

## We-Synthesis

### *Husserl and Henry on Empathy and Shared Life*

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#### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is threefold: (1) To show the basic contours of transcendental subjectivity in the later work of Edmund Husserl, especially the *Cartesian Meditations* and the *Crisis*, and in the strictly phenomenological work of Michel Henry, especially *Material Phenomenology*; (2) to highlight Henry's radical critique of Husserlian intersubjectivity and show that such critique, while valuable in its intention, is ultimately misguided because it neglects the important contribution Husserl's complicated vocabulary of lifeworld makes to the study of intersubjectivity; and (3) to point toward a phenomenological conception of intersubjective practice we may call the realm of we-synthesis that prioritizes the first-person perspective rooted in empathy, which enables meaningful engagement with the second-person perspective. Working in conjunction with Husserl and Henry on the phenomenological conception of shared life enables the recuperation of the fragile line between subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

#### Keywords

lifeworld – empathy – auto-affection – intersubjectivity – narrative

## 1 Introduction

Recent phenomenological literature, advanced in the wake of Husserl, concentrates increasingly on the intricate contours of the intersubjective structures of consciousness. From Dermot Moran, Evan Thompson, Dan Zahavi and Shaun Gallagher to Renaud Barbaras and Claude Romano, several contemporary phenomenologists have outlined the dynamics of intersubjectivity in various, but related, vocabularies: the “we narrative,” the “intercorporeal” space, the “first-person plural,” “open intersubjectivity,” the “We-World,” the “Co-constituted We,” or the possibility of a “collective/shared intentionality.”<sup>1</sup> The fundamental problem many investigations into intersubjectivity try to resolve is how to integrate the first-person singular experience of consciousness with the second-person account of intersubjectivity. The first-person account suggests that the principle or centre of the self lies in the structure of self-feeling, the experience of oneself in an ongoing subjective feedback loop known as unthematic self-reflexivity. The second-person account claims the self is constituted most basically by relationships, by being socialized into a publicly shared space of normativity.

If phenomenological analysis of consciousness involves the connection between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, how then do the first-person and second-person paradigms of selfhood interrelate in a manner in which both are genuinely preserved as distinct aspects of personal identity? How is it that I persist as “me” by primitively experiencing myself even while I also acknowledge that I am thrown into, and thereby shaped by, culturally normative commitments and narratives?

<sup>1</sup> I list them in the order given above. See “Deborah Tollefsen and Shaun Gallagher, “We-Narratives and the Stability and Depth of Shared Agency,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, vol. 47, 2 (2017): 95–110; Shaun Gallagher, “Intercorporeity: Enaction, Simulation, and the Science of Social Cognition,” in *Phenomenology and Science: Confrontations and Convergences*, eds. Jack Reynolds and Richard Sebold (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 161–80; David Carr, “Cogitamus Ergo Sumus: The Intentionality of the First-Person Plural,” in *Interpreting Husserl* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), pp. 281–98; for an analysis of open intersubjectivity, see Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 385ff; Dermot Moran, “*Ineinandersein* and *L’interlacs*: The Constitution of the Social World or ‘We-World’ (*Wir-Welt*) in Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” in *Phenomenology of Sociality: Discovering the ‘We’* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 107–26; Dan Zahavi, “Self and Other: From Pure Ego to Co-constituted We,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 48, 2 (2015): 143–60. On collective intentionality, see the excellent *The Routledge Handbook of Collective Intentionality*, eds. Marija Jankovic and Kirk Ludwig (New York: Routledge, 2016).

One way forward is to demonstrate the intrinsic value of the first-person singular that does justice to the second-person accounts of becoming, evolution and narrativity, whereby I come into regular contact with normative endorsements and a manifold of social practices (i.e., my daily confrontation with others). Two imaginative phenomenological investigations of this paradigm intersubjectivity appear in the work of Edmund Husserl and Michel Henry. The comparative fruit from reading these two influential transcendental approaches to intersubjectivity has yet to be harvested. More specifically, the intention of rereading Husserl's "lifeworld" after Henry's "life-community" runs the risk of making sharp distinctions between Husserl and Henry where none are evident. A distinction in transcendental approaches (Husserl's and Henry's) is made at some peril, for the corrective Henry develops requires philosophical clarification, and mutual correction from Husserlian phenomenology.

While both Husserl and Henry endorse and champion the first-person perspective, it is Henry who develops the accusative (the "me" as the basic ground of experience) as one way to decline, without eliminating, the first-person singular according to the logic of the second-person perspective. A phenomenological account of intersubjectivity that subscribes to and ratifies the first-person singular announces what makes possible a shared world: the universal structure of the first-person account of consciousness, which depends on a non-intentional or unthematic structure ascertainable in all subjects, a structure that underlies and makes possible intersubjectivity. Henry's account of "ipseity" and Husserl's paradigm of "monadology" both function as the subjective foundation on which the perception of the other as a co-present subject is built—even if this co-presence does not mark off once and for all the boundaries the life we share in a world we both inhabit. But why compare their differing accounts of intersubjectivity?

The comparative task of making phenomenological distinctions between Husserl and Henry enable the important intentional complex of the lifeworld in Husserl's work to come into greater focus, in which the first-person singular, immersed in a lifeworld, achieves the rank of primacy in the analysis of intersubjectivity. This shall make possible the thesis that the self or "monad" is the ground upon whom an account of the second-person relies, and not vice versa.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a broad defence of the first-person singular (in light of recent criticisms, especially Daniel Dennett's hetero-phenomenology), I have found John Drummond's article helpful, "Personal Perspectives," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 45 (2007): 28–44.

An objection to my comparative proposal must be raised at this juncture. The primacy of the first-person singular does not necessitate the counterclaim that the second-person account is only an epiphenomenal experience enjoyed by the self's imagination, as if the other is derivative and that second-person ascriptions reflect mere inferential gestures. As Dan Zahavi rightly observes, "Far from being competing alternatives, subjectivity and intersubjectivity are in fact complementing and mutually interdependent notions. Thus, the introduction of intersubjectivity should by no means be taken to imply a refutation of the philosophy of subjectivity."<sup>3</sup> Neither does emphasis on the first-person subject, I wish to add, license a refutation of intersubjectivity.

I would argue, in this context of mutual interdependence, that the inner alliance or link between first-person character of consciousness and the second-person encounter with an alter ego is found in the intentional activity of empathy. The empathic intentional stance does not emerge from a pure, ahistorical ego but rather belongs as a constituent of the subjective ground of the lifeworld, the space in which a genuine We-synthesis may obtain. The interpersonal dynamic and the phenomenological givenness of empathy remains a product of the lifeworld: empathy is embodied, attentive, calculated, and mimetically directed to the other precisely as "other," but who nevertheless shares my cultural world. To outline this, I draw out further points of divergence and convergence in Husserl and Henry, and I then attend to Husserl's phenomenology of the alter ego; following from this, I will be in a position to bring to light Henry's corrective, in the form of the life-community. I conclude with a critical analysis of Henry and a proposal of the narrative empathy informed by the lifeworld.

## 2      **Monadological Intersubjectivity: Husserl and Henry**

Edmund Husserl concludes his influential study of "Monadological Intersubjectivity" in the Fifth lecture of the *Cartesian Meditations* with a quote drawn from Augustine: "The path leading to a knowledge absolutely grounded in the highest sense, or a philosophical knowledge, is necessarily the path of universal self-knowledge first of all monadic, and then intermonadic... The Delphic motto, 'Know thyself' has gained a new signification. Positive science is a science lost in the world. I must lose the world by epoché, in order

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<sup>3</sup> Dan Zahavi, "Beyond Empathy: Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8 (2001): 151–67, reference on 166.

to regain it by a universal self-examination. ‘Noli foras ire,’ says Augustine, ‘in te redit in interiore homine habitat veritas’ [Do not wish to go out; go back into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man].<sup>4</sup> Counterintuitive though it may be, Husserl here culminates his analysis of intersubjectivity with the following claim: the phenomenologist shall discover the truth of intersubjectivity only by way of analysis of a more primitive phenomenon, that of subjectivity.

The descent “inward,” a movement whereby I reveal myself to myself, is a disclosure of the inner architecture of the ego, its “monadic” truth. And yet, the inner world of the ego is not just the province of myself alone, but precisely of the opposite: of myself together with the other—the “Kingdom of immanence” [*The Reich der Immanenz*].<sup>5</sup> Such a kingdom does not consist in an aloof monarch who rests on his throne isolated from the broader citizenry, but rather, as we shall see, an empathic king who cares for all practices and institutions that constitute the social makeup of the kingdom, from the family, to the schools and village square, to the political arrangement and economy.

The interior space or “kingdom of immanence” forms the central motif of transcendental phenomenology as both Husserl and Henry conceive of that mode of inquiry. It should be no surprise, then, that Husserl admits that his work utilizes methodological solipsism<sup>6</sup> and that Henry too acknowledges his work is vulnerable to the charge of solipsism.<sup>7</sup> Does each articulation of the immanent, formulated either in the idiom Husserl or Henry, entail solipsistic assumptions? If not, how may their similar transcendental paths tread on the open vistas of alterity or intersubjectivity? How may the subject, without evacuating subjectivity, enjoy an experience of the other ego? How do, in other words, interiority and exteriority, or the ego and non-ego, interrelate?

In light of this vexing phenomenological problem, the concern is not so much whether we enjoy a relationship with an object outside of consciousness but whether we are capable of perceiving another person, as a genuine other who transcends the grasp consciousness. The other ego, if it is to be

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine, “On True Religion.” In *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans., J. H. S. Burleigh, 225–283. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 262. Husserl concluded his *Cartesian Meditations* with this exact quote. See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns. (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 157

<sup>5</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt: Auslegungen der Vorgegeben Welt und ihrer Konstitution*, ed. Rochus Sowa, Geseammelte Werke, band XXXIX (Dordrecht: Springer 2008), 19ff.

<sup>6</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation*, §42.

<sup>7</sup> Henry, Michel, *Material Phenomenology*. trans. Scott Davidson. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 4.

given according to its own manner as an alter ego who is self-subsisting like me, must be more than the residue of the private transcendental ego, more than a fabrication of the meaning-endowing intentional life, and finally, more than a corresponding modification of the ego's powers of inference. If the other ego eludes the grasp of intentional constitution because the other ego gives its "own essential content" and its "own essential features," it follows that the other ego cannot be a product constituted by and assimilated to my unique intentional performance, what Husserl calls the *Original-sphäre*<sup>8</sup>. If this is the case, how is the other *also and at the same time* a phenomenon governed by the rules of transcendental phenomenology?

Husserl and Henry, to address this problem, suggest that apriori, transcendental conditions for the possibility of experiencing the other must be firmly in place. Certain open-ended norms and flexible structures of experience, in other words, must be secured, which permit me genuinely to experience the other as other. For Husserl, such norms consist of the vast cultural structure he named the lifeworld [*Lebenswelt*], a set of cultural norms that condition the givenness of the alter ego (as well as constitute a principal ingredient in the configuration of the whole phenomenological landscape of experience as such). The sometimes elusive vocabulary of lifeworld appears in *Experience and Judgment* (1921),<sup>9</sup> in important phases of the fifth meditation in *Cartesian Meditations* (1929),<sup>10</sup> and it receives a sustained and rather detailed, if cryptic, treatment in the late *Crisis of European Sciences* (1938), which I shall consider briefly below in section IV.

Michel Henry attempts to clarify, exploit and harness thereby fundamental phenomenological innovations in Husserl. The manifestation of the lifeworld, for Henry, no doubt qualifies as an indispensable phenomenological ground for both the formulation of the first-person singular structure of self-reference and the experience of the other i.e., the life-community discoverable only within my life. Henry develops, in this context, the vocabulary of life-community specifically as a phenomenological appraisal, and ultimately, a corrective to the conception of lifeworld in Husserl.

Do these two transcendental projects account genuinely for the other? While Henry seeks to clarify what is ambiguous in Husserl's lifeworld, it is

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<sup>8</sup> Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 243, see fn. 1 on bottom of page for German.

<sup>9</sup> Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (London: Routledge, 1973), 41–50, 65, 163.

<sup>10</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 19, 133, 134, 135, 138.

nonetheless the ambiguity that remains Husserl's strength. I draw out the strengths of both projects, if only to invoke the subtle richness of Husserl's lifeworld as the ground on which a "We-synthesis" can consummate an experience between two or more subjects.

### 3 The Fifth *Cartesian Meditation*

In §49 of the fifth of *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl wrote: "If, however, the intersubjective sphere of ownness and Objective world are to be distinguished here, nevertheless, when I as ego take my stand on the basis of the intersubjectivity constituted from sources within my own essence, I can recognize that the Objective world does not, in the proper sense, *transcend* that sphere or that sphere's own intersubjective essence, but rather inheres in it as an 'immanent' transcendency."<sup>11</sup> This quote highlights a central thesis of Husserlian intersubjectivity: that we experience the other (as well as the objective world) in a mode of "immanent transcendency." Husserl suggests that we experience the alter ego (i.e., the other person), "within the experiencing intentionality of my ego."<sup>12</sup> The alter ego becomes reduced to and fitted within the ego's sphere of ownness [*Eigenheitsphäre*].<sup>13</sup> Yet, Husserl never claimed that the other person, as a living ego, can become quite literally embraced within my immanent sphere of consciousness; rather the other is brought within my frame of reference by the intentional performance of empathy, also named "mirroring"<sup>14</sup> of the other.

It would be absurd, naturally, to think that two egos can coincide and exist within the same physical or emotional space. Both egos and their contents, "excludes the other; they cannot both exist in my sphere of ownness at the

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<sup>11</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation*, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> In Bernet, Kern and Marbach's introduction to Husserl, they observe that it remains unclear what Husserl precisely means by "sphere of ownness." At the very least, they suggest, it denotes a primordial sphere of self-experience in which no alien consciousness is given. See Rudolf Bernet, Iso Kern and Eduard Marbach, *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 156.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Husserl made mirroring central to his phenomenology of intersubjectivity: "In myself I experience and know the Other; in me he becomes constituted—appresentatively mirrored, not constituted as the original." Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 149.

same time.”<sup>15</sup> How, then, do I experience the other if there always remains an unbridgeable distance between us?

The interpersonal dynamic of empathy demonstrates the unique complications involved in an interchange between egos: one ego’s intentional focus on the feeling and experience of another ego whose outcome is the preservation of the otherness of the other ego. The question configured in a phenomenological manner is as follows: how can I experience, that is, genuinely experience, the alter ego within my immanent sphere of ownness? Because empathy is not a literal participation in the other ego (or the alter ego in me), the answer lies in the practice and logic of what Husserl calls “analogy.” In empathic responses, one ego imagines himself as the other person, “as if” my “here” were brought over and substituted for the other person’s “there.” As Zahavi notes, the other is given, and genuinely experienced, as other: “To claim that I would only have a real experience of the other if I experienced her feelings or thoughts in the same way as she herself does, is nonsensical, and fails to respect what is distinct and unique about the givenness of the other.”<sup>16</sup> Even though I experience the other within my primordial sphere of ownness, in reality I experience the image or replication of the alter ego, not the alter ego itself. And yet, this is a genuine experience of the alter ego after all. The reason is that the alter ego is characterized by a certain dimension of transcendence, because the alter ego also assumes the status of a first-person singular with his or her own irreplaceable experiential perspective.

Husserl writes that the other ego’s body and, “its manner of appearance actually belonging at the time to my animate organism (in the mode Here); rather it awakens reproductively *another*, an immediately similar appearance included in the system constitutive of my animate organism as a body in space. It brings to mind the way my body would look ‘if I were there.’”<sup>17</sup> Thus, Husserl describes empathy (or empathic pairing) as an embodied practice, an achievement structured by the phenomenology of immanence that simultaneously opens out onto, or is interlaced with (*Verflechtung*) transcendence.<sup>18</sup> Empathy is a concrete reimagining or analogizing of the other’s situation as if it were wholly mine, even while the limits of the first-person per-

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<sup>15</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 119.

<sup>16</sup> Zahavi, “Self and Other: From Pure Ego to Co-constituted We,” 151.

<sup>17</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> Didier Franck’s volume draws out the phenomenological detail of the interlacing of flesh and body or *Leib* and *Körper* in Husserl’s body of work. See his excellent *Flesh and Body: On the Phenomenology of Husserl*, trans. Joseph Rivera and Scott Davidson (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).



spective prohibit the shared experience from achieving perfect overlap or reciprocity between ego and alter ego.

A phenomenology of alterity, therefore, requires the mediation of two distinct, self-enclosed psychic bodies (i.e., a monad) that relate, if they relate at all, only properly through empathy and analogy. And yet, the “inter-monadology” that Husserl develops in *Cartesian Meditations* awaits a fuller phenomenological treatment of the social and cultural consequences of apperception. No longer do I experience an isolated alter ego but instead another life whose social norms affect the way in which I exercise empathy, pairing and analogy. I inhabit lifeworld [*Lebenswelt*] shared with the other. Husserlian intersubjectivity thus requires that the ego apprehend the alter ego on the basis of a shared, but implicit, cultural index. To that topic we now turn.

#### 4 The Lifeworld

Husserl’s notion of the lifeworld as presented in the *Crisis* is complex and multivalent; others have already attempted the arduous task of working out systematically the standard or formal grammars of the lifeworld.<sup>19</sup> For example, Anthony Steinbock’s taxonomy lists six layers or tiers of the life-world, four of them preliminary and two of them transcendental. The sometimes confusing, multi-faceted structure of the lifeworld leads David Carr to write that, “There is some question whether all these descriptions [of the lifeworld] operate on the same level and whether they are all compatible with one another.”<sup>20</sup> Given the underlying hermeneutical problem of the lifeworld in Husserl scholarship, I intend only to offer some brief reflections on how the lifeworld can, and must, highlight the basic ground for empathic intersubjectivity, and how Henry elaborates an innovative subcategory in its wake, the life-community.

The basic meaning of the lifeworld is that it designates that universe in which the ego is immediately immersed, without thematic or conscious apperception of the cognitive, social and cultural structures which give rise to

<sup>19</sup> For a readable and intelligent introduction to the *Crisis*, see Dermot Moran’s *Husserl’s Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); though more constructive in tone, see also the excellent volume, Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Lifeworld, vol. I*, trans. Richard M. Zaner and J. Tristram Englehardt Jr. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972).

<sup>20</sup> David Carr, “Introduction.” In Husserl, *Crisis*, xl.

that universe. As a subjective-relative world, the manner of givenness of the lifeworld lies on the axis of everyday experience, a site Husserl describes as the “actually experienceable world” where intuitive presence is not only accessible but unthematically acquired.<sup>21</sup> The lifeworld is thus the pre-theoretical, unthematic mode of living that we experience together, in which we share discursive commitments and normative structures that we may reflect on anytime, and “make thematic.” How do we make the lifeworld thematic?

When the ego attempts to thematize the lifeworld, its subjective depth remains elusive enough that its horizon can never be fully brought into view. At least an aspect of it remains, at every juncture, latent or unthematic:<sup>22</sup> “Constantly functioning in wakeful life, we also function together, in the manifold ways of considering, together, objects pregiven to us in common, thinking together, valuing, planning, acting together. Here we find also that particular thematic alteration in which the we-subjectivity, somehow constantly functioning, becomes a thematic object, whereby the acts through which it functions also become thematic, though always with a residuum which remains unthematic—remains, so to speak, anonymous—namely, the reflections which are functioning in connection with this theme.”<sup>23</sup> How, qualified in this way, do I make the lifeworld thematic? The first step is to recognize that the automatic disposition the ego assumes is “infatuation” with the surrounding world, lived as a subjective experience of valuing, constituting and validating the surrounding world.<sup>24</sup> The lifeworld is the hidden, taken-for-granted subjective ground of those acts of valuing, constituting and validating; it is the presupposed ground of the subjective constitution of objects. It is only through my empathic encounter with the alter ego that I recognize I have a particular lifeworld which, most likely, differs in degrees from the alter ego’s lifeworld. More on this in the final section below.

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<sup>21</sup> Husserl’s contrast between the theoretical world of the sciences and the lifeworld is stark: “The contrast between the subjectivity of the life-world and the ‘objective,’ the ‘true’ world, lies in the fact that the latter is a theoretical-logical substruction, the substruction of something that is in principle not perceivable, in principle not experienceable in its own proper being, whereas the subjective, in the life-world, is distinguished in all respects precisely by its being actually experienceable.” Husserl, *Crisis*, 127.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the concept of latency and the latent nature of the lifeworld in Husserl, see Robert Walton, “On the Manifold Senses of Horizonedness: The Theories of E. Husserl and A. Gurwitsch,” *Husserl Studies* 19 (2003): 1–24.

<sup>23</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

Husserl, then, suggests that lifeworld accurately captures the ego's instinctive and unreflective way of coping, which functions as a pre-theoretical apprehension and enjoyment of (or infatuation with) the world. Husserl wanted "to maintain the difference between the search after logical truths and, say, mountain climbing."<sup>25</sup> Husserl identified and sought to overcome, no doubt, the "crisis" of late modern scientific culture that failed to make this difference explicit. Science neglected the subjective dynamics of pre-theoretical experience. Modern science, as a latecomer in civilization, has redefined both nature and the human being in terms of mathematics and physics, a logic that may wield the pretence of neutrality but is a discourse like any other discourse in that it is informed by prejudice.

But science is insidious in that it is not self-aware in this respect. What incites Husserl's animosity toward science, however, is a particular species of metaphysical scientism; as early as the *Logical Investigations* he calls it psychologism or objectivism.<sup>26</sup> Decades later, in the *Crisis of European Sciences*, he draws out the large scale cultural implications of objectivism, tracing it back its genealogy to the early-modern pioneer of science, Galileo and to his mathematization of nature in particular. The crisis of scientific modernity lies in the presumption on which science operates: that its discoveries of mathematical laws reflect the world as we actually experience it. The reality, Husserl argues, is that science functions like a "garb of ideas" thrown over the world of concrete experience. Hence the garb of ideas we take for the true reflection of the surrounding world deludes us into embracing science as if it were the only mode of discovery, as if the true nature of experience is once and for all revealed by empirical science and the pursuit of theory.<sup>27</sup>

About the relation of the lifeworld to the scientific, theoretical world, Husserl wrote: "There has never been a scientific inquiry into the way in which the life-world constantly functions as a subsoil, into how its manifold pre-logical validities act as grounds for the logical ones, for theoretical truths." This implicit, even hidden subsoil of the lifeworld is what makes possible every human endeavour, social practice and cultural achievement, from music and theatre to science and technology.

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<sup>25</sup> Anthony Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology After Husserl* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 92.

<sup>26</sup> While it frames Husserl's early work, the issue of psychologism is explicitly addressed in *Logical Investigations*, vol. I, trans. J.N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2001), §§17–48.

<sup>27</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, p. 170. He also compares science to a "garb of ideas" in *Experience and Judgment*, p. 45.

The cultural and social texture of the lifeworld is the horizon upon which all objective and intersubjective manifestation takes place. I am not an isolated ego. Meaning and reference are determined not by private sentences or minds, but by a community of people. My constitution of objects arises not as a personal matter for the speaker or thinker to decide, but is a matter for the community to decide. This may justify the sweeping statements Husserl sometimes makes in this regard: "Universal intersubjectivity, into which all objectivity, everything that exists at all, is resolved, can obviously be nothing other than mankind; and the latter is undeniably a component part of the world."<sup>28</sup> The lifeworld is not just my subjective world but implies a community of others, precisely because the other egos form a component part of the lifeworld. But the lifeworld, as a structure or group of people, does not have a mind of its own, as if an elision of individual minds join together to generate a universal super-mind, which floats free of those individual minds.<sup>29</sup> The lifeworld rather remains an unthematic resource, one automatically constitutive of myself as this particular ego. We can escape neither subjectivity nor intersubjectivity—my ego and other egos are pre-given in a complex manner of givenness, one may say a double structure, at once unthematic and thematic.

Thus, within one universal intersubjective community, every ego's intentional accomplishments are valid and integral to the structure, even as they are conditioned by every other ego's intentional performance. In this way, Husserl could argue for a social form of intentionality in which all egos are co-subjects for each other. Every ego, in conjunction with the other ego, co-constitute any given lifeworld. A "We-synthesis" [Wir-Synthese] characterizes the complex layers of the concrete, social, common lifeworld.<sup>30</sup>

As the transcendental condition for all possible experience, the lifeworld signifies a fundamentally pre-given intersubjective horizon from which the individual never may escape. As Husserl wrote, "The intersubjectively identical life-world-for-all serves as an intentional 'index' for the multiplicities of appearance, combined in intersubjective synthesis, through which all ego-subjects (and not merely each through the multiplicities which are peculiar to him individually) are oriented toward a common world and the things in

<sup>28</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, p. 179.

<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Lackey makes this point with clarity from an alternative philosophical perspective (collective epistemology). She argues that that social cognition assumes and advances from individual minds who possess particular cognitive abilities, which does not demand we think there is a supermind that overlays particular minds. See Lackey, "Socially Extended Knowledge," *Philosophical Issues* vol. 24 (2014): 283–98.

<sup>30</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 172.

it, the field of all the activities united in the general ‘we,’ etc.” Three features of Husserl’s lifeworld call for commentary, which serve the purpose of background material for the analysis of Henry’s position below. Henry, to whom we turn, tackles the lifeworld’s threefold problem as he understands it.

## 5 Henry: Pathos-With

Michel Henry, a true disciple of Husserlian monadic interiority, remains the chief exponent of the interior givenness of selfhood, which he nominates with a new term, the field of “auto-affection.” Reframed in light of the doctrine of radical interiority, phenomenology in Henry’s work involves a series of textured descriptions of the internal formation and structure of feeling, the non-thematic self-awareness by which I know and feel myself without consciously apprehending myself as an explicit object of attention. This domain of internal, first-personal self-awareness, born of pathos, emerges in and through a sphere defined strictly by feeling, formulated in order to clarify a feeling so close to who I am that it consists of nothing less than self-feeling or self-affection, a site of pure immanence in which I discover myself only as a self whose experiences nothing other than itself.

This self-reference, or form of affection, moreover, is itself a nontemporal moment of the concrete self. In this scenario, I am prereflectively or non-intentionally aware not only of each experience as mine but of each experience as taking up its determinate position within the immanent domain of the self-affection of mineness. I am overcome with myself, as it were, in that self-impression follows on from self-impression, until I undergo the self-embrace of pure immanence, the “primordial suffering of life driven back to itself, crushed up against itself, and overwhelmed by its own weight. It is not an affection at a distance, isolated, and separate, something one can escape, for example, by moving away or by turning the regard away.”<sup>31</sup> I am prereflectively aware, in other words, of a single life in multiple stages of self-suffering without, however, thematizing this self-impressionality as an object in its own right. If I am aware of myself as a concrete life, as a self who is the subject of experience and not (ever) an object of reflection, how do I experience the other? How does this kingdom of immanence conceived by Henry open its borders to that which is other?

Henry discovers the way forward only in conversation with Husserl. He argues that Husserlian egology, in spite of its emphasis on subjectivity, pro-

<sup>31</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 130.

motes a radical distance or abyss between subjective monads. Those acquainted with Henry's philosophical genealogy know that it accuses the whole of the phenomenological tradition of ontological monism will readily associate Husserlian apperception with ontological monism. For Henry, intersubjectivity is monistic in that it presupposes one foundation of manifestation, a singular, and hence "monistic" structure of phenomenality—the outside of the self (*hors de soi*) of the exterior or the ek-static horizon of the world and nothing else.<sup>32</sup> Simply put, Husserl fails to uncover the site of radical and pure immanence and the real possibility of immediately experiencing the other.

How may I experience the other immediately, in Henry's phenomenological system? I shall explore this in more detail subsequently, but for now, it may be helpful to cue the reader to certain limit examples that Henry invokes as exemplars of intersubjectivity: the infant and the mother's bond, which does not require conscious reflection, language or representational capacities exercised by the cognitive-intentional structures of the mind. The mother and the infant communicate, but they do so only on the level of affection, a mode of exchange whose occurrence unfolds in a manner entirely independent of reflective conscious apprehension of culture, language, social conventions, etc. Henry also mentions the intensity, indeed mystery, of the inarticulable bond between lover and the beloved. An embrace here understood may occur only within the confines of affection, and therefore, independent of the knowledge of a particular personality trait or cognitive process of the beloved. Husserl does not account for these kinds of elusive, but genuine and powerful, kinds of intersubjective solidarity.<sup>33</sup>

The second problem bedeviling Husserl's phenomenology of intentionality, for Henry, is that it cannot in principle advance a strategy that enables the phenomenologist to bridge the gap between two monads, even if he should desire to do so. How can two Husserlian monads really have intersubjective contact with each other if they preserve structurally their absolute integrity as distinct monads? How can the monadic ego concretely experience the alter monadic ego on the basis of a monadology? If we each require a movement outside of ourselves into the abyss in order to meet, how do we not fall into the abyss? And how do we not thereby fail to encounter one another? According to Henry, Husserlian intersubjectivity is a phenomenology of the abyss—the abyss, or the yawning interval between the two monads, alone

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<sup>32</sup> For a careful description of ek-stasis in Henry, see his *Incarnation* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), part I.

<sup>33</sup> On the mother-infant dynamic, see Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 115.

remains the site where the community of monads interact. Simply put, he thinks that an emphasis on the abyss in Husserl fosters philosophical irrealism.<sup>34</sup>

For Henry, irrealty does not mean “fantasy,” “imaginary” or “non-real;” rather it calls to mind a striking ontological statement: irrealty communicates a sense of self-alienation. When I am alienated from myself, I am thrown outside of myself into the realm of the visible world, the field of exterior disclosure. The phenomenologist can only properly unearth the subjective core of the ego by means of the logic of auto-affection. As soon as a monad is forced outside of itself (ejected into the world or the flow of intentional life) it cannot experience itself. As a result, it becomes a non-self. Without pure immanence the self no longer inhabits its real, essential subjectivity.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, when both monads lurch into the sphere of the world, into the abyss, the perceptual act of apperception is nothing more than the idealism in the sense of having an “idea” or “noematic correlate” of the alter ego, which cannot in principle take up residence in the ego’s *Originalsphäre*. The ego mediates or mirrors the alter ego by force of a noematic idea of the alter ego. Henry, whose theory of the other serves the purpose of a corrective to Husserl on this score, sets into operation what he thinks is a more concrete experience of the other that allows for “real” (and not irreal) communion and interpenetration of egos, what he calls the life-community (which I discuss below).

The final, and perhaps most imposing, critique of Husserl is Henry’s insistence that Husserl never accounted for the affective state of affairs we obviously experience when confronted with the other. How can the other wound or thrill or even love/hate me if intersubjectivity is reduced to a cognitive-perceptual act alone? Henry writes bluntly about Husserl’s fifth *Cartesian Meditation*: “In what is its ownmost (and, I would add, its most horrendous), it is a phenomenology of perception applied to the other.”<sup>36</sup> Even though Husserl discussed the pivotal role of empathy in the fifth *Cartesian Meditation*, Henry thinks it is merely a cog in the larger perceptual wheel of objectivating cognition. Thus, Henry would argue that Husserlian intersubjectivity fails to distinguish between how we experience an object and how we experience another human being. The body of the other becomes *in nuce* a simple

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<sup>34</sup> These three points are presented in somewhat compressed fashion in Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 107–14.

<sup>35</sup> For more on Henry’s discussion of the nature of reality vs. irrealty, see *Material Phenomenology*, 116 and *Essence of Manifestation*, trans., Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Hijhoff, 1973), §41, 57 and 67.

<sup>36</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 114.

empirical thing, a body-object that resembles, perceptually speaking, the ontology of a stone or a tree.

Before I develop important lineaments of Henry's proposal of transcendental intersubjectivity, we here observe that Henry reads Husserl in isolation from some of his most important works, especially the *Crisis*. As we shall see, in that work Husserl's concept of the lifeworld opens up phenomenological possibilities of intersubjectivity not so far removed from Henry's theory. Also, by determining the experience of the ego's surroundings as a lifeworld, Husserl also began to acknowledge the need, if implicitly, to distinguish between objects and human beings. The ego's world is not simply a world-horizon or an openness to others, it is specifically a *lifeworld*, or to use Henry's vocabulary, a life-community.

## 6 The Life-community [*Communauté de vivants*]

Henry's distinctive contribution to the problem of intersubjectivity begins with the following question: "What, then, could one say about an experience of the other in which perception would play no role at all?"<sup>37</sup> Henry prizes affection (in contradistinction to perception) as the all-embracing domain of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Where, then, does the community of life gather? Where do we find its members sharing life together?

The disclosure of affection, in Henry's mind, transcends the simplistic or naïve interpretation of an affection as a "gut feeling" or emotional impression or the exorbitant sensation of ecstasy. Affection contrasts with particular episodes or manifestations of an emotional state of mind. It instead reflects the aboriginal and undetectable structure that lay behind the scenes, that is, the transcendental form of subjectivity: "Affectivity as the Universal Form of All Possible Experience in General and as Form of this Form. The Pure Concept of Affectivity."<sup>38</sup> There is, therefore, an unambiguous hierarchy in Henry's phenomenology of Life: "affection" elucidates a primitive form, inasmuch as it dictates the transcendental condition for the possibility of both non-intentional self-experience and intersubjective experience. Affection, however it may be conceived as a transcendental form, does not deprive the ego of the experience of the alter ego. But neither does it permit the ego to encounter the alter ego in the horizon of the world or within the parameters of the structures of consciousness that perception utilizes. The performative

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Henry, *Essence of Manifestation*, §57.



domain of perception, exercised in the world, remain posterior to and thus subordinate to affection, which is an antecedent form of experience that is self-experience.

Affection is superior to perception because, for Henry, auto-affection is by necessity always pure, while perception remains fundamentally impure. Pure in what way? In affection, if it is to remain within the sphere of auto-affection, it may admit of no exteriority, no mode of givenness that is transcendent to it. Life is pure and cannot appear anywhere but in itself, which is the site of radical, pure immanence. Life is tantamount to the color of pure white; this means that even if the color white is slightly tinted with another color (say red) and even continues to look white to the naked eye, it does not count as white. It is rather a very light shade of red. Thus illustrated, like the phenomenon of life, the color of white never may admit of any other shade of non-white color. Life is pure and cannot appear outside of itself, and must only manifest itself within itself by giving itself to itself. It crushes against itself in a constant interior reciprocity between self and itself. In so doing it produces the affective pathos of the self-suffering of being a self. As soon as I proceed toward the sphere of transcendence I step outside of Life altogether.

Henry also claims, in equally radical fashion, that only reality and truth can be found in the rich experiential purity of auto-affection. There is no truth "*hors de Soi*." When the ego experiences itself within the pure embrace of Life (i.e. pure self-presence), then it can embrace itself, a style of subjectivity he names ipseity.<sup>39</sup> The human being is not, Henry would argue, an object or mechanistic, empirical thing. The ego suffers, loves, hates and enjoys itself in an original self-suffering of being riveted to itself. The ego, as uniquely this self, feels the burden of not being able to escape its "me-ness."

Given this radical philosophy of concrete immanence, and the purity of auto-affection as the sphere of subjective reality, how can the ego be "affected" by another ego? Is the purity of auto-affection ruptured by the presence of an alter ego? Or can we experience the other ego within the purity of Life itself, apart from all hetero-affection? How do a community of egos experience one another in the community of Life? Life does not appear in the world nor in any horizon, nor even within flow of temporality, so in what domain does intersubjectivity arise?

Recall that auto-affection's manner of givenness resembles the way in which an infant intimately feels and experiences its mother, being reliant on

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<sup>39</sup> For more on the nature of truth as interiority in Henry, see *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans., Susan Emanuel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), chs. 1–3.

the mother for all nourishment and self-identity (yet it is a relation, from the infant's perspective, that remains outside of the world, language and intentionality). Henry, in his later systematic work on the subjective body (which he calls flesh [*chair*]) entitled *Incarnation*, devotes space to the analysis of sexual love as another representative paradigm of auto-affection. Pornography is the outcome of a sexual union that wholly occupies the physical body, whereas true love, an affective union of egos, occurs when the invisible subjective depth of each body has concourse with the other *prior* to the physical body. The physical body recedes into the background, for true erotic love evokes a point at which two egos can dovetail, where one auto-affection yields reciprocally to another auto-affection. The "night of lovers" is the scene here, in which the word "night" quite literally conveys its invisibility, that the sexual union of love enjoys only the invisible space of auto-affection, a space located outside of the "daylight" of the world and the structures of intentionality (which illuminate objects with perceptual "light" for the ego). The affective tonality lived between lovers, in the "lover's night," does not correspond to a particular conscious apprehension of sex, or to a psychosomatic flutter of the heart. It points to the depth dimension of love, in which lovers enter each other at the level of invisible affection, the living subjectivity they each possess one in the other, prior to their exchange of a "kiss in the objective bodies" that may appear to be nothing more than a "bombardment of micro-physical particles".<sup>40</sup> Sexual acts, when understood as a display of gratification and power, of using the other to quench a sexual drive, constitute the masochist and sadist profanation of erotic love that happens "in" the world.<sup>41</sup> Only when that relation between lovers is taken outside the realm of objects and particles and placed back inside its immanent life, the union between souls, can the night of lovers be seen as a union of peace, joy, and love and "real" living union occur in the Spirit.<sup>42</sup> Given Henry's radical theory of intersubjectivity based on non-intentional intersubjectivity, one can perhaps agree with Sebastian Laoureux, following Rudolf Bernet, in declaring Henry's notion of intersubjectivity as a form of hyper-transcendentalism—insofar as the relation between egos happens within the "form" of affection, and nowhere else.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Henry, *Incarnation*, 146.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 300–10, 321.

<sup>43</sup> See Rudolf Bernet, "Christianity and Philosophy." *Continental Philosophy Review* 32 no. 3 (1999): 325–42; Sébastien Laoureux, "Hyper-Transcendentalism and Intentionality: On the Specificity of the 'Transcendental' in Material Phenomenology." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17 no. 3 (2009): 389–400.

We all have one and the same origin, in Henry's system, and we must afford ourselves the opportunity to tap into that shared life should we aspire to not simply in order to enter into solidarity with the other but to share life itself, to experience the other in every way the other experiences himself. Intersubjectivity has its site in Life and in Life alone; each ego possesses an essential co-belonging between it and Life. For it is in Life in which I am borne forth, for I am self-affected in what occurs as my own life only in Life's self-affection; I am self-revealed to myself in Life's own self-revelation, this is the common source of the individual "me" to whom is given life.

To reinforce Henry's principal thesis about the first-person singular who is declined in the accusative, moreover, I am consubstantial with what Life reveals; hence "at no moment does it let that person go outside it, but rather holds him within, in its radical immanence... by giving him to be embraced within this embrace in which absolute Life embraces itself. The embrace in which absolute Life embraces itself is its love, the infinite love with which it loves itself."<sup>44</sup> The universal structure of self-affection presupposes the universal address and embrace of love. In the context of an amorous or "emotional acoustics," Henry will insist that community of Life consists of a collective accusative stance, inasmuch as each ego feels the other's auto-affection through the absolute auto-affection of Life.

Where is this community of life, then, if it is an inward unity in which I feel you in love? As Henry provocatively writes, "The community is a subterranean affective layer. Each one drinks the same water from this source and this wellspring, which it itself is. But, each one does so without knowledge and without distinguishing between the self, the other, and the basis."<sup>45</sup> One may beg the question of Henry: how does the temporality and cultural implications of the world intrude if at all in the connection between love and intersubjectivity? Should a *We*-synthesis of the most radical kind developed in Henry's work account for not just life but the structure of the *lifeworld*, where self and other are related and yet distinguished?

## 7 Empathic We-Synthesis

In this final section I turn to a constructive advance beyond the competing paradigms of intersubjectivity found in Husserl and Henry. One alternative suggests itself at this juncture, namely, a middle condition that roots the ex-

<sup>44</sup> Henry, *I am the Truth*, 226–27.

<sup>45</sup> Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, 133.

perience of the other in first-person intentionality, but nonetheless presupposes the affective structure of empathy that Henry's analysis sustains. That first-person experience can open out onto to an affective presentation of second-person alterity must be rediscovered in Husserl's *Crisis*. Such a position can be gleaned in the following excerpt from Husserl:

And in the epoché [the world] becomes a phenomenon. What remains, now, is not a multiplicity of separated souls, each reduced to its pure interiority, but rather: just as there is a sole universal nature as a self-enclosed framework of unity, so there is a sole psychic framework, a total framework of all souls, which are united not externally but internally, namely, through the intentional interpenetration [*Ineinander*] which is the communalization of their lives. Each soul, reduced to its pure interiority, has its being-for-itself and its being-in-itself, has its life which is originally its own. And yet it belongs to each soul that it have its particular world-consciousness in a way which is originally its own, namely, through the fact that it has empathy experiences, experiencing consciousness of others as [also] having a world, the same world, that is, each apperceiving it in his own apperceptions... Every other ego is already intentionally implied in advance by way of empathy and the empathy horizon.<sup>46</sup>

Empathy, as we saw above in Husserl, counts as a unique kind of intentional complex because it requires as its base the element of a foreign subjectivity, an alter ego. There is no reason to exercise empathy or analogy if I am already reducible, in my essence, to the alter ego. If in my self-disclosure I also participate wholly in the self-disclosure of the alter ego, then it follows that the feelings or emotions we share is not truly based on empathy but rather auto-affection (Henry). The underlying problem of empathy, the abyss or foreign element in intersubjectivity, is resolved by Henry, but at a high cost.

Henry's opposition to this possibility, I would argue, leads him to hold an arbitrary presupposition about reality, and ultimately, the reality of love. Why must reality wholly reside in pure immanence and nowhere else? This position runs the risk of surrendering to an extreme Cartesian substance dualism; perhaps it elects to replay aspects of a Gnostic dualism that pits two radically opposed spheres against each other, namely the illusory world and

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<sup>46</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 255.

the real inner self.<sup>47</sup> Also, and equally important, Henry's position succumbs to his own critique of the philosophical tradition: auto-affection effectuates the inverse of his interpretive category of "ontological monism." In other words, Henry's *Life* proposes one sphere of manifestation, immanence and nothing else—a proposal that purposely abandons the obligation to treat phenomenologically the domains of physical embodiment, intentional life, temporality, and thus, every form of transcendence where important entitlements of intersubjectivity and shared life persistently emerge.

To say that we cannot truly experience the other in the world is to rebut contemptuously the preponderance of the phenomenological tradition, and thus, to claim that language, physical embodiment and place, temporality and cultural/social context have no phenomenological bearing or normative force on our interrelation with others. One could argue that Henry's *Life-community* reflects an acosmic, immanent form of panpsychism, which, moreover, takes the primordial infant-mother relation not merely to represent an exemplary accomplishment of empathic love but to establish the norm that governs and orders the content implicit in intersubjectivity.

But, of course, as many interpreters of empathy have shown, the manifestation of empathy can be either passive or intentional. Henry's principle of love as the bond that joins together two egos (or multiple egos) into a more basic sublayer of auto-affection may designate this type of automatic, passive empathy.<sup>48</sup> Yet, most types of empathy reflect distinct movements of calculated intentional performance, even though the contemporary debate on empathy has resulted in taxonomy of variations, such as affective empathy, motor empathy, re-enactive empathy and cognitive empathy, to list only some of the available options. I do not intend here to settle the debate about

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<sup>47</sup> Several critics of Henry have reservations about his version of Christianity. Both Kevin Hart and James G. Hart find clear Gnostic tendencies in *I am the Truth*. And Jad Hatem argues that Henry's theology is unambiguously Gnostic. See James Hart, "Michel Henry's Phenomenological Theology of Life," 195–96; Kevin Hart, "Without World': Eschatology in Michel Henry." In *Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet in the Now*, edited by Neal DeRoo and John P. Manoussakis, 167–92. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 185–87; and Jad Hatem, *Le Saveur et les viscères de l'être: Sur le gnosticisme et Michel Henry* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).

<sup>48</sup> For an analysis of passive empathy, see Shaun Gallagher, "Intercorporeity: Enaction, Simulation, and the Science of Social Cognition," 165ff.

the scope and phenomenological structure of empathy, but rather, to illuminate that it expresses both affective and narrative qualities.<sup>49</sup>

To show this, and as a response to Henry, we ask: can we ensure that empathy can occur, so that shared life can properly express an affective unity, without also eliminating the distance between the ego and the alter ego? If so, what is this unique bridge that holds together the disjunctive poles of ego and alter ego without absolving their difference? The way forward lies in the logic of the lifeworld, the horizon on which empathic “intentional interpenetration” transpires.

One strategy that would manage to feature the strong affective dimension of Henry’s work and also to build on the ineluctable intentional performativity of Husserl’s thesis, is narrative empathy.<sup>50</sup> How may this emphasis on narrative yield results within the larger structure which Husserl names the empathy horizon? Familiarizing myself with the alter ego’s narrative is tantamount to narrowing the gap between my lifeworld and the alien narrative content of the alter ego’s lifeworld. As an expression of love, narrative empathy evokes in the other the power to reimagine their life in the words or plot points of a storyline, which express one’s life in a coherent form for the other. To ask about the alter ego’s life story may create a collective mood of joint attention on the alter ego’s personal narrative. The more I know about the alter ego, the more narrative information I gather, the better suited I am to empathize or to transfer the “over there” to my primordial “here.” I can, for example, better empathize or share in the pain of my best friend than I can an acquaintance. I can better empathize or share in the pain of an acquaintance than I can a total stranger, and so on. In narrative empathy I do more than simply mirror or analogize, since I am seeking out points of overlap between my narrative and the alter ego’s narrative, inclusive of cultural, social, religious and linguistic story lines. Access to the alter ego’s story, in other words, is crucial in getting to know the lifeworld of the alter ego, and fortify-

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<sup>49</sup> For a list of types of empathy and for an entrée into the debate, see Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 152ff.

<sup>50</sup> To avoid confusion, I am not claiming that Henry’s discourse of auto-affection can accommodate narrativity or hermeneutical norms. It cannot. Narrative empathy, as I frame it here, nevertheless takes with full seriousness the importance of affection and love, even it does so without relying on auto-affection. For a recent attempt to blend Henry’s phenomenology of immanence with narrative philosophy (unsuccessfully), see Rolf Kühn, *Wie das Leben spricht: Narrativität als radikale Lebenwphänomenologie: Neuere Studien zu Michel Henry* (Dordrecht: Springer Academic, 2016), 102ff.

ing the common world we share as the bridge that links my *Originalsphäre* to the alter ego's.<sup>51</sup>

Yet the activity of narrative empathy does not involve or trade on the idea that intersubjectivity consists of building a bridge between two closed-off monads, in which the distance between other's interior nucleus and mine is an abyss. Rather, as Husserl noted above, we are from the outset together already living on the bridge, with intentional dispositions that overlap, because each ego is "intentionally implied in advance." I quote: "Every other ego is already intentionally implied in advance by way of empathy and the empathy horizon." We begin to make explicit this shared life the moment we share narratives.

Lifeworlds include within them a set of implicit norms that do not operate as visible signposts for reference and meaning. Learning the alter ego's narrative, then, can take time and can occur only in proportion to the degree I am genuinely empathic. To show feigned interest in another's story is to ask for artificial, polite conversation, not to invite the disclosure of a lifeworld. Actions and experience from which I am alienated or in which I have no interest, are not constitutive of my narrative identity. But once I show interest, such stories emerge, and are shown to be part of the bridge of empathy on which intersubjectivity rests.

Even strong second-person accounts of intersubjectivity, embodied for example in the brilliant work of Emmanuel Levinas, manage to presuppose tacitly a narrative dimension. In *Totality and Infinity*, and elsewhere, Levinas will talk of the other's capacity to grant me a sense of my own identity by means of a call, an invocation and ultimately an encounter, each of which appear to transcend time and history (the other comes from the "hither side of being"<sup>52</sup>). Yet, the terms of the encounter are enunciated in narrative vocabularies particularly rich in biblical content, ones that require a level of literacy in the lifeworld from which they emerged. While Levinas talks little of the narrative or storied dimension of the experience of the other, he nonetheless expects his readers to have a working knowledge of the grammar of

<sup>51</sup> For more on the narrative possibilities that underlie empathy, see Marya Schectman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View," in *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, ed. Daniel Hutto (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 155–78; and see also David J. Velleman, 2005. "Self as Narrator." In *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, eds. by John Christman and Joel Anderson, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 56–76.

<sup>52</sup> For more on the "otherworldly" character of the "hither side of being" from whence the other irrupts, see Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 43ff.

the “face of the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan.” Each of these expressions on their own, and compounded once take together, invest the encounter with a certain narrative power and existential depth, at least for those to whom the narrative “of the widow and orphan” and its norms appeal. If one understands the religious significance of these terms in either the Jewish or Christian tradition (or any other tradition that focuses on social justice in this respect), then the ethical impact of the other may well register as Levinas hoped it would.<sup>53</sup> It may well be the case, though we do not have the space to investigate this here, that empathy exercised on the basis of the capacity to receive narratives presupposes a structure within the human condition that is already narrative in character, and thus the narrative can function as an ontological foundation of the ego.<sup>54</sup>

## 8 Conclusion

The foregoing has investigated two important paradigms of intersubjectivity in Edmund Husserl and Michel Henry, by exploring their first-person accounts of the alter ego. In doing so, we compared two paradigms of intersubjectivity that yield important results: the experience of the alter ego employs the resources of empathy, and this implies two types of bond: one the one hand, (i) an affective bond that may resemble as Henry notes the inarticulable sense of affection between a mother and infant or between lovers, and, on the other, (ii) the narrative unity a narrative may provide that thematic bridge between two egos such that a sharing of life may obtain between them, without implying that the difference between the two egos to be compromised—a We-Synthesis. I have not argued that the ego and alter ego enact each other reciprocally through empathy.<sup>55</sup> Rather, the ego’s first-person subjectivity may experience the other in we-experience that belongs to the process of tapping into what we already share, a common lifeworld by means of narrative empathy. A narrative possesses both affective and discursive content. This position is attractive because (i) it avoids the extreme affective-

<sup>53</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonse Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 77–78.

<sup>54</sup> For a helpful exploration of the ontological framework of the narrative self, see David Carr, *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 223ff.

<sup>55</sup> While I cannot take up the argument in detail here. Evan Thompson makes the claim that self and other reciprocally enact each other via empathy, as if to eradicate the first-person singular. See Thompson, *Mind in Life*, 382ff.



oriented intersubjective experience and (ii) it brings out in a more focused manner the living dynamics of the narrative quality of the Husserlian life-world.