second- or third-person – "discovers" about the human mind strongly depends on cultural values we hold, on beliefs we have about others and others have about us, on our experiential history, etc. Moreover, if we agree with the claim that a prominent scientific outlook on the human mind (that is accepted or widely discussed by the public at a certain moment) influences our values, beliefs and attitudes towards ourselves and towards others, and that it affects how we understand ourselves, we must concede that the findings of a science of the human mind are dependent on the very intersubjective processes that constitute it. Thus, sciences of the human mind are not activities of discovery but, in part, activities of co-creation of what the human mind is (for further elaboration, see Strle 2018; Strle & Markič 2018). This further means that the ideal of scientific objectivity is untenable, a chimaera, as Varela (1984) would put it.

« 14 » Understanding the dynamics of intersubjectivity (especially from first- and second-person perspectives that are lacking in mainstream cognitive science), is thus essential for a better and fuller understanding of the human mind. The study presented in the target article is, therefore, a welcome addition and starting point towards a better understanding of the human mind.

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Authors' Response

First Encounters and the Tensions Between Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to Intersubjectivity

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> Abstract • We discuss how to strengthen the empirical study of first encounters, and how to possibly reduce tensions between theoretical and empirical approaches to intersubjectivity.

« 1 » We thank our commentators, for their inputs are precious, especially since they come from different disciplinary fields, at the crossing of which our contribution stands. We have organized our response in two sections. The first one deals with how we consider first encounters and the limitations of our work in this respect. The second one deals with the tension between theoretical and empirical approaches to intersubjectivity.

« 2 » Before continuing we should restate explicitly the initial objective of our study: to propose a typology of the micro-moments that constitute people's intersubjective experiences during first encounters. This typology was achieved with a bottom-up approach in order to prevent ourselves, as much as possible, from assigning predefined categories to interviewees' verbal descriptions and experiences, as noted by Maria Gyemant (§2). Upon comparing and sorting the verbatim statements, we identified five descriptive categories that provide a reasonable overview of the diversity of these verbatim statements: act, mode of intersubjectivity, sense of agency, experiential modality, and content in terms of involved persons. From this approach stem most of the answers we can provide to the commentators' concerns.

Strengthening the empirical study of first encounters

« 3 » We can identify three levels of discussion, which are organized sequentially in relation to the conduct of our investigation:

a the initial choice of a specific situation to approach intersubjectivity empirically,
b the choice of a method to collect and analyze data, and
c the outputs of this method.

« 4 » Regarding first the initial choice of situations to investigate, in §§3–5 of their commentary Eli Pitcovski & Yochai Ataria suggest that we articulate our study of the ex-

perience of first encounters around two distinct and complementary questions:

a How is it that another person's unique individuality (occasionally) bursts into our world?

b What is the lived experience of facing the opportunity to make a first impression (to present oneself from the ground up)?

« 5 » Such questions can be applied specifically to what we have called first encounters (§6). For us, this distinction looks very useful. As practitioners of micro-phenomenological interviews, we can see how these two questions could function as anchor points for the interviewer's guidance, and therefore shape the interviewee's introspective journey toward specific aspects of her past lived experience. In this case, however, one walks a thin line, since while the interviewer can orientate the interviewee's attention toward various facets of her experience, she should be very cautious not to induce representations that are not the interviewee's (Vermersch 1994, 2012; **Petitmengin** 2006). In our case, we chose to start our investigations without subtly orienting the interviewees. This does not mean, however, that we did not already have some ideas regarding the possible experiences of first encounters, since we had conducted a few exploratory interviews before starting to collect the data reported in our article (see also below).

« 6 » **Pitcovski & Ataria** (§§7f) also suggest that we focus on specific interesting cases, where the experiences pertaining to their aforementioned questions occur separately rather than together. This suggestion echoes **Toma Strle**'s Q1 about a particular verbatim statement quoted in our article – where a psychotherapist reports how she can identify her patient's fear in herself –, and whether it reveals something deep about subjectivity and intersubjectivity. It also resonates with **Natalie Depraz**'s Q3 regarding our focus on generalized typologies. Indeed, in our study, we have attempted to cover all the descriptions and the corresponding lived experiences, in particular when we constructed generic descriptive categories. In doing so, we did not focus on the singularities of each experience, and thus potentially fail to notice illuminating cases and to analyze them in more depth. A parallel may be drawn here with sampling techniques in qualitative research, where a purposive sampling may either focus on extreme or deviant cases, or attempt to correctly represent the whole population (maximum variation sampling). On the one hand, we have been influenced by our knowledge of the analysis of micro-phenomenological interviews, where one commonly shifts from specific descriptive categories to generic ones (Valenzuela-Moguillansky & Vásquez-Rosati 2019). On the other hand, we were aiming at representative generic descriptive categories of experience, rather than at rare and abnormal situations. This being said, we agree that studying such situations is interesting and fruitful (Leplat 2002; Passeron & Revel 2005; Yin 2003). While focusing only on them at the expense of more common experiences would blur what the lived experience of a first encounter commonly consists of, it could be done in addition and complementarily to the approach we have followed.

« 7 » Broadening the question of first encounters to the topic of intersubjectivity, in her Q2, **Gyemant** wonders about the minimal condition for a genuine intersubjective experience, and whether putting oneself in the place of another could be the defining point of a first encounter. While we spent a long time pondering over what initial encounters are, prior to conducting our interviews, we eventually opted for a simple choice: the first moment of co-presence between two subjects. This contrasted, for example, with Cécile Duteille's (2002) heavily meaningful destinal encounters ("rencontres destinales"). This choice reflected our wish not to be entangled in a priori conceptions, and potentially miss interesting situations. As several commentators have noted, our study is probably the first micro-phenomenological empirical approach to intersubjectivity. As such, we kept a broad perspective on our question of interest, with the hope that it would highlight interesting facets of lived experiences. At the same time, we accepted that we might have to face the possibility that our results would, perhaps somehow paradoxically, not help that much in clearly delineating the genuine essence of first encounters.

« 8 » When it comes to the methodology of investigation, **Ezequiel Di Paolo & Hanne De Jaegher** put our approach in perspective with their method of analysis of interactions, PRISMA (DeJaegher et al. 2017), which grants direct access to the interactive experience, i.e., "what happens *between* people" (§4). We can confirm the complementarity of the two approaches, since we got acquainted with PRISMA during a workshop in 2017. As the authors state, "the one unfolds interactive experience as it happens, the other goes deep into its individually lived components" (§7). Nevertheless, a significant difference between PRISMA and our method is that in the former, subjects are researchers and repeatedly reflect upon their experience during the whole process (§5). This opens the door to different accounts and explorations of intersubjectivity. As we will see later, in §17 of this response, while micro-phenomenological interviews can be conducted with interviewees who are experts in the technique, this is not the path we followed in our study. As in all second-person methodologies, the data collection process was not immune to subjective and intersubjective effects, but we chose to leave these considerations aside: the place of the researcher as interviewer was not explicitly questioned, nor was the secondary encounter between her and the interviewee, as we thought it could have blurred our main message. Nevertheless, given that the technique of micro-phenomenological interviews explicitly aims at minimizing the interviewer's influence and inductions, potential issues are likely to be less severe than with other types of interviews, e.g., non-structured interviews in social psychology. To reply to **Gyemant**'s Q1, about how the results of our study can tell us more about the intersubjective interaction at the heart of the micro-phenomenological interviewing process, we can anticipate that a better understanding of first encounters could help to tune the interviewing process even more precisely, always in an effort to ease the interviewee's evocation. It is interesting to note here that learning how to be a good interviewer relies for a large part on experiencing being the interviewee and assessing what questions do to us.

« 9 » Regarding the outputs of our analysis, **Gyemant** (§10) states that what we called "act" (e.g., in §39) is actually very close to what phenomenologists call "intentionality." Furthermore, the categories "content" and "sense of agency" cannot be considered

independently from such intentionalities. While we have superficially considered our descriptive categories as disconnected because of our intention to further study their patterns of co-occurrence, we fully agree that connections and hierarchies can be established. Gyemant further questions our various experiential modalities, and whether vision or audition should not be considered bodily sensations (Q3). By contrast, we argue that all perceptions are bodily sensations, in the sense that they are all embodied. Because of this, we restricted bodily sensations to sensations of the inside of the body – such as aches, tickles, feelings of pain and pleasure, of warmth or fatigue – in contrast with perceptions of the environment.

« 10 » Depraz (Q1) wonders why our descriptive categories do not pay justice to what she considers the pristine character of first encounters, which includes elements such as surprise or novelty. We have, indeed, not singled out and thematised such emotions and their cues. The main reason for this, since we adopted a descriptive and bottom-up approach, is that they did not particularly stand out in our data. This does not mean in any way that these elements are deprived of meaning. Indeed, going back once again to the transcriptions and paying attention to cues of these emotions would probably reveal interesting patterns, and therefore why and how they are essential components of first encounters.

« 11 » Claire Petitmengin (Q3) asks about the clues leading to our conclusions about the pre-reflective nature of a duality between an active lived agency and a passive one. This assertion relies on the quality of our interviewee's descriptive statements, according to micro-phenomenological criteria – the intensity of the evocation assessed by the rate of speech, hesitations, the type of vocabulary, etc. –, and the astonishment some interviewees felt when reflecting upon the verbalizations of their past experience.

« 12 » Petitmengin also questions the definition of what we called "passive sense of agency" (Q2). We have proposed to define it as the feeling of being passive, which means for someone to experience being acted upon, rather than acting oneself. Petitmengin (2010: 176) has suggested that the sense of agency as defined by Shaun Gallagher (2000) can sometimes be altered, but this, however, seems to be a slightly different experience. Indeed, an altered sense means that the subject is not able to clearly distinguish whether she is the agent or not, while we are considering the possibility to experience, possible clearly, being acted upon. Overall, we agree that defining this notion, or rather assigning an appropriate name to the experience of reference, is difficult, as exemplified in our target article in Footnote 1 on the possibility of genuinely being acted upon. We acknowledge that the terms of the philosophical debate are in part beyond our expertise.

« 13 » Some of the aforementioned concerns – Pitcovski & Ataria's suggestions, Gyemant's parallel between our notion of act and intentionality, Petitmengin's concerns about the sense of agency – have in common that they refer to a rich philosophical tradition and to conceptual issues that have been debated for a long time. This explains why several of the commentators have stressed the discrepancy between these debates on the one hand, and our approach and its outputs on the other hand. We now turn our attention to this inconsistency.

The tension between theoretical and empirical approaches to intersubjectivity

« 14 » A major concern across the commentaries refers to the articulation between theoretical and empirical approaches to intersubjectivity. While some commentators recommend that the starting point of our investigation should derive from theoretical issues, others question the very possibility of connecting these two epistemological approaches.

« 15 » In particular, Pitcovski & Ataria (§§2f) advise against trying to delimitate first encounters from other intersections between subjects in favor of focusing on meaningful questions from a philosophical point of view. This is much in line with Depraz's Q2 of how the theoretical framework may offer a priori categories to be investigated with empirical data. Similarly, Di Paolo & De Jaegher (§8) recommend having a prior theoretical stance to get past the "exploratory" stage. Strle departs to a certain extent from this idea of theory as a starting point for empirical investigations. Rather, he raises the question (Q2) of whether the tension between philosophical and empirical approaches to intersubjectivity can be eased – or more precisely between "the second-person approach to understanding intersubjective experience, with its epistemic and methodological commitments" and "theoretical claims about the intersubjectivity of, say, traditional phenomenology."

« 16 » Although we chose a bottom-up approach to construct descriptive categories of the lived experience of first encounters, we attempted to anchor our approach in the very rich literature on intersubjectivity – despite being no philosophers and facing the difficulty of integrating the contributions of many important scholars. This may, at least partly, explain the feeling of disconnection between the empirical study and its theoretical background. Nonetheless, as suggested by Strle, there might also be an irreducible gap between subtle theoretical positions, whatever they are, and the result of micro-phenomenological interviews, which produce descriptions of lived experience that do not rely by default on sophisticated concepts and expert philosophical knowledge either. This difficulty calls for interdisciplinary collaboration with theoreticians, in an effort to better connect long philosophical traditions with more recent empirical endeavors.

« 17 » Coming back to what we said above in §14, it is totally possible to conduct micro-phenomenological interviews with precise and informed questions in mind. The question for us is whether starting *directly* with such questions, and thus bypassing a more exploratory stage, is detrimental to an all-encompassing understanding of the various experiences of first encounters. In other words, how much does the specific inform the general? As a way to address the challenge of possible inductions (§4 above), Di Paolo & De Jaegher (§8) suggest that we conduct the interviewing process, but "unbracket" the data during the phase of analysis. This makes good sense, although it requires the interviewer already in the know about future directions of analysis to cautiously stay away from them initially. This is in order to keep interviews as open to novelty and unexpectedness as possible – something that may not be that easy.

« 18 » We see other possible ways to ease the tension between theoretical queries and the requirements of micro-phenomenologi-

cal interviews, which go beyond the simple idea of starting broadly, then continuing with more specific questions:

a One could work with "experts in intersubjectivity" such as psychotherapists. Their descriptions may indeed reveal more of the subtle aspects of experiencing intersubjectivity. This is because they are more aware of what happens to them when with the other, and because they may be better able to express such experiences. We have conducted such work in another study (Ollagnier-Beldame & Cazemajou 2019).

b One can work with experts in micro-phenomenological interviews. Being familiar with the technique helps them to better connect with their past experience, to answer questions with precision, and, by themselves, efficiently "scan" varied aspects of their past experience. This usually results in finer-grained descriptions, and the highlighting of micro-moments of experience, which can be decisive when deciphering a complex flux of activities.

c Rather than conducting all the interviews in one phase, followed by a second phase of analysis, one can proceed in a more iterative way, and gradually refine the investigations as knowledge is gained from the previous interviews. In this way, better-informed questions can result in richer and more incisive descriptions.

« 19 » With these three approaches (and possible combinations), finer-grained and more attuned descriptions may more easily connect with theoretical considerations. In case (c), however, the iterative process results in an asymmetry between the interviews, which may hinder the construction of generic categories.

Conclusion

« 20 » The comments our target article received are insightful since they offer stimulating suggestions for choosing more appropriate situations for first encounters, for focusing better on key issues according to philosophical traditions, and for better analyzing and discussing interviewees' verbal descriptions of their lived experience. Micro-phenomenological interviews are a tool of choice when it comes to exploring human experience, but they raise both epistemological and technical challenges. These challenges consistently interact with the thematic questions that motivate their selection in the first place. Resolving this conundrum is still very much in progress.

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