

1 Empathy and mirroring: Husserl and Gallese

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5 Back in 1994 I defended my doctoral dissertation on *Husserl und die tran-*
6 *szendentale Intersubjektivität* with Bernet as my supervisor. One of the
7 central claims in this early work of mine was that Husserl's distinct con-
8 tribution to a phenomenology of intersubjectivity – in particular when
9 compared to later phenomenologists – was to be found in his analysis of
10 the constitutive significance of intersubjectivity, and that Husserl's ma-
11 ture phenomenology could consequently be seen as an explicit defence of
12 what might be called an intersubjective transformation of transcendental
13 philosophy. By focusing on constitutive intersubjectivity I more or less
14 stayed clear of a question that had preoccupied much of the secondary
15 literature on Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity up to then,
16 namely the question of whether Husserl's concept of empathy implied a
17 direct or mediated access to others (cf. Zahavi 1996, 15).

18 The focus of my current contribution will be on Husserl's theory of
19 empathy. My reason for choosing this topic is not merely a wish to fill what
20 some might see as a lacuna in my earlier work, but is also and primarily
21 motivated by the fact that there in recent years has been a renewed interest
22 in the topic. Interestingly, and perhaps also slightly surprisingly, the impe-
23 tus for this interest stems from empirical research, and from the discovery
24 of the so-called “mirror neurons”, i.e., neurons which respond both when a

1 particular motor action, say grasping an object with the hand, is performed
2 by the subject and when the subject observes the same goal-directed ac-
3 tion performed by another individual. To illustrate, let me provide a few
4 examples:

5 • Though warning against any facile “empirical confirmation” of phe-
6 nomenology Jean-Luc Petit, in an early article from 1999, claims that the
7 discovery of the mirror neurons amply justifies Husserl’s view “that our
8 empathic experience of the other is an internal imitation of the movement
9 accomplished by the other” (Petit 1999, 241).

10 • In a 2001 paper Evan Thompson suggests that “the mirror neuron
11 findings support Husserl’s position that our empathic experience of another
12 depends on one’s ‘coupling’ or ‘pairing’ with the other” (Thompson 2001,
13 9), rather than on various inferential processes.

14 • In a paper entitled “Phenomenology, Neuroscience, and Intersub-
15 jectivity” published in 2006, Ratcliffe argues that interesting parallels can
16 be drawn between the mirror system and claims found in Husserl (2006,
17 341). According to Ratcliffe, the core of Husserl’s proposal is that empathy
18 involves a pre-reflective, non-inferential “analogizing apperception” which
19 is achieved through a passive “pairing” of certain aspects of self and other,
20 and as he continues, work “on mirror neurons can lend some support to
21 Husserl, by illustrating what such a relation might consist of and how it is
22 possible” (Ratcliffe 2006, 348).

23 • Finally, to just mention one further example, in a 2008 paper, De
24 Preester writes that it is easy to translate the core of the mirror neuron
25 hypothesis – that we understand actions when the visual representation
26 of the observed action is mapped onto our motor representation of that
27 action – into a “Husserlian terminology: the visual perception of the body
28 of the other is mapped onto our own kinaesthetic representation, or the
29 *Körper* is mapped onto the *Leib* (and receives the latter’s status). Thanks to
30 this identification, an understanding of the other arises” (De Preester 2008,
31 139).

32 The aim of the following contribution will be to reconsider Husserl’s
33 account of empathy in order to assess whether this link to neurophysiology
34 is warranted. Is it really true that “the neurological discovery of mirror

1 neurons is of eminent importance for the phenomenological theory of
2 intersubjectivity” (Lohmar 2006, 5).

3 Before turning to Husserl, however, let us first take a look at the work
4 of Vittorio Gallese, one of the principal defenders of the mirror neuron
5 hypothesis.

6 1. Embodied simulation and mirroring

7 In order to survive and prosper in a complex society, we need to be able to
8 recognize, understand and respond to others. But how do we accomplish
9 that? The traditional answer in cognitive science has been that we employ a
10 Theory of Mind. According to one popular model, mental states attributed
11 to other people are conceived of as unobservable, theoretical posits, invoked
12 to explain and predict behavior in the same fashion that physicists appeal
13 to electrons and quarks to predict and explain observable phenomena.
14 According to Gallese, however, recent findings in neurobiology suggest that
15 our capacity to understand others as intentional agents might draw on other
16 and more primitive sources than various linguistic and mentalistic abilities,
17 namely those involving mirror neurons (Goldman & Gallese 1998, Gallese
18 2001, 34, 2009, 522). Empirical studies have shown that there are neurons in
19 the premotor cortex that are activated not only when the subject executes
20 goal directed actions, but also when the subject observes similar actions
21 performed by other individuals (Gallese 2001, 35). By contrast, neither
22 the sight of the object alone or of the agent alone is effective in evoking
23 the neuronal response. Why? The interpretation put forth by Gallese and
24 colleagues is that action observation and in particular action understanding
25 implies action simulation (Gallese 2001, 37). When we observe an action,
26 our motor system becomes active *as if* we were executing the very same
27 action that we are observing, that is, we simulate the action. And our
28 ability to understand observed behavior as intentional, as mind-driven, is
29 precisely dependent upon this link between observed agent and observer.
30 In order to understand the action, the presence of the visual information
31 is deemed insufficient. Rather, the motor schema of the observer has to
32 be involved. That is, the observer must rely on his or her own internal

1 motor knowledge (provided by the mirror neurons) in order to translate
2 the observed movement, “in principle, devoid of meaning for the observer
3 – into something that the observer is able to understand” (Gallese 2009,
4 520-521). I understand the action of the other because it is an action I could
5 perform myself. If the observed behavior of the other cannot be matched
6 onto the observer’s own motor repertoire, the goal cannot be detected and
7 understood (Gallese 2001, 36).

8 Gallese isn’t merely arguing that action understanding relies on mirror-
9 resonance mechanisms. He ultimately claims that all kinds of interpersonal
10 relations including action understanding, the attribution of intentions, and
11 the recognition of emotions and sensations rely on automatic and uncon-
12 scious embodied simulation routines (Gallese 2003a, 517). The very same
13 neural substrate, which is activated when we execute actions or subjectively
14 experience emotions and sensations, is also activated when we observe
15 somebody else act or experience emotions and sensations. So, when we en-
16 counter somebody, and observe their actions, or their displayed emotions
17 or sensations, we don’t just see them. In addition to the sensory informa-
18 tion we receive from the other, internal representations of the body states
19 associated with the other’s actions, emotions and sensations are evoked in
20 us, and it is “as if” we were doing a similar action or experiencing a similar
21 emotion or sensation. It is because of this automatic, non-predicative and
22 non-inferential embodied simulation mechanism, it is because the activa-
23 tion of these neural mechanisms allows us to share actions, intentions,
24 feelings and emotions with others, that we are able to understand others
25 (Gallese 2001, 44-45, 2009, 527). It is against this background that Gallese
26 defines empathy as involving a form of simulation (Gallese 2003a, 519), and
27 argues that it allows for a direct experiential understanding of others, one
28 that doesn’t rely on cognitive operations or conceptual reasoning (Gallese
29 et al. 2004, 396).

30 Gallese has been interested in the early discussions of empathy, and he
31 refers favorably, not only to Lipps’ discussion of inner imitation (Gallese
32 2003a, 519), but also to Stein’s account, and to Husserl’s and Merleau-
33 Ponty’s understanding of intersubjectivity (Gallese 2001, 43-44). Indeed,
34 Gallese is quite explicit in arguing that his own notion of embodied sim-

1 ulation is akin to and a further development of the phenomenological
2 proposal (Gallese et al. 2004, 397). More specifically, Gallese repeatedly
3 makes use of Merleau-Ponty's notion of "intercorporeity," which he takes
4 to refer to the mutual resonance of intentionally meaningful sensorimotor
5 behaviors (Gallese 2009, 523). He also, however, refers to Husserl's discus-
6 sion of empathy in *Ideen II* and *Cartesianische Meditationen*, where Husserl
7 claims that the lived body is the constitutive foundation of any perception,
8 the perception of others included, and argues that we on Husserl's account
9 don't have to employ anything like an inference from analogy in order
10 to understand that others are similar to us (Gallese 2005, 39, 2008, 774).
11 Likewise, Gallese mentions Husserl's notion of "Paarung" and sees that as
12 exemplifying the idea that "the self-other identity at the level of the body
13 enables an intersubjective transfer of meaning to occur" (Gallese 2003b,
14 175).

15 According to the embodied simulation view defended by Gallese, min-
16 dreading typically involves an attempt to replicate, imitate or simulate the
17 mental life of the other. But in contrast to the standard account of simula-
18 tion theory, as it has been developed by Goldman, Gallese primarily sees
19 the simulation as automatic, unconscious and prelinguistic, and he argues
20 that intercorporeity is more fundamental than any explicit attribution of
21 propositional attitudes to others and that it remains the main source of
22 knowledge we directly gather about others (Gallese 2009, 524).

23 To sum up, and to quote another mirror neuron theorist, the discovery
24 of the mirror neurons has not only for the first time in history provided a
25 plausible neurophysiological explanation for complex forms of social cogni-
26 tion and interaction (Iacoboni 2009, 5). Mirror neurons also seem to explain
27 why, "existential phenomenologists were correct all along" (Iacoboni 2009,
28 262).

29 2. Imitation and empathy: Lipps and Gurwitsch

30 A noteworthy feature of Gallese's reference to the tradition is his somewhat
31 indiscriminate reference to Lipps and the phenomenologists. As we shall
32 see in a moment, Lipps does indeed frequently talk of empathy in terms

1 of an inner imitation, but whether his account is in accord with the views
2 found in phenomenology is more controversial. Or to put it more bluntly,
3 his account was in fact one from which all the phenomenologists to varying
4 degrees distanced themselves.

5 Lipps' theory underwent several changes in the course of his writings.
6 In the following I will only discuss the brief and concise account we find
7 in his 1907 article "Das Wissen von fremden Ichen."¹ In this article, Lipps
8 argues that our knowledge of others is a modality of knowledge *sui generis*,
9 something as irreducible and original as our perceptual experience of ob-
10 jects or our memory of our past experiences. It is a novum that in no way
11 can be explained by or reduced to some kind of analogical inference (Lipps
12 1907, 697-698, 710). In fact, Lipps launches a comprehensive – and quite
13 successful – attack against the argument from analogy. He emphasizes the
14 role of expression and argues that gestures and expressions manifest our
15 emotional states, and that the relation between the expression and what
16 is expressed is special and unique, and quite different from, say, the way
17 smoke represents fire (Lipps 1907, 704-5).

18 So far, much of what Lipps has had to say found approval among
19 later phenomenologists – indeed many of his points against the argument
20 from analogy reappear in various forms in Scheler's *Wesen und Formen der*
21 *Sympathie* –, but the phenomenologists would be quite suspicious of his
22 own positive account. Lipps argues that we have a tendency to reproduce
23 a foreign gesture of expression when we see it, and that this tendency
24 also evokes the feeling normally associated with the expression. He talks
25 of this process as being instinctual in character. He speaks of an *instinct*
26 *of empathy*, and argues that it involves two components: a drive directed
27 towards imitation and a drive directed towards expression (Lipps 1907,
28 713). It is the feeling in myself evoked by the expression which is then
29 attributed to the other through projection. It is projected into or onto
30 the other's perceived gesture, thereby allowing for a form of interpersonal
31 understanding (Lipps 1907, 717-19). Why is projection involved? Because

¹For a detailed discussion of how the concept of empathy was employed by Lipps and contemporary psychologists and philosophers like Siebeck, Volkelt, Witasek and Groos, see Geiger 1911.

1 on Lipps' account, we only know of anger, joy etc. from our own case. The
2 only mental states we have experiential access to are our own.

3 How did the phenomenologists receive this proposal? Gurwitsch argued that
4 Lipps' theory of empathy despite its explicit criticism of the
5 argument from analogy still belong to the same class of theories (Gurwitsch
6 1979, 20). It still accepts the following basic assumption, that what
7 we strictly speaking can be said to perceive is physical qualities and their
8 changes, say, a distortion of facial muscles, and that this perceptual input is
9 psychologically meaningless. It is only by animating what is phenomenally
10 given with what we know from our own case that we come to know that
11 something mental is given at all. It is only by drawing on our own inner
12 experience that we are able to move from the input to the actual ascription
13 of mental states, say, joy or happiness, to others. By contrast, for Gurwitsch
14 the phenomenological alternative is to insist that the phenomenally given,
15 namely the expressive phenomena in question, already provides us with
16 access to the mental life of others (Gurwitsch 1979, 32, 56).¹ Gurwitsch
17 also observes that Lipps' appeal to instinct is unsatisfactory in that it sets
18 aside the job of analysis (Gurwitsch 1979, 20). The most pervasive criticism,
19 however, is directed at Lipps' claim that (inner) imitation constitutes the
20 basis of empathy. As Gurwitsch sees it, Lipps takes knowledge about the
21 mental life of someone else to paradigmatically be a question of being
22 infected by that life (Gurwitsch 1979, 24). But if someone is infected by
23 a certain feeling, he has that feeling, and for someone to have a feeling
24 oneself and to know that another has it are two fundamentally different
25 things (Gurwitsch 1979, 25). The former event does not per se entail either
26 knowledge about the origin of the feeling, or knowledge about the simi-
27 larity between one's own feeling and that of the other, in fact, it doesn't
28 lead to the mental life of the other at all. To put it differently, rather than
29 explaining empathy, that is, empathy understood as an experience of the
30 minded life of others, Lipps' account is better geared to handle something

¹It should be noted though, and this is an aspect of Gurwitsch's proposal that I will be unable to pursue further in this context, that Gurwitsch ultimately questions whether an understanding of expressive phenomena constitutes the most fundamental dimension of social cognition. In his view, such an understanding is founded on a more fundamental conviction about the existence of others (Gurwitsch 1979, 32-33).

1 like *motor mimicry* or *emotional contagion*.¹ There is consequently, as Stein
 2 puts it, a discrepancy between the phenomenon to be explained and the
 3 phenomenon actually explained (Stein 1989, 23).

4 3. Husserl

5 a. the preoccupation of a lifetime

6 It is now time to turn to Husserl in more detail. Before I can commence
 7 the assessment of whether or not Gallese' proposal is in accordance with
 8 Husserl's phenomenological account of empathy, I need to make a number
 9 of preliminary remarks in order to set the stage properly.

10 First of all, Husserl's discussion of empathy is not restricted to a few
 11 select publications of his, say *Ideen II* or *Cartesianische Meditationen*. Rather
 12 the most thorough treatment is obviously to be found in the research
 13 manuscripts contained in Husserliana XIII-XV, that is, in the three volumes
 14 on phenomenology of intersubjectivity. The timespan of these manuscripts
 15 covering the period from 1905 to 1937 makes it clear that empathy was a
 16 topic that Husserl worked on during most of his philosophical career. It is
 17 therefore also not surprising that many of his other works contain remarks
 18 and reflections on empathy. This includes not only works such as *Die*
 19 *Krisis, Formale und transzendente Logik, Phänomenologische Psychologie*,
 20 or more recently published Husserliana volumes such as *Einleitung in*
 21 *die Philosophie, Einleitung in die Ethik, Transzendentaler Idealismus* or *Die*
 22 *Lebenswelt*, but also and perhaps slightly more surprisingly even works
 23 such as *Logische Untersuchungen* and *Ideen I*.

24 That Husserl remained preoccupied with the issue and considered it to
 25 be of particular importance is indicated by the fact that he chose to dwell
 26 on it in his very last lecture course, which he gave in the winter semester of
 27 1928/29, and which carried the title "Phänomenologie der Einfühlung in
 28 Vorlesungen und Übungen." But of course, the fact that he kept returning

¹Stein is also known for criticizing Lipps for conflating empathy (*Einfühlung*) with a feeling of oneness (*Einsfühlung*), i.e., of taking empathy to involve a complete identification of observer and observed. More recently, however, Stueber has argued that this specific criticism of Stein is based on a too uncharitable interpretation of Lipps' statements (Stueber 2006, 8).

1 to the issue also suggests that it continued to remain a problem for him, and
2 that he was unable to reach a definite and (to his own mind) fully satisfying
3 solution.

4 For this very reason, the aim and scope of the following analysis will
5 necessarily have to be limited. It will be impossible in a single article to give
6 an exhaustive analysis of Husserl's theory of empathy. Indeed, there might
7 not even be one single coherent theory, rather during the years Husserl
8 pursued different directions. In the following, however, I will mainly focus
9 on ideas and themes that I take to be particularly prominent and pervasive.

10 This is the first preliminary point I need to make. The second concerns
11 an additional restriction. Husserl's investigation of empathy is compli-
12 cated by the fact that two different research agendas are frequently inter-
13 twined. As Kern points out in his introduction to *Zur Phänomenologie*
14 *der Intersubjektivität III* apropos the specific presentation that Husserl
15 offered in *Cartesianische Meditationen*: "Handelt es sich um die reflexiv-
16 philosophische Fundierung (Begründung) des transzendentalen Fremden
17 und das transzendente Verhältnis von eigener und fremder Monade oder
18 um die konstitutive Analyse der Fundierung (Motivation) der "natürli-
19 chen", "weltlichen" Einfühlung? [...] Die fünfte Meditation vermengt
20 diese beiden Gedankenlinien" (Hua 15/xix-xx). That Husserl's main in-
21 terest in intersubjectivity was motivated by transcendental philosophical
22 concerns is a claim I have defended *in extenso* elsewhere (Zahavi 1996). In
23 this context, it is merely important to remember that this transcendental
24 interest also manifests itself in his analysis of empathy. This is why Husserl
25 in § 62 of *Cartesianische Meditationen* criticizes Scheler for having over-
26 looked the truly transcendental dimension of the problem, namely the fact
27 that intersubjectivity is involved in the very constitution of objectivity. Or
28 as he puts it, only constitutive phenomenology will provide the problem of
29 empathy with its true sense and proper method (Hua 1/173). A theory of
30 empathy consequently has far greater implications than one would expect.
31 It has ramifications for a transcendental theory of the objective world (Hua
32 15/5). But important as this dimension of the problem might be, it is one
33 I will by and large ignore in the following. My focus will squarely be on
34 the problem of how we experience others, since it is on this level that any

1 meaningful comparison with the proponents of embodied simulation must
 2 be situated.

3 b. Empathy and perception

4 In *Phänomenologische Psychologie* Husserl wrote as follows: “Die Intentionalität im eigenen Ich, die in das fremde Ich hineinführt, ist die sogenannte
 5 Einfühlung” (Hua 9/321). One of the recurrent questions that kept pre-
 6 occupying Husserl was how to understand the intentional structure of
 7 empathy. On Husserl’s standard model, we have to distinguish between
 8 *signitive*, *pictorial*, and *perceptual* ways of intending an object: I can talk
 9 about a blossoming peach tree which I have never seen, but which I have
 10 heard is standing in the backyard, I can see a detailed drawing of the peach
 11 tree; or I can perceive the peach tree myself. Similarly, I can talk about
 12 how fantastic it must be to fly in helicopter, I can see a television program
 13 about it; or I can experience it myself. For Husserl these different ways of
 14 intending are not unrelated. On the contrary, there is a strict hierarchical
 15 relation between them, in the sense that the modes can be ranked according
 16 to their ability to give us the object as directly, originally and optimally
 17 as possible. The object can be experienced more or less directly, that is,
 18 it can be more or less *present*. The lowest and most empty way in which
 19 the object can be intended is in the signitive act. These (linguistic) acts cer-
 20 tainly have a reference, but apart from that, the object is not given in any
 21 fleshed out manner. The pictorial acts have a certain intuitive content, but
 22 like the signitive acts, they intend the object *indirectly*. Whereas signitive
 23 acts intend the object via a contingent representation (a linguistic sign),
 24 pictorial acts intend the object via a representation (picture) which bears
 25 a certain resemblance to the object as seen from a certain perspective. It
 26 is only the actual perception, however, which gives us the object directly.
 27 This is the only type of intention which presents us with the object itself
 28 in its bodily presence (*leibhaftig*), or, as Husserl says, *in propria persona*.
 29 The tricky question is where to place empathy within this classification.
 30 The answer provided by Husserl is remarkably consistent throughout his
 31 career, though it is an answer that remains characterized by an important
 32

1 vacillation. Already in *Logische Untersuchungen* Husserl wrote that com-
 2 mon speech credits us with percepts of other people's inner experiences,
 3 we so to speak *see* their anger or pain. As he then goes on to say, such talk
 4 is to some extent correct. When a hearer perceives a speaker give voice to
 5 certain inner experiences, he also perceives these experiences themselves,
 6 but as Husserl then adds, the hearer doesn't have an inner but only an
 7 outer perception of them (Hua 19/41). So on the one hand, Husserl argues
 8 that my experience of others has a quasi-perceptual character in the sense
 9 that it grasp the other him- or herself (Hua 13/24). On the other hand,
 10 Husserl also says that although the body of the other is intuitively given
 11 to me *in propria persona*, this is not the case with the other's experiences.
 12 They can never be given to me in the same original fashion as my own
 13 experiences; they are not accessible to me through inner consciousness.
 14 Rather they are appresented through a special form of apperception, or to
 15 use a different terminology, they are co-intended and characterized by a
 16 certain co-presence (Hua 13/27). As Husserl puts it in *Ideen II*:

17 Und doch hat jeder seine ihm ausschließlich eigenen Erscheinungen,
 18 jeder die ihm ausschließlich eigenen Erlebnisse. Diese erfährt nur
 19 er in ihrer leibhaften Selbstheit, ganz originär. In gewisser Weise
 20 erfahre ich (und darin liegt Selbstgegebenheit) auch die Erlebnisse
 21 des Anderen: sofern die mit der originären Erfahrung des Leibes in
 22 eins vollzogene Einfühlung (comprehensio) zwar eine Art Vergegen-
 23 wärtigung ist, aber doch den Charakter des leibhaften Mitdaseins
 24 begründet. Insofern haben wir also Erfahrung, Wahrnehmung. Aber
 25 dieses Mitdasein ("Appräsenz" in dem früher angegebenen Sinne) ist
 26 prinzipiell nicht zu verwandeln in unmittelbares originäres Dasein
 27 (Urpräsenz) (Hua 4/198).

28 In the lecture course *Einleitung in die Philosophie* from 1922/23, Husserl
 29 again writes that I in ordinary parlance can be said to see and hear another,
 30 can be said to see that he is sad or happy. In fact, however, what I actually
 31 see is his body and bodily expressions, and founded on this perception,
 32 I can be said to empathically co-perceive his happiness, sadness or anger.
 33 Thus, if we talk about the whole human being, we might say that I see him,
 34 if we talk narrowly about the purely psychological, it is better to say that it is

1 given to me in empathic representation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) (Hua 35/107).

2 What are the implications of this? Does empathy allow for a direct
3 experience of the other, or is empathy necessarily indirect and mediated?
4 These are the questions that Husserl kept struggling with. In some places,
5 Husserl is rather unequivocal. He writes that empathy is a distinct and
6 direct kind of empirical experience, one that allows the empathizing ego to
7 experience the consciousness of the other (Hua 13/187). As it is formulated
8 in *Ideen II*:

9 Einfühlung ist nicht ein mittelbares Erfahren in dem Sinn, daß der
10 Andere als psychophysisch Abhängiges von seinem Leibkörper erfah-
11 ren würde, sondern eine unmittelbare Erfahrung vom Anderen (Hua
12 4/375).

13 Husserl also claims that empathy is what allows the other to be present
14 to me, perceptually present (Hua 15/514), and that the other is given to me
15 originally in empathy, for what I see is not a sign, not a mere analogue, but
16 rather *the other* (Hua 14/385, 29/182, 1/153, 15/506). Similarly, Husserl
17 speaks of how the other is given in his being-for-me (*für-mich-sein*) in
18 empathy, and how that counts as a form of perception (Hua 15/641). If I
19 talk with another, if I look him in the eyes, I have the liveliest experience of
20 his immediate presence. I am justified in saying that I “see him” qua person,
21 and not merely qua body (Hua 4/375). Indeed,

22 Es wäre Widersinn zu sagen, dass sie nicht, wie wir sagen, erfahren in
23 der Weise dieser ursprünglichen Bekundung der Einfühlung, sondern
24 erschlossen sei. Denn jede Hypothese eines fremden Subjektes setzt
25 die „Wahrnehmung“ dieses Subjektes als fremden schon voraus, und
26 diese Wahrnehmung ist eben die Einfühlung (Hua 14/352).

27 Empathy is what allows us to know the experiential life of other, or as
28 Husserl puts it in a text from 1909: “Nun verschwindet alle Schwierigkeit,
29 wenn eben die Einfühlung als Gegebenheitsbewusstsein für fremdes Be-
30 wusstsein gelten darf” (Hua 13/20). At the same time, however, Husserl also
31 says that even the most perfect empathy is indirect and that the perception
32 of the psychical life of another lacks the originality of self-perception and
33 he denies that it can give us the empathized experience itself in its original

1 presence (Hua 13/347, 13/440, 17/389, 4/199-200, 1/139). As he writes, if
 2 I proceed to carefully investigate the perceptual givenness of the other, I
 3 will realize that only his body is given perceptually to me. The foreign I
 4 and its experiences can never be perceived by me, but only be represented
 5 in a special co-presence, though Husserl then proceeds to emphasize that
 6 this empathic representation is completely unlike any other kind of repre-
 7 sentation (Hua 15/354). A similar train of thought is articulated in a longer
 8 passage from August 1930:

9 Wahrnehmend sehe ich den Menschen M und ihn sehend “verstehe”
 10 ich als Bestandteil dieser Wahrnehmung sein Gerichtetsein auf je-
 11 ne andere Seite, sein psychisches Hinsehen etc. Ich sehe nicht nur
 12 seinen Körper, sondern ich erfahre dabei seine Körperlichkeit, seine
 13 Stellung, die seiner Augen, das Mienenspiel des Gesichts etc., ich erf-
 14 fahre den körperlichen Ausdruck als Ausdruck von einem Seelischen,
 15 ich erfahre das Körperliche als bedeutsam und in seiner psychischen
 16 Bedeutung.

17 Es ist also ebenso wie im Sprechen die gehörten Wortlaute ver-
 18 standen werden in ihrem Sinn, und dann auch geschrieben nicht nur
 19 als visuelle Zeichen etc. Dieses Verstehen, wie gesagt, ist hier nicht
 20 nur ein Annex meiner Wahrnehmung des M-Körpers, sondern meine
 21 Wahrnehmung von M: Solange “Wahrnehmung” den normalen Sinn
 22 behält, muss ich hier von Wahrnehmung sprechen. Ein Gegenstand,
 23 irgendein Reales heisst wahrgenommen, wenn ich ihn “unmittelbar”
 24 evident bewusst habe, als selbstgegenwärtig, im Original vor mir, mir
 25 gegeben. Ich nehme Menschen wahr, ich kann sie nicht erdenken
 26 als direkter erfahren, als ihrer in ihrer selbsteigenen Gegenwart mir
 27 bewusst, als wenn ich sie so erfahre, wie sie leiden und leben. Aber
 28 nun merke ich, dass das “Seelenleben” des Anderen, dass überhaupt
 29 das, was ihn zu einem Menschen und nicht einem blossen Körper
 30 für mich macht, bloss “bedeutungsmässig” gegeben ist - “bloss be-
 31 deutungsmässig”, das ist, keineswegs “eigentlich” wahrgenommen.
 32 Nichts vom Psychischen, weder das Psychische im ganzen, die frem-
 33 de Person, das personale Leben in irgendwelchen Einzelgestalten,
 34 irgendein Leiden. und Tun, irgendein passives Erscheinendhaben -
 35 nichts davon ist in Sonderheit wahrgenommen. Kann Psychisches
 36 „wirklich” wahrgenommen werden? Natürlich sage ich, ja. Nur nie

1 das des Andern, vielmehr nur mein eigenes (Hua 15/83-84).

2 Whereas Husserl consequently denies that empathy provides me with
 3 an inner perception of the other's experiences – i.e., although it doesn't
 4 provide me with first-person access to the experiences in question, since
 5 if that had happened, the other's experiences would have become the
 6 empathizer's own experiences, and no longer remained the experiences
 7 of another (Hua 15/12, 1/139) –, he would claim that empathy involves
 8 a perception of the other (Hua 13/343, 13/187), i.e., that it amounts to a
 9 form of person perception, and that it furthermore would be a mistake to
 10 measure empathy against the standards of either self-perception or external
 11 object perception. Empathy has its own kind of originality, its own kind
 12 of fulfillment and corroboration and its own criteria of success and failure
 13 (Hua 6/189, 36/65, 36/122, 14/385, 13/225, 14/352).

14 To strengthen the claim concerning the perceptual character of empathy,
 15 Husserl occasionally compares the kind of interplay between presentation
 16 and appresentation that we find in empathy with the mixture of presenta-
 17 tion and appresentation that we find in ordinary object perception. When
 18 I perceive an object, say, a sofa, the object is never given in its totality but
 19 always incompletely, in a certain restricted profile or adumbration. It is
 20 consequently never the entire sofa, including its front, backside, under-
 21 side, and inside which is given intuitively, not even in the most perfect
 22 perception. Despite this, the object of my perception is exactly the sofa
 23 and not the visually appearing profile. Our perceptual consciousness is
 24 consequently characterized by the fact that we persistently transcend the in-
 25 tuitively given profile in order to grasp the object itself. That is, perception
 26 furnishes us with a full object-consciousness, even though only part of the
 27 perceived object is intuitively given (Hua 16/49-50). Husserl's explanation
 28 for why we can be said to see more than what is given, for why perception
 29 involves a presence-in-absence, is well known. He argues that our intuitive
 30 consciousness of the present profile of the object is accompanied by an
 31 intentional consciousness of the object's *horizon* of *absent* profiles. The
 32 meaning of the presented profile is, in short, dependent upon its relation to
 33 the absent profiles of the object, and no perceptual awareness of the *object*

1 would be possible if our awareness were restricted to the intuitively given.

2 Die uneigentlich erscheinenden gegenständlichen Bestimmtheiten
 3 sind mit aufgefaßt, aber nicht “versinnlicht”, nicht durch Sinnliches,
 4 d.i. Empfindungsmaterial dargestellt. Daß sie mit aufgefaßt sind, ist
 5 evident, denn sonst hätten wir gar keine Gegenstände vor Augen,
 6 nicht einmal eine Seite, da diese ja nur durch den Gegenstand Seite
 7 sein kann (Hua 16/55).

8 In other words: in order for a perception to be a perception-of-an-
 9 object, it must be permeated by a horizontal intentionality which intends
 10 the absent profiles, bringing them to a certain *appresentation* (Hua 9/183).
 11 Importantly, however, although object-perception involves such a mixture
 12 of presentation and appresentation, we still say that it is the object itself
 13 and not merely the intuitively appearing front that we perceive (Hua 13/26,
 14 1/151). Moreover, what is presented and what is appresented are not given
 15 in separation and are not united by means of some inference. The same
 16 arguably holds true for our experience of others (Hua 14/332). Of course,
 17 this is not to say that there are not also important differences between
 18 empathy and object-perception. Not only do I, according to Husserl, in
 19 the face-to-face encounter grasp the other and what he or she is living
 20 through much more vividly than the backside of an object, which I don't
 21 see (Hua 14/486). But more importantly, whereas the absent, and merely
 22 appresented, profiles of the object can in turn become intuitively given
 23 for me, namely if the requisite movements are carried out, this can never
 24 happen with the other's experiences (Hua 1/139). This is an important
 25 qualification that also points to the limits of any comparison of other-
 26 perception and object-perception. But still, Husserl's main aim is just to
 27 stress that even the simplest form of perception involves appresentation,
 28 and that this doesn't jeopardize the existence of true perceptual experience.

29 But let us return to the issue of directness and indirectness. As men-
 30 tioned, there is a certain tension, or uncertainty, in Husserl's account. I
 31 think, however, that it is possible to reconcile Husserl's different claims by
 32 means of some slight reformulations. Husserl's occasional insistence on
 33 the indirect nature of empathy is obviously motivated by his worry that
 34 any claim concerning a direct experiential understanding of others would

1 amount to the claim that we have the same kind of first-personal access to
2 other people's consciousness that we have to our own. But this worry is, I
3 think, ultimately misguided. It assumes that there is a single golden stan-
4 dard of what directness amounts to, and that a direct access to one's own
5 mental life constitutes the standard against which everything else has to be
6 measured. In other contexts, however, Husserl has been careful to point out
7 that it is unacceptable to transfer the demands we put on evidence in one
8 domain to other domains where these demands are in principle incapable
9 of being realized (Hua 3/321). Employing that insight, one could respect
10 the difference between first-person and third-person access to psychological
11 states without making the mistake of restricting and equating experiential
12 access with first-person access. To put it differently, why not argue that
13 it is possible to experience minds in more than one way? Arguably, there
14 is no more direct way of knowing that *another* is in pain than seeing him
15 writhe in pain. By contrast, noticing a bottle of pain-killers next to his
16 bedside together with an empty glass of water and concluding that he is in
17 pain is an example of knowing indirectly or by way of inference (Bennett
18 & Hacker 2003, 89, 93). To put it differently, to experience (rather than
19 merely imagine, simulate or theorize about) another's psychological states
20 is precisely to experience the intentional and expressive behavior of the
21 other.

22 The fact that I can be mistaken and deceived is no argument against the
23 experiential character of the access.¹ Moreover, the fact that my experien-
24 tial access to the minds of others differs from my experiential access to my
25 own mind is not an imperfection or shortcoming. On the contrary, it is a
26 difference that is constitutional. It is precisely because of this difference,
27 precisely because of this asymmetry, that we can claim that the minds we

¹That we have an experience of others, and do not have to make do with mere inferences or imaginative projections is also not to say that everything is open to view. As Husserl points out, the perception of others is always partial and is always open for correction (Hua 13/225). In fact, there will always be an indeterminate horizon of not expressed interiority (Hua 20/70), and a complete knowledge of the other will forever remain impossible. Such knowledge would for one require me to possess full insight into the other's individual historicity and genetic self-constitution, and this is something I can only ever disclose in part. Just as I for that matter can only disclose part of my own, which is why my own self-knowledge will also always remain partial (Hua 15/631-632).

1 experience are *other* minds. As Husserl points out, had I had the same access
 2 to the consciousness of the other as I have to my own, the other would
 3 cease being an other and would instead become a part of me (Hua 1/139).
 4 In addition, although I do not have access to the first-personal character of
 5 the other's experience, the fact *that* the other's experience has this elusive
 6 surplus is indeed accessible to me, as Husserl repeatedly emphasizes (Hua
 7 1/144, 15/631). To demand more, to claim that I would only have a real
 8 experience of the other if I experienced her feelings or thoughts in the
 9 same way as she herself does, is nonsensical, and fails to respect what is
 10 distinct and unique about the givenness of the other. It would imply that I
 11 would only experience an other if I experienced her in the same way that
 12 I experience myself, i.e., it would lead to an abolition of the difference
 13 between self and other, to a negation of that which makes the other other.
 14 To quote Lévinas, the absence of the other is exactly his presence as other
 15 (Lévinas 1979, 89).

16 As already mentioned, Husserl struggled with these issues throughout
 17 the years. What he wrote early on in *Ideen I* remains pretty representative:

18 Originäre Erfahrung haben wir von den physischen Dingen in der
 19 "äußeren Wahrnehmung", aber nicht mehr in der Erinnerung oder
 20 vorblickenden Erwartung; originäre Erfahrung haben wir von uns
 21 selbst und unseren Bewußtseinszuständen in der sog. inneren oder
 22 Selbstwahrnehmung, nicht aber von Anderen und von deren Erlebnis-
 23 sen in der "Einfühlung". Wir "sehen den anderen ihre Erlebnisse an"
 24 auf Grund der Wahrnehmung ihrer leiblichen Äußerungen. Dieses
 25 Ansehen der Einfühlung ist zwar ein anschauernd, gebender, jedoch
 26 nicht mehr originär gebender Akt. Der andere und sein Seelenleben
 27 ist zwar bewußt als "selbst da" und in eins mit seinem Leibe da, aber
 28 nicht wie dieser bewußt als originär gegeben (Hua 3/11).

29 My only concern about this phrasing is that it might ultimately have
 30 been more consistent if Husserl instead of trying to combine the view
 31 that empathy does provide us with access to the experiences of others, but
 32 not originarily, had instead said that empathy gives us the experiences of
 33 others themselves originarily, but then simply made it clear that empathic
 34 understanding (and correlatively the empathic givenness of others) has its

1 own distinct optimality, and shouldn't be measured against the originary
2 givenness of self. This would, I think, have been the natural step to take.

3 Some might consider this a mere terminological fix to a serious philo-
4 sophical challenge. By simply stipulating that we in the domain of social
5 cognition ought to operate with a deflated notion of experiential access,
6 one that entitles one to say that one is directly acquainted with another's
7 psychological state simply by perceiving it in the other's intentional and
8 expressive behavior, phenomenologists mistakenly think they can avoid
9 the threat of solipsism and circumvent the problem of other minds. I don't
10 think this objection is justified, but my main concern for now is merely to
11 emphasize that any phenomenological claim concerning a direct experiential
12 access to another's psychological state is not in any tension with the
13 important point that we do not have access to other people's states "as if
14 they were our own". We must respect the difference between self-ascription
15 and other-ascription, between a first-person perspective and a third-person
16 perspective, but we should also conceive of it in a manner that avoids giving
17 rise to the mistaken view that only my own experiences are given to me
18 and that the behavior of the other shields his experiences from me and
19 makes their very existence hypothetical (Avramides 2001, 187).¹

20 c. Pairing and analogical transference

21 Claiming that we in empathy enjoy a direct, experiential, understanding
22 of others is not to say that we should take empathy as a primitive and
23 unanalyzable *factum brutum*, as Husserl accused Scheler of doing (Hua
24 14/335). It is no coincidence that Husserl labeled Lipps' appeal to funda-
25 mental instincts a "refuge of phenomenological ignorance" and considered
26 it a poor substitute for a proper analysis of the phenomenon in question
27 (Hua 13/24). To put it differently, and to paraphrase A.D. Smith, Husserl is
28 not trying to explain our awareness of others by appeal to empathy, rather
29 the term is a label for an accomplishment, and the task Husserl sets himself

¹For further reflections on how the phenomenological analysis of empathy complements and challenges core assumptions in contemporary discussions of social cognition, see Zahavi 2008, 2010b.

1 is to explain how empathy is possible as an intentional achievement (Smith
2 2003, 213).

3 One of Husserl's recurrent ideas is that our empathic understanding of
4 foreign subjectivity involves an element of apperception or interpretation,
5 though he is also adamant that the apperception in question is neither an act
6 of thinking, nor some kind of inference (Hua 15/15, 1/141). Occasionally
7 he speaks of the process as involving what he calls analogical transference,
8 and it is in this context that the central notion of *pairing* is introduced
9 (Hua 15/15).

10 What is pairing? According to Husserl's general account of intentionality,
11 patterns of understanding are gradually established through a process of
12 sedimentation and they thereby come to influence subsequent experiences
13 (Hua 11/186). What I have learnt in the past doesn't leave me untouched.
14 It shapes my understanding and interpretation of any new objects, by
15 reminding me (in a completely tacit manner) of what I have experienced
16 before. My current understanding of x will in short be aided by my previous
17 experience of something analogous (Hua 13/345), and ultimately
18 all apperceptive connections, all interpretations, might be said to rely on
19 such analogical links to past experiences (Hua 1/141). To exemplify, after
20 first having learned the function of a scissor, the next time a child sees a
21 scissor, the child will immediately apprehend its functionality. It will do so,
22 without performing any inference and without explicitly having to think
23 of or recall the first scissor. According to Husserl, the apprehension of the
24 new scissor as a scissor contains an associative reference to the original
25 scissor, which is established passively (Hua 1/141). Similarly, assume that
26 you for the first time have seen and touched a guava. Next time you see one,
27 your prior familiarity with its tactile qualities will infuse your experience
28 of the new fruit. If you then happen to also taste the new exemplar this new
29 experience will in turn affect your apprehension of the first fruit. Now,
30 the relevance of these examples for empathy is seemingly straightforward.
31 When I encounter another, my prior self-experience will serve as a reservoir
32 of meaning that is transferred onto the other in a purely passive manner.
33 As a result of this, a phenomenal unity is established. As Husserl writes,

34 Mit der ersteren Eigentümlichkeit hängt nahe zusammen, daß ego

1 und alter ego immerzu und notwendig in ursprünglicher *Paarung* ge-
 2 geben sind. [...] Erläutern, wir zunächst das Wesentliche der Paarung
 3 (bzw. Mehrheitsbildung) überhaupt. Sie ist eine Urform derjenigen
 4 passiven Synthesis, die wir gegenüber der passiven Synthesis der *Iden-*
 5 *tifikation* als *Assoziation* bezeichnen. In einer paarenden Assoziation
 6 ist das Charakteristische, daß im primitivsten Falle zwei Daten in
 7 der Einheit eines Bewußtseins in Abgehobenheit anschaulich gegeben
 8 sind und auf Grund dessen wesensmäßig schon in purer Passivität,
 9 also gleichgültig ob beachtet oder nicht, als unterschieden Erscheinen-
 10 de phänomenologisch eine Einheit der Ähnlichkeit begründen, also
 11 eben stets als Paar konstituiert sind (Hua 1/142).

12 Alter ego refers to ego – and vice-versa (Hua 14/530). The latter point is
 13 crucial. The transfer of meaning occurring through the process of pairing
 14 is not unidirectional. We are dealing with a reciprocal transference (Hua
 15 15/252), or as Husserl puts it in *Cartesianische Meditationen*, there is a
 16 “mutual transfer of sense” (Hua 1/142, cf. Merleau-Ponty 1964, 118).¹ In
 17 coming to understand the other, I draw on what I know from my own
 18 case, but through my encounter with the other, my own self-experience is
 19 also modified. In fact, not only that but Husserl even speaks of “a mutual
 20 awakening” where both are overlaid with the “sense of the other” (Hua
 21 1/142) thereby suggesting that the reciprocal transfer happens simultane-
 22 ously. The fact that the transfer of meaning is bidirectional speaks against
 23 the suggestion that we should be dealing with a simple form of projection,
 24 where I ultimately only find in the other, what I have put there myself.
 25 The latter implication would also go against Husserl’s repeated insistence
 26 that empathy allows us to encounter true transcendence, and that our
 27 consciousness in empathy transcends itself and is confronted with, as he
 28 puts it, otherness of a completely new kind (Hua 14/8-9, 14/442). Indeed,
 29 throughout his writings on this topic, Husserl insists again and again on
 30 the absolute otherness of the other. As he writes in a text from 1908, your
 31 consciousness is for my consciousness absolute “Aussensein” and so is my
 32 consciousness for you (Hua 13/6).

¹See by comparison Theunissen’s more critical reading (1977, 62), as well as Yamaguchi’s reply (1982, 87).

1 Husserl's insistence on this latter point occasionally makes him ques-
2 tion whether analogy really plays as fundamental a role as he is wont to
3 claim. After all, as he admits, a process of analogizing doesn't lead to the
4 apprehension of anything truly new (Hua 4/168). As he even writes in a
5 text from 1914-15, "es findet [...] keine Analogisierung statt, keine Analo-
6 gieschluss, keine Übertragung durch Analogie [...]. Es wird ohne weiteres
7 die "Apperzeption" des fremden Seelenlebes vollzogen" (Hua 13/338-339).
8 Criticizing what might count as a version of simulation theory, Husserl
9 also insists that it is nonsense to claim that I in order to understand that the
10 other is angry must experience anger myself, and that my own anger should
11 somehow function as analog for the other's anger. Empathy is precisely not
12 a kind of reproduction or reduplication of oneself (Hua 13/188, 14/525).
13 As Husserl also points out, to experience the other is not like experiencing
14 a transformation of oneself, like what might take place in imagination.
15 Such imaginative transformation only provides me with myself as different
16 (Hua 15/314). It doesn't provide me with the other. Furthermore, although
17 it is true that we sometimes imagine what it must be like for the other,
18 what the other must be going through, it is simply unconvincing to claim
19 that every act of empathy involves such imagination. When we empathically
20 understand the other we do so immediately and often without any
21 imaginative depiction, and in those circumstances where we do depict the
22 other's experience imaginatively, we precisely consider that an exception
23 (Hua 13/188).

24 Despite these occasional misgivings, Husserl does, however, normally
25 stress the importance of analogy. When I, for instance, apperceive a foreign
26 body as a lived body, we are, on his account, dealing with an analogical
27 apperception that draws on and involves a re-presentation of my own self-
28 experience (Hua 13/251). Indeed, insofar as the apprehension of the other
29 involves re-presentation, the latter necessarily points back to a proper pre-
30 sentation, which is constituted by my own immediate self-experience (Hua
31 13/288). As Husserl puts it in various texts, "subjectivity" is primordially
32 present to me in virtue of my self-experience and is only then appercep-
33 tively carried over to the other (Hua 9/242, 1/140, 8/62, 14/295). To that
34 extent bodily self-experience constitutes a foundation for the perception of

1 embodied others, which is why I first have to have a perception of my own
 2 body, before any experience of other subjects can arise (13/333), though
 3 Husserl also points out that we are not dealing with a temporal genesis,
 4 and that the self-experience in question doesn't have to be temporally an-
 5 tecedent (Hua 1/150). Moreover, the self-experience that needs to be in
 6 play is a "Durchgangserfahrung" and not a terminating experience (Hua
 7 14/468). It is not a question of actively comparing the two of us, nor does
 8 my body first have to be an object of attention, but there must be some
 9 form of self-giveness, otherwise no transfer of meaning could occur (Hua
 10 13/336).

11 At this stage, however, Husserl does voice a concern. Even if it is true
 12 that I always enjoy a bodily self-experience, the only thing that could
 13 motivate an analogizing apprehension or apperceptive transfer of sense
 14 would presumably be a perceived similarity between the body over there
 15 and my own body (Hua 1/140). But it is hardly true that I originally
 16 observe my own body in the same way I perceive the body of others.
 17 Originally, I don't perceive my own lived body as a spatial object. But isn't
 18 this what is required (Hua 13/344, 15/661)? Moreover, occasionally Husserl
 19 seems to claim that I only learn of the identity between my own lived body
 20 and my externally appearing body through the other, i.e., by adopting the
 21 other's perspective on my own body (Hua 13/420). As he puts it in a text
 22 dating from 1921, the apprehension of my own body as an object and as
 23 a physical thing is a mediated and secondary experience. It is one I only
 24 acquire through the other (Hua 14/61, 14/63, 14/238, 14/322). But if this
 25 is correct, his argumentation would seem to involve a vicious circle and
 26 consequently fail.

27 Husserl does, however, suggest a few possible ways out. First of all,
 28 although he considers a thorough objectification of the body to be some-
 29 thing intersubjectively mediated, he also speaks of the lived body as a
 30 continuously externalizing interiority, and claims that this exteriority is
 31 co-given as part of self-experience (Hua 14/491). Consider for instance
 32 the following intriguing consideration, where Husserl faults his original
 33 account of empathy for having failed to consider the

34 grundwesentliche Rolle der Verlautbarung in der eigenen selbster-

1 zeugten, zu den eigenen, ursprünglich gegebenen Kinaesthesen der
 2 Stimmuskeln gehörigen Stimme. [...] Es scheint, nach meiner Beob-
 3 achtung, im Kinde die selbsterzeugte und dann analogisch gehörte
 4 Stimme zuerst die Brücke für die Ichobjektivierung, bzw. die Bildung
 5 des "alter" abzugeben, bevor das Kind schon eine sinnliche Analogie
 6 seines visuellen Leibes mit dem des "Anderen" hat und haben
 7 kann, und erst recht: dem Anderen einen taktuellen Leib und einen
 8 Willensleib zuordnen kann (Hua 4/96).

9 To put it differently, one of the issues frequently emphasized in Hus-
 10 serl's phenomenological analysis of the body is its peculiar two-sidedness.
 11 My body is given to me as interiority, as a volitional structure, and as a di-
 12 mension of sensing, but it is also given as a visually and tactually appearing
 13 exteriority. And the latter experience, according to Husserl, is precisely
 14 what is needed for empathy to be possible (Hua 4/165-166, 15/652). One
 15 reason why I am able to recognize other embodied subjects is that my
 16 own bodily self-experience is characterized by this remarkable interplay
 17 between *ipseity* and *alterity* (Hua 8/62, 14/457, 13/263). This might be
 18 what Husserl was referring to when he wrote that the possibility of so-
 19 ciality presupposes a certain intersubjectivity of the body (Hua 4/297).
 20 Secondly, when speaking of the resemblance between own body and the
 21 body of others, we shouldn't only focus on the presence of similar visual
 22 appearances. As Husserl writes, the other body also behaves similarly, it
 23 moves and acts in similar ways (Hua 14/280, 13/289), and my continuous
 24 experience of it as a foreign subjective body is precisely conditional upon
 25 my experience of its continuous and harmonious behavior (Hua 1/144).
 26 More important for the pairing might consequently be the resemblance of
 27 intentional behavior and expressive movements, a resemblance arguably
 28 detected by some form of cross-modal perception.¹ In fact, Husserl even
 29 writes, and this does sound remarkably like formulations found in Gallese,

¹If this is correct, it would qualify a recent claim by De Preester. In her 2008 paper, she argues for the following significant difference between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl's account of pairing: Whereas the mediating term between ego and alter ego for Husserl is bodily similarity, it is for Merleau-Ponty the intended object of action to which ego and alter ego are equally directed. De Preester consequently claims that only Merleau-Ponty holds the view that it is by having the same intentional object and by trying to accomplish the same goal that I come to understand the other's actions (De Preester 2008, 136-137).

1 when I perceive the movement of the foreign body, it is *as if* I were over
2 there, as if I were moving my limbs (Hua 15/642, 4/164). When I see
3 the foreign hand, I feel my own hand. If I see the other hand move, I am
4 inclined to move my own hand. My own kinesthetic system is affected by
5 my perception of his moving body and by my anticipation of his future
6 movements (Hua 14/527, 15/642). But as Husserl is then careful to add,
7 this doesn't entail that I project what I experience in myself into the other
8 (Hua 13/311).

9 How should we reconcile Husserl's various statements? On the one
10 hand, he emphasizes the involved transfer of sense and the role of analogy,
11 on the other he questions its relevance, outright rejects the centrality of
12 projection and repeatedly accentuates the transcendence of the other.

13 One way to reconcile Husserl's thoughts on this issue, at least to some
14 extent, is as follows. When Husserl insists that the original givenness of
15 my own lived body, the *Urleib* or primal body, constitutes the reference-
16 and anchor point for any experience of other bodies, and when he claims
17 that every apperception has an origin which prescribes a certain norm of
18 meaning, and that this necessary *Urnorm* or primal norm is the foundation
19 of every experience of others, which necessarily involve an intentional
20 modification of the norm (Hua 13/57, 14/125-6), one might understand
21 the notion of *Urnorm* in two different ways. Either one can understand
22 it as a kind of matrix that I rely and draw on when understanding others.
23 On this reading, Husserl would claim that the subject interprets others
24 in terms of a sense of mentality that it has first grasped *in foro interno*
25 and which it then projects more or less successfully onto others. Another
26 possibility, however, is to see the self-experience in question as a necessary
27 contrast foil on the basis of which others can be experienced as others.
28 To put it differently, the other might be a self in his/her own right, but
29 the other can only appear as another for me in relation to and contrast
30 to my own self-experience. But in this case, my self-experience doesn't
31 constitute the model; rather it is that against which the other's difference
32 can reveal itself. To put it differently, although Husserl would insist that
33 (bodily) self-experience is a precondition for other-experience, there is a
34 decisive difference between arguing that the former is a necessary condition

1 (and that there would be no other-experience in its absence) and claiming
 2 that self-experience somehow serves as a model for other-experience, as if
 3 interpersonal understanding is basically a question of projecting oneself
 4 into the other. As already pointed out, I am not convinced that Husserl
 5 defended the latter view.

6 d. The object of empathy

7 So far, the discussion has suggested that empathy for Husserl is a unitary
 8 concept and that its object is the other. Both assumptions must be modified.

9 An important and often overlooked aspect of Husserl's account of em-
 10 pathy is precisely his careful distinction between various levels of empathy.
 11 As Husserl points out in his criticism of Lipps, one of the problems with
 12 Lipps' account was that he exclusively linked empathy to the understand-
 13 ing of expressions (Hua 13/70). Not only was Lipps' analysis, according
 14 to Husserl, too coarse grained in that it failed to distinguish sufficiently
 15 between different types of expressions, say, the expression of temperament,
 16 character, resolution or anger. That is, Lipps didn't observe the difference
 17 between, say, the way temperament is expressed in the timing of bodily
 18 gestures and the way intentions are expressed in bodily movements, or
 19 between the facial expression of specific emotions, such as anger or fear,
 20 and the linguistic expression of thoughts. In all cases, we are dealing with
 21 expressions, but of quite different kinds (Hua 13/76). But even more impor-
 22 tantly, according to Husserl, in order to even apprehend something as an
 23 expression, let alone apprehend that which is expressed in the expression,
 24 one must first have apprehended the perceptually given body as a lived
 25 body, i.e., most fundamentally as a sensing body (Hua 13/70, 13/66).

26 Das persönliche Sein, Leben, sich Verhalten, persönlich Tätigsein und
 27 Leiden etc. hat seine Expression, seinen Ausdruck. Aber die phäno-
 28 menale Umwelt des Anderen und seine Innenleiblichkeit hat keinen
 29 Ausdruck, sondern eine fundamentale und eigentümliche Weise der
 30 Anzeige, welche die Voraussetzung (Fundierung) „des Ausdrucks“ ist.
 31 Erst muss der fremde Leib, und als Zentrum der fremden orientierten
 32 Umwelt, für mich da sein, damit sich in ihm etwas ausdrücken kann
 33 (Hua 13/435-6)

1 This is why Husserl argues that the perception of the other presupposes
 2 an understanding of the other's body (Hua 13/74), and why he claims that
 3 the most fundamental form of empathy is one that targets this somato-
 4 logical level (Hua 13/440, 1/148). It is a process that happens passively
 5 and associatively, and which might also be called a form of animal apper-
 6 ception or experience of animality (Hua 13/455, 13/476). Husserl then
 7 contrasts this kind of empathy with a more active form that targets the
 8 understanding of that which is expressed in bodily expressions, namely
 9 beliefs, decisions, attitudes (Hua 13/435). In a manuscript from 1931-32,
 10 he operates with even more levels. The first level of empathy is the appre-
 11 sentation of the foreign lived body as sensing and perceiving. The second
 12 level is the appresentation of the other as physically acting, say, moving,
 13 pushing, or carrying something. The third level goes beyond this and sees,
 14 say, the running of the other in the forest as flight, the hiding behind a
 15 stone as a protection from missiles, etc. (Hua 15/435). On a few occasions,
 16 Husserl goes even further and also speaks of the kinds of empathy involved
 17 in apprehending the unity of a normal community and in appropriating
 18 foreign traditions (Hua 15/436, HuaM 8/372-373).

19 In other words, although Husserl would claim that a first level of em-
 20 pathy is constituted by pairing, by a passive and involuntary associative
 21 bonding of self and other on the basis of their bodily similarity, he would
 22 maintain that this is only the first primitive level and would never agree
 23 with the claim that it amounts to the full range of interpersonal under-
 24 standing.

25 Being next to one another and being for one another, understanding
 26 the other and even understanding each other reciprocally is all something
 27 empathy can accomplish. But something very different is achieved the
 28 moment I turn towards and start to address the other (Hua 15/471).

29 In einem Akte, in dem ein Ich sich an das andere richtet, ist vor allem
 30 zugrundeliegend: I₁ erfasst einführend I₂, und I₂ einführend I₁, aber
 31 nicht nur das: I₁ erfährt (versteht) I₂ als I₁ verstehend Erfahrenden,
 32 und umgekehrt. Ich sehe den Anderen als mich Sehenden und Verste-
 33 henden, und es liegt weiter darin, dass ich „weiss“, dass der Andere
 34 auch seinerseits sich als von mir gesehen weiss. Wir verstehen uns

1 und sind im Wechselverständnis geistig beieinander, in Berührung.

2 Sich wechselseitig in die Augen sehen, sich wechselseitig im wahr-
3 nehmenden Bewusstsein auf einanderbezogen vorfinden, füreinander
4 originär dasein und erfassend, aufmerkend, sich wechselseitig geistig
5 berührend aufeinander gerichtet sein (Hua 14/211).

6 When I seek to influence the other spiritually and not merely as a
7 physical object, and when the other is aware that he is being addressed and
8 when he reciprocates, we are dealing with communicative acts through
9 which a higher conscious interpersonal unity, a we, is established, and
10 through which the world acquires the character of a truly social world
11 (Hua 15/472, 13/498, 4/192-194).¹

12 As for the question regarding the proper object of empathy, Husserl
13 actually denies that I normally thematize the other as an object when
14 empathizing.² Rather, when empathically understanding the other, I so to
15 speak go along with his or her experiences, and attend to their object (Hua
16 36/617, 15/427, 15/513). It is consequently important to emphasize that
17 the other, rather than being given to me simply as a nucleus of experiences,
18 is given as a center of orientation, as a perspective on the world. To put
19 it differently, the other is not given in isolation or purity for me, rather
20 the other is given as intentional, as directed at the same world as I, and the
21 other's world, and the objects that are there for him, is given along with
22 the other (Hua 14/140, 14/287, 13/411, 4/168, 1/154). This is of course,
23 one reason why our perception of others is unlike our ordinary perception

¹As Husserl remarks in a well-known passage: "Leibniz sagte, Monaden haben keine Fenster. Ich aber meine, jede Seelenmonade hat unendlich viele Fenster, nämlich jede verständnisvolle Wahrnehmung eines fremden Leibes ist solch ein Fenster, und jedesmal, wenn ich sage, bitte, lieber Freund, und er antwortet mir verständnisvoll, ist aus unseren offenen Fenstern ein Ichakt meines Ich in das Freundes-Ich übergegangen und umgekehrt, eine wechselseitige Motivation hat zwischen uns eine reale Einheit, ja wirklich eine reale Einheit hergestellt" (Hua 13/473).

²By contrast, Husserl seems to think that our primary object in sympathy, care and pity (*Mitleid*) is the other him- or herself and not the object of, say, his or her distress. To use Husserl's own example, if the other is sad over the fact that his mother had died, I am also sad about this, and sad about the fact that he is sad. But it is his sadness which is my primary object, it only subsequently and conditional upon that that the death of his mother is something that saddens me (Hua 14/189-190, 37/194). More generally speaking, Husserl emphasizes the distinction between empathy and sympathy (just as he distinguishes both of these from emotional contagion). Whereas empathy is an epistemic attitude that doesn't have to involve love, sympathy involves care and concern (Hua 37/194).

1 of objects. As soon as the other appears on the scene my relation to the
 2 world will change, since the other will always be given to me in a situation
 3 or meaningful context that points back to the other as a new center of
 4 reference. The meaning the world has for the other affects the meaning it
 5 has for me. As Husserl puts it in *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*
 6 *II*:

7 Denn in der Geltung der Fremderfahrung, durch die ich die Anderen
 8 als für mich seiende habe, liegt schon beschlossen die Mitgeltung ihrer
 9 Erfahrung für mich. Schon dass ihr Leib nicht nur Körper ist, als wel-
 10 cher er für mich direkt wahrgenommen ist, sondern Leib, das schliesst
 11 in sich die Mitgeltung der Wahrnehmung, die der Andere von seinem
 12 Leibe hat als demselben, den ich wahrnehme, und das geht so weiter
 13 für seine Umwelt als sachlich dieselbe, als welche ich erfahre. Ich kann
 14 nicht Andere setzen, ohne mit ihrem erfahrenden Leben auch ihr Er-
 15 fahrenes mitzusetzen, d.i., ohne dieses vergegenwärtigte Erfahrene in
 16 Mitgeltung zu setzen so wie mein eigenes ursprünglicheres Erfahrene
 17 (Hua 14/388).

18 Husserl consequently wants to emphasize the interrelation between
 19 the experience of others and the constitution of a shared world. As he
 20 points out, the experience of experiencing others necessarily presupposes
 21 accepting the validity of some of the others' experiences. If nothing else,
 22 my experience of the lived body of another necessarily presupposes that
 23 the *very same* body I perceive externally is also sensed by the other (Hua
 24 15/158-159, 13/252, 14/83), which is why he characterized the body of the
 25 other as the first intersubjective datum, as the first object that is accessed
 26 by a plurality of subjects (Hua 14/110). This is obviously an idea Husserl
 27 draws on in his account of the constitution of objectivity, since he also
 28 defends the view that my experience of the significance and validity of
 29 objects changes the moment I realize that others experience the same
 30 objects as I (cf. Zahavi 1996). At the same time, however, and this is of
 31 particularly importance in this context, Husserl also notes that I am part of
 32 what the other intends. So again, when I experience others, I do not merely
 33 experience them as psychophysical objects in the world, rather I experience
 34 them as subjects who experience worldly objects, myself included (Hua

1 15/4-5, 4/169, 1/158). To put it differently, through my experience of
 2 others, I also come to attain a new experience of myself. Occasionally,
 3 Husserl refers to such cases, where my self-experience and my experience
 4 of an empathized subject who empathize with me coincide, as a case of
 5 higher-order empathy (Hua 14/315). He claims that it is through this
 6 process of mediated self-experience, by indirectly experiencing myself as
 7 the one viewed by others, that I come to experience myself as human (Hua
 8 4/167-9, 15/13, 15/665).

9 Why is this important? Because, as Husserl proceeds to point out, I
 10 am not what I am for myself, independently of the other, nor is the other
 11 independent of me. Everybody is for himself and at the same time for the
 12 other in an inseparable being-for-one-another. On occasion, Husserl does
 13 speak of empathy as involving a situation where one ego mirrors itself
 14 directly in the other (Hua 15/7, 14/300), and of the other as a reflection
 15 (*Spiegelung*) of myself, though as he then immediately adds, the other is not
 16 really a reflection (15/7). But on the basis of further analysis – and this is
 17 of course also in line with his account of pairing – he ultimately concludes,
 18 in a passage from the thirties, that we are not dealing with an ineffective
 19 mirroring (*kraftlose Spiegelung*), but that the being of self and other are
 20 constitutively intertwined (Hua 15/191).

21

4. Conclusion

22 Let me now turn to the question of whether Gallese's notion of embodied
 23 simulation is in line with Husserl's account of empathy. Can his proposal
 24 be said to constitute a further development and perhaps even a scientific
 25 vindication of Husserl's phenomenological account? Unfortunately, the
 26 question is too complex to really allow for a simple yes or no answer.

27 On the one hand, there does indeed seem to be some striking similar-
 28 ities. For Husserl, the most basic form of empathy is one involving the
 29 pairing of self and other. The pairing in question takes place between acting
 30 and expressive bodies, it draws on a capacity for cross-modal matching,
 31 and it is passive in the sense of not being initiated voluntarily or as a result
 32 of deliberation or reflection. And as Thompson points out, this "pheno-

1 menological conception of the bodily basis of empathy can be linked to
2 the growing body of psychological and neurophysiological evidence for
3 coupling mechanisms linking self and other at sensorimotor and affective
4 levels” (Thompson 2007, 393). More specifically, and here I am quoting
5 Ratcliffe, “neuroscientific findings can provide support for Husserl and can
6 also be integrated into the interpretation of phenomenological descriptions,
7 by clarifying the kind of relation described and showing how it need not
8 be something mysterious or even impossible” (Ratcliffe 2006, 348).

9 On the other hand, however, one shouldn’t overlook what might be
10 some important differences. First of all, as we have seen Husserl is very
11 explicit about the need for distinguishing various levels of empathy (and
12 interpersonal understanding). And although he would claim that the first
13 level is constituted by a passive and involuntary associative bonding of self
14 and other on the basis of their bodily similarity, he would never agree to the
15 claim that this amounts to the full range of interpersonal understanding.
16 If we turn to the defenders of embodied simulation, we will, however,
17 find slightly conflicting views regarding its explanatory scope. How much
18 can mirror-resonance mechanisms explain? Do they merely target the
19 foundations of interpersonal understanding, or can they more or less
20 explain every aspect of social cognition, from an understanding of the
21 movements and actions of others, to an understanding of their emotions,
22 sensations and intentions? It is here informative to consider a criticism
23 that Borg (2007) and Jacob (2008) have directed against what they take to
24 be the inflated claims made by some proponents of embodied simulation.
25 Borg and Jacob both claim that although mirror neurons might help us
26 decode another agent’s motor intentions, they cannot help us determine
27 his or her prior intentions. Or to put it differently, although they might
28 help us understand that the perceived movement is a goal-directed act of,
29 say, grasping, they can’t tell us why it happened. In response, Gallese has
30 defended a deflationary take on what it means to determine the intention
31 of others, and argued that determining why a given act is executed can be
32 equivalent to detecting the goal of the still not executed and impending
33 subsequent act (Gallese 2007a, 661-662). But even if one accepts this, and
34 a fortiori the claim that mirror neurons are involved in the detection of

1 intentions, there is obviously much more that needs to be in place before we
2 can be said to fully understand the actions of others, their whys, meanings
3 and motives, i.e., what others are up to, why others are doing what they
4 are doing, and what that means to them (cf. Schutz 1967, 23–24). And it
5 is by no means clear that mirror neurons are capable of providing that
6 information. I cannot at this point assess Gallese’s claims regarding the role
7 of mirror neurons in emotion understanding, but the point I want to make
8 is merely that the plausibility of the mirror neuron hypothesis increases in
9 reverse proportion to its alleged explanatory scope. It might not only be
10 wiser to opt for a quite modest claim – and in fact, in some places Gallese
11 does concede that an emphasis on the importance of embodied simulation
12 in no way rules out that more sophisticated cognitive mentalizing skills
13 might also be needed, and that the two are not mutually exclusive (Gallese
14 2007b, 10) – but doing so might also increase the compatibility between
15 his proposal and Husserl’s account.

16 Secondly, Gallese is quite explicit in arguing that the mirror neuron
17 system allows for a direct experiential understanding of others (Gallese
18 2007b, 9). At the same time, however, he explicitly and repeatedly aligns
19 himself with simulation theory and, like Lipps, considers empathy a form
20 of inner imitation (Gallese 2003a, 519). But isn’t there a tension here?
21 Isn’t the reliance on and reference to inner imitation precisely premised
22 on the assumption that we do not enjoy a direct experiential access to
23 others? Isn’t it precisely because other people’s mental states are taken
24 to be unobservable and inherently invisible that some have insisted that
25 we must rely on internal simulations in order to make the leap from the
26 perceptual input which is taken to be psychologically meaningless to the
27 output, which is the ascription of mental states to the other. In short,
28 isn’t the assumption precisely that we need internal simulation in order to
29 supplement the input with information coming from elsewhere in order
30 to generate the required output? This certainly seems to be Gallese’s view
31 for as he writes the observer must rely on his or her own internal motor
32 knowledge (provided by the mirror neurons) in order to translate the
33 observed movement, “in principle, devoid of meaning for the observer
34 – into something that the observer is able to understand” (Gallese 2009,

1 520-521). But if this is correct, it does seem to commit embodied simulation
 2 to a form of projectivism – where I ultimately only find in the other, what I
 3 have put there myself –, and as I have already indicated, I very much doubt
 4 this is in line with Husserl’s view.

5 Thirdly, and in direct continuation of this, what we find in Husserl
 6 is a recurrent emphasis on and respect for the otherness and alterity of
 7 the other.¹ This is also partly why Husserl distances himself from the idea
 8 that the best way to conceive of the relation between self and other is
 9 in terms of a mirroring. Though, as we have also seen, another reason is
 10 that he takes mirroring to be too static a concept. It doesn’t capture the
 11 dynamic and dialectical intertwinement between self and other. Husserl’s
 12 view on this seems in obvious tension with the persistent emphasis by
 13 mirror neuron theorists on the importance of mirroring. However, it is
 14 again important not to overlook that Gallese himself does recognize that
 15 there are limits to what the mirror neuron model can explain. He even
 16 concedes that imitation and self-other identity doesn’t really do the trick
 17 of accounting for interpersonal understanding, since there – in contrast to
 18 what is required in the case of emotional contagion –, has to be difference
 19 as well, that is, the other must preserve his or her character of otherness
 20 (Gallese 2007b, 11, 2009, 527). Furthermore, in a recent publication Gallese
 21 has even gone so far as to admit that the very mirror metaphor might
 22 be misleading, since it suggests the presence of an exact match between
 23 object and observer thereby disregarding individual differences (Gallese
 24 2009, 531).

25 Fourthly, and most importantly, any comparison of Husserl’s pheno-
 26 menological account of empathy with the attempt to explain empathy in
 27 terms of mirror-resonance mechanisms shouldn’t forget that we are dealing
 28 with accounts targeting a personal and a subpersonal level respectively,² and

¹For more on this topic, see Derrida 1967, Waldenfels 1989, Zahavi 1999.

²Though it must also be noted that this distinction is one that is not always sufficiently respected by mirror neuron theorists. They describe embodied simulation as unconscious and automatic, but also as pre-reflective and experience-based (cf. Gallese 2003a, 521, 2007b, 10). Compare also, for instance, Iacoboni’s claim that Lipps’ work in retrospect points directly at a role for mirror neurons (Iacoboni 2009, 108). Iacoboni refers to Lipps’ famous example with the tightrope walker. On Lipps’ account, when people watch the acrobat on the wire, they feel themselves inside the acrobat. And as Iacoboni then continues, Lipps’ “phenomenological

1 as long as one is not so naïve as to believe in straightforward isomorphism
2 it is not at all obvious that such accounts can be compared in any direct
3 fashion. For the very same reason, it might be best to avoid the claim that
4 the discovery of the mirror neurons has confirmed Husserl's phenomeno-
5 logical account or that the latter supports the mirror neuron hypothesis. A
6 more prudent and far more cautious claim would be that work on mirror
7 neurons as well as other neuroscientific findings can complement the phe-
8 nomenological description by clarifying the empathic relation described
9 and showing "how it need not be something mysterious or even impossible"
10 (Ratcliffe 2006, 336).

11 A final observation: Even if one went further than I have done and
12 ultimately concluded that there are in fact some substantial and perhaps
13 even remarkable similarities between the phenomenological proposal and
14 the mirror resonance hypothesis, this would still leave various questions
15 unanswered. First of all, are the proposals ultimately sound? To put it dif-
16 ferently, the presence of similarities is, of course, quite compatible with the
17 possibility that both accounts might be severely deficient or even outright
18 wrong. Secondly, would the presence of such similarities demonstrate that
19 Husserl's phenomenological account – contrary to the claim made by some
20 of his defenders – is really a version of simulation theory, or would the right
21 conclusion to draw be the opposite, namely to question whether Gallese's
22 proposal of embodied simulation is really a form of simulationism at all.
23 Let me emphasize that this isn't simply a dispute about terminology. What
24 is at stake here is the question of whether a simulationist interpretation of
25 mirror neurons is the best and most coherent interpretation, or whether
26 Husserl's phenomenological account might constitute a more adequate
27 framework for the conceptualization and interpretation of the role of these
28 resonance phenomena. Is it for instance better to talk of such resonance in
29 terms of a perceptual elicitation than in terms of a simulation (Gallagher
30 2007)?

31 As this last comment ought to remind us, our theoretical models and

description of watching the acrobat is eerily predictive of the pattern of activity displayed by mirror neurons that fire both when we grasp and when we see someone else grasping, as if we were inside that person" (Iacoboni 2009, 108-109).

1 the way we conceive of, say, intersubjectivity obviously influence our
 2 interpretation of the empirical findings. This is something we should not
 3 forget when discussing the relation between empathy and mirror neurons,
 4 and between phenomenology and neuroscience, and when we assess the
 5 question that has been lurking in the background of this entire discussion,
 6 namely the feasibility and desirability of a naturalized phenomenology (cf.
 7 Gallagher 1997, Zahavi 2004, Ratcliffe 2006, Gallagher and Zahavi 2008,
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