

PREPARING A LABYRINTH:

WRITING THE SELF IN THE WORLD

Volume 1: An exegesis

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## **Certificate of Authorship/Originality**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

At the heart of philosophical investigation is the question of what it means to be a human being. This is not simply a matter of ontology, but a matter of definitions, language, ethics, relationships and responsibilities. What it means to be, how to live according to sound epistemological and axiological frameworks, and how to articulate this, are questions that perhaps will never be answered in a satisfactory manner. This submission constitutes my contribution to the long discussion, and is presented as three separate but related research products. The story I found myself telling, in the essay and the two creative manuscripts, is one of ambiguity and uncertainty, of the human body, and of the being that is always shifting between self and other, nature and culture, living and dead.

The exegetical essay, *Preparing a Labyrinth*, lays out the intellectual and creative pathways I have travelled while engaging critically with questions of the body, truth and narrative. The short story collection, *Ways of Getting By*, addresses the pragmatics of being in a troubled world, and the material consequences of apparently abstract choices about the ‘right thing to do’, or ‘ways of getting by’. The fiction manuscript, *The Idea of Gravity*, similarly addresses the effects of decisions about ethical problems, and looks too to the effects on subjectivity of the workings – and the disintegration – of the body.

All three works are the products of a research process that combined some of the classic formulations of early twentieth-century phenomenological thought with contemporary insights from biologists, neurologists and scholars of the virtual world of IT, and my own observation, archival and phenomenological research methods. Using this material, I have generated a mass of creative and qualitative data, and used it to examine a perspective on the nature, and the ethics, of being, that resulted in the thesis presented here. All three elements take seriously the labyrinthine properties of language and its role in constructing our sense of ourselves and of the world in which we live. All use language as material to craft a way of sensing the social and natural world. All three, too, take seriously the place of death in society as ‘the problem of the subject’ (Certeau), that which is ‘too cruel anywhere’ (Shakespeare), and is yet always there, at once the great inevitability and the great uncertainty.