WHAT IS PHENOMENOLOGY?
MOMENTS by Will Hoffman
Inspired by David Eagleman’s book SUM

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNVPalNZD_I
Radio Lab
Moments
Visual Experiment

What is a Moment?
What is phenomenology?

- Phenomenology is the philosophical name for the method of investigating or inquiring into the meanings of our experiences as we live them. The method is phenomenological reflecting on pre-reflective or lived experience.

- Any experience whatsoever can be studied phenomenologically.

- The approach is called “phenomenological” reflection because it uses the method of the epoché and the reduction.

- Lived experience is prereflective in that it is experience as we are in it, live through it—while not, or not yet, reflecting on it, or making sense of it, or theorizing about it.
The phrase “phenomenology of practice” refers to the kinds of inquiries that address and serve the practices of professional practitioners as well as the quotidian practices of everyday life. For example, a thoughtful understanding of the meaningful aspects of “having a conversation or a talk together” or the experience of “interacting online and the kind of contact or closeness we experience through email, texting, or social networks” may be of value to professional practitioners as well as to anyone involved in the conversational relations of everyday living.

What is phenomenology of practice?
What is the Epoché and the Reduction?

Epoché means that we must try to enter a space of openness to the experience or phenomenon we are trying to understand in its prereflective sense.

Reduction means that, once we have opened ourselves, we try to close in on the meaning of the phenomenon as it appears in our experience or in our consciousness.

So, the aim of a phenomenological research project is to arrive at phenomenal insights that contribute to our thoughtfulness and practical tact, by using the methods of the epoché and the reduction.
What is a phenomenon? The instant of the Now?

It may be helpful to explain that a phenomenon can also be seen as a moment of the experiential Now—these are the normal moments of everyday living.

We are always in the Now—even when we recall a memory, anticipate an event, daydream, or do something routine or creative: we cannot be but in the Now (though without really “knowing” it). And yet when we try to grasp this experience in the instant of the Now, we are always too late. The present of the Now is always absent already—when we try to reflect on it. This is really odd, and yet true. Prereflectively, we are always in the Now, and yet, when we try to capture it (objectify it), we are never in that Now—the Now is at best always Just Now—an absent presence, and in some enigmatic sense a presence that never was.
What is the purpose of phenomenological reflection?

And yet, this is exactly what phenomenology tries to do: reflect on or uncover the primal meanings of this absent present moment of the now.

For example, reading a story, having a talk with someone, sending an email or a message, listening to a piece of music, and so forth.

In the questioning we gain the meaningful understandings. There are no ultimate determinations for the meanings of human existence.

What is so wonderful about phenomenological insights is that they can be surprising, deep, unexpected, and yet somehow recognizable—but an insight is never final, life is always more complicated and ambiguous that we can express and therein lies the wonder, promise and fascination of phenomenological inquiry.
What kinds of questions does phenomenology ask?

Phenomenology asks originary meaning questions

Any experience whatsoever can be a phenomenological topic: phenomenology studies the unique lived meaning aspects of a “possible human experience”
What kinds of questions does phenomenology ask?

Phenomenology asks originary meaning questions

In focusing on a particular phenomenon, it asks:

- What is this phenomenon like? And how do we need to describe it so that its phenomenological meaning becomes understandable and resonates with our lived experience?

- How does this phenomenon give or show itself in consciousness?

- What existential structures of meaning lie at the core of this phenomenon?

- What makes this phenomenon or lived experience unique and singularly different from other phenomena?
What is the philosophical framework of phenomenology?

The framework underpinning this research is rooted in continental philosophy.

“Philosophy today has become, essentially, phenomenology ... it has undertaken the task of seeing what gives itself–what gives.:”

(Jean-Luc Marion, 2004, p. ix)

And as I explained, seeing what gives itself involves reflecting on prereflective life, on lived or primal experience.
The framework underpinning this research is rooted in continental philosophy.

Phenomenology is commonly associated with the thinking and the voluminous writings by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. But, really we should now recognize that phenomenology has been and is presented or practiced by dozens of fascinating scholars.

*Phenomenology of Practice* contains discussions of a few dozen scholar who can give us new ways of understanding the meaning of meaning and the originary sources of meaning.
# Phenomenologies

## Beginnings:
- Transcendental phenomenology • Husserl
- Personalistic and Value phenomenology • Scheler
- Empathic and Faith phenomenology • Stein
- Ontological phenomenology • Heidegger
- Personal Practice phenomenology • Patočka

## Strands and traditions:
- Ethical phenomenology • Levinas
- Existential phenomenology • Sartre
- Gender phenomenology • de Beauvoir
- Embodiment phenomenology • Merleau-Ponty
- Hermeneutic phenomenology • Gadamer
- Critical phenomenology • Ricoeur
- Literary phenomenology • Blanchot
- Oneiric-Poetic phenomenology • Bachelard
- Sociological phenomenology • Schutz
- Political phenomenology • Arendt
- Material phenomenology • Henry
- Deconstruction phenomenology • Derrida

## New thoughts and unthoughts:
- Technoscience Post-phenomenology • Ihde
- Learning phenomenology • Dreyfus
- Sense phenomenology • Serres
- Ecological phenomenology • Lingis
- Fragmentary phenomenology • Nancy
- Religious phenomenology • Chrétien
- Philological phenomenology • Agamben
- Radical phenomenology • Marion
- Techno-genetic phenomenology • Stiegler
- Ecstatic-poetic phenomenology • Gosetti-Fereince
- Objectivity phenomenology • Figal
- Eventiel phenomenology • Romano
What does the methodological frame of phenomenology look like?

Of course, there is much more to the epistemological frame of phenomenological research. There are philosophical, philological and human science methods that need to be understood and practiced by someone opting for this kind of inquiry.

See for example these methodological or methodical outlines that would take too long to discuss here but that help with phenomenological research and writing.
Phenomenological Research & Writing
“meaning-giving methods of meaning”

Phenomenological Question

philosophical methods

The Reduction
heuristic: wonder
hermeneutic: openness
experiential: concreteness
eidetic: essence / eidos
methodological: approach
ontological: modes of being
originary: inception

philological methods

The Vocative
the vocative: voice
the revocative: livingness
the evocative: nearness
the invocative: intensification
the convocative: appeal
the provocative: epiphany

Human science methods

Empirical Activities
Gathering:
describing
gathering
interviewing
observing
Reflecting:
thematic
existential
Linguistic
insight-cultivating
corporeal
spatial
temporal
relational
material

Lived Experience
What kind of data does phenomenological research collect?

Phenomenology gathers lived experience descriptions...not opinions, views, beliefs, interpretations, but direct descriptions (depictions, renderings, portrayals) of an experience as lived through in a particular moment of time.

Lived experience descriptions are always retrospective recollections —never pure introspective accounts.
How are the data analyzed?

How analyzed?

The analysis is by way of the method of the epoché and the reduction, but this is more an attitudinal and intuitive practice than the application of some techniques, or codes, or methods in an instrumental sense.

Also, phenomenology tries to describe and interpret experiences that may require special expressive linguistic and rhetorical sensitivities. We call this the vocative dimension of phenomenology.
By way of an example, how this kind of research is conducted?

For example:
What is it like to experience keeping or sharing a secret?

Free download of “Childhood’s Secrets” here:

http://archive.org/details/childhoodssecretn00vanm
How are secrets experienced?

How do they shape a child’s world and reality?
Q: “What is the first secret you can remember from your childhood?”
Thematic analysis: What is it like to keep/share a secret?

When we hide a secret (thing / thought) we hide our “self”

Secrets separate the self (soul) from family (community)

Secrets double our reality: they make us live in two realities

Secrets make us invisible: we experience inner (& outer) invisibility

Secrets make us vulnerable: a secret is hard to hide

Secrets make us experience inwardness: inner and outer self

Secrets-kept may disturb relations of intimacy

Secrets-shared may create relations of intimacy

Secrets are involved in the formation of personal identity, persona, sense of unique self

Secrets empower us: we know things others don’t

Learning secrets is learning to handle relationships

A relation exists by the grace of the secret one is for the other

Secrecy is the condition for a meaningful relation with life
WRITTEN MEMORIES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SECRETS

PHILOSOPHIC MODES OF SECRECY & LIFE MEANING

SECRECY IN LITERARY NOVELS

PHYSIOGNOMY: THE WINK, SMIRK, SMILE, COUGH, GESTURE

THE HISTORY OF CONFESSIONS AND CULTURAL MANNERS

CHANGING IMAGES OF "INNER SELF" IN SELF-PORTRAITS

SOURCES AND METHODS FOR STUDYING SECRECY

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SOURCES AND METHODS FOR STUDYING SECRECY
The For a student new to this kind of research, what might you recommend they read in order to understand it further?

1. First: actual phenomenological studies: papers and dissertations. Eg: Papers published online in Textorium, in books such as Writing in the Dark, and selective articles in journals such Phenomenology and Practice… Exemplary dissertations by for example, Mary Haase, Cathy Adams, Michael van Manen, Carol Olsen, Tone Saevi, and many others.

2. Second: texts that clarify phenomenology as a project of reflective inquiry. Eg: “Researching Lived Experience” and “Phenomenology of Practice”

3. Third: any texts by exemplary phenomenologists: Eg, the phenomenologists such as discussed in chapters 5, 6 & 7 of Phenomenology of Practice
For a student new to this kind of research, what might you recommend they do?

In addition to reading the critical and supportive literature it is vital that one engages in relevant course work and workshops.

As well, for dissertation research one need to seek the support of supervisor and a supervisory committee who are familiar with this kind of human science inquiry.