

Imitative Empathy: An Intuitive Method For Psychology

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Empathy has been described as “the process by which one person is able to imaginatively place himself in another’s role and situation in order to understand the other’s feelings, point of view, attitudes, and tendencies to act in a given situation.”¹ In contemporary parlance, the term “empathy” is more often associated with therapeutic than theoretical or methodological literature in psychology. The notion of empathy has, in fact, been used by many psychologists in describing the clinician’s

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Note: This paper was written by the author while a graduate student at Duquesne in the 1970s, in preparation for a dissertation on clinical intuition. The ideas contained herein have been subsequently developed within other forums, while also serving as a foundation for the author’s forays into animal worlds.

¹ Gorden, *Interviewing: Strategy, Techniques, and Tactics*, 18–19.

presence to a client.² Originally this term was used to suggest “the imitative assumption of the postures and facial expressions of other people.”³ In the clinical context, it is usually said that the psychologist “puts himself in his client’s place,”⁴ “uses his imagination”⁵ or “listens with the third ear”⁶ to understand the client’s experience. It also has been suggested that the psychologist might “try to imitate the changing positions of a client to try intuitively to infer his un verbalized feelings” (Wiens, 35). One psychologist goes so far as to say, “When we cannot imitate an individual’s behavior we are at a loss to understand it.”⁷

What is this ‘empathy’ by which I invest myself in other people’s gestures, and they inhabit mine? If my body is indeed my point of view on the world, then it will be in my body that the other’s body becomes known to me. And since my own body is first lived and only subsequently known, it requires a phenomenological reduction to turn our gaze toward the body itself as the means which delivers the world over to us. Just as emotion is a consciousness of the *world* of emotion, and not of the emotion itself, bodily experience in general is a consciousness of the world given to me *through* my body, and not as yet a self-consciousness of the body. This is why empathy (*Einfühlung*) was originally understood as a projective phenomenon, where slight motor movements induced in my own body by another’s presence evoke experiential qualities that are perceived ‘over there’ in the other person.⁸ In this view, the kinesthetic sensations resulting from one’s assuming the postures and facial expressions of others become the very source of our

² Allport, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*; Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*; Sarbin, Taft, and Bailey, *Clinical Inference and Cognitive Theory*; Wiens, “Psychological Assessment”; Schafer, *The Analytic Attitude*.

³ Allport, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*, 530.

⁴ Combs and Snygg, *Individual behavior: A Perceptual Approach to Behavior*, 254.

⁵ Hamlyn, “Person-perception and Our Understanding of Others.”

⁶ Reik, *Listening with the Third Ear*.

⁷ Kempf, quoted in Allport, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*, 530.

⁸ Lipps, *Leitfaden der Psychologie* [Textbook of Psychology]. Lipps’ discussion of *Einfühlung* was an elaboration of the concept as used by Rudolf Hermann Lotze and Wilhelm Wundt in the development of a doctrine of aesthetics. The English translation “empathy” was coined by Wundt’s student E.G. Titchener. The original connection of the term *Einfühlung* with aesthetics owes to J.G. von Heider’s use of *Einfühlen* to express the artist’s imaginative insight into individual styles of experience. The concept was also implicit in Coleridge’s idea of “an imaginative union of the *percipi* and the *percipere*, the ‘perceived’ and the ‘perceiver’” (Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism*, 157).

knowledge of other people. As Wilhelm Reich observed, the other's "expressive movements involuntarily bring about *an imitation* in our own organism."⁹ We thereby sense in and through our own bodies the intentions and affects that animate the other, and simultaneously understand our tacit experience as significant of the other's experience.

When I perceive conduct I am perceiving not only an action that takes place in the midst of the world, but an *intentionality*. Sartre writes: "I see his gesture and at the same time I determine his goal."¹⁰ It is in this sense that Merleau-Ponty can say that "To imitate is not to act like others but to obtain the same result as others."¹¹ Even a young child understands that behavior is originally an *orientation* to the world, an arrangement of means in view of an end. Merleau-Ponty cites the child of thirty-two months, observed by Guillaume, "who has been asked to imitate the movement of turning his eyes from one side to the other. The child begins by turning his head. This fact effectively proves that the child is imitating the result and not the means by which the model obtains these results" (Ibid., 35). It is to this phenomenon of imitation that I will turn my attention, in order to develop a clearer sense of the body's role in the understanding of others. Methodologically, this requires a 'bracketing' of my own experience: starting with concrete experiences of imitation, I turn from my consciousness of the person imitated to my experience in which my sense of this person takes shape. This "reduction" becomes the basis for my reflections concerning imitation as a procedure for access to the psychological expressions of others. Through these reflections I hope to further develop the understanding of empathy as a "bodily reflective mode."¹² My interest here is not so much in developing a *theory* of empathy as in developing an appreciation of, and an aptitude for, empathy as a mode of access to psychological meaning. To the extent that the original concept of empathy referred to a "motor mimicry," it is appropriate, perhaps even paradigmatic, to develop a psychological methodology based on empathy out of a consideration of the phenomenon of imitation.

⁹ Reich, *Character Analysis*, 362.

¹⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 320.

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 33.

¹² Shapiro, *Bodily Reflective Modes: A Phenomenological Method for Psychology*.

Imitation is clearly a special case of empathy where an impression of someone gets expressed by one's own body. What interests me here is more the impression itself than the performance. In principle, the impression can give rise to various forms of expression, including imitation, description, caricature, and even musical portrayal. Methodologically, with the experience of imitation we have an occasion for a more direct *focusing in* on the bodily sensibility that enables us to understand others. It is this *aptitude* of the lived body that interests me. (Whether or not an impression actually gives rise to bodily enactment is a question of one's personal style of embodiment, i.e., how comfortable one is with stretching the boundaries of one's bodily expressivity.) The impression itself is based, in any case, upon one's bodily receptivity to the expressions of others. It is the 'formation' of the impression that is the real interest here. In empathy, it is my living body that is present to the living body of another. What I perceive is neither 'thing' nor 'idea' — the expression that I see is neither purely material (objective) nor purely mental (subjective).

The German words *Einstellen*, *Einbilden*, and *Einfühlen* all bear the prefix "ein," which means "in." The word "ein" also connotes "oneness," even if it does not bear this meaning in its conventional use as a prefix. Thus we might extend the meaning of "ein" to connote an intending that obtains a unity or union with the object of perception. It is just such a union that is implied by Scheler's term "*Einsfühlung*"¹³ and Merleau-Ponty's discussion of sympathy¹⁴ and of an original anonymous intercorporeality¹⁵ that precedes — both developmentally and logically — any division into self and other.

The question remains as to the nature of this experienced "oneness" with the other: is the other's experience given to me through a direct intuition, or rather by inference? Is the act of understanding others to be characterized as a perception followed by a judgment, or does it sometimes present itself as the singular intuitive experience of a perceiving, imagining, embodied subject.

¹³ Scheler, *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, 29.

¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow."

¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*.

INFERENCE VERSUS INTUITION THEORIES OF IMPRESSION FORMATION

The two competing views concerning how we understand others are in fact derivations of two opposing epistemological traditions. "Inference" theorists follow the lead of the British empiricists and associationists, who purport that impressions of other people are received passively and then organized according to laws of association. Accordingly, it is the latter process of organization that makes sense out of what was originally without sense. Locke's "association of ideas" becomes, in modern psychological parlance, "inference." In the context of person perception, it refers to "a cognitive process in which characteristics of a general class are *attributed to an individual taken as an instance of that class*" (Sarbin, Taft, and Bailey, 5; italics added). To the extent that the characteristic is attributed by means of association of the initial sense datum with information held in the perceiver's memory, the perceived characteristic cannot be said to exist independently of the perceiver's consciousness (a point with which intuitionists would not quarrel). But the characteristic is then understood to be the end product of a chain of cognitive events, the mechanism of which would account for the act of attribution.

It is this reduction of perceived characteristics to a causal network of cognitive processes that the opposing epistemological trend takes issue with. The "intuition" approach can be traced back to Leibnitz, a seventeenth-century contemporary of Locke, for whom perception could not be understood in terms of mechanical transactions. Kant, Brentano, Dilthey, Husserl, James, and Köhler all follow in this tradition which today continues to rival the Anglo-American empiricist influence in cognitive theory. In their approach to person perception, the significance of bodily expression is understood to be achieved through acts of direct intuition rather than inference. In the case of person perception, empathic intuition rather than mechanical association is understood to be the basis for knowing others. The Continental tradition, as represented by proponents of phenomenology, will be discussed later in the literature review. Because the empirical investigations into person perception are primarily concerned with the process of "inference," I will look more closely at what is meant by this term.

INFERENCE

To “infer” any particular personal quality, the perceiver must already be aware “of the existence of that characteristic as a possible psychological property that the self and other human beings may possess.”¹⁶ In this sense, inference refers to the process whereby the perceiver looks at an individual and “sees” general or typical motives, intents, or dispositions. Advocates of inference theory “hold that the conditions for knowing any ‘particular’ are fulfilled only when its ‘universal’ or class membership is recognized” (Sarbin, Taft, and Bailey, 255). This statement implies that recognition (a term which itself comes out of the associationist tradition) of class membership is taken to be the necessary and sufficient condition for understanding persons. “*Inference stresses what the other has in common with all men, not the pattern that belongs to him alone.*”¹⁷ While acknowledging that “our first tendency is to place a person in the category of the *generalized other*,” Allport argues that the category is only a “baseline (from which) we start to individualize” (Ibid., 514).

INTUITION

One empirical researcher who did not presuppose an inference model of person perception was From.¹⁸ His interest was the observer’s experience of the so-called “covert mental aspect” of the actor’s overt situational conduct. From’s findings indicate that in our spontaneous perceptions, the other is experienced as an undifferentiated totality including both a “mental” and a “material” aspect that are given “synchronously.” This view is reminiscent of Aristotle’s pre-dualistic comprehension of behavior as a “compound” of phenomena of the soul and body.¹⁹ Notwithstanding his contribution towards an holistic understanding of person perception, From’s approach to his research was limited by the fact that the research situation was not one of participant-observation where the behavior of the actor would be directed to an observer engaged in a face-to-face encounter.

One reason why inference theorists deny intuition is that their approach to perception is based upon a denial of the body. If we

¹⁶ Flavell, “The Development of Inferences about Others,” 72.

¹⁷ Allport, *Pattern and Growth in Personality*, 531.

¹⁸ From, *Perception of Other People*.

¹⁹ Fell, “The Phenomenological Approach to Emotion,” 267.

understand that “all perceivers have bodies and are oriented to embodied existences,”²⁰ then our approach to the perception of others is quite different. Rather than attempting to isolate the intervening cognitive variables of impression formation, intuition-theorists approach the latter as an act of the integrated body-subject.²¹ Research on the mechanism of inference begins with the assumption that there are higher-order cognitive processes involved in the formation of impressions of other people and proceeds to investigate the linear as well as configured combinations of cues that are involved.²² As science continues to investigate the cognitive activity of the clinician, the phenomenologist asks, “What becomes of the man—not of the brain but of the man. . . . What becomes of the face-to-face, the meeting, the seeing, the forming of the idea. . . ?”²³ In an earlier investigation of psychodiagnostic seeing,²⁴ my subjects were hard pressed to analyze their impressions into an orderly sequence of perceptual and cognitive acts. Rather, they described their impressions as having a “sudden” quality to them, while acknowledging that there was a lot going on all at once in their experience. This “all-at-once” quality should not be dismissed merely as a function of the subjects’ poor powers of introspection, as has been done in the past by cognitive psychologists.²⁵ Rather, such self-reports should be taken as a clue to how impressions are in fact formed.

Allport writes: “The fact that one perceives a personality at first contact, not by fragments pieced together with painful slowness, but with swift ‘intuition,’ . . . is a matter of considerable theoretical importance” (*Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*, 500–501). This observation is important precisely because it brings us back to the immediacy of our perceptions of others. Accordingly, embodied expression already signifies the “who” of the person being perceived. If

²⁰ Giorgi, “The Implications of ‘The Primacy of Perception’ for the Science of Psychology,” 6.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

²² Arthur, “A Decision-making Approach to Psychological Assessment in the Clinic”; Hammond, Hirsch, and Todd, “Analyzing the Components of Clinical Inference”; Jones and Davis, “From Acts to Dispositions: The Attribution Process in Person Perception.”

²³ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 42.

²⁴ Churchill, “Psychodiagnostic Seeing: A Phenomenological Investigation of the Psychologist’s Experience during the Interview Phase of a Clinical Assessment.”

²⁵ Nisbett and Wilson, “Telling More than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Process.”

the perception and understanding of another is found to be a fundamentally embodied act, then empathy in particular must be understood as more than just a social attitude, which is implied by common talk of “empathizing” as a gesture of care. Rather, as a “feeling oneself into” (*Einfühlen*), it involves a living awareness of embodied expression. Wilhelm Reich once observed that “[o]nly when we have *sensed* the patient’s facial expression are we in a position to comprehend it. We use the word ‘comprehend’ here to mean quite literally to know which *emotion* is being *expressed* in it” (362). The notion of empathy thus makes reference to an intercorporeal experience that is neither purely perceptual, nor cognitive, nor affective; it refers back to the fundamental condition that “all perceivers have bodies and are oriented to embodied existences” (Giorgi, 6).

APPERCEPTION AND EMPATHY

Husserl made a distinction between *Urpräsenz* and *Appräsenz*.²⁶ Accordingly, only my own experiences are given to me in “originary presence”; the experiences of another person are not directly presented to me, but are “appresented.” This means that the other’s ‘inner life’ (*Innerlichkeit*) is given to me only partially and in conjunction with aspects that are fully present, namely bodily presentations. Even prior to the analogical apperception of the other’s intentional life, there is at first the experiencing of the other’s body (*Körper*) as an animated body (*Leibkörper*): “The apperception of bodies other than one’s own as somatic, i.e., as organisms of other persons or animals, requires an appresentative transfer by analogy from our own somatic experience to what is at first given only as a corporeal thing.”²⁷ Thus the other is given to me directly in perception only as a physical object. I must “transfer” to this other corporeity the nature that I originally understand only my own corporeity to embody, namely, the nature of an “organism” (i.e., a center of intentions).

²⁶ Husserl, *Ideen zu einer Reinen Phenomenologie und Phenomenologischen; Philosophie II: Phaenomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution* [Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy; Second Book: Phenomenological Investigations of Constitution], 162–172.

²⁷ Gurwitsch, *Phenomenology and the Theory of Science*, 95; also, see Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, 110–111.

If I experience this inhering of my consciousness in its body and its world, the perception of other people and the plurality of consciousnesses no longer present any difficulty. . . . If my consciousness has a body, why should other bodies not "have" consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 351)?

In the natural attitude, when a perceived object in my world takes on the character of an alter ego, it is taken for granted that "simultaneous with *my* lived experience of you, there is *your* lived experience which belongs to you and is part of your stream of consciousness."²⁸

Given that the other is experienced as another "I," the question becomes how does one grasp the sense of this alter ego's experience. If the only direct access I have to the other is through his or her physical body and its manifest behavior, then I must contribute in some way to the constitution of the meaning of the other's acts. This mediation of the perceiver is referred to by the term "apperception,"²⁹ which means the spontaneous interpretation of what is directly perceived by the senses in terms of one's own past experiences and stock of knowledge. In the natural attitude, we understand the world by interpreting our experience of the world according to our own meaning-contexts or frames of reference. Since in the immediate encounter with the other we do not know what the other person's frame of reference is, we naturally fall back upon our own meaning-contexts within which to understand our experience of the other person.

The "condition of possibility" for such access to the meaning of other people's experience was described by Schütz³⁰ in his "general thesis of the reciprocity of perspectives," which can be described as two idealizations. The first is the "interchangeability of standpoints," according to which, if the other and myself were to step into each other's shoes, we would each "experience things in the same perspective, distance, and reach" as the other did, before our switch (*Ibid.*, 60). The second idealization Schütz refers to as the "congruence of relevance systems," according to which the other and I "learn to accept as given that the variances in apprehension and explication which result from the differences between my and his biographical situations are irrelevant for

²⁸ Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 169.

²⁹ Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*.

³⁰ Schütz and Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*.

my and his, our, present practical goals" (Ibid.). This "reciprocity of perspectives" is a lived ("natural") attitude that makes possible the spontaneous tendency to perceive and understand other people in terms of one's own experience. However, abiding by one's own meaning-context, one grasps only a general meaning of the other's manifest behavior, that is, a meaning constituted on the basis of typifications provided by one's own past experiences. Through our familiarity with types of experience we can aim toward an understanding of the other's experience; but what is given in apperception is never more than an approximation of the other's experience: "The other, then, is a generalized I" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 138).

Husserl³¹ elaborates the concept of apperception with the concept of empathy (*Einfühlung*),³² which refers to a feeling-oneself-into the intentionality of another. It is through this empathy, which amounts to an imaginative transfer or projection or investment of oneself into the other's world, that one co-performs the other's meaning-bestowing acts and thereby grasps the meaning of those acts. To fully appreciate the meaning of human acts, one must grasp the actor's motives and their contexts:

I may also in my imagination place myself in possible contexts of motives, in possible situations, and decide how I would behave under the then prevailing circumstances. The personal life shows a certain typicality. . . . In terms of these typicalities I comprehend the behavior of my fellow man and its motives. When I co-perform his acts in phantasy his motives become my quasi motives, and thus comprehensible.³³

³¹ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*; see also, Husserl, "*Ideen zu einer Reinen Phenomenologie und Phenomenologischen; Philosophie II: Phaenomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution* [Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy; Second Book: Phenomenological Investigations of Constitution]."

³² Spiegelberg writes that "in addition to this new type of association," namely, analogical apperception, "we also hear the older term empathy, used here in the sense of a process by which we invest the other organism with mental acts similar to our own. Verification and falsification of these constitutions take place on the basis of the consistency (*Einstimmigkeit*) and inconsistency of the presentations of the other ego and his world, as our experience of him expands" (Spiegelberg, *Doing Phenomenology: Essays in and on Phenomenology*, 43).

³³ Schütz, "Edmund Husserl's Ideas, Vol. II," 33.

Schütz characterized the understanding that emerges from empathic perception as a “reflective analysis carried out after the fact” (*On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 173). The moment one begins to imagine (*einbilden*) the other’s experience (quite literally, *picturing* to oneself what it might be like *in* the other’s position), one is no longer involved in direct perception of the other, but rather is engaged in a reflective attitude. For example, “we project the other’s goal as if it were our own and fancy ourselves carrying it out,” or “we may recall in concrete detail how we once carried out a similar action ourselves” (*Ibid.*, 176). Schütz reminds us that no matter how we use our imagination to understand another person, it is still from our point of view, and thus we are using our meaning-context, which is biographically different from the other person’s. To the extent that the other becomes an “object” grasped within somebody else’s meaning-context, the understanding gained through even “empathic” observation is “objective” knowledge of the other person.

GENUINE UNDERSTANDING OF THE OTHER

For Schütz, the movement toward a more unique, personal, or “subjective” understanding of a person occurs when “I exchange my role as observer for that of a participant” (*Ibid.*, 196). It is only when I participate as a “consociate” in a face-to-face encounter that I can ask questions of the other (as opposed to posing questions to myself about the other), that I can check my perceptions against the other’s self-interpretation. “It is only in the life of consociates that the individual identity, the uniqueness of the person, may be grasped.”³⁴ The face-to-face encounter also makes possible a spontaneous understanding of the other, referred to by Husserl³⁵ as a “pairing” of selves according to which we are able to co-perform each other’s intentional acts because we are “compresent.”

Then the observer’s living intentionality carries him along without having to make constant playbacks of his own past or imaginary

³⁴ Schütz, *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, xxxiii.

³⁵ Husserl, “*Ideen zu einer Reinen Phenomenologie und Phenomenologischen; Philosophie II: Phaenomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution* [Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy; Second Book: Phenomenological Investigations of Constitution],” 143–162.

experience. . . . [T]he observer keeps pace, as it were, with each step of the observed person's action, identifying himself with the latter's experiences within a common "we-relationship" (Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 177).

This identification of self with other is not to be confused with fusion: "what is being sought is not a fictitious coincidence of myself and others, . . . of the doctor with the patient; we cannot take over another person's situation . . . or illness as it is lived through by the patient" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 337). Rather, it is a matter of allowing my own experience and that of the other to "intersect and engage each other like gears" (Ibid., xx), and thereby to *take up* the other's experience within my own:

Within my own situation that of the patient whom I am questioning makes its appearance and, in this bipolar phenomenon, I learn to know both myself and others. . . . I am sitting before my subject and chatting with him; he is trying to describe to me what he "sees" and what he "hears"; it is not a question either of taking him at his word, or of reducing his experience to mine, or coinciding with him, or sticking to my own point of view, but of making explicit my own point of view, but of making explicit my experiences, and also his experience as it is conveyed to me in my own, . . . and to understand one through the other (Ibid., 338).

These views articulate a return to the experiential attitude—a return that requires a bracketing of the objectifying cognitive attitude that we ourselves impose upon experience. In this sense, we can say that genuine understanding of other people begins and ends in the observer's experience, in a perceptual and dialogical contact with the other.

RE-EXPERIENCING

The idea of a hermeneutical interpretation of others' expressions was first articulated by Dilthey³⁶ in his discussion of "the higher forms of understanding." Dilthey himself reserves the term "Hermeneutics" for the analysis of written expressions (Ibid., 35), and uses the more descriptive term "re-experiencing" (*Nacherleben*) to refer to the general

³⁶ Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and their Expressions of Life."

method of understanding another person's expressions. For Dilthey, the individual is the ultimate referent of a descriptive psychology; general investigations of human psychological life thus serve the researcher's interest in the individual. That is, individual investigation has as its foresight the investigator's guiding fore-conceptions about human life: "Its presupposition is knowledge of psychic life and of its relations to milieu and circumstances" (Ibid., 129). The goal of higher understanding is to articulate "the relation between another person's manifold of expressions of life and the inner context in which they are grounded" (Ibid.). This relation, which is deciphered through interpretation, Dilthey calls "the secret of the person" (Ibid., 131).

Dilthey's method is founded upon a transposition or projection of oneself into the life-context of the person one is attempting to understand. This method calls upon the utilization of all one's powers of comprehension, including what the researcher knows on the basis of his or her own familiarity with the vicissitudes of psychological life. "If the point of view from which the task of understanding is undertaken implies the presence of one's own experienced psychic nexus, then this is also denoted as the *transferring* of one's own self into a given set of expressions of life" (Ibid., 132). This transfer is not to be confused with a projection in the Freudian sense. It is rather an imaginative recreation of the other's experience in the researcher's own experience, fueled by sympathy and empathy (Ibid., 133). Although circumstances may limit my own possibilities for experience, I am also capable, due to the co-determination of my possibilities "from within," to experience many other existences in my imagination (Ibid., 135).

With Dilthey we find a foundation for the understanding of others that is elaborated in the works of all the aforementioned phenomenologists. This foundation rests on the perceiver's human giftedness for "co-experiencing" the experience of others so that one can begin to grasp how a particular expression or manifold of expressions signifies the world of the individual.

This apprehension originates from *lived experience* and remains connected with it. The processes of *the whole psyche* operate together in this experience. . . . In the lived experience particular occurrence is supported by the totality of psychic life and the nexus in which it itself stands, and the whole of psychic life belongs to immediate experience. The latter

already determines the nature of our *understanding* (*Verstehen*) of ourselves and of others. We explain by purely intellectual processes, but we understand through the concurrence of all the powers of the psyche in the apprehension. In understanding we proceed from the coherent whole, which is livingly given to us in order to make the particular intelligible to us.³⁷

FELLOW-FEELING AND INTERTWINING

Scheler's text on sympathy calls into question what is, in fact, the two-fold starting point of Husserl and Schütz's approach to the perception of others, namely, "(1) that it is always *our own self, merely, that is primarily given to us*; (2) that what is primarily given in the case of others is merely the *appearance of the body*."³⁸ In his critique of "reasoning by analogy" and "projective empathy," Scheler declares that these assumptions "involve a complete departure from the phenomenological standpoint, replacing it . . . by a realistic one" (*Ibid.*).³⁹ He posits instead the primacy of a prepersonal flow of experience wherein what is immediately given in our intersubjective awareness is a stream of conscious experiences at first undifferentiated between "I" and "Thou" (*Ibid.*, 246). To this phenomenon he gives the name "*Seinsteilnahme*," or "sharing in the being of another." Likewise, in Merleau-Ponty's ontology of "the flesh," myself and the other comprise one system with two terms, wherein we "function as one unique body" (*The Visible and the Invisible*, 215); "he and I are like organs of one single intercorporeality."⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty further describes this as the "reciprocal insertion and intertwining of others in us

³⁷ Dilthey, "Ideas Concerning a Descriptive and Analytic Psychology," 55.

³⁸ Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, 244.

³⁹ Similarly, Spiegelberg writes: "For us the decisive point is how far Husserl's approach can give us direct access to the other and his world. Is this still phenomenology in the strict sense? . . . Husserl frankly admits that, in spite of the experience of givenness in person, 'it must be conceded that, properly speaking, it is not the other ego, his experiences and his phenomena which we are given originally, and that the givenness of the other in our intentional acts has a certain indirectness' ([*Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*], 108f.). He also freely admits that what is appresented by analogical appresentation is never really present (*Ibid.*, 112), and that the fulfillment of appresentative givenness by full presence is impossible in principle (*Ibid.*, 119). Thus, Husserl never fully made up his mind about the question whether phenomenology has direct access to the other and his world or whether they are only indirectly presented by what is directly given" (Spiegelberg, *Doing Phenomenology: Essays in and on Phenomenology*, 43–44).

⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," 168.

and of us in them" (*The Visible and the Invisible*, 138, 180). The other is given to me through "a sort of reflection"⁴¹ which opens myself to the other and allows me to "invest" myself in his expression: the reciprocity between self and other is constituted by the nature of human flesh as touching/touched, visible/invisible. The other's body provides me with a mirror through which to see the surface of my own interiority:

The mirror's ghost lies outside my body, and by the same token my own body's "invisibility" can invest the other bodies I see. Hence my body can assume segments derived from the body of another, just as my substance passes into them; man is the mirror for man.⁴²

There was no intent by either Scheler or Merleau-Ponty to articulate this "sharing" or "reflecting" as a cognition of others; rather they were speaking of a nascent perception of others at the level of affective experience.

The medium for Scheler's *Seinsteilnahme* is the lived-body. In his own characterization of this phenomenon, Merleau-Ponty writes: "my body and the other person's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trance henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously" (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 354). Where Scheler and Merleau-Ponty depart from Husserl is in their characterization of this prepersonal perception not as a form of imagination or apperception, but as a sense of "fellow-feeling" (Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, 8; italics added) or "intertwining" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 143). Each grants us that we have only our own view of the other's corporeal experience, for it would be impossible to represent to ourselves the way the other feels his or her own body. In spite of this, the meaning of the other's experience is "given for us in expressive phenomena — again, not by interference, but directly, as a sort of primary 'perception'" (Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, 10). The other's body appears "as the bearer of a dialectic" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, 204) which is given to us perceptually, because our spontaneous way of seeing is already the perception of form.⁴³ The structure of behavior as it

⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 353; *The Visible and the Invisible*, 256.

⁴² Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 168.

⁴³ Merleau-Ponty, "The Film and the New Psychology," 49.

presents itself to perceptual consciousness already reveals the signification of behavior. Emotions, for instance, are “styles of conduct which are visible from the outside” (Ibid., 53): “It is *in* the blush that we perceive shame, in the laughter joy. To say that ‘our only initial datum is the body’ is completely erroneous” (Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, 10).

Fellow-feeling thus gives us an immediate mode of access to the other’s experience through a coupling of our embodied selves into one intercorporeal schema. Even prior to any explicit communicative interactions between myself and the other, “there is initially a state of pre-communication (Max Scheler) wherein the other’s intentions somehow play *across* my body while my intentions play across his” (Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 119). Scheler described this prepersonal access to the other as an “inner perception” through which “everyone can apprehend the experience of his fellow-men *just as directly (or indirectly)* as he can his own” (Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, 256). As flesh we are by nature “connatural” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 217) with each other and thus always already in touch with each other:

As an embodied subject I am exposed to the other person, just as he is to me, and I *identify* myself with the person speaking before me (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 18).

There is a universality of feeling—and it is upon this that our identification rests, the generalization of my body, the perception of the other (Ibid., 137).

When Merleau-Ponty spoke of a universality of feeling, he was articulating an ontological condition for the possibility of what Scheler called “sympathy.” Reflecting on his experience of other people, Scheler remarked, “nothing is more certain than that we can think the thoughts of others as well as our own, and can feel their feelings (in sympathy) as we do our own” (*The Nature of Sympathy*, 245). This does not imply that we employ extra-sensory perception in our encounters with others, although Merleau-Ponty does make reference to a kind of “telepathy” (*The Visible and the Invisible*, 244). Rather, I seize upon the other person’s acts by “re-enacting” them.

Conduct is always revealed as a lived-structure, and “to experience a structure . . . is to live it, to take it up, assume it and discover its immanent significance” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 258). Concretely, “when I say that I see someone, it means that I am moved by sympathy for this behavior for which I am a witness and which holds my own intentions by furnishing them with a visible realization.”⁴⁴ As a mirror—“a sort of reflection” that is lived as a “reversibility”—I re-enact the other’s behavior by vesting in the other’s stance, gesture, or expression a lived understanding of human intentions that constitutes my presence to the world. This “re-enacting” or “co-performing,” which others have referred to as “imitative empathy” (Allport, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*; Lipps), does not require any reflective effort on our part for it is what characterizes our “natural experiential attitude” toward others. “I know unquestionably that man over there *sees*, that my sensible world is also his, because *I am present at his seeing*, it is *visible* in his eyes’ grasp of the scene” (Merleau-Ponty, “Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man,” 169). This natural standpoint would be the essential basis for all experiences of other people, and thereby for any conclusions we might draw about others in our personal (as well as professional) lives.

To summarize, then, the primary datum in our experience of the other is not the mere appearance of the other’s body, but a stream of experience at first undifferentiated into separate identities. Thus we have immediate perceptual access to the “inner subjective state” (*Innerlichkeit*) of the other. To the extent that this “fellow-feeling,” or “intertwining,” of myself and the other is not originally based upon past experiences or typified knowledge of persons, our intersubjective understanding is not limited to apperception. With Scheler and Merleau-Ponty, we find a liberation of the other’s experience such that it can be given to us in direct, spontaneous, prepersonal perception—not “behind” but rather “in” the other’s conduct in a situation.⁴⁵ This would become relevant in attempting to understand how one person’s perceptual experience

⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty, “The Metaphysical in Man,” 93.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that Scheler and Merleau-Ponty substantiate their positions with Kohler’s comparative studies with apes as well as with developmental psychologists’ studies of children, which have demonstrated that inference is not involved in the physiognomic perception of gestures.

provides access to another person's world. That is, to quote Merleau-Ponty, "Nothing prevents me from explaining the meaning of the lived experience of another person, insofar as I have access to it, by perception."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," 65.

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