Phenomenology of experiential sharing

The contribution of Schutz and Walther

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Abstract: The chapter explores the topic of experiential sharing by drawing on the early contributions of the phenomenologists Alfred Schutz (Schutz 1967 [1932]) and Gerda Walther (Walther 1923). It is argued that both Schutz and Walther support, from complementary perspectives, an approach to experiential sharing that has tended to be overlooked in current debates. This approach highlights specific experiential interrelations taking place among individuals who are jointly engaged and located in a common environment, and situates this type of sharing within a broader and richer spectrum of sharing phenomena. Whereas Schutz' route to the sharing of experiences describes the latter as a pre-reflective interlocking of individual streams of experiences, arising from a reciprocal Thou-orientation, Walther provides a textured account of different types of sharing and correlated forms of communities.

1.   Introduction

Although there is a widespread consensus in contemporary debates that the capacity to share intentions plays a pivotal role in the establishment of human forms of sociality (Tomasello et al. 2005; Rakoczy 2008), it is still an open question what this sharing amounts to. Many agree that, when applied to intentions and other experiences, the talk of sharing isn't merely metaphorical, and that it involves either something more than an aggregation of individual subjects' experiences, or something altogether different from such an aggregation (for review see Tollefsen 2004; Schweikard and Schmid 2013). For instance, according to one influential approach, shared or collective intentions, although located in individual minds, are characterized by a *sui generis* psychological mode (Searle 1990, 1995; Gallotti and Frith 2013)[1]. Other theorists have argued that shared intentions can be accounted for in terms of individuals' intentions with the form 'I intend', characterized by a common propositional content and specific interrelations (Bratman 1999, 2014; Pacherie 2007), whereas a third family of prominent proposals have suggested that shared intentions ought to be attributed to collective or plural agents (Rovane 1998; Gilbert 1989; Pettit and List 2011). It has by now become customary to describe these approaches to collective intentions in terms of *mode-*, *content-* and *subject-* approaches (Schweikard and Schmid 2013)

In spite of their differences, these groups of proposals tend to be underpinned by some common presuppositions. In the first place, they have usually focused on the sharing of intentions, since the latter are taken to play a crucial role for joint action. The rationale behind this preference seems to

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[1] In the analytic philosophical tradition, the expression "shared intention" was introduced by Bratman (cf. Gilbert 2014, 97). Here it is used as neutral with respect to the different accounts.

be that, analogously to the way in which individual intentions are taken to be relevant for explaining individual actions, shared intentions are taken to be as relevant in accounting for joint actions. In recent years, however, there has been an increasing focus on the capacity that minded beings have for sharing other types of mental states, such as emotions (cf. von Scheve and Salmela 2014; Schmid 2009) and perceptual experiences (cf. Seemann 2012). Secondly, traditional approaches to the sharing of intentions have tended to overlook certain aspects of the cognitive, experiential and affective interrelations between individuals that might be of relevance if the latter are to share intentions and get involved in joint engagements. Think of the mutual recognition that potential collaborators in a joint activity might engage in; consider the sense of joint control that they often enjoy over a joint action in order to accomplish it successfully (Pacherie 2012, 2013; Tollefsen 2014); or think of the sense of mutual trust that is often crucial if the jointness of an activity is not to be disrupted (cf. Seemann 2009; Schmid 2013).

These and other relational aspects of shared engagements are not usually highlighted in much of the theorizing about the sharing of experiences. This is clearly the case with Searle's approach, which in spite of recognizing that collective intentions involve a "sense of us" (Searle 1990, 414), and of "doing something together" (Searle 1995, 24), allows for the possibility that a subject may have we-intentionality even in the absence of any other subject (Searle 1990, 407)[2]. And, apart from Searle's, other influential approaches, such as Bratman's (1999, 2014) and Gilbert's (1989, 2014), even if sympathetic towards the idea that individuals must stand in actual and specific interrelations in order to share intentions, have mainly focused on the propositional (Bratman) and normative (Gilbert) dimensions of this relationality. Perhaps one might be sceptical from the outset about the relevance that relational and experience-based aspects, like the previously mentioned, may have in accounting for the sharing of intentions. But then again, one might also ask whether it is possible to obtain a proper understanding of what sharing actually amounts to if one neglects the experiential dimension and fails to analyse the very structure of a we-experience. As Tollefsen has recently argued, the complexity of joint agency seems to require taking into account both the personal and subpersonal levels of analysis (2014, 28). More in detail, she notes that "the qualitative aspects of doing things with others", or as she also calls it, "the phenomenology of joint agency" has been for the most part overlooked in the literature (2014, 22), and goes on to defend the idea that "the experiential aspect of doings things with others plays a role in the control and monitoring of joint actions" (2014, 14). While Tollefsen readily acknowledges that her use of the term "phenomenology" does not refer to the philosophical tradition to which Husserl, Heidegger and others belonged (Tollefsen 2014, footnote 1), her comment is nevertheless suggestive. It is well known that classical phenomenology offers sophisticated analyses of intentionality. Might it also offer insights on the topic of collective intentionality and experiential sharing?

The contemporary debate on collective intentionality in analytic philosophy has spanned three decades, but questions concerning the structure of experiential sharing (broadly construed) and social reality have obviously been a long-standing concern in philosophy, and, as it happens, also in classical phenomenology (Scheler 1954 [1912], Schutz 1967 [1932], Walther 1923, Gurwitsch 2012 [1931], Stein 2010a [1917], 2010b [1922], Husserl (1973, 1952), von Hildebrand (1975 [1930]).

In the following contribution, our main aim is to present some details of these partially forgotten resources by considering the early work of the phenomenologists Alfred Schutz (1899 –

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[2] For some critiques, see Schmid 2009, Pacherie 2007, Mejers 2003.

1959) and Gerda Walther (1897 – 1977). We will show that both Schutz and Walther developed, quite independently of each other, insightful analyses about the structure of experiential sharing. Furthermore, we will argue that some of their ideas can be brought together in an approach to sharing that highlights specific experiential interrelations taking place among individuals who are jointly engaged and located in a common environment. Given the richness and broad scope of Schutz' and Walther's analyses, we cannot here do full justice to their accounts. Rather, we will focus on Schutz' account of what he terms the "we-relationship", and on the elements of Walther's proposal that enrich and clarify some of Schutz' ideas. In particular, Walther's distinction between types of communities and correlative forms of sharing will be discussed, as well as her notion of "communal experiencing" (*Gemeinschaftserleben*) that she distinguishes from related phenomena, such as empathy (*Einfühlen*) and sympathy (*Mitfühlen*).

Instead of following the chronological order of publication of Walther's and Schutz' contributions (Walther's doctoral dissertation *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften* was published almost ten years before Schutz' dissertation), we will start with the latter. The reason for this is that, as we will see, Schutz' analysis of the social world explores some of the ground that is presupposed in Walther's account.

2. Alfred Schutz

In his 1932 dissertation *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt: Eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie*, Alfred Schutz faults Weber for failing to offer a proper account of the constitution of social meaning, and more generally for being too uninterested in more fundamental questions in epistemology and theory of meaning. It is this lacuna that Schutz then seeks to overcome by combining Weber's interpretive sociology with reflections drawn from Husserl's phenomenology. According to Schutz, one of the more specific shortcomings of Weber's theory is that it fails to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the social world. As Schutz writes, "Far from being homogeneous, the social world is structured in a complex way, and the other subject is given to the social agent (and each of them to an external observer) in different degrees of anonymity, experiential immediacy, and fulfilment." (1967, 8. Modified translation)[3]. In the fourth and central part of the book (1967, 14), Schutz proceeds to distinguish four different spheres within the social world: the sphere of the "directly experienced social reality" (1967, 142) (*soziale Umwelt*), the "social world of contemporaries" (1967, 142) (*soziale Mitwelt*), the "social world of predecessors" (1967, 143) (*soziale Vorwelt*) and the "social world of successors" [*soziale Folgewelt*] (1967, 143).

The realm of directly experienced social reality, or to put it differently, the *social surrounding world*, is the one in which the social world is open for direct experience, and within which others are presented as fellow men (*Mitmenschen*). It would be wrong, however, to restrict the social reality that a subject has experience of to this social dimension. According to Schutz, we must recognize that there is also a social world of contemporaries (*Nebenmenschen*), that coexists with the subject and is simultaneous with his duration, although the lack of spatial proximity prevents other subjects' experiences from being grasped as originally and directly as is possible in the social surrounding world. Furthermore, a subject can also be directed to a world of predecessors

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[3] The English translations of passages from Schutz' book have throughout been modified where necessary, in order to provide a more accurate rendering of the original.

(*Vorfahren*), that existed at some point but does not exist anymore, and to a forthcoming world of successors (*Nachfahren*), that can be apprehended only in a vague and indeterminate manner.

According to Schutz, the face-to-face encounter characteristic of the *social surrounding world* provides for the most fundamental type of interpersonal understanding (Schutz 1967, 162). It is at the basis of what he terms the "we-relationship" or "living social relationship", which is the central concept in his account of experiential sharing. In consonance with a view to be found in other classical phenomenologists (Stein 2010a [1917], Scheler 1954 [1912], Merleau-Ponty 2002 [1945]), and which has seen a revival in recent years (Zahavi 2011, Gallagher 2008, Smith 2010, Krueger 2012, León 2013), he endorses the idea that the experience of the bodily mindedness of others is prior to and more fundamental than any understanding of others that draws on imaginative projection, memory or theoretical knowledge (1967, 101). We only start to employ the latter strategies when we are already convinced that we are facing minded creatures, but are simply unsure about precisely how we are to interpret the expressive phenomena in question. To that extent, there is a level at which the other is given as "unquestionable [*fraglos*]" (1967, 140). By this Schutz does not mean that we have an infallible access to another subject's experiences, but rather that any kind of doubting, theoretical reasoning, etc. about the latter presupposes that they are given in the first place to us. In the context of the social surrounding world, other subjects are given on the basis of what Schutz calls the "Thou-orientation" (*Du-Einstellung*), that is, "the intentionality of those acts whereby the Ego grasps the existence [*Dasein*] of the other person in the mode of the original self" (1967, 164, cf. Zahavi 2015). Along similar lines, Schutz allows for a "genuine understanding of the other person [*echtes Fremdverstehen*]" (1967, 111), where our intentional act is directed not at the observed body, "but through its medium to the foreign experiences themselves" (1967, 111. Modified translation).

One requirement that must be in place in order to allow for such a genuine understanding is that the perceiving and the perceived subject's streams of consciousness are "simultaneous" or "co-existent" (1967, 102) Drawing on ideas found in Bergson (1967, 103), Schutz argues that "whereas I can observe my own lived experiences only after they are over and done with, I can observe yours as they actually take place. This in turn implies that you and I are in a specific sense "simultaneous", that we "coexist", that our respective streams of consciousness intersect" (1967, 102). What is at stake here is more than a mere objective simultaneity. Indeed, Schutz argues that if we take seriously the idea that we have a direct access to other people's experiences, and that this direct access is grounded on the simultaneity of the streams of consciousness, we should deny that the epistemic asymmetry between the first-person and the second-person perspective entails that the access I have to your experience is somehow secondary or parasitic when compared to the access you have to your own experience. Actually, and quite to the contrary, if we follow Schutz' analysis, my perspective on you and your experiences is to some extent privileged in that I can be thematically aware of the latter as they unfold pre-reflectively, whereas you cannot be thematically aware of your own experiences prior to reflecting upon them (1967, 102, 169).

How are these ideas concerning the possibility of a direct perception of other subjects, of the simultaneity of the streams of consciousness, and of the distinctiveness of the second-personal access related to the Schutz' notion of the we-relationship? According to him, the Thou-orientation

can in principle be one-sided (1967, 146), that is, it doesn't need reciprocation or communication[4]. However, when two (or more) individuals engage in a reciprocal Thou-orientation, i.e., when each – in the face-to-face relationship - relates to the other as a you, we have what Schutz calls a "we-relationship" or, as he also calls it, a "living social relationship":

> I take up an Other-orientation toward my partner, who is in turn oriented toward me. Immediately, and at the same time, I grasp the fact that he, on his part, is aware of my attention to him. In such cases I, you, we, live in the social relationship itself, and that is true in virtue of the intentionality of the living Acts directed toward the partner. I, you, we, are by this means carried from one moment to the next in a particular attentional modification of the state of being mutually oriented to each other. The social relationship in which we live is constituted, therefore, by means of the attentional modification undergone by my Other-orientation, as I immediately and directly grasp within the latter the very living reality of the partner as one who is in turn oriented toward me. We will call such a social relationship a 'living social relationship'. (Schutz 1967, 156-157)

The living social relationship or we-relationship allows for different levels of concretisation (*Konkretisationsstufe*). For example, the richness of a face-to face conversation with an old friend obviously differs from simply apprehending a stranger as a minded being, with no concern for his or her specific experiences. As a limiting case, Schutz even refers to a "pure we-relationship" (1967, 164), characterized by an apprehension of the other's *Dasein*, of his bare presence, rather than of his *Sosein*, that is, of his being in a certain determinate manner (1967, 164). Furthermore, the experiential immediacy (*Erlebnisunmittelbarkeit*) of a we-relationship can vary along a spectrum in its intensity and intimacy (1967, 168, 176). A conversation, for instance, can be animated or offhand, eager or casual, superficial or quite personal, and so forth (1967, 168)

A crucial element in Schutz' account of the social relationship in the surrounding world is that the distinctiveness of the latter is constituted in the first place by an "interlocking" of perspectives. As he puts it, "This interlocking [*Ineinandergreifen*] of glances, this thousand-faceted mirroring of each other constitutes in the first place [*überhaupt erst*] the peculiarity of the social relationship in the surrounding world" (1967, 170. Modified translation). Although Schutz emphasizes the reciprocal and interlocking character of the we-relationship, it is however important to get clearer on what precisely this "interlocking" really amounts to. Importantly, the we-relationship doesn't come about as a result of a mere summation and alternation of your and my Thou-orientations, rather it involves something new. In being directed to your experiences, I apprehend them in a manner which is in principle foreclosed to you, and, since, at the same time, you are aware of my apprehension of your experiential life, your experiences are modified in a certain way (1967, 171). However, in order for the idea of interlocking to gain sufficient weight, the modification at stake cannot be incidental, but must be constitutive of the interlocking character of the we-relationship. Were your experiences not modulated by my apprehension of them and vice-versa, we could each have them in the absence of any joint engagement. This is why Schutz insists that as a result of living in such a we-relationship, we affect each other immediately (1967, 167).

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[4] The fact that Schutz allows for a one-sided Thou-orientation is surprising and must ultimately be considered a mistake (cf. Carr 1987, Zahavi 2014). For a more extensive discussion of the significance of reciprocal Thou-orientation and second-person perspective taking see Zahavi 2015.

Schutz occasionally writes that the singular reflections (*Spiegelungen*) from the I to the Thou, and vice versa, are not differentiated, but apprehended as a unity in the we (1967, 170):

Within the unity of this experience [the We-experience] I can be aware simultaneously of the experiences of my own consciousness and of the series of experiences in your consciousness, living through the two series of experiences as one series, that of the common We" (Schutz 1967, 170. Modified translation).

Although he even writes that we are then "living in our common stream of consciousness" (1967, 167), one must be cautious not to be mislead by this and similar statements. In fact, rather than entailing a fusion that destroys individuality ,the suggestion here is that our respective streams of consciousness are interlocked to such an extent that each of our respective experiences are colored by our mutual involvement (1967, 167, 180). Had there been any kind of true fusion, the focus on the you constitutive of the we-relationship would be dissolved. Furthermore, as Schutz emphasizes, the temporal closeness between you and me, within the we, goes hand in hand with spatial proximity but discontinuity (1967, 166).

Schutz insists that the we-relationship and the interlocking of perspectives is primarily pre-reflective and lived through. By this he means that if, while participating in a we-relationship, one tries to thematically observe or reflect on the latter, one will thereby disrupt and withdraw from it. As he writes, "To the extent that we are going to think about the experiences we have together, we must to that degree withdraw from each other. If we are to bring the We-relationship into the focus of our attention, we must stop focusing on each other. But that means stepping out of the social relationship in the surrounding world, because only in the latter do we live in the We." (1967, 167. Modified translation) The greater my reflective awareness of the we-relationship, the less am I involved in it, and the less am I genuinely related to my partner as a co-subject (1967, 167).

Until now, some of the crucial elements of Schutz's analysis of the we-relationship have been highlighted: direct perception of others, co-existence of streams of consciousness, second-person authority, reciprocity, and pre-reflective character. Of these conditions, the recognition of the distinctiveness of the second-personal access complements the idea of direct perception when the latter is understood as reciprocal. At the same time, we have suggested that the second-person authority sustains the specific pre-reflective interlocking of experiences that, according to Schutz, marks the distinctive character of the we-relationship. But would these preconditions be sufficient for the constitution of a we? Think of a situation where two people are having an argument and end up insulting each other. Even though the case may be constructed such that all of the aforementioned conditions are met, one might nevertheless have reservations about describing the situation as one involving a shared we-experience. Part of the problem might be due to the fact that Schutz' paradigmatic example of a reciprocal thou-orientation, namely the "face-to-face" situation, is precisely a situation where two individuals confront each other; it is in other words, an inherently confrontational situation. Curiously enough, however, when Schutz wants to illustrate the reciprocal (*wechselseitig*) character of the thou-orientation, as it happens in the we-relationship, he departs from his standard case and mentions an example where the focus is not on the you, but rather on the world:

Suppose that you and I are watching a bird in flight. […] Nevertheless, during the flight of the bird you and I have "grown older together"; our experiences have been simultaneous. Perhaps while I was following the bird's flight I noticed out of the corner of my eye that your head was moving in the same direction as mine. I could then say that the two of us, that *we*, had watched the bird's flight. What I have done in this case is to coordinate temporally a series of my own experiences with a series of yours (Schutz 1967, 165)

In the case of experiential sharing, the experience is no longer simply experienced by me as *mine*, but as *ours*. That is why it makes perfect sense to articulate the experience in question with the use of the first-person plural. One interesting feature about Schutz' example, however, is that the moment of sharing doesn't arise when one subject is directed to the other, and vice-versa, but rather when both of them are jointly directed at an object in the world. Of course, one might well think that the face-to-face encounter is a precondition for focusing on a common object, and that a focus on the other subject and on the common object may alternate as a specific perceptual situation unfolds. Nevertheless, and in spite of Schutz' occasional indications to the contrary, it seems that the face-to-face encounter isn't yet sufficient in order to achieve the desired reciprocity, rather what is also needed is a kind of coordination that is sustained by a common focus on an external object or project in the world (Carr 1987, 271).

It might here be important to insist upon the difference between being-for-one-another (*Füreinandersein*) and being-with-one-another (*Miteinandersein*). Whereas the you-me relation can be dyadic, the we often involves a triadic structure, where the focus is on a shared object or project. Not only can there be cases of intense you-me interactions, such as strong verbal disagreements or arguments, where there is not yet (or no longer) a we present but, even in more conciliatory situations, paying too much attention to the other might disrupt the shared perspective. The couple who is enjoying the movie together can serve as a good illustration of this. Their focus of attention is on the movie and not on each other. However, this is not to say that emotional sharing is independent of and precedes any second-person awareness of the other. We shouldn't make the mistake of equating consciousness with thematic or focal consciousness. After all, I can remain aware of my partner, even if I am not thematically aware of her, and it is hard to make sense of the notion of shared experiences, if other-awareness in any form whatsoever is entirely absent.

At this point, it will be useful to consider different types of interlocking systems that may come about as a result of different common foci. Gerda Walther's investigation of the ontology of social communities proves useful to locate the reciprocal Thou-orientation investigated by Schutz within a broader and more textured account of experiential sharing. After all, there might well be *shared experiences* which are not *we-experiences* in Schutz' sense.

3. Gerda Walther

In her 1919 dissertation *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften* (1923) Walther offers a far more detailed analysis of we-intentionality than the one found in Schutz. Her analysis of experiential sharing is in particular situated within a more overarching investigation of the ontology

of social communities.[5] Since Walther concedes that she in dealing with this latter topic is presupposing an account of how we come to know foreign subjectivities (1923, 17), one might also say that Walther's investigation to some extent presupposes some of the ground that Schutz were later to cover in his analysis of the Thou-orientation.[6]

Walther starts out by pointing to the insufficiencies of some standard accounts of communal life. A social community is distinguished by the fact that its members have something in common, there is something that they share (1923, 19). However, for a number of individuals to constitute a social community, it is not enough that they simply have the same kind of intentional state and are directed to the same kind of object. Such a match could obtain in situations where the individuals had no awareness or knowledge of each other. And that would be insufficient. What must also be required is some knowledge that the individuals have of each other. Moreover, the knowledge has to be of a special kind. Assume that A, B, and C are three scientists living in three different countries who are all working on the same scientific problem. The mere fact that each of the scientists knows about the existence of the other two would not as such make them into a community (1923, 20). But what if they interacted with one another? As Walther observes, such a reciprocal interaction, where each individual influences the intentional life of the other definitely brings us closer to what we are after. However, something would still be missing. Consider the case of a group of workers who are brought together to finish a construction, and who interact in order to obtain the same goal. To some extent they work together, but they might still consider each other with suspicion or at best with indifference (1923, 31). Seen from without, they might be indistinguishable from a communal group, but they only form a society (*Gesellschaft*) and not a community (*Gemeinschaft*). For the latter to obtain, something more is needed. What is missing in the two latter cases is the presence of an inner bond or connection (*innere Verbundenheit*), a feeling of togetherness (*Gefühl der Zusammengehörigkeit*). It is only when the latter is present, that a social formation becomes a community (1923, 33). As Walther writes,

> We are standing here on the same ground of those theorists […] that consider the essential element of the community to be a '*feeling of togetherness*', or an *inner unification* [*innere Einigung*]. Every social configuration that exhibits such an inner unification, and only those configurations are, in our opinion, communities. Only in communities can one strictly speak about communal experiences, actions, goals, aspirations, desires, etc. (in contrast to experiences, actions, etc. that may be the same or similar, and that can be present in societal relations [*gesellschaftlichen Verbindungen*]). However, not every social relation exhibits such a feeling of togetherness, such an inner bond. (Walther 1923, 33. Emphasis in the original).

To enjoy a we-experience, say, a shared feeling of joy, is to experience the other as participating with me in that experience. Thus, the joy is no longer simply experienced by me as *mine*, but as *ours*, *we* are experiencing it. The we in question is, however, not something that is behind, above or

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[5] As we have already said, a full analysis of the book falls beyond the scope of this contribution. Walther's work is still fairly unknown (but see Caminada 2014, Schmid 2009, 2012).

[6] Walther makes reference here, amongst others, to Husserl, who is also one of the key sources of Schutz' dissertation, in particular of the latter's concept of *Du-Einstellung* (cf. Schutz 1967, 101). As for the topic of *Einfühlung*, Walther refers to Stein's *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*, and to the *Anhang* of Scheler's *Phänomenologie der Sympathiegefühle* (later incorporated into his *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* as the last section of the last part of the book. Cf. Schlossberger 2005, 148).

independent of the participating individuals (1923, 70). The we is not an experiencing subject in its own right. Rather the we-experiences occur and are realized in and through the participating individuals (1923, 70). The latter consequently come to have experiences they would not have had, were it not for the fact that they stand in certain relations to others. But again how does this happen? It is not as if I first as an isolated individual have individual experiences that I then compare with the individual experiences of others, and which I then, if I think they experience the same as I, unite myself with in order to grasp the experiences as communal experiences. Such processes might indeed occur prior to the establishing of communal experiences, but they are not themselves true communal experiences. True communal experiences are experiences which on the basis of a prior unification emerge from *us*, from the others in me, and from me in the others (1923, 72). Consider as an example a situation where two individuals are admiring a beautiful vista. The other individual expresses his admiration and I grasp his admiration empathically. At this stage, the admiration is given as foreign and not as own. I might also personally admire the view. But even so, his admiration is given to me as his own, and therefore not as ours. At some point, however, the situation might change and we might come to enjoy the vista together. Although I do not see the vista through his eyes, his admiration of the vista becomes part of my experience of it (and vice-versa). Thus, each of us comes to have a complex experience that integrates and encompasses several perspectives at once. According to Walther, this peculiar belonging-to-me of the other's experience is what is distinctive and unique about we-experiences (1923, 75).

In her analysis, Walther carefully distinguishes communal experiences, or experiential sharing, from empathy, imitation (and emotional contagion) and sympathy. In the first place, to grasp the experiences of the other empathically is quite different from sharing his experiences. In empathy, I grasp the other's experiences insofar as they are expressed in words, gestures, body posture, facial expressions etc. Throughout I am aware that I am not myself the one who originarily lives through these experiences, but that they belong to the other, that they are the other's experiences, and that they are only given to me *qua* expressive phenomena (1923, 73). Even if we by coincidence had the same kind of experiences, this would not amount to a we-experience. Despite the similarity of the two experiences, they would not been unified in the requisite manner, but would simply stand side by side as belonging to distinct individuals (1923, 74). Secondly, we also need to distinguish experiential and emotional sharing from imitation or contagion. In the latter case, I might take over the experience of somebody else and come to experience it as my own. But insofar as that happens, and insofar as I then no longer have any awareness of the other's involvement, it has nothing to do with shared experiences. The latter consequently requires a preservation of plurality. Finally, to feel sympathy for somebody, to be happy because he is happy or sad because he is sad also differs from being happy or sad *together* with the other (1923, 76-77). It is only when the subject experiences that the experience which is there in the other also belongs to itself that we have a true communal experience (1923, 78). In the true communal experience it is as if a ray departs from my own experiential life and becomes interwoven with the experiential life of the other (1923, 79).

What exactly does Walther have in mind when she refers to this inner bond, this feeling of togetherness? She claims that it amounts to more than simply some kind of reciprocal influence that subjects have on each other (*Wechselwirkung*), and instead seeks to explain it in terms of a certain reciprocal unification (*Wechseleinigung*) (1923, 63), intrinsically characterized by its affective character. The feeling of togetherness is precisely a feeling, and not a judgment or an act of

cognition, although the former can certainly give rise to the latter (1923, 34). Walther next distinguishes different types of unification ranging from an actual and voluntary unification to a broader and more habitual unification. Although the latter presupposes the former, its relevance is nevertheless highlighted by Walther who writes that "the habitual unifications are almost more important for the foundation of communities and of the communal life than the actual unifications, that dissolve quickly" (1923, 48), and that "the habitual unification is what, in the first place, must found and underpin [*untergrundieren*] the whole communal life" (1923, 69). This emphasis on habitual unification is not meant to undermine the importance of our direct awareness of and interaction with others, rather it goes hand in hand with her distinction between we-experiences in the narrow sense of the term – which require spatial proximity and temporal simultaneity (1923, 66, 68) – and communal experiences. People can experience themselves as members of a community, can identify with other members of the same community, and can have group experiences even if they do not live temporally and spatially together, i.e., even if – to use some terms from Schutz – they are not fellow men or contemporaries. Some communities, which Walther calls "personal communities", come about because different individuals directly bond with each other. In other cases, however, the bond between individuals is mediated by a relation to specific objects (be it objects of art, religious associations, territories, rituals, scientific methods, social institutions etc.). As a result of being bonded with these objects, the individuals might then also feel unified with other people who likewise are attached to the same kind of objects, even if they have never met them in person (1923, 49-50). Walther refers to the latter form of communities as "objectual communities". The more the unification of the members is conditioned by the unification with external objects (rather than bound to direct interpersonal interaction) the more the knowledge that the different members have of each other can be indirect, and the greater their spatio-temporal separation can be (1923, 82).

Consequently, Walther emphasizes that not every unification is dependent upon the subject first having empathically encountered other subjects with similar experiences. However, the merely presumed presence of similar content and the merely presumed presence of other humans with whom one is unified, but of whom one doesn't know anything, does not yet amount to a real community (1923, 81). To have a real and fully constituted community it is important that the fulfilment of the intention that is directed at other human beings is brought about by direct *or* indirect (depending on the kind of community) real experience, where the different members are standing in reciprocal relationships to one another (1923, 82). The relational element is preserved, even in those cases where subjects do not have a direct access to each other.

Insofar as a community is institutionalized and organized around specific external objects, the concrete interaction between the members of the community is of less importance for the maintenance of the community. In those cases, by contrast, where the community is primarily interpersonal in question, the reciprocal interaction is much more important (and the focus on external objects might primarily be a means to an end, namely that of being together) (1923, 91-93). In the former case, the members are also far more replaceable than in the latter. Some communities, like friendships, families and marriages, are not regulated by a shared external object or goal. They are unified without pursuing common goals, but even in these cases, the communal life is penetrated by a shared meaning or goal, although the goal, instead of being external, is the flourishing of the community itself. Walther calls these forms of communities "reflexive communities" (1923, 67).

Coming back to the we-experience in the narrow sense of the term, the fact that it involves a certain unification or integration does not entail that it has no internal complexity. According to Walther, the following moments must be distinguished: 1) the experience of A is directed at an object, 1a) the experience of B is directed in a similar way as A at the same object. 2) At the same time, A empathically grasps the experience of B, 2a) just as B empathically grasps the initial experience of A. 3) A's unification (*Einigung*) with the empathically grasped experience of B, and 3a) B's unification with the empathically grasped experience of A. 4) Finally, A empathically grasps B's unification with A's experience, 4a) just as B empathically grasps A's unification with B's experience (1923, 85).[7] As the following diagram, which is Walther's own (1923, 86), can illustrate, one might even talk of a certain web of intentionality:
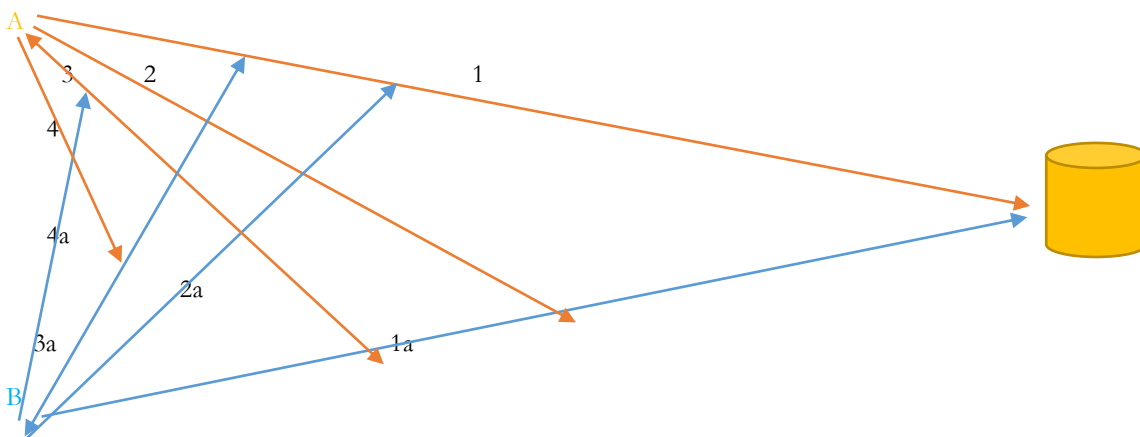
It is important to note that the different components of the we-experience distinguished by Walther are characterized as *moments* of an experience that is "entirely lived through as a unit" (1923, 85). However, despite this, one might still wonder whether Walther's account does not given rise to an infinite regress. *Prima facie*, it is not clear why the account stops at 4a. In order for the we-experience to take place, wouldn't it be necessary to also include a moment 5, in which A would be empathically directed at B's empathic awareness of A's identification with B's experience (and a corresponding moment 5a)?[8] And if so, wouldn't it also be necessary to include a moment 6, and so forth? This objection can not only serve to highlight some of the distinctive elements of Walther's proposal, but also pinpoint one limitation of it. The infinite regress objection relies on the possibility of empathically apprehending empathic experiences; to put it differently, it relies on the possibility of iterative empathy. Since Walther acknowledges that A's and B's respective experiences described in 4 and 4a are partially founded upon iterative empathy (1923, 85. Cf. Stein 2010a, 30), it is surprising that she doesn't consider the difficulty her own account runs into, were

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[7] A somewhat similar account can also be found in Husserl. Consider for instance the following quote from 1922: "An act, in which an I is directed to another, is founded first of all on the following: I_1 empathically apprehends I_2, and vice-versa, but not only this. I_1 experiences (understands) I_2 as understandingly experiencing [*verstehend Erfahrenden*], and vice-versa. I see the other as an other that sees me and understands me. Furthermore, I 'know' that the other also knows that he is seen by me. We understand each other, and in the mutual understanding we are spiritually together, in contact" (Husserl 1973, 211).

[8] As Schweikard and Schmid put it, "How could there be a shared experience between *A* and *B* if *A* is *unaware* of the fact that *B* is empathetically aware of *A*'s identification with *B*'s experience, or some such?" (Schweikard and Schmid 2013. For discussion, cf. Schmid 2012, 132 ff.).

the empathic acts to be performed *ad infinitum*.

But perhaps the *actual* performance of such empathic acts is not something that is required by her account. To put it differently, one way out of the difficulty might be to emphasize that, even if the performance of such acts of iterative empathy remains a possibility for A and B, such higher-order iterations are not needed in order for the we-experience to take place. Rather, what is important is that each subject is aware of the unification described in 3/3a, which is something that would already happen in 4/4a. On this reading of Walther's proposal, the regress would be stopped by noting that the we-experience involves a distinctive affective component, and that this component, together with each subject's awareness of the latter would be sufficient for basic sharing (A and B must each be aware of the affective bond described in 3/3a). This interpretation is consistent with Walther's emphasis on empathy and unification, and with her resistance to any attempt to explain sharing on the basis of explicit acts of knowledge or judgements (1923, 34).

Still, the infinite regress objection does highlight what appears to be a limitation of Walther's account. Walther's diagram suggests that the empathic apprehensions going on at 2/2a and 4/4a are of the same kind, namely thematic and focal. However, this need not be the case. While paradigmatic cases of empathy are focal and explicit, there are also forms of other-awareness that are less salient and objectifying, and which might precisely be found in we-experiences of the kind explored by Walther. As remarked in the previous section, in those cases in which a we-relationship involves a triadic structure, paying too much attention to the other person might disrupt the shared perspective. This echoes Schutz' idea that the we-experience is primarily pre-reflective and lived through, an idea that Walther seems to agree with. As she writes, in spite of the fact that the we-experience has a complex structure, each subject need not be intentionally directed to that structure as an object of experience. Instead, what might be involved is "a distinctive, immediate *Innesein* in the background of consciousness, an empathic and identifying living in-the-other and with-one-another [*ein eigenartiges, unmittelbares Innesein im Bewusstseinshintegrund, (…) ein einfühlend-geeignigtes In- und Miteinander-leben*]" (1923, 85). In such a context, a thematic awareness of the other could involve a disruption of the we-experience and of the affective bonding delivered by the unification. This should also make it clear why it would be problematic to include further hierarchies of empathy in the account.

4. Conclusion

Schutz' analysis of the we-relationship provides an account of one type of experiential sharing characterized by the spatio-temporal proximity of the involved individuals. According to him, the distinctive character of the we-relationship is marked by a pre-reflective interlocking of individual streams of experiences, arising from a reciprocal Thou-orientation. The latter is dependent upon the possibility of directly perceiving the other subject's embodied mindedness, and on the distinctive character of the second-personal access to the subjective life of others. Walther concurs with Schutz in recognizing the importance of the we-relationship, but she locates the latter within the broader notion of communal experiences. At the core of the latter there is an affective unification, or feeling of togetherness, that can occur even if individuals don't live spatially and temporally together. The more the unification of the members is conditioned by the unification with external objects, as is the case in Walther's "objectual communities", the more the knowledge that the different members have of each other can be indirect, and the greater their spatio-temporal separation can be.

There are several aspects of Schutz' and Walther's proposals that we have not been able to address, and that would merit further consideration. Despite this, however, it should be abundantly clear that both Walther and Schutz in their respective accounts of experiential sharing highlight the importance of a topic we started out with, namely relationality. On both account, a preservation of the self-other differentiation is a precondition for experiential sharing and we-intentionality.

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