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Thomas Hill

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Phantom Limbs and Phantom Worlds:  
A Phenomenological Study Concerning Experiences of the Absent

Thomas Hill

HON 499: Honors Project

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The phantom limb is an ailment in which a patient perceives a limb that is no longer present after amputation. They may experience pain or tingling in these regions, or even try to perform tasks involving the former limb. For example, they may try to walk while missing a leg, or try to open a door with a non-existent hand. Some research asserts that it originates from neural signal re-networking after damage from amputation, which leads to pain in the patient (Ardelean 2014, 308). However, a medical diagnosis such as this only provides an objective explanation of the disease, which does not necessarily reflect how the patient experiences their body. It assumes that a patient's experience of the disease is only rooted in their damaged neurons, which based on descriptions of patients with phantom limbs is not entirely accurate. Instead, this disease manifests itself in the relationships a patient takes up with the world around them. For example, a patient's experience of the phantom limb suggests their participation in activities they did in the past, such as walking, that are now impossible. A field of study that attends to the patient's experience of the phantom limb may thus provide more information in regards to this phenomenon than medicine. In particular, the use of phenomenology proves especially useful. Phenomenology is the study of one's lived experience as seen from the first-person point of view. The goal of a phenomenological study is to gain insight into the meaning surrounding a specific experience. These studies not only provide information for the person of study, but also for those who wish to understand the experience the other is going through. Through analyzing the phantom limb from this perspective, important features of a patient's experience can be understood.

## Section I: Being-in-the-World and The Habitual and Actual Body

Phenomenological concepts from philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work *Phenomenology of Perception* (2013) prove especially useful in understanding the phantom limb. Merleau-Ponty proposes general models of how we experience our bodies which can be applied to this specific medical condition. He explains that our experience of our body is rooted in our posture as being-in-the-world (81). He uses this term to describe how we experience the world in terms of what we can do with objects in space or what tasks we can achieve. As a result, the body lies within the "pre-objective perspective" and is the background on which objects are experienced (81). From this point of view, our body is determined to be the origin point from which we interact with the world. Therefore, rather than experiencing our body as an object in our field of perception, its presence fades into the background and becomes the vehicle by which we achieve our tasks. The body becomes "the darkness of the theater required for the clarity of the performance" (103). Merleau-Ponty uses this metaphor to explain that the silent role our body plays in our experience is essential in allowing for us to interact with the world. It allows us to move from task to task with great fluidity. For example, when picking up your phone, you do not need to focus on the mechanical movements required to contort your arm toward the phone or the exact strength of your grip needed to hold it firmly in your hand. Instead, your body serves as the background of this experience and rises up to complete this task.

Merleau-Ponty uses the concept of being-in-the-world to arrive at two specific layers of our bodily experience, which can be applied to the phantom limb. These layers are the actual and habitual body (84). The habitual body refers to our experience of the body as a set of possibilities that carry us toward the world. The habitual body resides within the non-reflective and pre-objective part of our experience. Over the course of our life we establish the capabilities of our

body that determine our relationship with objects. It's through the establishing of these capabilities that we come to develop our habitual body, which serves as the foundation of our being-in-the-world. We develop these capabilities in reference to our physical environment. Through these interactions, we inhabit a world full of meaningful objects. For example, through the repeated use of our legs we become able to use stairs as a means of getting to the second floor. In contrast, the actual body refers to our body as a determinate object made of determinate features. For example, our actual body is made up of legs of a certain length and muscles of a certain strength. These features of our actual body inform the habitual body and allow us to unreflectively experience its capabilities.

The relationship between our habitual and actual body allows us to access the possibilities that are held by objects in our perception. However, an injury such as the phantom limb may impede this relationship. The phantom limb presents an example of where the actual body is damaged, but the habitual body persists. This discontinuity between the two describes why a patient experiences the symptoms of the phantom limb. A patient with a phantom limb continues to experience their habitual body of the past. Therefore, they attempt tasks of their previous body. For example, a patient may try to walk even though they no longer possess a leg. Merleau-Ponty describes that to experience a phantom limb is "to stay within the practical field that one had prior to the mutilation" (84). He expresses that a patient remains within the habitual body of their previous life before injury. Their previous body is still available to them as one indivisible power containing their limb that has been amputated. Their posture as being-in-the-world guides them toward their bodily capabilities of the past. Objects such as stairs remain meaningful in their experience as methods of transportation even though they may no longer be able to use them.

## Section II: The Body Schema and Intentional Arc

Merleau-Ponty's notion of being-in-the-world emphasizes the specific way we relate to our body. We experience a habitual body available to us that allows us to maneuver toward the possibilities in our world. He proposes that we understand our habitual body as an indivisible space made up of many parts that create a unifying system. This understanding is rooted in what he calls the body schema (101). Merleau-Ponty explains that his definition of the body schema is different from those seen in classical interpretations. These classical models imply that we experience our body's spatiality as if it were positional similar to other external objects. For example, we experience external objects taking up separate sections of space next to each other, such as a tv remote laying close to a magazine on the coffee table. However, Merleau-Ponty proposes that our body schema is not positional because our body has the ability to "envelop its parts rather than laying them out side by side" (100). The body's parts relate to each other as one unified system and are not experienced as individual objects in space.

Merleau-Ponty proposes that the body schema is instead situational and experienced in our projects toward the world. He illustrates that our experience of our body schema is rooted in activity and the tasks that we are involved in. It's through what we are doing, that we come to relate to our bodily space. He provides the example of leaning his hands on a desk. He describes this experience saying:

If I stand in front of my desk and lean on it with both hands, only my hands are accentuated and my whole-body trails behind them like a comet's tail. I am not unaware of the location of my shoulders or my waist; rather, this awareness is enveloped in my awareness of my hands and my entire stance is read, so to speak, in how my hands lean upon the desk (102).

In this moment, his body schema originates from how his hands lay on the desk. The rest of his body trails behind his hands. His awareness of the rest of his body such as his legs and back

become enveloped within his hands that are performing the task and fade into the background of his experience. He uses this example to affirm that one's body schema comes from situations and actions, and our awareness of it is nonreflective and rooted in what we are trying to accomplish with our habitual body.

Merleau-Ponty presents a patient named Schneider to demonstrate the relationship between our habitual body and the body schema. Schneider's condition causes him to be unable to recognize objects or locations on his body unless involved in a particular task associated with them. He cannot perform "movements that are not directed at any actual situation" (105). For example, he cannot point to a mosquito bite on his body, but he can find this location if the itch directs him. From this case study, Merleau-Ponty explains that Schneider can only experience his body schema through participating in concrete movements, where he is engaged with his habitual body. He therefore is only "conscious of bodily space as the envelope of his habitual action" (106).

His condition highlights general characteristics of our experience that he lacks, which can be used to explain a patient with a phantom limb. In the course of normal experience, we maintain awareness of our body and objects in our perceptual field even when we are not involved in a particular situation. Rather, than being constrained within concrete movements, a person has the ability to project themselves within abstract situations. Merleau-Ponty proposes that through projecting into an abstract situation we, "polarize the world, causing a thousand signs to appear there, as if by magic, that guide action" (111). Therefore, objects within our perception retain potential for our involvement even when we are not actively engaged with them. For example, we experience the significance of an object such as our phone, without

needing to be placed within a concrete situation involving its use. We maintain a sense of the possibilities that our phone serves in relation to our body.

In contrast, a patient such as Schneider cannot project himself into an abstract situation. The world to patients like him is instead “ready-made or fixed” (115). Their experience is restricted by the situation that they are involved in. Rather than being open to a set of possibilities in their experience toward the world, they are closed within the constraints of a particular situation.

A patient with a phantom limb relies on this ability that Schneider lacks to experience their phantom limb. The phantom limb supplements the region of amputation as they attempt to act on their former physical capabilities. The phantom limb remains as just another part of their body (101). The patient is effectively situated in the abstract in their experience of the phantom limb as a meaningful part of their world that continues to give rise to possible actions.

Merleau-Ponty states that the ability of a person to project themselves into the abstract underlies a fundamental aspect of consciousness. He explains that consciousness is “underpinned by an “intentional arc” that projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or rather, that ensures that we are situated within all of these relationships” (137). The presence of the intentional arc is a unifying aspect of our experience of the world. It represents the tight connection that we retain with the world around us. Our intentional arc is composed of many different relationships which elicit the possibilities that hold up our world.



### Section III: Relationships that Constitute Our World

So far, our analysis has focused on how our relationship with our body determines certain possibilities within our experience. However, Merleau-Ponty suggests in his discussion of the intentional arc that our experience is also characterized by a moral component. Over the course of our life we are habituated toward certain moral standards which guide our actions and may unlock or limit the possibilities in our experience. Merleau-Ponty alludes to a moral component within our experience with the example of the psychological condition repression:

Repression consists in the following: the subject commits to a certain path (a love affair, career, or work of art), encounters along this path a barrier and, having the force neither to overcome the obstacle nor to abandon the enterprise, he remains trapped in the attempt and indefinitely employs his forces to renew it in his mind. (85)

Repression occurs when a person is unable to move on from a previous present toward the future. This past experience restricts their possibilities and holds them within a particular world. Merleau-Ponty suggests repression may occur during a love affair. For example, a man may commit to a love affair, but is unable to follow through because of an obstacle. This obstacle lies in the decision he must make either to continue with the affair or choose to remain faithful to his wife. His habitual actions of the past hold him back, while at the same time his desire pulls him to the possibility of a future involving the affair. While in contemplation, he inhabits this situation ambiguously, as he does not fully commit to the possibilities that lie within the situation of the affair. A certain moral weight is carried in this decision causing him to be situated between possibilities. Although he may remain frozen between two futures, the possibilities of both may remain within his experience and influence his actions.

Merleau-Ponty claims that “all “functions” in man – from sexuality and motricity through to intelligence – are rigorously unified” (173). Different and seemingly disparate dimensions of

our experience are related to each other and bleed into each other. Merleau-Ponty describes how this fundamental unity may escape our notice:

Thus, in hysteria and repression, we can be ignorant of something while knowing it because our memories and our body, rather than being given to us through singular and determinate acts of consciousness, are enveloped by generality. Through this generality we still “have” them, but just enough to hold them off at a distance from ourselves. (165)

He expresses that being-in-the-world includes structures that may eventually operate independently of us, and reflect decisions we have not explicitly made. Merleau-Ponty illustrates this idea with an example of a girl who loses her ability to speak when her mother disapproves of her lover. In this situation, the girl is physically capable of speaking. However, communication is no longer a possibility she can access, as her body closes her off from the world. The conflict she inhabits affects the use of her physically healthy body, and it prevents her from accessing the possibility of communicating with her mother. Her situation suggests that structures that support her world operate outside of her explicit control, and may appear in other aspects of her experience.

Just as the daughter cannot simply regain her ability to speak, a patient with a phantom limb cannot simply accept their amputation. Both of these people do not solely face a complication of their body. They experience a complication of their being. The daughter’s body is fully healthy; however, she cannot use it as a means of speaking. Instead her body’s possibilities are affected by the conflicts with her mother. Similarly, the patient with the phantom limb projects their limb as a means to continue to use their habitual body of a previous world. Both situations show that our experience of body is driven by aspects beyond our physical health. Our body holds features of our world such as our moral and social situations. These features impact our manipulation of our body causing certain possibilities to either be available or impossible.

#### **Section IV: A Phantom World**

In the first portion of this study we have focused on the medical condition called the phantom limb. At the core of this issue lies the question: Why might we experience a limb that we no longer possess? Merleau-Ponty's discussion of being-in-the-world shows that we experience the world in terms of possibilities that lie within objects in our perception. Our habitual body is the vehicle by which we access these possibilities and develop meaningful relationships with objects. Therefore, the phantom limb is experienced to maintain these previous relationships with the world around us. Through maintaining these relationships, a person preserves the intentional arc which ties their world together.

The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty explains one form of projection in the phantom limb. However, his concepts can also be used to understand other situations where a person experiences that which is absent. One notable example occurs in soldiers who return home from war. In this situation, soldiers continue to experience features of the war even though they are no longer in combat. Often, these men and women have difficulty transitioning back to their life at home. Their experiences in war echo into their day to day life and restrict them from moving on to a life after war.

In the next section, we will be looking at first-hand accounts from soldiers that describe this experience. Specifically, the accounts we will be examining will be from soldiers of the Vietnam War. These accounts come from various combat memoirs and autobiographical novels. The texts will provide perspective on the experience of a soldier before, during, and after the war. We will see the actions they performed and the scenes they witnessed, and how they affected them for the rest of their life. Specifically, we will assess how inhabiting the morally reprehensible environment of war affected their being-in-the-world. Through analyzing the

experiences of soldiers through a phenomenological lens, we will begin to understand why they experience a world they are no longer in.

Recall that in the first section we discussed Merleau-Ponty's analysis of being-in-the-world. His account emphasizes that we develop relationships with objects in our perception. These relationships define a particular world. It's through these relationships that we experience the world as a set of possibilities that we encounter. We rise up to meet these possibilities and carry ourselves toward the world. Our world has a particular structure as a result of being-in-the-world. This structure is maintained by possibilities and meaning within objects that we have developed over the course of our entire life. For example, a car serves as a means of transportation or our house is a place of shelter and comfort. We become habituated to a certain type of world, defined by objects that hold a particular meaning to us.

However, when a person goes to war, they lose sense of this previously established world. A soldier becomes habituated to a new world: the world of war. In this world objects in their perception take on new meaning. Through their habituation to this world, they become open to new possibilities relevant to the war. Daily exposure to death and abuse allow soldiers to incorporate these possibilities as features of their experience. These possibilities remain in the foreground of their experience as they live toward a world of war. However, when a soldier returns from the war, they cannot simply reinhabit their old civilian life. This is because during their time in war they were habituated to that world and will remain within the possibilities that maintain its structure. As a result, a soldier will continue to experience the world of war even once they return home. This experience causes soldiers to struggle in their transition as they attempt to return to their old life.

Evidence of this experience is shown in the autobiographical novel *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* by Le Thi Diem Thuy (2004). In her text, she writes about her family's life in the United States after fleeing from their home in Vietnam. Her family struggles to adjust to life in America. In particular, her father, a Vietnamese veteran, shows significant difficulty in assimilating into society away from the war and his home. Her father has a drinking problem and often has episodes of uncontrolled outrage. The novel implies these issues stem from his memories of the war. Objects he perceives elicit these episodes causing him to experience his life in the war. For example, Thuy describes her father being deeply affected by an image of a field of grass on the television which was to him as "lush as rice paddies" (152). This image may seem mundane and ordinary, but to her father it held deep meaning. When he reflects on the images, "He remembered the bodies that floated through the rice fields during the war. All those badly burned bodies. What happened to such bodies?" (157) The grass transported her father to the rice paddies he knew during times of war in his homeland. The grass reminded him of all of the death he saw on those rice paddies. It called to mind "the unseen bodies" of his family and friends that now lay underneath it (152). The image causes him to experience his time during the war. It holds the possibilities of death and causes him to feel intense pain. This example shows the power of objects within our perception. The grass has the ability to transport Thuy's father not only to a different world, but to a different time. When he experiences this vision, he inhabits a particular past where the grass holds a particular meaning. In this case, he experiences the world of war from when he was younger as a soldier.

Thuy's father shows an example of how soldiers struggle to assimilate into a life apart from war. They remain stuck within the world of war, as objects continue to cause them to experience possibilities from their time serving. Everyday objects, such as the grass Thuy's

father sees, no longer hold meaning toward his old life as a civilian. Instead, the grass constitutes meaning toward the world of war and the possibilities such as excess death that maintain it. In these moments, Thuy's father experiences something that is not physically there, similar to patients previously discussed with phantom limbs. Those patients experience a phantom limb because objects in their perception elicit possibilities of their previous healthy body. Similarly, objects in Thuy's perception also project certain possibilities. However, these possibilities are not of a previous body, but of a previous world. Therefore, we can say Thuy's father experiences a *phantom world* that he projects, maintaining the world of war that he once inhabited. His experience of a phantom world shows how his time in combat habituated him to a certain world that was different from his previous life. This world caused objects to take on new meaning associated with the possibilities of war. As a result, his transition to a new home is difficult as the phantom world pulls him back into a world he no longer is in. Ordinary objects take on meaning that cause him pain, as he attempts to return to his old life.

Thuy's father experiences a phantom world as result of his relationships to objects that were part of the world of war. It's through these relationships that this phantom world is maintained. However, it is important to consider that our world is not held up by just one feature of our experience, such as our physical relationship to objects. Instead our experience is "rigorously unified" between all aspects of our being (173). We remain situated within many relationships that underlie the intentional arc that holds our world together. These features interweave into each other and provide the fabric of our world. Therefore, when we analyze the phantom world that these veterans experience, we must consider all aspects that constitute their being.

One of the most appropriate to the experience of a soldier is their moral situation that they carry while serving in combat. Soldiers are faced with a great change in moral structure when they enter war. Actions of brutality and violence become permissible and possibly encouraged as new possibilities in their experience. In the following accounts, we will see that soldiers are subject to a new moral situation that holds up the world of war. They become habituated to it, and it creates a new structure that maintains their world. Through analyzing these accounts, we will understand how the habituation to new moral standards results in the persistence of a phantom world that follows them even when they leave the war.

The first account that we will examine comes from Bill Ehrhart's memoir *Vietnam Perkasio* (1995). In this text, Ehrhart describes his experience as a young marine serving in Vietnam. His stories show the deterioration of his old moral values as he becomes habituated to the world of war. When he first enlists, he hopes to protect his country. He writes that he believed "What more noble of a cause can a man die for than to die in defense of freedom?" (196). He hopes to serve his country and perform the ultimate act of patriotism. However, he faces a much different reality during his time of service. He finds himself witnessing horrific acts of violence and abuse. However, he eventually also takes part in these actions. One particularly gruesome example occurs when he partakes in raping a starving Vietnamese woman in exchange for some food:

Wally arrived a short time later with a Vietnamese woman wearing dark silk trousers and a light silk blouse. It was too dark to see how old she was or what she looked like. Wally and Mogerty counted heads—six—and paid for all of us: one-half a case. We sat in the rain, smoking and listening to the gunfire coming from the other side of the river, while each of us took his turn. No one said much. (264)

This scene shows how the values he entered with become lost. Rather than fighting for the virtues of freedom and country, he finds himself partaking in a new moral system comprised of

values he never stood for in the past. As he returns home, he hopes to leave the war behind him and begin the rest of his life. However, he struggles to revert back to his life before the war. He finds dissatisfaction and complacency at home and he no longer feels as if he belongs.

He hoped to return home a hero, but he realizes he is not one, asking himself, "What had I done in the past thirteen months to be proud of?" (275). Subsequently, he returns to the marines, back to the only world he knows.

Ehrhart's experiences in war show how he becomes habituated to a new world. He opens himself up to a new moral standard that maintains this world of war. Within this new moral structure, he becomes capable of new possibilities that otherwise he would never partake in. He acquires the ability to act violently against the innocent and to remain unmoved by evil. The virtues he hoped to spread from America to Vietnam fall into the background of his motives. He acts with selfishness and rage, rather than in the name of freedom or justice. Through his habituation, he rises up to meet these new possibilities as he lives toward a world of war.

As he becomes accustomed to this new world, his old world and the morals that held it up crumble. His experiences within the world of war destroy them. Ehrhart describes that the war made him feel as if his "world was in pieces" (1). In saying this, he presents a metaphor for how the war affected the rest of his life. The intentional arc that held his world together began to be disrupted as he entered Vietnam. He let the moral structures he stood for in his previous civilian life fade to the background. The more time he spent in combat the more he built up new moral structures that supported this new world of war. He became driven by his new capabilities to inflict violence and abuse on others. As this occurred, he developed a new intentional arc in relation to his life as a soldier, which caused his previous world to fall to pieces.



The fictional autobiography *The Short Timers* (1983) by Gustav Hasford illustrates a similar perspective. This text follows the journey of James T. Davis, an enlisted marine serving in the Vietnam War. His experience focuses on the transformative process that soldiers go through during their training and time in combat. The men enter similarly to Ehrhart, with aspirations of serving their country in the name of freedom. However, the account quickly shows that these ideals will become lost as they become habituated to the world of war. Before they even set foot in Vietnam, their training has already changed the marines. Rather than being patriots ready to defend their ideology, they instead are described as werewolves left with “the cold grin of death” on their face (13). As they experience the war through their time in combat, they continue to detach further from their previous world. They become accustomed to murder and chaos. Constantly, they are forced fend for their life with no restraint. They kill unarmed civilian Vietnamese leaving mass graves of the dead (47). The marines hope that one day they will return home and be free of the war. Unfortunately, one of the marines proposes that they truly will never leave it. He says,

Those of us who survive to be short-timers will fly the Freedom Bird back to hometown America. But home won't be there anymore, and we won't be there either. Upon each of our brains the war has lodged itself, a black crab feeding (65).

The soldiers realize that their old world and their old life at home no longer exist in the same way. Their time in war has caused that world to be destroyed. Through their habituation to war, they lost the structures that held up their world at home. Specifically, they have lost the important moral structures that directed them away from certain possibilities. Their time in combat allowed them to inhabit a world where the possibilities of murder and abuse were paramount. When they return home, they are left with images and behaviors of violence from living within a world of no restraint. These behaviors hold up their world of war. As a result,

they remain within it. While they continue to inhabit the world of war, their previous world crumples as they no longer associate with the moral structures that preserved it.

The habituation that these soldiers experience while in combat leads to them experiencing a phantom world when they attempt to return back to their old life at home. During this transition period they often find difficulty reverting back to how things once were. To gain perspectives on how they experience this phantom world at home, we turn to Tobias Wolfe's work *In Pharaoh's Army* (1994). His memoir accounts his time as an Officer during the Vietnam War. Similar to the other authors we've discussed he also experienced a habituation to the world of war. He developed an attitude that was permissive to violence and he often struggled to restrain his anger toward others. A particular scene where he exhibits this is when he irresponsibly directs a chopper close to the homes of many Vietnamize civilians (176). He does this just to spite his fellow officers who ordered him to perform the operation. His actions lead to the destruction of many of the village homes, and unnecessarily puts many in danger with no regard for their safety. Once he finally returns to the United States after his service, he has difficulty transitioning back home. His actions from the war haunt him and he feels as if he no longer deserves to be a part of civilian life. He explains this feeling after trying to reconnect with family and friends:

I thought of my friends and family as a circle, and this was exactly the picture that stopped me cold and kept me where I was. It didn't seem possible to stand in the center of that circle. I did not feel equal to it. I felt morally embarrassed. Why this was so I couldn't have said, but a sense of decency, even blight, had taken hold of me. In Vietnam I'd barely noticed it, but here, among people who did not take corruption and brutality for granted, I came to understand that I did. And this was what set me apart (195).

Wolfe's account shows the effects that the war has had on him. He became habituated to a corrupt and morally indecent world. When he returns home, he realizes this, and feels ashamed because he no longer feels he belongs in the world of his family and friends. For so long, he was

being in a world toward war. As he reverts back to life at home, he experiences a phantom world that drives him toward tendencies and actions that are no longer acceptable in civilian life. For example, he carries an attitude toward death and violence that civilians do not relate to. He expresses that sometimes, “He said horrifying things [to his friends] without knowing it until I saw a reaction” (195). These practices are those he inherited from the world of war.

The feelings of shame and embarrassment Wolfe experiences develop a social imperative associated with the phantom world. The experience of a phantom world leads to these veterans struggling to assimilate back to normal life. They cannot relate to those around them with the same ease that they once did. The phantom world influences their actions and behaviors. Wolfe showed issues controlling his temper and understanding social cues. Behaviors from his time in war echoed into his daily life. Other veterans likely also struggle with the same experiences caused by a phantom world. As a result, there is pressure for them to learn to suppress the phantom world in order to function in society. Otherwise, they may face the judgment of others. Many appear unable to suppress the phantom world causing them to become outcasts in civilian life. Some, like Bill Ehrhart, may even quickly return to the war because it is the only world they feel they belong.

Similar to the phantom limb, the phantom world upholds a previous present that a person experienced. In the case of the phantom limb, the projection of a limb into an area of amputation holds up their world that they once knew before injury. Their intentional arc is rooted in their relationship to this world of the past. Through projecting this phantom limb, they are attempting to retain the only world that they have ever known. The phantom limb holds a person within a past that they are comfortable in, and it may shield them from their fear of a future where they suffer from amputation. The phantom world also serves as a mechanism to preserve an

experience of the past in response to fear of the future. Soldiers often hold terrible memories from their time in war. Through living within the situation of war, they were forced to experience death and great suffering daily. They may have even been forced to act with great violence to preserve their life or follow orders. These memories and stories likely are difficult to tell family members and other civilians, especially, as veterans of the Vietnam War, a war which was notorious for controversy. Therefore, these soldiers hold in their experiences. They fear a future where they are met with shame or disgust by those who hear their stories. This fear prevents them from moving on from their life in war. They remain tied to the world of war living within an intentional arc constructed by the objects and moral structures that hold meaning in relation to their life in combat, causing the phantom world to persist.

Many veterans have managed their phantom worlds through activities such as writing. Writing may be therapeutic as it allows veterans to face their world of the past through telling their stories. They allow their experience to be embodied within their writing rather than manifested as a phantom world. Then, they hope to move on from their time in war as they conquer their fear of the future and try their best to acclimate back into their present life. Tobias Wolfe, who wrote the memoir *In Pharaoh's Army*, which we discussed above, expresses the therapeutic effect that writing has on him. He states he enjoys that his writing “could mean something” and it’s as if he is “saving his life with every word he wrote” (213). Through writing, Wolfe appears to escape the phantom world and suppress its effects. In a sense, he saves his own present life by moving on from his fear of the past. As he writes, he habituates himself into a new world away from war. He finds new meaning in new behaviors that are not tied to the world of war.

Using a phenomenological analysis, this discussion reveals that both the phantom limb and the phantom world stem from our posture as being-in-the-world. In the case of the phantom limb, our habitual body drives us toward certain possibilities held within objects in our perception. As a result, the phantom limb exists to maintain access to these possibilities. However, our being-in-the-world is composed of more than just our relationships with objects. Instead, we inhabit a world constituted by a variety of interconnected relationships which support our intentional arc. The experience of a phantom world shows that our world also includes moral components. Through being habituated to a new world such as war, we are exposed to new moral standards which allow for new possibilities in our experience. The accounts from soldiers who served in Vietnam show that these possibilities exist even once they return home and are experienced as a phantom world. This analysis provides perspective on both of these conditions, which will allow medical professionals and family members to understand why a person may experience these situations. Hopefully, this will allow for increased compassion and directives of care, as these patients and veterans come to terms with their experiences.

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