

## Encountering the Indeterminacy of the Self

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### Abstract

*In recent decades, phenomenology and hermeneutical phenomenology have taken the lead in addressing the question of personal identity through the inquiry of "who are you?". However, this lead has questionable aspects in capturing the relationality between self, others, and the surrounding world, characterized by its ever-changing state. To understand personal identity in its ever-changing state of becoming, the primary focus of this paper is twofold: firstly, exploring how to reconcile these complex relations into a unified conception of personal identity by following Husserl's notion of "indeterminate determinacy" and his theory of variation, and secondly, considering the limitations of defining this unity as an "autobiography or biography" in accordance with Arendt's notion of a "life-story". In the final analyses the notion of life-story will be revised together with Waldenfels's analyses on "radical alien" and Sözer's "in-between". This will prompt a reconsideration of personal identity as a process, leading to a genetic phenomenological perspective that recognizes the "indeterminacy of the self".*

**Keywords:** Self, personal identity, indeterminacy, alien, Husserl, Arendt, Waldenfels, Sözer

### 1.

In contemporary debates on identity, even in the most critical perspectives, there is a tendency to subsume persons into groups and

subgroups “under” pre-given qualities, whether they are related to gender, nationality or race. However, in their attempt to represent these groups accurately, these perspectives often come closer to describing them as if they have fixed identities. Accordingly, they fail to embrace the ontological features of the self that can be characterized as a process of becoming and is inevitably indeterminate in its interaction with the world and with others. This paper aims to contribute a more genetic conception of personal identity by exploring its limits and including what remains alien, hidden and unpredictable in its horizon of becoming.

The phenomenological conception of limit as horizon emphasizes this character of becoming. In *The Phenomenology of the Alien* Bernhard Waldenfels opens with the statement that “The alien is a limit phenomenon *par excellence*” (Waldenfels 2011: 1). This statement aligns with the title of the first section “The Human as a Liminal Being”. This unexpected, and provocative beginning assigns the descriptive role to the concept of “limit” and suggests that neither human nor alien can be understood without an accurate understanding of the limit. The conference held in Waldenfels’ honor in 2023 titled “The Enigmas of Phenomenology: the non-Evident”<sup>1</sup> and his lectures at that event, emphasized the same essential role of the limit, and took this as a starting point. From that perspective, in his first lecture the examinations on “the limit and the ground of experience”<sup>2</sup> are not only essential for his thought, but for phenomenology in general, as it introduces a new conception of the limit (ὄρος) (see Husserl 1976).

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<sup>1</sup> “Enigmi della fenomenologia: il non evidente”, Università degli Studi di Cagliari, 9 June 2023, Cagliari, Italy. I would like to thank Gabriella Baptist and other members of the Department of Philosophy at Cagliari University for their kind hospitality, and for their engaging questions together with other attendants, which thoroughly contributed to finalize this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Before the conference, between the 6-8 June 2023 Bernhard Waldenfels delivered three seminars on the Limits and Abysses of Experience (Margini e abissi dell’esperienza), in addition to his lecture in the conference. His first seminar’s title was “Breakpoints of a Diachronic Experience”.

Initially, all our experiences revolve around positing them as within the limits of experience and as what traverses these limits; whether the source of the experience is encountering with the world, others or oneself.

Embracing this symmetry in encountering, these reflections on the limit and the ways in which we transgress them offer a path to elucidate the meaning of encountering oneself, illuminating what remains “alien” in it exemplifies the phenomenological experience of the limit as such. The phenomenological and hermeneutical interpretation of the horizon as a limit denotes infinite temporal and spatial configurations, and the term famously opens a novel way of seeing appearances. The appearance of the self requires to be understood no less than the multitude of the appearances of the world. This primordial relation between the self and the world already suggests an *in-between* state from the beginning, since this in-between presents a field, where in their limits and delimitations, things can appear and disappear.

In his extended analyses, Önay Sözer explores the intrinsic relation of the limit and the in-between. In the preface of a collective work on “*Pera, Peras, Poros, Temporality and Spatiality of the Alien*” (Sözer 1999: 11–15), he elucidates this intrinsic relation:

Thinking of a city, thinking space, and philosophical thinking overlaps, for the reason that overall philosophical tradition is thinking on limit, passage, and beyond, -either in direct or indirect manner. Philosophy becomes a city inhabited by all the aliens of the world (15).

In the same volume Waldenfels, in “*Topologie de l'étranger*” (Waldenfels 1999: 73–85), delves into the spatial, topological character of the alien. He states that “alien does not arise from a demarcation (*Abgrenzung*)” that presumes a distinction among the

homogenous but, rather from a dynamic “process of inclusion and exclusion (*Ein- und Ausgrenzung*)” (74) that sets a limit. Exploring the intrinsic relation between the two in topological references, Waldenfels highlights the challenge inherent in Husserl’s description of the experience of the alien (*Fremderfahrung*) as “an access to what is originally inaccessible” (*Ib.*). This reference offers insights into Waldenfels’ approach to understanding the alien: he interprets this interaction as a movement without a foreseeable direction or order; its concealed aspects remain indeterminate. More importantly, he suggests that only by acknowledging the alien as “inaccessible” that the possibility of such movement arises.

If the aforementioned symmetry, as an integral aspect of the same relationality, compels us to consider the self, the alien and the world along with each other, what can we anticipate from encountering oneself? Would such encounters suffice to unravel the enigmatic question of “who are you?” and to grasp the essence of whoness within these relations? In recent decades, the articulations and advancements on personal identity in phenomenology and hermeneutical phenomenology have taken the lead in addressing this question. Heidegger, and later on Arendt and Ricoeur, are the foremost figures to be mentioned for their prominent inquiries on whoness and identity along this trajectory. Besides their shared emphasis on temporality, one can discern a similarity between Ricoeur and Arendt in the role they attribute to narrativity and identity. In his hermeneutics of the self, Ricoeur employs the term “narrative identity” (Ricoeur 1988, Ricoeur 1992) while in her political phenomenology, Arendt articulates the role of narration through the concept of a “life story” within a political-existentialist framework. Despite their divergent approaches, the common thread in their interpretations lies in both philosophers’ understanding of identity as what is disclosed in the question “who are you?”.

These philosophers, who share a common background in Husserlian phenomenology, through their diverse interpretations provide an opportunity to revisit the question and examine the embedded difficulties it entails. *Firstly*, this question fails to address the tensions between inquiries such as “who are you?” and “who am I for you?”. *Secondly*, by framing the inquiry as a question, it inherently assumes a certain temporality and relationality in which the question arises, and consequently a possibility of changing responses in different circumstances. The second section of the paper will explore these two questions in light of Husserl’s views on indeterminism and his theory of variation, particularly his examination of “my own variations and my variation in others”. *Thirdly*, formulated as a question directed towards another, the question implies a plural dimension and dialogical ground, as Arendt clearly designates, although it leaves them with a reluctance to set limits on this dialogical dimension. However, in Waldenfels’ terminology, this plural encounter will always be among “alien and liminal beings”, which might mutually determine their experiences both as the persons who ask and respond. *Fourthly*, as the final section will explore, it will be the limits of this encounter that not only set but also traverse them by opening a space of “in-between,” as emphasized by both Waldenfels and Sözer.

By following these four points, the embedded potentiality of this in-between fields, their limits and delimitations, and the plural appearances of oneself, not only for the others but to oneself, will serve as guiding themes to explore the enigmatic structure of the non-evident. Encountering the self within this in-between field, this paper will adopt the founding assertions of Husserl’s genetic phenomenology and interpret the meaning of “indeterminacy” and “limit” in the context of the self.

## 2.

When somebody hears the question of "who are you?" it would not be easy to anticipate a clear response or a clear thought. In such a situation, one can easily envision a moment of silence, possibly followed by a self-reflection that often does not proceed beyond the habitual usages of language, such as merely stating one's name in reply. The silence of self-reflection and perhaps the shocking difficulty in responding cannot be dismissed as mere speechlessness. The difficulty here must stem from the words that correspond to this experience, thus requiring an examination of the experience of the self at a further level. Waldenfels' words that the "shock" (Waldenfels 2011: 36; 2013: 89) can be a beginning, and be considered together with the difficulty in responding to the question of whoness, since it demands to unify a vast series of experiences of the self momentarily. Moreover, since a response inevitably comes from a particular point in one's ever-changing experiences of life, this person may already sense that the possible responses are destined to remain fragmentary and limited. This realization leads to more challenging questions: even with unlimited time, can the question of "who are you?" be answered? In other words, is that question sufficient to capture personal identity in its ever-changing unity? The embedded difficulty in these questions can easily manifest as the "scandal" of not knowing oneself, despite its being is the "nearest" to itself (Heidegger 1977: 21, 130). Exploring these inquiries will help to delineate the limits of the question of whoness.

Bringing unity to the ever-changing limits and delimitations of the experience of the self, requires thinking along with the infinite relationality of the world of appearances and the stabilizing role of memory together. In this context, as Husserl's refers to it in *Ideen I*, not only is the world "an indeterminate horizon" (Husserl 1976: 49; 1973: 6), but persons who interact within this world, in their embodied

unity can also be seen “indeterminate”. This ever-changing character of the world and mutual changes in one’s experience, can be encapsulated by the term “indeterminacy of the self”. While Husserl did not explicitly use the term “indeterminacy” in relation to the self in that work, as he did in later years, there is a sufficient ground to employ this expression in light of his genetic phenomenology, particularly his investigations into the historical sedimentation of apperceptive unity (Husserl 1973: 36). If the experiences of the ego are sedimented and constitute one’s personal identity, it also needs to be considered in relation to indeterminacy. In this way, identity can be seen in its ever-changing modes of whoness as being part of constantly evolving correlations between the self, the world and other people in it. This reminds Husserl’s depiction of the relation between consciousness and world, where he describes “the consciousness is in everlasting Heraclitan flux” (Husserl 1969: 359). His description motivates us to encounter the self in the same flow. As I will discuss in the following pages, the term flow can be understood together with the term indeterminacy, and in light of his late manuscripts in which Husserl employs the term “indeterminate determinacy” in the context of the self.

In the Husserlian context, the indeterminacy of the world and the relations it forms are transposed into determinate and regulated contents by acts of consciousness. Apperceptive unity, one of the most crucial unifying acts of consciousness, is intrinsically related to memory. For consciousness, both primary and secondary memory serve to gather together the momentary and past contents, whether in the form of primary impressions or perceptions. The relation between the two types of memory is not only central to our experiences in general, but also illustrates the complexity of constitution by providing unity to these series in the now. These series depicted by their “running off” character (27; Yazicioğlu 2022: 67–78), like musical notes or the fading

lights of a comet, display the difficulty of grasping the momentary images and sounds for two reasons. Firstly, these primary impressions appear in series that are characterized by being running off phenomena, allowing us to perceive them only to the extent that we can grasp them. Secondly, we perceive them in a way that we believe them to appear (Husserl 1973: 52, 57). This multiplicity of impressions, attached to each other in their constant adumbrations, not only determines how we constitute them in retention (primary memory) but inevitably opens pathways to reproduce them in indeterminate multiple ways in memory (secondary memory, *Erinnerung*). This leads to the fact that the historical sedimentation in the apperceptive unity of a single act can be recollected with its variations from the past.

These multiple series in recollection bring attention to Husserl's detailed investigations on variations. His late manuscripts from 1935, Nr. 32 and Nr. 33 (Husserl 2012) deserve attention for their exploration of free variations in relation to individual persons and their surrounding world<sup>3</sup>. In these manuscripts, he highlights both the "limit" of thinking with "variations" and the mutual co-founding role between the variations of the "I" and the other. In his examinations of the eidetic ontology of persons and cultural objects, Husserl emphasizes that determining forms of personality can only be thematized in a factual world and in its socialization with its concrete physical body. Moreover, concrete persons can only be thematized with their sensing (*Körper*) and living body (*Leib*), and hence, the "I" is an abstraction; "'I' as 'I' is inconceivable" (Husserl 2012: 380). In the following paragraphs, Husserl adds that this close proximity with the others is a form of

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<sup>3</sup> The titles of these manuscripts are: Nr. 32, "Kann es eine Wesensanalyse des eigenen persönlichen Charakters geben (oder des Charakters eines Anderen)? Grenzen des variativen Verfahrens im Kennenlernen eines personalen Individuums)", probably October 1935 (editor's note), 366–372 and Nr. 33 "Zur eidetischen Ontologie der Natur, des Organismus, der Person und der Kulturobjekte", dated 9.10.1935. p. 375-385. The quotations are translated by the author.



experiencing-together (*Miterfahrenden*) and thinking-together (*Mitdenkenden*) (Husserl 2012: 381). As a result of this inclusion of concrete intersubjective field of experiences, he states that “the horizon of human surrounding world” forms personality (380). This remark both underscores the plural formation and intersubjective dimension of becoming a person, as well as its temporal character as it takes place in now: “I can only go so far full evidence of my own being as I am now” (367). His stress on time challenges a static conception of the identity of the self from several aspects.

First and foremost, in these writings, Husserl emphasizes that persons experience themselves against the background and foreground of their possible variations. While past variations may provide an expectation of who we are becoming, any prediction remains devoid of evidence. As he aptly illustrates, the poetical forms, literature, perhaps most notably, biographies acquaint us with the potential variations of ourselves: however, ultimately, the only person on whom we can reflect is our present selves. Indeed, if the self is continually forming new unities based on past experiences and future expectations, and further, if the self mutually encounters other selves and their variations, this interaction can result in a form of indeterminacy, that is only captured by an apperceptive unity occurring in the present and conditioned by this present. It goes without saying that each present has its own unity, which forms another self.

This temporal indication introduces another difficulty that, according to Husserl, variations generally face. In a footnote of the text Nr. 31 (390) Husserl elucidates this difficulty: the transformation one observes in a variation ideally involves a change of the same example, and at the same time, a fictive variation of the same essence can also

possess this character and coincide with the exemplary<sup>4</sup>. This warning becomes even more intriguing when Husserl's captivating words are considered: "Variation of others is my variation [...]. Every variation of the other is equivalent to one of my self-variations [...]" (373). Following these remarks, two points worth noted. Not only do I remember my past and also imagine my future variations of myself, but I also do the same for others, as they are constituted in me through these variations, just as I am for them. Moreover, these constitutions, like all variations, can be affected from the fictive ones and can be a result of fictive variations. As Husserl confirms in the text Nr. 28, all these variations of the others will inevitably remain within the modes of their own possible being and in their indeterminate horizon for me (*Ib.*; "unbestimmten Horizonten ihres Für-mich-möglicherweise-Seins").

Returning to the question of "whoness," it becomes clear that the temporality of this question creates "one of many possible variations" one can reflect upon. What Arendt refers to as the "story" in someone's life-story opens a productive field for examining both Husserl's understanding of variation and its possible fictive character that stories in general share. I will incorporate Waldenfels' notion of "radical alien" and Sözer's interpretations of "in-between" to this critical reading.

### 3.

Arendt's examinations on whoness are inseparable from her theory of action. According to her, whoness of somebody is a state of disclosure:

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<sup>4</sup> "Problem der Variation: a) Variation als Wandlung des Exempels in seinem eigenschaftlichen Wesen als idealer Veränderung desselben, b) zugleich mit dieser Variation im eigenschaftlichen Wesen Fiktion eines beliebigen Gleichen, dasdas jeweilig veränderte eigenschaftliche Wesen „ebenfalls hat“, sich mit dem Exempel darin deckt."

people can disclose themselves only in their deeds and reveal themselves in their words, whereby people can “appear” as unique and singular persons among others (Arendt 1998: 176). For Arendt, this uniqueness in their mode of appearance enables them to distinguish themselves from others and uphold the principle of individuation. In exercising this possibility, understanding the world as an in-between is not only related to the world of things forming an in-between from which we can stand from a particular point, but also human togetherness forming an in-between where people insert themselves and can be “seen and heard by others” (50). As the terms disclosure and insertion suggest, the whoness or identity of someone “appears” in the temporal moment of the now, yet, almost in the ephemeral moments and amidst the manifoldness of events in which it takes place. For this reason, according to Arendt, people cannot adequately witness what is happening and cannot capture what is disclosed in that moment sufficiently. Therefore, Arendt states that the sufficient distance to see and tell the story does not belong to actors but to the spectators. Arendt’s conception of whoness entails a strong affirmation of her view that “Being and appearing coincide” (Arendt 1978: 19). However, when interpreting appearance in its intrinsic manifoldness, one can claim that a story, a biography or an autobiography, can create its own variations for both oneself and others. Moreover, by using the notion of “life-story” (Arendt 1998: 184), it becomes possible to understand this story as akin to any other story, always intertwined with fictive elements. This final remark not only allows us to follow her arguments in alignment with Husserl’s variation theory but also to reconstruct what remains “indeterminate” in a story more radically. Then the decisive question here is: in its ever-changing experiences, is it possible to form a unity that can be called someone’s life-story?

To answer this question, we can adopt two strategies regarding the self here. First, as described above, according to Arendt, there are

agents that disclose themselves in human togetherness and provide a ground for a story, although the narrative unity of the story depends on the narrative unity of the spectator. Second, what discloses in action and speech is destined to remain as an ideal unity, which cannot be achieved either by the agent or the story teller (spectator; story-teller; historian). In this framework, neither the ground of the story, nor what a spectator can create is a single story. Although Arendt attributes the primacy of providing a "unified" story to the spectator, whom possesses the sufficient distance to observe the events unfolding in one's life, she acknowledges that this person shares the same ground that forms human relationships. People are always part of the "web of relationships" (183) that mutually influence the intentions of people. Arendt emphasizes that not only being "in" the event, but being in this "web" is the main reason for the people that they cannot become the authors of their life stories as if following a predictable script. For the same reason, a life story is never simply a result or a product of the sum of the actor's intentions, but rather it constantly changes its course within the web. The story alters its direction when others influence the events, and Arendt describes this as "the process character of action" (240).

Yet, the same emphasis on the spectator is crucial, as not only are the actors always amidst the events of their lives, and lack the necessary distance to gain a perspective enabling them to tell their story, but so do the spectators. Although Arendt concludes that only a spectator can tell the story, it raises the question: who indeed has the sufficient distance to see the "story" and be capable of narrating it? She says that those who are witnesses are like the Greek *daimon*<sup>5</sup> who

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<sup>5</sup> Arendt's remarks become particularly interesting in her interpretations of the relation between *eudaimonia* and *daimon*, and its relation with appearances in light of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in footnote 18: "For which, which man (can) bear more *eudaimonia* than he grasps from appearance and deflects in its appearance?" (Arendt 1998: 193).

looks back from one's shoulder (193) but could any spectator truly assume this illustrious position? The arguments presented thus far support her notable conclusion that "nobody is the author or the producer of his life story" (184) as each story changes its course in the web of relationships, and inevitable remains perspectival and one among many possible narratives, as articulated above.

These articulations lead us to the edges of the notion of a life story, perhaps to an impossible story. At this point, Waldenfels and Sözer can provide rich insights into another interpretation of the "in-between" that Arendt's thoughts can motivate. It can be rightly said that what is more intriguing for Arendt is to bring an existential dimension to her political ontology. In her renowned theory of action, taking initiative in political action and becoming the actors of their own stories is described as people taking their births onto themselves, a concept Arendt refers to as the "second birth" (176). From this point, Arendt's focus is neither on the unity of the story nor on its accuracy, but rather on actualizing the agent's potentiality and disclosing their appearance in a unique manner. This article follows another venue and claims that in all circumstances the story itself remains "potential". As Waldenfels rightly indicates, this potential from the beginning, is something that cannot fully actualize itself, yet it always includes its limit; "the limit of the ungraspable" (Waldenfels 2011: 4).

This "ungraspable limit" can be interpreted in different ways. In the Husserlian framework, it has been examined that neither in disclosure nor in what is transposed in narration do we encounter a single event, but rather a ground for a story, which actualizes in interchanging variations of the selves that traverse each other's "experiencing-together". However, there is something intrinsically left behind in the unitary content of the life-story. Waldenfels' description of "human as liminal being" makes it possible to relate this description to the "ungraspable" elements of one's life story. Firstly, the ground of

the story is something that remains alien to the agent itself. The parts that are unseen and unheard in a story do not only display something unavoidably alien in each encounter with oneself, but also denote an initial position, as Waldenfels describes: "This initial position which confronts us when we encounter the ungraspable in the graspable, the unordered in the ordered, the invisible in the visible" (*Ib.*). This position compels us to recognize the possibility of what has not yet been encountered can trigger a movement between these notions. Perhaps even more, we need to recognize the potentiality that lays ahead of us, that can be called the "horizon of the self," which expresses the space for the ungraspable, something that Waldenfels describes by being surrounded by the "shadows of the extra-ordinary". The *extra-ordinary* is explained in this exquisite paragraph as follows:

By the term "radical" I designate an alienness that can neither be traced back to something of the own nor integrated into a whole, and which is therefore irreducible in the sense just explained. Such a radical alienness presupposes that the so-called subject is not a master of itself and that every order, (which "there is" and which could always also be different, has its limits). Alienness in its radical form means that the self in a certain way lies outside of itself and that every order is surrounded by the shadows of the extra-ordinary" (75).

This paragraph permits us to interpret *extra-ordinary* together with the variation that we produce in each other, as Husserl's words "my variation is always the variation of the other" confirms. These variations align with the term "*extra-ordinary*," as the quote emphasizes that the self "lies outside of itself". Additionally, this point brings an insight into the Arendtian notion of 'story' and its possible 'order'; a story will always be in the approximation of the extra-

ordinary, for, ultimately, a story can be narrated from one's variation of the other, destined to be a story among other possible stories, and as the term suggests, in the *shadow* of other stories. These shadows may evoke the origin of the term *Abschattungen*, which initially refers to the shadows and the invisible remnants of what is seen and told.

As Waldenfels adds, the potentiality of the extra-ordinary, the promise of the unseen is not necessarily innocent. He suggests that the alien is not entirely harmless; the same potential in "the not yet seen for oneself" might alienate us from ourselves, leading a perpetual motivation to resist, avoid, or assimilate the alien (3). If we apply this claim to storytelling, any attempt to narrate the story in its possible variations will have the potential to include the unexpected; as playfully expressed by Waldenfels, it will be in the limits of "expecting the unexpected" (Waldenfels 2013: 80). In either case, there will be shadows of something radically alien in the horizon of one's or others' whoness. As indicated earlier, the horizon of encountering oneself is challenged not only by the possibility of encountering different variations of oneself in various constellations in relation to the world and others, but by the temporal impossibility of encountering past constitutions as they were. These points lead us to confront aspects of the self that will always remain alien, and thus to acknowledge that in each constitution, the self will take on its ever-new forms in its indeterminate horizon. The emergence of these new forms can be interpreted in their state of "in-between".

#### 4.

Waldenfels' inquiries in *Das Zwischenreich des Dialogs*, Sözer's extensive works on in-between, and the dialogue between these two philosophers call us to interpret the self not only as something belonging to this "in-between", but also as something that constitutes itself *from* this in-between. As thematized in the second section of this

paper, in each attempt to constitute a unified narrative, recollection brings together new contents, and in doing so, inserts into the flow of consciousness and changes it. This way it opens an in-between to the possible new forms of a new variation, and in that sense, the between is not something that naturally lies among things and persons, but rather what allows them to be seen. In connection to this emphasis on potentiality and exploration of possible ways of seeing things, Sözer points out the linguistic affinity between the Turkish words for “searching” and “between”: He underscores that the term for “between” (*ara*) shares its root with the verb for “searching” (*aramak*), indicating that the “between” is not only a spatial or relational concept but also encapsulates the act of seeking something (Sözer 2002: 226). In this context, the “search” for one’s personal identity begins with the question “who are you?” and it opens a dialogue (an in-between) with an unexpected dynamic: usually, when a question is posed, the response is expected from the person addressed, however, following Arendt’s line of argumentation, what is searched can only be seen by those capable of posing the question, rather than by the one addressed. This argumentation does not signify a fallacy in reasoning; instead, it reveals the inherent symmetry between the self and others, that means, from the beginning, the question of whoness is a *decentered* question, positioning us at an appropriate distance to see each other.

In the text Waldenfels wrote for Sözer’s *Festschrift* “Theater als Schauplatz des Fremden” (Waldenfels 2013: 77–91), he clarifies not only the symmetry between self and other, but at the same time, the alien *as* the self and the other. For both philosophers, the former metaphysical framework of dialogue (an inner dialogue) cannot be a sufficient for encountering oneself; the difference must come from outside and only this can form a difference. In his essay “Dismantling Metaphysics and the In-between of Political History” (Sözer 2002: 225–255), Sözer interprets Arendt’s words regarding Socrates in this



context: Arendt refers to Socrates' words for being one and *therefore* unable to be in harmony with oneself (238; Arendt 1978: 183). As she continues, nothing identical "can be in or out of harmony with itself; you need at least two sounds to produce a harmonious sound [...]. A difference is inserted into my Oneness" (Sözer 2002: 238; Arendt, 1978: 183). According to Sözer this paragraph marks a crucial reversal regarding the concept of difference: one can interpret difference, "Unterschied"<sup>6</sup>, by forming the same *out* of itself. As he explains, instead of positing difference as something taking place "under" (*unter* as in *Unter-schied*), Arendt allows us to understand difference as a *gap*, a form of opening in-between that thinking can locate (Sözer 2002: 238)<sup>7</sup>. Hence not the sameness but "the difference can be inserted into my Oneness" and, as he adds, "does that not refer to the fact that the between is already within Oneness? A Oneness which is already from the point of view of others, of plurality" (*Ib.*).

The word "harmony" used to refer to "more than one" should not lead us in a wrong direction. Neither of the philosophers at stake sees the experience of the in-between as harmonious or harmless, nor an undisturbed encounter. As Waldenfels indicates in the same text the "alien discloses itself where we have no access", "when something is not in order" or "deviates from what we get used to", "when the ground of the evident is shaken" (Waldenfels 2013: 78). In these depictions, "the radical alien" can be considered to belong to the ultimate origin of things and persons, regardless of the form these experiences take. For that, he continues by stating that the alien shares the features of the tragic, as in Greek tragedy, which includes the same elements of surprise, shock and fear, or in comedy, for example, when the

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<sup>6</sup> Sözer analyses Heidegger and Arendt on their views on "oneness" and "sameness"; "Unterschied". He claims that Arendt's analyses include more radical elements than Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics, and consequently introduces a reversal in traditional metaphysical interpretations.

<sup>7</sup> Sözer refers to Arendt's description of thinking as "two in one" (Arendt 1978: 179).

displacement of persons forms the unexpected (80). In both cases, the experiences in them reveal that "we are always an alien to ourselves and in each recognition, there is a failure" (Waldenfels 2013: 79). For Waldenfels, the challenging difficulties of encountering the alien works in both directions; it mostly ends with the attempts to assimilate the alien, but it also carries the potential for awakenings. He describes this tension as the "in-between of shock and routine" (89). This tension registers in his final remarks that the "theatre had to display against each other" and this "requires the participation of the spectators" (90–91). In his various philosophical texts and novels, Sözer makes similar references to the "stage" (Sözer 2014) as something that allow to display of the "in-between" (Sözer 2002: 244, 246). Yet, this possibility necessitates beginning with an "in-between of ontological-difference" (Sözer 2002: 250).

Regarding the experiences of the "stage" Waldenfels states, "Nothing that has been lost can be found as the same" (Waldenfels 2013: 79) and Sözer reinforces this claim by highlighting the importance of embedding difference within ontological difference as explained earlier. This approach allows for the experience without subsuming difference under another conception. At the limits of language, for both philosophers, the stage not only denotes the space where people can come together but also represents the experience that introduces both the expected and unexpected: these elements encompass encountering alien selves, whether one's own or that of another. While the ways of encountering cannot be fully exhausted, they can be stabilized in particular ways.

In the possibilities of encountering of the self, one variation can evolve into a "stable" story, but the remaining parts of the story cannot be conquered by narration or writing. This claim introduces an abundantly productive "in-between" to phenomenology and hermeneutics, transcending the limits of recollection and variations of

the constituted wholes and placing them properly within the horizon of the infinite. In this in-between, not only the reconstitution of the past and its modes of presentation vary, but in the act of transposition, they generate their own variations both in narration and in writing. When transposing a story into a narrative, whether it is a biography or an autobiography, it will always be one story among many others, yet in each version, it will *determine the indeterminate* not only because of the concrete form it holds but also because it unites one of the possible variations and discloses what is hidden in it.

As I have highlighted throughout this text, none of these unities are fixed; they can always be altered into a something “new” (Husserl 1969: 289)<sup>8</sup>. The process of bringing a unity to the self might be achieved through distancing oneself or recollecting its own variations, since every spatial and temporal point would provide someone with a new stance to see the past events. Therefore, the past experiences of the “not yet seen and not yet heard”, revive themselves in a story and give rise to “another story” of the same person or the same event, based on the changed of perspective of the new variations. This affirms that we can only partially understand the experience of the self by including what remains *radically alien* to itself. Without the in-between space that alien opens, neither accessing these potential aspects nor narrating them in a unified form can be accomplished. Personal identity entails its ever-new appearances in the relationality of the world and the indeterminate actuality of their variations. Given this essential role, the *ungraspable shadows of my alien self* can be a starting point for a genetic theory of personal identity and for relating to other alien selves.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. “What is given as unity and as we presuppose here, given adequately as individual and consequently temporal being, is not really and immanently given in the final and absolute sense” (Husserl 1991: 283).

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