Empathy, Embodiment, and the Unity of Expression

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Abstract This paper presents an account of empathy as the form of experience directed at embodied unities of expressive movement. After outlining the key differences between simulation theory and the phenomenological approach to empathy, the paper argues that while the phenomenological approach is closer to respecting a necessary constitutional asymmetry between first-personal and second-personal senses of embodiment, it still presupposes a general concept of embodiment that ends up being problematic. A different account is proposed that is neutral on the explanatory role of the first-person sense of embodiment, which leads to an emphasis on the transformative nature of empathy and a broadening of the scope of possible targets of empathic awareness.

1 Introduction: The Problem of Direct Social Cognition

The concepts of empathy and embodiment intertwine to form the core of a conceptual framework for understanding social cognition. Within this framework, our ability to understand and navigate the social world is not mediated by a theoretical apparatus that yields inferential knowledge of the intentions and mental states of others. Rather, there is growing support for the idea that we possess a basic capacity to grasp the expressive behavior of others in a direct way, prior to engaging in more conceptually rich forms of theorizing and interpretation (Gallese 2001, 2003, 2005; Gallagher 2008; Gallagher and Zahavi 2008; Goldman and Gallese 1998; Overgaard 2005, 2007; Zahavi 2007, 2010, 2011a, 2011b). Simulation theory (ST) holds that we have a pre-theoretical understanding of the mindedness of others through physiological "mirroring" or "resonance" mechanisms that are responsive to the other's bodily movement (Goldman and Gallese 1998). The simulation that underlies this form of understanding is an automatic, sub-personal, "off-line tokening" of the target's intentional state. Phenomenological theories of social cognition are sympathetic to ST's emphasis on the embodied and pre-theoretical nature of our understanding of other minds, but critical of the idea that our understanding of others takes the form of an isomorphism between the observer's mental state and the target's mental state (Zahavi and Overgaard 2012). Furthermore, it is unclear how simulation could provide one with an understanding of the *other's* mental state without an additional act of projecting one's own simulation onto the perceived behavioral data. The *phenomenological proposal* (PP) is the claim that our understanding of other subjects takes the form of *direct social perception* that does not rely on embodied simulation, let alone any sort of theorizing (Zahavi 2011a).

According to PP, empathy depends on embodiment, but in a way that is much less straightforward than for ST. Whereas ST accounts for social cognition in terms of simulation or "resonance" mechanisms, phenomenological approaches rely on the concept of *expression* in their explanations of how empathy and embodiment are related. How this concept of expression performs the explanatory work needed here, however, is unclear. Zahavi (2007,

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2011a, 2011b) and Overgaard (2005) are the most explicit in their reliance on the concept of expression, therefore I will make frequent reference to their work in this paper. My aim is to build on their work while critically assessing their use of the concept of expression. I agree with the claim that empathy is a form of experience that targets expressive behavior. I am critical, however, of the idea that one can recognize the movement of the other *as expressive* in virtue of her first-personal bodily awareness. Two interesting upshots of my analysis are that empathy is not easily classified as perceptual insofar as it has a transformative effect on the empathizer (cf. Thompson 2001), and that the class of entities with which we may empathize may be broader than we commonly think. The account of empathy presented here seeks to make sense of Zahavi's claim, following Husserl, that empathy is a *sui generis* form of intentionality, with "its own kind of originality, its own kind of fulfillment and corroboration and its own criteria of success and failure" (Zahavi 2011b, 230). In other words, the nature of empathy is constituted by an awareness of a class of objects that elicit a response whose validity is dependent on a different set of principles than those underlying the validity of both perception and first-personal givenness. A proper theory of empathy should provide such a set of principles while remaining faithful to the original phenomenological desiderata—i.e., that empathy depends on neither isomorphic simulation nor an act of projection. Perhaps it is intuitive that empathy has a unique proprietary phenomenal character, distinct from both self-awareness and object-awareness; but this unique phenomenal character is the datum of experience we seek to explain.
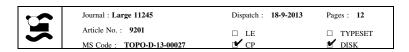
2 The Phenomenological Framework

At times, ST sounds very amenable to phenomenology (e.g., Gallese et al. 2004, 396). Both reject conceptually loaded theorizing and conscious interpreting as the primary means of understanding the mental lives of others. Both characterize our understanding of others as somehow "direct" or "quasi-perceptual" in nature. How, then, does phenomenology differ in approach?

The first thing to keep in mind here is that phenomenology seeks to preserve the first-personal nature of its explananda: different types of experience *as* experienced from the first-person perspective. This does not mean that phenomenology completely eschews analyses that break experience down into simpler components. In fact, Husserl was a master of such analyses. His accounts of perceptual objectivity, communicative action, and empathy all involve parsing structures, identifying necessary constituents and relations, and constructing conceptual strata via a foundational analysis.[1] Where Husserl differs from—e.g., Descartes—is his insistence that the fine-grained results of his analyses are *dependent parts* or "moments" of a "precise [*prägnant*] whole" (Husserl 2001, Investigation III; cf. Smith 2007, 6). The esplanade of phenomenological analysis are experiential wholes that can be conceptually understood in terms of the meanings through which we grasp the structure of our experiences. But this structure is ultimately derivative and must be understood as the product of an interpretive activity. Thus while the targets of phenomenological analysis may be broken down into parts and relations holding between those parts, the experiential unity or *phenomenal character* of that which we are analyzing remains logically prior.

Considering the differences and similarities between Husserl and Descartes helps throw the ST-PP debate into historical relief. Similar to Descartes, Husserl sought to account for empathy in *some* law-like fashion, rather than simply assert that first-person experience does not admit of analysis. Husserl, however, does not share Descartes' mechanistic framework.[2] Descartes' analyses of emotion, for example, start with first-person experience and then seek to explain how such experiences are built up through a series of mental operations.[3] In the Cartesian framework, we need not deny that upon encountering a bear in the woods we *see* it *as frightening*. What is going on in one's mind here, however, is actually a rapid sequence of sensation (seeing the bear), judgment (that this thing before me is threatening), and emotional response (feelings of fear to prepare the body for fight or flight). Descartes was committed to a framework in which the experiential unity of these mental acts is constituted by a fixed mind–body union operating according to mechanistic laws.[4] Thus, when Descartes looked out his window at the crowds of people walking below, all that he *really saw* was a bunch of coats and hats. Only through the work of judgment are these sensations transformed into perceptions of people.

This detour through early modern philosophy helps identify the explanandum at hand (empathy) and its peculiarity amidst our mental economy. Descartes recognized that the phenomenal character of many experiences implies a blend of sensation and judgment. Empathy seems related

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[1] On perceptual objectivity, see Husserl (2001, vol. 2) Investigation VI (viz. §10); on communicative action, see Husserl (2001, vol. 1) Investigation I (viz. §7); on empathy, see Husserl (1989) §56ff.

[2] For example, see Descartes' analysis of perception in the Sixth Replies (1984, vol 2, 294–296).

[3] See Descartes' (1989, §§35–36).

[4] See Descartes (1989, §§35–36). There is a lively debate regarding the reach of judgment in perceptual life in Descartes. See Hatfield (2007) for an account of why Descartes must be understood as keeping judgment and sensation distinct from one another. See Shapiro for a compelling reading of Descartes along more phenomenological lines.

159 to perception, but it also seems related to judgment.
160 Empathy is perception-like in that the body of the other is
161 given directly to us, just as other physical objects taking up
162 space. And yet, we must admit that the way others are
163 given to us is quite different than the way inanimate objects
164 appear. While the bodies of others are directly available to
165 our gaze, something about the other remains essentially
166 hidden. To use phenomenological language, the other
167 always transcends our gaze. The transcendence of the other
168 permits an in eliminable possibility of skepticism regarding
169 other minds. Thus, it also seems plausible that empathy
170 involves a kind of judgment, since many aspects of the
171 other are not obviously determined by perception.

172 Thus, on the common sense picture that emerges, the
173 perceptual correlate of empathy is the other's physical
174 body and the judgment-based or "predicative" correlate of
175 empathy is the other's mental state. Indeed, the other
176 appears *as* minded, but our common sense analysis tells us
177 that this "as" structure is a product of discreet mental acts
178 that combine in a certain sequence. We see other bodies
179 and judge of their mental nature. We do this very fast, and
180 we probably do this by habit, but the steps seem necessary
181 given our competing intuitions about the explanandum.

182 As I implied above, Husserl would appreciate Descartes'
183 zeal for parsing the building blocks of experience. The
184 phenomenological framework that Husserl instituted,
185 however, differs drastically from Descartes' mechanistic
186 one. Whereas Descartes took the results of his analysis to
187 reveal the literal building blocks of the mind, Husserl
188 insisted that such analyses were abstractions from what is
189 actually given in first-person experience. Thus, in the
190 phenomenological framework, when one is seeking to
191 understand a certain mental state or experience, one may
192 reconstruct it via an atomistic building-block structure, but
193 one must be aware that the nature of the resulting combi-
194 nation is akin to a chemical reaction and not a Lego-block
195 assemblage. The parts combine and form something wholly
196 different in kind. A mechanistic analysis such as Descartes'
197 may give us a nice interpretation of how a certain sensory/
198 bodily apparatus works, but it does not give us the phe-
199 nomenon that we set out to explain in its first-personal
200 givenness. Within the phenomenological framework, the
201 building blocks of experience constitute a *lived through*
202 unity with a unique phenomenal character, distinct from
203 the phenomenal characters of the individual dependent
204 parts.

205 In order to emphasize this lived through experiential
206 unity, Husserl appropriated the concept of apperception
207 from Wilhelm Wundt in order to characterize how the *acts*
208 of consciousness are "overlaid with various additional
209 characters" (Hua XIX/1, 566; cited in Dwyer 2007, 95) that
210 make them different in kind from the purely sensory
211 contents that constitute those acts in the stream of

212 consciousness. Every intentional act of consciousness, for
213 Husserl, includes an *apperceptive surplus* that carries more
214 significance than the concatenation of sensory parts that
215 make up the act (Husserl 2001 vol. 2, Investigation VI,
216 §14b).[5] A phenomenological theory of empathy, thus, is a
217 specific occasion for working out the nature of the apper-
218 ceptive surplus unique to those acts of consciousness that
219 present us with others *qua* minded subjects. Recall that our
220 Cartesian inspired common sense picture of empathy was
221 aware of this surplus of content, and accounted for it by
222 appealing to the faculty of judgment. On this view there is a
223 perceptual given (the other's body), followed by a judgment
224 aimed at what is not given (the other's mind). The concept
225 of apperception accounts for the surplus in a radically dif-
226 ferent way. For Husserl, "what we have here is not a surplus
227 which would be posited on top of the physical," (1989,
228 251). The mindedness of the other is not a surplus that is
229 "tacked on," in a *partes extra partes* fashion, to a purely
230 sensory awareness of the other's physical body. The phys-
231 ical and mental aspects of the other are discernible parts of
232 empathic experience *upon reflection*; however, they are not
233 included as parts in "the way one physical thing is a part of
234 another" (*ibid.*). Hence the need to heed the importance of
235 Husserl's distinction between the naturalistic and person-
236 alistic attitudes (Husserl 1989, 183ff.). We cannot seek to
237 understand that which we experience as motivated and
238 expressive with the notion of causality we employ when
239 investigating natural phenomena.

240 In contemporary terms, accounting for what Husserl
241 called the unique apperceptive surplus characteristic of
242 empathic experience is an exercise in working out the
243 *scope of proprietary phenomenal character*.[6] The phe-
244 nomenal character of an experience is what it is like to live
245 through it from the first person perspective. At any given
246 moment one's experiential state is constituted by a com-
247 plex concatenation of a myriad of phenomenal characters.
248 My current experiential state includes the visual phenom-
249 enal character constituting what it is like to see the colors
250 and shapes of the computer on the desk before me; the
251 tactile phenomenal character that constitutes the feel of the
252 keys on my hands, the pressure of the chair on my body,
253 and the feeling of my feet on the floor; the auditory phe-
254 nomenal character of the noise out in the hallway and the
255 humming of the ventilation system, and so on. Phenomenal
256 character is *proprietary* if it cannot be reduced to other
257 more basic phenomenal characters. Thus, in my current
258 experiential state, we could say, loosely, that there is

5FL01 [5] See Dwyer (2007) for an excellent account of the role of
5FL02 apperception in Husserl's philosophy and his appropriation of it from
5FL03 the apperceptive psychology of Wundt.
6FL01 [6] See Pitt 2004, 2011 and Siewert 2011 for in-depth explications of
6FL02 this notion.

something that it is like to be writing an essay on a laptop. But the phenomenal character of laptop-essay-writing is not proprietary precisely because it admits of further analysis into the visual, tactile, and auditory (and no doubt several more subtle) phenomenal characters constituting my current experience. The various sensory modalities are the most obvious examples of distinct proprietary phenomenal character.[7] What it is like to see red differs from what it is like to see blue, thus *qua* unique colors, there is a proprietary red phenomenal character and a proprietary blue phenomenal character. However, *qua* visual experience, what it is like to see red and what it is like to see blue have something in common insofar as both fall under the scope of proprietary visual phenomenal character. What it is like to taste cinnamon is simply different in kind from what it is like to see red, and this is due to the fact that there is a proprietary gustatory phenomenal character.

Does empathy, as a conscious act-type, have a proprietary phenomenal character? Or can it be reduced into a concatenation of simpler phenomenal characters? The difference between ST and the phenomenological approach is now clear: phenomenologists, following Husserl, argue for empathy as a *sui generis* intentional act-type with a proprietary phenomenal character. The problem with ST is that it runs the same risk as the Cartesian framework, albeit in a different way. When seeking to understand empathy, ST does not preserve the explanadum. The results of its analysis are shaped by prior commitments to a certain framework informed by cognitive neuroscience such that we end up with something different from the phenomenon we started with. For sure, cognitive neuroscience can provide important, interesting, and insightful leading clues for phenomenology. It may provide clues for us to refine our phenomenological descriptions. If research on recognition of conspecifics shows that very specific brain regions respond in law-like ways to, e.g., goal-directed action and faces, then we ought to seriously consider these two domains as targets of phenomenological analysis. The phenomenologist ought not presuppose that we are transparent to ourselves, and that some sort of basic introspection will easily reveal the nature of the phenomena to be explained. When wondering about the nature of empathy, we should not simply ask ourselves, "What is it like to see another person?" This question may be too general and not very useful for guiding our introspective gaze. Phenomenology is interpretive in that it must have a basic sense of what it is looking for before it begins looking. Thus, we may realize that empathy necessarily presupposes both visual and proprioceptive phenomenology, and that without these aspects we would no longer be explaining what we

sought to explain. But we may also validly conclude that the resultant phenomenology does not easily separate into a neat visual and proprioceptive category scheme. Otherwise we end up with very forced explanations like Descartes', where we are told to believe that were we to come across a bear in the woods we would make a judgment as of its danger.
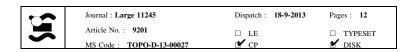
3 Two Concepts of Embodiment

Claiming that our understanding of others as minded subjects like ourselves is achieved through empathy is not an explanation of this understanding. Zahavi rightly points this out; empathy is an achievement and a theory of empathy seeks to explain how this achievement is possible (2011b, 234–235). ST unpacks the achievement of empathy by interpreting the mirror neuron system as a "resonance" mechanism. Empirical studies have shown that a network of neurons in the premotor cortex is active when one executes goal directed actions, *as well as* when one observes others performing similar actions (Gallese 2001, 35). Thus, in the presence of other bodies like one's own, and more specifically the gestures of those bodies, one's own body "resonates" with the other in a direct, measurable, physiological way. When one performs an action, say, grasping a coffee mug, a certain motor representation in the cortex is "online". When one observes coffee mug grasping, the same motor representation is tokened, but is "offline".

The problem with this account, as Zahavi points out, is that if we think of empathy in terms of the "offline" or "dim" tokening of a (neurally encoded) representation, we are left with the conclusion that we must be a little bit angry every time we recognize an angry expression, or somehow feel ourselves grabbing every time we observe grabbing behavior (2011a, 2011b). This is improbable. Therefore, the ST position seems to lead to a notion of empathy that is hard to discern from a kind of contagion. In order to avoid this path, ST needs to posit an additional act of projection or attribution of the resonating mental state to the empathic target. But now it seems that we are back in the mechanistic framework of Descartes, whereby we *must* posit a sequence of discreet mental acts in order to preserve the difference between self-awareness and other-awareness.

However, ST seems to have something right. Following Husserl, Zahavi explains how the appeal to embodiment captures something about our experiential grasp of others as minded subjects (2011b). Upon encountering others we are somehow in touch with their mental states through our direct perception of their bodies. The metaphors of "resonance" and "mirroring" may prove accurate for some forms of social cognition—consider the feelings of

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[7] Cf. Siewert (2011) pp. 243–247 on how to interpret the phrase "what it's like".

discomfort that arise when watching a big needle about to puncture someone's eyeball—but it seems that the scope of empathy is broader than this. Unless we limit our concept of empathy to the resonance response and the similarity principle underlying it, then "the plausibility of the mirror neuron hypothesis increases in reverse proportion to its alleged explanatory scope" (2011b, 247). Thus, the way empathy depends on embodiment must be different than the way resonance depends on embodiment. Zahavi and others working within the phenomenological framework have unpacked this peculiar intertwining of empathy and embodiment through the concept of *expression* (Zahavi 2007, 2011b; Overgaard 2005).

For the phenomenologist, the concept of expression provides a connection between mind and body that is stronger than causal contingency but weaker than logical entailment (Overgaard 2005, 256). The body of the other does not *necessarily* reveal what is on her mind, but the other's bodily behavior is more than an accidental co-occurrence alongside her mental state. Citing Gurwitsch, Zahavi claims that the expressive field of the other's body is the target domain of empathic awareness (2011b, 223; see also Zahavi 2007). Gurwitsch originally characterized the notion of a "field" of consciousness as the "totality of co-present data" through his field theory of consciousness, which sought to investigate "the articulation of the total field of consciousness and to bring out the patterns and forms in which co-present data are organized with respect to each other" (Gurwitsch 1964, 2; cf. Depraz 2004).

But in virtue of what do we recognize certain spatially extended objects in motion as expressive phenomena?[8] Here is where embodiment takes an explanatory role in PP: it is in virtue of one's own bodily awareness that one is able to recognize other bodies as *lived bodies* like one's own, expressive of various thoughts, intentions, emotions, etc. The problem with this account, however, is that by claiming that it is through an acquaintance with our own body that we are able to recognize other bodies as expressive, PP runs into a conceptual problem. As I shall now detail, there are two concepts of embodiment at work in this explanation; thus, the possibility of recognizing the movement of the other as expressive must be explained while maintaining the crucial distinction between these two concepts.

3.1 The Double Life of the Concept of Embodiment

Both the analytic and phenomenological traditions have analyzed what I here refer to as the "double life" of the concept of embodiment. This double life is revealed through analyses of self-consciousness or self-awareness. Wittgenstein (1958), for example, distinguished "I-as-object" from "I-as-subject" in order to contrast radically different forms of self-reference. Perry (1993) and Castaneda (1966) have stressed the essential indexicality of the pronoun "I" in order to argue that there is a sense of self that cannot be exhausted by a definite description. In the phenomenological tradition, Husserl, Stein, Merleau-Ponty and several contemporary interpreters have all emphasized the difference between reflective or "thetic" self-consciousness and pre-reflective or "non-thetic" self-consciousness.[9] In the case of reflective or thetic self-consciousness, one is conscious of oneself in a manner akin to one's consciousness of objects in the world. In this mode of awareness, one's self is the intentional object of experience. In pre-reflective or non-thetic awareness one is aware of herself as an experienc*ing* subject, and not as an object of experience.

This can be made more precise by focusing specifically on self-consciousness *qua* embodiment. Both forms of self-awareness are packed into every (non-pathological) experience of one's own body. When I look down at my arms and legs, or when I grab my left arm with my right hand, my body is the intentional object of my experience. And yet, simultaneously I experience my body as the organ of my will, as the sensing subject of the very same experiences that are visually or tactilely regarding my own body *qua* object. In such auto-affective experiences, one's body is simultaneously *what is experienced* and *that which experiences*. If I run my fingers over one of my arms, I can shift my attention back and forth between the sensation of being touched and the sensations of touching. Zahavi, following Husserl, characterizes this as the "remarkable interplay between *ipseity* and *alterity*" originating in bodily self-consciousness (2011b, 239).

Thus we may distinguish between the concept of embodiment that designates the bodily unity that we encounter as an object of experience, and the concept of embodiment that designates the bodily modality through which we experience the world. For convenience, call the former the "external body image" and the latter the "internal body image". The external body image is constituted by experiences *directed at* bodies, whether one's own or an other's. The external body image is thus primarily comprised of visual and tactile meaning—i.e., how bodies look and feel. The internal body image is constituted by complex system of proprioceptive and kinesthetic sensation that one has of one's own body, which typically is not the focus of one's attention. At any given moment of, e.g., visual experience, one's attention is directed at the

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8FL01 [8] At this point I want to make clear that "expression" should be
8FL02 understood as expressive bodily movement and not linguistic
8FL03 expression. Unpacking the relation between these two senses of
8FL04 expression is a task for another day.

9FL01 [9] See Gallagher and Zahavi (2008).

object before him while remaining only peripherally aware of his internal body image. One can always shift attention and make his current proprioceptive or kinesthetic states the object of consciousness, but we typically do not do this. We remain immersed in the world.[10]

The picture is complicated when another body is the intentional object of our awareness—i.e., when we address empathic awareness. Empathic awareness occurs in the context of our own first person embodiment—characterized above as our internal body image—*and* the object of empathic awareness is another embodied context. In the case of auto-affection, my internal body image interacts with my external body image, and a system or order of functional dependencies is established. In the case of empathy, however, my internal body image is not correlated with the external body image that is presented to me. In other words, in non-pathological first-person experience, when I see my right hand running along my left arm the visual information correlates in a regular way with the kinesthetic and proprioceptive information that constitutes my feeling of moving and controlling my right hand. In empathic experience, the visual information that presents the moving body of another person does not correlate in the same way with my internal body image since my current kinesthetic-proprioceptive state is one of, e.g., standing still and turning my head to watch the other.

Thus, the question becomes: in virtue of what do I recognize other bodies as other *lived* bodies, with their own internal body image? ST answers this question through the concept of resonance. The visual data I gain from the external body image before me "triggers" or "resonates" with my own internal body image in such a way that I "simulate" or "mirror" the internal state of the other. But as we have already seen, this is a problematic view of empathy because it seems to entail that I must somehow "dimly" or "faintly" token the experiences of others if I am to recognize them at all as foreign experiences. In short, ST seems to blur the distinction between our two concepts of embodiment by claiming that certain external body images always systematically correlate with certain internal body images. This allows ST a general concept of embodiment that explains how one's own embodiment is connected to foreign embodiment. Furthermore, it is hard to see how PP fares any better. It is not clear how shifting the discussion to "expression" solves the problem, since expression is then cashed out in terms of recognizing other lived bodies in virtue of acquaintance with one's own body.

Zahavi (2011b) provides the most detailed discussion of this issue. He is careful to point out that Husserl seems to vacillate on this issue. On the one hand, there are several places throughout Husserl's corpus where he claims that the ability to recognize the body of the other as expressive is based on a subject's primordial acquaintance with her own phenomenal body (*ibid.*, 237–238, 240). On the other hand, Husserl also insists that empathic awareness does not function through an act of projecting one's first-personal bodily acquaintance onto the expressive movement of the other on the basis of a perceived similarity (Zahavi 2011b, 238). Zahavi attempts to reconcile these competing Husserlian insights in the following manner:

> Another possibility, however, is to see the self-experience in question as a necessary contrast foil on the basis of which others can be experienced as others. To put it differently, the other might be a self in his/her own right, but the other can only appear as another for me in relation to and contrast to my own self-experience. But in this case, my self-experience doesn't constitute the model; rather it is that against which the other's difference can reveal itself (Zahavi 2011b, 240).

I am not sure, however, to what extent this subtle attempt really does overcome the difficulty. On what basis would self-experience serve as the "foil" or basis of comparison for other-experience? In virtue of what do I situate my experience of the other in relation to self-experience? Zahavi's answer seems to be Husserl's (and Merleau-Ponty's) claim that there is an "intersubjectivity of the body" (239) that is the precondition for sociality. It is the interplay between *ipseity* and *alterity* that characterizes one's awareness of her own body, and this is the precondition for recognizing other bodies as expressive. But as I explained above, the interplay between *ipseity* and *alterity* in auto-affection establishes an order of functional correlations between one's *own* internal body image and external body image. In the case of empathy, however, this order of correlations would not be operant, otherwise we are back in the realm of resonance or simulation. In other words, even though there may be a two-sided form of first-personal awareness of one's own body, this still does not explain why or how the appearance of the other's body would be automatically integrated into this system.

3.2 Constitutional Asymmetry

We need distinct concepts of embodiment in order to make sense of empathy. But rather than view this as a shortcoming or puzzle to be solved, those working within the phenomenological tradition claim that this is as it should be. After all, if the concept of embodiment through which

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[10] Cf. Legrand (2006)'s discussion of the "body image" and "body schema". Legrand cites Gallagher (1995) in distinguishing the "body image", which is a phenomenally conscious representation of one's body, from the "body schema", which is an organizing principle of the sub-personal body and is not phenomenally conscious. Here my focus is on the body image, not the body schema.

we recognize others were the same concept through which
we are aware of our own bodily states, then self-awareness
and other-awareness would run together. But clearly there
is a difference between the way I am aware of my own
body and the way I am aware of other bodies. Proponents
of PP favorably quote Wittgenstein to drive the point
home:

> "But you can't recognize pain with *certainty* just
> from externals."—The *only* way of recognizing it is
> by externals, and the uncertainty is constitutional. It
> is not a shortcoming. (Wittgenstein 1980, §657; cf.
> 1980a, §141; as quoted in Overgaard 2005).

Views that assume that the criterion for the knowability of
other minds is the form of first-person access one has to her
own mind confuses "a crucial distinction between *degree*
of certainty, evidence, etc. and *kind* of access" (Overgaard
2005, 267). Husserl makes the point succinctly:

> …if what belongs to the other's own essence were
> directly accessible, it would be merely a moment of
> my own essence, and ultimately he himself and I
> myself would be the same (Husserl 1973, 109).

The constitutional asymmetry between the internal body
image and the external body image is thus a necessary
condition for preserving what we set out to explain:
empathy understood as the direct awareness of the *other's*
experience.

3.3 Summing Up the Problem

Where does this leave us? Recall that both ST and PP rely
on the concept of embodiment to explain the direct, non-
inferential, quasi-perceptual form of access we have to the
experiential lives of others. For ST, we recognize other
bodies as unities of expressive behavior in virtue of reso-
nance with the first-person acquaintance we have of our
own expressive behavior. For PP, this explanation violates
a key principle of our notion of empathy by cancelling out
the constitutional asymmetry between first-person and
second-person forms of access. PP recognizes the role of
the concept of embodiment in explaining empathy by
positing the expressive field of the other's body as the
target of empathic awareness. But at this crucial juncture
PP seems to come up short. By relying on the interplay
between *ipseity* and *alterity* in first-personal experience, it
is still unclear how proponents of PP can account for the
external body image of the *other* to appear as expressive.
My awareness of the other's body as expressive must be
based on something other than the order of functional
correlations between my own internal and external body
images, otherwise PP begins to sound like a theory of
"triggering" or "resonance".

The question thus becomes: how does the concept of
embodiment function in a theory of our ability to recognize
foreign embodiment as a field of expressive behavior
without violating the necessary constitutional asymmetry?
Phenomenology may be correct to criticize ST's failure to
distinguish the two senses of embodiment, but it needs a
positive account of how there could be a *general* or *sin-
gular* concept of embodiment that allows us to recognize
foreign bodily movement as expressive at all. Otherwise, it
needs to account for our ability to recognize expressive
behavior without resorting to such a singular concept.
Davidson captures the difficulty clearly:

> If the mental states of others are known only through
> their behavioral and other outward manifestation,
> while this is not true of our own mental states, why
> should we think our own mental states are anything
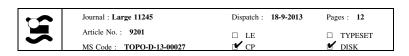> like those of others? (Davidson 2001, 207).

In other words, when it comes to recognizing the expres-
sive behavior of others, just as the concept of embodiment
lives a double life—as both the context of empathic
awareness and the target of empathic awareness—so do all
of our other psychological predicates. If the constitutional
asymmetry is to be maintained, it seems that we would end
up with two distinct sets of mental state concepts, one set
for those mental states I am acquainted with in first-person
experience, and another set for those mental states I grasp
in the expressive behavior of others. If I am motivated to
take the embodied expressivity of others *as expressive* in
virtue of my own sense of embodiment, then one must
explain how this works without violating the constitutional
asymmetry. Otherwise, one might seek an independent
account of how the bodily movement of the other appears
as expressive—an account that explains the appearance of
embodied unities of expressivity without reference to first-
person bodily awareness.

4 The Unity of Expression

Can we account for our experiential grasp of embodied
unities of expressivity without violating the necessary
constitutional asymmetry? In order to answer this question
I will explain the organizational principles that underlie the
appearance of expressive movement in the other, and then
consider whether these principles could be based on our
own sense of embodiment. Rather than assume from the
outset that we recognize other bodies as expressive on the
basis of our own sense of embodiment, we must remain
neutral and see if our account leads to such a conclusion.

Consider some examples of recognizing expressive
movement that make the isomorphism condition implied
by ST seem implausible:

Author Proof

651 – Citing Heider and Simmel (1944) and Michotte (1963),
652 Gallagher and Miyahara (2012) point out that we "tend
653 to see intentionality even in geometric figures if they
654 make particular kinds of movements" (Gallagher and
655 Miyahara 2012, 125).
656 – As Edith Stein originally pointed out, empathy seems to
657 be a scalar notion. "The type "human physical body"
658 does not define the limits of the range of my empathic
659 objects" (Stein 1989, 59). The "fulfillment" of
660 empathic experience is "very extensive" when the
661 target of the experience is of the type "human physical
662 body", yet we are also able to recognize basic levels of
663 expressivity in those whose bodies are unlike our own,
664 including animals. Thus, while the chimp's smiling
665 face appears to us as mocking, even the movement of a
666 scurrying ant can appear to us as intentional.
667 – Moving further afield, one may recognize the behavior
668 of collectives as unified expressive states. From a
669 spectator's vantage point, a school of fish may be seen
670 as a single instance of fleeing. Witnessing the behavior
671 of crowds, one may recognize approval or disapproval.

672 These examples are meant to indicate a basic form of
673 social cognition whereby we recognize embodied unities of
674 expressivity. Some may balk at designating this form of
675 experience as empathy, but I believe the designation is
676 appropriate. Recall that which we set out to explain: our basic
677 capacity to grasp the expressive behavior of others. Some
678 might argue that the ST-inspired notions of resonance and/or
679 mirroring get us the basic form of experience in question,
680 with empathy designating a more sophisticated level of
681 understanding the thoughts, motives, and intentions of oth-
682 ers. Of course, people may define terms however they like,
683 but the problem with this picture is that we have already seen
684 that the notions of resonance or mirroring do not respect the
685 constitutional asymmetry that is necessary for preserving the
686 explanandum. What we seek is something akin to resonance
687 insofar as it is *basic*—i.e., a form of experience that directly
688 grasps expressive behavior without inferential or theoretical
689 baggage. Thus, we may understand empathy as this basic
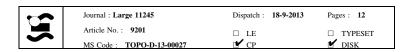690 form of experience while keeping it distinct from resonance.
691 Furthermore, understanding empathy as this basic form
692 of expression recognition is compatible with some of the
693 more traditional notions of empathy, which treat it as a
694 deeper form of understanding what it is currently like for the
695 other. On the view presented here, empathy is the form of
696 experience that affectively motivates taking the intentional
697 stance (Dennett 1987). Dennett introduced this idea in the
698 context of a eliminativist theory of intentionality. We can
699 remain neutral on that here while recognizing the intuitive
700 appeal of the idea: there are contexts in which we are
701 motivated to understand what stands before us in experience
702 as intentional behavior rather than mechanical movement. I

703 say "affectively" here to emphasize that this form of
704 experience does not involve choosing or deciding to inter-
705 pret certain movements as expressive, but rather that one is
706 affected by it in such a way to treat it as expressive. The
707 examples above were meant not only to explode the iso-
708 morphism condition, but also to show that empathy can be
709 understood as having a variety of targets. On this account,
710 empathy is the *phenomenal taking* of movement as
711 expressive. The phenomenal character indicated here can be
712 motivated through examples and pointed at through contrast
713 cases, but this still does not get us a theory of empathy. Now
714 the question becomes: what principles govern this inten-
715 tional-stance-motivating form of experience?
716 If empathy so defined targets the expressive movement
717 of the other, then we must determine the principles that
718 differentiate expressive movement from other kinds of
719 movement. Keep in mind that at this point we are no longer
720 discussing the phenomenal character of empathy. We take
721 that as datum of experience to be accounted for. Now we
722 seek the organizational principles of the target of empathic
723 experience, as opposed to what is phenomenally conscious
724 within such experience. To put it differently, the question
725 has become: what is the essence of expressive movement
726 as it appears to an observer?
727 Within the phenomenological tradition, a classic way to
728 differentiate forms of experience at the conceptual level is
729 by articulating differing intentional horizons. The inten-
730 tional horizon of an experience is the range of expectations
731 motivated by one's current perspective or view of the
732 world. Importantly, the horizon of an experience is *not* a set
733 of possibilities that one consciously entertains as he regards
734 something. As I look at the table whose legs are occluded
735 from my view, I experience it as a table rather than a flat
736 surface hovering above the floor. I do not consciously think
737 "There must be four legs to that table". Rather, horizon
738 expectations "correspond to a kind of counter-factual or
739 dispositional relationship between possible actions, per-
740 ceptions, and degrees of fulfillment or frustration…All my
741 tacit expectation amounts to is a relationship between what
742 happens and the degree to which I am surprised or not"
743 (Yoshimi 2009, 124–125).
744 Applying this structure to empathy yields the first obvious
745 distinction between empathy and other forms of experience.
746 There is a quantitative difference between the horizon of
747 possibility delineated by my expectations regarding the other
748 and that of perceptual experience of inanimate objects. In the
749 case of empathy, so many more anticipations are "live" or
750 "open" in relation to the occurrent expressive movement of
751 the target. We recognize others as embodied expressive uni-
752 ties insofar as our understanding of their gestures and move-
753 ments is situated in a very broad horizon of possibilities for the
754 continuation and variability of those movements. This horizon
755 is necessarily broader than our horizon of expectations for the

continuation and variability of the movement of inanimate objects. Simply put, the range of expectations that characterizes my awareness of a bag blowing around in the wind or a rock rolling down a hill is much narrower than it is when I see a person walking down the street or a student sitting at desk. Granted, there are certainly some very central sedimented expectations here; I expect the pedestrian to walk along, I expect the student to go about reading or writing, and so on. But I am not surprised in the least when the student suddenly reels backward to stretch her arms, nor am I surprised when the pedestrian changes direction abruptly and stops at a newsstand. I would, however, be quite shocked to see a tumbling rock suddenly cease tumbling, or a blowing bag suddenly begin jerking about at right angles. Were I to see such strange behavior, I would be instantly motivated to understand it as expressive ("Is someone remotely controlling that rock?" "Is that plastic bag alive?").

Consider Husserl's famous example of seeing a wax figure and momentarily taking it to be a person (Husserl 2001 vol. 2, Investigation V, §27). What changes when one undergoes the interpretive switch and suddenly realizes it's not alive? In the quantitative characterization of the horizon structure sketched above, what accounts for the shift is the sudden closing off of anticipations. One's expectations regarding the figure are suddenly downsized considerably, and the correlated feeling of this interpretive switch points at the phenomenal character of empathy by way of contrast. There must be more, however, to the difference between expressive and non-expressive movement. In addition to the quantitative difference in horizon expectations just discussed, there is a qualitative difference as well. It is not simply the fact that the set of if–then conditionals that constitute my horizon of expectations is much bigger for expressive phenomena than it is for non-expressive ones. This would only account for a difference in degree and not in kind. We may simply assert that the qualitative difference is a datum of experience and end our account there, but perhaps we may account for the qualitative difference through further analysis of the organizational principles of the appearance of expressive movement.

Overgaard (2005) accounts for the qualitative difference between the experience of expressive and non-expressive movement with the help of Wittgenstein and Levinas:

> When the other person expresses herself, she attends her own manifestation. An object does nothing of the kind. There is no one there to attend its manifestation; it lies passively open to view. But precisely because the other person, through expressing herself, is personally present at her own manifestation, as the dynamic source of that manifestation, the whole range of indicators of an essential inaccessibility presents itself to me (268).

The emphasis here on the other "attending" her own manifestation and being "personally present" as the "dynamic" source is provocative, albeit slightly vague. I believe that Overgaard's emphasis on the "dynamic" nature of expression is important. Expression "unfolds in a certain dynamic that does not have me as its source" (Overgaard 2005, 262). I think this point can be further clarified and understood as a continuation of the task laid out in this section, clarifying the organizational principles of the appearance of expressive movement.
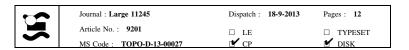
We may understand the "certain dynamic" that Overgaard speaks of with some help from Merleau-Ponty. In a striking analogy, Merleau-Ponty claims that the unity of the body is akin to the unity of the work of art (2002, 174–175). The idea is that like a work of art, the unity of the expressive body cannot be captured by a general law in the way that, e.g., geometric figures can be:

> A novel, poem, picture or musical work are individuals, that is, beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact, being radiated with no change of their temporal and spatial situation. It is in this sense that our body is comparable to a work of art. It is a nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of covariant terms (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 175).

This comparison can help us understand Overgaard's account of expressive movement as a "dynamic unfolding". Like a work of art, the parts or "moments" of expressive movement are uniquely interdependent. Slightly altering the slant of one's eyebrows, for example, may effect an entirely new facial expression even if the other parts of the face remain fixed. More important, however, is the fact that the rest of one's face would change along with the tilt of the eyebrows in the dynamic unfolding of an expression. We can recognize an even more dynamic interdependence by considering examples of expressive movement that are more noticeably temporally extended. One misses something essential if she only hears a certain temporal phase of a song or if she starts reading a poem two-thirds of the way through. Likewise, the temporal parts that constitute the dynamic unfolding of expressive movement all depend on one another in such a way that the meaning or significance of the movement would be altered if any of the parts were rearranged or removed.[11] The expressive movement of the other is experienced as a *precise whole*, to use Husserl's term. This does not preclude the possibility of experiencing

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[11] Perhaps this is why it is usually very obvious to the TV viewer when soccer or basketball players "flop" or "dive" in an attempt to have a foul called. Their movement appears intentional, whereas the movement of the body of one who is actually fouled appears as externally caused (from being pushed, tripped, etc.).

855 the expressive movement of the other as a part of a larger
856 whole. One may see the other waving her arms and
857 momentarily wonder if she is greeting someone or waving
858 for help. Nonetheless, the arm waving has its own unity
859 even if its inclusion in a more encompassing unity sheds
860 new meaning on it. One is prompted to wonder what *this*
861 expressive unity indicates or belongs to. One takes the arm
862 waving as *an* instance of something, even if one is not sure
863 what that something is. Recall that the account of empathy
864 being given here does not necessitate personal understand-
865 ing—i.e., understanding the reasons or motives behind the
866 other's actions. This basic form of empathy does not get us
867 what the other is up to. It just gets us the other.[12] Empathy
868 so defined is the experiential ground that motivates taking
869 the intentional stance.
870 To summarize, empathy is the form of experience that
871 takes expressive movement as its target. I have identified
872 two organizational principles that differentiate the
873 appearance of expressive movement from non-expressive
874 movement: the horizon of expectations associated with the
875 appearance of expressive movement is necessarily more
876 vast than that associated with non-expressive movement;
877 furthermore, the spatiotemporally extended parts of an
878 instance of the appearance of expressive movement are
879 uniquely interdependent such that an alteration of any of
880 them would result in an alteration of the meaning or sig-
881 nificance of the movement. These principles provide a way
882 to delineate a class of intentional objects of experience that
883 elicit a common response—recognizing movement as
884 expressive—rather than accounting for empathy in terms of
885 the other's embodiment and my own embodiment being
886 related in a certain way. That is, these principles identify
887 the target of empathic experience without equivocating on
888 the concept of embodiment.
889 At this point one might object by asking, "I see that you
890 have formulated some organizational principles underlying
891 the appearance of expressive movement that remain inde-
892 pendent of a concept of embodiment, but *why would the*
893 *appearance of this sort of movement be seen as expressive,*
894 *as mental, at all?* If such a class of movements is recog-
895 nized "as expressive", then it appears that they must do so
896 in virtue of *some* form of self-acquaintance, and thus this
897 fares no better than ST or PP". It may be the case that I
898 have identified some interesting ways to categorize the
899 appearance of various kinds of movement, but it seems that
900 Davidson's challenge remains forceful. Why should *this*
901 class of movement count as expressive?[13]

902 In response to this objection I would say that, in short,
903 Davidson's challenge remains so long as it is formulated as a
904 *conceptual* problem of other minds. My account of the
905 principles underlying expressive movement sought to
906 account for the uniqueness of that movement without ref-
907 erence to a concept of first-personal awareness or embodi-
908 ment. Thus, my account does not get us *mindedness* or
909 *expressiveness* at the foundational level of the class of
910 movement in question. However, I do not see this as a
911 problem. In fact, it could be a virtue of the account. It could
912 provide a way to account for intersubjectivity that avoids the
913 *conceptual* problem of other minds by focusing instead on
914 the *pragmatic* problem of other minds. Rather than seeking a
915 way to get expressivity or mindedness built into the orga-
916 nizational principles of a certain class of movement, this
917 account offers a minimal set of criteria for differentiating
918 kinds of movement in general. These kinds of movement
919 may then *come to be understood* as expressive in virtue of a
920 continuous, complex, and rich history of interaction with
921 one's environment. Throughout this developmental process,
922 one would come to understand the appearance of this class of
923 movement as affording various forms of interaction. This
924 process would be facilitated by constant dynamic feedback
925 in the form of further articulations of movement and further
926 opportunities for interaction, and so on. On such an account,
927 the problem of other minds is solved via a set of organiza-
928 tional principles that make a certain class of movement show
929 up in *some unique way* (though not "essentially" expressive)
930 combined with a developmental process whereby one con-
931 tinuously acquires a vast and complex array of ways to cope
932 with such movements.
933 Construed in this way, empathy is a matter of coming to
934 understand movements as expressive, where "expressive"
935 means "affording various forms of interaction". One
936 understands the other in virtue of having a more or less
937 robust sense of how one may interact with him, and not in
938 virtue of figuring out what is going on in his mind. I believe
939 much work remains to be done to fully flesh out these
940 ideas, however for the time being I am content to provide
941 an account that lets us differentiate the appearance of
942 expressive movement from non-expressive movement
943 without relying on a private sense of one's inner life.
944 Furthermore, one might still wonder how this account
945 differs from previous phenomenological accounts. As I
946 have said above, Zahavi's careful treatment of Husserl
947 shows that Husserl vacillated on the issue of whether
948 empathy depends on a first-personal grasp of embodiment.
949 Thus, while I am an overall sympathetic reader of Husserl,
950 I believe the account provided here helps us avoid some of
951 the confusion that can be born of reading only certain texts
952 in Husserl. *Ideas II*, for instance, Husserl begins his dis-
953 cussion of empathy in a way that could easily lead one to
954 think of him as a simulation or resonance theorist: "the

12FL01 [12] Cf. Schutz (1967) for further phenomenological analyses distin-
12FL02 guishing the basic recognition of expressive behavior from the fuller
12FL03 understanding that comes with grasping the other's motives.
13FL01 [13] I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for pushing me on this
13FL02 point.

other's touching hand, which I see, appresents to me his solipsistic view of this hand and then also everything that must belong to it in presentified co-presence" (Husserl 1989, 174). As Zahavi points out, Husserl hedges on such characterizations in other places, and insists that his account is not one of "introjection". Nonetheless, by focusing on the organizational principles of expressive movement, my account aims to describe empathy without resorting to any talk of "appresenting" the inner life of the other.

I take my account to be a continuation of Merleau-Ponty's ideas, which, however, can also be unfortunately vague at times. For instance, sometimes Merleau-Ponty seems to speak of something like resonance: "it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another, and discovers in that other body a…familiar way of dealing with the world" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 412). Yet in other places his imagery is not so much of resonance or mirroring, but of complementarity: "as the parts of my body together compromise a system, so my body and the other's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon" (ibid., 412). Gallagher and Miyahara (2012) have suggested that Merleau-Ponty's concept of "intercorporeity" involves an understanding of empathic awareness in terms similar to those I outlined above: the embodied expressive unity of the other's movement solicits interaction rather than representation (Gallagher and Miyahara 2012, 134). The additional value of the account offered here is a precise focus on the organizational principles underlying the appearance of the class of movement that we may subsequently discuss in terms of "social affordances".[14]

5 Conclusion: Empathy's Transformative Power and Broad Scope

Recall the question at hand: for PP, how do we recognize movement as expressive in virtue of our own bodily awareness while simultaneously respecting the necessary constitutional asymmetry between the internal and external body images? The previous section characterized the unique nature of how expressive movement appears to us by considering both its vast horizon structure and the unique form of interdependence amongst its spatiotemporal parts. Thus, at this point it seems that the organizational principles that differentiate the appearance of expressive movement from the appearance of non-expressive movement can remain independent of the principles that define our own sense of embodiment. Therefore, perhaps both ST and PP have been too quick to assume that empathy

depends on a "making the other like me" structure. That is, simply overlaying my own internal body image onto some visual input does not constitute empathic awareness. Perhaps what has been overlooked by both approaches is the affective and transformative power of empathy, based in a "making me like the other" structure. In other words, my understanding of my own sense of selfhood and embodiment is transformed and enriched throughout my history of encountering the embodied expressive unity of the other.[15] Among his prodigious work on empathy and self-awareness, Husserl noted that "the grasping of one's own psyche in the subjective level would remain quite rudimentary without the grasping of the alien one" (Husserl 1980, 98). I take the implications of this to be that we can *not* treat "embodiment" as a primitive term in our explanations of empathy, or of interpersonal understanding in general. A singular or general concept of embodiment only becomes possible on the basis of empathic experience—i.e., a univocal concept of embodiment is *achieved*, not innate.
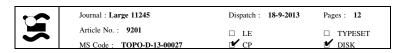
Furthermore, as has been hinted at above, the account of empathy given here does not preclude non-humans from being the objects of empathic experience. By recognizing that a univocal concept of embodiment has a genesis that includes empathic awareness, we may admit a wider variety of forms of embodied expressive unity into the class of empathic targets. Collectivities can be seen as embodying single instances of Φ-ing, where Φ stands for a psychological predicate.[16] This opens interesting possibilities for further research, namely how we should think of the resonance or mirroring phenomenon in light of these findings. For example, empathy may be a necessary background capacity for group members to recognize each other and proceed to constitute plural subjects, while something like resonance accounts for the proliferation and adoption of the collective's mental state by the individuals who comprise it.[17] Thus, this reconception of empathy as the recognition of embodied unities of expressivity may shed light not only on the transformative nature of empathy, but also allow us to extend our understanding of affiliated concepts like resonance or mirroring.[18]

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[14] Cf. Gallagher and Miyahara 2012; Carassa and Colombetti 2011; Rietveld 2012.

[15] This process, no doubt, would be most affective and transformational during one's early developmental years.

[16] See Margaret Gilbert's canonical (1989) account of *plural subjects*, which she characterizes in terms of group members being "jointly committed to Φ as a body" (433).

[17] See Mathiesen (2005), who argues that collective consciousness is achieved through the individual's simulation of the group's collective mental state.

[18] I would like to thank David Woodruff Smith, Martin Schwab, Dan Siakel, Louise Kleszyk, and two anonymous reviewers for discussion and comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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