical impression could be further developed.

The practice of intuiting the beauty understanding of interest in a dialectical fashion constitutes a different strategy for articulating beauty understandings than the one that was employed in the second step of the analytical process. Whereas in the whole-part analysis characteristics of a particular beauty understanding were identified and described, the dialectic process was oriented towards articulating features of variations of lived understandings of beauty. In the earlier phase, I wondered: “What is beauty lived to be in this experience?” whereas in the fourth phase I asked the question: “What understanding of beauty speaks from this fused perspective?” The analytical focus thus shifted from extracting the understanding of beauty as it appeared to have been instantiated in one particular experience to articulating a vision onto beauty that was projected into existence through the dialectical consideration of two lived instances of beauty. By shifting from an individual to an interactive consideration of a beauty understanding, a more expansive perspective onto beauty was given the opportunity to emerge. The second and fourth steps of the procedures were similar, however, in the sense that they both involved implementing a variation of the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, *Truth* 266): the whole-part analysis pivoted on oscillating between whole and parts of the experiential instance in order to disclose the beauty understanding that appeared to have been instantiated in the experience and the dialectical exploration consisted of moving back and forth between two lived instances of beauty and the vision onto beauty that their

resonance projected into being.

3.12.3. Dialectical Descriptions of Beauty

Beauty understandings intuited in the dialectic practice were described in a narrative fashion. As the beauty characterization had been the writing workplace for the lived beauty of a particular experiential narrative, the dialectical description was the place where I worked on articulating the understanding of beauty as it appeared to speak through the fused perspectives of the paired up protocols. In addition to engaging with experiential evidence, it is through the act of writing that the dialectical vision onto beauty is addressed, questioned and explored and is thus also given the opportunity to evolve. This practice was not oriented towards reconciling or dissolving the differences that two similar (i.e., not identical) lived instances were found to have (cf. Barthold 104), because that would mean disregarding the diversity that characterizes beauty's morphological structure. The dialectical effort was also not a matter of simply identifying those meanings that instances appeared to have in common or combining the different meanings of instances considered. Instead the aim of the dialectical effort as it formed part of the current project was to see whether beauty could be articulated in a way that *accommodated* both similarities and differences. This meant that descriptive phrases were sought that could hold both instances of beauty in readiness and house experiential-eidetic meanings of either narrative. Further, the dialectical process involves the possibility of considering whether meanings that were identified as essential in one of the two dialectical partners could in fact be

of importance to the topic of dialectical interest. Thus, meanings that featured in only one of the two experiential narratives were sometimes found to be relevant for the beauty understanding that was brought into existence through the dialectical encounter. Those meanings were therefore also gestured towards in the dialectical description of that specific encounter.

3.12.4. Illuminating the Dialectical Exploration of Beauty Narratives

Now I will show what components formed part of the dialectical practice as it was employed in the analysis of this project's materials. Rendered below are two experiential narratives, accompanied by a list of the lived meanings and a beauty characterization, a short reflection on the ways in which the narratives are similar and ways in which they are not, and the description of beauty that was generated through engaging with the two narratives in a dialectical manner.

The first experience of beauty that formed part of the dialectical exchange reads as follows:

My experience of beauty:

took place the summer right after I finished high school. That summer my best friend (and her family) invited me to their cabin on the lake. It happened in the morning. I got up and went out unto the dock by myself and sat down and put my feet in the water. It was gorgeous out. Very peaceful. The water was as smooth as glass and felt soft on my feet. Perfect temperature as well. My best friend and her sister (also a very good friend) came and sat with me

on the edge of the dock. We sat silently and watched the sun slowly make its way up the mountain (and warm us too!). This sitting with my friends, outside on the dock in the morning, was an experience of beauty.

The first open question, about why this was a moment of beauty to her, the respondent answered as follows:

I felt very peaceful and loved by those with me. Plus the natural beauty and just how perfect the outdoors was made the experience. Also, the silence, which wasn't awkward at all, felt natural and accepting. I felt in tune with the lake and those around me. All in all, it was an experience of beauty because I felt amazing, comfortable, peaceful.

She gave the following answer to the second open question, about what gives the experience its unique character:

That my best friends in the whole world, without being asked or anything at all, came down and enjoyed it with me. We just watched the lake in silence. The fact I was with others, and they experienced & appreciated it too (and with me) is what gives it its unique character. (230a)

The occasion of beauty was summed up as “watching nature with others.” A total of 24 lived meanings were identified: in terms of happening/activity/intention: being alone, in solitude; being joined by others; watching nature; being in silence with one another; enjoying together, with someone else or others; just

experiencing the view; just experiencing the view with others; appreciating with others; concerning sensations: sensory; concerning feelings/ thoughts: peace, peaceful, peacefulness, at peace; loved, feeling loved; accepting silence; natural silence; feeling in tune with the environment; feeling in tune with others; amazing, feeling amazing; comfortable; enjoying; appreciating; and concerning perceptions/observations: peaceful; natural; natural beauty; perfect; optimal weather circumstances.

The experiential narrative was given the following beauty characterization:

Crucial to beauty in this experience seemed to have been experiencing peacefulness: experiencing peaceful circumstances and feeling at peace, also with the friends who were there. The respondent felt in tune with others and the environment, an environment that she found to be beautiful. Beauty thus pertains to how the respondent felt, the connection she experienced with other people, and also what the circumstances and environment were like. All in all, beauty seems to have been a matter of the situation as a whole.

The second experiential narrative read as follows:

Summer morning. In the mountains with family. Pristine water on a lake nestled between mountains on all sides. Clear as drinking water, you see the fish swimming 30 feet deep. Not a cloud in the sky, not a worry on my mind. I had nothing to do, nothing to strive

for, nobody to impress or keep my distance from. There were no problems, no thoughts, no expectations. For that small moment, time practically froze, and there was a feeling of bliss as I was staring at the lake, it was, for lack of a better word: perfect.

The respondent gave the following answer to the first open question:

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

Basically the experience caused in me a sense of euphoria and oneness, peacefulness. It was serenity, it was beauty.

And in response to the second open question he wrote:

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

The feeling had never happened before, and has never happened to the same extent since then. Perhaps it was the unique setting, the mountains and the crystal clear water in the sun. Maybe it was the family I enjoyed it with. Personally I think it was the combination of everything. My life since has been a way to get back to that calmness, that lack of worry or care. (226a)

The occasion of beauty was summed up as “summer morning, in the mountains with one’s family, simply being there.” A total of 19 lived meanings were identified: concerning perceptions/observations: natural; unique setting; concerning feelings/thoughts: no worry—taking away worry; nothing need to be done; no need to act in a certain way; no problems; no thoughts; no expectations; time freezes—stands still; bliss, on cloud nine; peace, peaceful, peacefulness, at peace; euphoria; oneness; serenity; calm, calmness; no care; concerning

impressions of the moment/situation: perfect; and concerning happening/activity/intention: just looking at the lake; enjoying together, with someone else or others.

The following beauty understanding was articulated in the second phase of the analytical process:

Beauty here is a matter of “the combination of everything”: that time is experienced as standing still; that worry, obligations, expectations (e.g., regarding how to behave), thoughts, and self-consciousness do not play a role; that bliss, calm, and oneness characterize the way the respondent is feeling; and that the environment and circumstances are enjoyed with family members. Everything together constitutes a perfect and serene moment that is understood to be an instance of beauty.

The narratives are largely similar in that they both involve enjoyable circumstances, a feeling state that is exceptionally pleasant and peaceful, and the experience being shared with other people. They differ in what they accentuate: in the first experiential narrative (230a) being with others in silence and enjoying the sun rise with one another appears particularly pivotal. It is a calm and comfortable moment. In the second narrative (226a) the emphasis lies with stressors of any kind being absent. It is a moment of quiet, but also of intense joy.

What dialectical understanding of beauty speaks from these instances?

Dialectical consideration of both narratives led me to the following description:⁸²

Beauty is found to reside in the environment as nature is found to be beautiful. Yet beauty is also lived in another way and in that instantiation two experiential qualities seem to be of particular importance, both having to do with how one relates to oneself, to others, and to one's environment: peaceful attunement and a sense of oneness or unity.

This is a moment of beauty that embodies peace. One is in harmony, within oneself, with others, and with the world. It is a moment that flows and is without disruptions or stressors of any kind (e.g., involving others, having to do with ways in which one should be, concerning things one should be doing). One feels at peace, not plagued by inner or outer turmoil. Open to what is, one takes in the situation and the moment, deeply enjoying what is there, in a spirit of calm and elation.

⁸² Although both short, the two narratives in this example are in comparison to other experiential accounts rich in their description of a moment of beauty. Hence, a rather informative dialectical description could be articulated on the basis of these two protocols. Dialectical descriptions of other pairings generated for this project were often much shorter. Also, not every dialectical exploration leads to insights being generated and furthered, that is, some dialectical dialogues are more fruitful than others. That a dialectical consideration of two texts has not helped deepen understanding of the theme of interest in a particular dialogue does not mean that dialectical deliberation of the same texts at some other moment may not have a different outcome, even when the same dialectician does the analysis. In this project not only protocols were sorted through multiple times in order to identify dialectical pairings that seemed to have potential to further understanding of beauty and its lived meanings, dialogues arranged between texts were revisited repeatedly to make sure the potential of each pairing appeared to have been fully explored, at least for the time being.

The relationships with other people that are present are also characterized by peaceful attunement. They are believed to have the same experience, experiencing the same enjoyment. One feels at ease with those that are there, one feels in tune with them, even loved by them. When silent with one another, that is, when no verbal communication is taking place, the silence that is shared feels natural. There is no need to add commentary or to have a conversation.

The circumstances (company, weather, setting, view) are experienced as highly enjoyable, soothing, and pleasant. The peacefulness of the place is welcoming to the extent that one feels 'in place.' Self and surroundings are in tune, that is, the way one feels and the feel of the surroundings are aligned in peacefulness.

Overall, the situation is one characterized by its various aspects (including one's own state of mind, one's feelings, the connection with others present, the beauty and calm of the environment) happening together as a harmonious collective. We might wonder to what extent the fact that different facets of the situation are simultaneously enjoyed and appreciated heightens awareness of the individual presence and nature of each component.

The peaceful harmony observed in various components of the experience may not just be a matter of correspondence, but

may be understood as being suggestive of certain sense of unity. When notions such as oneness and fusion are entertained for the extent to which they seem to feature in the beauty experiences considered, it appears that the distinction commonly made between the internal and external may be read as being defied by certain aspects of the experience. For example, some variation of unity seems to take place when one is fully in the moment. Not burdened by mental turmoil, worries or obligations, not being distracted by a conversation from what is right in front, directly around, one can be in the moment, attentive to its quality and qualities. That one assumes that others are having the same experience is also suggestive of a certain oneness or, perhaps better in this context, interconnectedness. Separation does not have to be overcome, one does not have to communicate to share; by being there, one is already together. Also, that the feel of the surroundings as well as one's inner feeling are both characterized as being peaceful—thus, one is peaceful within and it is peaceful all around—is suggestive of an equivalence that may have a fused quality. The peacefulness experienced is thus not just something of the outside world or something within, but something more inclusive. It is the feel of the world experienced through me. It is the world as it takes place in me and I as I am taking place in the world. It is the feel of the situation that includes me. Both experiential equivalence between

inner and outer and that situated sense of self also seem to depart from a differentiated perception of the inner and outer.

Lastly, that beauty here pertains to a situation as a whole (i.e., it concerns the various components that constitute the distinctive character of the situation, including the feel of one's own presence) also suggests that the moment experienced is characterized by a particular oneness or unity.

Both protocols formed part of a grouping of narratives that was tentatively termed 'situative beauty' when beauty characterizations were compared. After the dialectical process, I decided that this name remained appropriate as a descriptor of the kind of beauty articulated (see 4.6.1 – 4.6.19 for an elaborate impression of situative beauty).

3.12.5. Comments Regarding the Dialectical Practice

The description presented above is one way in which these experiential narratives may be read dialectically. Another reading may result in a different dialectical impression, with other meanings standing out. As Van Manen writes:

A phenomenological description is always *one* interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description (*Researching* 31; cf. "Practicing Phenomenological Writing" 40)

That there are other readings does not mean, however, that a particular reading

(limited as it inevitably is) may not hold insights of interest and address meanings evidenced in the texts worked with (Gadamer, “Dialectic” 121).

How has the dialectical description presented above deepened the understanding of lived beauty as instantiated in the experiences individually? In other words, what meanings were obtained by considering the narratives dialectically? As explained above the dialectical approach employed in this project pivots on relating narratives and their meanings to one another in order to entertain the notion of beauty that emerges through a fused consideration of both protocols. In a very general sense then the dialectical step as it forms part of these procedures may be perceived as another analytical round in which a beauty understanding of experiential narratives is carefully considered and examined for its nature. Consequently, dialectical descriptions hold meanings that gave rise to a fused vision onto beauty and also meanings that are generated through engaging with that vision. For example, sharing silence with one another is only explicitly talked about in protocol 230a and absence of mental turmoil is only mentioned in protocol 226a. Both meanings are rendered in the dialectical description, because they helped to become aware of an important dimension of the beauty understanding explored. Through observing their resonance while simultaneously entertaining the light they shine on beauty, it became apparent that both conversation and worries might be understood as involving possible distractions from the present moment. If the meanings had been ‘simply’ compared or considered in terms of a more abstract category that captured them both, a general descriptor such as ‘silence’ or ‘quiet’ might have been deemed sufficient. Not

much additional insight as to the beauty understanding of either narrative would have been gained in that way, however. Through engaging with those meanings in a dialectical fashion, that is, by carefully entertaining their potential role in an experience that is lived as an instance of beauty, it appeared that they could be understood as having to do with being fully immersed in the moment, completely being there with what is taking place both within and around. Furthermore, being in the moment is one way in which harmonious attunement, and, perhaps even more so, oneness or unity may be experienced: when one is completely present, not distracted from what is happening right where one is, a sense of togetherness or fusion with whatever else is present may emerge. It also appeared that ‘being in the moment’ seemed to reflect lived beauty as instantiated in the experiences individually. Hence, the narratives were considered anew in order to verify whether the dialectically obtained meanings did justice to the experiences as described and whether they indeed enriched the understanding of beauty as it had been obtained so far. ‘Being in the moment’ is thus an *emergent* meaning that was obtained through dialectical consideration of meanings involving both experiential narratives, namely ‘absence of mental turmoil’ and ‘being in silence with one another.’⁸³ Again, not every meaning that forms part of a dialectical

⁸³ In “A Theory of Expressive Reading,” Kuiken describes the notion of ‘emergent features’ of metaphoric expression as follows:

apt metaphors are generative in that they are more likely to facilitate the consideration of emergent features, i.e., features of the metaphoric topic that become salient when reading the intact metaphoric expression but that are not salient when the metaphoric vehicle or metaphoric topic are separately considered. (57)

Emergent meanings obtained through the dialectical practice are similar to

description is an emergent one. Yet those emergent, freshly uncovered meanings are typical for the kinds of insights that may be obtained by working dialectically.

Another example to illustrate how entertaining meanings dialectically may deepen insight into their role in lived beauty involves the distinct situational feel of the moment. When asked to indicate why his experience was an instance of beauty, the respondent of protocol 226a wrote: “Basically the experience caused in me a sense of euphoria and oneness, peacefulness. It was serenity, it was beauty.” The respondent thus first addressed his feelings: he was euphoric and experiences a sense of oneness and peacefulness. He then shifted from the personal pronoun ‘I’ to the objective pronoun ‘it.’ Perhaps he tried to indicate that the way he felt involved serenity and beauty being experienced. Yet ‘it’ can also be read as referring to the situation or experience: the situation was experienced as an instance of serenity and an instance of beauty. When the latter possibility is further entertained, it is telling that his feelings and the feel of the situation as a whole (which supposedly include his feelings) appeared to have been similar: he felt peaceful and the situation substantiated a sense of serenity.

Protocol 230a suggests a similar correspondence. The respondent wrote: “It was gorgeous out. Very peaceful”; “I felt very peaceful and loved by those with me”; and: “All in all, it was an experience of beauty because I felt amazing,

emergent features of metaphors in the sense that they become apparent through engaging with two meanings at the same time. It is not unthinkable, however, that ‘absence of mental turmoil’ on its own could have given rise to the insight of ‘being in the moment.’ However, when considered in combination with ‘being in silence with one another,’ the meaning of ‘being in the moment’ came much more readily and potently into presence.

comfortable, peaceful.” Here the correspondence seemed to have been a matter of the respondent’s feelings and the feel of the outside circumstances: she felt “very peaceful” and it was “very peaceful” out. Peacefulness ‘within’ does not necessarily mean that there is peacefulness ‘outside’ and vice versa. There are situations in which one may feel at peace even though the circumstances are, for instance, hectic and stressful. It is also possible that one does not feel at peace, even though the environment is acknowledged as being peaceful. A dialectical consideration of both narratives suggested that the way in which one felt corresponded experientially with the situational specifics or outer circumstances. Also, the respondent of protocol 230a mentioned explicitly that she felt “in tune with the lake and those around me.” It thus appeared that attunement in this dialectical context may also be understood as referring to how one related to others.

Given the expressed similarity in content of feelings and feel of the environment, peacefulness should not be envisioned as just a matter of inner or outer but also as pertaining to an experiential moment that is other than either orientation. Peacefulness may thus be perceived as a state of being or a situational feel (including the respondent’s feelings). Moreover, if ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ are aligned to the extent that they appeared to have to been in the moments described, it is not unlikely that a sense of unity or fusion took place, a sense of there being little or no experiential separation between the experiencing individual and the world experienced. That the respondent of 226a indicated that she experienced a sense of “oneness” is not unimportant in this context. Oneness might not have

(just) referred to an experienced wholeness within oneself, but may have also been suggestive of a sensed oneness with the world. It is an explicit reference towards the experience of unity that the rest of the narrative and also protocol 230a gestured towards in more subtle ways.

To sum up, both narratives were found to point in the direction of attunement with regard to the experience of peacefulness and also, although more indirectly, a sense of unity. By exploring peacefulness, attunement and unity in relation to one another and in view of the beauty that appeared to have been experienced, each one of those meanings and the beauty understanding in which they appeared to have featured could be disclosed much more insightfully. Hence, working dialectically in this manner implies honoring the lived understanding of beauty as a whole, while considering its meanings in considerate detail.

3.12.6. Selection of Narratives and Integration of Descriptions

Due to time constraints it was not feasible to relate each narrative of a particular beauty grouping to every other narrative of that grouping in a dialectical manner. Not only are dialectical explorations and descriptions very labor-intensive undertakings, the size of the groups and the corpus would have led to very large numbers of dialectical impressions. Relating all narratives to one another in a grouping of 10 narratives, for example, would have resulted in 45 dialectical descriptions. In case of situative beauty, a group holding 95 protocols, as many as 4,465 dialectical descriptions would have had to be generated.

To keep the amount of work reasonable, I decided upon the following

strategy. Within a particular group of beauty understandings, those narratives that appeared particularly similar were grouped together. In case of situative beauty, for example, this resulted in 12 different narrative subgroups, including “moment of stillness and insight after emotional turmoil”; “uncomplicated moment of joie de vivre experienced with loved one(s); and “peaceful and empowering moment of solitude and contentment in beautiful (natural) surroundings” (see 4.6.3).

Protocols of a narrative subgroup that were comparatively rich in content and informative about the beauty understanding of interest were dialectically related to one another. No more than 4 rich cases were dialectically considered for each narrative subgroup, which meant that no more than 6 dialectical descriptions had to be generated for a particular narrative subgroup. Next the dialectical descriptions were brought together in one descriptive impression, a description that presents an overall characterization of a particular beauty understanding and also touches upon a variety of its meaning possibilities. The quotes that were incorporated in the text were selected to illustrate clearly and preferably succinctly the nature of a particular meaning possibility. Lastly, narratives of a particular beauty-grouping that were not dialectically explored were related to the integrated description to fine-tune and optimize the dialectical impression, also, if deemed appropriate, by obtaining quotations from those protocols.

3.13. Recapitulation of the Procedures

The four steps of the procedures may be summarized as follows. (1) After having excluded those protocols that did not describe a lived moment of beauty, (2) I

explicated the lived meanings and understanding of beauty of each experiential narrative by moving back and forth between parts (that is, its lived meanings) and whole (that is, its lived understanding) to gain a deeper insight into both. (3) The characterizations generated suggested that beauty might be understood as accommodating a variety of structures. I therefore created different groups of beauty characterizations, with members of each group gesturing towards a similar kind of beauty understanding. (4) Of those groupings, protocols that were particularly similar were dialectically investigated. Dialectical descriptions were integrated in order to create an impression of the beauty understanding of interest. Protocols that were not dialectically considered were consulted to enhance the descriptive impression. The next chapter presents the descriptive impressions of the four types of lived beauty that were identified in the research materials: objective beauty, affective-noetic beauty, nondual beauty, and situative beauty.

3.14. In Comparison: Giorgi's Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method and Kuiken and Miall's Numerically Aided Phenomenology

To conclude this chapter I would like to reflect upon two other methods that may be applied when analyzing phenomenological-empirical materials: Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological method and Kuiken and Miall's numerically aided phenomenology. I decided against working with either method, above all because the sense of the whole, as lived in a particular experience, is not centralized to an extent that I deemed important for the current project. Moreover,

neither method involves the dialectical work that may help deepen understanding of experiential variants. Here I outline both methods and I present a few critical observations.

Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychological method is the most well-known among methods for analyzing qualitative materials in a phenomenological fashion (Hein and Austin 8; Morley 588-89, 592). Even though a sense of the whole is not explicitly addressed until the final phase of the research process, the researcher's precomprehension of the whole already plays a crucial role in the third step Giorgi's procedures, a step that follows reading through the materials (step one) and dividing protocols in meaning units (step two). In this third phase, the phenomenological investigator is to draw out those meanings embedded in the description that are particularly revealing from a psychological point of view to subsequently describe their general nature (i.e., essential in a psychological sense rather than in a universal-philosophical way; Giorgi, *Descriptive* 131, 154; "Sketch" 17). In order to express meanings "in a more secure way," that is, with "a certain level of invariance" (*Descriptive* 131), "a process of reflection and imaginative variation" is employed ("Sketch" 17), in which "the actually given data are imagined to be different from what they are" (*Descriptive* 132; see 2.10.3 on the possibility investigating phenomena with a morphological essence by means of imaginative variation in its traditional application). This procedure, however, is "based upon the sense of the whole description" as that sense "sets the parameters within which the most invariant meaning must be ascertained" ("Phenomenological" 71; cf. *Descriptive* 145;

“Sketch” 18). Yet an inclusive understanding of the phenomenon in question is not yet articulated, because, as Giorgi notes: “This is another one of those instances were achievement—even consistent intersubjective achievement—is ahead of comprehension” (“Sketch” 17). Thus, even though the sense of the whole enables the possibility of the identification and description of relevant meanings, Giorgi indicates that it is to be left implicit. And yet a sense of the whole already appears to play a role in the two procedural steps that precede the third phase of the analysis: in the first step a holistic sense is the focus of attention when descriptions are read through in their entirety and it is one aspect of the orientation guiding the division of the text in meaning units that takes place in the second step. If a sense of the whole is crucial for the analytical process from the very beginning why not address that impression as it emerges and evolves? Why not aim for the transparency and include in one’s descriptive efforts the articulation of that lingering, implicit, and developing inclusive understanding, if only to correct them if that appears called for? Giorgi’s rationale for not articulating the phenomenon as a whole until the last phase of the analytical process becomes particularly is addressed in the following passage:

while there are presuppositions and a general precomprehension, these are not specific enough to delineate the relevant categories in an exclusionary way and thus, genuine discoveries can be made with respect to specific facts and very frequently categories as well. What differentiates the phenomenologically inspired method is the fact that a disciplined spontaneity is allowed to function

whereby one first discovers the relevant meaning unit, or its category, and only later, based upon subsequent analysis, explicates its actually full import. (“Sketch” 13-14)

Giorgi thus seems to suggest that it is by virtue of pre-understandings being unspecific, discoveries may be made with regard to the phenomenon that is being investigated. At least two comments are called for here. First, vagueness cannot be assumed. In fact, sometimes we already have a rather well developed understanding of the phenomenon that we set out to explore. In such cases especially it is important to articulate and confront that understanding. Even if there is vagueness in first instance, which is something that is hopefully overcome through repeated consideration of whole and parts, that does not mean that that understanding, however vague it may be, not already played a role when one was trying to identify the constituents of the phenomenon that is being explored.

Second, regardless of whether one’s precomprehensions are vague, it is not vagueness per se that affords that fresh insights may be obtained: in addition to the quality of the research materials, it is rather the researcher’s ability to face his preunderstandings in the practice of carefully exploring the lived understanding reflected by the experiential narrative. By using terms such as “genuine discoveries” and “disciplined spontaneity” and by proposing to postpone articulating a sense of the whole until the very last step of the analysis, Giorgi seems to imply, however, that by making the (evolving) understanding explicit, an understanding that initially may have featured only implicitly, the dynamics of discovery are sacrificed, because one may then already get hooked on an

understanding of a particular kind. Yet such rigidity should be countered when one tries to work in a phenomenological fashion, as phenomenological work should be characterized by being open-endedly receptive to whatever meanings appear to have been lived. It may be argued that by not addressing the nature of the phenomenon in a holistic sense, even though it is clearly significant throughout the analytical process, undesirable effects of lingering assumptions are more likely to be introduced than when assumptions are articulated as soon as they arise. By not acknowledging the phenomenon as a whole explicitly, the methodological transparency that Giorgi holds in such high esteem is in fact jeopardized (*Descriptive* 111).

With numerically aided phenomenology, Kuiken and Miall present a method in which cluster analytical algorithms are used to group experiential narratives that have a similar meaning profile, form experiential classes of which members (i.e., the meaning profiles of experiential narratives) have a large number of meanings in common, articulate ideal prototypes with all meanings of a certain grouping, and indicate to what extent the meaning profile of an experience corresponds to the prototypic profile. They write:

First, these algorithms provide disciplined, pair-wise assessment of the degree of similarity between the profiles of constituents associated with each narrative expression. Second, they contribute to the disciplined formation of categories of experience, categories that might not otherwise be identified. (“Numerical” par. 34)

Although systematic and insightful indeed, above all when it comes to the

assessment of similarity between profiles and between profile and prototype, three interrelated comments are in place, also with regard to how effective this method would have been if worked with in the current project. First, the analysis of numerically aided phenomenology is primarily based on determining the presence or absence of experiential properties rather than, as is the case in the study reported here, the overall sense of a lived understanding as instantiated in a particular experiential account. Because the current project is above all interested in lived understandings both phenomenally lived and phenomenologically described, it makes sense that impressions of those lived understandings drive the analysis, rather than their parts. Second, meanings that feature in less than 10% of the narratives or are found in more than 90% of the narratives are not entered for analysis (par. 32). As the authors explain:

Using this criterion to eliminate rare or ubiquitous constituents minimizes some problems that arise when these numeric methods are applied to sparse matrices, e.g., difficulties in systematically identifying the constituents that differentiate the clusters. These criteria also pragmatically constrain how exhaustive (and exhausting) the process of constituent identification will be. (par. 32)

Since I am interested in a particular kind of phenomenon, which knows a considerable variety in its experiential and eidetic ways, such restraints may preclude the possibility of describing the eidetic identity with the precision intended. To exclude meanings 'beforehand' is not desirable therefore. Also,

because in case of beauty it is possible that a large percentage of its instances contain a particular experiential property, the percentage rule may make it impossible to reach certain insights. Lastly, whether meanings of a particular protocol are considered in the analysis as envisioned by Kuiken and Miall depends on whether that meaning features in other protocols as well (albeit not too often; par. 38). Ergo, the prototypes that are eventually found may only consist of inter-narrative meanings (that did not show up too often). That the primary objective of the analysis is disclosing experiential categories, rather than profiling experiential narratives per se, might read like an explanation for working in this inter-narrative manner. On the other hand, it may also be interpreted as an argument against this methodological choice, especially when experiential narratives are examined that potentially but not necessarily instantiate the same experiential categories (as is the case in the study that Kuiken and Miall report; par. 41): it potentially removes the possibility of further and more refined differentiations.

Findings

4.1. Introduction

Four different lived understandings of beauty were identified in the empirical materials investigated for the current project. By dialectically considering lived experiences that appeared similar in their beauty understandings I tried to capture the holistic sense of beauty that appeared assumed by those individual instances and I tried to describe lived meanings that seemed to have informed those understandings of beauty. This chapter presents the descriptive impressions of those endeavors.

Even though the corpus has a considerable size—a total of 471 experiential narratives were collected and analyzed—it cannot be assumed that the findings presented here cover understandings and meanings of beauty in a definitive or exhaustive manner (cf. Van Manen, “Practicing Phenomenological Writing” 40; *Researching* 31). At the same time, it is plausible, also given the number of narratives investigated, that this chapter touches upon a number of meanings that are relevant when lived beauty is concerned. In what follows I first make a few remarks about the descriptive impressions and the experiential narratives that informed them (4.2). Next I present the experiential profiles of objective beauty (4.3.1 – 4.3.10), affective-noetic beauty (4.4.1 – 4.4.11), nondual beauty (4.5.1 – 4.5.13), and situative beauty (4.6.1. – 4.6.19).

4.2. Descriptions of Lived Understandings

The following comments may be helpful when reading the descriptions of the lived understandings of beauty presented in this chapter.

First, the experiential profiles provide impressions of beauty understandings obtained by dialectically exploring multiple pairings of experiential narratives that, in comparison to similar accounts, were relatively rich in their description of lived beauty. Narratives that were not dialectically considered, but were identified as describing the particular kind of lived beauty, were consulted to help refine the experiential profile of the kind in question (see 3.12.6).

Second, a lived instance tends to constitute only a selection of the meanings of the kind of beauty that it instantiates. ‘Happiness,’ for example, is touched upon in the impression of the lived understanding that I have called situative beauty. But that does not mean that happiness can be expected to be present in every instance of this experiential kind. In other words, happiness should not be perceived as a condition that is to be fulfilled for an experience to be a moment of situative beauty (see 2.8). Yet there are moments of situative beauty in which the presence of happiness is crucial. What happiness is like when it does show up in a moment of situative beauty, I have tried to show and articulate in the text below (see 4.6.16).

Third, because beauty has a morphological structure, lived meanings characterizing its identity may be shared among different lived understandings. In fact, it is also not unthinkable that they may also show up in other phenomena.

These kinds of possibilities stress the importance of comparative analyses, that is, investigative efforts in which different lived understandings of beauty are related to one another and instances of beauty are related to instances of other phenomena. Neither of these endeavors formed part of the objectives of the current project (see chapter 5).

Fourth, from the perspective of (the description of) an experiential variant of beauty, experiential qualities should be viewed as its *meaning possibilities*. From the perspective of instances as they are actually lived, experiential qualities are *meanings*, however, that is, they are meanings that enabled that those experiences were lived as instances of a specific kind of beauty. A text concerned with meaning possibilities should work with modal verbs, because it is then most appropriate to explicitly articulate probability and possibility. When experiential qualities are taken to be meanings, it is not necessary to write by means of ‘mays’ and ‘mights.’ Also for reasons of readability, the text below holds both declarative sentences and sentences with modal verbs to honor the fact that it is possible to understand experiential qualities as meanings, but also as meaning possibilities.

Fifth, a particular lived experience may accommodate different kinds of beauty understandings. In fact, moments of beauty that are lived nondually or situatively often imply that beauty is also lived affective-noetically. In the current project, however, the four kinds of beauty understandings were analyzed and described ‘separately.’ This has resulted in the category of affective-noetic beauty being relatively small: this group contains 54 instances, versus 103 for objective beauty, 128 for nondual beauty, and 95 for situative beauty. That experiential

narratives were kept 'separate' once they were grouped according to their particular beauty understanding does not mean, however, that beauty understandings were not related to one another at all in this project: the experiential profiles presented below include several comments about how a certain understanding appears to differ from other kinds (e.g., situative beauty is more spacious than nondual beauty). Again, it is clear that phenomenological-empirical research of beauty would benefit from the systematic analysis of different experiential profiles.

Lastly, I would like to outline the different components that form part of the descriptions of the four lived understandings of beauty presented below. Each description begins with an overall characterization of the beauty understanding in question. I then list the occasions of beauty (e.g., nature scene, artifact, interpersonal moment) that were described in the experiential accounts and I provide short phrases that give an impression of the different dialectical groupings that were created and explored. Then three protocols are rendered that exemplify the kind of beauty understanding that is being described. These experiential narratives are quoted in their entirety not with the intent to cover all meaning possibilities of the experiential variation that is being discussed, but rather to give the reader a concrete impression of the different ways in which a particular beauty understanding appeared gestured towards in words. Next meanings of the beauty variant are touched upon. These sections entail many quotations from protocols to show how those lived meanings were found to show up as meaning components of the kind of lived understanding that is being described. Meaning possibilities

are discussed one by one, although there is also some explicit cross-referencing, linking meanings to one another. Even if not explicitly addressed, it should be understood that the themes are interrelated, showing up in combination with one another in lived experience (cf. Van Manen, *Researching* 168). After discussing a number of meaning possibilities, I recapitulate the findings in a short overall impression. Although all four profiles contain the same components, there are also differences in the ways in which the beauty variants are discussed. For example, in case of nondual beauty, it was helpful to devote a separate section to experiences that all shared the same occasion of beauty, namely the experience of truth. By looking at that particular group of nondual experiences it becomes particularly apparent how in moments of nondual beauty the combination of *what* is experienced and *how* it is experienced is pivotal (see 4.5.12). Other experiential variants did not benefit as much from singling out a group of experiences pivoting on a particular occasion of beauty.

4.3.1. Objective Beauty in General

100 protocols described instances of *objective beauty*. In experiences of objective beauty, beauty is lived as exclusively belonging to the object (e.g., a nature scene, an artifact, an act of mastery).⁸⁴ That the object has ownership over beauty means that the individual does not experience herself and the experience that she is

⁸⁴ In this corpus objective beauty was mostly a matter of inanimate things, rather than, for instance, human beings. In characterizations of objective beauty I therefore refer to what is found to be beautiful as a ‘thing’ or an ‘object,’ unless other descriptors are more appropriate.

having as forming part of beauty. Instead beauty is over *there* and being *what* it is in *the way* that it is affects the experiencing individual, who perceives the beautiful thing from over *here*. I am walking through a beautiful landscape, but I am not part of the beauty that takes place all around me; I simply come to observe beauty's presence and by observing its nature I am affected by it. The experiencing individual witnesses and responds to beauty's being. In objective beauty, object and subject are thus experienced as distinctly separate. Beauty is self-sufficient. This means that the given that the beautiful thing has the power to influence is not experienced as forming part of the beauty that is experienced. The way in which the experiencing individual is affected is also experienced as being an aspect of the beauty that is lived. Being affected and the way in which one is affected are both not lived as being beautiful. Moreover, beauty is not experienced as coming into being because the individual comes to experience it. The individual's response to beauty acknowledges its presence by reacting to its nature, but that does not mean that that experience is lived as establishing beauty's presence. Instead the thing of beauty is experienced as already being (there as) an instance of beauty and the individual comes to be its onlooker. Sometimes the individual realizes in fact that the beauty she now sees had already been there for her to experience before if only she had been more attuned to (the possibility of) its presence.

What is found to be beautiful in objective beauty? It is either the thing as is or the way in which the thing shows up. The thing of beauty summons the individual to react to its presence and in that sense she has little agency. By being

there, in the presence of beauty, the individual is affected. As such beauty is experienced as the cause and origin of the impact experienced. Objective beauty is an imperative and not responding to its presence is not an option. The beautiful thing calls forth a response without demanding or depending on one. The way in which the experiencing individual responds to objective beauty may vary from noting that something is beautiful, without that observation being colored by much feeling, to being awed and overwhelmed by beauty's presence. Prototypic statements characterizing objective beauty are: "Beauty works upon me"; "Because the thing is beautiful, I am affected"; and "This is how that thing of beauty makes me feel."

4.3.2. Occasions of Objective Beauty

The 100 protocols describing an instance of objective beauty were grouped according to the following occasions of beauty: a nature scene of some kind (e.g., sunset, stars, thunderstorm, mountain scenery; 72 experiential narratives); an artifact or work of art (e.g., a painting, a car, an architectural building; 20 experiential narratives); some instance of mastery (e.g., dancing, playing the piano; 4 experiential narratives); the physical appearance of another human being (3 experiential narratives); the phenomenon of love (1 experiential narrative).

4.3.3. Dialectical Subgroups of Instances of Objective Beauty

The following dialectical subgroups were worked with:

1. The view from top of a mountain (10 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
2. A calming nature scene (20 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
3. Stars (2 protocols; 1 dialectical exploration);
4. Northern Lights (2 protocols; 1 dialectical exploration);
5. A storm (2 protocols; 1 dialectical exploration);
6. A sunset (10 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
7. Urban sunset (3 protocols; 3 dialectical explorations);
8. The landscape from a plane (5 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
9. Human physical appearance (4 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
10. The act of painting (2 protocols; 1 dialectical exploration);
11. Performance of mastery (4 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
12. A dance or figure skating performance (4 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
13. An architectural masterpiece (4 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
14. A painting or image (3 protocols; 3 dialectical explorations);
15. A car (5 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations).

80 protocols were grouped in subgroups. This led to 64 dialectical descriptions.

4.3.4. Example Protocols

The first protocol that provides an impression of the kind of experiential narrative that informed the description of objective beauty is the following:

My experience of beauty:

My experience of beauty occurred 3 years ago, as I was on the plane on my way back from a church missions trip to Mexico. Maybe it was so beautiful to me because I had just come from a week of missionary experiences that reminded me about what really counts in life, or maybe the experience was influenced by my sense of conviction of a loving God. Either way, I saw this experience of beauty as a gift from him. I was on the plane at night on my way home, and I was looking out the window. I looked up and it seemed like I would see every star in the sky. Every now and then I could make out a shooting star, sometimes I saw more than one at a time. At the same time, below the plane was a thunderstorm. The clouds were gigantic, and the lightning showed every detail of them. A little while later I looked north and saw a majestic display of the Northern Lights, and for a while it seemed like I was surrounded by the beauty of God's creation on all sides. I felt so tiny compared to the splendor of what I was seeing, and it gave me a rush to be 100% sure that I am only a small part of

something bigger than me. Most of all, though, it felt like God was putting on a show for me.

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

I was overwhelmed by how small I seemed and how big the universe seemed. It felt reassuring to know that there was something more powerful than me, and that I didn't have to worry about controlling my world, my life, or my circumstances because I couldn't if I wanted to. I was also as sure that moment as I've ever been that there is a God who knows what he's doing and who is watching out for me—a loving God, who cared enough to put on that “display” for me.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

The fact that I can vividly remember the peace and tranquility of that moment, combined with the overwhelmingly beautiful artwork that was painted out in front of me. It was one of those moments where all of life seems to make sense, and where you know [respondent's underlining] that you are not the center of the universe as you so often pretend to be. It is an experience that I believe to be uniquely human—the ability to not only think outside the box but to actually see [respondent's underlining] outside the box. My relative insignificance was so calming and reassuring, which is why this experience was beautiful. Also, it felt great to

know that I'm loved by the creator of the universe, the one who designed the beauty I was looking at. (376a)

The second protocol reads as follows:

My experience of beauty:

My most promising or most significant experience with beauty was when I went to the most beautiful place I have ever seen. I was in France one summer when my parents' friends decided to take me on a car ride. Little did I know this would be this most exotic, magical place I'd ever see. The friend I was with told me one thing: I was going to the home of the French impressionist painter Giverny. I had seen a few of his pieces and knew his main inspiration was his home. I was rather excited to see a place that had inspired someone so famous. The crazy thing about Giverny was that even the car ride there was beautiful. The roads weren't like Canadian roads; they were thin, windy and uncluttered. The scenery was enchanting, flowers sprouted from every possible place and the hills appeared as if someone had shaped them to fit so perfectly together. The road prepared for what was about to come.

We arrived at the home of Giverny. The house itself was rather small. I was not in the least bit impressed, actually I was upset I had driven so far to arrive at such a weak excuse for a home. My friends shook their heads when they noticed my

disappointment, one even laughed. They then told me to look out back. I obliged and stepped outside. I was in absolute shock. There is really no other way to describe it. In Giverny's backyard were the most glorious garden I had ever laid my eyes on. It opened with row after row after row of colour, and the colour appeared to change after time, or after row, almost as if the colour was cascading. Beyond the beds were these magnificent canopy trees. The trees hung over the beds, enclosing them in, making one feel as if they were trapped in a utopia of beauty. To my pleasant surprise, the canopy trees were not the end of the gardens. Past these incredibly overwhelming trees were a number of ponds outlining the estate. The ponds excited me the most, hidden in the back they did not scream beauty but instead emitted beauty in their serene tranquility. These ponds were the end of me, I had witnessed so much beauty to last a life time.

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

This experience of beauty was distinct because I had never felt shocked or overwhelmed by beauty before. I think this experience taught me to not take the beauty in nature for granted. Or the things I find beauty are usually hidden, like the ponds that lie like little secrets behind the canopy trees.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

I felt like a different person after I saw Giverny's gardens. (447a)

The third experiential narrative is the following:

My experience of beauty:

My experience of beauty occurred when I hiked up a mountain with my friends. It was a 3 km hike with some extreme steepness. However, when there was 0,5 km left, the land started to even out and we noticed sun shining through. Then we entered a bowl like setting. There was pristine lake and mountains surrounding it, except from the tiny valley we came through. What really struck me was the quiet grandeur the scene had. It was so majestic, but not overpowering, rather it felt alive, like a painting that was alive. The water was cool and deep blue and the air was balmy. To me this was beautiful, because of its pristine quality. The scene had no intent of being beautiful; the sun wasn't shining on the lake making it sparkle so that it was beautiful. By just growing naturally by itself it was able to achieve its beauty.

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

without even trying to be beautiful, it already was. Beauty is not something that should be forced but rather it is refined and does not impose itself on you. It is not just the majestic quality, but also that if we were to break it down and look at it individually, e.g., just the sun, water, rocks, you can still find something to be in awe about.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

I feel that the beauty I saw was one of a kind. No man can create it, it took so long to reach that level of beauty; you cannot just mimic it. Each item is irreplaceable and if lost, can never be obtained again. (29b)

4.3.5. Meaning Possibilities of Objective Beauty

Experiential qualities constituting moments of objective beauty may be divided in meanings that refer to what the thing of beauty is lived to be and what it is experienced as bringing about. There are also qualities that characterize the identity of the beautiful thing, while also referring to that which the thing brings about. Here I first touch upon a number of experiential qualities that have to do with the identity of that which is found to be beautiful (4.3.6). Then I discuss qualities that characterize the objectively beautiful both in terms of what it is and what it does (4.3.7). Next I mention a number of meanings that address the way in which beauty is experienced as working upon and affecting the experiencing individual (4.3.8). Lastly, I point to a few meanings that indicate that the experiencer is aware of the fact that beauty is impacting her in the ways that it does (4.3.9).

4.3.6. What Objective Beauty Is Experienced to Be

When lived in an objective manner, *beauty is experienced as a thing in itself*, as something that resides in a certain place or takes place at a certain location, sometimes in a particular moment of time. The experiencing individual then comes to witness its nature by being in its presence:

I remember one year in the summer on a road trip with my family to Jasper that I saw beauty. At Pyramid lake, the lake was very still and the sun was shining very bright. The mountain reflected almost perfectly in the lake. It looked as if there really were 2 of them. Then a mallard duck swam right through the reflected mountain creating a ripple. I thought that this whole scene was very beautiful. After a few moments the ripples were away and the mountain was whole again. (302a)

When beauty is a matter of the environment, the experiencer feels *surrounded by beauty*. This respondent participated in a run through the mountains in Banff and there “were moments were [she] had to stop and just gaze at the beauty around her” (297a). Experiencing a nature scene, one respondent found that “nature [towered] in all its beauty around [him]” (319a). The beauty perceived is experienced as *existing independently from the experiencing individual*. That beauty is lived as something separate also speaks from this passage in which a respondent wrote about a painting he had created: “After long hours of dedication I created a masterpiece. I felt rather proud when I witnessed that beauty” (325a). When visiting islands in the Philippines, “[the] scene that [the respondent] saw

was very beautiful.” She wrote: “I felt very happy there and quite excited to be in such a beautiful location” (191a). Instead of being involved in beauty’s presence, the individual is an *observer of its nature or a visitor of its ‘territory.’* When hiking through a winter landscape where “[l]arge gusts of wind picked up and blew snow off the steep hills comprising the valley,” this respondent “did not feel like a part of the experience only that [he] was watching it” (227a). Not feeling implicated in the beauty that is there, *its presence may be experienced as being a performance*, one that the individual is fortunate enough to experience. When witnessing a sunset in Cape Town, this respondent was “able to relax after a long day at work and enjoy a brilliant show from nature” (112a). When watching the sky at night from a plane, another individual found that “an overwhelmingly beautiful artwork ... was painted out in front of [her]” (376a). That which is perceived as a thing of beauty does not try to be beautiful: it simply is what it is and *by being what it is it is beautiful*. When entering a valley, with a “pristine lake and mountains surrounding it,” this respondent found that “[t]he scene had no intent of being beautiful, the sun wasn’t shining on the lake making it sparkle so that it was beautiful. By just growing naturally by itself it was able to achieve its beauty” (29b). The *beauty that is experienced is believed to be there for others to see as well*. When watching the performance of a very talented ice-skater, one respondent that “everyone fell silent and was mesmerized by her [that is, the ice-skater’s] beauty” (331a). When watching the stars in the Atlantic Provinces, which was as “[i]f you shone a tiny light through a tiny diamond and put it against a deep, velvety, navy blue fabric,” another individual also found that the beauty

present was for everyone to experience: “[E]veryone could look at that sky and acknowledge the beauty there, it’s universal” (404a). Or as another respondent observed: “Beauty is said to be in the eye of the beholder... but to me I felt like I couldn’t imagine anyone who would not find the Swizz Alps beautiful” (89b).

What are qualities of beauty that is experienced in an objective manner? Here I will mention the following objective qualities: the beautiful is experienced as something that is unreal; it is found to be true or authentic (also in comparison to other kinds of beauty); it concerns the superlative and exceptional (e.g., glorious, majestic, magnificent, masterful); it is perfect, just right, or ideal in some way; it concerns a striking intensity (i.e., it is *so* blue, *so* bright).

The thing of beauty may be experienced as being unreal, that is, as if it is not or cannot possibly be what it seems. As this respondent wrote about the Taj Mahal: “It was so ridiculously beautiful, it did not seem real but like an illusion” (250a). When visiting “a small village in a country that I don’t remember... I was awed and stunned that such a place could exist” (199a). Another respondent wrote about walking through a small town in Croatia: “It was like I was in a novel, this place was unreal. It was like I just entered Narnia from a fur closet” (336a) and another described looking at “the Spanish Steps in Rome ... as if [she] was staring at a painting” (22b).

Objective beauty may also be experienced as *true or pure*. This tends to mean that the thing of beauty is experienced as being purely a matter of nature, which implies that *human beings have not played a role in its creation and they have not left their marks on it in any way*. When experiencing a winter landscape,

this respondent wrote that “the swirling snow, bright sun and the surreality of standing in the vast, white expanse conveyed to [him] the true beauty of nature” (227a). Standing on top of a mountain, one respondent experienced something that was “100% natural” and that to her was an experience of “true beauty” (86b). Experiencing a mountain view, this individual wrote that “[i]t was the most beautiful thing [she had] ever seen. It was nature at its utmost beauty. Natural, fresh, untouched, breathtaking, unforgettable” (295a). Witnessing the sunset from her window, another respondent witnessed beauty that she felt was “pure, natural, real.” Also, “nobody had to invest in it to make it that way. It just is” (198a; respondent’s underlining). When slowly drifting through a tiny cove, with “[t]he trees around the edge [being] beautiful forest green spruce trees and the willows swaying their branches lazily into the cool water,” one individual found that “[t]he beauty just was,” that is, “[n]o-one had designed it or made it” (113a). What is found to be beautiful stands out as immaculate and that means that humankind has not played a role in the thing of beauty being what and as it is. Taking in the view in the Swizz Alps, this respondent wrote that what she experienced “was pure, unblemished by mankind” (51b). Looking at “a great waterfall when [he] was 13 years old” was “the first time [that another respondent] came to see nature’s beauty”: “It’s nothing man-made and no man can make that, either” (272a).

In general, a sense of origin appears important when beauty is lived in an objective fashion. Besides *nature* being acknowledged as affording the beauty that the respondent is presented with—[the sunset] “was a work of art created by mother nature which evoked an emotion of awe and calmness in me” (124a)—the

beautiful may also be perceived as being *God's work*. The sunset “made me happy and smile, and made me think of what a beautiful masterpiece God has made for the whole world to enjoy if we would just stop for a moment and take the time to look” (198a). When participating in a run through the mountains, one respondent stopped several times “to truly enjoy what God has created around us” (297a).

Meanings indicating what the thing of beauty is like include adjectives such as glorious (“I was continuously gazing up at the glorious view ahead of me” [297a]), majestic (“the natural atmosphere of the situation created a majestic scene of true beauty” [169a]), magnificent (“I could feel and appreciate the magnificence of what I was seeing” [206a]), and powerful (“The image was very powerful as the mountains stood boldly against the grey sky” [233a]). That many instances of objective beauty of the current corpus described nature and mountain scenes is not unimportant in this context. In general moments of objective beauty entailed a sense of *the superlative* quite regularly. That correlation showed up repeatedly as well in experiential narratives that described a striking diversity of colors, a presence that was often identified as crucial in establishing beauty's presence: “The sunset was beautiful because of all the bright warm colors. It just puts a smile on your face because you feel so relaxed and just so warm inside. It was on the beach, and just all the colours reflecting of the ocean was amazing” (100a). This respondent watched the sun rise from a mountain in Hawai'i:

the view was beautiful. The air was crisp and the sky was crystal-clear. As it approached sunrise, numerous colors dances across the

sky. Pink, orange, yellow, red. It was something that I had never experienced before. I watched in awe as the sun crept over the horizon and above the mountain. It was a thing of beauty. ... It was natural beauty. I felt refreshed and pure upon watching the sunrise. I had never seen such diverse colors dance in the sky like that before. (135a)

And another respondent described a sunset she experienced in Greece: “I was surrounded by beautiful colors: orangey-pink of the setting sun, the clear blue water, and the pure white of the town houses” (169a).

The experiential presence of the superlative in objective beauty also speaks from finding *a masterful performance* to be objectively beautiful: “I was awed by [the pianist’s] virtuosity (147a). The *observation that something is perfect of just right* may also be understood as yet another variation of the superlative. Watching a sunset, this respondent found that “all the colors seemed perfect and even though I might not see it like that again I’m always watching sunsets now. I love the colors, I can’t describe them. They just seem so right” (36b). Another respondent recalled a moment on a plane: “the plane was over an ocean and the sky was incredible, perfect blue. The sea matched, and together they stretched out into a slightly lighter blue haze; there was no difference between the earth and sky outside my window.” She found that:

It seemed perfect. I have flown a lot and seen quite a few amazing sights from above, but the purity of this took my breath away; I remember that. It wasn’t tainted by trees or land or any moving

thing that could cause any sort of chaos; we were too high to see the waves and there were no clouds. It was complete peace and perfection; the type of place where one could just exist, just be [respondent's underlining], without thinking or doing anything other than that existing. (288a)

The experiential exuberance characterizing objective beauty also speaks from the fact that features that are found to qualify the thing of beauty are experienced as being present in *a striking amount or with an extraordinary intensity*. A respondent who had “stumbled across a picture on the internet of a tree in a Japanese garden” found the image to be “very striking” and “very beautiful” as it was “*so colorful and vibrant*” (238a; my italics). Another respondent described the mountains as being “*so majestic, powerful, so superhuman.*” Also, she “could not believe *how* clear [the lake] was. [She] had never seen anything like it. It looked *so pure, fresh, clear*” (39b; my italics).

4.3.7. Objective Beauty Is What It Does

A number of experiential qualities typifying objective beauty characterize both the nature of the object and the nature of the response that the beautiful thing is experienced as bringing about. Many qualifiers have such a dual function. For example, by calling someone endearing, I indicate how she is affecting me (see 4.5.5 on dual meanings in nondual beauty). Yet amongst experiential qualities that have a dual function, there are those that are felt to originate from the object quite distinctly. It is from that position that they are experienced as instantiating a

certain sensation or sense, which is felt to work upon the experiencing individual. Meanings in which a sense is experienced as originating from the object are recurrent in instances of objective beauty. Most recurrent amongst such qualifiers identified in the corpus were ‘amazing,’ ‘overwhelming,’ ‘breathtaking,’ and ‘transfixing.’ To call something amazing is to indicate that the thing has the ability to amaze you and that you are in fact amazed by it. ‘Amazing’ thus says something about the object and about the experience of the object. Yet the object is distinctly recognized as the source of the experiential feel: it is the beautiful thing that ‘amazes.’ One respondent wrote about the performance of an ice-skater: “The audience fell silent when she came in on the ice and the other performers as well as I were amazed at her transformation from off to on the ice rink” (331a). Another example gesturing towards the way in which the *amazing* amazes speaks from this passage addressing what it was like to witness the sun set over Athens from a plane: “It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen in my life. The sky was a collage of pink and purple lines that I have never seen before in my life. I remember feeling so amazed” (8b).

Overwhelming works in a similar manner: the thing of beauty appears to have the capacity to overwhelm the experiencer. This respondent describes her experience of one of Paris’ landmarks:

we reached the steps of Notre Dame Cathedral—it was beautiful. As I looked up at it I craned my neck to look at every intricate stone detail—figures, columns, even the decals along the walls. The stone figures placed within the walls were lit up from behind as

well as the windows. As I stood on the walkway in front of the Cathedral I became completely overwhelmed by everything, the way the lights hit the statues, it's gigantic, and every small detail of the Cathedral was to me perfectly beautiful. (151a)

Another respondent wrote about being overwhelmed when witnessing a storm from an observatory point: "I could see the lights of the city dotting together to form a beautiful picture accented by the lightening, it was one of the most beautiful views I've ever seen." She indicated that she "felt overwhelmed, comfortable and awed" and elucidated that "[t]he feeling of being overwhelmed was very different. It is hard to explain, but generally when [she feels] overwhelmed it's because of school, exams or homework, but this sense of overwhelmedness contained no stress, and it was comforting" (451a).

Then there is the experiential meaning that has to do with the thing of beauty being *breathtaking*. When seeing the Taj Mahal, this respondent "was literally breath taken. [She] literally took in a gasp of air and was speechless" (250a). And this respondent found that "mountains capped with snow and surrounded by sparkling waters just take my breath away. Beauty surrounds us, and in the mountains it is so quiet, peaceful, calm. The beauty is overflowing and [she] just felt humbled to be in the presence of such greatness" (39b).

Objective beauty is also experienced as *transfixing*: *it captures the experiencer's attention*. A painting "captivated [the] attention [of the respondent] so abruptly" and she "was drawn to it immediately" (2b). Another respondent described looking at the ocean:

We'd gotten out of the car and for a moment I listened as the waves crashed against shore. The breeze smelled fresh and damp and my parents just took picture after picture, but the sound, smell, taste and look of the waves just held me completely still. It was quiet and loud at the same time and it was just beautiful. (307a)

Another respondent characterized an experience of a sunset as follows:

I have witnessed numerous sunsets before, but this was the first time I had actually 'seen' the process and was able to enjoy it. It was like time had frozen and I couldn't take my eyes off the sunset. It was as if I was being lured into its beauty and could not think of anything else. The colors mixing in the sky over the water, the sound and the stillness of my surroundings had captivated me. (223a)

4.3.8. What Objective Beauty Brings About

In addition to experiential meanings that characterize beauty's objective identity and ones that characterize both the thing of beauty and the response to its presence, instances of objective beauty entail lived meanings that are experienced as being brought about by the thing of beauty and that are felt as working upon the experiencing individual. Here I discuss awe, calm, and joy and also the sense that one is made aware of one's own relative insignificance.

First, *awe*. That which is found beautiful in an objective sense is found to bring about awe. When at the top of one of the mountains in the Swiss Alps, this

respondent found that “it felt as though we were in another world. Everything was so quiet and life stood still, yet there was this sense of power and strength of the mountains. I stood there quietly in awe of the beauty” (51b). Another respondent described an experience in which a young pianist played a piece of music:

As he played, that was when he was beautiful to me. His neck was arched as his fingers confidently glided across the piano. His expression too! Oh he had so much lyricism and expression in his face in a piece that isn't even pleasing to the ears (my sister played this piece too, but without the same effectiveness). By the end of his performance, I was literally shaking, not from fear or losing the competition, rather I was awed by his virtuosity and elegance.

(147a)

One respondent recalled attending a rehearsal of a group of dancers:

I was in awe. They looked so graceful, content, and happy that I couldn't keep my eyes off of them. It was amazing. The dancers were so flexible, their movement so versatile, they seemed not even human at all. All of them seemed beautiful, for a second in mid-dance and not only physically. Their movement was beautiful, their combination, spins and the lifts and the ascending and descending steps of their dance, as they ran across the dance floor and into the arms of the lean male dancers, I was overcome by the beauty of it all. (432a)

Objective beauty is also experienced as bringing about a sense of *calm of some kind*. One respondent remarked that “[t]he feeling of peace while watching the storm roll around me was indescribable” (247a). Another respondent wrote that watching the sun set from his balcony “made [him] calm, as if all [his] problems were gone” (153a).

Another feeling quality that objective beauty is experienced as eliciting is some variation of *joy*. One respondent suddenly realized that her surroundings, which are familiar to her, were truly beautiful: “Everything looked flawless, colorful, and the sight just somehow brought joy” (326a).

When living objective beauty often a combination of feelings is felt to be evoked: when attentively looking at the trees in the university area, this respondent noted that a “relaxed feeling of joy ... had been brought on” (212a). Another respondent writes that “the beauty of the surroundings ... made [her] feel relaxed, calm, and happy” (14b).

Objective beauty may also be felt to bring to light one’s own *smallness or insignificance* in the larger scheme of existence. This experiential quality was found exclusively in experiential narratives in which respondents recounted looking at the sky or experiencing mountain scenery. When looking at the stars, this respondent found that “[t]here is an insignificance to how you feel, in face of so much distance, and you are overwhelmed by the enormity and wonder and beauty of it all” (156a). When seeing “a majestic display of the Northern Lights” from a plane, another respondent felt “like [he] was surrounded by the beauty of God’s creation on all sides”: “I felt so tiny compared to the splendor of what I was

seeing and it gave me a rush to be 100% sure that I am only a small part of something bigger than me” (376a). The sense of smallness that is felt in the face of the vastness seems to discourage stress and worry:

It made me feel a little bit insignificant when I thought about this amazing mountain that I was on. I realized that this type of beauty was here long before I existed and that it was going to exist long after I was gone. It was refreshing to see that this type of beauty still existed and it felt nice to be reminded of that. It was so serene and calming and it felt as if all the troubles of my normal life didn't have to exist here on the mountains. (52b)

While standing on the top of a mountain in the Swiss Alps, this individual found that the experience of the mountain “showed how small [she] was in this world and it allowed [her] to give up the things [she] had stressed about earlier and [she is] now able to focus on making [herself] happy and not caring what others think of [her]. Feeling so small actually gave [her] a clearer outlook on life” (51b).

4.3.9. Experiencing the Experience of Objective Beauty

The last group of experiential meanings constituting experiences of objective beauty has to do with the way in which the experiencing individual experiences her own experiencing. Without being reflective, these meanings convey in what ways a respondent was aware of her own experiencing. An important experiential quality of this kind is a respondent acknowledging that she is *being impacted by beauty*: “I realized how beautiful the mountain was and how much it impacted my

feelings” (52b). Also, the experiencing individual knows that she is *responding to the beauty that is being perceived*. When walking through a town in Croatia, the respondent realized that he “responded to this remote area of paradise by just absorbing everything like a sponge. In general, I would say that that is I how respond to beauty” (336a). Lastly, an instance of objective beauty may be found to be an *extraordinary moment*, because it is experienced as being unique, for example, or it concerns something that was never experienced before. One experiential narrative described the experience of seeing a Lamborghini: “I was very tired as it was early in the morning but seeing the car was very exciting because this was the first time I saw it this close in real-life” (102a). Another respondent wrote about his camping spot in Jasper:

I had never seen a sight like it, mountains surrounded us in every direction, birds where chirping, everything was in perfect harmony. The river weaving its way around the huge mountains, the snow on mountain peaks, sound of birds chirping and the flowing river, the smell of brisk, clean air. This experience stimulated all of my senses, never will I forget the sight. (163a)

When witnessing a performance of a very talented ice-skater, this respondent wrote that “[t]he grace of her movements were unlike anything [she]’d ever seen” (331a).

4.3.10. Overall Impression of Objective Beauty

In objective beauty the thing of beauty is experienced as existing outside of the experiencing individual. It is because the individual has entered beauty's 'territory' that beauty shows up for her as well, surrounding her or playing out in front of her. Not wanting the thing to be any other way than it already is, the individual's way of relating to the thing of beauty is receptive and responsive: she is simply a witness to the beauty that is present, acknowledging its nature as it presents itself to her. The thing of beauty oozes impact, yet it has no intention to influence. By simply being what it is, it works upon the experiencing individual. Without acting as an agent, agency lies with the thing found to be beautiful. The beautiful works as an imperative upon the experiencer. That beauty calls the shots holds for its presence as well: objective beauty is self-sufficiently beautiful, which means that it is not experienced as being brought into being by being experienced. It happens to be there and the respondent finds herself to be in a place of being able to observe its happening. Others that are present are believed to have the same opportunity when it comes to seeing beauty. That objective beauty makes an impact by simply being there means that the distinction between being and doing is dissolved: by being what it is, it does what it does. That it is amazing means that it amazes. Or, to put it more elaborately, because the thing is experienced as being unreal, because it is understood as true or authentic beauty, or as striking and exceptional in some way (e.g., by having a particular quality in a striking amount or by being glorious), it is felt to amaze, overwhelm, captivate, and it has the power to leave one breathless. Further, it is experienced as inducing feelings

such as awe, calm, joy, and a state of being in which the experiencing individual comes to see her own life as small in relation to existence, nature, or the world in a comprehensive sense. The experiencing individual is very much aware that beauty is in charge of the experience that she is living: she knows beauty has its way with her. Those moments in which beauty is experienced in this manner may be found to be unusual and unique. That the experiencer receives and responds, alertly acknowledging the thing of beauty, rather than engaging with it in a more pro-active manner might correlate with the extraordinariness that is being experienced.

4.4.1. Affective-Noetic Beauty in General

In 54 experiential narratives lived beauty was described as a state of being, a beauty variation that I decided to call *affective-noetic beauty*.⁸⁵ In this experiential kind, beauty pertains to how one feels, relates to the world, or feels about oneself. In this variation beauty may also have to do with the state of mind that one is in. Beauty thus takes place in the body and mind of the experiencing individual and colors the way in which she projects herself onto who and what surrounds her. What is being experienced (e.g., a nature scene or a work of architecture) may be found to be significant in evoking the feel and state of beauty, but it is not experienced as forming part of the beauty that is lived. How one feels is

⁸⁵ Noetic refers to the mental activity of the experiencing individual. Noetic in this context should not be understood as referring to the noetic act (i.e., the act of consciousness [e.g., perception, thought, imagination] taking place in real space-time). Instead, it has to do with the fact that there is a mental, cognitive, or thinking aspect to beauty when it is experienced in an affective-noetic manner.

experienced as instantiating the presence of beauty. Or, to be in that state of mind, which is one of clarity, alertness and understanding (instead of, for instance, dullness, absent-mindedness and confusion), is to experience beauty. It could be said, therefore, that affective-noetic beauty pertains to the way in which something is experienced. This then means that affective-noetic beauty is neither primarily a matter of the thetic aspect of the noetic-noematic act (i.e., whether something is imagined, remembered, directly perceived) nor the noema of the experience (i.e., what is being experienced such as an urban situation or an interpersonal moment). Instead affective-noetic beauty characterizes the state of being in which the noematic-noetic act is experienced. Prototypic statements of affective-noetic beauty are “I am experiencing beauty when I am in this state of mind”; “Beauty is the very feeling I am having right now”; and “How I am feeling is beautiful to me.”

4.4.2. Occasions of Affective-Noetic Beauty

The following occasions were central to the instances of affective-noetic beauty that were identified: one’s own inner and/or outer beauty (19 experiential narratives); a nature situation (10 experiential narratives); an interpersonal moment (11 experiential narratives); an experience (active or passive) of an artifact of some kind (e.g., a speech, a manga cartoon, a singing performance; 5 experiential narratives); an urban situation (4 experiential narratives); an experience that involved both nature and an interpersonal moment (2 experiential narratives); an experience that involved both nature and a city situation (1

experiential narrative); an experience in which both nature and an artifact played a role and entailed an interpersonal moment (1 experiential narrative); a situation in which one has the day off (1 experiential narrative).

4.4.3. Dialectical Subgroups of Affective-Noetic Beauty

Five dialectical groupings were created, which involved a total of 20 dialectical explorations:

1. Feeling true love (2 protocols; 1 dialectical exploration);
2. Experiencing happiness or calm and reaching an understanding of some kind (3 protocols; 3 dialectical explorations);
3. Feeling very much at peace or relaxed (6 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
4. An uplifting and (cognitively) inspiring experience (3 protocols; 3 dialectical explorations);
5. Experiencing oneself as being beautiful (17 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
6. Feeling beautiful while helping others (2 protocols; 1 dialectical exploration).

4.4.4. Example Protocols

I selected three narrative accounts to give the reader an impression of the kind of experiences that were identified as instances of affective-noetic beauty. The first protocol reads as follows:

My experience of beauty:

I work part time at a car dealership. Often times I drive around the city to do errands. One day I stumbled upon a street with overhanging trees and beautiful houses. It was a warm day so I had the windows cranked down and my arm hanging out the side of the car. To describe the exact feelings would be nearly impossible; however, I do recall feeling at peace with myself, and understanding of every situation that was going on in my life. The warmth and nice breeze were extremely pleasant and everything just seemed in-sync; I felt I had no reason to be sad in a world so beautiful, in a place so ideal. Part of me wishes that the street would have continued on forever. I often try to experience the same feeling of overwhelmed understanding but I have yet to find an experience of that much harmony and warmth.

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

this is the most refreshing moment of my life. I felt the most overcome with excitement and happiness I have ever felt. I am usually happy but that moment was on a whole other level. I believe the reason I found it so beautiful was the state I was in, being so fond of everything. Maybe that is what beauty is: something that makes you happy.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

The reason this instant stands out from the rest is the fact that it was so internal and no external force alone made me so happy. The beauty I saw was the internal state of being unbelievably comfortable with everything that I was doing; I had no regrets left in my life from that point and feeling so glad, and seeing so much beauty gave me my meaning of life; the continuous journey to find beauty and happiness where there was none (to me) before. And reflecting current situations to that moment and being more sure of everything. (172a)

The second narrative is the following:

My experience of beauty:

It was a late afternoon summer's day in the mountains. I have been going to Christina Lake every summer since I was born, but this experience happened only a few years ago when I was 17. It was very hot outside, and there was no wind blowing like there usually is to cool you down. It felt like being in an oven if you stood still to contemplate it. Anyways, I was sitting in the back of the extremely old motor boat we use to pull tubes, wake-boarders, water-skiers around, etc., and I was 'spotting' (watching the person being pulled to see if they fell, wanted to go faster, slower, etc.) my cousin Scott. I was wet from having been swimming, but not cold, and as we drove across, back and forth, the beauty crept up and overwhelmed me. The water was like glass—no ripples, no waves.

Green-black glass. The mountains rose up all around, brown and dark; protective. The wind from the boat whipped around my hair, and the sun gilded everything; my skin, the boat, the skier, the tree-tops, the rocks, the crystal-droplets of foam being sprayed in the air. It was peaceful; it was golden, and I loved everyone and everything. I felt like I was the sun itself—glowing and about to explode from the beauty of it all. Like I couldn't contain the beauty—it had to pour out of my skin.

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

Of the perfection of a golden afternoon. Even though I'm sure there were imperfections, they all had their place and made it even more meaningful. I had a full belly, no homework, no worries or woes, and I had a crush on my cousin Scott, and watching him perform tricks and stuff was lovely. The glowing feeling of being the sun, that made it unique. And the stillness of the water... like I said, there's usually always a wind and so little waves and currents and ripples normally.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

I've only felt 'it' a few times after, but this was the first incidence of feeling the beauty so strongly it makes your stomach hurt, and you want to either shout out loud, or burst into tears. Instead I think I just smiled, very broadly, for a long time. Haha, how does it continue to influence my life? Well, now that I know that the

feeling is out there I probably continue to look for it. It only happens rarely. (354a)

And this is the third experiential narrative:

My experience of beauty:

My experience of beauty occurred just a couple [of] nights ago. It was a Wednesday night and I had just left a library on campus and I was walking home. I first stopped at a place I worked and talked to friends and then ran into another friend and then started walking by myself down Whyte Avenue. It was about 9 o'clock at night and FREEZING, but I found myself overwhelmed by a feeling of appreciation for the beauty of all things around me. I had just left campus, which is full of beautiful and old buildings, I talked to some friends who I really care for, and then I was on Whyte Ave with all the trees lit up and all the shops decorated for Christmas. I felt almost giddy inside and just overwhelmed with happiness. I also felt a sense of clarity. It's so easy to get stressed and wound up over school, but when you take a step back and appreciate everything going on around you, you realize how special this time is, how these years will be missed in the future, and truly how beautiful life can be—when you let yourself see it. I guess the biggest feeling I had during this experience was appreciation. I felt everything around me; couples holding hands, the crispness of the air, the lights in the trees, the warmth of the red and green colours

of the Holiday decorations. As I progressed down the street I recalled memories that I have of experiences on Whyte. Going for coffee at Starbucks, dinner at Chiantis or Valentines with my boyfriend, dancing at Lucky 13, eating drunken pizza at Checkers... all memories that I will hold near and dear as they fade further into my past. I felt a sense of how fast time is moving, and how necessary it is to stop and appreciate the beauty of the point of my life I'm at. I will miss it when it's over and my life has moved to a new point.

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

of the way I felt on the inside, and how I felt everything around me. I was overwhelmed by my senses, and felt pure happiness. It was distinct to me, probably because it was very recent, but also because of my clarity of thought at the time. It just changed my perspective from being nose-deep in abode. To seeing the world in a big-picture view. What this experience has taught me about beauty is that it's about the feelings evoked.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

is probably the simplicity of what I found beautiful. I walk down Whyte Avenue several times a week, often rushing and in a hurry, and frustrated by slow walkers. But, late in the evening on a cold night, with the street virtually empty, and me having all the time in

the world, I was able to see my walk home in a new way. My feelings were different. (395a)

4.4.5. Meaning Possibilities of Affective-Noetic Beauty

Dialectical consideration of protocols featuring instances of affective-noetic beauty led to the disclosure of the following meaning dimensions of this kind of beauty experience: lived awareness of one's own experiencing (4.4.6); inner feelings, that is, the feelings that one feels within oneself in the moment of beauty (4.4.7); centrifugal feelings, that is, how one relates to the world, others, and also how one relates to oneself (4.4.8); feelings that have to do with feeling beautiful oneself (4.4.9); and noetic qualities, that is, the more cognitive aspects of this type of beauty experience (4.4.10). In the following sections I give examples of each of these groupings.

4.4.6. Lived Awareness of Experiencing

That beauty is lived in an affective-noetic manner is implicitly understood as the experience is unfolding. When watching the sunset from a cruise ship, this respondent found that “[i]t gave [him] a feeling which [he] instinctively defined as beauty” (203a). A young woman described the following experience:

One experience of beauty which stands out to me is standing by the ocean alone and feeling the wind rush in from it and looking out and seeing only a few birds out there. It wasn't particularly sunny, it was sort of a grey bleak day but there was something about

having the wind blow in my face and having no humans around that made me feel like I was part of nature and belonged and couldn't possibly be judged. I felt sort of uplifted and strong and like I was motivated and somehow radiating energy. I was just thinking to myself about nothing in particular when it happened and then my thoughts went away and after that I just felt renewed and fresh and powerful.

She further elucidated that “the ocean itself or anything about my surroundings weren't really important, just the feeling I got” (914a). While driving through the city during a warm day with the window down, this respondent found that his experience:

was so internal and no external force alone made me so happy. The beauty I saw was the internal state of being unbelievably comfortable with everything that I was doing. I had no regrets left in my life from that point and feeling so glad and seeing so much beauty gave me my meaning of life: the continuous journey to find beauty and happiness. (172a)

And this respondent describing a “golden afternoon” identifies herself as the place where beauty took place: “It was peaceful; it was golden, and I loved everyone and everything. I felt like I was the sun itself—glowing and about to explode from the beauty of it all. Like I couldn't contain the beauty—it had to pour out of my skin” (354a).

The feeling of beauty does not just take place within the bodymind space of the experiencing individual but it may also be experienced as a felt attunement towards one's environment. When walking home one evening through an urban area, this respondent indicated that she experienced beauty because "of the way [she] felt on the inside" and also "how [she] felt everything around [her]": "I felt everything around me; couples holding hands, the crispness of the air, the lights in the trees, the warmth of the red and green colours of the Holiday decorations." She also "was overwhelmed by [her] senses" (395a). Such a striking sensory presence is another meaning possibility of affective-noetic beauty. When walking through nature, this respondent found that:

Everything seemed so clear so vivid as if it wasn't real. After about 2 km this feeling was at the climax. The landscape was absolutely breathtaking. The smell, sounds, and sights were clear it almost felt as if I had been wearing dirty glasses all my life and just took them off. (419a)

Whether it is the sense of *beauty showing up as a feeling*, as *a kind of attunement to one's surroundings*, or as *a sensory experience*, when living beauty in an affective-noetic way one tends to be *aware of one's own experiencing*, that is, one is very present to one's own experiencing. After having shared a moment of beauty in which the respondent perceived a winter landscape—"[e]verything was white, the surrounding environment was quiet"—he indicated that this was an

experience of beauty for him because “[b]eauty for [him] is something that makes [him] think about NOTHING but what [he is] experiencing [himself]” (464a).⁸⁶

4.4.7. Inner Feelings

A second category of experiential qualities characterizing affective-noetic beauty concerns lived meanings that have to do with how the individual experiences herself during a moment of beauty. In a lived experience of affective-noetic beauty those affective qualities are thus understood as typifying the beauty that is lived. For example, being this happy means that beauty is experienced. These affective qualities are intrinsic in the sense of having to do with the state of being of the individual’s bodymind. From that place they may affect the way in which the experiencing individual relates outwardly, to someone or something. In the experiential narratives considered for this project, these ‘intrinsic’ affective qualities appeared to be mostly a matter of *being at peace, experiencing real love, and feeling (great) happiness*. In addition it appeared that *feelings were experienced as being present in a strong, intense, or deep manner*: it was “heavily emotional” (453a) and “[t]his version of beauty is.... an emotional thing that

⁸⁶ Although this is a generalizing and reflective statement—as the respondent reflects upon his experience of beauty and presents a statement about beauty in general—it does directly touch upon the nature of the experience that is being described. It is reflective of pre-reflective experience and is therefore of interest to this study. Statements of this kind were more often used in descriptions of instances of the affective-noetic beauty variant than in descriptions of other beauty types. That respondents resorted to generalizing statements when describing affective-noetic beauty might have to do with the fact that it can be challenging to put feelings into words. To then address (aspects of) their experience in a generalizing manner may be a (subconscious) strategy to try to get a handle on the nature of the experience.

touches deep into one's heart" (394a). Also, *the true quality of those feelings is being lived*: "[I]t was the first time I'd truly felt love" (359a) and "I ... felt pure happiness" (395a).

An affective quality that often showed up in a moment of affective-noetic beauty was "the beauty of peace" (246a). When looking at the mountains in India, this respondent's "mind [was cleared] of thought and filled with peace" and he experienced "a wave of serenity" (192a). Another respondent "had just gotten off a night train from Paris and had arrived in Florence. ... It was probably just after 7 in the morning and the sun was just coming up over the city. ... This was when it happened":

I had this overwhelming sense of calm. It felt very peaceful. It was like nothing else existed for a moment but me and the city—specifically, me and the river. Reality left me—I had no problems or fears or life → life in the sense of the physical world. It was kind of how I imagined the first moments of death would feel like. It was a release from the real world. (436a)

Another respondent "was in Bermuda visiting [his] sister." After "an early morning run," he "climbed down the point into the water, about waist high, and kneeled down" and he watched the sun rise:

Everything was very calm, and I suddenly felt the most overwhelming sense of peacefulness. I am not at all a religious person—I have never been to church—but I realized that moment the meaning of God. I guess this is difficult to explain in a non-

religious context, but I felt absolute peace for a brief moment in time, and it was the most beautiful thing in the world. (25b)

Another inner feeling of beauty is love. In affective-noetic moments experiencing love is experiencing beauty. Two protocols addressed the moment in which the respondents experienced a moment of deep love for their partners. One respondent recalled a moment when she laid in her boyfriend's arms and that "was the first time [she]'d truly felt love" (359a). The other respondent described looking at her boyfriend from across the room:

It's not that he looked amazing or was really dressed up, he was just sitting there in a t-shirt, he looked so pure and it's like a wave hit me of all the things I loved about him at that moment. The reason it was so beautiful was because it touched something inside that made me realize how lucky I am to have him in my life.

Beauty is a feeling, not a materialistic thing. Something is beautiful when it is pure and you can feel it.

She elaborated: "[B]eauty is love, when you are able to see something clearly for all that it is" and the moment "gave me a feeling of warmth and comfort. A feeling I will never forget. It was complete internal beauty" (122a). Another respondent recalled the moment her grandmother passed away: "The love and support that was in the room ... was amazing and beautiful." She wrote that the beauty "couldn't be touched, seen, or heard—it had to be felt from within. In a moment of complete grief and sadness it was truly amazing to find hope and love in that situation" (409a).

The third affective category of feelings concerns the experience of (great) happiness. When on a ski-trip, this respondent experienced beauty because he “felt so happy and alive” (339a). When driving through the city, another respondent experienced “the most refreshing moment of my life. I felt the most overcome with excitement and happiness I have ever felt. I am usually happy but that moment was on a whole other level” (172a). When walking home from university through a busy shopping street, a third respondent recounted that she “felt almost giddy inside and just overwhelmed with happiness” (395a).

4.4.8. Centrifugal Feelings

Another group of meaning possibilities of beauty lived affective-noetically has to do with the way in which the experiencing individual is directed towards and relates to other human beings, the world, a situation, a thing. Whereas the feelings mentioned in the previous section take place in the individual’s bodymind, characterizing the sense of the feeling self, the feelings touched upon in this section are directed outwards. For example, when skydiving, this respondent finds that “[b]eauty is appreciation,” because as he is experiencing the view, he thinks of his friends and family and he finds that the *appreciation* he feels for both the view and his loved ones are crucial to the experience being one of beauty (201a). Another way in which an individual may relate to the world in a moment of affective-noetic beauty is through a sense of *belonging and connectedness*. When standing by the ocean, this respondent found that she “[felt] like she was part of nature and belonged (914a). Describing an experience of beauty when witnessing

the sun rise, the respondent recalled experiencing “a sense of belonging and connectedness with the rest of the world” (25b). That sense of wanting to belong may also have a future orientation. When driving through San Francisco at night, one respondent felt “like [she] wanted to be a part of it [i.e., the city]” (411a). That *felt sense of what may be and what may be done* constitutes in fact a sub-category of centrifugal meanings of affective-noetic beauty. One variation thereof is concerned with human beings in general. This respondent wrote the following:

The best experience of beauty I can think of was listening to the New Frontier speech by J.F.K. Not the first time I had heard it but rather hearing as the [X] of a time spent studying the internal strife of cold war politics. It moved me to see how energy, enthusiasm and hope could cause a nation to rise above an era of blind hatred and petty intolerance and look to a new era. That the hardships to come could be embraced as an opportunity for improvement and times of uncertainty could be a rallying point to bringing people together. This was a moving experience of beauty because it not only made me feel I could do anything but that my fellow people could as well. It was a totally irrational, but nevertheless a beautiful feeling of hope that overcame feelings of cynicism.

He further wrote that that moment “gave [him] faith in those around him” and “[i]t revitalized [his] faith in man’s ability to create new and better places. This has had a lasting impact on [his] life as reflection on this moment reminds [him] that despite our limitations, there is so much we can accomplish” (323a). A sense

of prospect may also be directed to the self. When standing on top of a mountain, one respondent recalled that she “felt uplifted and that [her] problems which seemed so big no longer seemed un-accomplishable. [She] felt a burning desire to scream in joy.” She found it to be “an uplifting experience. This beauty helped [her] see that life is doable” (412a). During an experience in which she “[stood] by the ocean alone,” another respondent found that:

The feeling of being rejuvenated and refreshed was what stood out to me the most. It gave me self-confidence and a feeling that I had power over my own life. The feeling of having enormous potential was what made me feel beautiful because it made me feel better about myself and confident.

She elaborated that:

The feeling of self-empowerment was what gave my experience of beauty its unique character. The feeling that I am capable of doing so many things and being somebody I respect and consider beautiful is what stayed with me because it was very inspiring for me. (914a)

In the next section the experience of ‘feeling beautiful’ is further exemplified.

4.4.9. Feeling Beautiful

An important subgroup of affective-noetic instances had to do with respondents feeling beautiful themselves. Feeling beautiful is first of all a matter of *feeling really good*. When dancing on stage, this respondent feels beautiful as it is then

that she “feel[s] at [her] best” (268a). Being in love, another respondent wrote “was not objective or physical beauty, rather a beautiful feeling”: “It made me feel so wonderful” (342a). It is not just feeling good that characterizes feeling beautiful, it is also *feeling good about oneself, more in particularly feeling self-confident*. This respondent wrote that when she feels beautiful:

I have that much confidence and positive energy around/within me that I don't need to dress up for anybody. I'm content with myself and I think if I have this good feeling/self-esteem about myself, I can have less worries about having to impress anybody. It feels good to be content/happy with yourself. That is what I think an experience of beauty. (424a)

In this instance self-confidence was experienced as independent of someone or something. Other variations of confidence in which an individual experienced herself as being beautiful appeared intimately intertwined with the way in which others were felt to relate her: “being around people who like you for you makes me feel beautiful” (906a). Feeling beautiful may also be a matter of feeling acknowledged and seen by someone else: “Throughout that evening I continued to feel beautiful when being with my friends and receiving attention back and from my boyfriend. He made me feel beautiful just by giving attention to me” (361a). One may also feel beautiful, because of the work one does. When working in a nursing home:

The elderly took notice of my kindness and inner beauty and that really made me feel beautiful. They always complimented me and made me feel accepted and good about myself. (352a)

Another respondent described a similar experience when helping patients at a hospital: “I really felt beautiful because I could help them do things they couldn’t do themselves” (372a).

4.4.10. Noetic Qualities

Lastly, I would like to mention a few lived meanings of affective-noetic beauty that are characterized by a kind of understanding that is more cognitive than affective in nature. These qualities involve *a sense of clarity of mind or thought*, *insight into one’s own life*, and *insight into existence in general*. One respondent found “the feeling of overwhelmed understanding” to be crucial to his experience of beauty: “To describe the exact feelings would be nearly impossible; however, I do recall feeling at peace with myself, and understanding of every situation that was going on in my life” (172a). When walking down a shopping street at night, this respondent experienced:

a sense of clarity. It’s so easy to get stressed and wound up over school, but when you take a step back and appreciate everything going on around you, you realize how special this time is, how these years will be missed in the future, and truly how beautiful life can be—when you let yourself see it.

She further elaborated that the experience was distinct to her, because of “[her] clarity of thought at the time. It just changed [her] perspective from being nose-deep in abode. To seeing the world in a big-picture view” (395a). Another respondent came in touch with the kind of beauty he called “peace of mind” while reading a manga about a tragic love story. He described the beauty he lived as follows: “[B]eauty is this peace at heart, where all my emotions are calm yet vibrant and flowing. It’s great being able to move on in life with this clarity in the mind” (394a). Existential insight forming part of affective-noetic beauty does not necessarily just concern one’s own life, but may also have to do with the world and life in general. This respondent wrote:

I felt, for a moment, overwhelmed with the complexity of the human experience. It was beautiful because it was unique, and very internal. It wasn’t the beauty of the Notre Dame, that had such an impact, it was the beauty of the feeling that felt complete. In the moment I felt like I had an understanding of the world. That human existence is simply about creating something, anything. (422a)

4.4.11. Overall Impression of Affective-Noetic Beauty

In instances of affective-noetic beauty, beauty takes place in the experiencing individual’s own bodymind space and as such it may be understood as a state of being. The experiencing individual is aware of the fact that the beauty that is lived is very much a matter of the feelings that she is experiencing and the state of mind that she is in. Affective-noetic beauty include meanings that have to do with the

way the experiencer feels within, with what she experiences sensorily, with the way in which she relates to her surroundings and with what she comes to realize. Feelings are deeply felt and are experienced in a manner that is felt to be pure. Inner feelings and self-directed feelings are positive (e.g., peace, happiness, love, and feeling good and self-confident, respectively) and centrifugal feelings are constructive (e.g., appreciation, hope, empowerment). One is clear-minded and one may have a vast understanding of one's life or life in general.

4.5.1. Nondual Beauty in General

128 narrative accounts were found to gesture towards an experience in which beauty was lived in a nondual manner, which means that beauty was experienced as having to do with both *what is experienced* and *the way in which it was experienced*. To put it differently, when beauty is lived nondually, beauty is experienced as involving both objective and subjective factors. In such moments, the individual finds the experience of a certain intended object beautiful, which may but does not necessarily include that the intended object itself is also found to be beautiful. If the object is found to be beautiful, be it a nature scene, an insight, or another person's happiness, it is implied that the individual's experience of that object plays a role in beauty being present. The experiencing individual thus participates in beauty's givenness in a moment of nondual beauty. Nondual beauty differs from affective-noetic beauty, because beauty is not experienced as exclusively or above all a matter of one's own feeling state or state of mind; instead the object is acknowledged as being pivotal in constituting beauty's

presence. In being concerned with a certain object, nondual beauty is also different from situative beauty: instances of nondual beauty may be understood as more ‘focused’ than moments of situative beauty as instances of the latter entail all facets of a situation, whereas the former constitute a more concentrated encounter (see 4.6.1).

When in nondual beauty the object is found to be beautiful, that sense of beauty may have to do with *what the thing is* (e.g., an instance of truth, selflessness, the combination of a bright blue sky and a deep green hill) or *the way in which the thing shows up* (e.g., as colorful, as perfect, as nurturing). That same pair of what and how characterizes an instance of nondual beauty in general, but then it is never a matter of either/or: when beauty is experienced nondually beauty is always a matter of both the thing (i.e., the ‘what’ or ‘its way’) and the way in which the thing is experienced (i.e., the ‘how’). Thus whereas in moments of objective beauty that which is found to be beautiful is experienced as working upon the experiencer and response and beauty are felt to be two different things, nondual beauty is more nearly like a joint effort of the nature of one’s own experience and the nature of the object. Thus rather than belonging primarily to subject (as in affective-noetic beauty) or to the object (as in objective beauty), beauty lived nondually involves both at the same time. In its nondual manifestation beauty is simultaneously noun and adverb. One finds and ‘finds’ beauty when beauty is experienced nondually. In fact, there is no difference between what is experienced and how it is experienced: what is experienced implies what it is like to experience the thing and vice versa. For example, beauty

might be experienced when witnessing the love between two people one really cares about. Living that moment, witnessing two loved ones, may include experiencing a sense of tenderness. The moment of nondual beauty then includes what is seen and the way in which that which is observed is experienced. Experientially the difference between what and how is irrelevant in moments of nondual beauty therefore: thing and experience of the thing are caught up in one another. Separating the two is merely a strategy to try to gain insight into the nature of their unity and entanglement. Furthermore, in descriptions of moments of nondual beauty the notions ‘beauty’ are ‘beautiful’ often feature in a nondual manner. Calling something beautiful is then meant to indicate how it is experienced. It implies that one is moved, appreciative, inspired, etc.⁸⁷ When clarifications such as the latter are not rendered explicitly, it can be unclear what is meant when thing or experience thereof are called ‘beautiful.’ Hence, it may also be challenging to determine to what extent ‘beautiful’ is meant to refer to the ‘subjective dimension’ of the experience (i.e., the feelings, sensations) or to the ‘object side’ (i.e., the nature and properties of the thing intended). Prototypical statements characterizing instances of nondual beauty are: “It is beautiful to experience X,” “She is such a beautiful person,” “Beauty is what I sense and what I see.”

⁸⁷ Is it possible to find something to be beautiful, but not to experience a shift in feelings? It should be noted that even if something beautiful were to be observed in a state of indifference that mood or stance is already characterized by a certain kind of felt sense. Is it possible however to perceive beauty indifferently?

4.5.2. Occasions of Nondual Beauty

The following kinds of objects or occasions of beauty were identified in the 128 protocols describing a nondual beauty moment: nature scene (42 experiential narratives); animals (2 experiential narratives); a situation in which nature and culture are combined (5 experiential narratives); an urban situation (1 experiential narrative); an artifact (e.g., car, music; 5 experiential narratives); beauty of human appearance (10 experiential narratives); inner beauty, that is, who someone is (20 experiential narratives); a combination of someone's inner and outer beauty (6 experiential narratives); a moral act (e.g., telling the truth, helping someone; 6 experiential narratives); a personal accomplishment (3 experiential narratives); a meaning or insight (5 experiential narratives); and experiencing other people's feelings (e.g., happiness, love; 23 experiential narratives).

4.5.3. Dialectical Subgroups of Nondual Beauty

The following dialectical groupings led to a total of 65 dialectical pairings:

1. A calming ocean view (4 experiential narratives; 6 dialectical explorations);
2. A peaceful nature situation (5 experiential narratives; 6 dialectical explorations);
3. The mountains (3 experiential narratives; 3 dialectical explorations);
4. Natural beauty as formal beauty (2 experiential narratives; 1 dialectical exploration);

5. Standing on top of the mountain (6 experiential narratives: 6 dialectical explorations);
6. A waterfall (2 experiential narratives; 1 dialectical exploration);
7. A view onto a rural landscape (2 experiential narratives; 1 dialectical exploration);
8. The Butchart Gardens (2 experiential narratives; 1 dialectical exploration);
9. Listening to music (2 experiential narratives; 1 dialectical exploration);
10. The beauty of someone's body or face (8 experiential narratives; 6 dialectical explorations);
11. Someone else's selflessness (2 experiential narratives; 1 dialectical exploration);
12. Innocence (3 experiential narratives; 3 dialectical explorations);
13. Insight into who someone is (5 experiential narratives; 6 dialectical explorations);
14. An intimate moment in which one becomes aware of the inner and outer beauty of one's significant other (3 experiential narratives; 3 dialectical explorations);
15. A personal accomplishment (3 experiential narratives; 3 dialectical explorations);

16. Existential insight (3 experiential narratives; 3 dialectical explorations);
17. Young parents and their newborn (3 experiential narratives; 3 dialectical explorations);
18. Someone else being emotional (3 experiential narratives; 3 dialectical explorations);
19. Other people's great happiness (4 experiential narratives; 6 dialectical explorations);
20. The love between people (2 experiential narratives; 1 dialectical exploration).

4.5.4. Example Protocols

I have selected three protocols to provide an impression of the kind of experiential narratives that were understood as gesturing towards beauty lived in a nondual manner. The first experiential narrative reads as follows:

My experience of beauty:

On a sunny afternoon, I was sitting down outside with my friends. I look up high at the sky, and it was striking. I used to think I knew what the sky looked like until that very moment. It was incredibly beautiful. Its color was unique, so light, vibrant, alive. I have never seen that blue anywhere else. It was the perfect colour, not too light, not too dark. It wasn't too warm or cool. It was just right. It seemed like I was the only one to see the magnificent beauty of the

sky of that afternoon. I said: “Look man, it’s so nice” and one of my friends was like: “It’s just the sky.” But it wasn’t just the sky. The sight of it warmed me up. It was natural beauty, it was genuine, light, it felt like it was transcending my whole body and was making me feel revived, serene. I felt like touching it, it looked so smooth, warm. On that afternoon, I really wished I could touch the sky!

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

It was unique, in that I see the sky everyday, but only that day was I able to recognize its beauty. It is distinct because it seems like I was the only one who was seeing the sky as extremely appealing. This experience has taught me that beauty is something that comes from inside of us. We have to be open-minded in order to see beauty.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

It wasn’t only appealing to the sight but to all my other senses. And every time I think about the moment, it takes me back to some of the feelings I was experiencing at the moment. It was unique because it wasn’t the first time I was looking at the sky, but it was the first time I was realizing how beautiful it can get, so it was shocking and surprising, and inspiring. (267a)

This is the second protocol:

My experience of beauty:

I think for most people when you ask them about experiencing beauty, they think about scenery and what not. Personally right now, the most beautiful thing I ever experienced was actually sitting down at a mall. I sat and I watched people go by, people laughing, couples holding hands, business people, teenagers, and I observed what they were doing. And I think at that point I realized how beautiful it feels to be alive and to see so much life around me. My heart was full of wonder and joy, I guess, because I realized how every person I looked at also had a life to live and how everyone was so unique. And I think not only did I find the people and the event around me beautiful but I also cherished the life that we have. I can't totally describe how it felt when I experienced this 'beautiful' event because the emotions I felt lacked words really. But I guess you could say that I was overwhelmed with wonder at just how beautiful life is and how everyone that I pass by everyday had a story to tell about their life. That is what I consider beauty as well, the story their lives tell.

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

It made me feel feelings and emotions that I've never felt before. It stirred my heart to be amazed and be bewildered at what I was seeing but in a good way. I kind compare it to seeing a beautiful girl. There's someone I love at the moment and every time I see her, my heart is so filled with emotion because of how beautiful I

think she looks everyday. And I think for me, beauty has a lot to do with evoking emotions in our heart that cause us to just really love something, either the event or someone.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

Like I just said, I think my experience of beauty is unique because whatever I find beautiful, I also love a lot. Just like how my experience with seeing so many people at the mall made me love life, so too does whenever I see my girl make me love her more. And now that I think about it, yah, every event that I've ever found beautiful has made me think of love. And I guess one of the unique characteristics in my mind that beauty has is that I associate love with beauty a lot. (405a)

The third protocol describing an instance of nondual beauty is the following:

My experience of beauty:

I was listening to a friend singing a piece of sacred music by Monteverdi. There is a section near the end, which involves a lot of ornamentation—which is semi-improvised embellishments on the written melody. The tempo is also less strict and my friend X was taking time to sing with expression and with real emotional commitment to the musical phrases as well as the ornamentation. At one cadence near the end of the piece, during a longer musical phrase that was drawn out in order to fully express adoration or praise, I was overcome unexpectedly by a welling up of tears. It

was as though this particular cadence or chord, along with X singing had opened or softened some part of me and I closed my eyes to cherish the sense of beauty that had overtaken me. This sense was followed by a sharpening of presence, as though I was determined to open more of my self and give more attention to the music. I was also quite immediately filled with gratitude. After the intensity of the initial momentary wave of beauty, however, I wasn't able to feel as emotionally connected or to summon up the same unexpected welling of tears.

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

I could not recreate it myself it was unexpected and momentary. I was made more present and aware of my senses and surroundings, as well as more grateful for my life. I experienced emotional intimacy with some thing in the world and became vulnerable; there was something unmediated by my rational/cerebral processes.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

Lots of what I have said already, maybe mostly 2 things, one being the experience of vulnerability I had. Beauty seemed to be about an emotional immediacy in relation to the world or the 'stimulus.' This is the case because I often feel further, a little bit (or a lot) insulated from the world, not moved or inspired or connected as much as I did in that moment. Secondly, I think this experience

will continue to offer me personal knowledge about what I care about most deeply, or what is important to me. That's another way it is unique, as I don't walk with clarity about what is most important to me. (430a)

4.5.5. Meaning Possibilities of Nondual Beauty

Below I first discuss variations of meanings of beauty when lived in a nondual manner (4.5.6 – 4.5.8). Next I address the fact that especially when beauty appears to have been lived nondually, it may be difficult to articulate its meanings (5.5.9 – 5.5.10). Lastly, I discuss two kinds of nondual beauty experiences that turned out to be particularly recurrent in the group of narrative accounts investigated for this study (5.5.11 and 5.5.12).

4.5.6. Nondual Expressions

In instances of nondual beauty, beauty is lived as having to do with both the thing that is being experienced and the way in which that thing is experienced.

Expressions forming part of narrative accounts that describe instances of nondual beauty reflect that joint presence. Recalling looking out from the Greek island of Santorini onto the ocean, this respondent wrote that “[t]here is such beauty and such emotion encompassed all in this one scene of the ocean view” (420a), suggesting that beauty as it was lived appeared to have been a matter of what was perceived and the feelings that were experienced when she was taking in the view.

Another respondent recalls an instance of beauty when she was “walking down the street in Calgary.” She described her experience of beauty as follows:

a perfect moment in body and mind, transcending the physical. It is the joy to be alive, to be, to live, to be part of this beautiful world. It’s an experience full of love and full of hope. It’s a brief moment of peace; carefree and safe. It’s a feeling of being true, complete, when body and mind aren’t conflicting and nature and the rest of the world seem to embrace you. (77b)

When hiking in Whistler up Blackcomb Mountain, this respondent and her dad “came out over an outlook and all you could see were the blue sky, trees and clouds forever on into the ocean.” She wrote:

The beauty that overcame me made me feel a lot happier and more at ease, taking troubles away. The clean blue sky and sun shone down on me, as I realized how beautiful this experience is. (79b)

4.5.7. Subjective or Objective Meanings

In addition to meanings that suggest that beauty holds both the ‘what’ and the ‘how,’ there are also lived meanings in which the subjective and objective are manifested in slightly more distinctive ways. Below I mention four categories of meanings, all of which were identified in instances of nondual beauty: meanings that have to do with the feelings that the individual is experiencing and the state of mind that she is; meanings that characterize the way in which the individual appears to relate to the object intended; meanings that indicate what is found to be

beautiful; and meanings that refer to the way in which the thing of beauty is found to present itself to the experiencing individual. The second and fourth type of meaning may be understood as particularly nondual. Nondual moments of beauty tend to feature at least one of these two types.

Meanings that were identified in instances of nondual beauty and that appeared to be *subjective in a rather straightforward way* (that is, they pertain to the personal feeling state and state of mind of the experiencing individual) include: feeling at ease, peaceful, relaxed; experiencing body and mind as together; feeling alive, grateful, spiritual, inspired; being focused, concentrated; being happy, joyful, excited; having a good feeling, having a warm feeling; being emotional, feeling intense emotions; feeling emotionally opened up; having no sense of time.

Then there are *qualities that characterize the manner in which the experiencing individual finds herself relating to the intended object*; for example, a sense of presence—“This sense was followed by a sharpening of presence, as though I was determined to open more of my self and give more attention to the music” (430a)—being in-tune with the thing intended, and experiencing a sense of intimacy in relation to the thing (i.e., feeling close to it) or exclusivity: “I felt so close to the stars that I felt like they only existed for me” (384a).

‘Objects’ found to be beautiful include someone being loving, enthralled, happy; someone’s innocence or purity; how colourful or symmetrical something is; or the contrast, balance, or harmony that is found to characterize something.

Lastly, there are lived *meanings that refer to the way in which one experiences the (beautiful) thing as being presented to oneself*. It is in principle possible, for example, that seeing that something is green is an observation that is neutral in nature, without it being accompanied by a distinct experiential presence of pleasure or displeasure, good or bad. But there are also lived meanings that are inherently suggestive of a subjective sense of an objective presence. In these meanings a ‘how’ forms part of the ‘what’ in a distinctly expressive manner. Examples include: perfect; unique (e.g., “being able to classify this experience as perfect makes it stand out. It was obviously unique in that way” [385a]); elegant; magnificent; surreal (e.g., “It almost seemed surreal. I felt as if I was in a snow globe & the rest of the world was blocked. Just our car, the lights and the snowflakes” [435a]); serene (e.g., atmosphere in the Butchart Gardens was “so serene” [370a]); *so* clear, colorful, fresh, smooth; tranquil, still, calm (“the calmness of nature was something that contributed to the beauty of nature and of this moment” [5b]).

4.5.8. The Experience is Beautiful

Among instances of beauty that are experienced in a nondual manner, there are moments in which the experience itself is found to be beautiful. Experiencing beauty equals experiencing a certain thing, at that particular time, in that particular manner. Listening to a Pink Floyd album meant for this respondent that beauty was experienced:

My most important experience of beauty is when I first sat down and listened to the music of Pink Floyd. At this time, I had only heard of them once or twice, through friends and maybe sometime in the media. I put the vinyl LP of *Dark Side of the Moon* and played it in my father's sound room (he is an audiophile). Initially, their music had failed to catch my attention, but I listened on. To become more relaxed, I laid on the couch, closed my eyes. My thoughts were fully concentrated on the music. As the music went on, it was as if I was hypnotized. I felt the highs and lows of the mood of the music; my emotions were connected to it. I could imagine flying or swimming in an abyss. It was also a physical experience as I had turned the volume quite loud. I felt relaxed, happy, sad, on the brink of tears, inspired, all through the playing of the album. I was not on any recreational or prescribed drugs, but it felt as if their music had taken my mind on a journey with them. I would picture (my eyes still closed) the guitar solo as a point of light (think laser pointer) dancing up and down, with the corresponding pitches of the notes played.

The respondent might not have found the album beautiful per se, but the experience of listening to the album was lived as an instance of beauty. Listening to that album was beautiful and that meant having an emotional, relaxing, imaginative and transportative experience. He elaborated:

It is beautiful because it was able to strike such a vast range of emotions with me in such a short amount of time (i.e. the album length). To me, it was one of the perfections of any musical piece I ever listened to. The music was so unique, and it was able to give me an escape from my life. I could close my eyes and let the guitar solos carry me away. (363a)

Another respondent indicated that she experienced beauty when she was able to move the audience with her self-created choreographies. She wrote: “[I]t was me creating beauty through my movements and evoking emotions in people. ... It is a unique feeling that is very powerful which is why I dance, it is like creating a piece of moving art.” (12b). Another respondent recalled visiting the Butchart Gardens: “The simplicity of nature and yet its abundance was overwhelming.” She found that “[t]he trees, luscious flowers and fountains created an almost heavenly atmosphere and was beautiful to experience. ... [A]lthough I have photographs, the beauty of actually being there can’t be explained or seen, through them” (370a).

4.5.9. Unspecified and Specified Subjective Beauty

Calling something beautiful, whether it refers to the object ‘as such’ or to the experience of that object, may imply that one is affected by experiencing that which is found to be beautiful. Descriptions of nondual beauty do not always specify, however, in *what way* one is affected. See the following experience, for example:

My experience of beauty occurred when I was traveling in Europe this summer. I was heading to the well known and well dreamt about Eifel tower. As I approached it, I could see the gorgeous parks below, all the tourists with looks of amazement, I was speechless. I remember trying to figure out how I was going to get a picture that could grasp what I was seeing. I then proceeded up the elevator to the top. My fear and sweaty palms at first disappeared as I realized what I was looking out at... all of Paris. It was beautiful. (11b)

That the respondent calls the view on Paris beautiful suggests that the sight affected her. The protocol does not provide information, however, as to in what way exactly she was impacted. The same happens in the following description, in which the respondent wrote about his arrival in Ucelet, Vancouver Island:

We arrived when the sun was already going down over the horizon. And I guess it was the combination of the moist, fresh air (it rained a few hours before), the temporal forest, that was of a deep green color and the sound and the view and the ocean that had the combined effect on us. It was one of the most beautiful places I had ever been to and one of the most powerful and beautiful experiences of my life. (429a)

Most respondents did specify, however, what their sense of beauty entailed. This young woman described walking along the Italian coastline, “a beautiful place,” for seven hours:

We'd walk up and down—closer to the ocean and then up and further away—the only sound I remember is the water hitting the rocks. I remember being completely in the moment when I'd stop and take it all in. That means almost feeling completely alone in the experience despite having been there with other people. It was hot, and we were exhausted but it was amazing.

She elaborated that “[i]t was beauty to [her] because it was awe inspiring, [she] felt so lucky to be able to see such gorgeous landscape. ... [B]eauty makes [her] feel at peace ... [and] it made [her] question [her] disbelief in a god or a higher being of creation.” (244a). Here the landscape is called beautiful yet the manner in which she experiences the landscape—as absorbed in the moment, as experiencing awe, feeling fortunate and at peace, contemplating the possibility of the existence of a higher power of some kind—appears crucial to beauty being experienced as well. Another description of nondual beauty that specified in what way beauty was lived concerns an experience in which the respondent “hiked to the very top of a mountain to a clearing very early in the morning”: “The view of absolute stillness and calm as the sun rose was the most beautiful thing. ... “[I]t made me feel alive. It was peaceful and there were no distractions. It made me grateful. I felt at ease, I wasn't worrying or sad or angry, just alive” (375a).

4.5.10. Unspecified and Specified Objective Beauty

Although narrative accounts all indicate what object is central in an experience of nondual beauty (e.g., the ocean, one's mother, someone's selflessness), how to

understand that beauty specifically is not always elaborated upon. An example of a protocol in which something is called beautiful without further specification is the following:

I remember sitting on a fallen tree, and looking into a glowing orange aspen tree stand, and it looked like it was on fire, and there was this beautiful gray and black wolf standing there looking at me, before it trotted off into the woods again and vanished. The experience was beautiful and felt so wild and frightening, but staying against my instincts to run away paid off. (225a)

By calling the wolf beautiful, it is characterized in some way, but how to understand that beauty in terms of the wolf's features is left unaddressed.

An example of a narrative account that is explicit about how to understand the beauty that was perceived is the following:

My experience of beauty in the recent past would be the first time that I experience Lake Louise at Banff National Park. ... From the glacier on top of the touching mountains flows down ocean streams that feeds into Lake Louise, which reflected the sun, the sky, as well as the towering peaks. The atmosphere was free from the noise of the cities, and everything was in harmony with one another and at peace, the way nature was intended to be. ... The beauty was crafted by nature, which was a perfect balance of the aggressive lines of the mountains and the fluid tides of the lake. ... It is the balance between the staggering height of the mountain and

the serene surface of the lake. The balance of the stillness of the snow-capped peaks and the motion of the streams, as well as the balance of the colour, from the white glaciers, to the blue water of the lake, to the shadow of the forests. (85b)

For this respondent the contrasting combination of sharp and soft, of overwhelming and inviting, of stillness and movement, of colors and shadows seemed to have been pivotal to the beauty he experienced.

4.5.11. Witnessing Beauty

An important subgrouping of nondual beauty experiences involves witnessing someone else having a particular kind of experience (e.g., love, beauty).

Witnessing another individual living a particular situation constitutes a moment of beauty for the experiencing individual. The experience that is observed is lived as strikingly expressive: something is found to take place in a very overt manner.

This expressivity allows the object intended to become very apparent to the experiencing individual, giving her the opportunity to clearly understand the nature of her experience. Reported situations in which others' being or doing led to the respondent experiencing a moment of nondual beauty included observing *acts of moral behavior*, *people's innocence*, *individuals acting in a caring manner*, *someone expressing her feelings*, and *a person experiencing beauty*. I will now give examples of each of these instances.

Seeing someone performing an act of kindness or generosity may lead to beauty being experienced:

When I was in high school, in China, I walked across a bridge after school to home. There was a beggar who was sitting and singing in order to ask money from others. His son was with him, and he said he was hungry but his father had no response to him. Then a girl about my age at that time stop [stopped] by them and left some food and water, and she was gone. That was an experience of beauty. (73b)

After having helped completing a school in Nicaragua, another respondent experienced a moment of beauty when he saw “the expressions on the children’s faces The innocence and passion struck me as being completely pure” (90b). This respondent experienced beauty when observing her brother holding his new born son: “He’s a very quiet, reserved guy normally, but around X he was soothing, nurturing, proud and loving. It made me feel proud of my brother to see him react to fatherhood in this way” (101a). A kind of situation that was reported numerous times involved witnessing someone else experiencing strong feelings. The experiencing individual then observes how much an individual cares about another person or about something, witnesses someone’s love for someone or something, or sees another person’s happiness. One respondent wrote about her high school graduation: “The moment I saw my teacher shed tears was the moment I found her beautiful. The whole situation was beautiful because it was a moment where everybody was moved. The feeling was very, very intense” (60b). Another respondent wrote about a moment in which he “played guitar with some friends” on a parking lot: “By chance I played the right song and sang the right

notes.” He then saw his friend crying: “[T]hat she was able to let herself feel my music and let it mean so much to her that it might bring her to tears in front of our friends in a less than surreal parking lot was truly beautiful.” He elaborates: “This is an experience of beauty to me, I think because in a world where the general expectations of society are set in stone, she was able to let her emotions be her world” (108a).

Experiencing someone else’s happiness may also lead to an experience of beauty that involves the individual also being or becoming happy. This respondent recalled an experience of “seeing [her] new born cousin for the first time”:

I saw her when she was only 4 weeks old, she was absolutely gorgeous in every way. The experience was beautiful in that it was aunt and uncle’s first child, and they were so enthralled with the child. Every time she moved or made a noise, the first time parents would examine her with wonder and pride. It made me feel so happy and excited for them. It’s hard to describe the beauty felt and observed there. It was just amazing to me that this tiny little baby could make you feel such big and powerful emotions. Their little family was just so perfect, and it was so beautiful to see them just like this. (80b)

Another respondent described what it was like for her to be at the airport:

My experience of beauty would have to be this one time that I was picking up my dad from the airport. My dad was one of the last

people off the plane so I had lots of time to see everyone else come off the plane. It was so beautiful to see the reunion of the family members or such. To see a girl run up and kiss her boyfriend or parents so happy to see their son or daughter return or a child running up to their grandpa. It was really beautiful to see and I really felt love throughout the room. Seeing all those smiles was what I would call beauty. (34b)

Lastly, witnessing someone else experience beauty may also be experienced as being beautiful. One respondent recalled an experience she had during a trip to Greece. She travelled in a group and at some point they had climbed a hill: “From the top we had the most amazing view of the ocean I’ve ever seen”:

Instead of paying attention to the tour guide, I watched my friend still on a rock and just gaze at the beautiful view—the concept of her just sitting there and taking in all of the beauty, was beautiful because she was so immersed in absorbing every last bit of it. ...

She found that “watching how entranced [her] friend was by the natural beauty around us made her even more amazed by it ... all of the energy went towards the present” (6b).

4.5.12. Nondual Truth

Another important subgroup of nondual instances of beauty consists of experiences in which the individual discovers a truth of some kind, a truth that is intimately caught up with what is being experienced in the moment of beauty. The

content of the insight (i.e., what the insight reveals about something) and the experience of the insight (i.e., what it is like to engage with the insight that is obtained) both inform the experience of beauty. Three themes stood out in the nondual experiences of truth reported in this study: existence and finitude, love, and who someone is.

When driving through a wildlife reserve in East Africa, this respondent witnessed a leopard giving birth to two cubs, an experience that gave rise *thoughts of life and belonging*. He wrote:

The birth process itself was not appealing to me but the first few moments right afterwards were very moving seeing the mother to round up her cubs and give them their first cleaning of their lives. It was beautiful to see that the cubs were born into a place where they belonged and ultimately were needed to maintain the circle of life. ... The experience of this natural birth in the most natural of settings was a thing of great beauty for me. ... Beauty to me seems truth one way or another. (128a)

Another respondent described a contemplative moment while “sitting down at a mall” (see 4.5.2). Looking at people passing by, observing their behavior, he “realized how beautiful it feels to be alive and to see so much life around him. ... [And he] realized how every person [he] looked at also had a life to live and how everyone was so unique.” He found the people he saw, life in general, the fact “how everyone that [he] passes by everyday had a story to tell about their life” and the experience he lived all to be beautiful. Although he indicated he found it

difficult to describe how he felt as the experience was unfolding, he does mention that “[his] heart was full of wonder and joy” (405a).

For one respondent love and finitude went hand in hand in his experience of beauty. He wrote that he was not “so sure if [he] found the moment beautiful because it exposed my mom’s love for [him] and [their] family or because [he] realized life has an expiry date and that to take people for granted is foolish. Either way, it made [him] sad and happy at the same time”:

One night, the power went out and my mom and I sat by the fire playing cards. ... Suddenly, everything felt so frail and helpless against time. I looked at my mom’s black hair and saw it turn grey. I saw wrinkles form at her eyes that were not manifested by a smile. I saw her hands become shaky. I saw my mum age. I realized 5,10, 20 years down the road, everything might be different. It was at this moment, though, that I realized just how much I loved my family. Someday, my mom won’t be able to take care of me like she does now, but that lesson only highlighted how beautiful of a person my mom is. She just wants to save the world day by day, starting with her children, and that raw, unwavering love is the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. (179a)

A few experiential narratives describing a nondual experience of truth gestured towards *the experience of love, both being in love and being loved*. On the second day of a trip together with his girlfriend, a young man experienced a moment of beauty: “It was on this morning that I truly understood how much I cared for her

emotional beauty, and how she treated me, and how I loved her” (265a). Another respondent described the following experience:

I was lying on his chest and when I looked up at him this was my experience of beauty. ... The emotions that were running through me were just so intense, and it occurred to me that I loved him. That one moment; that one glance at him smiling just made my heart melt. With him I just felt so safe, I loved him.

She elaborated: “At that moment, it was like an epiphany for me. There was no other experience in my life where I had cherished and cared for someone like that before” (463a).

The last theme standing out in nondual experiences of beauty in which some truth was experienced concerns *the authentic being of another person*, that is, the individual *truly sees the other*, sometimes in a situation in which that person’s being is exemplified somehow. One respondent wrote about her mother:

She wakes up every morning, goes to work with self-confidence and style, she is funny and sweet, she comes home and he always me and my brother’s best intentions in mind. She has strength of the mind to deal with hard situations. That day I saw all of that flooding out of her. She had strength, confidence, a sense of humor, she caring and bubbly, she’s not afraid to be sensitive or vulnerable. She was, and still is, the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. (162a)

Another respondent recalled a similar moment, a moment in which she “began to see [her] mother in a different light.” She realized she “had never taken that step back before and viewed [her] mother as more than just a caregiver.” Up until that point, “[she] was looking but [she] wasn’t really seeing.” Now she saw her mother’s “beautiful soul” (264a). An instance in which certain kind of behavior instigated a moment of insight was when, this respondent saw her boyfriend being very caring and loving to his baby niece: “It changed [her] perspective on [her] boyfriend and allowed [her] to see him in a whole new light.” To see him “truly and sincerely care... felt really good” (132a).

4.5.13. Overall Impression of Nondual Beauty

Nondual beauty is not that easy to get a handle on, also because descriptive impressions may initially seem vague in their characterizations of beauty. Once one realizes, however, that beauty in those instances is understood as involving both that which is experienced and the way in which it is experienced—a combined presence that is sometimes also implied by calling the experience beautiful—instances of nondual are not nearly as inaccessible. In general one could say that when beauty is experienced nondually, beauty is experienced as being present in both the perceiving and the perceived.

4.6.1. Situative Beauty in General

A total of 95 protocols were found to feature the kind of lived understanding of beauty that I decided to call *situative beauty*. The experiential narratives that

informed the descriptive impression of situative beauty and its various meaning possibilities as presented below all gestured towards a lived sense of beauty in which beauty was experienced as having to do with the situation as a whole. Although situative beauty may include something that is found to be objectively beautiful, beauty in these instances is not something that is primarily or exclusively a matter of something that exists out there, over there, as in a thing owning beauty, which the individual then comes to perceive. Even if an instance of situative beauty includes a beautiful thing, it is not that thing alone that the experiencing individual is concerned with. The perspective that typifies situative beauty may therefore be understood as more spacious than the gaze that characterizes objective beauty as well as the orientation that is typical for nondual beauty. Situative beauty is more spacious, because it not only includes that which is found to be beautiful and what it is like to have this experience, but it also involves all else that gives the situation its distinctive identity, whether it concerns biking with one's great grandmother in the rain while singing songs (355a), lying in bed at night in Florence, listening to the voice of an opera singer and experiencing utter happiness (200a), or teaching a young boy how to read (360a). In each of those instances, the locus of beauty is the experience in its entirety, which means that for the experiencing individual beauty is a matter of what is perceived and sensed, what is happening, how one feels, what one comes to realize, who one is with, what that togetherness feels like, what one's state of mind is, where one is at in one's life, what activity one is engaged with, and whatever else determines the identity of the situation. Beauty is the happening of

all those components together. Prototypical statements characterizing situative beauty include “Everything about this moment is beautiful!” and “This is a beautiful moment.”

4.6.2. Occasions of Situative Beauty

The following occasions of beauty were identified in experiences that featured situative beauty: a nature scene (20 experiential narratives); a landscape (i.e., combination of nature and culture [e.g., houses, roads]; 1 experiential narrative); work of art or an artifact of some kind (2 experiential narratives); a physical activity (3 experiential narratives); an artifact (1 experiential narrative); a interpersonal moment (i.e., a situation that involves a significant other, a few close friends, or one’s family; 5 experiential narratives); group situation (i.e., the experience involves a large group of individuals who the respondent does not all know personally; 6 experiential narratives); hallucinatory moment (2 experiential narratives); a nature scene and physical activity (4 experiential narratives); a nature scene and group-situation (1 experiential narrative); a nature scene and an interpersonal moment (31 experiential narratives); nature scene and a work of art or an artifact (3 experiential narratives); a combination of a nature scene, a physical activity and an interpersonal moment (2 experiential narratives); a nature scene and a group situation (4 experiential narratives); a landscape and an interpersonal moment (1 experiential narrative); artifact and physical activity (1 experiential narrative); physical activity and a group situation (1 experiential narrative); an interpersonal moment and a group situation (1 experiential

narrative); and an interpersonal moment including an insight of some kind (6 experiential narratives).

4.6.4. Dialectical Subgroups of Situative Beauty

The following summarizing statements reflect the content of the different subgroups of protocols that described an instance of situative beauty and whose dialectical explorations were central to the descriptive impression:

1. An emotional experience shared with a group of others to whom one feels connected (10 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
2. A moment of stillness and insight after emotional turmoil (7 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
3. A moment in which beautiful surroundings are enjoyed with significant others to whom one feels close and with whom one feels safe and relaxed (20 protocols; 6 dialectical explorations);
4. A perfect, carefree moment while playing with young children (2 protocols; 1 dialectical exploration);
5. A happy moment in which one feels very fortunate about having the experience that one is having (2 protocols; 1 dialectical exploration);

6. A very peaceful and sensory experience in which one walks through nature on one's own (3 protocols; 3 dialectical exploration);
7. An uncomplicated moment of joie de vivre experienced with loved one(s) (5 protocols; 6 dialectical encounters);
8. A peaceful and empowering moment of solitude and contentment in beautiful (natural) surroundings (10 protocols; 6 dialectical encounters);
9. A moment during which the music listened to meshes perfectly with both the activity the experiencing individual engages in (e.g., walking, driving in a car, skiing) and the visual surroundings (3 protocols; 3 dialectical encounters);
10. A hallucinatory experience in which one feels peacefully fused with all else (2 protocols; 1 dialectical encounter);
11. An exceptional moment while playing sports (2 protocols; 1 dialectical encounter);
12. A happy moment while skiing in the mountains (3 protocols; 3 dialectical encounters).

These subgroupings held 69 experiential narratives in total. 43 dialectical explorations were orchestrated following the different groupings.

4.6.4. Example Protocols

Here are three complete experiential narratives to give the reader an impression of the kinds of experiences that have informed the articulation of situative beauty.

The first protocol reads as follows:

My experience of beauty:

My most memorable experience of beauty is probably at my cabin. It is not dramatic or anything, but I think it is rather beautiful. My cabin is my favorite place to be for this reason I suppose. So, my experience was as follows. It was dusk, the sun was setting on the horizon it pinks and oranges, the lake was perfectly calm, and I had just been swimming and wakeboarding, so I was already feeling quite content. It utterly peaceful, for once there was no loud people around to distract, and all there was were the loons and fish jumping. I was perfectly content, sitting at my dock with my feet in the water, on a completely serene lake. And as an introvert, I really enjoy being alone, so it was a really beautiful moment for me. Not worrying about school or other people; just serenity. I felt open, like the world and I were almost together. There was no motion or time, it just was. (respondent's underlining)

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

For me an experience of beauty is when I can feel content, and look at the world through rose colored glasses. When I don't have worries and can just enjoy.. This is what I experienced when I was

at my lake. Just being able to be content and enjoy the beauty I was surrounded by.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

In my normal life I am very busy. I rarely have time to stop and just enjoy. There is always something I need to be worrying about, or something I need to do, or that is distracting me from simply enjoying. Therefore when I get a moment of total contentedness, it is very unique. (275a)

This is the second protocol:

My experience of beauty:

Back home my favorite place in the whole city is a particular stretch by the river. It is in the middle of the city but when I'm there it feels like I'm outside the city, alone, peaceful, safe, and happy. I would go down to the park and skateboard up one side of the river with the traffic, then cross a bridge and come back on a side weaving in and out of trees and grass. The sun is always shining and I coast so smoothly along on my skateboard. On this side of the river the noise of the cars are gone and you feel like you're the only person in the world. Of course you're not, but all the people you pass look happy too. This place is a beautiful spot in a large city where you can feel free from suburbia and just come back to nature.

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

Because it was perfect. Everything about it was beautiful, the trees, the water, the sky, the smell, the people passing me by, how fast I was going, how peaceful I felt. This taught me that beauty is a feeling not a ‘look.’

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

The feeling quality I was left with continues to influence my life because I can always think of the fond memories of my favorite beautiful place. I’ve learned that beauty is different things to different people. Not everyone walking by the river is going to have such strong feelings. It helps me respect other peoples opinions more. (366a)

And this is the third protocol:

My experience of beauty:

One of my experiences of beauty was when my family including aunts and uncles spend time together (kind of like a reunion) in a farm or our house. It was very relaxing and in a sense, motivating to do more ‘fun-even-though-hard’ stuff. It was very comfortable and I felt very secure to [have] experienced that. It was like kind of staying at home or in a place without doing anything (but I was doing something), without exerting much pressure and just going with the flow. It was like time was frozen because every moment was enjoyable and though I encountered some awkward moments during that moment of beauty, it wasn’t a big deal. The

peacefulness of the aura and the surrounding helps in improving my outlook/mood in that moment, making me feel better and satisfied.

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

It made me feel better and comfortable with being me. No pressure or expectations to fulfill and worry about and they accepted me for who I am and what I do. This experience made me experience stability, happiness and acceptance, because sometimes we are not really satisfied with who we are.

This is what gives my experience its unique character:

My experience of beauty still continues to influence my life. I can still remember the numerous times when that happened. The feeling was very relaxing and beyond happiness. It was like there was more in life. Now, I still think those times were precious and it strengthens my bond with my family. It gave me a different perspective of relationships between relatives and other people.

(42b)

4.6.5. Meaning Possibilities of Situative Beauty

The meaning possibilities that were found to characterize the instances of situative beauty that were examined in this study are not necessarily exclusive to beauty experienced in a situative manner. Yet what is distinctive about those meanings is that they showed up in that specific situative context, that is, they formed part of

an experiential presence of beauty that involves all and everything in a very inclusive manner. Below experiential variations of inclusiveness are discussed first (4.6.6 – 4.6.12). Analysis of the empirical materials also suggested that moments of situative beauty tend to concern experiences in which an individual experiences herself as particularly alert, very much here, now, attuned to what is taking place (4.6.13 – 4.6.14). In addition, the affective state of a moment of situative beauty tend to include a sense of calm, happiness, perfection, and furthering (4.6.15 – 4.6.18).

4.6.6. Everything May Be Found To Be beautiful

The beauty that is lived in a moment of situative beauty is experienced as having to do with *the situation as a whole*. A respondent noted while skateboarding in an area outside of the city that “[e]verything about it was beautiful, the trees, the water, the sky, the smell, the people passing me by, how fast I was going, how peaceful I felt” (366a).

Aspects that together constitute the experience (e.g., sensory impressions, feelings, how the presence of others is experienced, the way in which one feels about oneself) *may also be found to be beautiful individually* and it is in that capacity, that is, in being beautiful, that they are being experienced as forming part of the beauty that is lived holistically. When driving through a rural area of Belize, this respondent experienced a “sky [that] was reddish/orange/yellow/purple—it was truly beautiful” (149a). Having hiked up the top of a mountain, a respondent described his experience as “beyond merely

beauty of sight. I could smell beauty. I could taste beauty in the air I inhaled. The sound and feel of the gentle wind was beautiful. My every sense was stimulated by that moment's beauty" (19b). When spending an evening lying in a hammock on a beach with her significant other, a respondent observed that for her in that moment "'beauty' is not simply sights also but sounds, smells, and emotions" and the latter included enjoyment, happiness, contentment, and feeling relaxed (387a). That time is spent with a certain individual may also be found to be beautiful. A respondent wrote about a boat ride with her boyfriend that "[i]t was beautiful because we were together, it was peaceful and absolutely breathtaking" (368a). Experiencing a beautiful mountain meadow with her family, this respondent wrote: "there was a kind of inner connectedness and peacefulness which was beautiful too" (40b).

4.6.7. Transference of Beauty

In a moment that is defined by the presence of beauty, beauty can be 'contagious': as the experience is unfolding, more and more aspects of the experience may be found to be beautiful. In such cases it could be said that a *transference of beauty* takes place as a certain 'moment' of beauty leads to the disclosure of other 'moments' of beauty. Another way of thinking about this is a lived sense of solidarity between self and (something) other. For example, a respondent observed the beauty of the surroundings to then acknowledge the beauty of the people that are also present in the experience (168a). And this respondent wrote the following:

When I was 11 years old my mother, brother and I visited my paternal grandmother in her hometown. She had a 4 bedroom house with no electricity. One night as we sat outside I looked up at the sky. The stars were illuminating in a way I had never seen them before. I felt complete and utter happiness, the stars, their beauty, reflected the time I was having in the town. Though not what we consider beautiful, the people and moments I had were beautiful and looking at the stars it put together all I was feeling and the beauty of my experiences into one moment that if I could relive it again and again I would.

She further disclosed that “the beauty of my experiences was accentuated and illuminated to me through the beautiful stars” (65b).

It could be argued that even though different understandings of beauty may be entertained in seeing one thing as beautiful and then understanding another thing to be beautiful as well (e.g., beauty of character and beauty of form), it is nevertheless meaningful that they are both experienced as instances of beauty. That both aspects are lived as instances of beauty is suggestive of a similarity or correspondence of some kind and possibly even a certain unity.

4.6.8. Not Everything Has to Be Beautiful

That aspects of a moment of situative beauty *may* be found to be beautiful does not mean they *have* to be beautiful to be experienced as forming part of an instance of situative beauty. As we will see below, experiencing a sense of

belonging, experiencing togetherness and interconnectedness with others, being fully present in the moment, being very aware of what is being perceived, experiencing clarity of thought, being at peace and without stress, and being happy and having fun are among the qualities that may be experienced as contributing to living beauty in a situative manner. Moreover, it is also possible that aspects characterizing the moment that is experienced as beautiful in a situative sense are found to stand out as *not being beautiful*. A respondent described a situation in which she sat at a lake with her boyfriend, after she had had an argument with her dad. This lake, she wrote, was “really not the most ‘beautiful’ or nature surrounded lake. ... The lake was just this dinky little lake, but it was serene and peaceful, and we were alone.” Being there, with him, was a “moment [that] was beautiful”: “It was a moment that was memorable. It was beautiful in its own sort of way. Just like the mood/the environment” (107a).

4.6.9. Composite Beauty

In featuring different aspects that are found to be beautiful, situative beauty may be understood as an experiential variation that is *a composite of different beauty understandings*. The experiential components that are experienced as being beautiful are either found to be subordinate to the overall lived sense of beauty or they are experienced as collaborating with other experiential aspects, being caught up in one another, in the inclusive presence that is situative beauty. Remembering an experience of skiing in the mountains, this respondent writes, for example: “Though I interpreted the view as beautiful, the situation was probably more

beautiful than the view itself” (15b). “Watching the sun rise in Thailand,” another respondent experienced, “a moment in which two moments of beauty [were] combined into one, [namely being] stress free, and [experiencing the] beautiful scenery, making one amazing moment of beauty” (362a).

4.6.10. Unity in Variety

In situative beauty the components that are experienced as characterizing the moment are felt to complement one another. That *agreeable combination or togetherness of different features* is often explicitly acknowledged as crucial in manifesting the beauty that is lived. Situative beauty may thus be understood as unity in variety as different experiential aspects (e.g., the feel of the interpersonal interaction, the outlook of the environment, the way in which one relates to nature, the music that one is listening to, how one feels physically/emotionally/mentally) are experienced as establishing a harmonious whole that is the experience of beauty. While at a lake with his family, this respondent found that:

The quality of nature around me, the serenity, the emotion of family, the feeling of cold water on a hot summer day, all these small factors contributed uniformly. What I found beautiful was the medley of everything I felt; from the connection to my parents to the quiet natural environment, it was peace. (322a)

Another respondent described a moment during a tennis match:

During that one point in the match I felt calm, on-balance, and I executed the technique effectively for the shots I made. ... I guess it was the completeness of all the parts (footwork, focus, weight transfer, arm-stroke, follow-through, the balls trajectory and pace) that made this moment a beautiful one. ... I couldn't stop a large smile from forming on my face. ... Also, I couldn't help but say to myself: "This is why I play tennis, this is how it's supposed to be played." (407a)

In the words of a basketball player who described a rather similar experience:

I was in the zone that night. ... It felt so effortless, so natural, it was almost a surreal experience. It was not the intense struggle competitive sports usually are. It was incredibly unique how the game came to me and flowed through me. (53b)

And this respondent experienced a moment of situative beauty when skiing down a mountain, a moment in which physical activity and music fused in a way that was very much welcomed:

I let my other friends go before me, and turned on my ipod, I turned to the song "Sir Psycho Sexy" by The Red Hot Chili Peppers and fast forwarded the song to the last 2 minutes and 30 seconds, which is a very melodic musical rift that I find quite lovely. I hit the slopes the powder was deep and fine, and that was probably the best minute of my life, everything meshed together so well. (279a)

4.6.11. Involved in Beauty

In situative beauty one experiences oneself as participating in the experience of beauty, rather than that one perceives or responds to the beauty that is present. Hence, one experiences oneself as more or less implicated in the beauty that is lived. Whereas it is possible to be in a situation and not feel involved at all—for example, one may be in a room full of people who are all conversing with one another and feel very estranged from it all—in case of beauty that is lived in a situative manner one experiences oneself as a vital participant in the beauty that is found to be present. As we will see in 4.6.15 and 4.6.16 the feel and feeling of situative beauty tends to involve some variation of calm and happiness. Here I will touch upon the following experiential qualities of the self: that one experiences oneself as partaking in the beauty experienced; that one feels connected or attuned to the world; that one experiences a sense of belonging during the moment of beauty; and that one feels fortunate or privileged to be having the experience.

An individual experiencing situative beauty is not an outsider to the beauty that is lived, but she is not at its center either. Instead she shares in the beauty, as do all other components that constitute the experience. In other words, living situative beauty means that *one experiences oneself as partaking or participating in the beauty that is being experienced*: “It looked beautiful, sounded beautiful, and even smelt beautiful. ... I was a part of the beauty” (310a).

As allies in beauty, *self and world are not experienced as being separate, but as aligned somehow*: “I felt open, like the world and I were almost together”

(275a). In drug-induced hallucinatory experiences of situative beauty this feeling of closeness with the world is particularly apparent: “I felt fused with the things around me and completely at peace” (350a) and “I felt like I was connected to everyone and everything, not like a separate entity. I felt so happy and at peace knowing that I was connected to everything” (54b). One feels in tune with the world (i.e., understood in the traditional, non-phenomenological way) and in that moment of beauty the situation that one finds oneself is one’s world.

Another aspect of how the experiencing individual may find herself in a moment of situative beauty has to do with *feeling at home or experiencing a sense of belonging*. When enjoying the view of a mountain landscape, this respondent “felt a profound sense of belonging, as if I could stay in this place and this moment forever” (40b). A volunteer during a summer program, this respondent went for a walk one evening, ending up at the steps of a church on a hillside: “I felt comfortable, like I belonged... I was filled with such joy, such peace, such a sense of belonging” (258a).

Another phenomenal quality that characterizes the way in which the self experiences itself experiencing a moment of situative beauty is as *being privileged or fortunate*. When “seeing the resting place of St. Mark” in Venice, the respondent “was honored to have the outmost privilege of being in the presence of the resting place of a man who had walked the earth alongside Christ” (189a). When walking with her family in Tofino as the sun is setting, this respondent “[felt] truly happy to be alive and blessed that I could experience something like that” (46b). When backpacking in the mountains, a young man and his dad set up

camp “in such an amazing place, but yet nobody knew about it.” He wrote: “[M]e and my dad looked around and realizing that we were some of the very few people in the world that would ever get to experience this place. It was our own” and that “made me feel so empowered, and so unique, and so happy that I was sharing the experience with my dad” (310a). Thus the self that is immersed in beauty may also experience herself, albeit arguably in a slightly more reflective sense, as standing out, as different from those who do not get to experience this situation of beauty. Lucky to be having the experience, one wishes that loved ones could experience the same. This respondent listened to an opera singer singing one evening in Florence: “As I laid there in my bed I wished how much I would like for my family and friends to be here to see, hear, and experience what I was experiencing” (200a). When parasailing in Mexico, another respondent realized how “fortunate [he] was” and he was “wishing [that his] family and friends could experience the same experience” (248a).

4.6.12. Together in Beauty

When other people form part of the experience of beauty, the experiencing individual tends to feel close or connected to them. That one is related, friends, or in a relationship does not mean that that interpersonal bond is always at the forefront of one’s experiences together. In a moment of situative beauty, that connection is acknowledged, enhanced and celebrated. In case the experience of situative beauty involves people that the experiencing individual does not know personally, she still feels a strong sense of togetherness, often in the form of

solidarity. In this section I touch upon the following meaning possibilities: connection with others; feeling closer to another person; connection with strangers; connection with others and world; communal experience; being silent with one another, that is, sharing silence; and, lastly, an experiential quality of situative beauty that pivots on the (striking) absence of other people.

When visiting a lighthouse with her family, this respondent found that *the bond she experienced so vividly* with her relatives was central to the beauty she was experiencing:

We were all together and it felt great. There was a feeling of acceptance and joy. I felt confident. It was just so much fun, it's hard to describe in words. At that moment I felt as if the world spun only for my family and I. ... The experience was beautiful because my family and I were all together and getting along. We just seemed to connect at that moment. Everyone was happy.

(256a)

In fact, a moment of situative beauty may be felt to rekindle the connection between the experiential individual and another person or other people. During a walk through a Hawaiian rainforest, a respondent and her father stumbled upon a “completely deserted perfect sand beach” where they relaxed while “the sun was setting ... until [they] could see the stars”: “Without saying a word the entire time ... I felt like we became really close in that moment” (68b).

Situative moment may also involve experiencing *a sense of connection with people who the experiencing individual does not know personally*. One

respondent who attended World Youth Day wrote: “The 100s of 1000s of us were all strangers to each other, but we did not see it that way: we saw each other as brothers and sisters” (222a). Another who visited the same event indicated that:

When I first got there I didn’t think much of it but once I came into contact with all these other people (ethnicities and races) who all believed the same and had such strong faith, it was amazing. Especially when all sang together, walked together, and believed together. I felt a very strong connection to everything I came into contact with and I was truly lifted by this experience. (402a)

It is possible that in this last excerpt, the respondent meant ‘everyone’ when he wrote that he “felt a very strong connection to everything.” Or perhaps he did mean exactly what he wrote and thus he did not only experience *a connection with others, but also with the world*. That combination is not unusual in instances of situative beauty (see 4.6.9). While sitting on a dock with friends, watching the sunrise together sharing the experience, another respondent “felt in tune with the lake and those around me” (230a). Taking in the vista from one of the higher points in the Rocky Mountains, this respondent indicated that “the overall feeling quality was one of appreciation and solidarity and tranquility with the natural world and my family” (40b).

When others are present in a moment of beauty, the beauty experiencing individual may believe that they are having the same or a similar experience: not only are others understood as experiencing beauty also, but they are also thought to have similar feelings—at a graduation party, “[e]veryone was united and so

happy” (106a)—or having the same understanding: “I think we all realized then what it means ... at that particular moment ... to have friends” (129a). That suggests that the experiential qualities characterizing the moment are not necessarily experienced as being distinctly one’s own: the individual feels that when one is there, in that situation, one comes to experience those meanings with one another. Experiencing that moment is what one has in common and in that sense a moment of situative beauty may be experienced as being a communal experience.

Being silent with one another, that is, not saying anything while being together, is another way in which togetherness may show up in situative beauty. That beauty is shared in silence is in fact experienced as crucial to the beauty that is lived. Sitting at a dock with friends, experiencing the sunrise together, this respondent wrote that “[w]e sat silently and watched the sun slowly make its way up the mountain (and warm us too!). This sitting with my friends, outside on the dock in the morning was an experience of beauty.” She indicated that she “felt very peaceful and loved by those with me. Also, the silence, which wasn’t awkward at all, felt natural and accepting.” It is the very fact that the moment is shared without words being exchanged that is particularly significant for the respondent: “That my best friends in the whole world, without being asked or anything at all, came down and enjoyed it with me. We just watched the lake in silence. The fact I was with others, and they experienced and appreciated it too (and with me) is what gives it its unique character.” Sitting in silence in situations such as these are communicative and expressive and are experienced as very

meaningful. Whereas with others it might have been “awkward,” it is not with these friends. She feels comfortable with the others to the extent that it is not necessary to chat the silence away (230a). The experience stands out in that sense. Silence may constitute a contrast also in another manner: after “a huge fight with [her] father about school,” this respondent found herself at a lake with her boyfriend: “being there and just taking everything in, in silence while being with someone close to me. It was a beautiful moment, not just a beautiful image” (107a). That honoring the quiet forms part of the beauty that is being experienced is tacitly understood:

There was a comfortable silence among us, as we silently watched the sun paint the sky with beautiful colors... We sat there in silence, but our bonds grew in strength and vocality, all brought on by the silent observance of nature, connecting us to many generations who viewed the beauty of nature before us. ... The unique character arises from the fact that if we had been discussing anything the moment would have been lost. It was the silence and the intake of natural beauty that brought us closer together. (137a)

One is comfortable in being silent with one another, without engaging in some kind of activity that ‘explains’ that nothing is being said (waiting or working, watching television or reading a book, praying or meditating). One is simply there and there is no need or desire to do anything else than taking in and enjoying the moment for what it already is: “We just sat there in silence. ... being there and

just taking everything in, in silence while being with someone close to me”
(107a).

Lastly, *that there are no others present* may also be experienced as being essential to a moment of situative beauty. That one is in solitude is in fact something that is appreciated. “[O]n the spring days where I noticed how everything looked and smelled, I was grateful that there was nobody around to ruin the view.” Since there are no others to distract the respondent “it felt as if the moment just belonged to me alone (286a). Sitting at her dock with her feet in the water, this respondent found that “[i]t was utterly peaceful, for once there was no loud people around to distract, and all there was were the loons and fish jumping” (275a).

4.6.13. Being in the Moment

When living an experience in which beauty manifests itself situatively, one is attuned to the immediacy of the moment. Not dissociating from what constitutes the present, not being distracted by a wild and wandering mind, one’s consciousness is fully attentive to what takes place right now, here, in this very moment. Being fully present to the experience exactly as is may interrelate with experiential qualities such as heightened sensory and cognitive processing (see 4.6.14), stress being noticeably absent, and experiencing mental and emotional tranquility (see 4.6.15). In this section I mention a few experiential meanings through which ‘being in the moment’ is exemplified in lived experiences of situative beauty, namely ‘just’ being there; nothing else matters; time stands still;

and being without thoughts that may distract the experiencing individual from the moment as is.

The noetic nature of situative experiencing is characterized by a certain simplicity. It is an effortless and appreciative being in which *one is open to the moment and 'just is' with what constitutes the present*. While on vacation in Florida, this respondent “just stood outside in the rain looking around and simply reveling in the experiencing, committing it to memory” (28b). The girl who was at the lake with her boyfriend after a fight with her dad wrote: “We just sat there in silence. ... [B]eing there and just taking everything in, in silence while being someone close to me” (107a).

When one is fully present to the moment, this moment and what it entails is all that one is concerned with. That attentiveness gives the moment a distinctive sense of significance. To put it differently: *all else, that is, everything that does not form part of this very moment, does not matter*: “It was nice out, I was playing with my cousins and that was all that mattered... [I]t was so in the moment, nothing else mattered” (155a). A respondent wrote about the beauty he experienced while lying in bed in Florence:

From the square I could hear a woman opera singing. At this moment I felt complete happiness, I could not think of anywhere or anything I would rather be doing at that time. At that moment nothing else mattered but the beautiful voice from below my window and the magnificent view. I was content. (200a)

When one is in the moment, time is irrelevant. *If a sense of time does feature in a lived instance of situative beauty, it may be experienced as standing still.* This is felt to be an extraordinary quality, which suggests that ‘normally’ or at least in some if not most experiences, time is lived as a (background) sense of moving along or perhaps ticking away: “There was no motion or time, it just was” (275a; respondent’s underlining). In a moment of situative beauty, one takes a time out from time: “It felt as if time has just stopped and I didn’t have to worry or think about anything except walking towards the direction of my house and watching drops of water dripping off from the branches of trees” (286a).

A moment of situative beauty does not hold thoughts that the experiencing individual experiences as distracting him from the moment as it is unfolding:

Summer morning. In the mountains with family. ... Not a cloud in the sky, not a worry on my mind. I had nothing to do, nothing to strive for, nobody to impress or keep my distance from. There were no problems, no thoughts, no expectations. For the small moment, time practically froze, and there was a feeling of bliss as I was staring at the lake, it was, for lack of a better word: perfect. (226a)

Thoughts that are found to be distracting are those that cause stress or worry (see 4.6.15). When witnessing a sunrise in Thailand, this individual lived a “moment which was entirely stress free.” She wrote: “I remember just being able to focus on the present instead of worrying about the past or the future. ... [T]here was literally nothing to worry about in that moment of time. No thought that could take me away from the moment that I was experiencing” (362a). It is not the case,

however, that instances of situative beauty do not tolerate any thinking at all. Yet the thinking that does form part of such beauty experiences is the kind that is welcomed, which means that it does not induce anxiety, stress or worry, but rather complements the flow and feel of the moment as it is already being lived. On a train in England, enjoying the view of the countryside and the “lack of noise” because London is behind them now and her family is asleep, this respondent found that the moment of beauty “gave [her] time to [herself] to reflect about anything [she] wanted” (287a). In fact, the reflection that plays a role in instances of situative beauty may give rise to valuable insights. This meaning possibility is touched upon in the next section.

4.6.14. Heightened Sensory and Cognitive Processing

When one lives beauty situatively, one’s senses and mind are particularly attuned to what is present and what is happening. Awareness of that being so forms part of the lived experience: one is aware that the experiencing that one is living is heightened and more defined in comparison to the way one ‘normally’ moves through life. That one’s sensory perception and cognitive reflection are more acute or sensitive is not something that is willed or consciously brought about, but is rather simply something that happens as the experience unfolds. This respondent addressed “spring days where I noticed how everything looked and smelled” (286a). Being attuned in this manner means having an experience that has a very rich quality: “Everything was so serene and fresh and soothing, the sounds of the waves the soft sand, the smells, I felt like I was having a sensory

overload” (68b). And to have such an experience is pleasurable: “I got such enjoyment out of just stopping + looking/listening” (387a). In fact, being fully attuned to what one is perceiving may be experienced as bringing about a sense of calm as well as a sense of enjoyment: “It was surprising how I could completely relax and stop stressing, simply from looking at nature” and “enjoy it [all] so much” (286a).

Not only are the thoughts that one may have during a moment of situative beauty not disruptive to the harmony of the unfolding moment, *the thinking that takes place tends to be beneficial, leading to insights that are welcomed*. The insights obtained are not necessarily completely new (i.e., never realized before), but they are particularly illuminating and spot-on when it comes to the situation that the experiencing individual finds herself in, whether situation is here a matter of the current moment or the situation that is one’s life. A number of respondents recalled insight emerging after having experienced a situation that entailed turmoil of some kind. One respondent described what she called an instance of ‘tragic beauty’ during which one of her friends had run away from home because his very religious parents had found out he was involved with a girl and they were furious with him. The respondent recalled a moment during which a few friends had come together to support and console their friend:

The 5 of us sat at the kitchen table, drinking tea. Even though all had been taken away from him at this point, there was still hope to start over with a new life and he knew this. Someone said:
 ‘Everything’s going to be okay.’ Then we were quiet as we sipped

tea and offered each other comfort. ... I think we all realized then ... what it means to have friends. (129a)

And this respondent shared a moment of beauty and calm clarity taking place during combat training:

An experience of beauty that I recall was when I was in Quebec this summer. I was going through my basic officer training course and we were in our last week of course. In this week we had to spend the entire time in a training field, live under operational conditioners and could not sleep. It was during the early morning of the third day, we just completed a night mission and were waiting at the side of the road for transport. It was still raining when we first sat down and continued to rain until the truck arrived. We all boarded the truck. I was the last one on and was sitting at the back. As we started to take off back to base, the sun started coming up and the birds started to chirp. The noise of the truck engine was drowned out by the sound of the rain hitting the top. At that point I knew this is what I wanted to do and the forest scenery and all that has happened during the first two days came into perspective. The sun, the forest, the ruin, birds and the slow moving the truck all added up to a very calming and beautiful moment in a chaotic week.

This was a moment that brought calm—“when I sat in the back of the truck and saw the sun, all of the combat stuff disappeared for a moment and it was calm”

(298a)—and it is in that spacious instance that something important was realized. Besides epiphanic moments, an experience of situative beauty may also include a sense of perspective:

2 years ago, I was fortunate to be able to go to England and France during my Christmas break. I went by myself. Due to stress from school, I was really confused about my goals in life. Once I've arrived in London, the first thing I did was walked out from my hostel and just wandered around the place Greenwich. I didn't really know here I was, but I just kept walking up a hill, then reached the top of the park. I sat down, breathed in the wet air, kinda chilly. I took out my sketch book and start sketching the view of the city. I felt relieved and stayed there till sunset. ... [I]t didn't solve any of my confusions about my life. However, it gave me an impression that no matter what downfall I'm gonna face in the future, I can still breath freely and appreciate life even when the problems are still there. (35b)

Also in this instance clarity is experienced during a moment of calm. In the next section meaning possibilities involving calm are discussed.

4.6.15. Some Variation of Calm

Experiences in which beauty is experienced situatively are not plagued by stress or worry. Instead one feels at ease with where one is at. In a moment of situative beauty, one pauses and finds oneself in a state of peace. The different experiential

variations of tranquility that may play role in a moment of situative beauty that I discuss here include feeling peaceful; absence of mental stressors; taking a break from the ‘usual’ way of being; being at peace with self and with others; slowing down physically; and transference of calm.

One experiences *a sense of peace* in a moment of situative beauty. When gazing at a rock island and witnessing the sunrise, this respondent “felt absolute peace” (25a). Another respondent described running on a beach early in the morning: “[I]t was beautiful and calming and in that single moment I was just at peace with everything, and I had no stress or concerns” (378a). The moment itself is one of calm. Another respondent indicated that “when [he] sat in the back of the truck and saw the sun, all of the combat stuff disappeared for a moment and it was calm” (298a).

To feel at peace means that *stressors are absent*. Crucial here is that one is not burdened by worries about the past or future, that one is free from thoughts about what should have happened (or should have been said or done) or should happen (or should be said or done). Also, a moment of situative beauty does not entail negative or anxious tension that may emerge when contemplating obligations and expectations. A respondent describing watching a sunrise in Thailand wrote that “the moment was entirely stress free. I wasn’t in school and didn’t have a job and I remember just being able to focus on the present instead of worrying about the past or the future” (362a). Watching the sunset while sitting on the steps of a church overlooking the river, this respondent:

felt completely at peace, as if there was nothing else in the world. I could have stayed there forever. ... I wasn't there for a specific reason and I had no worries, it was just a tranquil moment with a place that was calming. ... This experience made me feel at peace without worry. I think that lack of beauty involves being self-conscious and worried. At this moment, none of that negativity crossed my mind. (258a)

Another respondent recalled “just standing on [her] backyard porch staring out into the sky:

Feeling the nice soothing wind blow gently against my skin. I stood there for such a long time just staring into the star filled midnight sky. ... Feels like the weight of life is lifted off my shoulders and I have nothing to care about. (440a)

There are no concerns clouding and crowding the mind, distracting the experiencing individual and taking her away from what this very moment entails. In that sense, a situation of beauty can feel like “a vacation away from stress and worry” (388a). Not being stressed means that one is not struggling. One participates in the natural flow of the moment. As this respondent wrote about the highpoint in his basketball career: “I had never played that well before or after that game. It felt so effortless, so natural, it was almost a surreal experience. It was not the intense struggle competitive sports usually are. It was incredible unique how the game came to me and flowed through me” (53b).

To be without stress is experienced as *an alternative to one's 'usual' way of being*: when playing with a toddler, and baring witness to the “child’s innocence and happiness,” this respondent wrote that the experience “made [her] feel relaxed from reality”: “When I was playing with the toddler, all my worries and sorrow in the real world seemed to slowly fade away in the back of my mind” (196a). About walking home on a spring day, this respondent wrote that “[i]t felt like I was taking a break from the world, almost.” The natural surroundings “felt very quiet, but not eerily so, which was a relief after a day at school, worrying about marks and grades, and so on” (286a). Addressing a moment during which she “[stood] on the docks by the ocean during sunset,” this respondent wrote that “[she] felt like [she] had escaped and for a moment [she] was so free. [She] had no worries, [she] could just watch the magnificence of nature” (304a).

In a moment of situative beauty, *one feels at ease with who one is and who one is with*. It is a moment in which the experiencing individual is not self-conscious in the sense of being self-critical, that is, one is not negative or apologetic about who one is. One is at peace with oneself and at ease with who one is. Watching the sun set into the water, this respondent writes that the experience “brought me back to a whole person, it let me relax” and afforded her to be “at home with [her]self.” Also when the moment is shared with someone else, the experiencing individual feels very much at ease: “I felt relaxed with myself and with him” (218a). One feels accepted as one is. A respondent who was with her family at the vantage point of the world’s highest natural lighthouse in Mazatlan, Mexico wrote: “We were all together and it felt great. There was a

feeling of acceptance and joy. I felt confident” (256a). Another respondent recalled a family reunion at a farm:

It made me feel better and comfortable with being me. No pressure or expectations to fulfill and worry about and they accepted me for who I am and what I do. This experience made me experience stability, happiness and acceptance, because sometimes we are not really satisfied with who we are. (42b)

Others are experienced as feeling at ease as well: “everyone around me was happy and relaxed” (374a).

Situative beauty may involve also *slowing down, not just mentally, but also physically*. In doing so one gives oneself the chance to simply be with everything that the moment has to offer and to observe and appreciate its qualities:

My experience of beauty involved walking in nature, in a part, surrounded by trees and grass. It was summertime, the sun was shining (not too bright), and there were not many people around. All of the trees, the green, the sounds made me feel very calm, very peaceful, and very appreciative of nature. I was walking through the area, slowly, there was a trail. ... It seemed very peaceful there, and almost like you were immersed in it, surrounded. (31b)

By slowing down the respondent seemed to have adjusted to the ‘pace’ of the environment through which he moves. He comes to share in the peace that is

already there. *A transference of calm* seemed thus to have taken place. Outer circumstances are experienced as calm or calming and the individual's state of mind and physical state of being are also experienced as being or becoming calm. When walking from school to home through a river valley forest, this respondent: "realized how calm, peaceful it was in there. I was surrounded by lush [abundant] trees and the wonderful smell of nature." "It was an ordinary situation that made me stop and stare for a moment, leaving me in a more peaceful state of mind" (127a). A respondent describing a walk in the park wrote: "All of the trees, the green, the sounds made me feel very calm, very peaceful, and very appreciative of nature. ... It seemed very peaceful there, and almost like you were immersed in it, surrounded" (31b). The surroundings are calm and they have a calming effect: to be in this situation is to come to share in the calm that characterizes the situation. That the individual partakes in beauty rather than that she is its center speaks from transference of calm as well (see 4.6.7).

4.6.16. Some Variation of Happiness

Besides calm of some kind, instances of situative beauty also tend to include a *variation of happiness*. The happiness that respondents report to have experienced while living beauty situative was found to vary in quality. Some mentioned contentment: "I felt content, not happy, just content" (107a) and "I just felt so relaxed and content (286a). But a more rapture-like happiness, such as bliss and euphoria, was also described: "there was a feeling of bliss as I was staring at the lake" (226a) and "[a]t that moment in the air [while parasailing] it truly felt like I

was on top of the world” (248a). When a game of tennis went exceptionally well, this respondent experienced an “uncontrollable feeling of happiness that appreciated what unfolded” (407a). Sometimes the nature of happiness, that is, what it actually means to be happy, is felt to have revealed itself: “True happiness is what I experienced” (388a). Joy is also a recurrent experiential quality of situative beauty. While sitting in a coffee house in San Torino, reveling in the view, this respondent wrote that she “was filled with such joy, such peace, such a sense of belonging” (285a). Lastly, a variation of happiness was reported that appears to resemble some kind of *joie de vivre*, an exuberant and cheerful enjoyment of the situation, which includes the sense that it is possible to relate in this way to life at large or more often or even always. This respondent experienced a moment of “stress-free joyous living,” when she and her boyfriend “took a visit to Lake Minnetanka”:

The experience at this lake was incredibly memorable. The water was very still and a beautiful aqua color that was clear the rocks on the bottom could be seen everywhere. The temperature was warm and the sun felt as if enveloped just in a blanket of warmth and security. We giggled and frolicked in and around the lake for hours while making jokes and skipping stones across the water. The experience was beautiful because it was truly a moment that had no negative feelings or stress. We were very much in love. (313a)

Another respondent talked about “a family trip to the Netherlands,” where she embarks on “a bike ride through the ... countryside” with her “great aunt (oma’s

sister),” an experience which included “sing[ing] random songs and stop[ping] along the pathway to pick wildflowers and pet[ting] the horses that came to the fence.” It is then that she got to experience and partake in the elderly lady’s “joy for life” (355a).

4.6.17. A Perfect Moment

A moment in which beauty is lived in a situative sense is experienced as being *perfect*. When singing songs with some of her closest friends at a bible camp in the mountains, this respondent experienced “true beauty” as “everything [was] as it should be” (271a). There is no desire for anything to be different than it already is. The situation as is is just right. In being perfect the experience is lived as being extraordinary: it is an experience that stands out from other experiences. During a joyful moment with her family, this respondent found that:

It seemed that at that moment everything was perfect in the world.

It was nice out, I was playing with my cousins and that was all that mattered. ... Like everything was perfect for that one moment. ...

It is an experience of beauty because everything was right in that moment. (155a)

When lying at the lake with her sister, this respondent experienced “a perfect moment”: “It felt like my whole childhood, all the memories of my family and everything that had happened at our lake, was echoed in that moment. It felt like home” (428a).

4.6.18. A Sense of More

Lastly, an experience of situative beauty is often felt to include *an expansive sense of possibility and abundance*. One respondent wrote about being in the mountains with her friends: “[I]t sticks out as being a time of total contentment. Although I felt ‘full,’ I also felt there was so much more for me to experience” (271a). Another variation of ‘more’ is more existential in nature. At a family reunion, during which the respondent felt very much she could simply be herself, she found that “[t]he feeling was very relaxing and beyond happiness. It was like there was more in life” (42b).

4.6.19. Overall Impression of Situative Beauty

A succinct characterization of situative beauty might read as follows. In a moment of situative beauty, beauty is experienced as defining the experience in its entirety. The experiential meanings that form part of an instance of situative beauty are lived as together constituting a harmonious whole, a situation that is often experienced as perfect or just right. The experiencing individual is in tune with herself, with what is happening, with her surroundings and with others that are present. In situative beauty one is able to ‘simply be’ and ‘just experience’ the situation. Often a moment of tranquility and happiness, an instance of situative beauty knows no stress or worry, no inner or outer turmoil. Characterized by heightened awareness, moments of situative beauty may give rise to insights of personal or existential significance and they tend to include sensory perceptions that are experienced as particularly intense.

I would like to make some additional comments and explore a few meaning combinations a bit further. An experience of situative beauty is very much characterized by that which it does not have: it knows no criticism, no self-judgment, no insecurity, no harshness, no disruption, no interruption, no distraction, no worry, no stress, no struggle, no fear, no disharmony, no negativity. Instead it is an unobstructed experience, one that flows, one that works. It is a spacious experience, one in which one feels one can... breathe. There is room to be oneself, to think if one wants to, to just be. In a spirit of calm and contentment and sometimes elation even, one is open to what is, living the moment as it is.

Being in the moment, being with what the moment has to offer means that one is not distracted by a conversation or consumed by worries. One is thus not led away from the experience as it is taking place. Stressful thoughts disconnect an individual from the present moment. Being caught in worry is a narrowing experience, because when we are absorbed in our concerns we lose touch with what is happening around us. A moment of situative beauty knows no struggle, however; one simply participates in the flow of the experience, taking on the feel of the situation, a situation that is often characterized by some variation of calm. If one is not distracted, but instead fully present in the moment, a sense of oneness or wholeness may emerge.

That oneness is not just an inner feeling, but it also colors one's relationship to the world. In situative beauty, one feels connected to the world. Even when we are not literally at home, because we are in a foreign country for

example, we may experience what it means to belong, what it means to feel at home, also with ourselves.

One experiences a sense of interconnectedness with others. Not only are others experienced as having the same or a similar experience—which means that they are experienced as also partaking in the moment of situative beauty—one feels very attuned to the other individuals present. The closeness to others is felt to be striking, which suggests that the distance between self and others is experienced as being smaller than normally.

Moments of situative beauty then entail the sense of everything coming and being together, the experience of being present (and whole), and the feeling of being aligned with the world and attuned to others. All this is welcomed and appreciated. The oneness within corresponds with the oneness that is experienced around. As such the divisions commonly made between self and other, self and world, internal and external do not seem particularly appropriate when one aims to capture the feel and identity of this kind of beauty. In fact, being aligned with others and the world gives rise to a sense of there being so much more to experience, to be, to do. That is the expansiveness of situative beauty. And it is enjoyable and desirable to be in that space, a space that we might understand as characterized by a particular kind of mood.

Conclusion

After touching upon the difference between lived and reflective meanings of beauty and between lived understandings and meanings of beauty (chapter 1), discussing various topics of philosophical phenomenology—which constitutes the research tradition that has informed this doctoral project—and considering what methodological options might be appropriate when examining a phenomenon that has a morphological essence (chapter 2), I outlined the analytical procedures that were employed to investigate 471 experiential narratives describing a moment of beauty (chapter 3). When investigating concrete moments of beauty, I found that the *locus* of beauty plays a crucial role in establishing a particular kind of lived beauty (chapter 4). Beauty was found to be experienced as residing in the object; as having to do the feelings and state of mind of the experiencing individual; as being a matter of both the object and the way in which it is experienced; or as involving all aspects constituting the situation that the individual finds herself in. I called these phenomenal variations of beauty: objective beauty, affective-noetic beauty, nondual beauty, and situative beauty and several of its meaning possibilities were outlined in the descriptive impressions that were created for each of these lived understandings of beauty. In these experiential kinds, the lived sense of beauty appears to structure the experience in a certain way, giving the act of consciousness a particular focal point or sense of direction with regard to the way in which beauty is experienced. The four profiles that were identified were

found to share similar meanings (e.g., some variation of calm, happiness, or unity in variety), but the findings, preliminary as they may be, also suggest that there are meanings that are more typical for one profile than they are for others (e.g., in objective beauty, beauty is lived as existing independently from the individual; in a moment of affective-noetic beauty, one feels good about oneself; in a nondual experience of beauty both insight and the experience of that insight constitute the sense of beauty; in an instance of situative beauty a rich variety of different kinds of experiential qualities are experienced as together affording a very inclusive and harmonious moment of beauty). Instead of being categories in any absolute sense, the patterns that were identified are impressionistic characterizations of ways in which individuals may relate to beauty as given in experience. When lived objectively, beauty is experienced as working upon the experiencing individual; when lived noetic-affectively, beauty is experienced as primarily taking place in the bodymind of the individual; when lived nondually, beauty is lived as a joint matter of what is experienced and the way in which it is experienced; and when lived situatively, beauty is felt to permeate the situation in its entirety, implicating the experiencing individual also. The first three of these beauty types resemble objective, subjective, and interactionist conceptualizations of beauty to some extent (see 1.2). So far there are no theories, however, that explore the situative variation of lived beauty. To conclude, I propose that, beauty should be described polythetically, rather than anchored monothetically, which implies that the variety of its experiential variations is explicitly addressed. Instead of endorsing and emphasizing one way specifically in which beauty may be manifested (e.g.,

subjective or objective) or characterizing beauty as if defined by a particular set of qualities, which supposedly typifies all its manifestations (see 1.2.1), a description of beauty's identity should acknowledge that beauty is a phenomenon that gives rise to lived instantiations with different 'directionalities' and articulate the different understandings and meanings that beauty harbors.⁸⁸

This first phenomenological-empirical study of beauty is only a first step in working towards a conceptualization in which beauty's kaleidoscopic richness is insightfully expressed. Not only does the notion of *locus* (or perhaps *experiential directionality*) deserve more consideration, lived variations of duality and nonduality that were found to play a role in concrete moment of beauty are also in need of further investigation. Phenomenological concepts such as Merleau-Ponty's *flesh* and *chiasm* might be useful in this regard (*Visible* 139-47). Also, Heidegger's understanding of *Gelassenheit* (*Gelassenheit* 29-71) or Csikszentmihalyi's characterization of *flow* (1-8) may help to become more attuned to the different meanings that may form part of lived understandings of beauty.

⁸⁸ One of the ways that Van Manen proposes we may "[proceed] in phenomenological writing is to weave one's phenomenological description against the existentials of temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), sociality (lived relationship to others)" (*Researching* 172; cf. 77-109). This proposal is based on an existential, hermeneutic, or Heideggerian variation of phenomenology, rather than endorsing the Husserlian project (see footnote 24). The findings of the current project suggest that it might be worthwhile, at least in case of some phenomena, to consider lived manifestations in relation to the different aspects of acts of consciousness, that is, what is experienced, what it is like to experience it, a combination of objective and subjective aspects, and the situation in a more comprehensive sense. These variations correspond arguably more with Husserlian than with Heideggerian phenomenology.

There are obviously additional ways in which the current materials may be analyzed. Here I will touch upon three possibilities. First of all, we should consider the ways in which (the same or similar) meanings show up across different beauty understandings. For example, is the calm that is felt when experiencing objective beauty different from the calm that is lived in situative moments of beauty?⁸⁹ Second, we might investigate how different beauty understandings feature in similar occasions (e.g., a nature situation, an interpersonal moment, a work of art). Third, it may be of particular interest to revisit the materials by means of numerically aided phenomenology, a method involving cluster analytical methods that help differentiate between experiential categories of a morphological kind (Kuiken and Miall par. 21, 33). Working with this method may be effective when trying to articulate experiential profiles as distinctly as possible and trying to determine to what extent a particular lived experience instantiates a certain kind of beauty. Earlier I expressed some reservations concerning the extent to which a sense of the whole is sufficiently acknowledged in these numerically aided endeavors (see 3.14). In that regard it is of interest to see whether it is possible to find a way in which we might combine a qualitative analysis that honors a sense of the whole with the systematization introduced by cluster analytical algorithms.⁹⁰ Such an approach might facilitate

⁸⁹ In preparation: an article for *The Handbook of Narrative Absorption*, edited by Frank Hakemulder and Ed Tan, on the experiential quality of absorption (and variations thereof) as it plays a role in lived instances of the different experiential kinds of beauty as described in this text.

⁹⁰ Don Kuiken and I have talked about considering this investigative possibility in future research endeavors.

systematic comparative consideration of the different beauty understandings that were identified in this project. The fourth chapter contains a few observations concerning the differences between the four beauty profiles, but a systematic comparison of profiles did not form part of the research objectives of the current project. To some extent it could be argued therefore that this exploration actually consists of four sub-studies, each examining an empirically identified variation of beauty. Hence, methodical comparison of beauty understandings appears an appropriate and logical continuation of the work presented here.

As to additional, other studies that might be conducted to further the findings of this work, I would like to mention the following options. First, it is of interest to conduct similar studies concerning related yet different phenomena such as the sublime, aesthetic appreciation, and the good, also to further flesh out, in a phenomenological-empirical manner, the distinctiveness of beauty as a phenomenon. Second, a possible follow-up study of the research reported here might be more directly concerned with investigating experiential issues related to the *locus* or *phenomenal directionality* of lived beauty and thus entail questions that help respondents address that dimension of their experiencing. Third, it might be worthwhile to conduct interviews, because it is not unthinkable that lived moments of beauty are easier talked about than that they are put to paper (cf. Van Manen, *Researching* 64). Furthermore, when interviewed, respondents may be guided so that they become more attuned to (articulating) lived qualities of their experiences rather than that they focus on reflective observations (Petitmengin et al. 256). Lastly, in future studies of concrete moments of beauty, we might want

to work with standardized stimuli such as pictures of paintings, introduce a cross-cultural perspective, or compare beauty experiences from people of different ages.

Appendix I

Research Materials

1

Demographic Information

Please provide the following demographic information. This information can be recorded on the green answer sheet (numbered 1) that forms part of this research package.

Please provide the information requested by blackening the appropriate circles on the answer sheet.

Your gender: M or F

(Enter this information under the heading marked “SEX”)

Your birth date:

Month (mo.)

Day

Year (yr.)

(Enter this information under the heading marked “BIRTH DATE”)

Your primary (general) ethnicity

1. **Aboriginal/First Nations**
2. **African (including Caribbean of African descent)**
3. **East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino)**
4. **South Asian (e.g., Pakistani, East Indian, Bangladesh)**
5. **European (e.g., French, German, Italian)**
6. **Hispanic/Latin-American (e.g., Chilean, Brazilian, Mexican)**
7. **Middle Eastern (e.g., Iraqi, Iranian, Egyptian)**
8. **Euro-North American (including Euro-Canadian)**
9. **Pacific Islander**
10. **Other**

(Enter the code number associated with your primary ethnicity under the heading marked “SPECIAL CODES,” column K)

Your primary (first) language is:

1. **English**
2. **A language other than English** (Enter the code number associated with your primary language under the heading marked “SPECIAL CODES,” column L)

2

INSTRUCTIONS

First of all, I want to thank you for participating in this study. The information you provide about your experience of beauty is most helpful to my research, and your cooperation is highly appreciated.

I would like to ask you to write about **a lived experience of beauty**, i.e., a moment of distinct, memorable beauty that you have had in the past.

In this study, we are not explaining what is understood by “beauty.” This is deliberate, because we are interested in what beauty means to you; what you perceive beauty to be; in what way you have experienced beauty; and how beauty made you think and feel in that particular moment.

In response to this request, perhaps more than one experience of beauty will come to mind. If so, choose the experience that is most important to you and that you are willing to reflect upon and describe fully during this session.

Take a few moments now to recall your experience of beauty: what happened, what were your thoughts, how were you feeling, what were the circumstances, what were you perceiving, what changed as the experience unfolded, etc.

Then proceed by describing your experience of beauty and the way you lived through it in your own words and in your own way.

Please try to describe your experience in as much detail as you can because that will give us the opportunity to imagine and understand more fully what having this experience was like.

Write freely. Do not worry about grammar, spelling, or sentence structure. And do not worry about your experience making a good story. Just describe what it was like.

My experience of beauty:

3

INSTRUCTIONS

We have invited you to write about an experience of beauty. Now we would like you to reflect upon this experience further by answering a number of open-ended questions.

Perhaps these open-ended questions will ask you to reflect upon aspects of your experience that you have already touched upon in your description of beauty. If that is the case, we invite you to revisit that aspect of your experience once more and explore it in even more detail.

1. What makes the experience that you have described an experience of beauty to you? What makes it the distinct experience that it is? Or, in other words, what has this experience taught you about beauty?

This is an experience of beauty to me, because:

Please continue with question 2 on the next page.

2. Is there something about your experience of beauty that stands out and gives your experience its unique character (e.g., the overall feeling quality, the nature of what you found beautiful, or the way the experience has continued to influence your life)? Please reflect upon that aspect of your experience in more detail.

This is what gives my experience of beauty its unique character:

Please continue with question 3 on the next page.

3. Please draw a line that shows how your experience of beauty unfolded over time. Did the experience develop in a very even way? Or were there intensified moments and disruptions?

Try to capture the flow of your experience in the way you draw the line. Start with the dot on the left side of the page, and end with the dot on the right side of the page.⁹¹

λ

λ

Please continue with question 4 on the next page.

⁹¹ In version B of the study, we worked with only one dot, because a few respondents had indicated that at the end of the experience they felt they were in a strikingly different place than at the beginning of the experience.

4. Please mark on the line that you have just drawn, two moments that give your experience of beauty its unique and distinct character.

Circle those places on your line.

Please continue with question 5 on the next page.

5. Give each of the two moments that you have marked on your line a word or a phrase that briefly indicates what each moment was like.⁹²

My word or phrase for the first moment is:

My word or phrase for the second moment is:

This was the last open question. Proceed with the next task.

⁹² This task was excluded from version B of the study.

INSTRUCTIONS

On pages 7 and 8 of this research package, you identified and named two moments in your experience of beauty that were pivotal in giving your experience its unique and distinctive character. We would now like you to describe your experience during each of those moments by answering the questions below, once for the first moment and then once more for the second moment. Please use the first green answer sheet (that is, the one that you also used for the demographic information) for your ratings of the first moment, and then use the second green answer sheet for your ratings of the second moment.⁹³

When rating each moment, try to think of each question as if it were being asked during a conversation. Thus, with each item ask yourself: “Was that moment in my experience like that?” Then rate that item using the following scale:

0 = Not at all true

1 = Slightly true

2 = Moderately true

3 = Quite true

4 = Definitely true

NOTE: In the items below, X represents whatever object, person, or event was central to your experience of beauty.

⁹³ In version B of the study participants completed the questionnaire only once: for the experience as a whole.

1. It was as if everything else around X had vanished.
2. I experienced a sense of fusion with X.
3. I was very aware of how my body felt when
experiencing X.
4. I felt as if I were somewhere other than where I
actually was.
5. I felt strikingly close to X.
6. I felt as if my heart was opening up.
7. I experienced a sense of possibility.
8. I felt suddenly more alive.
9. I was aware of the way I was experiencing X even
while I was experiencing it.
10. I felt very removed from the world.
11. It seemed as if time stood still.
12. There was something quite ambiguous about X.
13. I felt as if my consciousness was expanding.
14. I experienced a strong sense of the now.
15. I was only aware of X.
16. It was as if my usual sense of myself was absent.
17. X was exactly right.
18. I felt as if my body were expanding.
19. I experienced a more authentic sense of myself than I
normally do.
20. My sense of time changed.
21. I felt emotionally vulnerable.
22. I felt a sense of release.

23. I wanted to be close to X.
24. I felt sadness.
25. I had no concerns but X.
26. I got a sense of all that life can be.
27. I experienced awe.
28. I experienced a sense of destruction.
29. I sensed I was experiencing beauty, even before I
named it that.
30. I was not aware of my body at all.
31. I felt really content with who I am.
32. I experienced bliss.
33. I tried to figure out how X became the way it is.
34. I felt invigorated, ready to undertake action of some
sort.
35. I felt there had to be a distance between X and myself.
36. X is special.
37. I had a sense of a time that was still to come.
38. Experiencing X energized my body.
39. I experienced desire.
40. I felt like I had come to know something that was
unknown to me before.
41. I felt many more feelings than I usually feel.
42. Experiencing X took my breath away.
43. It was as if all of history was coming together.
44. I experienced happiness.
45. I had a sense of time already lived.

46. I sensed something that cannot be put into words.
47. I got a sense of how wonderful life is.
48. My body felt tense.
49. I got a sense of what really matters in life.
50. I felt a sense of playfulness.
51. I felt really calm.
52. I experienced feelings that I normally do not feel.
53. I realized there is something about X that I will never
be able to understand fully.
54. I got a sense of happiness still to come.
55. I got a sense of what it means to be human.
56. I loved X.
57. I was experiencing something significant.
58. I felt emotionally opened up.
59. I felt a sense of pain because of the difference between
what life is like and what experiencing X is like.
60. I felt strikingly close to the creator of X.
61. I experienced a sense of joy.
62. I was thinking a lot.
63. I realized that X can only be the way that it is.
64. I got a sense of something that goes beyond human
imagination.
65. I felt a sense of consolation.
66. I loved the fact that X is.
67. I felt that what I was experiencing was good for me.
68. For a moment, I felt as if death did not exist.

69. Experiencing X is beauty.
70. I felt great empathy for the world.
71. I experienced a sense of freedom.
72. I experienced a kind of desire that doesn't entail a sense of possession.
73. I loved the way X is.
74. I felt a sense of purpose in life.
75. I was experiencing something meaningful.
76. I experienced a sense of stillness.
77. I experienced confusion.
78. I felt fulfilled.
79. I felt as if a variety of different things were coming together.
80. I experienced a sense of openness.
81. I wanted to know more about X.
82. I experienced a sense of belonging.
83. I experienced a sense of death.
84. I often experience things the way I experienced X.
85. I experienced a sense of yearning that I knew would never be fulfilled.
86. I felt inspired to try to find more truths.
87. I felt a sense of loss.
88. I experienced a sense of truth.
89. I felt as if contradictory things were in harmony with each other.
90. X was beautiful.

91. I intensely felt life within me.
92. I experienced a sense of change.
93. I felt empowered.

INSTRUCTIONS

Please **identify those words or phrases** that most aptly capture **the unique and distinctive character of your experience of beauty**.

Feel free to use words or phrases from your description of your experience of beauty, from your answers to the open questions, or from the questionnaire items.

These are the words and phrases that most aptly capture my experience of beauty:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Please proceed to the next page.

If there are any other words or phrases—ones that you might not have used before or that do not form part of the questionnaire items but that also capture the unique and distinctive quality of your experience of beauty, please report them here.

These are the additional words and phrases that most aptly capture my experience of beauty:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Please proceed to the next page.

3. Sometimes when people describe an experience in the way you have just done, their understanding of that experience changes a little. If any new or altered understandings of your experience of beauty emerged as you were answering the questions, please describe those changes here.

While describing my experience of beauty, my understanding of it changed in the following way(s):

This is the end of this study. Please give your materials to the experimenter.

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