

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 Christophe 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 sub-categories 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 Heidegger, 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 psy-

chology 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-