Meeting You for the First Time: Descriptive Categories of an Intersubjective Experience

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> Context • There is little research currently on first encounters with a first-person epistemology and empirical evidence. **> Problem** • We want to provide an answer to the question: "What is the lived experience of being with others for the first time?" **> Method** • We rely on a first-person epistemology and a second-person method, namely the explicitation interview, a technique of guided retrospective introspection. We analyze a corpus of 24 interviews conducted after planned first encounters. We identify generic descriptive categories of subjects' lived experience. **> Results** • We propose a typology of the micro-moments that constitute people's intersubjective experiences during first encounters. We identify five descriptive categories of these experiences: act, mode of intersubjectivity, sense of agency, experiential modality, and content in terms of involved persons. **> Implications** • This article highlights what a careful investigation of subjective experience can bring to the understanding of intersubjectivity. It shows in particular how an applied phenomenology can complement and revisit less empirical philosophical approaches. It can be useful to scholars conducting third-person studies on first encounters. This study is a first step toward investigating more spontaneous encounters, occurring for instance in everyday situations or in less usual settings. We are currently analyzing interviews on first encounters between health practitioners and their clients, which will offer practical advice to both sides. **> Constructivist content** • Constructivist approaches argue that "reality" is actively brought forth by the subject rather than passively acquired. Questioning the separation between the objective world and subjective experience, they examine how people build their own reality through their perceptions, through their experience of the world, and through their interactions with others. Our study focuses on first encounters "from within," listening to subjects' accounts of their lived experience. We aim to defend and promote the experiential perspective in the field of cognitive science. We therefore follow Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, for whom the "concern is to open a space of possibilities in which the circulation between cognitive science and human experience can be fully appreciated and to foster the transformative possibilities of human experience in a scientific culture."
> Key words • **Intersubjectivity, experience, first encounter, first-person epistemology, micro-phenomenology, explicitation interview, micro-experiential phenomenon, generic descriptive category.**

Introduction

« 1 » What is the lived experience of being with others for the first time? During a first encounter, is it possible to "put oneself in someone else's shoes"? Conversely, can one remain drawn within oneself in front of another person? In this article, we address these questions "from within," listening to subjects' lived experiences in such situations. We first provide some background knowledge on intersubjectivity and why it matters to study it with first-person approaches. We then describe our method, namely the explicitation interview, and our data collection on the lived experience of first encounters. We expose the micro-experiential phenomena underlying it, and how we analyze them in terms of generic descriptive categories. Finally, we discuss our findings and how they are a first step toward investigating more ecological situations.

Intersubjectivity as a topic of scientific and philosophical investigations

« 2 » Intersubjectivity refers both to what separates, creates a gap, and what is common, i.e., what articulates two, or more, subjectivities (Ciccone 2006). It is at the heart of interpersonal relationships, whether they unfold easily or with difficulty, are infused with enthusiasm or hesitation, with open-mindedness or resistance, etc. (De Jae-

gher 2015). Intersubjectivity has been a recurrent topic of investigation in philosophy, and stands prominently, in particular, in Edmund Husserl's study on one's constitution with others:

> "The intrinsically first being, the being that precedes and bears every worldly objectivity, is transcendental intersubjectivity: the universe of monads, which effects its communion in various forms." (Husserl 1960: 156)

« 3 » A large body of work is available, with ramifications regarding notably the way the subject and subjectivity are circumscribed, or the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and whether the former precedes the latter or vice versa. Hanne De Jaegher, Barbara Pieper, Daniel Clénin and Thomas Fuchs (2017) focus, for example, on the embedded and interactive aspects of social understanding. They do so by studying the roles played by the bodies, by the interaction processes, and by interpersonal experience. Relying on Vasu Reddy (2008), they characterize intersubjectivity as a meaningful engagement between subjects, beyond mere coexistence, and mutual need of multiple first-person perspectives. According to De Jaegher and Ezequiel Di Paolo (2007), intersubjectivity is co-created by two (or more) subjects, and interactions can acquire their own autonomy and "influence, form and transform their participants" (De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007: 486). As for Fuchs and De Jaegher (2009), they present the concept of social understanding as a continuous and dynamic process of participatory sense-making and mutual incorporation. This process corresponds to an interactive coordination of several embedded agents in which the lived bodies of the participants generate a common intercorporeality.

« 4 » For George Herbert Mead (1934), self-development is possible thanks to social interactions. How a person socializes depends on the reactions and answers provided by individuals surrounding her actions. The coordination, or attunement, of respective perspectives is an elaborate dance: I am aiming at others, and others are aiming at me (Martin & Gillespie 2010). The crossing of these reciprocal acts, which Husserl calls coexistence of intentionalities (Husserl 1960), is what should be studied under the term intersubjectivity. For Martin Buber, the subject is primarily made of "relations to others," and not a solitary *cogito*: "at the same time as the 'you' occurs, so does the 'I'" (our translation of "en même temps qu'est posé le tu, le je est posé") (Misrahi 2012: 16).

« 5 » Bin Kimura (1972) defines the originating co-presence of a person and her conspecifics (the "*hito to hito tono aida*") as the first dimension of the being-with-others. The self does not emerge first as an isolated monad, which builds relationships with others only at a later stage. Rather, it finds its primary shape in interpersonal relationships. For instance, during early development, family relations form a primary intersubjective environment in which the structure of the self is built on the basis of shared experiential contents: feelings, perceptions, thoughts or linguistic significations (Tomasello 1999).

« 6 » Buber and Kimura's statements converge on the idea that social interactions do much more than modulate our individuality, and eventually turn us into who we are (De Jaegher 2015). They, and noticeably first encounters, often leave us transformed, although sometimes in subtle ways we may not be aware of.

« 7 » It is worth mentioning that beyond psychological mechanisms, in our relationships, body sensations also play a role in the construction of subjectivity. This is what Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1965) means by inter-corporeality, focusing on the relation between one's own body and that of the other, and which he sees as the foundation of intersubjectivity.

« 8 » Much work on intersubjectivity is also related to the concept of empathy. According to Daniel Stern, our mental life is co-created and the idea of a one-person psychology is no longer tenable. He thinks of the intersubjective matrix as the "overriding crucible in which interacting minds take on their current form" (Stern 2004: 77f). He identifies what he calls intersubjective consciousness: a specific form of reflexivity that appears when a person becomes aware of the content of her mind or actions because someone else's mind is reflecting them back to her. This process occurs when this person accepts someone else's thoughts, i.e., when she accepts what these thoughts tell her about who she is. This corresponds to Serge Tisseron et al.'s (2013) process of intersubjective empathy, which characterizes how one's self-consciousness temporarily espouses someone else's situation in order to share her experience and adopt her point of view.

« 9 » Reciprocity is pervasive in all previous considerations on individuality. Relations to others are essential to one's subjective development, and we are therefore all mutually involved in our respective subjective growths. The concept of ubuntu is a form of relational spirituality emphasizing the basic connectedness of all human beings beyond all lines of race and class (Battle 2000). It hence leads to defining humanity by our reciprocal connections and sharing: "*I am because you are*."

From theoretical considerations to the lived experience of intersubjectivity

« 10 » Answering an initial question such as "what is the lived experience of being with others for the first time?" requires a definition of experience. In our work, we adopt the *individual experience* as the fundamental unit of analysis, and define it as an ongoing process that is lived "from within." We follow Natalie Depraz, Varela and Pierre Vermersch's conception of experience:

> "[…] the lived, first-hand acquaintance with, and account of, the entire span of our minds and actions, with the emphasis not on the context of the action but on the immediate and embodied, and thus inextricably personal, nature of the content of the action. Experience is always that which a singular subject is subjected to at any given time and place, that to which she has access 'in the first person'." (Depraz, Varela & Vermersch 2003: 2)

« 11 » Experience is situated in a social and material world. Indeed, it spans over one's social and material interactions, and also impregnates one's bodily state at any given moment. On this basis, experience as we study it is characterized by several properties described hereafter.

« 12 » First, the experiencing subject is an I who is not only a point of departure toward the world, but also the end point of the ways the world affects her:

> "[…] with experience there is something like an encounter between a subject and a reality that transcends him and which, by its novelty, creates surprise. From this we may conclude that experience is, for the subject, both active, in so far as it represents a formative trial, in the sense of an attempt at knowledge of what is encountered, and passive in as much as it is a trial in the sense of an ordeal." (Depraz, Varela & Vermersch 2003: 171)

« 13 » Martin Heidegger provides a description of the passive dimension of experience when he writes the following:

> "To undergo an experience with something – be it a thing, a person, or a god – means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us. When we talk of 'undergoing' an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens." (Heidegger 1976: 57)

« 14 » Second, because experience is both active and passive, it has to be understood in terms of relation. Hence, in Husserl's phenomenology, the subject's relation to the world is an intentional relation, which binds consciousness to phenomena. What is "real" is a lived and experienced world, which always unfolds in front of the subject from a specific intentional act. This approach is centered *both* on the subject and on the world and in doing so, tones down the duality between subject and object. This relational stance is also adopted by Thomas Nagel (1974), for whom a living being's experience of the world is what defines her as a being.

« 15 » Third, when a phenomenon occurs to a subject, her experience is characterized by its holistic nature. In other terms, an experience is a composite of various elements that cannot easily be set apart. Vermersch (2006) highlights the different layers of the lived experience, which relate to its perceptual, cognitive, motor, or emotional aspects. This typology echoes John McCarthy and Peter Wright's (2004) four experiential threads: the *sensual* thread (sensorial involvement in experience), the *emotional* thread (meaning attributed to an object or a person on the basis of our values, objectives and desires), the *compositional* thread (relations between the parts and the whole of an experience) and the *spatiotemporal* thread (the links of experience to the past and to the future). McCarthy and Wright's fourth experiential thread refers to an essential component of experience: time. The holistic approach to experience accounts for its inscription in time: although the time of the lived experience is always the present (Stern 2004), it integrates both the past and the future. More specifically, within a phenomenological perspective, one aims at the study of things as they appear or are given to our experience, in the present moment, with a temporality of the order of seconds or fractions of seconds. However, for Husserl, in the present time one finds echoes of the past (retentions), and what he calls the future of the present (protentions). Husserlian retentions are the immediate past, which still resonates in the present moment, much like the tail of a comet. Protentions point to the immediate future, either predictable or implicit, given what has happened in the past or the present of the present moment. Retentions and protentions are thus both part of present-time experience, and belong to a global, unified and unique experience occurring in a subjective now. This relation of experience to time means that it can only be approached from a well-defined angle: the study of a peculiar and specific moment (Vermersch 2000). Otherwise, one is instead dealing with a class of experiences, or with something general.

« 16 » Fourth, at the moment it is lived, experience engages several types of awareness. One of them is the subject's reflective consciousness, i.e., what she is conscious of, and can easily report. Another part of experience is below the threshold of this consciousness and is not directly accessible to the subject who lives it. It is therefore known as pre-reflective. This non-reflective part of consciousness, which Vermersch calls direct consciousness, covers everything that passively affects the subject. It is everything that gets deposited in passive memory, and which creates retentions. This points to Husserl's phenomenological unconscious, and Vermersch's organizational unconscious or potential (Vermersch 2017). These two types of awareness may or may not be visible to an outside observer.

« 17 » Integrating philosophical inquiries on this issue, the use of the explicitation interview described in a latter section of this article is associated with the above dimensions of the lived experience: its situated and embodied nature, its dual agentive and relational properties, its holistic nature, its temporal quality and its inscription in different kinds of consciousness.

A lack of data on lived intersubjective experiences

« 18 » Despite the abundance of literature on intersubjectivity (De Jaegher 2015; De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007; Fuchs & De Jaegher 2009; Reddy 2008), data are very rare when it comes to the lived experience of intersubjectivity, although it can be argued that experience, and its description, should be at the heart of humanistic approaches. Two notable exceptions are studies by De Jaegher et al. (2017) and by Tom Froese, Hiroyuki Iizuka and Takashi Ikegami (2014), with the latter focusing on the development of social awareness using multi-user Human-Computer Interfaces and first-person reports. The current lack of data can partly be explained by the deficit of methods oriented toward recording and assessing one's experience. The explicitation interview, described later in this article, is a well-structured method to bridge the gap, and offers rich and concrete phenomenological data. Importantly, first-person approaches, which focus on the subject's point of view, are sometimes undervalued in comparison to third-person approaches, on the assumption that an external point of view offers greater objectivity. The limits of this last statement have however been stressed, and the epistemic validity of first-person approaches, and especially of the explicitation interview, has been analyzed in detail (Petitmengin & Bitbol 2009). Especially, claims denying subjects' introspective abilities (Nisbett & Wilson 1977) have been rebutted (Petitmengin & Bitbol 2009; Petitmengin et al. 2013). Research on lived experience, while recognized as crucial in philosophical and empirical approaches to the study of the mind, is moreover confronted with the problem that each examination of experience seems to change the experience itself. Many have taken this so-called "excavation fallacy" (Kordeš & Demšar 2018) to

undermine the possibility of a first-person inquiry as a scientific practice.

« 19 » It must be stressed that external observations leave aside entire facets of the situation at play. Indeed, they cannot access what is unfolding for each person in an unobservable way, and which constitutes her subjective experience. This to some extent occurs "behind" physical movements that can be recorded by a video camera. It also occurs "in front" of neuronal patterns of activity that can be recorded by brain imaging techniques. This unobservable aspects of subjects' experience can, however, be reported by them, hence the benefits of asking them to do so with a specific method.

First encounters as a prime testbed to study intersubjectivity

« 20 » In our efforts to better understand intersubjectivity as it is lived by subjects, we decided to focus on a specific category of intersubjective situations: first-time encounters. This choice was based on several reasons. One reason is that, given the complexity of intersubjectivity as a concept and as an attribute of some lived experiences, first-time encounters restrict the field of investigation to a well-defined situation: two persons being put in the presence of each other for the first time. While this may seem restrictive with respect to the diversity of intersubjective situations (later encounters, group meetings, etc.), their inherent richness still holds the promise of shedding light on intersubjectivity from a more general standpoint. Indeed, the initial encounter of two persons generates in both of them a range of cognitions, which altogether contribute to the intersubjective density of the situation, with respect to later encounters where novelty has mostly recessed. In cognitive psychology, the study of first impressions – initial judgments made about people very quickly, with little information, and which are often accurate to a considerable extent – opens a window on what happens in the very first instants (Evans et al. 2000; Bar, Neta & Linz 2006; Willis & Todorov 2006; Schiller et al. 2009; Ambady 2010). This unfolding of cognitions is a process under the influence of specific knowledge, norms and expectations, and is therefore partly shaped by previous experiences. This is exemplified by the role played by stereotypes in impression formation (Branscombe & Smith 1990; Abreu 1999; Dukes & Maddox 2008; Yeung & Kashima 2010), or by the hypothesis confirmation bias, which describes how one is biased toward asserting one's initial perceptions of someone else as the meeting carries on. From yet another perspective, psychotherapists study how the early moments of their encounter with a new client impact on what will later unravel in the therapeutic process, and in particular on the construction of a therapeutic alliance with this client (Sexton et al. 2005; Hilsenroth & Cromer 2007). These different lines of work suggest that first-time encounters are a rich setting in terms of intersubjectivity. Lastly, first-time encounters reduce the overlapping of memories, in contrast with later encounters. During the latter, one can hypothesize that previous encounters with the same person may interfere and generate confusion. Restricting oneself to first-time encounters therefore contributes to the clarity of the data that can be collected on the lived experience, especially when using the explicitation interview (see below).

Study

Experimental design

« 21 » Among the variety of first encounters, one may initially distinguish between fortuitous and planned encounters, i.e., for example, between a random encounter on the street and a job interview. One may also conceive of a gradient of situations, from a totally unexpected encounter to going to knock at the door of new neighbors to going on a first date. What may differ is the level of engagement and of expectations. In the case of a job interview, for example, the applicant may thus have made great efforts to prepare herself, or to learn about the recruiter she has never met, in order to maximize her chances of getting hired.

« 22 » For our study, we needed both a protocol in which people could meet for the first time, and an interview technique tailored to the challenges of collecting information on lived experience. We chose to study planned first encounters. Such situations have limited ecological validity because of the experimental setting and the instructions given to the participants. As in every possible interview situation, the interviewee may also show a social desirability bias. We thus do not claim that they provide results applicable to natural encounters. They are rather a first step in the micro-phenomenological study of first encounters.

« 23 » As for the protocol, we chose to invite pairs of people who had never met before. Our participants only knew that they were going to partake in an experiment on interpersonal relationships, that they would meet and converse with someone else, and be interviewed. Although no strict control was enforced, we matched participants to have occurrences of male-female, male-male and female-female pairs. This choice resulted from the difficulty of anticipating what effect gender and gender pairing could have on the lived experience of the participants. We therefore chose to allow for all three possible pairings in order to collect experiences as diverse as possible.

« 24 » Two experimenters were needed for each pair of participants. People were welcomed separately outside the building and led to a room where they met the other participant. Instructions were given that we would leave them together in the room for 10 minutes, that they could use this time as they wished to learn about the other person, and that we would then separately ask them to briefly present that person. We mentioned that no recording device of any sort was concealed in the room. We then left them, came back, and led the participants to two other rooms, where interviews were conducted. Each participant was first asked to provide a brief presentation of what they had learnt of the other person. This was followed by a longer – on average 40 minutes – interview focused on what had been experienced during the encounter. This specific type of interview is described in the next paragraphs. Allowing 10 minutes for the participants to meet and converse was the result of a trade-off between different constraints: on the one hand, having at least some time for each of them to learn something about the other person. On the other hand, we wanted the whole experiment to last under one hour for each participant, so as not to take up too much of her time.

Additionally, given that the explicitation interview most often consists in fragmenting very short moments of experience, 10 minutes seemed enough to collect material for our investigation. After asking for a coarse-grained description of the encounter to get a better understanding of it as a whole, we let participants choose the more specific moment during the 10 minutes, or in some interviews the moments, they wanted to focus on. We did so because better and more extensive information on experience is usually gathered when the interviewee can focus on something genuinely meaningful to her. In a dyad, participants could therefore choose different, non-overlapping moments. At the beginning of the interview, participants were told in simple words about the expected process of revisiting their subjective experience of the encounter with the interviewer's guidance. They were also told about the nature of the interviewing process, and how it differed from other situations such as a chat between friends or a clinical interview. They were then asked to grant their permission to be interviewed, before being given time to start to reconnect to their past experience. The questioning *per se* could then begin.

Method: The explicitation interview

Overview

« 25 » The explicitation interview, also known as the micro-phenomenological interview, has been developed and tailored over several decades by Vermersch (1994, 2012) and Claire Petitmengin (2006). The "entretien d'explicitation" was founded by Pierre Vermersch in the 1990s. The first English translation was elicitation interview, which was then replaced by "explicitation interview." Claire Petitmengin pursued the development of the method, especially for data analysis, and used the term micro-phenomenological interview. The approach connects several lines of thought: Jean Piaget's theory of consciousness, Georges Gusdorf's theory of affective memory, Husserl's phenomenology, Carl Rogers' client-centered therapy and Eugene Gendlin's focusing, among others.

« 26 » Explicitation is at the heart of an applied approach to micro-phenomenology. Indeed, departing from more theoretical considerations, it consists in a guided retrospective introspection, i.e., it aims at guiding an interviewee in the recall of a past situation in order to build a detailed and holistic description of her lived experience during it. This interview technique is based on very firm attentional guidance, to accompany and to maintain the interviewee in an activity of introspection. It does not however guide her on the content, which comes to her consciousness through a process of letting go. This is possible thanks to a particular stance on the part of the interviewer, guiding the interviewee's attention with open and non-inductive questions but never inducing the content of what the interviewee says. During this process, she suspends her judgment – this is the Husserlian epoché –, which allows her to access her past lived experience. According to Depraz, Varela and Vermersch,

> "one accomplishes the epoché in three principal phases: A0: Suspending your 'realist' prejudice that what appears to you is truly the state of the world; this is the only way you can change the way you pay attention to your own lived experience; in other words, you must break with the 'natural attitude'; A1: Redirecting your attention from the 'exterior' to the 'interior'; A2: Letting-go or accepting your experience." (Depraz, Varela & Vermersch 2003: 25)

« 27 » This reference lived experience is also called "V1" (vécu 1 in French) by explicitation practitioners. It is contrasted with "V2" (vécu 2 in French), which is the time and situation of the interview (and which is also a lived experience). By "holistic" we mean that the interviewer is interested in the whole of experience, with its different facets. These facets include the interviewee's cognitive/mental operations, but also her physical actions, her sensations and her emotions. The temporal dimension of experience which, as said previously, is one of its fundamental properties, is carefully accounted for, with an effort to decompose larger-scale experiences into series of very fine-grained microscopic experiential events. In more specific terms, a step of fragmentation is followed by a step of qualitative expansion: any micro-experiential moment is investigated along the various dimensions of experience.

« 28 » An explicitation interview is always addressing a singular situation experienced by the interviewee, even if she has repeatedly experienced similar experiences. This requirement is important to obtain specific descriptions and not generalizations, for instance, about know-how or habits. It also pays considerable attention to the perlocutionary effects of the interviewer's interventions. First, to minimize induction and the construction of distorted or false memories (Schacter 2001), the use of carefully crafted open questions is the interviewer's primary concern. "Why" questions are not used, while "how" and "what" questions are favored, e.g., "what were you doing when you (+ verb of action)…?," "how did you manage to…?," "what did you pay attention to?," "how do you know that?," "how does it feel?," etc. Considerations of time are often added to these questions to help the interviewee navigate the chronology of her experience, e.g., "and at that very moment, what did you do?," "and just after doing that, what did you pay attention to?," etc. Second, questions are supplemented by recapitulations of what has been previously said, with great attention to the interviewee's words and descriptions in order to facilitate recalling. Without a tool such as the explicitation interview, and the targeted questions of the interviewer, the pre-reflective aspects of the experience under study, i.e., the part of this experience that remained below the threshold of consciousness, remains very elusive to the interviewee. Shedding light on it is then especially interesting since it contributes to a fuller understanding of what was lived, and how.

« 29 » Harvesting such details of the lived past experience implies the induction and maintenance of a specific figure of speech in the interviewee, named an "embodied figure of speech" (EFS) by Pierre Vermersch ("Position de parole incarnée" in French). This figure enables a presence to oneself, in what is a slightly modified state of consciousness. It leads to an intimate contact with the past situation, and therefore to the possibility of quasi-reliving it and of providing a step-by-step description of its content. The EFS is not spontaneous and adopting it upon the interviewer's guidance may be easy or more difficult depending on the interviewee. It can be assessed

with different verbal and non-verbal cues – like unfocused eyes or the slowing down of speech, the use of the personal pronoun "I" rather than "we," etc.

« 30 » A key concept of the explicitation interview is the concept of satellites of action. The technique aims at collecting the various operations performed by the interviewee. This is the core of the description, around which a number of satellites gravitate. They give its meaning to action but are not what the interviewer is primarily interested in. They are:

- the context of the experience – where and when it happened, i.e., the circumstances;
- the purpose of actions – why they happened: the objectives and intentions;
- the interviewer's theoretical or experiential knowledge;
- the beliefs, judgments, justifications or rationalizations during V2.

« 31 » Finding one's way in the interviewee's discourse relies on constantly monitoring whether an action or a satellite of action is being expressed. Questions can then be asked to bring the interviewee back to her experience when she departs from it. Context, however, facilitates the recall of past situations and can be questioned to this end when needed.

First-person epistemology and second-person method of data collection

« 32 » Along with other data-collection techniques, the explicitation interview is a first-person approach, in the sense that the resulting material is made of the interviewee's words and subjective point of view. This comes in opposition to third-person approaches, which are based on an external point of observation. Words provide access here to the subjective experience (while gestures during an explicitation interview can also provide cues for subjective experience, they are not the primary focus of attention), and subtle discriminations between experiences will derive from variations in linguistic usage ("he says that" will therefore be interpreted differently from "he tells me that," or "I perceive that" differently from "I see that" or "I feel that"). This does not mean, however, that words need to be analyzed *stricto sensu* in all situations: a statement like "I *know* that she is scared" does not point to knowledge, as knowing primarily suggests, but rather to a feeling or reasoning.

« 33 » As in other interview techniques, the explicitation interview is the interaction between an interviewer (named B in research on explicitation) and an interviewee (named A). A's first-person data are therefore collected through B's intervention and guidance, which leads to classifying the technique as a second-person approach. As already explained, B's role is crucial in assisting A in her recalling, in a quasi-reliving, of her past experience.

Overview of the collected data

« 34 » During the month of June 2014, we conducted 24 explicitation interviews with 11 men and 13 women. Interviewees were aged 25–55, were highly educated and had a middle-to-high socio-economic status. They were native French speakers (19 of them) or fluent speakers of French as a second language (5 of them). The total duration of the recordings was 14 hours, 39 minutes and 50 seconds. After transcription, with the addition of a few codes (see below), this amounted to a total of 149,546 words (with a mean number of 6,231 words per transcription and a standard deviation of 978 words, according to Microsoft Word).[1]

Step-by-step treatment of the data

« 35 » We followed the method of analysis developed in Petitmengin (2006) and Vermersch (2012). However, given our focus on intersubjectivity and encounters, rather than restricting ourselves to actions performed by A, we extended the standard approach to integrate interactions and A's experiences as a target of her partner's actions. We called this partner A*. The successive operations applied to the data unfolded as follows:

- Attribute codes to the interviewer and the interviewee's respective interventions – B1 for the interviewer's first intervention, A2 for the interviewee's first reply, B3 for the interviewer's second intervention etc. –, for the sake of easy referencing;
- Clean the transcription: remove time-codes, pauses, aborted sentences, duplications, signs of hesitation or brief interventions of agreement, for both A and B. Facing the delicate question of the punctuation of the transcriptions, we chose to minimize punctuation, and in particular not to use commas, periods or semi-colons. Indeed, the transcribed text is only a representation of the corresponding audio signal and such signs would be an interpretation rather than a simple observation. We also chose not to indicate pauses. Our transcripts being short, these conventions do not interfere much with their readability. Ellipses, i.e., when two components of a verbatim statement are separated by other words and in particular by interventions from the interviewer, are indicated by "[…]." Segments enclosed in parentheses do not correspond to words uttered by the interviewee, but are here to facilitate readers' understanding when missing the context of the verbatim statement;
- Distinguish passages describing V1 from other passages such as B's interventions and A's comments belonging to V2 and not to V1;
- Single out sentences focused on physical and mental actions, sensations, emotions and body sensations, i.e., differentiate actions from satellites of action; because of our focus on intersubjectivity, both instances of A taking the semantic role of an agent (who performs an action) and of a patient (who undergoes an action) were kept, with attention to pronouns such as "I" and "me," as commonly done, but also to "we," "us" and to the French indefinite personal pronoun;
- Reorganize the sentences selected previously to re-establish the timeline of V1, since A's recall often diverges from it. Given attempts to fragment experiences into smaller components, a hierarchical leveling of the descriptions was adopted when necessary to specify that some micro-experiences were part of a larger experience.

« 36 » For each interview, the result of these successive transformations was a time-ordered summary oriented toward intersubjective actions during V1. This constituted the material for our analyses.

1| Interview transcriptions are available upon request to the authors.

Data Analysis

« 37 » Our analysis falls into the field of qualitative analysis, and therefore echoes its epistemological and methodological challenges (Saldaña 2011). It rested on a patient and iterative craft work to extract meaningful descriptive categories for our target situations.

Extracting meaningful descriptive categories of the intersubjective experience

« 38 » Early investigations of our data suggested we should focus our attention on two complementary aspects: on the one hand, the different synchronic descriptive categories of what we named an "experiential micro-phenomenon" or EMP, for short; on the other hand, the diachronic ordering and unfolding of these EMPs. Of most interest to us were EMPs that would be unobservable from a third-person point of view, and are only accessible through A's recall of her past experience.

« 39 » Regarding the synchronic dimension, comparing fragments of our verbatim statements across interviews led us to consider five descriptive categories for each EMP:

- Act performed by the subject;
- Mode of intersubjectivity;
- Content of the EMP with specific consideration to both participants to the encounter: A alone, A* alone, both A and A*, someone else (specified or unspecified), something (inanimate), and all possible combinations of these elements;
- A's sense of agency during the EMP: either active or passive, as exemplified by the contrast between "I remember" and "memories come back to me";
- Experiential modality: vision, audition, olfaction, bodily sensation or internal language.

« 40 » Delineating the various acts and modes of intersubjectivity was the core of our analysis, and is detailed in the next section. For the sake of illustration, the extracts in Table 1 are analyzed according to the three remaining descriptive categories.[2]

« 41 » It can be seen that taste does not appear in the aforementioned experiential modalities. This comes from the "bottom-up" method we followed to prepare our categories: we did not have any description of taste in our corpus, and therefore did not introduce it in our typology. Another point to underscore regarding the experiential modality is the category of feelings: we followed Christopher Heavey, Russell Hurlburt and Noelle Lefforge (2012)'s "phenomenology of feelings," in which feelings are defined as the experiential aspect of emotions, and sometimes but not always include bodily sensations.

2| The original French verbatim statements for all translations are provided in annex at https://constructivist.info/data/14/2/167.annex.doc

From specific to generic categories

« 42 » To better define the acts and modes of intersubjectivity of our EMPs, we gathered all the relevant extracts of the 24 time-ordered summaries of our interviews. Large sheets of paper were used to this end. We labelled each extract in terms of act and intersubjectivity. These labels were attributed so as to remain close to the words and expressions used by participants, without trying to build exclusive or complementary sets of descriptions. A trade-off was sought between gaining genericity and preserving the essence of what the participants had said. We, however, chose at this stage not to impose too many constraints on the descriptions, so as to promote creativity and discovery in the first steps of the analysis. At this stage, each of us worked independently and studied half of the corpus, which amounted to around 400 EMPs. Some of the labels and their corresponding extracts are given in Table 2.

« 43 » In a second stage of the analysis, we worked together to derive generic sets from the previous labels. This time the aim was to build exclusive and complementary generic labels, to be related to generic sets of EMP. To reach this goal, previous labels were compared and regrouped in different sets until a satisfying result was obtained. We reached a dual classification of our extracts: a first set of elements for the category of acts and a second set related to the modes

Verbatim statements	Content	Sense of agency	Experiential modality
"I said to myself so she's a smoker that's a pity"	A*	active	internal language
"this feeling of being in a strange unlikely place that's what came"	A	passive	feelings
"I knew he felt at ease by the sound of his voice"	A*	active	audition
"I was saying to myself that he must be thinking a bit like me at that moment"	A and A*	active	internal language
"straight away I pictured her living in someone's home"	A*	active	vision
"I have a feeling that she is afraid of crossing the road"	A*	active	feelings
"it was something at an emotional level he might have the same cultural experience […] it's the feeling one can get about a person supposed to have the same experience"	A*, someone else	passive	feelings
"I was picturing her lecturing at the university I was imagining her in this role […] me I would sit opposite in the middle"	A, A*, someone else, something	active	vision
"it surprised me […] it gave me energy actually"	A	passive	x

Table 1 • Descriptive categories of experiential micro-phenomena.

of intersubjectivity, with all extracts being categorized along these two sets. We undertook this process jointly in an effort of intersubjective validation, through discussions and evolving mutual agreements or disagreements on attempts written on paper or whiteboard. At least two or three early classifications were completely dismantled before a satisfying output was reached. Not going too quickly and leaving time to ponder over the qualities and weaknesses of these categorizations was important here. We also looked, at some point, at existing categorizations of cognitive acts, before getting away from them to preserve our bottom-up approach. Table 3 reports and illustrates the elements we identified for the category of acts (leaving aside an undefined element we had to create for a few verbatim statements), while Table 4 does the same for the category of the modes of intersubjectivity.

« 44 » We studied the lived experience of first encounters, via planned situations, and identified five descriptive categories of these experiences: the act, the mode of intersubjectivity, the sense of agency, the experiential modality involved, and the content in

Verbatim statements	Label
"I have a feeling that she is afraid of crossing the road"	To feel the other's emotion
"I try to put myself in her position she who is not Korean but Vietnamese"	To identify with the other
"I feel as though I am closer to him"	To feel the connection between oneself and the other
"still I am shocked because here in Europe one does not ask about age"	To feel unsettled/perplexed while interacting
"I am extremely surprised that she replies to me with her date of birth"	To be surprised
"I asked myself whether this question meant our exchange was turning into some kind of seduction"	To question oneself
"the fluidity broke" (of the exchange)	To feel separated from the other
"I said to myself so she's a smoker that's a pity"	To issue a judgment on the other
"the pedestrian crossing and one person was crossing […] it's me"	To imagine oneself in the situation that the other is describing
"I was imagining things actually things she didn't say"	To imagine another situation than the one the other is describing
"I was picturing her lecturing at the university I was imagining her in this role"	To imagine the other in the situation that she describes
"I want to share that with him"	To be willing to share something with the other
"I said to myself well you've been through that too"	To connect to one's past
"I said to myself wow yes indeed […] I understand"	To 'understand' what the other says
"this feeling of being in a strange unlikely place"	To feel the situation the other is describing
"I put myself in a position where I need to fix things" (with another person)	To guide the interaction by acting on oneself
"I thought that he would probably not take the initiative with the next" (question)	To project something onto the other

Table 2 • First labeling of experiential micro-phenomena.

Act	Example
To imagine	"straight away it's these images of perpetual day of open spaces of this magnificent lake"
To feel	"this feeling of being in a strange unlikely place that's what came" […] it's in the belly […] it's in the pit of the stomach […] in the guts"
To observe	"when I say the words I observe her reactions"
To know	"I know that Swiss Romands speak French"
To remember	"I am projected into something in my head […] I look for a brief moment inside myself I mean in my own memory my own travels […] I see images not of people or animals […] it's an image of an ancient land"
To question oneself	"I wonder if she's laughing because I understood nothing or if she's laughing because she knows she can make some words sound ambiguous"
To evaluate	"I said to myself this is someone who is really open-minded so likes diversity and likes languages"

Table 3 • Identified elements for the category of acts.

terms of involved persons. At each moment, the lived experience can be qualified according to these descriptive categories. With a larger timespan, a few seconds or minutes, in which there are several EMPs, changes in the lived experience can be observed along these categories. For example, an experience can be visual at first, then become olfactory, then become visual again. It can be described as a succession of acts such as to observe, then to remember, then to question oneself, then to observe, and so on. The lived experience can thus be described as a flow of instants, each one instantiating elements of the five descriptive categories we have highlighted.

« 45 » Our classification of acts is reminiscent of existing classifications in cognitive science, although we were not driven by global principles and a necessity of exhaustivity, but rather by organizational principles at the local scale of our 24 interviews. Regarding our main result, i.e., the different modes of intersubjectivity, the first three – to have something in common, to feel a part of the same set, to feel close to the other – are backed by the dyadic nature of the interaction, and offer a symmetry absent from the four other modes. To some extent, they expand Arthur Aron, Elaine Aron and Danny Smollan (1992)'s proposal: a scale of "Inclusion of Other in the Self" to describe a relationship, based on seven Venn-like diagrams of closeness. Our results suggest that while distance and overlapping are ways to characterize intersubjectivity, it can also be experienced in ways that do not involve distance or overlapping, such as "feeling oneself to be part of the same set." A significant assertion of our approach and interpretations is that our different modes of intersubjectivity refer to different experiences. For example, there should be experiential differences between identifying oneself with the other, and identifying the other with oneself. These differences in terms of lived experiences – mental acts, sensations, bodily states, etc. – are the reason why interviewees produce different descriptions of their recalled experience during the explicitation interview. Additionally, most of our modes of intersubjectivity contain their own negation, which means for example that "to feel a part of the same set" also points at situations where one experiences that one does not feel part of the same group or set as the other.

Discussion

« 46 » Following the previous analysis, a number of issues deserve further discussion. First, we argue that our results, although obtained from experimental situations – planned first encounters –, are a first step in understanding more ecological contexts. Indeed, as previously highlighted, the description of our participants' lived experience is genuine because the explicitation interview, if conducted by an expert who fulfills its requirements, guarantees the authenticity of the descriptions. These descriptions are then as close as possible to the reference lived experience (vécu 1). Since many first encounters in everyday life are also planned (first medical appointment, job interview, first date, etc.), it is reasonable to assume that the lived experiences that are associated with them share similarities with what we have described. This assertion would, of course, need to be checked, especially because the objectives pursued by people in everyday situations are obviously different from those participating in scientific research.

« 47 » Second, on the basis of our analysis, we argue that a sense of agency is a significant facet of the intersubjective experience, and is therefore key to understanding it. Agency is primarily the faculty of beings to perform actions, but it also points to a subjective judgment, a state or an experience that one initiates and controls an action, particularly an intentional, goal-directed action, regardless of whether one objectively initiated, or is responsible for, that action. This experience as of agency is

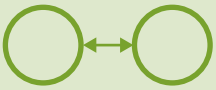
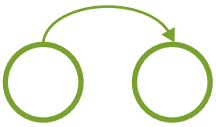
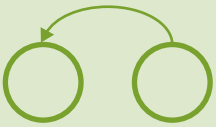
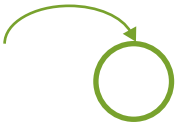
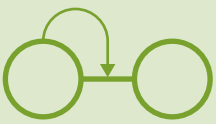
	Mode of intersubjectivity	Example
	To (not) have something in common	"it's a bit like I had things in common with another person I'm talking to […] there is something in common that I can share"
	To (not) feel a part of the same set	"I feel like telling him about my own experience too […] to show him that we could be part of the same category of people in the world who like Bolivia"
	To (not) feel close to the other	"Benedict is watching with me […] I can't see her in the image […] she is next to me"
	To (not) identify oneself with the other	"I identified with her experience and through her I was sharing it […] it's as if I became her in a way and as if I was experiencing the same thing"
	To (not) identify the other with oneself	"it reminded me of the experience with my children"
	To (not) assign to the other	"with the smell I got confirmation that she was a smoker poor her"
	To oversee the interaction	"when I say the words I observe her reactions"

Table 4 • Identified elements for the category of modes of intersubjectivity.

called "the sense of agency" by Patrick Haggard and Baruch Eitam (2015). This sense of agency corresponds to what Yochai Ataria, Yair Dor-Ziderman and Aviva Berkovich-Ohana (2015) describe in their study on the phenomenological nature of the sense of boundaries in a long-term mindfulness meditator. They show that for this subject, under certain conditions, things happen "on their own," spontaneously, without the need for an agent who controls what happens, whether at the corporal level or at the level of thought. Our study specifically describes this subjective aspect, rather than objective information about agency. The sense of agency is structured by the opposition between feeling that one is being active and feeling that one is being passive. As revealed by our analysis, this duality between an active lived agency and a passive lived agency is partly pre-reflective. Indeed, according to the reports of our participants, while they tend to experience themselves as the agent of most of their internal experiences, they also sometimes experience themselves being acted upon/moved by events or entities.[3] One can, for example, compare the reports "I told myself don't even try you won't find it," "I imagine her at the meeting with these retired people" or "I look for a reason […] when he asked me this question because it's not normal" with "it's in my thoughts that it actually opens," "it surprised me […] it gave me energy actually" or "it reminded me of the experience with my children."

« 48 » The sense of agency is not the only significant element when it comes to subjectivity. In our study, we had many examples of reports describing experiences that were lived as an "I," but the content of which was directly derived from what the other was contributing. For instance, when a participant told us "she told me she was primarily interested in French to Spanish and to italian and by extension to Portuguese […] I see a map of Southern Europe […] as in books […] I see it centered on Corsica […] I see it from Gibraltar almost to Lebanon […] I see a map like those at school with language areas," his subjective experience was driven by the words of his interlocutor, as well as by his gestures, posture, etc. This can be seen as the basis of interpersonal relationships. In some specific cases, the intersubjective experience consisted in experiencing what the other person was experiencing. In another corpus of data, we obtained, for example, reports such as "I feel that something a bit weird is happening to him," "I think of the fear she herself had." What is important here is to distinguish these verbatim statements from the preceding ones by the way the participant clearly attributes to another person what she is experiencing, which thus does not belong to her. For instance, one of the interviewees of our other corpus told us

> "so at that time indeed I feel fear […] but it is not mine […] I notice when it's my fear I don't have the same symptoms […] me when I am afraid I immediately feel pain in my stomach […] I physically feel when it's mine and when it's other people's fear […] I learnt gradually while working that some anxieties or fears that go through me are not mine […] and that it's them so at that time I do actually feel fear […] but it's not mine."

« 49 » Through these examples, the question of the porosity of the boundary between the self and the other arises, as well as that of empathy conceived as an ability to perceive and to understand what the other is living. In social psychology, the relationship between the self and the other is echoed by the distinction proposed between alter ego and strict alter (Moscovici 2000): while one feels that one shares some characteristics with an alter ego, one feels different from the strict alter, whether because this alter differs on many external (alter from outside) or internal (alter from inside) aspects. There are thus two main modes of relationship, and the transition from one to the other can be a topic of investigation. We can reasonably hypothesize that these two types of perception of otherness do not constitute two discontinuous categories, but are rather the extremes of a continuum. Transitions as experience unfolds can therefore be gradual rather than always abrupt. Moreover, our data show that the subjective relationship with the other person is not only a question of distance, but can also be described with topological entities such as sets and shared features – with modes of intersubjectivity such as "to (not) feel a part of the same set" or "to (not) have something in common." Our study therefore points to a variety of modes of intersubjectivity. This outcome is representative of a first-person approach, and could not have resulted from a third-person one. The typology we proposed is still hypothetical, and more research is needed to reach firmer conclusions. Interviews could, in particular, focus on micro-moments of transition between "feeling the other as similar to oneself" and "feeling the other as different from oneself." One could expect to observe gradual, although rapid transitions, as well as more abrupt ones.

« 50 » The intersubjective experience between two persons may involve not only them, but also third parties. Especially in situations where the boundary between the other and oneself seems to fade, the description (in the lived experience) of a third entity often seems to be meaningful. This entity may already be or become a component of the interaction, or not. For instance, when a participant told us "he spoke of Serbia […] it reminded me of Emir Kusturica's *Black Cat, White Cat* and the fanfare music that features in his movies […] we got onto Kusturica and his orchestra," the filmmaker and his music were then discussed by both people. This illustrates what Anika Fiebich and Shaun Gallagher call "joint attention in imagination" (Fiebich & Gallagher 2013: 577), i.e., the connection between two people via a third element, which can be a person or an object. Although joint attention usually refers to joint attention in perception, Fiebich and Gallagher's proposition goes beyond perception (as usually "joint attention" refers to "joint attention in perception") and involves

> "the conceptual in the sense that two agents are jointly attentive towards a concept or an idea – our conversation about justice, for example, requires that we mutually attend to this concept and the conversation itself confirms that we do." (ibid)

In other situations, the third entity remains private to the interviewee's mind, as when one participant described how she imagined her nephew, who is in a coma, after the other person had mentioned a room where she was with other persons: "first I see my nephew Clément who was lying on his bed at the La

3| The philosophical question of whether one only experiences oneself being acted upon or is genuinely acted upon is beyond the scope of this article.

Tronche hospital and who was in a coma." In this case, this entity assists the subject in apprehending the interaction, but without being made explicit. To our knowledge, documenting these experiential processes had not been done before our study. This is a promising track to develop our knowledge of what it means to share an experience, in the sense of Stern's (2004) intersubjective matrix, i.e., the mental and physical space within which two people interact. It is likely that when a subject builds a new intersubjective matrix, one strategy she relies on consists in remapping past matrices, which connect to the new one thanks to the bridge created by the third entity described above. Such outputs of a first-person approach clearly differ in their take on internal processes and behaviors from third-person paradigms without access to subjective experience. This thus opens the door to relevant complementary perspectives (Lutz et al. 2001; Depraz, Gyemant & Desmidt 2017).

Future directions

« 51 » Analyzing the various experiential modes of intersubjectivity has been the target of the previous sections. We are currently looking for recurrent patterns of values of descriptive categories for the EMPs. For example, does the mode of intersubjectivity "To (not) feel a part of the same set" preferentially occur with mental images or bodily sensations? Does it relate rather to an active or passive sense of agency? Our preliminary analyses show that such regularities are present in our corpus. It would be interesting to put them in perspective with the notion of habitus, defined as a matrix of behaviors or thoughts by Pierre Bourdieu (1980), or as embodied and implicit social knowledge by Norbert Elias (Delmotte 2010). Given that both participants of each first-time encounter are available in our corpus, do we also observe similar patterns among them? As a preliminary result, the mode of intersubjectivity "To assign to the other" often seems to be associated with the presence of internal language.

« 52 » A second direction for future work consists in focusing on the diachronic structure of the lived experience of first encounters. Until now, our analyses have been synchronous, in the sense that we have unearthed the experiential structure of micro-moments without looking at the antecedents or consequences of these moments. We now investigate possible diachronic ordering of values of descriptive categories and their unfolding in time. To this end, we complement each EMP with what we call a seed, i.e., a lived micro-event (described by the participant in her interview) that preceded this EMP and led to it. Two descriptors of the seed appear significant to us:

a whether this event was observable or unobservable;
b whether the agent(s) of the seed was/were A, A*, both A and A*, or neither A nor A* but someone else.

« 53 » Describing seeds brings unfolding and dynamics to the description of experience. It is meaningful when it comes to answering questions such as "why did A experience this specific EMP?" or "how did this EMP occur at that precise moment?" In the specific case of intersubjectivity, it deals with what causes two subjectivities to enter into interaction the way they do. Interestingly, the seed of an EMP can be another EMP.

« 54 » Overall, diachronic and synchronic individual patterns are equally interesting to study, as well as the analysis of synchronic experiences of dyadic interacting participants, and can provide complementary perspectives. They are together at the core of the micro-phenomenological approach, which especially focuses on the temporal fragmentation of the lived experience, identifying phases of activity and events triggering these phases. It is thus possible to study the unfolding of lived experience in time, which constitutes a particularly innovative and stimulating perspective in the field of intersubjectivity.

Conclusion

« 55 » In this article, we have proposed a typology of the micro-moments that constitute people's intersubjective experience during first encounters. We have identified, on the basis of experiential reports, various subjective modes of intersubjectivity, taking place in relation with various acts and an active or passive sense of agency. We have since led other interviews about ecological encounters, especially between clients and therapists (physicians, nurses, psychotherapists…). The first analyses show similarities with planned encounters (in particular, we find the same acts and some of our modes of intersubjectivity) but also specificities related to the context and the finalized activity of the healthcare practitioners.

« 56 » Our results, and those that will be obtained from the future studies outlined at the end of the preceding section, raise the question of the possible generalization of the proposed typologies. Our results indeed derive from specific, planned, first encounters. Do they apply to encounters such as those between healthcare practitioners and clients, between employers and potential employees during job interviews, but also at school between teachers and students, or during a first date? An answer to this question should relate to whether the variety of experiential situations is much larger than what we witnessed in our interviews, or whether we circumscribed this variation despite the restrictions of our experimental setting. This depends partly on the size of the corpus of interviews – more interviews are more likely to exhaust the diversity of experiences –, and ours, with 24 interviews, is fairly large. Interviewing people from different cultures and of different ages, as we have done, also likely leads to a wider range of experiences and of their descriptions.

« 57 » Finally, it should be recalled that the micro-phenomenological approach is in no way restricted to first encounters, but can benefit most investigations in the humanities and social sciences. Properly listening to what subjects have to say about their experiences could and should be considered as one of the main gateways to the understanding of human cognition and behavior, beyond unjustified restrictions imposed by the dominance of third-person approaches. We therefore follow Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, for whom the

> "concern is to open a space of possibilities in which the circulation between cognitive science and human experience can be fully appreciated and to foster the transformative possibilities of human experience in a scientific culture." (Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1993: xviii-xix)

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Open Peer Commentaries

on Magali Ollagnier-Beldame & Christophe Coupé's "Meeting You for the First Time"

Conceptual Groundwork for the Phenomenology of First Encounters

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> Abstract • We aim to provide the basis for some conceptual work, designed to serve as a ground for future phenomenological investigation of first encounters. We argue that there is more than one standard by which an intersection ought to be regarded as *an encounter*. Hence, there are various notions of "first encounter," each of which deserves independent phenomenological inquiry.

« 1 » In their target article, Magali Ollagnier-Beldame and Christophe Coupé take a step toward a micro-phenomenological study of intersubjectivity. Using explication interviews, they study first-person experience of highly designed first encounters. The authors are well aware of some ways in which their study is limited: they do not purport to apply their findings to more natural encounters (§22). But they take the "inherent richness" of first encounters to hold the promise of "shedding light on intersubjectivity from a more general standpoint" (§20). In our commentary, we argue that as far as philosophical insight is concerned, the notion of "first encounter" is too coarse-grained. Addressing the plenitude of philosophical queries into intersubjective experiences will require a plenitude of fine-grained notions of "(first) encounters." Rather than using the conceptual work undertaken below as straightforward criticism, we offer it, and the methodology that governs it, as a basis for future inquiry.

Delineating "first encounters"

« 2 » On a busy day in the city we may come across hundreds of complete strangers. When do intersections with strangers constitute a first encounter? (Think of an eye contact, a gesture signifying "you go first," or a formal exchange of words.) Phrased in this way, the question of delineating "first encounter" seems quite pointless. What would be the philosophical point of drawing the line between first encounters and other intersections?

« 3 » There are, however, questions that may deserve philosophical attention. Let us briefly discuss two such (families of) questions:

A: How is it that another person's unique individuality (occasionally) bursts into our world?

« 4 » This question breaks down into a cluster of questions, including:

- Empirical questions such as: What is it that makes it initially possible for us to perceptually reidentify some person?
- Conceptual questions such as: What explains the gap between the transcendental intersubjectivity (or being-with-others), and being-with-some-person-S?
- And phenomenological questions such as: Given the way in which we cling to stereotypes while trying to make sense of the world, what sort of experience is associated with outstripping categorical expectation? Or: What is the lived experience of recognizing the unique individuality of some other person for the first time?

B: What is the lived experience of facing the opportunity to make a first impression (to present oneself from the ground up)?

« 5 » This question also has third-person counterparts, including: What are the typical differences in behavior characterizing opportunities for making a first impression? For the sake of the present discussion, however, we can focus our attention strictly on the two phenomenological questions as-

sociated with (A) and (B), i.e., on: What is the lived experience of facing the opportunity to make an impression?, and: What is the lived experience of recognizing the unique individuality of some other person for the first time?[1]

« 6 » The first point we wish to make is that when using the term "first encounter," we may be speaking of one of (at least) two things:

a The experience of noticing a person, qua individual personality, for the first time;
b The experience of making a first impression.

Thus, when asking about the lived experience of a first encounter, we may be asking one of (at least) two questions, viz.

a What is the experience of noticing a person, qua individual personality, for the first time?
b What is the experience of making a first impression?

Noticing individuality/ making an impression

« 7 » Typically, the episodes in which we notice another person's individuality are episodes in which we are, at the same time, given a chance to present ourselves. The same initial intersubjective interaction could, perhaps, encapsulate both: we are often, so to speak, both detectives and immediate suspects at the same time. But this need not be so. Consider the following two cases:

Rita

Rita is meeting an airport bureaucrat who is supposed to sign her passport. She has reasons to worry that the bureaucrat will not sign, so she is trying very hard to make a good impression, highly aware of the way she appears and of every little movement she is making. The bureaucrat, on the other hand, looks at her only to make sure that the photograph in her passport matches the way she looks. He asks some formal questions, and then turns to the next person in line.

Rami

Rami is working in the restaurant he owns, when all of a sudden, some drunk diner he has never noticed before starts behaving in an awkward manner. Rami is not sure whether this behavior could become violent, and, very attentively, he tries to figure this out. Eventually, the stranger approaches him, pronounces something that sounds like "goodnight," and leaves.

« 8 » Rita's intersection with the bureaucrat is definitely a "first encounter" in the sense that she takes herself to be given the opportunity to make a certain impression. But it is not necessarily a case in which the other person's individuality bursts into one's conscious world. Plausibly, this applies to both parties. Rami's encounter with the stranger is definitely a "first encounter," at least in the sense that Rami will likely reidentify the drunk diner, and will no longer consider him as just another diner. But nothing like the experience of making a certain impression was present in *Rami*. And again, on a plausible reading of the case, this applies to both parties.

« 9 » In light of this, we find the notion of "first encounter" to be too coarse-grained to capture what is phenomenologically intriguing. Everyday life cases that relevantly resemble *Rita* are particularly intriguing because the experience of creating a first impression is phenomenologically intriguing (how is the sense of agency affected by such exposures, for instance?). Everyday life cases relevantly resembling *Rami* are also worthy of phenomenological research, because underpinning what happens when some particular individual is initially noticed as such is phenomenologically intriguing (what is it that we attend to at that moment, for instance?). However, drawing an arbitrary line between some more casual intersections and other, less casual intersections, and focusing on exploring the lived experience of the latter intersections, is misguided.

« 10 » Having said that, we are definitely open to including other notions of "first encounter" that capture some phenomenologically natural category, embedded in episodes in which we interact with another person for the first time. Some of those notions will, perhaps, regard much more casual interaction with bureaucrats and diners as "first encounters," and as long as they interestingly capture a phenomenological question worth asking, their usage will be justified.

« 11 » Above all, it is worth noting that our distinctions are not question-begging: we have not decided in advance whether every *Rita*-like encounter is also, to some degree, a *Rami*-like encounter. We have left this kind of insight as an open possibility, to be decided by the phenomenological work itself. We are merely emphasizing the conceptual distinction that can be made, suggesting that when concepts are clearly set apart, micro-phenomenology has a chance to reveal illuminating correlations.

Further segregation

« 12 » So far we have focused mainly on two notions of "first encounters," which match two types of phenomena (often found in the same episode). Before concluding, we wish to emphasize that what is most important in a phenomenological context is not whether an interaction with some person does not succeed any previous interaction with that person, but rather whether it is lived in this way. At the phenomenological level, Joseph's brothers' encounter with the ruler of Egypt (*Genesis*, chapter 42), which, unbeknownst to them was their brother, is by all means a first encounter (at least on their part).

« 13 » This opens up the possibility of making further classifications. For instance, for some theoretical purposes, we may set an especially high threshold for seeing someone "as if for the first time," requiring a high degree of recognition with respect to the individuality of that person (we sometimes use this notion when we speak of a new friend who was always a classmate; of a cheating spouse whom we took to be loyal). Although for most purposes we employ a more relaxed threshold for what constitutes a first encounter (allowing a more superficial recognition to be considered a bursting of individuality). Along the same lines, there may be theoretical contexts allowing for first encounters to spread over temporally detached episodes, for instance: a context in which "facing the opportunity to make an initial impression" is to be understood very broadly, even if for most purposes we use "opportunity for initial impression" rather restrictedly.

1| Both questions are naturally associated with canons of phenomenology. Most notably: for Jean-Paul Sartre, addressing them is the key to the basic structure of our existence, for fundamentally: "I exist for myself as a body known by the other" (Sartre 1956: 351).

« 14 » A plenitude of "first-encounter" notions explains the use of expressions that seem to be employing more than one notion of encounter. Think of expressions such as: "We have met, but she doesn't really know me" or "I have seen her, but we haven't really met." Relatedly, this plenitude calls for phenomenological insight with respect to crosscuts between notions. Consider questions such as:

a What is the experience of not-noticing a person, qua individual personality, when you see her for the first time"? (where "seeing for the first time" is trivially not synonymous with the same notion of "noticing a person qua individual");

b What is the experience of meeting someone for the first time while not entertaining the opportunity for making a first impression? (where "meeting someone for the first time" is trivially not synonymous with the same notion of "entertaining the opportunity for making a first impression").

« 15 » The above remarks serve to provide a basis for further research into the phenomenology of (ecological) first encounters. As illustrated in this section, further conceptual groundwork can serve as a basis for specifying more types of initial interactions that may serve as starting points for a plenitude of phenomenological interests.

Conclusion

« 16 » Ollagnier-Beldame and Coupé have provided an elaborate taxonomy of generic modes of intersubjectivity, issuing bottom-up from experiential micro-phenomena. Aside from providing a taxonomy, studying the correlation between experiential micro-phenomena can potentially reinforce or challenge philosophical insights into intersubjectivity. However, in order to achieve this, the micro-phenomenological interview, and the experience it concerns, ought themselves to be guided by conceptual work pertaining to the phenomena under investigation.

« 17 » To illustrate this, consider the following points quoted from Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002: 420):

- "If I am dealing with a stranger who has as yet not uttered a word, I may well believe that he is an inhabitant of another world in which my own thoughts and actions are unworthy of a place."
- "Let [a stranger] utter a word, or even make a gesture of impatience, and already he ceases to transcend me: that, then, is his voice, those are his thoughts and that is the realm that I thought inaccessible."
- "The objectification of each by the other's gaze is felt as unbearable only because it takes the place of possible communication."
- "A dog's gaze directed towards me causes me no embarrassment."

« 18 » These points are meant to support the claim that "The other's gaze transforms me into an object, and mine him, only […] if each of us feels his actions to be not taken up and understood, but observed as if they were an insect's" (ibid). They also relate to the broader theoretical view that "Being for-, against-, and without-one-another, passing-one-another-by, not-mattering-to-one-another, are possible ways of concern" (Heidegger 1996: 114). In light of this, being informed with respect to the correlations referred to in each of the points is potentially philosophically illuminating. But in order for this to work, the research ought to be designed to detect the relevant correlations (e.g., between the first word of the other and the transformation discussed by Merleau-Ponty) and the explicitation interview ought to be designed to explore those correlations in a range of contexts that are carefully picked out by the relevant notion of "first encounter." Many first interactions that count as a first encounter by some standard will not be promising in this respect.

« 19 » Ollagnier-Beldame and Coupé take up a modest task, that falls short of providing philosophical insight of the kind discussed in this section. Rather than straightforwardly directing this remark to them, we take it to illustrate a broader methodological point: Discovering the relationship between intersubjective categories (like "objectification" and "possible communication") rests on conceptual groundwork. Such work enables the specification of the sort of encounters one should explore. This point is especially relevant for further research on ecological first encounters.

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Intersubjective Categories: A More Precise Classification?

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> Abstract • While being in total agreement with the bottom-up method used in the target article, I address three issues: the first concerns the intersubjective situation of the explicitation interview itself; the second aims to put the results in the perspective of the traditional phenomenological approaches of intersubjectivity; and the last one considers the analysis of the material, and questions the general categories that emerge from this process.

« 1 » The advantage of the experiential method in psychology is that it uses an empirical, "scientific" approach combined with a first-person "phenomenological" approach: it proceeds bottom-up, assembles a great amount of empirical data and then extracts from it more general categories. But the particularity lies in the type of these empirical data: they are not obtained through the observation of a mind-independent world but are the result of introspection, i.e., of the first-person knowledge a subject has of her own experience. Introspection is the only instrument available for observing the internal life of the subject: only the subject who lived the experience has a direct knowledge of what this experience was like. But is this knowledge reliable? Can it be verified by another person? Building "objective" knowledge on "subjective" empirical data seems to be a particularly risky challenge. This controversial type of knowledge becomes possible, however, through a second-person method called the explicitation interview (Vermersch 1994).

« 2 » In their target article, Magali Ollagnier-Beldame and Christophe Coupé apply this first- and second-person method admirably in order to extract the general categories that describe intersubjective encounters from the verbatim statements describing the first-person experience of a large number of individual subjects. They thus avoid the danger of imposing *a priori* categories founded on pure speculation.

The intersubjectivity of the explicitation interview

« 3 » However, they are not only exposed to the issues of reliability and verifiability mentioned above, but also to an additional problem, related to intersubjectivity. On the one hand, in their study they use explicitation interviews to obtain a general picture of intersubjective relations, or more precisely, of first encounters. But on the other hand, the method used to obtain this picture is itself intersubjective: the explicitation interview is itself a (first) encounter, defined by the same general categories that emerge from it. This point should have been more explicitly addressed in the article. So, my first question is: Do the results of the study teach us something new about the nature of the particular intersubjective interaction that goes on in the explicitation interview? (Q1)

The phenomenological background

« 4 » The second issue I want to comment on should be seen as a complement of the general discussion of intersubjectivity in the introduction in the target article. I will especially focus on the phenomenological approach to intersubjectivity, crucial in Edmund Husserl's work, but also in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, who does not get mentioned in the target article.

« 5 » The phenomenological background is implicitly present in any micro-phenomenological study (Vermersch 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2001), starting with *On Becoming Aware* (Depraz, Varela & Vermersch 2003). The method of the explicitation interview itself was founded by Pierre Vermersch (1999) based on three Husserlian principles: *epoché*, the idea of pre-reflexive experience (the passive syntheses) and the Husserlian understanding of the lived experience of time. *Epoché* means, among other things, turning one's attention from the world of objects to the world of subjective experience. This gesture is not reversible. It also means accepting that we cannot know anything for sure of the mind-independent world and its existence. This fundamental doubt is the condition that allows phenomenology to reveal a whole new world that can be scientifically explored: the world of subjective experience. The problem is that once the *epoché* is practiced the subject is stuck inside her subjective experience, and this is why intersubjectivity is a particularly hard problem for phenomenology. How can one consider another subject as something other than a creation of one's own subjectivity?

« 6 » Husserl's perspective is briefly mentioned in the introduction of the article (§2), where a rather obscure quote from the *Cartesian Meditations* is reproduced without being sufficiently commented upon. Husserl's conception of intersubjectivity in the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation* (Husserl 1960) is built around the concept of *Einfühlung* inherited from Theodor Lipps (Depraz 2017). Husserl's idea is that intersubjectivity is a way of thinking about the other as an *alter ego*, a vision of one's self as if seen from the outside. This is why, for Husserl, the intersubjective relation is different from our relation to mere objects: a sort of game of mirrors is activated in the encounter of the other, a game that attributes to the other experiences that I can only live in the first person. The other subject is none other than my own self, but as if seen from the outside, and symmetrically, the one who can see *me* as an *alter ego* is herself an ego, just like myself. Understanding the other as another version of myself gives her all the dignity and complexity I attribute to myself.

« 7 » Husserl's view was criticized by other phenomenologists such as Levinas (1961) who insisted that reducing the otherness of another subject to a mere mirror image of oneself removes her irreducible strangeness, making her familiar and tame. We find a striking example of the irreducibility of the other in Table 2 of the target article, with the verbatim statement "I asked myself whether this question meant our exchange was turning into some kind of seduction." The authors only mention the questioning, but the essence of the experience seems to be rather the uneasiness of realizing that the one in front of us is much more complex than what we can imagine and that some part of her will be forever inaccessible. However, if this verbatim statement reinforces the view defended by Levinas, several other statements show how a subject identifies with the other, is able to put herself "in the shoes" of the other.

« 8 » I am not suggesting that the interpretation of the collected material should be subordinated to *a priori* theories of inter-

subjectivity. On the contrary, it is the empirical first-person data that should lead to a confirmation or a rejection of one or the other of the two opposed positions. But the possibility for a subject to think of herself in the place of the other without quitting her subjective position, feeling the feelings and thinking the thoughts of the other, is not merely an aspect of intersubjectivity among others, but the very essence of an intersubjective relation, which Lipps and Husserl (Depraz 2017) called *Einfühlung* (literally "feeling inside somebody else's mind"). In the target article, *Einfühlung* was implicitly considered under the category of content, which describes whether the experience refers to a subject's own experience, or to the experience of two interconnected subjects. One particularly interesting verbatim statement (§48) says that the subject felt the other's fear while realizing that it was not *her* fear. This shows that a subject can have a first-person experience of someone else's fear and produce precise criteria allowing her to identify it – at the very moment when she feels it – as the fear of someone else. So, rather than a specific sort of content, should we not consider the capacity of a subject to put herself in the place of another as the *minimal condition* for a genuine intersubjective experience, as opposed to other types of encounter, where the other is seen as an object, rather than a full-blown subject? (Q2)

The choice of general categories

« 9 » The third issue concerns the analysis of the data obtained through explicitation interviews. My suggestions concerning the classification of the experiential modalities are based on my own research, which Natalie Depraz and I developed and published in a previous issue of this journal (Depraz, Gyemant & Desmidt 2017).

« 10 » The five descriptive categories identified by the authors in §39, i.e.,

a types of acts,
b modes of intersubjectivity,
c content,
d (active/passive) agency, and
e experiential modality,

do not seem to be on the same level. What the authors call "acts" corresponds largely to what the phenomenological tradition calls "intentionality," i.e., the specific ways in which a subject relates to an object. Making the different types of intentional acts emerge from the subjective experience rather than imposing categories *ex nihilo* is certainly the right way to proceed. However, categories (c) and (d) are in my view aspects of (a) rather than independent categories: every intentional act, be it an act of imagining something, feeling something, observing something, etc., can be either passive or active and needs to be one of the two. Similarly, the content of an act, if there is one, is not dissociable from the act. Thus, I would suggest that these three aspects of the analysis (type of act, content and the activity/passivity distinction) be connected and considered concurring aspects of intentionality.

« 11 » I also wonder about the category of experiential modality, in which we find different types of bodily sensations, but also internal language. This sub-list seems to me at the same time heterogeneous and incomplete. The four types of sensations mentioned in the article (vision, audition, olfaction and *bodily sensation*) do not always describe entirely the verbatim statements. What does "bodily sensation" mean exactly and are visual, auditory and olfactive sensations not considered bodily sensations? Should we not better think that the large category is that of bodily sensations and that vision, audition, etc., are types of bodily sensations? (Q3)

« 12 » Internal language seems also out of place in the list of experiential modalities. If the authors meant to include in this category experiences that imply some sort of conscious thought, other types beside internal language might be pertinent, for instance imagination or volition. Also, some of the verbatim statements are complex and correlate several different experiential modalities (for instance Table 1, "I knew he felt at ease by the sound of his voice" combines an audition with a type of cognition). Briefly, my suggestion would be that the descriptive categories be further refined and that a hierarchy between different levels of aspects be considered.

Conclusion

« 13 » Despite these critiques, which I intend to be constructive, I believe this article to be an important advance in the research on intersubjectivity. In particular I find Table 4 brilliant, as it presents the most accurate and refined classification of intersubjective interaction I have ever encountered. In conclusion, I think the article fulfils its mission as it provides us with a fascinating view of the complexity of intersubjective interactions, nourished by a large range of first-person experiences on which it offers a very clear synthetic overview.

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Microphenomenology of First Encounters: A Sympathetic Critique

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> Abstract • Microphenomenological methods provide important sources of experiential data for the investigation of intersubjectivity. We discuss complementarities with the PRISMA method, and surmise that microphenomenological investigations must be articulated within larger epistemic cycles in conjunction with other disciplines. In particular, we suggest that while a certain interpretive bracketing is needed during the interviews themselves, this is not the case for the analysis of the gathered data, which should rely on more explicit theoretical perspectives. We exemplify this point by suggesting patterns that may be looked for in the data from the perspective of participatory sense-making theory.

« 1 » The last two decades have seen a growing interest in research on embodied intersubjectivity. Much of it has been fuelled by a dissatisfaction with the traditional individualistic and mentalistic premises that have informed the investigation of social cognition in psychology, neuroscience, and cognitive science. Many now question assumptions once held self-evident such as the privacy of mental states, the opacity of others, and the idea that social cognition is in some sense secondary to the development of individual cognitive and affective skills and that much of it indeed occurs within the confines of the individual mind. These are still common assumptions. Methodological individualism informs mainstream research and sometimes also critical projects in embodied cognition and constructivism. But various strands of theoretical and empirical work have studied human intersubjectivity from an interactive and participatory perspective, moving from artificially circumscribed problems (e.g., how do we figure out the intentions of others?) to more encompassing questions spanning and crisscrossing a number of disciplines, from neuroscience to robotics, from phenomenology to sociology, from developmental psychology to political science. These novel perspectives focus on the embodiment of concrete social interactions, the joint authoring of activities, and the mutual shaping of sensorimotor, cognitive, affective, and social skills during lifetime development. A science of *embodied intersubjectivity* is emerging (De Jaegher 2018; Di Paolo & De Jaegher 2015) and the study of lived experience during social encounters is a fundamental pillar of this new science.

« 2 » In this contemporary context we can only welcome studies like the one offered by Magali Ollagnier-Beldame and Christophe Coupé into the microphenomenology of first-time social encounters. Our involvement in the social world occupies most of our time and energy. Yet, science knows embarrassingly little about what goes on in the fine-grained experience of encountering others. Too closely knit into the fabric of everyday life, we struggle to clarify, systematize, or simply name the experiences of living in a social world. Studies like the present one have started to fill in this gap in knowledge.

« 3 » Ollagnier-Beldame and Coupé investigate, in their words, a first-person epistemology through a second-person methodology. They apply explicitation interview techniques developed by Claire Petitmengin, Paul Vermersch, and colleagues, to the microphenomenology of a first encounter between two people, gleaning insights into the patterns by which different individuals recall and describe their lived experiences.

Comparison with PRISMA

« 4 » PRISMA,[1] like microphenomenology, is an intersubjective method for unfolding the experience of interacting with others (De Jaegher et al. 2017). But rather than focusing on individual lived experience, PRISMA directly studies interactive experience, that is: what happens *between* people. It relies on individual lived experience for this, and the findings are partly also in terms of individual lived experience, but the methodology is more self-aware of its own inherent intersubjectivity. Participants in PRISMA are at the same time subjects and researchers, explicitly so. This begins in the bodily calibration of the participants who, in the course of a workshop/experiment, also engage in bodily exercises. These are led by the facilitators/lead researchers (they do not require special expertise on the part of participants), and are designed particularly to tune the body to the task at hand. This also makes it an embodied method.

« 5 » The results of a PRISMA workshop/experiment are twofold: it leads to research findings, and it also leads to an increased sensitivity to interactive experience in the participants. This does justice to the fact that experience changes us. It is an explicit aspect of the method that this happens. While Ollagnier-Beldame and Coupé's phenomenological interview is like an archaeological search for an original experience that should remain as uncontaminated by the method as possible, PRISMA is more like a crash course in attending to experience as it happens together with others and reflecting on the process.

« 6 » Data in PRISMA are, in part, intersubjectively generated. What is investigated are interactive processes, and the initial first raw data come from individual statements on lived experience. These are then looked at with others, noticing commonalities or saliencies in these data together. In a next step, the interactive experience is generated anew, now modulated by the commonly assessed previous data. There is thus intersubjective reflexivity at every step of the method. This means that the interactive experience is transformed by the method's interpersonal processes. A criticism could be that this muddies the experiential waters. But we contend that this is actually characteristic of interactive experience, which is by definition constantly modulated by others. The fact that it is so modulated is an intentional part of the method's conceptual as well as experiential and systematic reflexiv-

1| The name was coined in analogy with prisms refracting light into component colours. This method intends to unfold interactive experience, "fanning out" its "components."

ity. In its refracting of interactive experience, PRISMA approaches the very processes by which interactive experiences are constituted. They never quite resemble the raw, pure individual experiences that classical phenomenology theorizes about.

« 7 » Nevertheless, we do think that PRISMA and microphenomenology of the kind Ollagnier-Beldame and Coupé present are quite complementary as methods for studying interactive experience. The one unfolds interactive experience as it happens, the other goes deep into its individually lived components.

The need for theoretical guidance when analysing results

« 8 » Our second comment regards the need to embed microphenomenological studies within larger epistemic cycles. While Ollagnier-Beldame and Coupé draw from phenomenology in attempting not to induce alterations to the content and structure of individual experience during the interview themselves, we see no need for such restrictions in the analysis phase, where the data may now be "unbracketed" back into a dialogue with other relevant epistemic practices. Notably, in this case, we may think of work in ethnography and sociology studying the organization of interactive patterns, salutations, formalities, protocols, etc. (Goffman 1972; Kendon 1990). We may also include the large body of work in dynamical approaches in psychology that addresses coordination and complex forms of complexity matching during social interactions (e.g., Schmidt & Richardson 2008). If these engagements are absent, the findings of microphenomenological studies remain forever at the exploratory stage. To avoid this, it is important to have a prior theoretical stance at hand.

« 9 » What do we mean by having a prior theoretical stance? Take, for instance, the concept of participatory sense-making (De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007). This was the first attempt to take enactive ideas developed in terms of the relation between the autonomy of living organisms and the nature of their sense-making and examine their consequences for cases of social interaction. Autonomous individuation, it turns out, can be used to describe social interactions as patterns/events and performances. A social interaction is not merely the causal coupling of two or more autonomous agents, but, in addition, the emergence of self-sustained patterns of relating through multiple forms of embodied coordination, breakdowns, and recoveries. Both the social patterns and the individual participants remain autonomous, or else the interaction ceases to exist. Participatory sense-making is a direct implication of this situation in the sense that the fact of participating in a social encounter entails an opening to the agency of others having a direct impact on our individual sense-making (hence, also on our lived experience). This can take many forms, e.g., others orienting our attention, changes in our self-understanding through the gaze or utterances of others, learning together, co-authoring acts of remembering, collaborating in jointly constructed activities, and so on. Crucial to this idea is a proposal that joint sense-making "advances" through recovering patterns of coordination after they break down. These can be patterns of all kinds, from (mis)coordination in interactive rhythm (talking over each other, embarrassingly long pauses) to (mis)alignments in meaning, expressivity, and interaction genres.

« 10 » When there is a literal participation in each other's agency and sense-making, we no longer have a situation of complete opacity of the other. Alterity is fluid and shifting; neither absolute, nor absent. Others are not masks that hide internal states, but patterns that I engage with at the same time as they engage with me and whom I can thus know in the ways they move, how I move myself, and how we move each other. Methodological individualism is thus definitely discarded, but also, importantly, any attempt to sufficiently capture embodied intersubjectivity *only* from an analysis of lived experience. Classical phenomenology, insofar as it primarily seeks constitutional accounts of experience, is necessary but insufficient for a theory of embodied intersubjectivity. It is challenged once we take seriously the materiality of living bodies and social practices. What a purely phenomenological approach misses are the constitutive powers of concrete material processes such as the precarious biochemical self-individuation of living and sensorimotor bodies, their world-involving activities, and the interactive dynamic patterns just described. All of these condition the material possibilities for experiential events. There is simultaneously a need for phenomenological approaches and a need for enlarging the epistemic cycles beyond phenomenology to include other forms of knowledge practices in order to move from intersubjectivity to *embodied* intersubjectivity.

« 11 » It is not our purpose here to defend the enactive perspective of participatory sense-making (see De Jaegher 2018; Di Paolo, Cuffari & De Jaegher 2018 for recent discussions). We only want to show that having a theoretical perspective is important. To see this concretely, we can remark on some specific issues that might contribute to further investigations in the microphenomenology of intersubjectivity. These suggestions entail only minor tweaks to the methodology employed in the target article.

a Participants were left alone to interact without any recording devices, presumably to put them at ease. While this choice may be appropriate in particular cases, in general, as we argue above, an analysis of embodied aspects of interaction (postures, rhythms, pauses, distances, orientations, gesturing, etc.) is fundamental for guiding the analysis of interview data.

b Relatedly, we find it surprising that the authors have not reported on correlations between the descriptions and experiential motifs of participants in the same interactive encounter. Instead, they have remained focused on recounting the general kinds of descriptive experiential categories based on the whole ensemble of participants. Whether there are patterns of correlation or disparity between reports in each dyad should be of interest in understanding the lived experience of each individual.

c Participatory sense-making predicts that periods of coordination, breakdowns (large or small), and repair punctuate the flow of social interactions. Based on the data presented, we think that traces of these patterns might easily be looked for in descriptions of individual experiences. These might then be investigated, both individually and in some way correlated with the interaction partner's experience.

d Related to the previous observation, participatory sense-making predicts that the spatial, temporal, and affective aspects of interactive experience are modulated by transitions between periods of coordination and periods of dissonance. To the extent that evidence of these transitions emerges in the interviews as the specific moments interviewees spontaneously want to focus on (§24), these could be investigated specifically and contrasting the experience of both participants (for instance, reports concerning tension and release during the encounter).

« 12 » Considering these issues and attending to relational, embodied, and participatory factors of easy empirical access will extend the scope of these studies. Regardless of the theory favoured, attention to interactive factors is vital. Without it, there is a risk of remaining locked within an individualist perspective mediated mainly by linguistic data and only indirectly informed by bodily and relational processes that occur concurrently and are themselves constitutive of lived experience.

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The Surprise of the Other: What about Radical Asymmetry, Surprise, Passivity and Emotions in Inter-Subjective First Encounters?

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> Abstract • I argue that when focusing on first encounters (as the target article does), the unique pristine character of such encounters should be dealt with. In particular, it would be necessary to include as main components surprise, emotions and passivity. Another issue addresses intersubjectivity: While the article considers shared reciprocity as a main invariant feature of intersubjectivity, many phenomenologists have stressed the structural asymmetry of the relation between oneself and the other: am I not the only one who is able to experience (perceive, know) the other? Finally, since the very technique of micro-phenomenological explicitation interviews is based on a clear asymmetry between the interviewer and the interviewee, one may ask to what extent the model of intersubjectivity presented in the article can be representative of first encounters.

« 1 » Magali Ollagnier-Beldame and Christophe Coupé's target article addresses the rich yet still only partially covered research on intersubjectivity. In particular, they focus on the specific case study of first encounters, which is quite promising, as the newness and freshness of such encounters may reveal the pristine core of intersubjective features in general. Their article shows a remarkable knowledge of the micro-phenomenological techniques, which is put to service quite well in the case study. However, the reader may end up a bit disappointed by the results of the inquiry, which focus on various detailed modes of intersubjectivity, the sense of agency and of self-other interactions. However, these results correspond to rather standard ge-

neric intersubjective experiences and in no way express the peculiarity of the intersubjective dimensions of first encounters. So, I wonder, why is the pristine character of first encounters not dealt with, thematized and put to the fore? (Q1)

« 2 » Of course, these components of the newness of first encounters, i.e., surprise and, along with it, emotions of different kinds (anxiety, feeling ill at ease, astonishment, happiness) (Tables 1 and 2) and passivity in its multifarious modes (ordeal, undergoing, welcoming, openness), appear at different moments in the protocols of the interviews and they are mentioned in the intersubjective mode as alternating passive and active interactions (§14). Still, they do not constitute a single main descriptive category among the five identified in §39 of the target article: act, mode of intersubjectivity, sense of agency, experiential modality and content in terms of involved persons. Besides, while these five categories offer a cartography of features of the standard understanding of intersubjectivity, they do not specify at all what happens during a first encounter. The question then is: how were these descriptive categories chosen? Was the criterion to fit a priori categories that were thought to be part of the definition of intersubjectivity? If surprise (as claimed in Depraz 2018) is expected as a descriptive category for contributing to the analysis of first encounters, emotion also appears to be central here in association with surprise.

« 3 » In this respect, phenomenologist Max Scheler developed a fine account of multifarious intersubjective relations going from fusion, forms of attunement (empathy, sympathy, affective contagion) to positive and negative sympathies (Scheler 2017). So why is emotion (as argued in Depraz & Steinbock 2018) not included as a main descriptive category? I find it curious that emotion should not even be identified for describing a standard account of intersubjectivity, let alone first encounters.

« 4 » Furthermore, one may wonder why passivity is presented only in alternation with activity, as if they were mutually exclusive notions. Husserl (far more than Heidegger, as is expressly claimed in §13) thoroughly analyzed a concept of passivity named "receptivity," which amounts to an active opening: so receptivity is neither a mere passivity in the sense of "undergoing" nor a mere activity in the sense of an activist willful agency-control. Since such integrative passivity is at the core of intersubjective encounters in Husserl and Henry (Yamaguchi 1982; Depraz et al. 1995), should not it be given a higher priority than in the article? At the very least, bringing in such a phenomenological concept of passivity would help in further clarifying and unfolding what remains fuzzy in the assertion in §14: "[B]ecause experience is both active and passive, it has to be understood in terms of relation." Indeed, it is not clear what the authors mean by "both passive and active." On the one hand, I would like them to clarify "how" experience can be both at the same time? On the other hand, the causal connection between such unclear "mixed" experience and relation is not obvious. Why should not an individual be able to experience moments of activity and moments of passivity without necessarily involving the other?

« 5 » My next concern refers to the presentation of the theoretical (philosophical, phenomenological) conceptions of intersubjectivity (§§2–9 and §§9–17) and their methodical use in relation to the empirical study that constitutes the core of the article. Many venerable authors are mentioned, including Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Buber and Bin Kimura, and also more recent ones, even though it may be important to build a hierarchy between founding references and contemporary thrusts. Also, it is somewhat difficult to understand what keeps the theoretical framework together, and how it is relevant for the empirical study. To what extent does the theoretical framework offer useful a priori categories to be checked with the empirical results and the descriptive categories that have emerged from the study? (Q2)

« 6 » More specifically, the state of the art regarding intersubjectivity in philosophical phenomenology is not systematic.[1] It is difficult to see what the red thread of the presentation is. For example, reciprocity is claimed to be an invariant of intersubjectivity (§9). This view is supported by phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty ("intercorporéité"), Buber ("Ich und Du") and Kimura ("aida"), but claiming reciprocity as a general definition of intersubjectivity is incompatible with Husserl's and Heidegger's conceptions, not to mention Emmanuel Levinas's and Michel Henry's, who all contend that asymmetry is a structural feature of intersubjectivity. For Henry the primacy is given to subjective immanent self-affection, for Heidegger it is given to *Dasein* as being primarily open to the world, and for Levinas the alterity of the other comes first. As for Husserl, it is the ego that primarily constitutes the sense of the alter ego. In short, in phenomenology, asymmetry characterizes the understanding of intersubjective relations, and such a claim is intuitive: I am the one who enters in contact with the other and I will never be able to understand her from within. In that respect, Husserl's analysis of intersubjectivity, which tackles the problem of accessing the other, should be taken closely into consideration, all the more so, as accessing the other seems to me to be the very problem of the different modes of intersubjectivity the empirical first-person study in the target article faces.

« 7 » In my book on intersubjectivity (Depraz 1995), I detail the fine cognitive mechanisms proper to Husserl's account of empathy. Ollagnier-Beldame and Coupé's attempt at differentiating some of the multifarious mechanisms underlying intersubjective interactions (identification, "as if" mechanism, imagination, etc., Table 2), may greatly benefit, methodologically, from a precise reference to and comparison with Husserl's theory of empathy. It relies on two related experiential acts: the first act refers to a corporeal passive experience (named *Paarung*), during which one's lived body (*Eigenleib*) sensorily relates to (thus perceives) the lived body of the other (*Fremdleib*). *Paarung* is the sensorimotor experiential basis for one's imaginative transposal (as an active *Hineinphantasieren*) into the other's embodied consciousness (see Depraz 1995: chapters 3 and 5 for an analysis of this complex experiential dynamic). Furthermore, the different modes of intersubjectivity that emerge in

1| There is important literature that would need to be taken into account. To mention only a few: Schütz (2014), Yamaguchi (2013), and Steinbock (2014).

the study reported in §43, and especially the last one, should invite the authors to go beyond a mere "dual" classification with only two spheres. In that respect, it might be beneficial to set a quadripolar chiasmatic dynamic interaction as initiated by Husserl and described in Depraz (1995), made of two Is and two Yous (each being both subject-oriented and object-oriented) or, in Husserl's words: each I and each You is both *Leib* (lived body) and *Körper* (physical body). Closely relying on this Husserlian theory may help to better structure the experiential analysis reported in the second part of the target article, and provide the conceptual clues in order to further refine the experiential analysis.

« 8 » Finally, the target article also triggers a broader methodological-epistemological question: Why does the first-person empirical study only focus on discovering generalized typologies (§56)? (Q3) Is this not a bias deriving from the very third-person studies the authors want to put aside? Should first-person approaches not at least also favor the "hapax," i.e., the unique singularity of experience? In particular, in the case study, is a "first encounter" not absolutely singular? Is a first-person epistemology not required to tackle singularity as such? Does it have to meet the expectations of third-person studies, or does it not need to clearly distinguish itself from them?

« 9 » To conclude, the authors of the target article brought here, with first encounters, a crucial topic, and they are quite well equipped with micro-phenomenological skills to study it. In order to proceed in a satisfactory way, it might be useful to refine and systematically appropriate the abundant theoretical phenomenological literature and to unearth more peculiar experiential categories such as surprise, emotion and receptivity for describing the pristine character of first encounters. Furthermore, they should use their topic of first encounters to identify more directly the requirements of a first-person epistemology regarding singularity as a keystone of objectivity.

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Between You and Me

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> Abstract • My commentary briefly addresses the methodological issue of a possible disconnection, in micro-phenomenological studies, of singular and generic analyses, and of synchronic and diachronic analyses. Then it focuses on some descriptive categories highlighted by the study, suggesting a weakening of the sense of identity in intersubjective relationships.

« 1 » The target article by Magali Ollagnier-Beldame and Cristophe Coupé is a very stimulating first step towards a micro-phenomenology of intersubjective experience, a venture that has never been systematically attempted so far. Based on the analysis of 24 interviews about the experience of a planned first encounter, the authors identify five generic descriptive categories of the intersubjective experience, including a core category called "mode of intersubjectivity." This mode is divided into seven specialized sub-categories such as "To (not) have something in common" and "To oversee the interaction." Even if the reader would have appreciated more details on how the subcategories have been identified, the excerpts from interviews, as well as the Venn-like diagrams illustrating them (Table 4), make it possible to understand their meaning easily. However, I have a reservation about the diagrams: since they represent "you" and "me" as two separate entities, they may hamper the understanding of their co-construction through interpersonal relationships, as the authors hypothesize in the theoretical introduction of the study.

« 2 » I regret that few links, either synchronic or diachronic, are established between these core modes of intersubjectivity and the other categories of the model, which for the moment looks like a network of scattered elements. For example, is there any relationship between "to identify oneself with the other" and the "sense of agency"? Is this identification an active process, is it a passive one, or can it be active or passive? Is this

identification experienced through sensorial modalities and, if so, which ones? Only a fine-grained description of the dynamics of this act would make it possible to answer these questions. But I recognize that, knowing the considerable power of micro-phenomenology to unfold the micro-dynamics of experience, I may be too eager to see it applied to intersubjective experience.

« 3 » Even though in §51 the authors promise this study at a later stage, some indication would have been helpful of how these categories interact, through the analysis of a few individual experiences. The article presents quite abstract categories, largely disconnected from one another, which have lost their embodiment in individual experiences. I hypothesize that it is the direct transition (at least for the reader) to generic categories, without going through the detailed analysis of single experiences, that at least partly explains this loss. This poses the question of whether it is possible to lead micro-phenomenological studies without establishing a strong link between specific and generic analyses. (Q1)

« 4 » Next, I would like to discuss the reservations I have about the way the authors use the concept of "sense of agency" (§47). First, the article does not provide any clear definition of the concept. Shaun Gallagher (2000) proposed to define it as "the sense that I am the one who is causing or generating an action," and in the specific case of ideation, as "the sense that I am the one who is generating a certain idea in my stream of consciousness." From this perspective, the sense of agency is active by definition: does it therefore make sense to speak of an active or passive sense of agency, is it not a pleonasm or a contradiction in terms, and would it not be more relevant to speak of the presence or absence of a sense of agency? Unless by "passive sense of agency," the authors mean that there is a graduation between a strong sense of agency and a "light" sense of agency? In any case the expression requires a more precise definition. (Q2)

« 5 » Moreover, I wonder if the excerpts that are given at the end of §47 are undisputable examples of the presence or absence of a sense of agency. For example, how can we be sure that "I imagine her at the meeting…" involves the sense that I am the one who is generating this image, and "It reminded me of the experience with my children" does not imply the sense that I am the one who remembered the experience? I also wonder what clues the authors rely on to assert that "as revealed by our analysis, this duality between an active lived agency and a passive lived agency is partly pre-reflective." What in their analysis allowed them to reach this conclusion? (Q3)

« 6 » To introduce the idea of a lack of a sense of agency, the authors call upon the description given by a long-term meditator in an article by Yochai Ataria and colleagues (2015) on the "sense of boundaries," suggesting that this experience would be of the same type as those described in their interviews. I have to confess that I found this comparison between allusions to a possible very light weakening of the sense of agency in the authors' interviews and an attempt to describe the complete disappearance of this sense after thirty years of intensive meditative practice rather exaggerated.

« 7 » In any case, why be so interested in the sense of agency in this study? Why consider it as one of the main descriptive categories of intersubjectivity? What are the stakes of the presence or absence of this sense in intersubjective relationships? It seems that the authors have an implicit hypothesis, which it would be interesting to make explicit. The very clear distinction made in Ataria and colleagues' study between sense of agency, sense of ownership, sense of an "I," and sense of boundaries, may be useful to help highlight the different threads of this implicit hypothesis.

« 8 » In §48 the authors introduce a dimension that they recognize as the basis of interpersonal relationships: the experiencing of contents that are directly elicited by the words or coverbal gestures of the other person. As an example, the authors give the description of a precise visual content that is elicited by the words of the interlocutor. In some cases, the subject may even have the feeling of "experiencing what the other person is experiencing, which thus does not belong to her." This last experience seems to represent a case of loss of "sense of ownership," the sense that one is the owner of the action, movement or thought that is experienced, which has been distinguished from the sense of agency by Gallagher (2000). It is surprising that the authors did not include this category earlier in the generic descriptive categories of the intersubjective experience. It would notably be interesting to explore its possible relationships with the two modes of intersubjectivity dubbed "identify oneself with the other" and "identify the other with oneself."

« 9 » A careful investigation of the dynamics of each intersubjective mode would also make it possible to highlight its microgenesis. For example, is the experience of "experiencing what the other person is experiencing" favored by a particular inner disposition, for example a particular attentional state? Is it possible, on the contrary, to avoid this experience, to protect oneself from it? Is it possible to learn how to distinguish what belongs to me from what does not belong to me, as is suggested in a very interesting interview excerpt ("I learnt gradually while working that some anxieties or fears that go through me are not mine")? Answering these questions would require a fine-grained description of the possible modes of attention to another person, and of the way they are generated.

« 10 » In the context of a study on the experience that accompanies the emergence of an intuition (Petitmengin 1999, 2001), several psychotherapists described to me such attentional modes, in the form of "inner gestures" of "connection" with the patient, which seem to foster the emergence in the therapist of contents that she considers as not belonging to her but to the patient. These gestures are notably characterized by the following experiential categories: the part of the body that is the source of the connection (heart, belly, head, hands, whole being), the sensorial register of the connection (visual, kinesthetic, auditory), the direction of the connection (bringing or "welcoming" the other into oneself, extending oneself or becoming absorbed into the other, or harmonizing with the rhythm of the other, resonating, becoming attuned to the other), and finally the degree of awareness of the gesture: a few interviewees were able to make the gesture of connection in a conscious and deliberate way, while for the others, it was a pre-reflective gesture that they became aware of during the interview. It will be interesting to check whether these attentional modes appear in the descriptions that the two authors are collecting from therapists,

who usually develop a refined awareness of their attentional processes.

« 11 » The introduction of the article presents the hypothesis that intersubjectivity creates subjectivity, through processes of co-emergence or co-construction of "me" and "you": "*I am because you are*" (§9). To what extent do the categories highlighted in this study illustrate this co-emergence or co-construction? The processes of "identifying oneself with the other" and of "identifying the other with oneself," the weakening of the sense of agency and of the sense of ownership, seem, on the contrary, to be associated with a loss of solidity of me, of you, and of the border between us. I look forward to the next stage of the study which, through micro-phenomenological descriptions of the temporal unfolding of these processes, may provide answers to these questions.

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On the Relation between Theory and Experience, and the Intersubjective Nature of the Human Mind

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> Abstract • I argue that the connection between the theoretical claims of the introductory part of the target article and the presented empirical findings on different modes of intersubjectivity is rather tenuous. Further, I touch upon the quandary of whether second-person research on intersubjective experience targets the same level of description of intersubjectivity compared with the theoretical accounts of intersubjectivity. I end with a discussion on why understanding the dynamics of intersubjectivity is essential to cognitive science.

Tenuous links between theoretical claims and empirical findings

« 1 » In the introductory part (§§2–8) Magali Ollagnier-Beldame and Christophe Coupé present and espouse – or so it appears – various theoretical claims about the inseparability of the subject and the other; or, stated less strongly, they adopt the view that the subject and the other are much more tightly bound to each other than their empirical findings reveal. They mention Martin Buber, who claims that "the subject is primarily made of relations to others" (§4). They also allude to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, where he, at least in part, argues that the embodied subject and the world (that fundamentally includes others) are inseparable "projects" of each other. As Merleau-Ponty succinctly puts it:

> "The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects." (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 430)

They further refer to Daniel Stern, who maintains the view that "our mental life is co-created and the idea of a one-person psychology is no longer tenable" (§8). Lastly, the authors also seem to accept the enactive account of cognition that, at least as envisioned by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch in *The Embodied Mind* (1991), argues for a constitutive relatedness of the subject, the world and the other. This is the *constitution thesis*: the view that claims that what is at stake here is not merely that the subject is affected by or connected to the other and the world but that the subject and the world (that essentially includes others) are inseparable – that they constitute each other. However, it is unclear from the empirical study and the authors' interpretation of the results for different modes of intersubjectivity how they, if at all, bear upon the views presented in the introductory, theoretical part of the target article.

« 2 » One could, possibly, try to interpret certain modes of intersubjectivity in light of the constitution thesis; that is, move towards understanding the subject as inseparable from the other and not merely as being affected by the other. For instance, as an example of the mode "To (not) feel a part of the same set," the authors provide us with the following report (I quote just parts of the provided examples for the sake of brevity): "[…] to show him that we could be part of the same category of people […]" (Table 4). On the one hand, this example could be understood as a mode of intersubjectivity where the person, say in her wanting to belong to "the same category" as the other, is, through the interaction, co-creating what she is as a subject. On the other hand, one may take this report in a much weaker and more plausible sense as a desire of the person who would simply like to feel close to another person and thus expresses her wish to belong to the same category as the other. This example in itself, without further interpretation, does not tell us anything about how, if at all, the person and the other co-constitute, co-create each other.

« 3 » Let me provide another illustration. The mode "To (not) identify oneself with the other" is illustrated by the following report: "I identified with her experience and through her I was sharing it […] it's as if I became her […]" (Table 4). One could interpret the quoted report on experience – identifying, sharing and becoming the other – as suggesting that the other is, at least some-

times, essential to what she is (to become) as a subject. Conversely, one does not need to interpret the report in this manner. It could simply be that having had a similar experience (or the belief thereof) as the other (if this is what is meant by "identifying with her experience") leads her to feel *as if* she became the other person. In this view, it is quite plausible that she did not, however, go through any process of becoming the other but rather, as the report states, only felt *as if* she did. It is thus unclear whether the person reporting on her experience is affected by the other in any fundamental way.

« 4 » Later on (at the end of §48), the authors do give a more convincing example of a verbatim report that seems to relate to the claims of the theoretical part of the target article in a more direct way and may even support them. In the report, the person describes her experience of feeling the fear of other people and how she, only after some time, learns to differentiate the experience from her own, distinctly bodily, experience of fear. In this rich example, the experience of the reporting person is strongly intertwined with the experience of the other. To put it more precisely, such is the experience of the reporting person. Although she gradually learns to distinctly separate the two experiences, it is possible that she, through many such encounters, is rather fundamentally affected by others. What remains unclear is to what degree this tenacious presence of others in her experience constitutes what she is (to become) as an experiencing subject. To what degree, if at all, does it exert influence on her own experience? Could this last example reveal something "deeper" about the nature of subjectivity, intersubjectivity and the relation of both? (Q1)

« 5 » As I have tried to illustrate, trying to understand the authors' findings on different modes of intersubjectivity (together with the provided examples of reports) as illumination, or support, of the constitution thesis, would be, in large part, reading too much into the data. The findings presented in the target article rather reveal insightful ways of how two subjects interact and relate, how they sometimes affect each other, and, to a certain degree, how an individual mediates the interactions she is engaged in. This is also implied by the authors' own brief interpretation of their results (that is at least how I understand the claim): "Through these examples, the question of the porosity of the boundary between the self and the other arises […]" (§49). However, the *porosity thesis* the authors make is much weaker than the *constitution thesis* the theoretical part of the target article argues for.

« 6 » As a consequence, the empirical findings presented in the target article seem to bear upon the theory presented and espoused by the authors in a rather tenuous way at best. This either calls for further discussion on how the empirical results might elucidate the theory, or for an explication of the usefulness of theory in such an empirical endeavour.

Do theory and second-person research aim at a different level of description of intersubjectivity?

« 7 » Judging from the literature (e.g., Zahavi 2001), theoretical accounts of intersubjectivity are often concerned with the nature or ontology of intersubjectivity. Furthermore, they are rarely grounded in experience, at least not in any systematic manner. In contrast, second-person research on intersubjective experience is concerned with how in everyday situations persons experience their and others' interactions, and the various, possibly more general, ways in which such interactions unfold.

« 8 » Additionally, the goal of first- and second-person research on experience is not to (and should not) give grounds for existing theoretical claims or to provide support for a preferred theoretical position. (By no means do I want to imply that the authors fall prey to this.) On the contrary, empirical phenomenology should rather try, as far as possible, to get rid of various theoretical beliefs, presuppositions or foundations before starting an inquiry into experience (Kordeš 2016; Strle 2016). To this end, one must leave open the possibility that second-person research on intersubjective experience, taken up by the authors, possibly targets a rather different level of description of intersubjectivity compared with the presented theoretical investigation of the phenomenon.

« 9 » How could the way the authors research intersubjective experience decide upon whether we could, for instance, agree with Dan Zahavi's (2001) remark on what phenomenology generally tells us about intersubjectivity, i.e., that circularity between the subject, the world and the other is integral to the very nature of intersubjectivity? Zahavi states:

> "[T]he subjectivity that is related to the world only gains its full relation to itself, and to the world, in relation to the other; i.e., in intersubjectivity; intersubjectivity only exists and develops in the mutual interrelationship between subjects that are related to the world; and the world is only brought to articulation in the relation between subjects." (Zahavi 2001: 166)

« 10 » It might be that the second-person approach to understanding intersubjective experience, with its epistemic and methodological commitments, cannot elucidate or even relate to theoretical claims about the intersubjectivity of, say, traditional phenomenology. What could be done about this quandary, especially in light of the relation between theory the authors allude to and their empirical findings? (Q2)

Why understanding intersubjectivity is essential to cognitive science

« 11 » If we accept the intuition that minds are fundamentally coupled with (or constituted by) each other and that the world necessitates an understanding of and research into the human mind as an *intersubjective mind*, research on intersubjectivity (first- second- and third-person) should become essential on the path towards a better and fuller understanding of the human mind – notwithstanding the described conundrum of the relation between theory, practice and experience of intersubjectivity.

« 12 » Endorsing such a view of the human mind forces us to admit that

- we are, as (conscious) minds, fundamentally affected by values and culture we are immersed in and that we practise towards ourselves and others;
- beliefs and attitudes we have towards others, and others have towards us, exert influence on our minds, on what we are as subjects; and
- we are a product of the history of thoughts, actions and experience we have had through our interaction with others and the world.

« 13 » This, however, would imply that what a science of the human mind – be it

second- or third-person – "discovers" about the human mind strongly depends on cultural values we hold, on beliefs we have about others and others have about us, on our experiential history, etc. Moreover, if we agree with the claim that a prominent scientific outlook on the human mind (that is accepted or widely discussed by the public at a certain moment) influences our values, beliefs and attitudes towards ourselves and towards others, and that it affects how we understand ourselves, we must concede that the findings of a science of the human mind are dependent on the very intersubjective processes that constitute it. Thus, sciences of the human mind are not activities of discovery but, in part, activities of co-creation of what the human mind is (for further elaboration, see Strle 2018; Strle & Markič 2018). This further means that the ideal of scientific objectivity is untenable, a chimaera, as Varela (1984) would put it.

« 14 » Understanding the dynamics of intersubjectivity (especially from first- and second-person perspectives that are lacking in mainstream cognitive science), is thus essential for a better and fuller understanding of the human mind. The study presented in the target article is, therefore, a welcome addition and starting point towards a better understanding of the human mind.

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Authors' Response

First Encounters and the Tensions Between Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to Intersubjectivity

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> Abstract • We discuss how to strengthen the empirical study of first encounters, and how to possibly reduce tensions between theoretical and empirical approaches to intersubjectivity.

« 1 » We thank our commentators, for their inputs are precious, especially since they come from different disciplinary fields, at the crossing of which our contribution stands. We have organized our response in two sections. The first one deals with how we consider first encounters and the limitations of our work in this respect. The second one deals with the tension between theoretical and empirical approaches to intersubjectivity.

« 2 » Before continuing we should restate explicitly the initial objective of our study: to propose a typology of the micro-moments that constitute people's intersubjective experiences during first encounters. This typology was achieved with a bottom-up approach in order to prevent ourselves, as much as possible, from assigning predefined categories to interviewees' verbal descriptions and experiences, as noted by Maria Gyemant (§2). Upon comparing and sorting the verbatim statements, we identified five descriptive categories that provide a reasonable overview of the diversity of these verbatim statements: act, mode of intersubjectivity, sense of agency, experiential modality, and content in terms of involved persons. From this approach stem most of the answers we can provide to the commentators' concerns.

Strengthening the empirical study of first encounters

« 3 » We can identify three levels of discussion, which are organized sequentially in relation to the conduct of our investigation:

a the initial choice of a specific situation to approach intersubjectivity empirically,
b the choice of a method to collect and analyze data, and
c the outputs of this method.

« 4 » Regarding first the initial choice of situations to investigate, in §§3–5 of their commentary Eli Pitcovski & Yochai Ataria suggest that we articulate our study of the ex-

perience of first encounters around two distinct and complementary questions:

a How is it that another person's unique individuality (occasionally) bursts into our world?

b What is the lived experience of facing the opportunity to make a first impression (to present oneself from the ground up)?

« 5 » Such questions can be applied specifically to what we have called first encounters (§6). For us, this distinction looks very useful. As practitioners of micro-phenomenological interviews, we can see how these two questions could function as anchor points for the interviewer's guidance, and therefore shape the interviewee's introspective journey toward specific aspects of her past lived experience. In this case, however, one walks a thin line, since while the interviewer can orientate the interviewee's attention toward various facets of her experience, she should be very cautious not to induce representations that are not the interviewee's (Vermersch 1994, 2012; **Petitmengin** 2006). In our case, we chose to start our investigations without subtly orienting the interviewees. This does not mean, however, that we did not already have some ideas regarding the possible experiences of first encounters, since we had conducted a few exploratory interviews before starting to collect the data reported in our article (see also below).

« 6 » **Pitcovski & Ataria** (§§7f) also suggest that we focus on specific interesting cases, where the experiences pertaining to their aforementioned questions occur separately rather than together. This suggestion echoes **Toma Strle**'s Q1 about a particular verbatim statement quoted in our article – where a psychotherapist reports how she can identify her patient's fear in herself –, and whether it reveals something deep about subjectivity and intersubjectivity. It also resonates with **Natalie Depraz**'s Q3 regarding our focus on generalized typologies. Indeed, in our study, we have attempted to cover all the descriptions and the corresponding lived experiences, in particular when we constructed generic descriptive categories. In doing so, we did not focus on the singularities of each experience, and thus potentially fail to notice illuminating cases and to analyze them in more depth. A parallel may be drawn here with sampling techniques in qualitative research, where a purposive sampling may either focus on extreme or deviant cases, or attempt to correctly represent the whole population (maximum variation sampling). On the one hand, we have been influenced by our knowledge of the analysis of micro-phenomenological interviews, where one commonly shifts from specific descriptive categories to generic ones (Valenzuela-Moguillansky & Vásquez-Rosati 2019). On the other hand, we were aiming at representative generic descriptive categories of experience, rather than at rare and abnormal situations. This being said, we agree that studying such situations is interesting and fruitful (Leplat 2002; Passeron & Revel 2005; Yin 2003). While focusing only on them at the expense of more common experiences would blur what the lived experience of a first encounter commonly consists of, it could be done in addition and complementarily to the approach we have followed.

« 7 » Broadening the question of first encounters to the topic of intersubjectivity, in her Q2, **Gyemant** wonders about the minimal condition for a genuine intersubjective experience, and whether putting oneself in the place of another could be the defining point of a first encounter. While we spent a long time pondering over what initial encounters are, prior to conducting our interviews, we eventually opted for a simple choice: the first moment of co-presence between two subjects. This contrasted, for example, with Cécile Duteille's (2002) heavily meaningful destinal encounters ("rencontres destinales"). This choice reflected our wish not to be entangled in a priori conceptions, and potentially miss interesting situations. As several commentators have noted, our study is probably the first micro-phenomenological empirical approach to intersubjectivity. As such, we kept a broad perspective on our question of interest, with the hope that it would highlight interesting facets of lived experiences. At the same time, we accepted that we might have to face the possibility that our results would, perhaps somehow paradoxically, not help that much in clearly delineating the genuine essence of first encounters.

« 8 » When it comes to the methodology of investigation, **Ezequiel Di Paolo & Hanne De Jaegher** put our approach in perspective with their method of analysis of interactions, PRISMA (DeJaegher et al. 2017), which grants direct access to the interactive experience, i.e., "what happens *between* people" (§4). We can confirm the complementarity of the two approaches, since we got acquainted with PRISMA during a workshop in 2017. As the authors state, "the one unfolds interactive experience as it happens, the other goes deep into its individually lived components" (§7). Nevertheless, a significant difference between PRISMA and our method is that in the former, subjects are researchers and repeatedly reflect upon their experience during the whole process (§5). This opens the door to different accounts and explorations of intersubjectivity. As we will see later, in §17 of this response, while micro-phenomenological interviews can be conducted with interviewees who are experts in the technique, this is not the path we followed in our study. As in all second-person methodologies, the data collection process was not immune to subjective and intersubjective effects, but we chose to leave these considerations aside: the place of the researcher as interviewer was not explicitly questioned, nor was the secondary encounter between her and the interviewee, as we thought it could have blurred our main message. Nevertheless, given that the technique of micro-phenomenological interviews explicitly aims at minimizing the interviewer's influence and inductions, potential issues are likely to be less severe than with other types of interviews, e.g., non-structured interviews in social psychology. To reply to **Gyemant**'s Q1, about how the results of our study can tell us more about the intersubjective interaction at the heart of the micro-phenomenological interviewing process, we can anticipate that a better understanding of first encounters could help to tune the interviewing process even more precisely, always in an effort to ease the interviewee's evocation. It is interesting to note here that learning how to be a good interviewer relies for a large part on experiencing being the interviewee and assessing what questions do to us.

« 9 » Regarding the outputs of our analysis, **Gyemant** (§10) states that what we called "act" (e.g., in §39) is actually very close to what phenomenologists call "intentionality." Furthermore, the categories "content" and "sense of agency" cannot be considered

independently from such intentionalities. While we have superficially considered our descriptive categories as disconnected because of our intention to further study their patterns of co-occurrence, we fully agree that connections and hierarchies can be established. Gyemant further questions our various experiential modalities, and whether vision or audition should not be considered bodily sensations (Q3). By contrast, we argue that all perceptions are bodily sensations, in the sense that they are all embodied. Because of this, we restricted bodily sensations to sensations of the inside of the body – such as aches, tickles, feelings of pain and pleasure, of warmth or fatigue – in contrast with perceptions of the environment.

« 10 » Depraz (Q1) wonders why our descriptive categories do not pay justice to what she considers the pristine character of first encounters, which includes elements such as surprise or novelty. We have, indeed, not singled out and thematised such emotions and their cues. The main reason for this, since we adopted a descriptive and bottom-up approach, is that they did not particularly stand out in our data. This does not mean in any way that these elements are deprived of meaning. Indeed, going back once again to the transcriptions and paying attention to cues of these emotions would probably reveal interesting patterns, and therefore why and how they are essential components of first encounters.

« 11 » Claire Petitmengin (Q3) asks about the clues leading to our conclusions about the pre-reflective nature of a duality between an active lived agency and a passive one. This assertion relies on the quality of our interviewee's descriptive statements, according to micro-phenomenological criteria – the intensity of the evocation assessed by the rate of speech, hesitations, the type of vocabulary, etc. –, and the astonishment some interviewees felt when reflecting upon the verbalizations of their past experience.

« 12 » Petitmengin also questions the definition of what we called "passive sense of agency" (Q2). We have proposed to define it as the feeling of being passive, which means for someone to experience being acted upon, rather than acting oneself. Petitmengin (2010: 176) has suggested that the sense of agency as defined by Shaun Gallagher (2000) can sometimes be altered, but this, however, seems to be a slightly different experience. Indeed, an altered sense means that the subject is not able to clearly distinguish whether she is the agent or not, while we are considering the possibility to experience, possible clearly, being acted upon. Overall, we agree that defining this notion, or rather assigning an appropriate name to the experience of reference, is difficult, as exemplified in our target article in Footnote 1 on the possibility of genuinely being acted upon. We acknowledge that the terms of the philosophical debate are in part beyond our expertise.

« 13 » Some of the aforementioned concerns – Pitcovski & Ataria's suggestions, Gyemant's parallel between our notion of act and intentionality, Petitmengin's concerns about the sense of agency – have in common that they refer to a rich philosophical tradition and to conceptual issues that have been debated for a long time. This explains why several of the commentators have stressed the discrepancy between these debates on the one hand, and our approach and its outputs on the other hand. We now turn our attention to this inconsistency.

The tension between theoretical and empirical approaches to intersubjectivity

« 14 » A major concern across the commentaries refers to the articulation between theoretical and empirical approaches to intersubjectivity. While some commentators recommend that the starting point of our investigation should derive from theoretical issues, others question the very possibility of connecting these two epistemological approaches.

« 15 » In particular, Pitcovski & Ataria (§§2f) advise against trying to delimitate first encounters from other intersections between subjects in favor of focusing on meaningful questions from a philosophical point of view. This is much in line with Depraz's Q2 of how the theoretical framework may offer a priori categories to be investigated with empirical data. Similarly, Di Paolo & De Jaegher (§8) recommend having a prior theoretical stance to get past the "exploratory" stage. Strle departs to a certain extent from this idea of theory as a starting point for empirical investigations. Rather, he raises the question (Q2) of whether the tension between philosophical and empirical approaches to intersubjectivity can be eased – or more precisely between "the second-person approach to understanding intersubjective experience, with its epistemic and methodological commitments" and "theoretical claims about the intersubjectivity of, say, traditional phenomenology."

« 16 » Although we chose a bottom-up approach to construct descriptive categories of the lived experience of first encounters, we attempted to anchor our approach in the very rich literature on intersubjectivity – despite being no philosophers and facing the difficulty of integrating the contributions of many important scholars. This may, at least partly, explain the feeling of disconnection between the empirical study and its theoretical background. Nonetheless, as suggested by Strle, there might also be an irreducible gap between subtle theoretical positions, whatever they are, and the result of micro-phenomenological interviews, which produce descriptions of lived experience that do not rely by default on sophisticated concepts and expert philosophical knowledge either. This difficulty calls for interdisciplinary collaboration with theoreticians, in an effort to better connect long philosophical traditions with more recent empirical endeavors.

« 17 » Coming back to what we said above in §14, it is totally possible to conduct micro-phenomenological interviews with precise and informed questions in mind. The question for us is whether starting *directly* with such questions, and thus bypassing a more exploratory stage, is detrimental to an all-encompassing understanding of the various experiences of first encounters. In other words, how much does the specific inform the general? As a way to address the challenge of possible inductions (§4 above), Di Paolo & De Jaegher (§8) suggest that we conduct the interviewing process, but "unbracket" the data during the phase of analysis. This makes good sense, although it requires the interviewer already in the know about future directions of analysis to cautiously stay away from them initially. This is in order to keep interviews as open to novelty and unexpectedness as possible – something that may not be that easy.

« 18 » We see other possible ways to ease the tension between theoretical queries and the requirements of micro-phenomenologi-

cal interviews, which go beyond the simple idea of starting broadly, then continuing with more specific questions:

a One could work with "experts in intersubjectivity" such as psychotherapists. Their descriptions may indeed reveal more of the subtle aspects of experiencing intersubjectivity. This is because they are more aware of what happens to them when with the other, and because they may be better able to express such experiences. We have conducted such work in another study (Ollagnier-Beldame & Cazemajou 2019).

b One can work with experts in micro-phenomenological interviews. Being familiar with the technique helps them to better connect with their past experience, to answer questions with precision, and, by themselves, efficiently "scan" varied aspects of their past experience. This usually results in finer-grained descriptions, and the highlighting of micro-moments of experience, which can be decisive when deciphering a complex flux of activities.

c Rather than conducting all the interviews in one phase, followed by a second phase of analysis, one can proceed in a more iterative way, and gradually refine the investigations as knowledge is gained from the previous interviews. In this way, better-informed questions can result in richer and more incisive descriptions.

« 19 » With these three approaches (and possible combinations), finer-grained and more attuned descriptions may more easily connect with theoretical considerations. In case (c), however, the iterative process results in an asymmetry between the interviews, which may hinder the construction of generic categories.

Conclusion

« 20 » The comments our target article received are insightful since they offer stimulating suggestions for choosing more appropriate situations for first encounters, for focusing better on key issues according to philosophical traditions, and for better analyzing and discussing interviewees' verbal descriptions of their lived experience. Micro-phenomenological interviews are a tool of choice when it comes to exploring human experience, but they raise both epistemological and technical challenges. These challenges consistently interact with the thematic questions that motivate their selection in the first place. Resolving this conundrum is still very much in progress.

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