

Niamh Éilis Burns

New College

GERDA WALTHER: MYSTICISM, PHILOSOPHY, ART

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



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Short abstract

My thesis examines the work of Gerda Walther, a philosopher and mystic whose work had until very recently been almost entirely neglected. A member of the Freiburg and Munich circles of phenomenologists, Walther worked in her main published texts (*Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften* (1922) and *Zur Phänomenologie der Mystik* (1923)) to balance the competing impulses arising out of a radically atheistic Marxist upbringing, her study of philosophy, and the onset of what she describes as mystical and telepathic experiences.

Walther's work, seen more or less as failed interventions into conventional phenomenological discourse by several of her contemporaries, has been recently reassessed by philosophers, and presented as more successful than previously thought. I undertake a reorientation of emerging scholarship on Walther in terms of a meditative-mystical tradition, and in terms of German modernist writing: examining the overlooked conditions and cultural contexts that show their workings in Walther's texts. I argue that Walther does indeed 'fail' to fit the mould of an early phenomenologist, and that this ironically staged failure forms the interest of her work.

My thesis is the first study of Walther to be grounded in a language-based reading of her texts, and which takes a wider cultural approach to her work. I employ a methodology of critical close reading to make explicit the compelling implicit textual processes of Walther's work. Throughout her work, peculiar accounts of personal experiences masquerade as the result of abstracted philosophical reflections; and artistic approaches to religious experience and social life are presented as having as much of a hold on those topics as philosophy does. Walther is asking what it means for a text to be philosophical, mystical or artistic, with work that occupies an intersection of generic traditions, and blurs these distinctions in productive and problematic ways. The set of problems she presents contributes to a new vision of the philosophical and cultural landscape in early twentieth-century Germany. I introduce Walther's work into areas of scholarship in which she is virtually unknown, but to which she ought to be of most interest: discussions of the margins of modernist cultural life and writing; and philosophical scholarship which questions the grounds of its investigations.

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Long abstract

My thesis investigates the early works of German philosopher and mystic Gerda Walther (1897–1977). As a young woman, Walther was involved in both the Freiburg and Munich circles of early phenomenologists, and was taught by Edmund Husserl and a young Martin Heidegger. Born in Nordrach in 1897, she was the granddaughter of the Danish Nobel Peace Prize Winner Fredrik Bajer, and was raised by an atheist Marxist father who ran a tuberculosis sanatorium. Following the onset of what she describes as telepathic and mystical experiences in 1918 (during which time she was studying philosophy), Walther began to integrate discussion of such experience into her phenomenology.

My thesis investigates the extent to which Walther attempts to align herself with mainstream phenomenological procedure, and uncovers the alternative kinds of investigation and narrative she turns to as she encounters limitations in what she can do with phenomenology. My primary focus is on Walther's first two published texts, *Zur Phänomenologie der Mystik* (1923), and *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften*, submitted as her doctoral thesis in 1921 and published in 1922. These are texts in which Walther's stated position is that she is adopting a Husserlian phenomenological procedure. However they diverge from these Husserlian principles far more quickly than Walther ever explicitly acknowledges, using textual strategies that draw as much on the meditative-mystical tradition and modernist aesthetics as they do on Husserlian reduction.

My thesis builds on the work done by a number of philosophical scholars to 're-discover' Walther in the past five years. The University of Paderborn's *Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists* has been an important driver of the recent resurgence of

interest in work by Walther and other relatively neglected women phenomenologists. Though still relatively small in number, recent publications (including those by Sebastian Luft, Ruth Hagengruber, Antonio Calcagno, Dan Zahavi, Alessandro Salice and Rodney Parker) indicate a significant renewed interest in Walther. They form part of a wider effort to re-investigate the lost contributions of women in this period. These publications have done a great deal towards identifying Walther's unique philosophical contribution, often viewing her work in comparison to other figures in early phenomenology. In general the focus of recent scholarship has been Walther's social ontology, with Walther's later more extreme esotericism perhaps putting some scholars off re-investigating her early mysticism.

While recognising the importance of some of this philosophical scholarship, I pursue quite a different approach to Walther's work. By examining those parts of her texts that are less clearly presenting a 'philosophy', I illuminate another side of Walther's output. I show that Walther clearly limits the role of philosophical language, but ventures beyond those limits in her use of mystical and literary sources. In this way I offer an early intervention into this emerging Walther scholarship, and encourage a wider, less narrowly philosophical view of what her work can offer present day scholarship. In particular I emphasise how her work is interesting as a modern expression of mysticism, and as the result of a change in the status of language in the light of modernist poetics. These considerations then influence how we ought to read Walther's very conception of the role and power of philosophy in significant ways. My contention is that Walther's texts are stranger than recent literature makes clear. I argue that a more culturally-focused, text-based approach can uncover why this is productive for scholarship on phenomenology, mysticism and modernist cultural output.

My thesis is the first study of Walther to be grounded in a language- and text-based reading of her work, and which takes a wider cultural approach to it. I employ a methodology of critical close reading to uncover how certain overlooked conditions and cultural contexts

show their workings in Walther's texts. In reading Walther's texts on social ontology and mysticism, I make explicit the implicit processes of Walther's texts with a study that is philosophical, literary-critical and cultural. In making explicit the implicit, I do not mean that I extract the 'ideas' that lie behind the texts. Rather I adhere to the material of the text – the language used – and look at the nuances of how that language operates. I supplement this close reading with a consideration of biographical detail, primarily taken from Walther's 1960 autobiography, as well as an examination of unpublished materials found in Walther's *Nachlass*, held by the Bavarian State Library. My study of these under-researched aspects of Walther's work provides an alternative view of her position in early German phenomenology, and of how phenomenology was conceived of by its early members. In testing the limits of phenomenological investigation, and in moving beyond those limits to establish affinities with mystical-meditative and modernist artistic production, Walther reimagines the role of phenomenology as a creative, meditative reflection on contingent material experience, rather than the absolute grounding science her teachers often position it as.

Central to my investigation is Walther's treatment of essence/abstraction versus materiality/contingency throughout, showing how she locates them between disciplines and discourses rather than conceiving of them in purely philosophical terms. Throughout Walther's work, accounts of strange personal experiences masquerade as the result of abstracted philosophical reflections; and artistic approaches to religious experience and social life are presented as having as much of a hold on those topics as philosophy does. Walther is asking what it means for a text to be philosophical, mystical or artistic, with work that occupies an intersection of generic traditions, and blurs these distinctions in productive and problematic ways. The set of problems she presents contributes to an altered vision of the philosophical landscape in early twentieth-century Germany. This is interesting as a cultural-historical point, and for its insights for contemporary philosophical or cultural debates which arise out of a history in which voices like Walther's were relatively excluded. My thesis serves

as an intervention into a history of thought that is dominated by mythologised accounts of ‘great figures’.

My thesis flips the order of Walther’s two main published texts, in order to unsettle the priority of the philosophical in the discussion of her work. I begin with a reading of *Zur Phänomenologie der Mystik*, where Walther writes as a modernist mystic as well as a phenomenologist. By beginning with *Zur Phänomenologie der Mystik*, the more unusual aspects of *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften* are allowed to come to the fore. My dissertation is structured around the themes of mysticism, philosophy and art: the three forms of language or cultural output with which Walther engages. I focus in particular on those areas where these forms interact, or begin to seep into one another.

Chapter Two, ‘Mysticism’, repositions Walther’s 1923 text, which examines the structure of human experience and especially religious/mystical experience, as the key to reading all her output. Though Walther masks it with depersonalised and abstracted language, the text is in fact rooted in mystical and telepathic experiences Walther had herself, and which she sought to reconcile with her previous Marxist materialism and emerging interest in phenomenology. Walther presents a modernist form of a mystical meditation (in the style of Teresa of Ávila), in which phenomenological investigation and personal reflection are productively blurred. In this way her second work offers a fascinating model for a kind of philosophical language which arises once philosophical objectivity is left behind. My close readings of Walther’s text on mysticism focus on the metaphorical language she uses, in particular the points at which philosophical analogy collapses into modernist metaphor. I determine where she does this in order to mask those personal reflections that do not fit into a philosophical text; and where she indicates, in modernist fashion, that metaphorical language is the only kind available in such an investigation.

Chapter Three, 'Philosophy', reassesses Walther's earlier work on social ontology in the light of the previous chapter's reading of her more obviously 'unusual' text. Walther is concerned in *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften* with establishing what it is that makes for human community. I show how in this text, philosophical and phenomenological abstraction is presented alongside a more contingently located and creative account of social interaction: one that borrows from fictional writing. Phenomenological procedure is employed and simultaneously ironized in such a manner that its limits are exposed and tested. In seeking a way out of radical materialist determinism, Walther employs a Husserlian transcendental 'pure I'. But this explicit identification with phenomenological convention quickly breaks down as Walther employs various distancing strategies, including ironic and playful language. In doing so Walther collapses the distance between material contingent description and generalised phenomenological statements about experience 'as such'. This is an implicit challenge to Husserlian phenomenologists who rely on the self-grounding nature of philosophy as discipline. I argue that Walther to some extent anticipates the later Wittgenstein in staging the problems of the limits of philosophy in general, and phenomenology in particular, as problems of language. At the same time she is inspired by mystics who have found creative solutions to the problem of representing God in language.

Chapter Four, 'Art', examines the other forms of language and creative output to which Walther turns as a result of her loss of faith in philosophy's self-grounding character. I return to *Zur Phänomenologie der Mystik* to examine Walther's reference to artistic works, including poetry by Stefan George and Rainer Maria Rilke, and expressionist painting. I place Walther in relation to a vision of modernist poetics in which language, like theory in Walther's work, anticipates its own failure or inadequacies (particularly when judged against criteria of reference-based meaning), but works to re-draw the lines of criteria for 'success'. I look at where Walther's use of poetic quotation is so extensive and plays such a crucial role in her text that it bleeds into the main philosophical narrative. I also examine Walther's introduction of

references to childhood literature in the 1955 revised edition of *Zur Phänomenologie der Mystik*, where literature is used to make the phenomenological investigation an accessible one.

Walther's interaction with art demonstrates a kind of modernist sensibility in which the crises of modernity are approached with a degree of pragmatism. I examine Walther's engagement with the artistic production of the day as part of her efforts to find community in practice: and I show how, as with her interaction with phenomenological circles, Walther faced only partial acceptance, if not active exclusion.

In my conclusion (Chapter Five), I briefly look at Walther's life and work beyond that of the 1920s, with a consideration of her 1938 publication *Abnen und Schauen unserer germanischen Vorfahren im Lichte der Parapsychologie*. I examine how Walther's procedure of concealment and indirectness, productive and valuable for the most part in her early texts, is used in this later one to contribute to the kind of Nazi myth-building around German identity that Walther disavows in her 1960 autobiography. In doing so I encourage a nuanced view of Walther's more positive and productive contributions. I emphasise Walther's cultural situation and pursue a demythologised history of the period: one that does not ignore the failings of new figures who also have something positive to offer.

In all, my project reorientates emerging scholarship on Gerda Walther, providing an original account of how her work is distinctive. This account is cultural-critical in scope in that it draws out her work's interaction with mystical-meditative and artistic traditions. As a result of this wider critical reading, my thesis shows how Walther implicitly provides a model for a critique of an overly systematic and closed-off phenomenology: in this sense, my argument is also philosophical. I provide a model for how the history of philosophy can be expanded to include figures who were marginalised at the time of writing as well as since then. I examine how that marginalisation caused one such figure to shift the terms of her inquiry outside of the mainstream in productive and problematic ways. And in showing how a critical

reconsideration of Walther's work might contribute to discussions of key scholarly questions around mysticism, philosophy and modernism, I suggest a movement beyond the canon in literature and philosophy in search of fresh insights, both historical and contemporary.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I. Introducing Gerda Walther: phenomenology and the noise of the day

In a 1923 lecture given in Freiburg and entitled *Ontologie: Hermeneutik der Faktizität*, Martin Heidegger declared that phenomenology, a relatively new field of philosophical investigation, had already reached a point of crisis. He illustrated this ‘public scandal of philosophy’ by noting the recent publication of a book on the phenomenology of mysticism:

Die phänomenologische Forschung, die der Boden für wissenschaftliche Arbeit sein sollte, ist zu Verwaschenheit, Leichtfertigkeit und Schnelligkeit herabgesunken, zum philosophischen Lärm des Tages und zu einem öffentlichen Skandal der Philosophie. [...] Wie weit es gekommen ist, zeigt ein neu erschienenes Buch: *Zur Phänomenologie der Mystik*, das im offiziellen Verlag und mit offiziellster Patenschaft erscheint. Es soll hier davor gewarnt werden!¹

The author of this book, though she goes unnamed in Heidegger’s lecture, was philosopher and mystic Gerda Walther (1897–1977). As a young woman, Walther was involved in both the Freiburg and Munich circles of early phenomenologists. Born in Nordrach in 1897, she was the granddaughter of the Danish Nobel Peace Prize Winner Fredrik Bajer, and was raised by an atheist Marxist father who ran a tuberculosis sanatorium. Following the onset of what she describes as telepathic and mystical experiences in 1918 (during which time she was studying philosophy), Walther began to integrate discussion of such experience into her phenomenology. The text Heidegger references in this 1923 lecture, *Zur Phänomenologie der Mystik* (1923) (*PdM*), is Walther’s second publication.² It followed shortly after her doctoral thesis *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften* (*OsG*), submitted in 1921 and published in 1922.³

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Ontologie: Hermeneutik der Faktizität*, Gesamtausgabe, LXIII (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1988), pp. 73-4.

² Gerda Walther, *Zur Phänomenologie der Mystik* (Halle a.d.S.: Niemeyer, 1923). Further references appear in parenthesis in the text.

³ Gerda Walther, *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften* (Halle a.d.S.: Niemeyer, 1922). Further references appear in parenthesis in the text.

Only recently a student of Heidegger and his teacher Edmund Husserl in Freiburg, Walther's work was by this point being condemned as the 'philosophical noise of the day' by a central figure in the development of German phenomenology. According to Heidegger, Walther was simply not up to the task with which Heidegger charged phenomenology: that of providing the basis for scientific research. What did Gerda Walther do to earn such a review from her former teacher? As the Heidegger quote demonstrates (though he puts this in less than charitable terms), the disagreement between the two was around the fundamental role of phenomenology as an investigative tool. Even as Walther embraced phenomenology, her conception of both its purpose and its methods differed greatly from that of her teachers. My study of her under-researched work provides an alternative view of early German phenomenology: showing an early figure in phenomenology reaching outside of that discipline. In testing the limits of phenomenological investigation, and in moving beyond those limits to establish affinities with mystical-meditative and modernist artistic production, Walther reimagines the role of phenomenology as a creative, meditative reflection on contingent material experience, rather than the absolute grounding science her teachers often position it as.⁴

The phenomenological method in which Walther was schooled was represented most strongly by Edmund Husserl. Husserl stood at the centre of the phenomenological circle in Freiburg and his influence was felt further afield in Munich, the other location in which Walther was educated. Walther's primary supervisor in Munich was Alexander Pfänder. Herbert Spiegelberg writes in his 'historical introduction' to the phenomenological movement that Pfänder was one of his own main teachers too. Spiegelberg notes that Pfänder is generally

⁴ I discuss Husserl as an example of this in this chapter and later. Heidegger is another example, though he can be said to have departed from this sort of grounding phenomenology (as Walther does in a different way) later in his career. For a discussion of the nuances of Heidegger's later position towards phenomenology see Tobias Keiling, 'Phenomenology and Ontology in the Later Heidegger', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Phenomenology*, ed. by Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 251–67.

thought to be part of the ‘older phenomenological movement’, meaning that he did not follow all of the developments made by Husserl to the phenomenological method.⁵

Nonetheless Pfänder worked as an editor on Husserl’s *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* from 1913, and despite some differences they can be said to follow the same basic phenomenological principles.⁶ The editors of the *Jahrbuch* state in the first issue’s foreword that they are united by:

[...] die gemeinsame Überzeugung, daß nur durch Rückgang auf die originären Quellen der Anschauung und auf die aus ihr zu schöpfenden Wesenseinsichten die großen Traditionen der Philosophie nach Begriffen und Problemen auszuwerten sind, daß nur auf diesem Wege die Begriffe intuitiv geklärt, die Probleme auf intuitivem Grunde neu gestellt und dann auch prinzipiell gelöst werden können.⁷

What this represents is the position that phenomenology offers a kind of reorientation of philosophical thinking, one that will result in a reformulation of the terms it uses, and the very questions it asks.

Husserl’s *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* made up most of this first issue of the *Jahrbuch*. In this key phenomenological text, Husserl proposes his ‘epoché’, a reorientation that sees the philosophising subject suspend their ‘natural standpoint’ [‘natürliche Einstellung’]. This is the usual mode of experience and reflection, in which a subject speaks as an ‘I’, from their own experience in their world.⁸ The subject instead positions themselves in such a way that they approach experience without presuppositions. The structure of experience *as such* is at issue, rather than the content of experiences. This sort

⁵ Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1960), p. xxii.

⁶ This is why Spiegelberg calls them part of the same ‘movement’. Spiegelberg (1960), p. 5.

⁷ Edmund Husserl, Moritz Geiger, Alexander Pfänder, Adolf Reinach and Max Scheler, ‘Vorwort’, *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, 1 (1) (1913), v–vi. Spiegelberg concludes on the basis of the style of this foreword and conversations with Pfänder in the 1913 that it was drafted by Husserl himself. Spiegelberg (1960), p. 5.

⁸ Edmund Husserl, ‘Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie’, *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, 1 (1) (1913), 1–323. On the ‘natural standpoint’ and its suspension see especially pp. 48–57.

of procedure makes phenomenology the grounding for any subsequent academic investigations of particular experiences or kinds of experience. In this way phenomenology grounds all other academic endeavours. Though Heidegger began to disagree with Husserl early on in their professional relationship, it is this Husserlian vision of phenomenology as a grounding discipline that comes across in the above Heidegger quotation.⁹ To use Heidegger's language, Husserl advocates that the investigative subject take themselves out of the 'noise of the day', suspending their usual, everyday sorts of judgements about themselves and their world.

My thesis investigates the extent to which Walther attempts to align herself with this sort of phenomenological procedure, and the alternative kinds of investigation and narrative she turns to as she encounters limitations in what she can do with phenomenology. My primary focus is on Walther's first two published texts, on mysticism and social ontology. My methodology is a close reading that makes explicit the most interesting implicit impulses underlying how these texts work. Alongside this close reading, I consider details of cultural and historical context that illuminate facets of these texts that have otherwise gone unnoticed. These are texts in which Walther's stated position is that she is adopting a Husserlian phenomenological procedure. However they diverge from these Husserlian principles far more quickly than Walther ever explicitly acknowledges, using textual strategies that draw as much on the meditative-mystical tradition and modernist aesthetics as they do on Husserlian reduction.

Walther's own exact position towards her teachers remains somewhat difficult to establish, and it is likely that it was reasonably ambivalent. Her 1960 autobiography, published long after Walther's professional association with her former teachers was dissolved, sheds

⁹ For one account of this disagreement see Taylor Carman, 'The Critique of Husserl', in *Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity in Being and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 53–100.

only some light on the matter. Its title is *Zum anderen Ufer: Vom Marxismus und Atheismus zum Christentum (ZaU)*. This title frames it as a narrative about her conversion to Catholicism, but its subject matter is generally more comprehensive. In this autobiography Walther tells her life story from early childhood through to the end of the Second World War. This text is an important source of biographical detail in my thesis. Part of its interest lies in how it shows Walther reflecting on her own position in history in the run-up to 1960. Walther's autobiography was later made a *Zeitdokument* and placed in school libraries across Germany for the insights it gave into German life during the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰ The chapters dedicated to Walther's engagement with the phenomenological circles show her deep respect for her teachers including Husserl, Pfänder and Heidegger; but they also indicate that Walther's position in the academy was from the outset a difficult one.

Walther documents the beginning of her academic career in philosophy in the chapter 'Endlich auf der Universität', which begins with her arrival in Munich for the Winter Semester of 1915/16.¹¹ She was taught there by the Catholic Pfänder, who set her out on the search for the 'foundational essences' ['Grundwesen'] of different entities. From the outset Walther's education involved her having to balance a variety of intellectual commitments, bringing together traditions and affiliations that did not always sit comfortably together. Walther's education up to that point followed the Marxist principles learned from her father: her account in her autobiography is backed up by a notebook compiled around 1913 with essays and notes on Karl Marx and August Bebel's *Die Frau und der Sozialismus*.¹² As she describes in *ZaU*, when she arrived at university Walther saw the revelation of Pfänder's foundational

¹⁰ Linda López McAlister, 'Gerda Walther', in *Contemporary Women Philosophers: 1900-today*, ed. by Mary Ellen Waithe, A History of Women Philosophers, IV (Dordrecht and London: Kluwer Academic, 1995), pp. 189–205, p. 195.

¹¹ Gerda Walther, *Zum anderen Ufer: Vom Marxismus und Atheismus zum Christentum* (Remagen: Reichl, 1960), pp. 181–95. Further references appear in parenthesis in the text.

¹² Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Ana 317 Gerda Walther Nachlass, Sch. 21. B. V. Diverse Nachschriften.

essence as a task that fitted with her commitment to socialism: ‘der Sozialismus mußte all diesen Grundwesen die äußere Möglichkeit verschaffen, sich zu entwickeln und zu vollenden [...] Auf solche Weise konnte ich leicht diese beiden Weltanschauungen vereinigen’ (*ZaU*, p. 189). In this statement she emphasises the importance of the material realities of subjects who seek this essence. She adds of her teacher, however: ‘Pfänder freilich war das völlig fremd’ (*ZaU*, p. 189).

Walther’s account of her first encounters with religion show her excitement at the prospect of ‘Vorurteilslosigkeit’ with regard to the religious; Pfänder convinced her that the dogma of non-believers was equivalent to that of believers (*ZaU*, pp. 189–90). When she encountered resistance from her father around her choice of major at university, she convinced him that economics was not the right choice (she told him she would be better off reading Marx in her spare time); philosophy, on the other hand, was ‘ein ganz neutrales Gebiet’ (*ZaU*, p. 199). Despite her apparent excitement at the prospect of ‘unprejudiced’ or ‘neutral’ study, Walther’s disagreements with her teachers seem to centre on their insistence that she reject those ‘prejudiced’ commitments that gave her thinking shape.

Walther moved to Freiburg in 1917 to study with Husserl, and devotes a chapter of her autobiography to this period: ‘Bei Edmund Husserl in Freiburg i. Br.’ (*ZaU*, pp. 196–20). When she first met him, Husserl was dismayed when she told him that she intended to be a ‘sozialistische Agitatorin’, on the grounds that he thought a philosopher must be ‘völlig vorurteilslos, frei von weltanschaulicher Voreingenommenheit’. He thought she ought to become a schoolteacher instead (*ZaU*, pp. 203–4). Walther recalls Husserl telling her on another occasion: ‘Sie sind doch eine unverbesserliche Materialistin’ (*ZaU*, p. 212). Though Walther generally held Husserl in high regard, some of her comments suggest that she possessed an underlying scepticism around the possibility of truly unprejudiced enquiry. Her

description of a lecture about the phenomenological reduction is certainly at least somewhat ironic in tone:

Wenn Husserl in der Vorlesung auf dem Katheder stand, erinnerte er mich manchmal an einen Propheten des Alten Testaments oder einen mittelalterlichen Weisen, der auf einem hohen Turm stehend den Bahnen der Sterne nachsinnt: in weltentrückter Ferne schien er über den Dingen in der Sphäre des 'reinen Bewußtseins' zu weilen. [...] Es gab freilich doch etwas, was Husserl sehr schätzte in der Außenwelt, und das war starker Bohnenkaffee. (ZaU, p. 211)

Walther seems intrigued but not entirely convinced by the notion that the philosopher might operate independently of contingent worldly conditions or values. She notes that she is most excited by the study of formal logic when it is used in service of 'das Erfassen der Natur, der ganzen Welt', and so is not 'abstrakt und abseitig' (ZaU, pp. 193–4).

So even in advocating for unprejudiced enquiry she emphasises the role of the material conditions of the philosopher in that philosopher's thinking. Despite her enthusiasm and aptitude for philosophy, Walther shows an awareness of the particular material constraints facing her as a woman doing philosophy. From a young age, Walther exhibited an awareness of how her gender affected her ability to engage in intellectual circles, and articulated frustration with assumptions concerning the intellectual inferiority of women. A note from her *Nachlass*, dating from around the time she turned sixteen years old in 1913, reads:

Ich sei besonders klug und intelligent usw. usw. sagen sie. Wenn sie doch das Quatschen ließen. Ich bin nur einigermaßen vernünftig erzogen worden und kann daher etwas mehr als die durch eine blödsinnige Erziehung verdrehten anderen jungen Mädchen. Erzieht die Mädchen vernünftig und berücksichtigt vor allem auch ihre Verstandesbildung und ihr werdet sehen, daß sie den Männern an geistigen Fähigkeiten nicht nachstehen.¹³

The same notebook includes a short essay entitled 'Beweis für die Unrichtigkeit der Behauptung: die Frau sei von Natur aus unlogisch' (these pages are undated but the

¹³ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Ana 317 Gerda Walther Nachlass, Sch. 21. B. V. Diverse Nachschriften.

handwriting suggests Walther was younger when she wrote it). She gives some examples of what she calls '[die] altmodische Einstellung zur Frau' in her autobiography (*ZaU*, pp. 216–7). She recalls reading Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* on a train and being told by a man sitting opposite her that she could put the book away, as he had already seen it: 'er bildete sich Wahrhaftig ein, ich "als Frau" würde niemals so ein Buch lesen und hätte es nur zum Schein aufgeschlagen, um ihm – dem fremden Mann!! – zu imponieren' (*ZaU*, p. 217). More significantly, she recalls that she returned to Munich to work with Pfänder because Husserl refused to supervise her doctoral thesis on the grounds that 'die Aufgabe der Frau [sei] im Grunde doch das Heim, die Ehe' (*ZaU*, p. 217).¹⁴

These details give a sense of Walther's precarious balance of commitments as she began her short academic career, and the external limitations she faced. My analysis of her two main texts will show both her adherence to the phenomenological movement to which she retained strong ties at the time of writing these texts, and her frustration with it. This fraught context can be read in the construction of her texts. Insofar as she approaches and even collides with the limits of her engagement with certain intellectual communities, Walther presents work which both aligns with their output, and diverges from it in fascinating ways. The context of these external limitations also goes to the very idea of her thought, which so often occupies a tension between the abstracting or systematising impulses of philosophy and a commitment to more material concerns. It is in this place of tension that Walther makes some of her most interesting contributions. Walther exhibits in her work and in her own reflections on that work in *ZaU* both a desire to move beyond those limitations, and also an impulse to make her insights conform to established modes of academic writing. This is why some of her more critical or creative sections operate implicitly rather than explicitly, a feature

¹⁴ I return to the position of women in Husserl's circle, particularly that of Edith Stein, in Chapter Three.

of her work that means it has been misunderstood or undervalued, but which makes it ripe for critical reconsideration.

Alasdair MacIntyre has identified in the case of Edith Stein a philosopher who was both allowed a place in the phenomenological movement, and denied a central one.¹⁵ He shows how that dual exclusion and embrace led ultimately to interesting diversions from the straightforward phenomenological path. His study considers how Stein's life and her philosophical work influenced one another, making a strong case that 'compartmentalisation' of the private/personal and the philosophical is a 'constructed' narrative. He points to Heidegger as a 'coauthor of the myth' that his politics and philosophy are separate.¹⁶ This fits with efforts by other philosophers, notably John D. Caputo, to 'demythologise' Heidegger: to find the historical, material basis for his apparently ante-historical insights.¹⁷ MacIntyre finds in Stein 'one kind of philosophical life possible in the twentieth century'.¹⁸ Walther lived another kind of philosophical life: one in which she failed to find the perfect intellectual community to receive her, but in which her efforts to do so resulted in a fascinating phenomenological contribution characterised by a focus on the material and the personal, and a creativity of approach.

My contention is that even where Walther presents her work as conforming to an ideal of phenomenological 'purity', it is in fact highly personal and partial. As Walther later admitted, her supposedly ideal cases of mystical experience in *PdM* are based on specific

¹⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁷ John D. Caputo, *Demythologising Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). See as well Caputo's work on the 'logic of "derivative and original"' in Heidegger. Caputo draws on Marlène Zarader, who exposes Heidegger's denial of the very obvious links between his work and Hebrew scripture. John D. Caputo, 'People of God, People of Being: The Theological Presuppositions of Heidegger's Path of Thought', in *Appropriating Heidegger*, ed. by James Faulconer and Mark Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 85–100.

¹⁸ MacIntyre, p. vii.

experiences she herself had.¹⁹ Thus the criticism that Heidegger levies against Walther in 1923 has its legitimacy: her work is indeed firmly rooted in ‘the noise of the day’, if we take this to mean the messy material and cultural context of its production. And she does not purport to present a fundamental grounding for all academic endeavours: her aims and the role she identifies for phenomenology are more modest. But I argue that this noisiness, messiness and modesty are precisely what make her work worth re-investigating.

II. Walther Contra Heidegger! An initial close reading

In order to gain a sense of how this textual messiness operates in Walther’s work, I use a methodology of critical close reading throughout my thesis, taking into account important contextual influences and resonances. I give a preliminary indication of how that methodology works here, with a close reading of a short handwritten note in Walther’s *Nachlass*. This reading draws out Walther’s own position towards phenomenological purity more precisely. It also gives an initial sense of the productive possibilities of Walther’s less pure conception of phenomenological inquiry. The note is entitled ‘Contra Heidegger! (im Sinne Hegels)’; the emphatic punctuation is characteristic of her style of writing in her published works as well. It deals with the phenomenological reduction to a ‘pure I’ (bracketing off the natural standpoint), with Heidegger as its representative. The note itself is not dated, and is written on a single loose page inserted into the back of a bundle of notes Walther took on Heidegger’s lecture ‘Die Idee der Philosophie und das Weltanschauungsproblem’ (appearing in Walther’s notes as ‘Idee einer Philosophie und Weltanschauungsproblem’). Heidegger gave this lecture at Freiburg in the *Kriegsnotsemester* of 1919, at the age of 29; so this note can be viewed as the responses of a young Walther to the early phenomenological standpoint presented by the

¹⁹ She acknowledges this in the preface to the second revised edition of *PdM*, published in 1955. Gerda Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 2nd rev. edn (Olten and Freiburg i.B.: Walter, 1955), p. 17. She also mentions this in *ZaU*, p. 11.

young Heidegger. The points raised by Walther in this note are a general response to this notion of reduction, and so can be read as responding as much to Husserl as to Heidegger.

Walther's short note takes the form of a series of rhetorical questions, followed by a series of statements. I quote it in its entirety here, save for one bracketed reference to Scheler's *Ethik I* and Kant's 'lieblosen, mißtrauischen "Standpunkt" in der Erkenntnis der Objekte', which is not fully legible. The note contains some shorthand: as well as the obvious 'u.' for 'und', 'empir.' is presumably 'empirischen', 'im D' presumably 'im Denken', and 'hist.' presumably 'historischen'. The underlining is Walther's own.

Zurückdrängung des empir. Ich bei Sachlichkeit gefordert, damit die Sache rein im D erfaßt? Ist das notwendig? Kann die reine Hingabe an das Objekt in seinem Argument nicht der selbstlosen Hingabe an u. Liebe zu dem Objekt entspringen? Kann nicht diese Liebe die höchste Erfüllung der Wesensintention des historischen Ich sein, oder die höchste Zurückdrängung des hist. Ich zum Zwecke der Hingabe an das Objekt gleichzeitig die höchste Erfüllung und Steigerung desselben sein [...] Höchste Sachlichkeit (in der Hingabe an das Objekt) und höchste Erfüllung des eigenen Ich u. seinen Wesensintention (nämlich eben der Liebe zu diesem Objekt) sind also keine Gegensätze oder Widersprüche, höchste Interessiertheit kann so höchste Sachlichkeit hervorrufen. (Auch das ist ein Stück Dialektik, Negation der Negation.)²⁰

Walther is here questioning the kind of objectivity ('Sachlichkeit') that appears in Heidegger. In particular she wishes to retain in pure phenomenological reflection some role for the empirical or historical 'Ich'. This seems to mark an important departure from the vision of Husserlian pure phenomenological reflection, which Heidegger broadly follows at this point (and which, at the very least, Walther associates with him in this note).

Walther expresses in this note a concern that the phenomenological reduction as presented by Heidegger involves an abandonment of the historical or empirical 'Ich' in favour of the pure 'Ich'. In Walther's view, this hierarchical relation of the historical/empirical and

²⁰ Gerda Walther, 'Contra Heidegger! (Im Sinne Hegels.)', loose note. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Ana 317 Gerda Walther Nachlass, B. V. Vorlesungsnachschriften, 3 (a).

the structural is misguided. For Walther, a sense of 'purity' in one's intentional approach towards objects can be achieved without such a radical repudiation of the natural standpoint. Walther's 'Ich' does leave itself behind in some way (it is 'selbstlos'). However the sense in which Walther's 'Ich' is 'selbstlos' is that it, an empirically and historically located Ich, has chosen to devote itself to or love an object outside of itself. And this love or devotion is framed not as an opportunity for the radical reorientation of the Ich; rather it is couched in the language of fulfilment for the historical/empirical Ich ('Erfüllung', 'Steigerung'). Walther's final statement offers a distinctive vision of objectivity as *interest*: 'Höchste Sachlichkeit (in der Hingabe an das Objekt) und höchste Erfüllung des eigenen Ich u. seinen Wesensintention (nämlich eben der Liebe zu diesem Objekt) sind also keine Gegensätze oder Widersprüche, höchste Interessiertheit kann so höchste Sachlichkeit hervorrufen'. This goes beyond the basic phenomenological repudiation of the most extreme forms of objectivity (as an impossible standpoint beyond or outside subjectivity).

Walther goes along with the phenomenological repudiation of this extreme objectivity in her work. But what this note indicates neatly is that she does not then seek some 'possible objectivity' in the form of the discovery of absolute structures of that subjectivity out of which any objectivity arises. Walther situates her thinking in the relative: the contingent, historical or empirical 'I' who loves or devotes itself to an object. The Ich's reorientation is possible without a radical suspension of the specific historical or contingent circumstances of the ordinary Ich. As I will show in my analysis of *PdM*, Walther is committed to some sense of the absolute, in that the most important object to which an Ich can devote itself is God. But the absolute has its source outside of the workings of the Ich, and enters into the Ich's sphere in that Ich's everydayness.

Walther presents here a positive vision of phenomenological procedure. It is positive in the philosophical or epistemological sense of having content (historical and empirical)

beyond what is true by definition, rather than pertaining only to definitional or structural matters. It is also positive in an everyday sense, in that love and devotion are held up as vital pre-reflective modes of engagement. It is interesting then that Walther presents this positive vision in the form of a modest *via negativa*, by positioning it in the title of the note as a counter to Heidegger's position. Walther calls the formulation she uses towards the end of the note ('keine Gegensätze oder Widersprüche') a 'negation of a negation', meaning it is 'Ein Stück Dialektik'. She shows an awareness of the indirectness with which she presents her vision of devotional intentionality, a stylistic indirectness that arises as well from the 'questioning' form. Walther's criticism of Heidegger is far less pointed than the title of the note might lead one to expect. Indeed Walther presents her important modification to the phenomenological method represented by Heidegger as a minor one; she situates her thinking firmly within the Heideggerian space and introduces how it might work *with* his argument rather than *against* it. As such Walther presents her disagreement in quite different terms to how Heidegger expresses his disapproval of Walther.

This note is evidence of Walther's real-time engagement with the phenomenological movement. It is not a published text, and it does not present a polished argument. Rather it sits alongside her lecture notes as a physical, material trace of the context in which it was produced. In a sense, it is unimportant. But an awareness of its unfixed, incomplete and unpolished character indicates something about how her published texts ought to be read: with a careful attention to contextual structures and with a sensitivity to that which remains implicit rather than explicit. As I will explore, this indirectness is at different times a strength and a weakness. Walther's criticism of Heidegger never becomes direct even when more explicitly situated in the 'historical' rather than the 'philosophical'. The condemnation of his association with Nazism is offloaded in her autobiography to the Jesuit priest and philosopher Erich Przywara whom she quotes at length, rather than appearing in her own words (*ZaU*, pp. 630–32). Walther could never quite give up her desire to be accepted by the

phenomenological mainstream: the signed postcards sent by Heidegger's office (including a glossy photograph of Heidegger) in her *Nachlass* materials indicate that she wrote to him to wish him happy birthday on both his 80th birthday in 1969 and his 85th in 1974.²¹

A handwritten note like 'Contra Heidegger!', a material artefact of Walther's engagement with early phenomenology, draws attention to the material conditions of its production. In my thesis I rely on a methodology of close reading to uncover how certain overlooked conditions and cultural contexts show their workings in Walther's published texts. In reading Walther's texts on social ontology and mysticism, I make explicit the implicit processes of Walther's texts with a study that is philosophical, literary-critical and cultural. In making explicit the implicit, I do not mean that I extract the 'ideas' that lie behind the texts. Rather I adhere to the material of the text – the language used – and look at the nuances of how that language operates. In those moments where Walther privileges the material – the noisy, messy conditions of the phenomenological subject's enquiry – her work offers an indication of how scholarship might get beyond the sort of mythologised histories of this period to which Heidegger contributed.

I centre Walther's treatment of essence and abstraction throughout, showing how she locates them between disciplines and discourses rather than conceiving of them in purely philosophical terms. Throughout Walther's work, accounts of strange personal experiences masquerade as the result of abstracted philosophical reflections; and artistic approaches to religious experience and social life are presented as having as much of a hold on those topics as philosophy does. Walther is asking what it means for a text to be philosophical, mystical or artistic, with work that occupies an intersection of generic traditions, and blurs these distinctions in productive and problematic ways. The set of problems she presents contributes

²¹ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Ana 317 Gerda Walther Nachlass, C. Briefe II. Korrespondenz seit der Studienzeit (insbesondere seit 1945). Martin Heidegger.

to an altered vision of the philosophical landscape in early twentieth-century Germany. This is interesting as a cultural-historical point, and for its potential insights for contemporary philosophical or cultural debates that are tied up with a history in which voices like Walther's were relatively excluded. My thesis serves as an intervention into a history of thought that is dominated by mythologised accounts of 'great figures'.

III. Gerda Walther today

In 1995 American philosopher Linda López McAlister wrote a chapter on Gerda Walther for a volume aimed at expanding the philosophical canon to include women. López McAlister, who had corresponded with Walther in the 1970s, provided an introduction to Walther's life and works. She noted that Walther was not in a position to write much philosophy after the early 1930s due to her effective exclusion from academic philosophy as she became more interested in topics such as parapsychology; this necessitated that Walther earn a living doing other work. Nonetheless López McAlister concluded that 'the quality of the work she did produce is such that it is clear that the field of philosophy is impoverished as a result of her absence from it'.²²

In 2018, López McAlister contributed a foreword reflecting on her memories of Walther to a volume marking the beginning of Walther's more significant rediscovery by philosophical scholars in the past five years.²³ Edited by Sebastian Luft and Ruth Hagengruber, this volume brought together the talks given at a conference called 'Women Phenomenologists on Social Ontology' at the University of Paderborn in 2016. This conference arose out of work done by Paderborn's *Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists*, an important driver of the recent resurgence of interest in work by Walther and

²² López McAlister, 'Gerda Walther', in *Contemporary Women Philosophers*, ed. by Waithe, pp. 203–5 (p. 205).

²³ Linda López McAlister, 'My memories of Gerda Walther', in *Women Phenomenologists on Social Ontology: We-Experiences, Communal Life, and Joint Action*, ed. by Sebastian Luft and Ruth Hagengruber, *Women in the history of Philosophy and Sciences*, I (Cham: Springer, 2018), pp. vii–ix.

other relatively neglected women phenomenologists such as Hedwig Conrad-Martius and Edith Stein. Their publication was the first in a series on *Women in the History of Philosophy and Sciences*. The second volume in this series, edited by Antonio Calcagno, focused on Walther and expanded the scope of the work on her to include some consideration of her phenomenology of religion as well as her social ontology.²⁴ Other publications by Dan Zahavi, Alessandro Salice and Rodney Parker have added to this emerging Walther scholarship.²⁵

Though still relatively small in number, these recent publications indicate a significant renewed interest in Walther. They form part of a wider effort to re-investigate the lost contributions of women in this period. These publications have done a great deal towards identifying Walther's unique philosophical contribution, often viewing her work in comparison to other figures in early phenomenology. In general the focus of recent scholarship has been Walther's social ontology, with Walther's later more extreme esotericism perhaps putting some scholars off re-investigating her early mysticism. Several of these scholars find in Walther a stronger role for the community in the workings of the individual than is found in the works of other early phenomenologists. Antonio Calcagno and Julia Mühl find Walther's 'I' subject to be more rooted in the 'we' than Edith Stein's, for example.²⁶ Zahavi and Salice consider Walther's notion of the 'inner connection' between subjects in a community to be original and important.²⁷

²⁴ Antonio Calcagno (ed), *Gerda Walther's Phenomenology of Sociality, Psychology, and Religion*, Women in the History of Philosophy and Sciences, II (Cham: Springer, 2018).

²⁵ Dan Zahavi, 'Intersubjectivity, Sociality, Community: The Contribution of the Early Phenomenologists', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Phenomenology*, ed. by Zahavi, pp. 734–53. Dan Zahavi and Alessandro Salice, 'Phenomenology of the we: Stein, Walther, Gurwitsch', in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of the Social Mind*, ed. by Julian Kiverstein (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 515–27. Rodney K. B. Parker, 'Gerda Walther and the Phenomenological Community', *Acta Mexicana de Fenomenología*, 2 (2017), 45–69.

²⁶ Antonio Calcagno, 'Edith Stein and Gerda Walther: The Role of Empathy in Experiencing Community', in *Women Phenomenologists on Social Ontology*, ed. by Luft and Hagengruber, pp. 3–18. Julia Mühl, 'Meaning of Individuals Within Communities: Gerda Walther and Edith Stein on the Constitution of Social Communities', in *Women Phenomenologists on Social Ontology*, ed. by Luft and Hagengruber, pp. 19–29.

²⁷ Zahavi and Salice, 'Phenomenology of the we', p. 519.

In my thesis I build on the useful start made in these contributions, but I also present an alternative perspective on Walther's work. By examining those parts of her texts that are less clearly presenting a 'philosophy', I illuminate another side of Walther's work. I focus on the parts of her texts that show Walther's concern with finding her own community, and the diverse discourses in which her texts might have resonance. I show that Walther clearly limits the role of philosophical language, but ventures beyond those limits in her use of mystical and literary sources. In this way I offer an early intervention into this emerging Walther scholarship, and encourage a wider, less narrowly philosophical view of what her work can offer present day scholarship. In particular I emphasise how her work is interesting as a modern expression of mysticism, and as the result of a change in the status of language in the light of modernist poetics. These considerations then influence how we ought to read Walther's very conception of the role and power of philosophy in significant ways. My contention is that Walther's texts are stranger than recent literature makes clear, and a more culturally-focused, text- and language-based approach can uncover why this is productive.

IV. Mysticism and modernist art

Walther does not present her work as providing the original grounding for all other academic disciplines. In this way she positions it as less self-contained than Husserl's more systematic offerings. The open-ended quality of her work means that its links to and reliance on other disciplines, traditions or forms of creative output are crucial to a complete understanding of her contributions. I began this introduction with a focus on the philosophical. This is the discipline to which Walther most explicitly expresses allegiance, and is the most obvious context in which Walther's contribution can be seen. But my aim here is to expand the exclusively philosophical understanding of Walther's work that has emerged in recent scholarship. I highlight Walther's commitments to the meditative-mystical tradition, examining the parallels between her phenomenological investigation and the mystical-

meditative journey of St Teresa of Ávila: one of Walther's most referenced sources in *PdM*. I look at how her extensive quotations of modernist artistic figures, most prominently Stefan George, speak to her creative application of language throughout her texts. Walther limits the role of the philosophical in that she denies it the absolute priority that other phenomenologists might grant it. At the same time, however, Walther expands the possibilities of a philosophical text by allowing it to undergo a generic or formal transformation.

Walther's mysticism is a potentially thorny topic for academic study: scholars might question those parts of her account which are grounded in strange personal experiences of which many readers might be sceptical. Some scholars attempt to distinguish between Walther's serious philosophical contribution and her more esoteric claims; Rodney Parker, for example, suggests that Walther's work on the paranormal might be the result of a 'psychotic break'.²⁸ I make no such hard distinction, and instead follow Ann Taves, whose work as a historian of religious experiences '[moves] beyond the polarized perspectives of believers and critics', and instead explores 'how people decide on the meaning and significance of their experiences'.²⁹ Walther's mysticism is an important aspect of her philosophy, and vice versa.

With Walther's regular use of mystical sources, cited in much the same way as she cites philosophical ones, Walther presents her phenomenological investigation as a kind of spiritual journey. Though Walther does not explicitly turn away from the strictly phenomenological path in *PdM*, by situating her text firmly in a spiritual tradition she indicates divided commitments, and a source of insight and grounding that is at times at odds with a purely phenomenological foundation. In this sense Walther operates in a tradition of mysticism as an outlet for women denied a firm institutional position from which to make

²⁸ Parker, p. 59.

²⁹ Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 3, p. 1.

their spiritual or intellectual contributions. Grace M. Jantzen notes that the history of mysticism is tied up with (often gendered) power relations; she points out that ‘a person who was acknowledged to have direct access to God would be in a position to challenge any form of authority, whether doctrinal or political, which she saw as incompatible with the divine will’.³⁰ Anne L. Clarke similarly emphasises the ‘social embeddedness of mystical life’, and the dangers faced by historical figures such as Marguerite Porete for seeking mystical insight outside of the institutional structures of the Church.³¹

In this way Walther’s mysticism ought to be viewed as part of her efforts to establish a community even where she faces limitations in how far she can take her institutional ties. The mystical figures she cites are people with whom she identifies spiritual affinities, and who offer models for working around certain constraints. Jantzen’s account shows how the understanding of mysticism as to do with ‘private, intense, and ineffable experience’ is relatively recent, and has the effect of removing the communal or political force of mystical practice.³² Walther’s turn to the mystical is not a retreat into the private sphere, but an effort to reach out to potential members of a spiritual community. Her mysticism centres the material conditions out of which particular mystical experiences arise. As a result these mystical experiences, though granted real significance by Walther, are presented in a way as part of everyday, communal life. There is an accessibility to Walther’s work that means she aligns with a form of modern mysticism described by Heather Ingman, where mysticism is ‘a practical motivating force in daily life’ (a tradition that includes texts such as Evelyn Underhill’s *Practical Mysticism* (1914)).³³

³⁰ Grace M. Jantzen, ‘Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics’, *Hypatia*, 9 (4) (1994), 186–206 (p. 186).

³¹ Anne L. Clarke, ‘Hildegard of Bingen and Women’s Mysticism’, in *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, ed. by Glenn Alexander Magee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 118–129 (pp. 128–9).

³² Jantzen, 187.

³³ Heather Ingman, ‘Religion and the occult in women’s modernism’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, ed. by Maren Tova Linett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 187–202 (p.191).

Though Jantzen claims that the ‘ineffability’ or ‘inexpressibility’ of mystical insights is a modern construction, Walther is certainly committed to the notion that mystical insights remain, in a sense, ‘unsayable’; and she presents this side of her work as in keeping with an earlier mystical tradition.³⁴ Still the sort of unsayability that Walther invokes finds its sense in a modernist sphere of understanding. Modernism, as related to aesthetics and poetics, is another key term in my thesis. It is a term that is notoriously open-ended, and its lack of easy definition (one that seems to arise out of the particularities of the modernist period) is a matter of interest in my discussion of Walther’s own vision of the powers and limitations of certain kinds of language.

As Andreas Kramer notes with respect to Rilke, the term ‘modernism’ ‘covers many things’: despite attempts in modernist studies to construct it as a clear movement or umbrella term, Kramer notes that it became ‘increasingly clear that homogenising modernism to a more or less unified aesthetic or cultural response to the modern world was unable to account for the diverse, often complex and contradictory range of modernist texts’.³⁵ To give an indication of the specific sense in which I employ the term ‘modernism’, I adopt as a working definition that used by Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei in an essay on Merleau-Ponty, which shows how the modernist imagination is relevant to phenomenological investigation. With the caveat that ‘modernism itself defies narrow definition, and the term courts contestation’, Gosetti-Ferencei writes:

‘Modernism’ and ‘modernist’ will refer here to art and literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in critical tension with received traditions through new possibilities of expression. Modernist themes include a rejection of realism, a challenge to the rational subject, and validation of the present over historical or timeless ideas.³⁶

³⁴ Jantzen, 191.

³⁵ Andreas Kramer, ‘Rilke and modernism’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, ed. by Karen Leeder and Robert Vilain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 113–30 (p. 113–4).

³⁶ Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, ‘Phenomenology and the Imagination of Modernism’, in *Understanding Philosophy, Understanding Modernism*, ed. by Ariane Mildenberg (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. 96–106 (p. 96).

As I explore throughout, Walther's imagination of 'new possibilities of expression' brings philosophical and literary language closer together, and her work exhibits a questioning of realist representation and rationality, along with a foregrounding of immediate experience. Gosetti-Ferencei's 'critical tension with received traditions' is a nuanced idea that captures the way in which Walther strains against the traditions available to her, without this resulting in an outright rejection of those traditions. Kramer notes that the common theme of the 'crisis' of unsettled tradition in modernism can lead modernists down a number of different paths:

These crises are seen as symptoms of a wider sense of discontinuity of tradition, and a feeling of alienation from the modern world. But some modernists embraced technological modernity and attendant ideas about social or political revolution, while others opted to look to past or exotic cultures as sources of authenticity and inspiration against the modern world. Many modernists shared an anti-bourgeois outlook, but this could mean either an adherence to a valuation of art as a sacred realm, its redefinition as a vehicle for political revolution, or the complex dialectics between the two that we find in Adorno's theory of art.³⁷

Indeed a key feature of modernism is that even a single modernist work, when moving away from tradition in this manner, may pull in different directions in the search for new sources of authenticity or meaning.

At the same time, some common themes in modernism are less relevant to Walther's work: the 'critical tension with received tradition' in her work does not involve the common 'sceptical questioning of religious truths' (as outlined by Michael H. Whitworth in his overview of modernism), nor does she spend much time considering the city or technology as sites of extreme alienation.³⁸ As I outline throughout the thesis, Walther's modernism, though inspired by a sense of crisis or alienation (especially with regard to language), finds pragmatic possibility in that crisis.

³⁷ Kramer, p. 114.

³⁸ Michael H. Whitworth, *Modernism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007). See esp. the chapter on 'Modernity and the city' pp. 181–215 (p.181).

I explore Walther's affinity with modernist artistic production, shown in her extensive quotations from poetry by Stefan George, as well as in briefer quotations to poetry by Rainer Maria Rilke, and reference to expressionist painting: important aspects of her work that have gone mostly undiscussed. Broadly put, the artistic responses to modernity that I highlight as most influential for Walther are ones in which language (and art generally) establishes a relation to reality that is non-representational. These approaches to language arise out of a general sense in the period that language may up to that point have been assumed to have more power than it truly possessed. This is a kind of approach represented by Friedrich Nietzsche, whose *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne* asserts that language cannot get at 'das rätselhafte X des Dings an sich', or the 'Wesen der Dinge'.³⁹ Instead linguistic systems are presented as constructed systems of metaphors: 'der große Bau der Begriffe [zeigt] die starre Regelmäßigkeit eines römischen Columbariums und atmet in der Logik jene Strenge und Kühle aus, die der Mathematik zu eigen ist'.⁴⁰ Despite its regularity, this structure is built 'auf beweglichen Fundamenten und gleichsam auf fließendem Wasser'.⁴¹ I explore the fallout of this shift in how language is thought to operate for both artistic and philosophical output throughout my thesis. I argue that following Nietzsche, Walther approaches the problem of the sayability or unsayability of things (divine and otherwise) in an artistic manner.

In examining Walther's affinities with modernist artistic production, I introduce Walther's work to discussions of the relations between art and philosophy in modernism generally. Publications by Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, Ariane Mildenberg and Carole Bourne-Taylor on the connections between phenomenology and modernist art present several interesting accounts of how modernist art and phenomenology both involve a significant

³⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne' [1873], in *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, III (2) (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1973), pp. 369–84 (p. 373).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

resetting of habitual modes of experience and communication.⁴² But despite the sense that this sort of reset often comes as the result of, or is itself, a kind of crisis, Walther positions her turn to the modernist aesthetic as a pragmatic one. Her references to art indicate a desire to keep things accessible as well as indicating a movement into a kind of language more suited to approaching the mysterious aspects of experience. The ungroundedness of some of Walther's language, and the loss of faith that phenomenology can itself ground other disciplines, need not always mean a crisis. In identifying this side to Walther I draw on Lisi Schoenbach's account of a 'pragmatic modernism', which presents a form of modernism in which habit need not be entirely rejected for new contributions to be made.⁴³ Walther may be committed to some sense of 'unsayability', but for her, unsayability does not mean inaccessibility: and a description that is in one sense inadequate might well be adequate for the purpose of achieving some communal understanding.

V. Scope of the thesis

My thesis flips the order of Walther's two main published texts, in order to unsettle the priority of the philosophical in the discussion of her work. I begin with a reading of *PdM*, where Walther writes as a modernist mystic as well as a phenomenologist. By beginning with *PdM*, the more unusual aspects of *OsG* are allowed to come to the fore. My dissertation is structured around the themes of mysticism, philosophy and art: the three forms of language or cultural output with which Walther engages. I focus in particular on those areas where these forms interact, or begin to seep into one another. The scope and structure of my dissertation is outlined in the following.

⁴² See for example: Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian: Phenomenological Sightings in Modern Art and Literature* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Carole Bourne-Taylor and Ariane Mildenberg (eds), *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Ariane Mildenberg, *Modernism and Phenomenology: Literature, Philosophy, Art*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁴³ Lisi Schoenbach, *Pragmatic Modernism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Chapter Two, 'Mysticism', repositions Walther's 1923 text, which examines the structure of human experience and especially religious/mystical experience, as the work which offers a key to reading all her output. Though Walther masks it with depersonalised and abstracted language, the text is in fact rooted in mystical and telepathic experiences Walther had herself, and which she sought to reconcile with her previous Marxist materialism and emerging interest in phenomenology. Walther presents a modernist form of a mystical meditation (in the style of Teresa of Ávila), in which phenomenological investigation and personal reflection are productively blurred. In this way her later work offers a fascinating model for a kind of philosophical language which arises once philosophical objectivity is left behind. My close readings of Walther's text on mysticism focus on the metaphorical language she uses, in particular the points at which philosophical analogy collapses into modernist metaphor. I determine where she does this in order to mask those personal reflections that do not fit into a philosophical text, and where she indicates, in modernist fashion, that metaphorical language is the only kind available in such an investigation.

Chapter Three, 'Philosophy', reassesses Walther's earlier work on social ontology in the light of my second chapter's reading of her more obviously 'unusual' text. I show how in Walther's earlier work, philosophical and phenomenological abstraction is presented alongside a more contingently located and creative account of social interaction that borrows from fictional writing. Phenomenological procedure is employed and simultaneously ironized in such a manner that its limits are exposed and tested. In seeking a way out of radical materialist determinism Walther employs a Husserlian transcendental 'pure I'. But this explicit identification with phenomenological convention quickly breaks down as Walther employs various distancing strategies, including ironic and playful language. In doing so Walther collapses the distance between material contingent description and generalised phenomenological statements about experience 'as such'. This is an implicit challenge to Husserlian phenomenologists who rely on the self-grounding nature of philosophy as

discipline. I argue that Walther anticipates the later Wittgenstein in staging the problems of the limits of philosophy in general, and phenomenology in particular, as problems of language (inspired again by mystics who have found creative solutions to the problem of representing God in language).

Chapter Four, 'Art', examines the other forms of language and creative output to which Walther turns as a result of her loss of faith in philosophy's self-grounding character. I return to *PdM* to examine Walther's reference to artistic works, including poetry by Stefan George and Rainer Maria Rilke, and expressionist painting. I place Walther in relation to a vision of modernist poetics in which language, like theory in Walther's work, anticipates its own failure or inadequacies (particularly when judged against criteria of reference-based meaning), but works to re-draw the lines of criteria for 'success'. I look at where Walther's use of poetic quotation is so extensive and plays such a crucial role in her text that it bleeds into the main philosophical narrative. I also examine Walther's introduction of references to childhood literature in the 1955 revised edition of *PdM*, where literature is used to make the phenomenological investigation an accessible one. Walther's interaction with art demonstrates a kind of modernist sensibility in which the shock of the modern is approached with a degree of pragmatism. I examine Walther's engagement with the artistic production of the day as part of her efforts to find community in practice: and I show how, as with her interaction with phenomenological circles, Walther faced only partial acceptance, if not active exclusion.

In my conclusion (Chapter Five), I briefly look at Walther's life and work beyond that of the 1920s, with a consideration of her 1938 publication *Abnen und Schauen unserer germanischen Vorfahren im Lichte der Parapsychologie*. I examine how Walther's procedure of concealment and indirectness, productive and valuable for the most part in her early texts, is used in this later one to contribute to the kind of Nazi myth-building around German identity that Walther disavows in her autobiography.

In all, my project reorientates emerging scholarship on Gerda Walther, providing an original account of how her work is distinctive. This account is cultural-critical in scope in that it draws out her work's interaction with mystical-meditative and artistic traditions. As a result of this wider critical reading, my thesis shows how Walther implicitly provides a model for a critique of an overly systematic and closed-off phenomenology: in this sense, my argument is also philosophical. I provide a model for how the history of philosophy can be expanded to include figures who were marginalised at the time of writing as well as since then. I examine how that marginalisation caused one such figure to shift the terms of her inquiry outside of the mainstream in productive and problematic ways. And in showing how a critical reconsideration of Walther's work might contribute to discussions of key scholarly questions around mysticism, philosophy and modernism, I suggest a movement beyond the canon in literature and philosophy in search of fresh insights, both historical and contemporary.

CHAPTER TWO: MYSTICISM

I. Introductions and meditations

I begin my investigation of Walther's work with a reading of the first edition of her second published work: *Zur Phänomenologie der Mystik* (1923). This text is a phenomenological investigation of mystical experience, considered by Walther to be the 'Urquelle aller leibhaften religiösen Erfahrung' (*PdM*, p. v). As Walther outlines in her brief foreword (*PdM*, pp. v–vi), she first conducts a phenomenology of general human experience and the human essence found in experience, with the aim only of laying the ground for her investigation of experience of the divine. Walther claims that in preparing this text for publication, the general phenomenology of experience she presents '[ist] mehr und mehr zu einer bloßen Hinführung zu dem zweiten Teil über das Erleben Gottes herabgesunken'; she states 'eine ausführlichere Untersuchung des menschlichen Grundwesens und seiner Erfassung überlasse ich berufeneren Forschern' (*PdM*, p. vi). Her phenomenological commitments are already subordinated to what she sees as a higher purpose.

Despite this disclaimer, the first part on general experience makes up just over half of Walther's text. It reveals an approach to general experience that is importantly informed by Walther's consideration of the mystical. This text includes a phenomenological investigation of basic intentional experience, moments of intersubjectivity (including through telepathy, something Walther views as a precursor to mystical experience), and an investigation of the inner sources of experience. As part of this she identifies the human 'Grundwesen' ['foundational essence']: the deepest part of oneself, out of which those experiences arise which are most one's own. This chapter will analyse crucial moments within *PdM* (akin to Walther's own method of highlighting 'wesentliche Unterscheidungs momente' in experience (*PdM*, p. 35)), following its structure broadly chronologically, and making explicit its implicit

textual processes. These are textual processes which allow the text to be understood in a wider context than that of early phenomenology.

I pay particular attention to Walther's language and methodology as those areas which are most neglected in scholarship, and most revealing in a discussion around Walther's status as a mystic, and as a modernist writer. An understanding of these contexts alters how her earlier text, *Osg*, ought to be read. I move away from the impression that Walther's mysticism came about as a kind of esoteric turn, following her real, philosophical contributions as contained in the earlier text.⁴⁴ In fact, Walther reports having had mystical experiences since November 1918.⁴⁵ Additionally, she worked on the two texts contemporaneously: the first draft of *PdM* was composed in 1920 (*PdM*, p. v). My analysis of both texts thus emphasises Walther's mystical motivation even when her discussion does not explicitly treat the mystical.

This chapter outlines important approaches and tensions that run throughout *PdM*. What I show is an account of experience that first invokes and then goes beyond linear intentionality (the structure of 'subject experiences object'). In this complex account, the context of our experience is such that subjects are torn between multiple objects and multiple ways of experiencing them. With mystical experience, along with those other experiences like telepathy to which it is related in Walther's scheme, Walther illustrates different ways in which the ordinary, simple structures of experience break down, allowing something radically different to break through. On a textual level there is a parallel breakdown of conventional, linear forms of meaning-making: the ways of *describing* experience (such as with the very statement 'subject experiences object') are complicated.

Scholarship on the connections between phenomenology and modernism see in both phenomenology and modernist art a non-mimetic relation between text and reality. This

⁴⁴ As suggested in Parker, p. 59.

⁴⁵ For an autobiographical account of her first mystical experience see *ZaU*, pp. 223–6.

relation is as productive as it is problematic. Carole Bourne-Taylor and Ariane Mildenberg discuss the ‘the status of the modernist text or artwork’, noting the text’s ‘attempt to re-establish a relationship with the world, a non-mimetic one in that it integrates the distance that separates them’.⁴⁶ Just as the relation between subject and object becomes disrupted in Walther’s vision, a parallel direct, linear relation between word and object, or word and meaning, is disrupted. At its core, *PdM* inhabits a tension around sayability and unsayability: it conforms to Beckett’s sense of the twentieth century as a time of ‘the rupture of the lines of communication’.⁴⁷

In a sense, this concern with sayability and unsayability is unsurprising, given the text’s place in a mystical tradition. Meister Eckhart, whose writings Walther cites in her foreword to *O:G* as having influenced her thinking on questions around social life (*O:G*, p. iv), notes that the language he uses acts as a kind of call for us to grasp the ‘real’ word, which is a silent, unsayable word: ‘hie gât alliu diu rede zemâle ûf’.⁴⁸ Walther employs metaphor and analogy in order to hint at that which cannot be said directly, as Teresa of Ávila used metaphors in order to allow readers (particularly women) to ‘get to know’ that which remains obscure to the understanding.⁴⁹ But as the status of the metaphors and analogies employed by Walther is increasingly complicated, a creative, non-mimetic relation between text and experience is established. What will be revealed in this close analysis is a narrative and meditative vision of philosophy that unfolds with a material, contingent focus. The limitations of language and rational procedure identified by Walther necessitate a creative response.

⁴⁶ Carole Bourne-Taylor and Ariane Mildenberg, ‘Introduction: Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond’, in *Phenomenology, Modernism and Beyond*, ed. by Bourne-Taylor and Mildenberg, p. 11.

⁴⁷ In a 1934 essay on ‘Recent Irish Poetry’, as explored in relation to phenomenology in Mildenberg, p. 17.

⁴⁸ From Predigt 9. Meister Eckhart, *Werke*, I, trans. by Josef Quint, ed. by Niklaus Largier (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993), p. 114.

⁴⁹ Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *The Classics Of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 41.

Throughout *PdM* Walther regularly cites Teresa of Ávila's *Interior Castle* (1588) and Martin Buber's *Ekstatische Konfessionen* (1909). These two texts form the background of mystical literature and tradition against which Walther's text stands out. She turns to them as both an appeal to spiritual authority, and evidence of shared mystical experience. Walther relies on these texts to stand for that which she is reluctant to assert on the basis of her own personal mystical experiences, an explicit account of which is strikingly absent from *PdM*. Walther's text demonstrates competing impulses in terms of audience; her implicit audience appears at certain points a sceptical academic one to whom she seems reluctant to give a personal account. The foreword to the second revised edition of *PdM*, published 1955, confirms the text's uneasy reception among philosophers:

Als das Büchlein dann erschienen war (1923), mußte ich jedoch erleben, wie einige meiner philosophischen Lehrer, selbst der von mir so verehrte Edmund Husserl, in diesen Dingen nicht etwa Schilderungen von Realitäten, sondern bestenfalls 'ideale Möglichkeiten' sahen. [...] Ein anderer sehr bekannter Philosoph hielt mir entgegen, die heilige Theresia 'sei doch hysterisch gewesen'... [...].⁵⁰

Though it is not clear who this very well-known philosopher is, Martin Heidegger's disparaging remarks about *PdM* are further evidence of this difficult reception among phenomenologists; Dermot Moran suspects that these were motivated by Heidegger's envy towards Walther for having been published on religion before him.⁵¹

In the foreword to the second edition Walther notes that more sympathetic readers enquired as to whether her own mystical experiences formed the basis of the analysis, and she opts in this later edition to make explicit some of what remained implicit in the original: 'Ich habe mich deshalb entschlossen, bei dieser Neuausgabe die selbsterlebten Dinge als solche

⁵⁰ Walther, *PdM* (1955), pp. 16–7.

⁵¹ Dermot Moran, 'Choosing a Hero: Heidegger's Conception of Authentic Life in Relation to Early Christianity', in *A Companion to Heidegger's Phenomenology of Religious Life*, ed. by S. J. McGrath and Andrzej Wierciński (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 349–75.

kenntlich zu machen und durch neue zu ergänzen'.⁵² There is a parallel between Walther's depersonalisation of key accounts of mystical and telepathic experience in her original edition and Teresa's strategy in *Interior Castle*.⁵³ This depersonalisation marks a substitution of the general for the particular: it marks points at which Walther makes absent her own experience in order to fit the insights she sees arising out of it into the mould of early 1920s phenomenology. This is an imperfect fit, and as I show, there are important traces of that which is left absent in what remains.

This chapter will lay the groundwork for a discussion of 'philosophy' in chapter 3, where the focus will be on Walther's 1922 text on social ontology, *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften*. It will be shown in Chapter Three that the above tensions around sayability and unsayability are not restricted to the investigation of the mystical in Walther. Rather the meditative, narrative philosophical strategy identified in *PdM* drives *OsG* as well. By taking more seriously the connections between the two texts, I show that the philosophical strategies and language employed by Walther in *OsG* are less conventional than it might first appear. The non-linear reasoning, complex metaphorical connections and tensions around the limitations and possibilities of indirect language that characterise *PdM*, will be shown to have implications for the functioning of language in philosophy beyond the consideration of the mystical.

Walther can be seen to inhabit a tension around the grounds of language generally, and philosophical language in particular: a tension that she shares with many of her contemporaries. Walther's meditative vision follows Teresa's but extends the earlier mystic's

⁵² Walther, *PdM* (1955), p. 17.

⁵³ Mirabai Starr points out this depersonalisation in the introduction to her more recent, modern and 'non-dogmatic' translation of *The Interior Castle*. This translation uses the more modern term 'metaphor', rather than 'comparison' as in the translation I cite more commonly. Mirabai Starr, 'Introduction', in Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, trans. by Mirabai Starr (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), pp. 1–27 (p. 16).

non-mimetic use of language around God to cover how she talks about experience in general. In this way, Walther offers a modernist vision of mysticism and meditative philosophy. This modernist moment follows the Nietzschean vision of philosophical language which, as Sarah Kofman describes, ceases to privilege concepts over metaphors.⁵⁴ In this Nietzschean modernity, metaphor ceases to be as Plato conceives of it, an inadequate reflection of a truth best encapsulated in other, more direct or conceptual language.⁵⁵ Instead all language, and all truth, functions in metaphorical terms: metaphor is central to the war waged by Nietzsche on the Platonic philosophical order (as explored by Katrin Kohl).⁵⁶ Walther's philosophy is meaningful in this new modernist paradigm: in her work, I identify a collapse of the classical philosophical analogy⁵⁷ into the Nietzschean-modernist metaphor. Nietzsche appears, alongside Marx, in many of Walther's notes from her student days.⁵⁸

In this introductory section I wish to spend some time thinking about introductions, openings and prefaces, as a means by which a text establishes its motivations and approaches. Walther's preface reveals that her phenomenology of experience in *PdM* has an explicitly religious motivation: the text explores the self as part of an exploration of that self's relation to God. As this is a phenomenology, it is unsurprising that the text opens with a reference to its situatedness as investigation, rather than launching into a treatment of the subject matter 'in itself'. Yet Walther's assertion of such a motivational standpoint differs from the more common structural version of phenomenological situatedness: it is not just the revelation that

⁵⁴ Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor* [1972], trans. by Duncan Large (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), p. 1.

⁵⁵ Plato states that the painter, playwright and 'all other representers' are 'two generations away from the throne of truth', i.e. from the *Platonic* ideal realm. Plato, *Republic*, trans. by Robin Waterfield, Oxford World Classics Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 348 (§597e).

⁵⁶ Katrin Kohl, *Poetologische Metaphern: Formen und Funktionen in der deutschen Literatur* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), see esp. pp. 1–4 and pp. 82–4.

⁵⁷ One example of how such philosophical analogy works is Aristotle's reasoning by likeness. See Aristotle, *Topics*, I 17 <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/topics.1.i.html>> [accessed 13 July 2021].

⁵⁸ See notes apparently dated from 1916, quoting for example *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Ana 317 Gerda Walther Nachlass, Sch. 21. B. V. Diverse Nachschriften.

there is a questioner asking this question. And the underlying question is not, as in Heidegger for example, about the meaning of Being;⁵⁹ rather it is one about how materially located subjects can get closer to God.

Walther's above-quoted short preface, acting as it does as disclaimer, notes that more might be achieved by 'more qualified researchers'. Teresa's preface to her *Interior Castle*, the text to which Walther refers as a source of mystical insight throughout *PdM*, begins in a similarly self-deprecating tone. Teresa notes the difficulty of the task that has been assigned to her (by other, wiser, spiritual leaders), and expresses doubt that she possesses the strength or faculties to complete it.⁶⁰ As in Walther, self-investigation is here one step on a path towards experience of the divine. Teresa speaks of her motivation in writing: that her text might offer guidance to women in their prayer. Any insights contained within its pages, she writes, do not have her as their source.⁶¹ The opening disclaimers in Walther and Teresa create a sense of contingency around all these texts' claims and the terms which they employ; though Teresa's denial of ownership of her own insights creates the possibility of their arising from a far more authoritative source, if they are indeed divine insights.

Walther's description of the processes of self-investigation then are introduced as a contingent means of achieving a particular, spiritual kind of meditative experience. A comparison to how another phenomenological text of this period introduces itself will reveal how this might subvert expectations for a 'phenomenology'. Walther's teacher in Freiburg, Edmund Husserl, gave a series of lectures at the Sorbonne in 1929 which acted as an introduction to phenomenology. With these lectures Husserl revisits Descartes' meditative-philosophical processes as a 'Neubau' of previous philosophical procedure; the comparison of

⁵⁹ See especially the introductory section of Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* [1927], 11th edn (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967), pp. 2–15.

⁶⁰ Teresa of Ávila, 'Prologue', in *The Interior Castle*, pp. 33–4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

himself with Descartes is one that also appears in his *Ideen* and earlier unpublished works.⁶² He notes the situatedness of the individual who does any philosophising, and their need, at some point, to do away with all previous structures of knowledge and re-build them: 'Jeder, der ernstlich Philosoph werden will, muß sich "einmal im Leben" auf sich selbst zurückziehen und in sich den Umsturz aller ihm bisher geltenden Wissenschaften und ihren Neubau versuchen. Philosophie [...] ist eine ganz persönliche Angelegenheit des Philosophierenden'.⁶³ But Husserl asserts that the importance of Descartes' procedure is in its reduction to a questioning ego that forms the ground of all philosophical investigation, something he distinguishes quite clearly from a personality:

Die Cartesianischen Meditationen wollen also nicht eine bloß private Angelegenheit des Philosophen Descartes sein, geschweige denn eine bloße eindrucksvolle literarische Form für eine Darstellung erster philosophischer Begründungen. Sie zeichnen vielmehr das Urbild der notwendigen Meditationen eines jeden anfangenden Philosophen, aus denen allein eine Philosophie ursprünglich erwachsen kann.⁶⁴

Husserl takes seriously Descartes' expression of the 'Notwendigkeit eines radikalen Neubeginns der Philosophie'.⁶⁵ His interest is not in the *narrative* of Descartes' reduction, the 'literary form' provided by the latter's meditative vision. Rather it is the notion that the ego can provide the *grounds* for all investigation from which Husserl takes his impetus.

For Husserl, phenomenology can provide an ultimate re-grounding of philosophical claims. Walther's own meditative vision of phenomenology considers the possibility of grounding philosophical claims. Yet *PdM*'s self-deprecating introduction frames its efforts

⁶² Stephan Strasser, 'Einleitung', in Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, 2nd edn, ed. by Stephan Strasser, Husserliana, I (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), pp. xxi–xxxii (p. xxiii).

⁶³ Edmund Husserl, 'Cartesianische Meditationen: Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie', in Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, pp. 41–183.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45. For an account of the connections between the 'radical beginnings' involved in Husserl's and Descartes' methods, see Paul S. MacDonald, *Descartes and Husserl: The Philosophical Project of Radical Beginnings* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

quite differently to Husserl's: even as she asserts the desire to become closer to God, Walther does not suggest that she is capable of re-grounding philosophy. Husserl makes reference to the traditional historical narrative of Descartes' radical re-working of philosophy.⁶⁶ It is worth noting that this narrative is a constructed one, as shown in Christia Mercer's recent work on Descartes' 'debt' to Teresa of Ávila. Mercer calls for the contextualisation of Descartes' work in relation to the devotional meditative tradition to which Teresa contributed with her *Interior Castle*: a work with which Mercer argues Descartes must have been familiar.⁶⁷ It is precisely this devotional meditative context which Walther's work draws on.

Mercer presents her argument as part of an effort to make philosophical history more inclusive of the contributions of women, particularly those in the early modern period whose works are neglected due to the women's categorisation as 'mystics'.⁶⁸ But she also highlights the potential to mislead of a history of philosophy that neglects questions of genre and inheritance in favour of individual-focused accounts of 'great men'.⁶⁹ I highlight Mercer's contribution here, as I introduce my own investigation of Walther's *PdM*. I do this in order to frame my analysis in terms of what can be gained when we look beyond canonical figures in philosophy, but also because Walther's work is most interesting when approached with a sense of the competing generic impulses that it embodies.

To conclude this introductory section, I wish to sketch an interpretation of Walther's contribution in *PdM* as that of a modernist mystic. Walther takes from Teresa a meditative form, and offers a twentieth-century response to Teresa, as Husserl responds to Descartes. Alongside the common impulse to experience a higher, divine power, Teresa's humility is

⁶⁶ He calls Descartes 'Frankreichs größter Denker', and notes that 'Jeder Anfänger der Philosophie kennt den merkwürdiger Gedankenzug der *Meditationes*'. Husserl, 'Cartesische Meditationen', p. 43.

⁶⁷ Christia Mercer, 'Descartes' debt to Teresa of Ávila, or why we should work on women in the history of philosophy', *Philosophical Studies*, 174 (10) (2017), 2539–2555.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2553.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2542.

given a modern form in Walther's decentring of the subject in general experience (through, for example, the intrusion of extreme forms of social experience in telepathy). This twentieth-century humility has a textual force in *PdM*'s creative responses to a rupture in language. As Teresa was necessitated to mould her insights to a form acceptable to the Catholic Church⁷⁰, my close reading of *PdM* demonstrates how Walther attempted to make her insights fit the mould provided by the early twentieth-century phenomenological tradition to which she belonged. I highlight the extent to which she struggled to fit that mould, and examine the evidence within her text of the alternative models she turned to for how, and why, to write.

II. Metaphors and methodology: seeing and blindness

Walther's divided loyalties are present from the outset of her text. Having considered the sense of the 'beginning' in Walther's phenomenology, I now consider in more detail Walther's philosophical strategies as set out in the introduction of *PdM*: outlining some of the tensions around the very purpose and language of the text. These tensions surround the status of the phenomenological descriptions Walther offers. Walther begins her investigation of mystical experience with another disclaimer: one which sets the tone of the descriptions and arguments that she employs throughout the text. Her text opens with the following caveat:

Es scheint ein vermessenenes Unterfangen zu sein, gerade der Mystik, als dem völlig Verborgenen, Irrationalen, dem nach Ansicht Vieler schlechthin Unerkennbaren, Unaussagbaren, phänomenologisch beikommen zu wollen, also doch mit Hilfe einer rationalen Denkmethode. [...] Was eine Phänomenologie der Mystik von vornherein nicht leisten kann und gar nicht leisten will, wäre eine natürlich kausale, womöglich naturwissenschaftliche Erklärung oder Zurückführung der mystischen Tatsachen [...] Ebenso wenig aber kann es sich darum handeln, gewisse Meinungen über das Mystische auf Grund logischer Schlüsse und vermeintlich in der Natur des Seins gelegener Möglichkeiten oder Unmöglichkeiten dessen, was dem Menschen zugänglich ist, endgültig zu beweisen oder zu widerlegen. (*PdM*, pp. 1–2)

⁷⁰ Mirabai Starr, 'Introduction', in Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, trans by. Starr, p. 16.

Walther sets herself up to do that which according to her ‘many’ think impossible: to *say* something of the mystical, to *say* what many think *unsayable*. Yet from the outset she is clear to define her task in negative as well as positive terms: to make clear that which she cannot do or indeed that which she considers herself to have no business attempting.

The mystical, as ‘ein Urphänomen, eine letzte, nicht mehr auf anderes zurückführbare oder aus anderem ableitbare Urgegebenheit’ (*PdM*, p. 2), must be taken to some large extent on its own terms, as something experienced rather than something arrived at in reasoning. Reason here is relegated to a supporting role: it may offer assistance (‘mit Hilfe einer rationale Denkmethode’), without being that which determines the methodological terms or pace of Walther’s investigation. Indeed even the term ‘investigation’ (from Walther’s ‘Untersuchungen’, used in her foreword, *PdM*, p. v) may suggest a more systematic approach than is in fact present in the text. Walther’s use of ‘Untersuchung’ lends a certain academic weight to her efforts, but her opening line, with its use of ‘beikommen’, suggests that she wishes to ‘negotiate’ or ‘come to grips with’ the mystical.

Thus the opening of Walther’s texts demonstrates a crucial tension between a rational philosophical method and one, as yet undefined and presumably less easily definable, which is more open to the vicissitudes of experience. She proposes to treat mystical experience in the following way:

Und dieses Urphänomen wollen wir hier völlig vorurteilslos ins Auge fassen, genau so, wie es sich uns im Erleben derer, die mystische Erlebnisse gehabt haben, darstellt. Diesem mystischen Erleben wollen wir uns in unserer Untersuchung so innig wie möglich anschmiegen und dabei nichts anderes tun, als das, was an diesem Erleben wesentlich ist, hervorheben und die einzelnen wesentlichen Merkmale dieses Erlebens scharf abheben und charakterisieren, damit es seinem ureigensten Eigen-sinne nach zur Erfassung kommt [...]. (*PdM*, p. 2)

Walther’s terminology in this quotation, particularly her use of ‘anschmiegen’ and ‘fassen’, speaks to her vision of this form of investigation as a lived and potentially emotionally

charged one in which God, for example, is not the conclusion of a rational argument, but rather is arrived at in an experience that is 'ein direktes, leibhaftiges, wenn auch unvollkommenes und einseitiges Erleben der Göttlichkeit selbst' (*PdM*, p. 4). So regarding the question of the possibility of *saying* something on this supposedly *unsayable* topic, Walther sets up the matter in such a way that deduction or rational argumentation may be impossible as a means to arriving at God, but description (or 'characterisation') of such experience may not be.

At this early stage in her text, as shown in the above quotation, Walther has already introduced a textual 'wir'. Though hardly an unusual academic convention, there is a sense in which the 'wir' in Walther carries a specific significance. In academic convention, this 'we' may somewhat mask the author's own position, lending it a degree of generalisability, and appealing implicitly to an audience or readership to agree with the statements of the text. However in the case of mystical experience, it is clear that Walther's use of 'wir' is not generalisable to the extent that it might be in cases where she describes the structures of ordinary experience. In fact, the 'wir' who has mystical experiences is a specific, restricted group to which Walther belongs. Mystical experiences may only be examined from a phenomenological standpoint by those to whom such experiences are available as phenomena. So Walther's 'wir' in this introductory portion of the text restricts itself to those who have experienced the mystical. At the same time, there is some indication in Walther's reluctance to adopt a first-person voice of a tension in the text's stance towards Walther's own experiences: the above quotation's use of 'derer' creates a distance between those investigating and those being investigated, even as Walther's form of investigation can only be done by one with inner access to such experience.

This discussion of the 'wir' in *PdM*, building on the idea that Walther's investigation is a lived, non-systematic, non-rationalising one, introduces the question of who the text's

audience can be thought to be.⁷¹ The text displays different impulses in this regard, appearing at once as a philosophical text intended for an academic audience whose scepticism regarding the mystical Walther anticipates⁷²; as an account of the mystical whose insights are said to only be understandable to those who have themselves already had mystical experiences; and a kind of spiritual guidebook intended to assist a more general audience on a path towards such experience of the divine. There is throughout a tension surrounding the question of just how much can be said about the unsayable, as well as to whom it can be said. As such the functioning of language and metaphor is constantly, often implicitly, at issue. This crucial aspect of *PdM* can be illustrated using Walther's extended analogy on seeing and blindness in her introduction.

Walther arrives at this analogy in describing two 'Vorurteile' regarding mystical experiences which she avoids here (adopting from Husserl the language of 'preconceptions' that ought to be left behind in such inquiry, even if the specifics of the sorts of preconceptions at issue are different). The first is the tendency to imagine that that which is glimpsed in mystical experience is not the divine but rather just the workings of the deepest parts of one's self (*PdM*, p. 6). The second, which Walther states is 'Erbteil der englischen empiristischen Philosophie', is the idea that everything that can be consciously experienced must be mediated ('vermittelt') by our bodily senses and their data (*PdM*, p. 7). This second view, she says, may seem to be lent some legitimacy by the fact that a great number of mystics use sensory metaphors in describing their experiences (*PdM*, p. 8). Walther notes:

⁷¹ For my part, when I use the term 'we' when not directly quoting Walther, it will typically correspond to those portions of her texts which make claims about general human experience: e.g. 'our essence can be found in our experience'.

⁷² For example, Walther compares her study of the mystical with the study of mathematics: 'Es sind vielleicht auch nur etwa ein Fünftel aller Menschen, denen die höchsten Regionen der Mathematik [...] zugänglich sind, dennoch halten wir doch auch die von dazu berufenen Mathematikern über diese Gegenstände und Zusammenhänge gemachten Aussagen und die Ergebnisse ihrer Forschungen auf diesen Gebieten nicht einfach für willkürliche Phantastereien, Spintisierereien oder Selbsttäuschungen'. *PdM*, p. 11.

[...] jedoch handelt es sich hier u. E. durchaus nur um Gleichnisse, denn wie sollten die Mystiker das ‘schlechthin andere’ denen, die es nicht erlebt haben, auch nur andeutungsweise klarmachen, wenn nicht durch Anknüpfung an solche bekannte Gegebenheiten des alltäglichen Lebens? Daß es sich dabei nur um Gleichnisse von großer Unangemessenheit handelt und handeln kann, haben sie dabei immer wieder aufs schärfste betont. (*PdM*, p. 8)

Walther uses the term ‘Gleichnis’: one which can have the sense of allegory, parable, analogy (in a philosophical context), as well as metaphor. Whatever its sense, and particularly with the inclusion of ‘Unangemessenheit’, this term suggests an indirectness; meaning about the subject is conveyed by means of reference to something else, something which bears some relevance or similarity to the subject matter, but which is also separate from it. If the ‘Gleichnisse’ used by Walther can be called ‘analogies’, then there is nothing particularly disruptive about their presence in a philosophical text; analogy is an established rhetorical device in philosophy.⁷³ But the sense of ‘Gleichnis’ shifts within the text: apparent analogies collapse into Nietzschean metaphors, whose status within the philosophical text is more complex, and which in this modernist philosophy accompany a rejection both of the conceptual power of all the terms used and idealist visions of their meanings as fixed. As Kofman writes in her study on Nietzsche’s use of metaphor, ‘Nietzsche intentionally diversifies his styles in order to save the reader from misunderstanding a single style as a “style in itself”’.⁷⁴ Shifts in sense (as well as style) function similarly in Walther’s work, even if they do not announce themselves in quite as dramatic a fashion as Nietzsche’s.

The above quotation introduces the idea that descriptions of the mystical, including, presumably, Walther’s own subsequent descriptions, are ‘*mere* metaphors’ (I stick with this term for now with the caveat that the sense of ‘metaphor’ does shift in the text). Implicit in this is the idea that in ordinary description, there is a direct, linear relation between a description of reality in language and reality: a relation that is then somehow disrupted in the

⁷³ See again Aristotle, *Topics*, I 17.

⁷⁴ Kofman, p. 2.

use of metaphor. The metaphor can only be understood, i.e. the indirect, non-linear relation of metaphor to reality can only be (re-)established, by a reader who already grasps the sense of the metaphor: its deciphering must follow a circular logic. The above quotation has the potentially paradoxical suggestion (though indirectly in that Walther writes of 'die Mystiker' in a way that does not explicitly include herself) that this text may both offer an account of the mystical to those who have not had such experience, and that its terms may only be understood by those who have.

Following the above quotation Walther introduces an analogy of seeing and blindness in which the status of the 'analogy' (as the wider structure of the comparison), and of 'metaphor' (meaning the individual terms) is itself at issue. She invites her reader to imagine ('Man stelle sich vor', *PdM*, p. 8) that four fifths of humanity was born blind, and that the minority who could see were to attempt to provide the blind majority with 'auch nur eine ahnende Vorstellung von dem [...], was sie erleben, wenn sie Farben sehen' (*PdM*, p. 8). The seeing would need to 'translate' what they saw into language that would be understood by those who could not see:

Dazu müßten sie aber die Farben sozusagen in eine andere Dimension, etwa die der Töne, übersetzen, anders ginge es wohl nicht. Und da würden sie vielleicht an das Gefühl anknüpfen, das helle, 'harte' Farben in ihnen auslösen [...] Vielleicht gelänge es ihnen, hier ein ganz bestimmtes, feststehendes System von Beziehungen aufzustellen, das sich an ein gewisses gemeinsames Etwas (man könnte es vielleicht das metaphysische Wesen nennen) in diesen beiden sonst so verschiedenen Sphären anschliesse, das eben wirklich diese Gleichnisse und gerade diese Zuordnungen (im Gegensatz zu beliebigen anderen, der freien Willkür ebenso möglich scheinenden) rechtfertigte. Man könnte dann von einer größeren oder geringen 'Richtigkeit' und 'Angemessenheit' beim Anwenden dieser Gleichnisse, bei dieser Übersetzung in eine andere Dimension, sprechen. (*PdM*, p. 9)

So in this scenario, the metaphors employed by the seeing, translated from the dimension of sight into another, do function relatively well in some respects. These metaphorical translations can be systematised and agreed upon collectively; though Walther says that each

seeing person must have arrived at the best metaphor in any given case independently, and find them to agree with others' independent experience, for this system to be made up of 'feststehende Wesensbeziehungen' (*PdM*, p. 10).

There is a sense of a real correspondence between metaphor and reality here: Walther states that if a blind person suddenly gained even partial sight, the analogical structure of the seeing would provide a 'Schlüssel zu dem ganzen Gebiet der Farben' (*PdM*, p. 10). Yet there is also an overwhelming sense of the fundamental inadequacy of these metaphors in Walther's eyes: 'Diejenigen aber, die nur immer die Töne und Tongebilde hörten, könnten sich trotzdem nur ein sehr blasses und unklares Bild von den dadurch dargestellten Farben machen. Erst wenn sie plötzlich "sehend" würden, könnten sie auf einmal das Gemeinte vollständig erfassen' (*PdM*, p. 10). The metaphors may assist a partially sighted person in understanding the system of colours they are coming to see, yet there is no suggestion that the metaphors themselves played any role in that person suddenly gaining sight. The two spheres, of colour and sound, remain in a very real sense radically distinct. Colour is to the blind, as mystical experience is above, 'das "schlechthin andere"' (*PdM*, p. 8).

Walther uses this extended analogy of seeing and blindness to demonstrate how mystics come to describe their experience in a language that belongs to another sphere: 'Genauso verhält es sich aber mit der Mystik. Alles, was die Mystiker von "Licht" und "Süßigkeiten" [...] berichten, ist nichts anderes als eine derartige Übersetzung rein geistiger Gegebenheiten in die Sphäre der Sinnlichkeit' (*PdM*, pp. 10–11). This analogy extends to the structural level: Walther's wider seeing/blindness analogy functions as the system of sound and colour metaphors do within the analogy, by making clear in an indirect fashion her approach to language around the mystical. It is an approach that highlights both the productive possibilities and the structural limitations of a language whose relation to reality is

non-linear and indirect. In the use of such analogy, Walther's own investigative and textual methodology is shown to bear an indirect relation to its own subject.

Walther implies that there is in whatever language employed around the mystical an absence, the absence of that for which the metaphorical matter stands. But throughout *PdM*, Walther's use of metaphor or analogy is far from confined to a sphere separate to the rest of her phenomenological description. It is not the case that elsewhere in the text, things straightforwardly assert their positive presence in language. There is a hint of this in the analogy of seeing and blindness, as indicated in a slippage in Walther's use of quotation marks in one of the above quotations; such slippages occur multiple times in this text, marking a complication of the metaphorical structure employed. In speaking of the blind and their understanding of the system of metaphors established by the seeing, Walther writes: 'Erst wenn sie plötzlich "sehend" würden, könnten sie auf einmal das Gemeinte vollständig erfassen' (*PdM*, p. 10). The use of quotation marks on 'sehend' suggests that the term is being employed metaphorically, as with the "'harte" Farben' described by the seeing (*PdM*, p. 9). However in this instance, within the structure of the analogy, there is no reason to include quotation marks on 'sehend'; the blind are literally starting to see on the level of the story. What this slippage indicates is that the story of the analogy does not have its own hermetic sphere within the text: its status as analogy is clear as the structural level begins to bleed into the level of the story itself. In this way it can be asserted that Walther's analogy begins to look like a Nietzschean system of metaphors: it is not an appendage to other forms of philosophical reasoning; rather other forms of reasoning no longer distinguish themselves from the metaphorical system.

'Gleichnis' might be inadequate in some sense, its relation to reality revealed to be indirect and inadequate, in that its terms belong to a different sphere to that for which it stands. But in Walther's text, it moves beyond the confines of its original sphere of

‘Unangemessenheit’. Metaphors may indicate an absence, a potential *unsayable*, but they have a certain, very real power in the text. At the same time, the parallel limitations of non-metaphorical language, of language as such, are hinted at in Walther’s use of the term ‘Etwas’ in the above quotation: ‘ein gewisses gemeinsames Etwas (man könnte es vielleicht das metaphysische Wesen nennen)’ (*PdM*, p. 9). Versions of this ‘Etwas’ appear elsewhere in Walther’s work (marking different ‘somethings’ in each case). In this quotation, Walther indicates an interchangeability between the terms ‘Etwas’ and ‘das metaphysische Wesen’. This is significant in that it suggests that the latter philosophical term does not carry any real weight: the meaning is found in experience, and words seem to be superimposed upon experience (in this case at least). So even this supposedly more straightforward, direct language appears to make meaning in a less than direct manner.

In Walther’s text, the mystical unsayable may well belong to its own sphere, but the problem, and possibilities, of unsayability are not confined to this sphere. As I have shown, there is a circularity to Walther’s thinking and writing in the introduction to *PdM*: only those who have experienced the mystical may understand the metaphors used to describe it; and only those who already have a sense of the language in use may understand its meanings. But as I will show, the circular movements of Walther’s text are productive, and they are not closed off. In this introductory section it is clear that no matter how much scepticism she displays about the matter, Walther is writing for someone, and seeking out a community. Part of her argument is that well-chosen metaphors may help in some way.

III. Intentionality and intersubjectivity: sitting at the window

As it moves into the phenomenology of general experience, *PdM* builds on the sense of an implicit audience: one less concerned with rational argumentation, and seeking a guide on a spiritual journey. The creative metaphors included form modern equivalents of those used by Teresa of Ávila, and the tone of the text suggests an affinity with Teresa. This section will

examine Walther's use of narrative and textual enthusiasm as she begins to investigate the intentionality and intersubjectivity of experience. Walther outlines her next task in the following two chapters: '1. Die innere Gegebenheit des Seelischen und Geistigen' (*PdM*, pp. 22–41) and '2. Das Grundwesen und die gegenständliche, die erlebnismäßige und die Quellpunktuntersuchung der Erlebnisse' (*PdM*, pp. 41–5). This task is to investigate the sources and structure of human experience, and to find in it the human 'Grundwesen': 'der tiefste Wesensgrund der menschlichen Persönlichkeit' (*PdM*, p. 22) and 'metaphysisch-realer Kern der Persönlichkeit' (*PdM*, pp. 41–2).

This foundational essence, which bears an inner connection⁷⁵ to God's essence, must be understood by anyone seeking to gain an understanding of the divine (*PdM*, p. 22). In each case this 'understanding' is an 'Erschauung' or 'Erfassung', and in the case of the foundational essence, it is an understanding of one of the 'Gegebenheiten der realen Welt' (*PdM*, pp. 22–3). From the outset then this essence is one that is available to us as such in our experience of the world, not one arrived at in rational argumentation. Walther follows classical and contemporary accounts in outlining that this essence, in humans, has three sides (as opposed to animals, plants or inanimate objects): 'geistig', 'seelisch' and 'leiblich'. As Christina M. Gschwandter writes, this distinction in Walther (like similar ones in Edith Stein and Hedwig Conrad-Martius) forms part of her 'explicit opposition to Husserl's more "idealist" turn'.⁷⁶ Gschwandter notes that Walther's 'traditional terminology' is 'loaded and liable to be misunderstood', but maintains that her terms may be 'retrieved' as part of her fuller account of human intentionality: one that goes beyond 'Cartesian subjectivity'.⁷⁷ My focus here is on

⁷⁵ I will discuss the nature of Walther's 'inner connection' in Chapter Three in my analysis of *OsG*, where a version of the 'inner connection' appears as that which marks out a community as such.

⁷⁶ Christina M. Gschwandter, 'Conceptions of the Self in Early Phenomenology', in *Gerda Walther's Phenomenology of Sociality, Psychology, and Religion*, ed. by Calcagno, pp. 85–99 (p. 85).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

the interesting wider textual strategies (not examined as such by Gschwandter) that Walther employs in highlighting the intentional character of human experience.

Given that her text cannot follow a straightforward structure of reasoned argumentation, in that she has outlined that the matters she investigates are ones of material experience rather than speculative reason, Walther appeals to the experience of an implicit audience throughout, and must assume their agreement with her descriptions at any given stage before moving to the next. In outlining the intentional nature of human consciousness, Walther does not merely state that consciousness is intentional, but refers to the general consensus of a 'wir' in the matter. She notes that what sets humans apart from other beings is:

[...] das Bewußtsein, das Wissen 'von etwas', Erleben usw. 'von etwas', überhaupt eben die Fähigkeit, sich meinend, wissend, wollend, wertend usw. 'auf etwas' innerlich zu richten und dies 'Sich-richten-auf' selbst, das man eben nicht weiter ableiten kann, das wir unter dem Namen 'Bewußtsein' alle mehr oder weniger kennen. (*PdM*, p. 24)

Walther guides her readers along the route to the foundational essence, a route which is 'nach dem Zeugnis aller Mystiker, ein Hauptweg zur leibhaften Erschauung Gottes' (*PdM*, p. 22). In relating the intentional structure of experience, the fact that all experience is *of something*, her language is almost conversational in tone, and she here employs a first-person voice. She introduces the first of many spatial-bodily metaphors in outlining the structure of experience, and mentions the technical-philosophical term 'intending' only in an aside in parenthesis:

Ich erlebe..... Was heißt das? Das heißt, daß da ein 'Nullpunkt' in meinem Innern ist, gleichsam der Ausstrahlungspunkt meines Erlebens, der wie im Kopf innerlich zu sitzen scheint (wenigstens erlebe ich es zunächst scheinbar unmittelbar so), der sich bei allem meinem Erleben bewußtseinsmäßig auf alle möglichen Gegenstände, eben das Erlebte, richtet. (Dies innerliche 'Sich-richten-auf' des Bewußtseins hat man übrigens 'Intendieren' genannt.) (*PdM*, p. 25)

In this quotation it can be seen how Walther's first-person descriptive account signals at its own contingency, in the bracketed aside 'wenigstens erlebe ich es zunächst scheinbar unmittelbar so'. This is quite different to the tone of Husserl's more authoritative introduction

of intentionality as a key structure of experience in his work.⁷⁸ In Walther's text the authority of the descriptive voice is destabilised.

Walther continues: 'Diesen "Punkt" da oben im Kopf wollen wir den Ichpunkt oder das Ichzentrum nennen' (throughout she often shortens this term to 'Ich'): this is the conscious directedness ['Hinzielen'] towards an object that characterises all conscious experience, 'wie immer dies innere Hinzielen sonst noch geartet sein mag (denkend, wertend, liebend, hassend oder wie sonst)' (*PdM*, pp. 25–6). Walther specifies that not all experience is consciously directed in this way, however, or is so entirely. She distinguishes from the Ich another inner sphere of experience which she terms the 'Einbettung' or 'Hintergrund'. The sense here is that in ordinary experience, we consciously direct ourselves some object or objects, but we are as well embedded in a general, less conscious or unconscious background of diverse kinds and sources of experience. Again, there is a sense that the particular terms employed are of limited significance in that Walther uses multiple terms for each element she describes.

To some extent then unconcerned with the technical-philosophical vocabulary that could be used in an investigation of the structures of experience, Walther includes stylistic elements which create a sense of enthusiasm while constructing, in her conversational tone, a kind of narrative tension. Having outlined her distinction of 'Ichzentrum' and 'Einbettung', Walther introduces one of many passages that appear in the text as literary vignette as much as they function as thought-experiments. They are descriptive passages which carry more of a narrative than an argumentative force, appearing in this way to follow in the style of Teresa. This is demonstrated in the following quotation, which introduces Walther's account of the different ways in which experience can be focused or unfocused (at this point taking a first-person form):

⁷⁸ See for example Husserl, 'Ideen', pp. 64.

Wenn ich ruhig betrachtend aus meinem Fenster sehe, so ist das etwas ganz anderes, als wenn ich in spannendster Erwartung dieselbe Straße hinuntersehe, weil jemand, den ich erwarte, auf ihr zu mir kommen muß. Und wieder anders ist es, wenn ich beim Glanze der sinkenden Abendsonne diese selbe Straße mit stiller Freude an ihrer weihvollen Schönheit betrachte. Wohl mag ich hier immer auf die Straße sehen, aber mein Erleben ist dabei doch jeweils ganz verschieden, bald freudig, bald traurig, bald gleichgültig, bald forschend. Und einmal sehe ich mit angestregter Spannung und Aufmerksamkeit auf die Straße, ein andermal denke ich dabei an allerhand anderes, bin ich dabei unaufmerksam, 'zerstreut'. (*PdM*, p. 26)

Once Walther has determined that the Ich is active in all these different sorts of experiences, she asks if it can be said that this experience originates in the Ich, and declares, with palpable enthusiasm: 'Wir wollen es an einem Beispiel untersuchen!' (*PdM*, p. 27). She returns to her window scene, but this time uses a 'wir', and structures several of her statements as questions to be answered in the affirmative by the implicit reader:

Wir betrachten etwa wieder unsere Straße draußen vor dem Fenster. Da plötzlich fällt uns ein Problem ein und wir denken nun angestrengt darüber nach, – ist es da nicht, als komme der Gedanke an das Problem gleichsam aus einem 'Dunkel' direkt 'hinter' dem Ich hervor, als packe er das Ich, ziehe es aus dem äußeren Auge fort, in sich hinein, so daß es sich nun gleichsam aus dem Sehen innerlich zurückzieht, in sich selbst 'zusammenrollt', um nun in sich über dem Gedanken zu brüten? Oder wenn eine tiefe innere Freude in uns auftaucht, ist es da nicht, als steige sie sozusagen aus dem Inneren 'unter' dem Ich, gleichsam im Herzen, auf, als strahle sie von dort in jenen inneren 'Raum' im 'Kopf', in dem das Ich innerseelisch ruht, aus dem es herauschaut, hinein, von dort das Ich durchströmend, in sich hineinziehend und durch es hindurch nach außen strömend? (*PdM*, pp. 27–8).

In this scene, Walther constructs a spatial schematic. There is someone (at first Walther, then a general 'wir' which invites the reader to consider themselves in this position) sitting inside at a window, which marks the border between the physical interior and exterior spaces. In being grasped by something from their own internal background, this individual (or group) is pulled back into an internal, non-spatial space ('Raum').

The metaphorical status of the spatial terms used in this inner realm is indicated, as in the seeing/blindness analogy, by the presence of quotation marks. As before, there is a

bleeding of the metaphorical into the literal as Walther begins to outline a metaphorical, spiritual 'space' of the body. This 'space' is distinguished from the body's literal, physical life. But as the text blends the metaphorical and the literal, the spiritual 'body' and the physical body relate in interesting ways. Unlike the seeing/blindness analogy, however, the window scene appears not just as a means by which to explain the metaphor of the internal 'space'. Here the reader would be to find meaning in the inside/outside schematic of the window in that it represents or provides a key for understanding the distinction between external physical space and internal 'space'. Textually this correspondence is suggested, but at the same time this scene is a literal depiction of the material way in which certain experiences can arise. In its detail and enthusiastic tone it evokes real, concrete experience the reader is invited to recognise. The metaphorical weight of the spatial terms are in keeping with those used by Teresa, who in describing her meditative self-investigation as passing through the chambers of an inner castle writes: 'how foolish it would seem were we to tell someone to enter a room he is already in. But you must understand there is a great difference in the ways one may be inside the castle'.⁷⁹

There is a definite sense as Walther's 'ich' becomes a 'wir' that she views her role with this text as guiding others along a path of self-investigation which she has herself undertaken. She indicates how the text will proceed with an enthusiasm that contributes to the construction of narrative tension: '[...] sehen wir zu, wie wir von hier aus weiter zu den ersten Keimen des Geistes und schließlich zu diesem selbst gelangen!' (*PdM*, p. 29). When she describes how the Ich can come to direct its own attention and concentrate itself on certain objects, she declares: 'Hier aber haben wir – die Geburt des, wenn auch noch keimhaften, Geistes! [...] Wir haben nämlich hier den ersten Anfang einer Selbstbestimmung, einer Freiheit des Ich gegenüber seinem Erleben' (*PdM*, pp. 30–31). The dash between 'haben wir'

⁷⁹ Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, p. 37.

and ‘die Geburt’ functions only to provide a dramatic pause. This dramatic, narrative impulse coincides throughout the text with moments at which Walther presents the investigation as a kind of journey, or even pilgrimage, along a path (‘Weg’). As she identifies experiences that can be seen to come directly from one’s own foundational essence, she adopts the voice of an implicit reader who may not fully understand what she is getting at: ‘Erlebnisse, die “ursprünglich aus der letzten Tiefe des Menschen hervorgehen”!? Was heißt das? Haben wir es in diesem Merkmal des Auftauchens mancher Erlebnisse vielleicht endlich mit dem gesuchten Wege zum Grundwesen zu tun?’ (*PdM*, p. 72).

As is clear from her introduction, Walther is sceptical of the ability of mystics to make their experience accessible to others in any direct sense through the medium of language; only those who have themselves had such experience may understand the metaphors employed to describe them. Yet if only mystics could get anything out of such metaphor, we might ask why the mystic would then bother to ‘translate’ their mystical insights into metaphorical language at all. As the above discussion demonstrates, *PdM* shows interpersonal instincts that treat this linguistic scepticism in a more relativized way. The insights of the mystic may be unsayable in some sense, but we may at least talk about them, or around them, nonetheless. The circularity of the reasoning around the metaphors of the mystics has a parallel in how Walther’s general investigative structure plays out, as is standard in phenomenology⁸⁰, and as Walther recognises explicitly. For example, in continuing her discussion of how we might arrive at experiences which arise out of our foundational essence, Walther states:

Wir meinen doch, daß in vielen Erlebnissen des Menschen von seinem Grundwesen auch nicht die geringste Spur zu finden sei, ja, daß manche unechte, angenommene, oberflächlichere ihm sogar direkt zuwiderlaufen! Woher aber wissen wir das? Wenn wir meinen, nur in bestimmten dieser Erlebnisse das Grundwesen selbst leibhaftig und angemessen erfassen zu können, in anderen aber gar nicht, oder doch nur sehr unvollkommen und unangemessen, dann müssen wir doch schon irgendwoher etwas von ihm

⁸⁰ See for example Heidegger on ‘Die formale Struktur der Frage nach dem Sein’. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 5–8.

wissen, um überhaupt einen Maßstab dafür zu haben, welche Erlebnisse ihm angemessen sind, in welchen es sich äußert, und bei welchen dies nicht der Fall ist. (*PdM*, pp. 44–5)

Just as one must already recognise what underlies the mystic's metaphors to understand them, so too must one already have a sense of what the foundational essence is in order to be able to determine whether an experience originates in it, and in order to 'find' it in self-investigation.

As Walther's commitment to this process of self-investigation shows, its circular structure does not in her eyes render its insights trivial or tautological. The investigation itself, as a lived one, adds meaning to that which is investigated. And the text, though imperfect, has a role in communicating this with others. Walther's vision of how this text might benefit others is hinted at at various stages throughout. The text can function as a kind of guidebook, even if each person must still follow their own path themselves:

Einen allgemeinen Weg, den jeder gehen müßte, einen 'Königsweg' zum Grundwesen, gibt es hier wohl nicht. Jeder muß da eben seinen Weg suchen und ihn unbeirrt zu Ende gehen, wenn er ihn gefunden hat. (Das schließt natürlich nicht aus, daß die Wege innerlich verwandter Menschen oder der Angehörigen gleicher Gemeinschaften, Völker, Zeitepochen usw. ähnlich sind und daß verschiedene Menschen auf Grund dieser Ähnlichkeiten zusammen gehen, einander helfen und einander Umwege ersparen können [...].) (*PdM*, p. 122)

Walther's landscape is not overly individualistic, then, despite initial appearances. In fact, *PdM*'s account of individual, intentional human experience is quickly complicated, and rendered intersubjective.

IV. Telepathic and textual breaks

Walther's text itself has an implicit intersubjective impulse that is palpable in these moments of narrative enthusiasm. Continuing to explore this intersubjectivity on the explicit level of her investigation of experience, Walther moves to a form of direct intersubjectivity, in telepathy. Here, some of her textual strategies begin to strain in interesting ways: there are points where

the unstated personal basis of her account, that which provides an implicit grounding to some of her reasoning, needs to be stated. Walther's account of telepathy is preceded by another warning against over-intellectualism.

In the window-vignette, Walther has already indicated the ways in which the ordinary intentionality of experience is more complex than the basic intentional structure she first introduces: that of 'subject experiences object'. Rather intending subjects are embedded in an experiential background which may turn out experiences unexpectedly, and consciousness may be 'zerstreut' (*PdM*, p. 26), split between multiple objects. The Ich may be concentrated on an object, while one has other experiences that bypass the workings of the Ich altogether. One might experience something unconsciously on the level of the background before that experience comes to be 'actualised' ['aktualisiert'] by the Ich (*PdM*, p. 51). Walther notes (in an aside set in smaller type) that the Ich's freedom is sometimes misinterpreted in such a way that thinkers (she does not specify who) over-emphasise the role of the intellect that arise out of such a freely choosing Ich. She introduces the idea of a philosophical 'Fall' here, a motif to which she returns, and which I discuss in more critical detail later:

Man hüte sich, diese Freiheit des Ichzentrums mit der in unserer Zeit so verhängnisvollen Emanzipation und Loslösung des Intellektes, des Verstandes, von den übrigen Erlebnissen, ja ihre Unterdrückung durch den Verstand zu verwechseln oder gar gleichzusetzen. Diese Erscheinung ist vielmehr nicht einmal eine notwendige (wenn auch mögliche) Folge dieser Freiheit des Ich, sondern nur ihr Mißbrauch, der daraus entstehende 'Sündenfall' des Ich, der selbstverschuldet, nicht notwendig ist. Denn diese einseitige Intellektualisierung des ganzen psychischen (und geistigen!) Lebens und Erlebens kommt doch daher, daß das freie Ich die Regungen des Intellektes einseitig bevorzugt [...] Notwendig aber ist das keineswegs. Das Ich könnte seine Freiheit ebensogut in anderer Richtung brauchen [...]. (*PdM*, pp. 31–2)

There is a suggestion in this brief passage that the personal self-investigation to be undertaken here has a parallel with a process of philosophical self-investigation: a process by which the

philosophical discipline must re-examine its own processes. This philosophical Fall, which sees the over-emphasising of the intellect, is both a textual one and a personal one.

Walther includes this reference to over-intellectualisation as a kind of warning as part of her account of how best to proceed in order to identify those experiences which may be said to arise out of the foundational essence. To this end Walther sets out on a 'Quellpunktsuntersuchung der Erlebnisse' (*PdM*, pp. 41–72). This is a lived self-investigation whereby the Ich freely, consciously and carefully turns itself towards its inner processes, in a reflexive motion, and allows them to unfold:

[...] das Ich [muß] sich dabei innerlich so demütig an das Erlebnis anschmiegen, es so still betrachtend innerlich begleiten (statt es etwa gleich zu zergliedern oder absprechend zu bewerten), daß dieses dadurch möglichst nicht wesentlich verändert wird in seinem 'normalen' Verlauf. Da aber das Grundwesen als metaphysisch-realer Kern der Persönlichkeit etwas Psychisch-geistiges ist, muß es also, wenn es überhaupt unmittelbar und leibhaftig, nicht erst auf dem Umweg über verwickelte Schlüsse und Ableitungen erfaßbar sein soll, zweifellos auf dem Weg dieser 'reflexiven' Betrachtung zur inneren Gegebenheit gebracht werden können. (*PdM*, pp. 41–2)

Walther proposes to find the foundational essence in an investigation of the experiential background and the sources of experience which can be found in it, as the only way in which it can be grasped 'als unableitbares Urphänomen', 'in leibhaftiger Selbstheit' (*PdM*, p. 45). This investigation may not operate independently of intellectual processes (recall her desire to approach the mystical 'doch mit Hilfe einer rationalen Denkmethode' (*PdM*, p. 1)). But it is not *led* by those processes.

In proceeding in this way, Walther continues her Teresa-inspired use of spatial metaphor, depicting one's inner self in analogous fashion as a space to be traversed in this journey of self-investigation. She describes inner 'Sphären', 'Schichten' and 'Richtungen' (*PdM*, pp. 46–9) which can be explored as the investigative subject turns inward. She often uses river-imagery in describing the subject's internal movements. The following quotation

demonstrates Walther's convention of using quotation marks to indicate metaphor in explaining our complex inner space:

Aus diesem Hintergrund strömen dem Ich [...] in der verschiedensten Weise alle möglichen Erlebnisse zu, in die verschiedenen Sphären dieser Einbettung scheinen die inneren Gesamteinstellungen eingesenkt zu sein, aus denen die einzelnen Erlebnisse des Erlebnisstromes sich nur emporheben, wie die Wellen und Strudel eines Flusses an seiner Oberfläche aus seinen Quellen und Tiefen emportauschen. Wir sahen schon, wie das Ich, wenn es diesen auftauchenden Erlebnisregungen innerlich 'nachgeht', in diesem Einbettungshintergrund ganz verschiedene 'Richtungen' unterscheiden kann, aus denen sie hervorkommen, und wie diese 'Richtungen' schließlich auf bestimmte innere Erlebnisquellen zurückführen, die teils unmittelbar 'hinter' dem Ich, teils in einer näheren oder ferneren 'Stelle' des innerleiblichen Bereiches des betreffenden Menschen, teils auch innerlich wie 'über', 'unter' oder 'neben' dem Ich in den innerseelischen Schichten seiner Einbettung gelegen sind. (*PdM*, pp. 46–7)

Before arriving at those experiences in which she is most interested, those arising out of the foundational essence, Walther finds along this path experiences which are not one's own. She notes that other subjects can arrive in one's internal background via the Ich (in the ordinary experience of empathy ['Einfühlung']), or without the involvement of either party's Ich. Some experience may arise out of a 'Wir' found in community with others (Walther references her own text on social ontology here) (*PdM*, p. 50). Among those experiences Walther identifies which do not come from the foundational essence, she highlights the following: "'Fremde' Erlebnisse in der eigenen Einbettung, die auf bestimmte andere Subjekte als Urheber hinweisen', "'Fremde' Erlebnisse in der eigenen Einbettung, die nicht auf bestimmte andere Subjekte als Urheber zurückweisen' and "'Eigene' Erlebnisse im engeren Sinn in der Einbettung, die gar nicht oder nicht unmittelbar aus dem Grundwesen hervorgehen' (*PdM*, pp. 53–71).

This sets the scene for Walther's discussion of telepathy. This is an experience which arises in oneself but recognisably has its origin in another person (and potentially a deceased person). This is another kind of experience, like mystical experience, which Walther asserts is

only accessible to certain people. It uses some of the same spiritual [‘geistig’] abilities as mystical experience, but Walther maintains a clear sense of hierarchy. Some people’s abilities in this regard are limited such that they may have telepathic experiences without being able to experience the divine:

[...] ebenso wäre es denkbar, daß ein geistiges Wesen nur die niedrigen Arten des Geistigen (wie etwa manche Medien, die auf religiösem Gebiete ganz ‘blind’ zu sein scheinen, während sie von allerhand Geisterspuk nicht genug zu erzählen wissen) [...]; da die höheren Stufen die niederen offenbar umfassen, kann man zwar von einer höheren Stufe aus wahrscheinlich alle niedrigen Geistesstufen überblicken und verstehen, nicht aber umgekehrt. (*PdM*, pp. 38–9)

This does not allow for the possibility that mystics who experience the divine might not also have telepathic experiences of ghosts or other living subjects. There is no reason to exclude this possibility based on accounts of other mystics, and Walther evidently, given her own stated methodology, ought not to deduce the impossibility of such an imbalance in one’s spiritual abilities by reasoning from the assumption of a hierarchy in such abilities. That kind of speculative reasoning is of the kind Walther has just warned against in her account of the philosophical ‘Sündenfall’. The assertion of this hierarchy must be based in Walther’s own experience as mystic and telepath. Yet this basis goes unstated in this portion of the text, leaving Walther’s account of the hierarchy in spiritual experience unsatisfying and unconvincing. This faltering on Walther’s part comes to a head in the following section on telepathy.

Walther is aware of academic scepticism surrounding the subject matter she treats in this section of *PdM*, and her sudden caution here makes this short section on telepathy one of the most problematic and interesting parts of this text.⁸¹ In this section, that which goes *unsaid*

⁸¹ Antonio Zadra and Robert Stickgold give a historical account of the status of telepathy in academic research, beginning with its mention by Freud and Jung, and continuing to describe various scientific attempts to ‘prove’ dream telepathy later in the twentieth century: all of which encounter serious methodological difficulties. Antonio Zadra and Robert Stickgold, ‘Telepathic and precognitive dreams,

is as plain, and has as profound an effect on the text, as that which is said. Walther prefaces an account of one of the possible kinds of telepathic experience (that where the experience found at work in one's own background can be traced back to a particular other subject) with the following almost self-contradictory statement, which vacillates between embrace of the reality of such experience, and disclaimer to the sceptic:

Da die Sachlage also bei der Telepathie offenbar besonders deutlich und mit anderen Elementen nicht vermischt vorliegt, wollen wir uns ein solches telepathisches Erlebnis einmal näher vor Augen führen, ohne uns dabei im geringsten dadurch beirren zu lassen, daß viele Gelehrte das Vorhandensein solcher Erlebnisse rundweg leugnen. (Auch wenn es keine solche Erlebnisse in der tatsächlichen Wirklichkeit gäbe, gäbe es doch ihren Begriff, ihr Wesen, ihre Idee, – oder wie man es nennen mag – und diese jedenfalls können wir in unserer Betrachtung in voller Reinheit ihrem eigenen Sinn nach uns vor Augen führen.) Betrachten wir also ein beliebiges telepathisches Erlebnis in seiner Eigenart! (*PdM*, p. 54)

So what follows is established in the text as an account of possible experience, but Walther also concedes to the implicit reader (now a member of an adversarial academic audience, rather than an ordinary non-telepathic reader or the reader of her spiritual guidebook) that this account need not be accepted as such, but might instead function in the text just as well if it is thought to be an 'idea' which can be assessed in the abstract. This is out of keeping with Walther's general approach throughout *PdM*. In any case it is not at all clear that this account of telepathy would function just as well as an abstract 'idea' in a phenomenology of experience. Following this apparent (and temporary) loss of nerve on Walther's part, the account of telepathic experience she provides is strangely depersonalised as compared, for example, with the window-vignette above. She claims to have chosen it arbitrarily, as the above quotation shows, and its status, whether as real experience or ideal possibility, is left unclear.

or why you may have already dreamt of this chapter', in *When Brains Dream: Exploring the Science and Mystery of Sleep* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021), pp. 246–60.

The telepathy account (*PdM*, pp. 54–8) has an unsettling presence in the text as it is introduced. It appears in the main body of the text, and fits into the main text in terms of content, but is printed in smaller typeface than the main text (the same size as that used in footnotes). This formal break marks this passage out as somehow different to that which precedes and follows it, but without making clear what this difference consists in (in other places this smaller typeface is mostly used for what amount to asides, but are not signposted so clearly as a main part of text as here; see for example the end of this subsection, *PdM*, pp. 61–2). The formal break reflects the unsatisfactory lack of specificity regarding the function of this account. The account begins as follows:

Ein Mensch – irgendein Mensch – sei etwa in die Lektüre eines Buches vertieft; er ist völlig davon in Anspruch genommen und schweift dabei durchaus nicht etwa ab, denkt also auch nicht nebenbei an einen anderen Menschen. Da plötzlich wird es ihm unmöglich, weiterhin aufmerksam dem Inhalt des Buches zu folgen, er wird von einer äußerst starken Erlebnisregung – die er noch nicht näher bestimmen könnte, – in der Einbettung seines Ich innerlich angezogen. Dabei ist es zunächst, als versinke sein Ich gleichsam in die Einbettung [...]. (*PdM*, pp. 54–5)

As this quotation demonstrates, the third person is adopted in this account, with this experience attributed not to a ‘me’ or an ‘us’, but to a ‘someone’, an ‘anyone’, or a generalised ‘he’. It begins in the subjunctive (‘sei’). Thus this first line creates a kind of distance between the text and the experience being described; it suggests that this is indeed an ‘ideal’ account of such experience. Yet Walther immediately reverts to the indicative present tense as she describes the inner state of this supposedly random individual, allowing the text to regain a kind of immediacy of description. Walther’s specificity throughout this fairly long account (spanning almost four pages) appears strange following the above disclaimers, her suggestion that this is an ideal account, and given the depersonalised nature of this account.

Walther describes this person’s efforts to enter more deeply into this experience, beginning this sentence with a ‘vielleicht’ that emphasises the supposed arbitrariness of the description, and that seems to be at odds with its specificity:

Vielleicht steht dieser Mensch nun auf, ‘weil er doch nicht lesen kann’, geht ins Nebenzimmer, ‘damit man ihm nichts anmerkt’, setzt sich dort aufs Sofa, löscht das Licht aus und schließt die Augen, ‘um sich ungestört dieser Erlebnisregung hinzugeben, da sie sich doch nicht wegschieben läßt’ (*PdM*, p. 55).

Walther describes how this person recognises this sudden ‘Erlebnisregung’ as coming ‘gleichsam “von wo andersher”’, and bearing the ‘innerseelische Färbung’ of another person: ‘Vielmehr ist es, als sei die Einbettung wie “von außen”, aber doch nicht auf dem Wege über die äußere Wahrnehmung oder sonst ein Erlebnis des bewußten Ich, von der Atmosphäre eines anderen Menschen ganz durchtränkt’ (*PdM*, pp. 55–6). The person might (though need not) recognise the other to whom this ‘atmosphere’ belongs, from having encountered them either in person or ‘in seinen Werken (Gedichten, Gemälden, Abhandlungen, oder was es nun sei)’, though this new experience is not merely a memory of ‘früheres Zusammensein’ (*PdM*, pp. 56–7).

Crucially this experience is telepathic as such; its status is made clear in its phenomenal character, and not reached via reasoned abstraction: ‘[die Atmosphäre des telepathischen Erlebnisses] ist rein ihrer inneren Gegebenheit nach grundverschieden von der ureigenen Artung der Erlebnisse [...], ganz ohne alle vergleichenden und schließenden nachträglichen Urteile’ (*PdM*, p. 57). This account only functions as part of Walther’s phenomenology if the experiences it describes do reflect the structure of genuine, material experience. This passage, with its strange formal features and introduction in the manner of a disclaimer, is a kind of ‘Versinken’ of the text, where its underpinnings appear murky and strange. Its real status, as an account not only of the kind of experience Walther herself had, but of a particular experience she had, is concealed. The second revised edition of the text reframes this episode as an explicit account of the author’s personal experience, providing more context but also including some almost identical language, altered now to appear in the first person: ‘Ich stehe nun auf, “weil ich doch nicht lesen kann”, gehe ins Nebenzimmer, “damit man mir nichts

anmerkt”⁸². But in the concealment in the 1923 edition, in the absence of this personalisation, is also contained the suggestion of its presence underlying the text. The juxtaposition of vague arbitrariness with precise detail creates the sense that there is something more at play than is present on the surface of the text. Walther’s own experience, as that which goes unsaid, is present in an indirect way, and plays a significant role.

Walther notes that her telepath might ‘see’ what the person they are telepathically linked to might see, ‘experience’ what they experience:

Sieht [den anderen] [...] so, wie man sich selbst sieht [...]. Außerdem ‘sieht’ er vielleicht in perspektivischer Verkürzung einen Teil des Zimmers des anderen, wie dieser von seiner Lage aus ihn auch sieht. [...] Ferner empfindet er vielleicht, daß dieser andere jetzt raucht, ‘riecht’ und ‘schmeckt’ förmlich innerlich den Duft seiner Zigarette (oder was er sonst rauchen mag) und wird vielleicht sogar dadurch angeregt, jetzt selbst zu rauchen. (*PdM*, p. 58)

Again the quotation marks signify that the sensory terms used here are not meant in the literal sense. However their metaphorical use carries a real weight here; though the telepath might not smell the other’s cigarette in the way they would one which lit physically next to him, the ‘smell’ that appears here is something materially experienced, and is not ‘mere metaphor’. Just as telepathy marks a case in which the subject’s own intentional structure is disrupted through the intervention of another, so too is Walther’s metaphorical schematic increasingly complicated. By the same token, Walther’s visceral, spatially fleshed-out description here mark this passage out as something more material than mere ideal possibility.

The text breaks again as this account ends and emerges out of its ‘Versinken’. The text reverts, in a sudden, jarring manner, to the standard, larger typeface to re-establish a more academic tone: ‘Machen wir uns also nochmals zusammenfassend den inneren, phänomenalen Gehalt und Charakter eines derartigen telepathischen Erlebnisses klar’ (*PdM*, p. 58). What follows is a kind of ‘translation’ into more academic language of the preceding passage, which

⁸² Walther, *PdM* (1955), p. 64.

lists the stages or moments in the anecdotal account as if they are conditions for telepathic experience: ‘1. ein Ich, das völlig wach und aufmerksam irgendeinem Gegenstand zugewandt ist [...]’ (*PdM*, p. 58–9). The telepathy account is generalised here, but with Walther’s footnote referring to ‘Geistererscheinungen’ (*PdM*, pp. 59–60), and aside on the other ways in which one can come to be filled with the atmosphere of another subject (*PdM*, pp. 61–2), the strange dual absence and suggested presence of a more personalised account leaves its mark on the text. This kind of issue will arise again with Walther’s later accounts of divine experience. Despite her insistence that material experience must form the basis of any phenomenological investigation, her reluctance to include explicit reference to her own mystical experience will there be compensated for with an abundance of references to accounts of other mystics, particularly Teresa of Ávila and accounts collected by Martin Buber in *Ekstatische Konfessionen* (see especially *PdM*, pp. 130–56). These references appear as a kind of appeal to both a spiritual authority, and evidence of shared experience within a religious-mystical community: they function by allowing Walther to conceal her own experience.

Walther’s strange concessions to the academic sceptic and unsatisfying depersonalisation of this account of experience are weak points in her text, but ones which raise important questions about the status of the claims Walther makes throughout. It is plain that this account of a telepathic experience would not carry any argumentative weight if it dealt only in abstract concepts or ideas. If it were, the argument would fail to establish anything: ‘we can imagine (in some detail) an experience that is telepathic as such, so we have the abstract concept of telepathy’. It is nothing more than the assertion that an internal relation, as opposed to merely an external relation, between subjects is *thinkable*. Once the telepathy account is re-personalised, made material, it regains power in the text. The claims made are assertions about and analyses of personal experience, and do not form part of such an abstract, grounding argument at all.

It is clear from Walther's introduction to the 1955 edition that she was disappointed by Husserl's claims that *PdM* dealt in 'ideal possibilities': a statement which makes her inclusion of this concession all the more inexplicable.⁸³ In reframing the telepathy account in the light of the 1955 edition, its strange status is clarified. This is worth doing for two reasons. First, it makes clear that Walther's vision of general experience involves an extreme degree of intersubjectivity or social distribution: subjects can intervene directly in one another's experience. This is an important backdrop for a reading of Walther's social ontology. This extreme intersubjectivity relates as well to how *PdM* functions as text: it is in a sense incomplete, its terms unsatisfactory, until intervened in by the reader. Secondly, the telepathy account, with its reliance on the personal, calls into question how Walther views phenomenology functioning generally. If Walther's claims about telepathy only gain legitimacy through reference to material examples of experience, there is no reason that the rest of her claims which arise out of phenomenological self-investigation, whether about mystical or general experience, function any differently. As indicated in Walther's 'Contra Heidegger!' note, one of the distinctive features of Walther's form of phenomenology is its material focus. I discuss this in more detail in my next chapter: phenomenological claims that have a generalised, 'structural' character can only function as phenomenology if that structure underlies material, contingent experience. Phenomenology which deals in 'ideal possibility' strays too closely towards the objectivity that a phenomenological standpoint rules out. What I have established here is that in Walther, the distinction between philosophical text and personal writing is complicated; this too has implications for how a text like *OsG* is to be read. As Walther continues in *PdM* to an investigation of experience arising out of the foundational essence, philosophical procedure is personified further, as an apparently Cartesian meditation becomes more like one of Teresa's.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 16–7.

V. Philosophy personified

Up to this point, Walther has outlined the basic intentional structure of experience, whereby all experience is of something, even if that something is a set of manifold unclear objects. Experience of this intentional kind is grounded. Each intentional experience bears a relative character in that it takes place and is characterised relative to the network of objects around it and the embedded background of experience that underlies it. In this chapter thus far I have pointed to the correspondence of Walther's textual methodologies with this intentional structure. From the text's introduction, in which Walther explicitly outlines the role of the 'Gleichnis' in relaying that which remains unsayable in a direct, representational sense, Walther has made certain sensory, bodily and spatial terms 'stand for' internal experiential processes in her description. This use of metaphor itself bears a linear, relative structure that reflects intentionality. However my analysis has shown moments throughout where the text loses this basic structure as soon as it is invoked: slippages in the use of certain metaphors, uneasy textual breaks. This unease about linear/intentional structure and the grounds of textual relations and relatedness signals what is to come on the level of Walther's phenomenological description: a breakdown of the intentional structure of experience.

This breakdown arrives once Walther's investigation inward approaches those experiences which arise directly out of one's foundational essence (*PdM*, Chapter 4: 'Die aus dem Grundwesen hervorgehenden Erlebnisse und seine Erfassung in ihnen', pp. 72–122). Walther notes that the level of concentration of the Ich is not that which characterises such experience (*PdM*, p. 74). Rather the Ich can begin to lose its relatedness to the objects among which it lived and from which it gained its meaning:

Es gibt im Seelenleben gewisse Wachzustände, in denen das Ich sozusagen gegenstands- und haltlos in sich selbst zurückgefallen zu sein und nur noch um sich selbst zu kreisen scheint, ohne von außen neue Anregung aufnehmen oder aber von innen einen Zustrom neuer Erlebnisse erfahren zu können. [...]

es 'sieht' [irgendwelche Gegenstände] noch, aber wie versinkend in einer seelisch unüberbrückbaren inneren 'Ferne'. (*PdM*, p. 75)

In this quotation, Walther invokes the circular movements she has hinted at before as a structure for her inner investigation, but at this stage of the investigation the Ich's circle is closed-off. At the same time, this circular movement propels the Ich downwards into an abyss. The inner space of the Ich is still visible in some sense, as is the literal, physical world, but it has lost its connection to either:

Ebenso hat [das Ich] aber auch [...] in seinem Inneren, keinerlei Halt mehr in der Einbettung [...]; – dies alles scheint zwar auch irgendwie noch 'da' zu sein, ebenso wie die verschiedensten äußeren, transzendenten (realen oder irrationalen) Gegenstände, aber auch in ihnen kann das Ich nicht mehr eigentlich 'leben', es kann auch 'zu ihnen' innerlich nicht kommen, ist wie 'abgesperrt' von ihnen durch einen inneren 'Abgrund', der es von allen Seiten umgibt und in dem es ständig unaufhaltsam zu stürzen scheint. Es 'lebt' hier nur noch in sich und seiner vollständigen Verlassenheit [...]. (*PdM*, pp. 75–6)

Here Walther employs quotation marks liberally, sometimes indicating as before a spatial or sensory metaphor applying to the inner sphere of experience. However in the case of 'leben', the function of the quotation marks is less obvious. The material, empirical person whose Ich finds itself in this state is still physically alive; this is clear in how this passage is set up. But the ordinary sense and meaning of life is radically disrupted as the Ich loses its intentional connectedness with the objects around it, and with its own inner experiential background. On a linguistic level, the status or sense of 'leben' may no longer be fixed, as the Ich loses hold of any frames of reference upon which it previously relied. This relative loss of self and world undergone by the Ich loosens the intentional, but also the temporal structure of experience:

Das Ich erlebt hier wirklich eigentlich nur noch sich selbst als Ich'punkt'; sein Grundwesen, sowie das Gehaltenwerden vom 'Ich selbst' als empirische Person, von seiner Einbettung mit all ihrer Fülle an aktuellem Erleben, Erinnerungen, Innesein des Leibes usw. hat es verloren, ebenso jegliche Verbindung mit allen Teilen seiner gegenwärtigen oder früheren, realen oder irrationalen Umwelt. (*PdM*, p. 76)

Walther's use of the term 'Verlassenheit' indicates a connection with the mystical tradition; she references Teresa of Ávila's letter to Rodrigo Alvarez (printed by Martin Buber)

as an example of the kind of process she is describing (see note 1, *PdM*, p. 77). At the same time, however, she references a philosophical tradition which in her material description comes to life. In describing this detached Ich, Walther's description has parallels with an extreme Cartesian reduction, whereby all that can be doubted is set aside.⁸⁴ But this description in Walther is not a thought experiment; or for her, the thought experiment is a lived process in which theoretical reasoning is personified.

Invoking the circular movement of her text again, Walther notes that the Ich is in this scenario a 'Punkt', 'der wie ein personifizierter circulus vitiosus sich verhält, der nichts ist als circulus vitiosus und sich immer nur um sich selbst im Kreise herumdreht' (*PdM*, p. 78). The person in question literally, physically continues to live in the world ("mechanisch" [...], als wäre es völlig losgelöst von seinem eigenen Tun' (*PdM*, p. 77)), but in this state of detachment they are detached as well from the forms of language and reasoning that previously held descriptive power for them. The vision Walther presents here is one in which philosophical problems such as Descartes' are lived crises, crises of faith in one's grounding in the world.

Walther moves away from this state of detachment, using it on an explicit level at this stage in her text only to show that the Ich and foundational essence function separately (*PdM*, pp. 80–83). But like the telepathy example, the workings of this strange interlude go beyond that which are explicitly stated. The form of detachment described here recurs as a route to more significant and mystical insights as Walther explores the three sides of the foundational essence: 'Geist', 'Seele' and 'Leib' (*PdM*, pp. 83–122). Her introduction to this section (*PdM*, pp. 83–90) contains some more explicit consideration of intellectual history.

Walther attributes certain differences between thinkers throughout history to personal imbalances in how they experience their foundational essence. She writes:

⁸⁴ See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* [1647], trans. by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Je nachdem, von welcher Seite ein Mensch sein Grundwesen erlebt, wird es ihm auch unter einem anderen Vorzugsmerkmal erscheinen, wird er dasselbe unter einem anderen Gesichtspunkt erfassen, als 'schauendes Auge', als seelisch-geistige 'Liebes- und Willenskraft', als 'schöpferische Lebenskraft'. Deshalb werden auch Forscher und Denker, die auf verschiedenem Wege zur Erschauung oder Ahnung des Grundwesens kommen, es ganz verschieden darstellen und charakterisieren, je nachdem, von welcher Seite sie es erfaßt haben. Bauen sich dann noch ethisch-religiöse, oder philosophische Systeme darauf auf, so mögen diese Unterschiede oft so weit gehen, daß die verschiedenen Denker selbst und auch andere, die von ihnen gelernt haben und auf ihnen aufbauen, gar nicht mehr erkennen können, daß sie eigentlich dasselbe, nur von verschieden Seiten aus gesehen, meinen. (*PdM*, p. 86)

She briefly categorises key contemporary and historical philosophers according to the perspective by which they most strongly see their foundational essence: Hegel and Husserl are particularly intellectual, for example, while Klages and Simmel see things 'von der Seite der schöpferischen Lebenskraft' (*PdM*, p. 87). As with the philosophical 'Sündenfall' Walther mentions above (*PdM*, p. 31), there is a sense here that these imbalances are not necessary ones, but rather are historically or materially determined according to the individual and their circumstances: 'Welchen Weg ein Mensch da geht, hängt wohl von vielen Umständen ab, zunächst natürlich von seiner urindividuellsten Eigenart, dann aber auch von dem, was er von seinen Vorbildern und Erziehern und von dem Zeitgeist, in dem er lebt, übernimmt' (*PdM*, pp. 87–8). Walther places a real importance on the material situatedness of thinkers in her analysis, yet she does not explicitly consider her own situatedness; there may not be any reason to think that Walther's perspective on the foundational essence is any more comprehensive than that of the other thinkers she characterises here. But even as she demonstrates traces of an absolutist mode of thinking in her assumption of an ability to view others' thinking from some removed distance, the warning to avoid absolutism is stronger.

Walther characterises a particular kind of thinker (tentatively, with a question mark, naming Hegel as an example) who excludes consideration of the material in favour of speculative generalisation:

Mancher scheint z.B. sein eigenes Grundwesen mehr durch Emporsteigen zum reinen geistigen Erkennen und Schauen zu finden, sein höchstes Vollkommenheitsziel ist die Vergeistigung und Durchgeistung seiner selbst und der ganzen Welt (Hegel?); ein Ziel, das mehr im Rationalen, Allgemeinen (nicht Verstandesmäßigen, sondern Spekulativ-vernünftigen Hegels) liegt, mehr auf allgemein-menschliche und geistige Normen unter Ausschaltung des spezifisch Individuellen, Konkreten, also auf 'Vernunft' hinausläuft. (*PdM*, pp. 88–9)

The kind of philosophical approach imagined here is one which attempts to exclude precisely the sort of personal and contextual networks out of which Walther asserts even the most rationalising approaches must arise. As she sees it, the impulse to distance oneself from the subjective, experiential aspects of thought forms just one kind of experience. Again, philosophy is personified: objectivising patterns of thought are dramatized as a kind of personal alienation for another sort of person, to whom insight appears as part of caring interpersonal interaction rather than through the use of reason:

Auch die 'Vergeistigung' wird ihnen vielleicht nur durch innere Liebeseinigung mit einem Menschen verständlich, dem sie das höchste Wunschbild bedeutet, so daß sie es nun von ihm aus, aus ihm heraus lebend, verstehen können. Aber jenes strebungslose, scheinbar gefühlslere, ruhige, klare Schauen, das ewig gleichmäßig alles überblickt von einer unendlich hohen, einsamen Warte aus, ist diesen Menschen doch auf die Dauer fremd, – wenn nicht zugleich eine allumfassende Liebe hinzukommt – : sie frieren in dieser einsamen Höhe, wenn sie zeitweilig sich voll Begeisterung hinaufschwingen mögen, um ihr Grundwesen und ihren Gott dort zu finden. (*PdM*, p. 89)

Walther adds that this latter kind of impulse might be 'spezifisch weiblich', while the more objectivising is assumed to be 'spezifisch männlich' (*PdM*, p. 89).

Though she opts not to investigate whether this gendering of the different approaches has any legitimacy, it is an interesting aside. For one it is an ongoing implicit hint of the situatedness of Walther's own approach; it gestures to the gendered space in which she is writing, and to her own status as a woman philosopher. It demonstrates as well the possibility of differing philosophical approaches once the personal, material and experiential dimensions of thought are regained. Philosophical conventions may be disrupted or broken. I note

elsewhere the connection between Walther's above-quoted vision of constructed philosophical systems and the Nietzschean vision of the 'Bau der Begriffe' in *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*: constructed systems of philosophical terms, all metaphorical.⁸⁵ The breakdown of the intentional structure of experience is accompanied by the breakthrough of different forms of analysis.

VI. Body and essence

In Walther's discussion, philosophical one-sidedness arises out of a lived one-sidedness regarding how those philosophers see their own foundational essences (*PdM*, pp. 83–90). She continues with an account of how insights are reached in experience that arises out of each of the three sides of the foundational essence: 'Geist', 'Seele' and 'Leib' (*PdM*, pp. 90–122), which I discuss in this section. Here another 'Fall' narrative is introduced, one which has implications for the individual undergoing self-investigation, and the text itself. Walther demonstrates in this discussion a commitment to the idea that all thinkers are empirically situated, and that her work as academic phenomenologist forms part of the life it investigates. As Walther begins her account of 'Die Erfassung des Grundwesens als "Geist"' (*PdM*, pp. 90–97), it can be seen how philosophy continues to be illustrated as part of life. As in several examples I have already identified, Walther introduces her account of 'geistige' insights into the foundational essence by setting a scene, allowing a descriptive account to unfold. In the following quotation, along with continued use of spatial metaphor, the emergence of an important structure of bodily metaphor can be seen, in which the 'Geist' is associated with the 'Kopf' (the latter bodily term appearing in this context with quotation marks to indicate metaphorical usage).

Oft geschieht es etwa, daß ein Mensch sich lange quält um eine Frage, und doch trotz tagelanger Bemühungen nicht zu einer Lösung oder Klärung des Gefragten kommt: es bleibt alles dunkel und finster [...]. Da mag es wohl

⁸⁵ Niamh Burns, 'A Modernist Mystic: Philosophical Essence and Poetic Method in Gerda Walther (1897–1977)', *German Life and Letters*, 73 (2) (2020), 246–69 (p. 258).

geschehen, daß sich plötzlich in seinem Inneren, wie im ‘Kopfe’, etwas wie ein (geistiger) Lichtstrahl im Hintergrund der Einbettung ‘über’ dem Ich öffnet, der nun durch dieses hindurch auf seinen Gegenstand, seine Frage strahlt und diese in der überhaupt erreichbaren Klarheit und Durchsichtigkeit vollkommen einsichtig durchleuchtet. (*PdM*, pp. 90–91)

It is clear that this insight forms an *indirect* answer to the call put forward by the individual in their theoretical question. Rather than arising as direct conclusion in a process of reasoning, this insight appears, if not in spite of this individual’s reasoning, then still in an at least somewhat mysterious fashion. In embracing this insight, this individual’s Ich may continue to relate to its object, but this relation is complicated; the Ich is simultaneously detached from the object in the face of something deeper.

[...] das Ich ist oft plötzlich wie vollständig eingetaucht und versunken in jene Sphäre, deren Licht es nun von allen Seiten umfließt, unabhängig von irgendwelcher Beziehung zu irgendeinem Gegenstand, Wert- oder Sachverhalt. Hier erlebt dann der Mensch seine eigene geistige Wesenheit gleichsam ‘an sich’, ohne alle Beziehung auf bestimmte Gegenstände und Werte, nicht erst durch diese hindurch. (*PdM*, pp. 92–3)

This is a further complication of the basic linear intentional relation between subject and object Walther initially introduces. This relation, even as it ensures situated experience of the object, maintains a kind of distance between subject and object.

Walther describes how in moments of insights such as these, detachment and alienation from ordinary objects may allow for a ‘direct’ insight to break through in a complete disruption of linearity and intentionality. A new object, one’s own foundational essence, appears, making for a coincidence of subject and object. In this passage, as the use of metaphorical language around body, space and light increases and the literal reference recedes, Walther’s description becomes increasingly figurative, as demonstrated in the following quotation. The idea of the circle and the ‘Punkt’ are invoked again, and there is a greater distance between this description and the original, material experience it began with:

Das erlebende Ich ist hier zwar immernoch das blickende Ich aller bewußtseinsmäßigen (intentionalen) Erlebnisse, aber es ist in seinem Blick

gleichsam heller und klarer und ruhiger geworden, und sein Hintergrund, seine 'Einbettung' ist nicht mehr gleichsam hinter ihm 'flach' und 'dunkel', sondern wie eine geräumige Lichtkugel, in deren Innerem es frei schwebt und es ist nicht mehr so, wie sonst wohl, daß die Gegenstände gleichsam ein lineares Erlebnis aus dem Hintergrunde hervorrufen, einen konzentrierten Blickstrahl des Ich auf sich ziehen, sondern es ist als strahlte jenes Licht von selbst durch das Ich und erst von ihm auf die Gegenstände, sie in einer Weise erhellend, die ihnen sonst nicht zukommt. [...] Es ist, als weise diese räumliche Lichtsphäre, aus der jene Strahlen kommen, schließlich über den Menschen selbst und seine innerseelischen Grenzen hinaus, wenn sie selbst sich auch als noch in ihm, innerhalb seiner Einbettungs'kugel', entspringend darstellen [...] auf eine 'jenseitige' ('jenseitig' in einem durchaus innerseelischen Sinne gemeint, der eben erlebt werden muß) zentrale geistige Lichtquelle hin, mit der jene Quelle im Menschen selbst irgendwie verbunden ist. (*PdM*, pp. 93–4)

As Walther's subject breaks through the limits or borders of its previous experiential structures, so too does Walther's description appear to strain against its own limitations.

The metaphorical structures she relies upon appear to bear a looser than ever relation to the material or literal reference points they ordinary invoke. There is a sense that Walther can only gesture at the experience in question, and as part of this, she gestures to other religious sources. This spiritual light from one's own foundational essence is said to resemble divine light: 'Jene Quelle aber scheint auf den göttlichen Geist ahnend hinzuweisen, aus dem das eigene "Fünklein" im Menschen selbst stammt, das aus dem "heiligen Geist" in den Menschen geflogen ist' (*PdM*, p. 94) Walther's mention of the 'Fünklein' is an indirect reference to Meister Eckhart.⁸⁶ Such references appear often in Walther, sometimes, like here, marking points at which Walther's own descriptive power appears to falter. What they offer is a sense of community: a sense that even as direct, deep insights appear that can only be inadequately approached with descriptive language, there is still hope of connecting with others regarding such insight. And all the while, even in its transcendent language, this

⁸⁶ See the editor's note on 'vünkelin' in Meister Eckhart, *Werke*, I, trans. by Quint, ed. by Largier, pp. 763–72.

description is explicit in its relation, even if that relation is indirect, to real, material experience.

Walther's account makes clear that theoretical reasoning is not particularly special; there are other kinds of experience which may just as likely bring forth such direct insight from the spiritual foundational essence: 'Ähnlich kann es sich aber auch bei anderen, nicht nur bei theoretisch-wissenschaftlichen Problemen verhalten. Vielleicht befindet sich das Ich in einer schweren sittlichen Krise, die sein ganzes Leben erschüttert [...]' (*PdM*, p. 91). Of all the three sides of the foundational essence, the spirit ('Geist') may be where the intellect is most commonly at home, but there is more to the spirit than the intellect; the realm of the spirit can extend to ethical and religious/mystical experiences as well.⁸⁷ At the same time, there is a reappearance of Walther's own impulse to universalise certain insights. She notes that spiritual insights, which when they come from one's foundational essence bear 'seine eigene geistige Färbung', are the most generalisable: 'Trotzdem gelten [...] alle von einem aus dieser Sphäre herauslebenden Ich evident erschauten Einsichten und Zusammenhänge auch für alle anderen geistigen Subjekte' (*PdM*, p. 95).

Importantly, the universality of these insights is framed here as kind of vital intersubjectivity rather than pure objectivity. Walther does not wish to take this universality as she thinks some metaphysicians understandably do: '[es wird] auch verständlich, daß manche Metaphysiker [die geistige Seite des Grundwesens] nur als allgemeines geistiges Fluidum, in der jegliche Individualität ausgelöscht werde, auffassen konnten' (*PdM*, p. 96). Rather such spiritual insights as the ones gestured at here retain the character of individually and materially felt experience: 'Trotzdem aber müssen wir auch dieser Seite des Grundwesens individuelle Momente zusprechen' (*PdM*, p. 96).

⁸⁷ Walther draws a distinction between the ethical and the religious; see *PdM*, pp. 182–3.

Walther's next section (*PdM*, pp. 97–106) is titled 'Die Erfassung des Grundwesens als Seele (Gemüt)'. The titles of these sections are inconsistent in their use of quotation marks: 'Seele' does not appear in quotation marks here (and neither does the 'leibliche Lebenskraft' of the next section, *PdM*, p. 106) where 'Geist' does in the previous section. In this case, the slippage appears a less textually significant slippage than others I have pointed out elsewhere. At the same time, the unpolished appearance of parts of the text seem to signal a kind of pragmatism of approach that is evident at various points throughout. This section deals with moments of insight similar to those above in structure, but where the insight in question is experienced as arriving out of the 'seelisch' side of the foundational essence: the soul. This kind of insight arises as the Ich devotes itself deeply to a special kind of object (a beloved person, or a high artistic, ethical or religious value) and then sinks into the feeling that object arouses, without letting go of that object or becoming overly inward-looking (*PdM*, p. 99–100). It is through this devotion that the foundational essence as soul can be glimpsed:

Dies Versinken in einem Gefühl kann so lange dauern, bis das Ich gleichsam durch es hindurch in dem Mittelpunkt seiner Gefühlsquelle angelangt ist und der daraus hervorbrechende Gefühlsstrom so stark wird, daß das Ich nun plötzlich, von seiner Wucht gepackt, für einen Augenblick herumschauend, blitzartig diese selbst und ihre Eigenart, seine Artung, innerlich erschaut. Dabei erfaßt das Ich sie, erschaut es sie in seinem Bewußtsein auf ganz eigenartige Weise in diesem blitzartigen reflexiven Zurückschauen [...]. (*PdM*, pp. 100–101)

Yet even as the Ich maintains its relatedness to this object, the usual intentional structures of experience are still disrupted. First, the complex background of experience (and its foreground of other objects) disappears for a split second. Then the linearity of the subject-object distinction is overhauled as subject (Ich) and the new object (foundational essence as soul) in some sense coincide (Walther quotes Georg Simmel here):

In jenem, wenn auch auf dieser Stufe nur blitzartigen, Zurückblicken auf sich selbst haben wir also ein leibhaftes Erschauen [...] des eigenen Grundwesens als 'Seele' [...], unmittelbar [...], nicht ahnend oder vermittelnd durch ein anderes hindurch. Es scheint dies wirklich jenes 'wie frei schwebende Gefühl

seiner selbst' zu sein, 'in dem Subjekt und Objekt zusammenfallen' [...]. (*PdM*, p. 103)

Though similar in structure to the above spiritual insights, these insights of the soul are experienced as arising out of a different area of one's inner 'space'; here Walther builds on the bodily metaphor established in the previous section. Whereas spiritual insight is found in the 'head' (see *PdM* p. 91, quoted above), the insights of the soul come from below, in the 'heart' (both can be experienced at once: see *PdM*, p. 105–6). As before, Walther uses quotation marks to indicate the metaphorical use of these bodily terms, but she addresses the distinction between the (physical, literal) heart and the ('seelisch', metaphorical) 'heart' more explicitly than before:

Da steigen [einem Menschen] aus seinen 'tiefst enTiefen' [sic] jene Erlebnisse der größten Liebe, der höchsten Freude und inneren Bejahung auf, – also nicht mehr aus einer Lichtsphäre gleichsam 'über' ihm, wie 'oben im Kopf', sondern wie 'von unten herauf', nicht 'von oben herunter' dringen diese Erlebnisse in die Einbettung und von dort in das Ich hinein. Sie steigen fühlbar von unten, wie 'aus dem Herzen', aus der Herz'grube' auf, aber doch durchaus wesensanders als etwa ein innerleiblicher Vorgang in derselben 'Gegend', wie etwa ein Herzkrampf, oder sonstige organische Vorgänge im Herzen bei Schreck, Überanstrengung usw. Von dem allen ist dieses Hervorströmen aus 'dem Herzen' vielmehr unmittelbar anschaulich rein seinem inneren, phänomenalen Gehalt nach wesensverschieden. Jener seelische Gefühlsquellpunkt ist durchaus wesensverschieden von dem physiologisch-organischen Herzen, das einem in diesen innerleiblichen Vorgängen gegeben ist, mag er auch in der Durchdringung des Körperlichen durch das Seelische gerade mit diesem Organ besonders innig verknüpft, in ihm gleichsam inkarniert sein. (*PdM*, p. 98)

This is an odd quotation; in making explicit the stark distinction between the heart and the 'heart', there comes the surprising suggestion in the last sentence that the two can in fact be connected. The exact nature of this connection between remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that the connection between them is significant, and material (in the terms 'Durchdringung' and 'inkarniert'). The bodily metaphor employed here is not 'mere metaphor', and does not form part of a classical philosophical analogy. Unlike in Walther's introductory seeing/blindness analogy, there does seem to be some true or significant relation

between the object to which the analogous term is applied (the 'heart'), and the object the term for which is selected for the analogy (the heart). The material significance of such bodily metaphor, and the possibility of connection between the material and the mystical, becomes all the more pronounced in Walther's next subsection.

This subsection examines 'die Erfassung des Grundwesens als leibliche Lebenskraft' (*PdM*, pp. 106–22). I identify in this section an implicit parallel between the status of the body and the text. The metaphorical association between body and language or text has a long history, with biblical underpinnings.⁸⁸ Walther's text, and her language generally, has been seen to occupy an undefined space. It is at once inadequate 'metaphor' for something real and important that cannot be directly described, and a productive and pragmatic means for negotiating this something, precisely because of the inexact, indirect relation the language bears to this something. The body as metaphorical 'space' features heavily throughout Walther's text and stands at times for aspects of mystical experience that seems to transcend the capabilities of the physical body. In delineating the moments in which mystical insights, and the insights of our foundational essence, unfold, Walther appears at times to place the body at the bottom of the apparent hierarchy (below 'Geist' and 'Seele') that makes up our selves, and at our core, our foundational essence. Yet in introducing the bodily side of the foundational essence (a side which does not have some metaphorical parallel in the inner bodily 'space', Walther distinguishes herself from (unidentified) philosophers who see the body as opposed or alien to these other sides of the self:

Es liegt diese [leibliche] Seite des Grundwesens für gewöhnlich nicht eigentlich für sich abgeschlossen in einem eigenen Bereich im Inneren des Menschen, wie wir dies bei den beiden anderen Seiten sahen, sie ist auch nicht etwas diesen Fremdes, womöglich Entgegengesetztes, wie man auf Grund mancher philosophischer Systeme annahmen könnte. (*PdM*, p. 106)

⁸⁸ See Kohl, p. 62.

Later, in giving an account of one of the types of mystical experience, Walther notes that God can be experienced as a sudden, sharp ‘magnetische Welle [...] an jener Stelle im Rücken, von der wir wissen, daß dort das Rückenmark seinen Sitz hat’ (*PdM*, pp. 150–1). Walther distinguishes this sensation, one that is ‘seelisch-geistig’, from one that is ‘körperlich’, but admits that the two are in lived experience ‘untrennbar verwoben’ (*PdM*, p. 151).

In clarifying the status and importance of the body, this section introduces an important image or account of the Fall (parallel to the philosophical ‘Sündenfall’ that appears earlier). The Fall is a key structure for Walther. It is a trope that she shares with many of her contemporaries in philosophy and cultural production more widely: I discuss its appearance in artistic production (and the artistic references Walther herself makes in this section) in more detail in Chapter Four. In *PdM*, the Fall appears at times as an essential philosophical structure, at times an essential religious one, and at other times more of a contingent narrative device (an appeal for communal understanding by means of a well-known trope). Walther’s blending of these three modes in the case of the Fall shows how she operates between modes of thought and writing more widely.

Stephen Mulhall shows how for the modern (broadly secular) philosophers Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, the use of Fall narratives indicates the desire to borrow from Christianity the notion that ‘human nature as such is tragically flawed, perverse in its very structure or constitution’, and that human beings are not merely contingently ‘imperfect’.⁸⁹ As Mulhall notes, the trouble with secular philosophical, rather than religious, conceptions of human fallenness, is that they struggle with finding a non-divine source of redemption that must stand outside of the fallen human sphere.⁹⁰ Where Walther’s philosophical investigation

⁸⁹ Stephen Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 6–7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

encounters the need for redemption, however, she does not close it off from the divine.

Walther's philosophical redemption is also a religious one. Her use of the Fall as a narrative structure is thus not exactly like that of Mulhall's philosophers, in that she presents redemption as to an important extent beyond human ability, and so beyond the scope of a philosophical text.

I return to Mulhall's account and this critical discussion of the status of the Fall in Chapter Three. For now I follow Walther's account of the human-personal Fall and trace its parallel on a textual level, as the text encounters limitations in what it can do philosophically, and even descriptively. Interesting in Walther's account of redemption is the role she preserves for the human body. Though she prioritises the spiritual, the redemption Walther describes in this section is one that does not neglect the body, even as its limitations are acknowledged. And there is in this section an implicit, parallel enacting of a form of textual redemption that allows Walther to write productively even where human language is in some sense inadequate. So contingent forms (of life, and of language) continue to have their place even as Walther appears to be moving into the realm of the essential.

Walther explains in this section that the division of the foundational essence and the wider self into the three sides she discussed only occurs following a Fall. She describes an originary childhood state in which these three sides have not yet separated out:

Denken wir etwa an ein selten schönes, reines Kind und vergegenwärtigen wir uns seine innerseelische Haltung. Es ist, als wären bei ihm Geist und Seele noch ganz in den Leib versunken [...] Solche Kinder können auch 'geistige' und 'seelische' Regungen in unserem obigen Sinne haben, aber es ist, als bildeten hier 'Geist' und 'Seele' noch nicht einen eigenen Bezirk innerhalb des seelischen Gesamtseins des Menschen in seinem Inneren ihren Wohnsitz aufgeschlagen, sondern als wären sie gleichsam noch 'überall und nirgends', [...] in seinen ganzen 'Leib' hineingegossen, nicht nur in seinem 'Kopf' und seinem 'Herzen' zentralisiert [...] Daher ist denn auch auf dieser Stufe gleichsam alles Seelische und Geistige schon ohne weiteres auch leiblich, es drückt sich viel mehr in Mienenspiel und überhaupt im ganzen leiblich Sein aus als beim ('beherrschten') Erwachsenen [...]. (*PdM*, pp. 108–9)

In this description, Walther's distinction of the inner bodily 'space' and physical, literal body does not apply, and her linguistic or textual conventions, particularly those around quotation marks, strain to accommodate the fluidity of the child's 'inner' and 'outer' life. The child's 'Geist' and 'Seele' (both terms unusually appear here in quotation marks, as their status alters versus how they appeared earlier) are seen to reside in the literal, physical bodily space, being expressed for example in 'Mienenspiel'. The terms 'Leib' and 'leiblich' appear both within and without quotation marks, as the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical body the text previously established recedes. Walther outlines a fluid movement of the different sides of the self throughout the body: a movement that is 'unbewußt' (*PdM*, p. 110). Rather than having a 'Heeresstraße' leading from the 'heart' and 'head' to the Ich, as the adult does, the 'seelisch-geistige Regungen' of the child 'durchdringen ihn bis in seine letzten Poren' 'wie das Wasser eines Netzes von Kanälen' (*PdM*, pp. 110–11).

Following the Fall, the three sides of the foundational essence become distinguishable, and may begin to lead separate lives, sometimes even in conflict with one another (materialists may neglect the 'Geist' and 'Seele', and ascetics the body) (*PdM*, pp. 112–3). Walther here suggests the possibility of some redemption following this Fall:

Von vielen wird die verlorene Dreieinheit von Körper, Geist und Seele in ihrer harmonischen Durchdringung, wie sie sich bei manchen in der Kindheit findet, als ein verlorenes Paradies betrauert und zurückersehnt und bitter klagen sie die Bewußtwerdung, die 'Vergeistigung' an, weil sie den Menschen aus diesem Paradies vertrieben habe. Es fragt sich also, ob nicht trotz und nach dieser Trennung diese harmonische Einheit in vollendeter Schönheit, nur gleichsam auf einer höheren Stufe, gerade durch die auf der Trennung beruhende Bewußtwerdung der drei Seiten des Grundwesens mit Hilfe der durch die Selbstmacht des Ichs möglichen Selbstgestaltung wieder hergestellt werden kann. (*PdM*, pp. 115–6).

Walther describes flashes of post-childhood harmonic experience, for example 'in einem Augenblick eben überstandener höchster Lebensgefahr': 'Hier, in dieser höchsten Anspannung aller Kräfte seines gesamten Seins, fühlt der Mensch die noch und wieder pulsierende Lebenskraft in allen Adern, in jeder Muskel und Fiber seines Leibes' (*PdM*, p 117). This is a

more obviously material threat of death than Heidegger's structural one.⁹¹ Walther's concern here is with establishing a practice, a sustainable means of bringing about harmonic experience in everyday life: 'Um nun die paradiesische Harmonie und Schönheit wieder zu einem Dauerzustand zu erheben, müßte also das Ich sich gleichsam drei Heerestraßen mit vielen Verästelungen und Kanälen in seinen ganzen inner-seelischen Bereich hinein bauen zu den drei Seiten seines Grundwesens [...]' (*PdM*, p. 118).

The harmony of this redemption does not undo the Fall. The distinctions between the sides of the foundational essence remain, but they are not absolute. In having become distinct in the Fall, their harmonic working-together becomes all the more worthy of conscious appreciation. In this we see the role of Walther's text itself in this self-investigation, as it marks a making-conscious of the harmony. The text's descriptions strain as it moves beyond its own fallen state of differentiation, in which the distinctions between the literal and metaphorical are too clearly drawn. In the textual redemption, there is a conscious and creative reappropriation of fallen textual strategies. As over-differentiation in philosophy appears inadequate, the figurative language of Walther's phenomenological description marks a different approach. The text's strength is in the non-mimetic relation it bears to its investigative subject (as does the modernist artwork to reality in Bourne-Taylor and Mildenberg's vision).⁹² In functioning in this way, it avoids the pitfalls of an approach that rationalises beyond the experiential, material realm even as it attempts to capture it more exactly. The material focus that underlies figurative description is crucial as Walther moves towards the mystical.

VII. The 'It', and transcendence versus objectivity

⁹¹ For discussion of the disagreement around Heidegger's 'death', see Iain Thomson, 'Death and Demise in Being and Time', in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's Being and Time*, ed. by Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 260–90.

⁹² Bourne-Taylor and Mildenberg, 'Introduction', p. 11.

In moving towards more direct, mystical experience, Walther's account does not abandon the commitment to materiality even as it distinguishes between the mediated and unmediated, and the immanent and the transcendent (in the chapter 'Die Frage nach der Unmittelbarkeit oder Mittelbarkeit, der Immanenz oder Transzendenz dieser Gegebenheit des Grundwesens' (*PdM*, pp. 122–30)). This chapter clarifies the relation between materiality and the deep insights gleaned through experience of the foundational essence in Walther's scheme (laying the groundwork for subsequent mystical intervention into experience). Walther begins this chapter by imagining a being which, unlike a human, did not need an object outside of itself in order to be able to experience its foundational essence. This being would be a kind of angel (the term 'Engeln' appears in quotation marks), which unconsciously *lives* its foundational essence, rather than having it as a conscious object (of knowledge etc.) (*PdM*, p. 123).⁹³ For humans, however, a transcendental object may be needed: a 'Nichtich' [a 'not-I']. This is not a singular material object or type of object, but rather a general contextual background to this experience ('das äußere transzendente Sein aller Art' (*PdM*, p. 124)). Walther begins the chapter and introduces the notion of a not-I in a conversational tone:

Man könnte nun die Frage aufwerfen, ob das Grundwesen denn nun hier transzendent oder immanent, äußerlich oder innerlich, ob nur durch anderes hindurch oder auch unvermittelt und direkt, leibhaft und ursprünglich [sic] dem Bewußtsein sich darbiete, ob es nur mit Hilfe eines 'Nichtich' und durch es hindurch sich kundgebe, oder auch ohne dieses, ob es eines anderen, eines äußeren 'transzendenten' Gegenstandes bedarf, um von Bewußtsein erfaßt zu werden, oder nicht. Vielleicht beides! (*PdM*, p. 122)

There is an air of coincidence about the route Walther's account takes: she has arrived at this stage in her investigation because 'one could raise' this question. Though the text is crafted with intention (this passage forms a reasonable next step in the investigation, and is not an aside resulting out of some random questioning), what is emphasised in this textual tone is the

⁹³ Walther invokes the image of an unborn child here, stating that the mode of being of this 'angel' would be like that of a foetus in the womb: 'ein dumpfes Ruhen in ihrem Grundwesen [...], ähnlich etwa, wie man sich das bei einem ungeborenen Kinde vorstellen könnte' (*PdM*, p. 123).

sense that there may be other ways to get to the matter at hand. This passage follows the one quoted above which states that there is no 'Königsweg' to the insights sought here, and that history, cultural and material circumstance play a role in how they are arrived at.

This is precisely what Walther conveys about the role of the not-I itself in experience. In an extended note at the end of this short chapter which deals with Edith Landmann's 1923 book 'Zur Transzendenz des Erkennens' (noting that she did not have time to properly integrate the insights of this book into her own), Walther emphasises that experience of God (and one's foundational essence), though it may be most complete in unio mystica, can come in many different forms:

Und ebenso ist die denkbar vollkommenste Schau des göttlichen Wesens, die dem Menschen überhaupt zugänglich ist, die Schau, die ihm die unio mystica gewährt. Daneben gibt es unzählige andere Gegebenheitsweisen des göttlichen Wesens und des eigenen (und fremden) Grundwesens, wo die 'Teilerkenntnis' in viel stärkerem Maße den Ausgangspunkt und die Grundlage einer solchen 'Gesamterkenntnis' bildet [...]. (*PdM*, p. 128)

The not-I is not an essential structural component of such deep experience in the sense of a contrasting element against which one's foundational essence can be grasped. It is not that one gains knowledge of oneself in the negative, by comparing oneself to something that is not oneself. Rather the not-I appears as 'Erwecker' (*PdM*, p. 124), or 'Katalysator' (*PdM*, p. 126) in experience. It puts out a call ['Anrufung oder Anregung'] (*PdM*, p. 126) that the Ich answers. A 'call' is invoked by Martin Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*: he identifies an ontological structure of conscience, in which, as Stephen Mulhall puts it, 'the one who calls through the voice of conscience is definable by nothing more concrete than the fact of its calling'.⁹⁴ However Walther's call is more material, more specific. It is a call answered by the 'empirische Person' of her 'Contra Heidegger!' note. Even as Walther's investigation moves towards a moment of detachment, detachment appears as a kind of commitment to something outside of oneself. It

⁹⁴ Stephen Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Heidegger and Being and Time* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 127.

is paradoxically in losing oneself that one finds one's foundational essence. But one does not lose one's empirical self in the face of structural abstractions; rather this loss of self occurs in the form of a devotion to a not-I:

Denn nicht indem es sich selbst suchte, indem es immer nur auf sich selbst hinschielte, kam das Ich ja dazu 'sich selbst' zu finden, sondern eben nur, so widersinnig das klingen mag, – indem es 'sich vergaß', indem es [...] dem 'Gegenstand' seines Erlebens sich völlig widmete [...]. (*PdM*, p. 125)

This devotion can appear in all kinds of different forms: 'in Wissen, Schauen, Lieben, Werten usw.' (*PdM*, p. 125). Each of these forms carries with it the implication of desire, of material human impulse, on the part of some individual, even if this desire is of a particularly lofty kind.

What Walther is exploring in this short chapter is how direct or unmediated kinds of experience (to which mystical experience belongs) are not opposed with the material, even if they are not equated. The not-I need not be an ordinary material object – it could in fact be God – but it can be (*PdM*, p. 124). Indeed, Walther does not even think that the not-I is necessary to experience of one's own foundational essence; in certain circumstances the foundational essence 'blossoms' of its own accord in experience: 'Hier ist also nicht einmal als Erwecker des Grundwesens ein transzendenter Gegenstand nötig: wie ein zum Blühen gereifter Baum öffnet es sich und entläßt seine Licht- und Wärmestrahlen aus sich, wenn die Stunde dafür gekommen ist' (*PdM*, p. 126). But the conscious kind of experience of one's foundational essence that does involve a material not-I is neither 'vermittelt' nor 'unangemessen' (*PdM*, p. 127). Crucially, materiality is not just a matter of the 'externalisation' or 'objectification' of internal truths that are separate to them (*PdM*, p. 123). The material, as one kind of not-I, plays a role in unmediated experience and does not mean its mediation. This is an interesting point of emphasis, occurring right before Walther's investigation turns more definitely towards the divine (beginning with chapter 6: 'Die Erfassung Gottes und des Grundwesens in ihm' (*PdM*, pp. 130–56)). For Walther to have emphasised this sense of the

potential interaction of the material with deep unmediated experience of one's own foundational essence at this stage in the text serves as a reminder for what follows that the material and the mystical can appear side-by-side, on the same plane of experience, and on the same textual plane.

Walther continues by returning to the moment of detachment she arrived at previously as part of her 'Quellpunktsuntersuchung', and which I examined under the heading of 'philosophy personified'. This lived version of the Cartesian reduction, in which the Ich's intentionality is disrupted and it sinks inwards, losing all connection to the outside world and ultimately to itself. In this inward spiral movement the Ich surpasses its own inner space: it is a mode in which '[das Ich] halt- und ziellos wie im 'leeren Raum' in sich und jenseits seines innerseelischen Bereiches versinkt' (*PdM*, p. 132). There are two paths open to such an Ich. It may try to regain its intentional connection with its own inner processes and with its world, to go 'nach "vorne"'; or, it can sink even further:

– Oder aber: es wendet sich noch weiter zurück von dem allen fort, läßt sich immer tiefer versinken in dem dunklen inneren Abgrund, stürzt unaufhaltsam immer tiefer – aber nicht ins eigene Grundwesen, denn auch dieses liegt schon weit zurück 'hinter' und 'über' ihm in einer Sphäre, die der sonnigen Welt mit ihrem Leben und Treiben noch viel näher lag, als der dunkle Grund des Abgrundes jenseits der innerseelischen Grenze seines eigenen inneren Bereiches [...]. (*PdM*, pp. 132–3)

As one of two paths ('zwei Wege', *PdM*, p. 132) open to this Ich, this turn is a materially, contingently located possibility, even as it takes the form of a turn away from the material and contingent, and all that is personal and individual to this Ich. Walther clarifies the kind of distance that one must gain from oneself to secure the possibility of mystical intervention:

Also indem das Ich sich gleichsam in das Herz und das Auge Gottes schmiegt und von hier aus sich selbst betrachtet, so wie Gott es sieht, erschaut es sein eigenes Wesen in voller Reinheit von einer jenseitigen (aber nicht äußerlichen), höchsten Warte her. (*PdM*, pp. 130–31)

Walther has already outlined an opposition to those thinkers who use reason to view human life from an impossibly removed and depersonalised distance. In this passage, she outlines

another stage in a lived detachment that allows for a view of one's own life 'from beyond', as opposed to 'from outside'. The transcendence of one's own situatedness is of a different sort to the 'objectivity' left behind by philosophers such as Husserl, and whom Walther follows.⁹⁵ There is a purity of vision that is not objectivity. Indeed, supposed objectivity is inferior in Walther's view to this transcendence, as the former is an intersubjective construction, and merely a human one at that. The greatest transcendence allows one to *intuit* the divine in all creation, rather than engaging in some process of inductive reasoning from one's own experience of the divine out to all the world:

So sieht nun das Ich den wesentlichen Aufbau der Welt gleichsam *von innen* [...]. Es *fühlt*, daß es sich so bis in die weitesten Sphären des Kosmos hinein verhalten muß, wenn ihm auch natürlich nicht die Blickweite und die Fassungskraft gegeben sind, jeden einzelnen dieser Strahlen [...] für sich zu betrachten [...]. Es ist eine letzte Urgegebenheit, eine unmittelbare Schau, die sich nicht weiter zergliedern und ableiten läßt [...]. (*PdM*, pp. 140–41, emphasis mine)

This discussion clarifies what this transcendent view is not: it is not depersonalised objectivity. To delineate it in positive terms poses a greater challenge for Walther. At this stage in the text, though Walther does not admit so explicitly, the power of phenomenological-philosophical procedure appears limited. Delineation along reasoned grounds is impossible, as this kind of transcendence embodies contradictions. For example, in this state of transcendence the Ich takes on God's perspective to some extent; but at the same time, it is always 'winzig und beschränkt' compared to God (*PdM*, p. 131). As previously in her accounts of telepathy and human essence, phenomenological description is strained as Walther introduces her account of experience of the divine. What emerges is a fascinating passage which initially appears as phenomenological description written from the stance of a generalised Ich. However this description on the one hand carries with it the sense of its emerging out of a personal experience (like the telepathy account). At the same time the

⁹⁵ Mildenberg points out that Husserl sees all objectivity as arising out of an 'intending subjectivity'. Mildenberg, p. 9.

passage calls into question its very status as a description or account of that which it introduces.

Walther describes how the Ich that has reached the deep state of detachment outlined above begins to search for something outside of itself, and outside of the ordinary world to save it. Language (and its limits) are key to this search, as Walther's text reveals the inability of the Ich to *articulate* or *name* this something as central to its experience of it:

Es [das Ich] sucht nach einem letzten, kaum geahnten, nie gekannten Etwas, das es nicht nennen und auch nicht sich vorstellen kann, nach dem es sich nur sehnt, ohne doch sagen zu können, wie und was es ist. [...] Es weiß nicht, wo 'Es' ist und ob 'Es' überhaupt ist und ob 'Es' zu ihm kommen wird. [...] Und so ruft das Ich aus seiner tiefsten Verlassenheit mit aller Kraft, die es noch hat, danach. (*PdM*, pp. 133–4)

The 'Es' or 'Etwas' is a crucial element in Walther's text: it is that which cannot be captured in language. At this stage in the text Walther employs her strategy of introducing quotation marks around terms which have metaphorical usage. Yet in this passage there is no substance to this metaphor; there is only a placeholder, an 'it' or a 'something' that is distinct from the 'it' that refers to the Ich. This 'something' is thus doubly distanced in the text: it has no real designator, and the 'it' that stands in for the absent designator is further marked out as a stand-in through the use of these quotation marks. The language of the text cannot encroach on the divine sphere to which this 'it' belongs, just as the Ich itself has no power over it. But even though it knows it cannot directly influence this 'something', the Ich calls out to it.

Es weiß nicht, ob dies Rufen nützen wird, denn es fühlt, daß es nicht in seiner eigenen Macht steht, 'Es' zum Kommen zu zwingen [...]. Und dennoch ruft das Ich und wartet, denn ihm ist, als könne jenes andere, das 'Es', das es ruft, sein Rufen vernehmen und von sich aus, aus eigener, freier Machtvollkommenheit, nun zu ihm kommen – wenn 'Es' will; und es fühlt, daß es eben darum eine höchste Gnade wäre, wenn 'Es' wirklich käme [...]. (*PdM*, pp. 134–5)

This calling encapsulates how Walther's own text functions when confronted with these phenomenological-descriptive challenges; it acts as a kind of call, one which cannot bear a

direct relation to its subject matter as description, but which may nonetheless be answered, or understood, in the right circumstances. The indirect nature of the answer is maintained even when the questioning becomes more explicit: in Walther's account of experience of the divine in which God appears as a 'geistig' other subject, the human subject's questioning still cannot compel an answer, and answers can arise even when no question is asked (*PdM*, pp. 170–2). Walther's text makes things explicit: it describes, and characterises experience. But this explicitness does not ensure its direct relation to its subject, or that it will be understood.

As before, whether one can understand this text is a matter of experience. Echoing previous such disclaimers, Walther notes:

Wer es nie erlebt hat, wird es nie begreifen und verstehen, bis er selbst es such erlebt. Denn nur andeutungsweise und in schwacher, mangelhafter Annäherung kann man, von anderen Sphären herkommend, sich auch nur einen Begriff des hier Gemeinten machen; – wer es aber selbst erlebt hat, für den genügt auch eine geringfügige Andeutung, um zu wissen, worum es sich handelt. (*PdM*, p. 141)

In this quotation, Walther uses the terms 'Andeutung', 'Begriff' and 'Annäherung' to indicate that which is articulated. The 'Begriff' here ('concept', or just an empty 'designator') is no different to the 'Gleichnis' at the outset of her text: as in Kofman's Nietzsche, concepts do nothing more than metaphorical gesturing. This quotation demonstrates particularly clearly Walther's debt to a mystical tradition. It echoes similar disclaimers appearing throughout Teresa; even as certain metaphors or comparisons are introduced, Teresa states explicitly that the divine matters being discussed cannot be grasped by the mind or represented in language.⁹⁶ Like Teresa, Walther is to some extent undeterred in her efforts to nonetheless provide some language with which to approach these matters; she writes anyway. That is because there is a certain power in this humility: there remains the possibility that this meaningless 'es' can come to be inhabited by a meaning for which it calls out, even if it cannot

⁹⁶ See for example Teresa of Ávila, *Interior Castle*, p. 85.

directly demand an answer. This occurs by divine grace, in the case of the 'es' that stands for something experienced in moments of mystical insight. Or meaning can come to inhabit the other kinds of 'es' Walther invokes (metaphors, and concept-names that function as metaphors), if they are read by a kindred spirit. In this sense the text is like Walther's subject calling out to the divine: it hopes to be understood, makes itself ready, but knows that it cannot force this understanding, that this understanding depends on something outside of itself.

VIII. Conclusion: approaching the divine, approaching meaning

The remainder of *PdM* contains attempts at an 'Andeutung': attempts to characterise (in a loose sense) the sorts of mystical experiences which this anonymised subject might have. In keeping things depersonalised, Walther presents her work as 'philosophy', but this is a conception of philosophy which as I have shown clearly stretches the usual bounds of that discipline. *PdM*'s meditations are not concerned with treating the 'ideal possibility' of particular kinds of experience. The real possibility of such experience is the premise of the text, which works to characterise them in some way. As part of this the text reaches outside of itself, with continuous explicit references to accounts of other mystics, particularly Teresa's *Interior Castle*, and those collected in Martin Buber's *Ekstatische Konfessionen* (1909) (see the entire second half of *PdM*, where such references are abundant). Alongside these are references to literary and other artistic texts, including poetry by Rainer Maria Rilke (*PdM*, p. 88), the use of colour in expressionist painting (*PdM*, p. 108), and Wagnerian opera (*PdM*, p. 231). Walther leans on the work of Stefan George in constructing a scheme of metaphors of colour and precious stones in characterising the different aspects of the foundational essence and the divine (see, for example, *PdM*, p. 145). One extended footnote remarks on some of Teresa's statements about the possibility of deception by an evil spirit, and notes that Rudolf Borchardt's drama 'Verkündigung' treats this subject 'mit unübertrefflicher Meisterschaft'

(*PdM*, pp. 162–4).⁹⁷ I return to Walther’s use of the literary in more detail in Chapter Four, but for now wish to note that Walther views both mystical and literary writing as relevant to her own, forming part of how Walther makes her text ‘approach’ or ‘approximate’ the subject to which she is devoted.

For the most part, these references to other texts are brief, with little to no discussion of the sources she cites. To some extent this is a weakness; Walther appears to cite these sources as authoritative, without providing any explicit justification for their treatment as such (this seems particularly strange in the case of the poems cited, as I will cover later). They point to the text’s more problematic absences; Walther again does not ‘own up’ to the underlying basis of her own identity as a mystic, and uses others’ accounts (ones which she apparently hopes to be taken more seriously than her own, without clearly saying why) to paper over these gaps. At the same time, it draws attention to the productive incompleteness of the text: it is not, and cannot be, self-contained; its reception depends on its adoption by members of a mystical community. Walther did not always find this community: as indicated in *PdM*’s reception by Heidegger. But as Walther notes in the second edition, the text did have its enthusiastic readers, including another of Husserl’s former students Hedwig Conrad-Martius, who used it with her own students.⁹⁸

Bolstered by the reports of other mystics, Walther provides her own account of mystical experiences. These cover different types of such experience: experiences in which God appears as other, an ‘unendliche geistige Person’ (*PdM*, pp. 156–75); experiences where one finds a form of community with God, either via mediator or not (*PdM*, pp. 176–223); and states of extreme ‘unio mystica’ (*PdM*, pp. 223–37). The progression between these accounts marks a movement between forms of experience of God, whereby the usual dualism of

⁹⁷ Borchardt’s drama is also referenced in a footnote in Walther’s section on the foundational essence as soul, and called ‘die meisterhafte Darstellung des Satanischen’ (*PdM*, p. 102).

⁹⁸ Walther, *PdM* (1955), p. 17.

subject and object is increasingly complicated, if not overcome (their identity in these extreme mystical moments is only ‘angeblich’: *PdM*, p. 223). This will have an interesting parallel in Walther’s accounts of interpersonal relations in *OvG*. As before, these accounts are depersonalised, raising a question as to their status as accounts of the ‘facts’ of mystical experience (see *PdM*, p. 171: ‘die Tatsachen des mystischen Erlebens’). This depersonalisation lends a sense of universality to the text’s statements which is not necessarily justified. It suggests that the list of types of mystical experiences included here might be exhaustive; something that seems to be at odds with Walther’s general focus on the contingent (in the sense of materially, historically and culturally situated) forms of such experience.

Walther often discusses the contingency of the language she uses in particular. In her treatment of the experience of God as ‘unendliche geistige Person’, she notes that God’s absolute character encounters the contingent in human experiences of the divine (*PdM*, pp. 166–7). As a result of this, Walther writes: ‘So ist es also durchaus nicht widerspruchsvoll, daß Angehörige verschiedener Nationen dieselben göttlichen Offenbarungen in verschiedenen Sprachen, manchmal auch mit verschiedenen Gleichnissen usw. wiedergeben’ (*PdM*, p. 167). This section links the language used about God with thought (the ‘gedanklich’ and ‘wörtlich’ are associated, see *PdM*, p. 167): the language used is framed as part of the conscious experience even as it remains, as ‘Gleichnis’, distanced from the pre-conscious experience in some way.⁹⁹ This language then, and Walther’s text, is identified as culturally specific rather than absolute, which makes any suggestion of the exhaustiveness of her typology of mystical experiences inconsistent. By re-situating these accounts as ones personal to Walther, and which she altered, imperfectly, to fit the philosophical mould available to her, their status, like that of the account of telepathy, shifts importantly. If these forms of mystical appearance are

⁹⁹ This distance is integral to the phenomenological and related modernist-literary procedure identified by Bourne-Taylor and Mildenberg. Bourne-Taylor and Mildenberg, ‘Introduction’, p. 11.

read as contingent expressions of Walther's own mystical experience, the text appears as the meditations of a modernist mystic.

In this way Walther's procedure takes from that of Teresa, and her meditative vision follows that of the mystic, even as she lifts the phenomenological vocabulary of, in particular, Husserl. In spite of the weaknesses that result from the text's uneasy placement between disciplines and the tensions that remain unresolved in it between absolute and contingent focus, reading *PdM* offers a fascinating vision of how mysticism functions in a twentieth century in which not only the language used about God, but all 'lines of communication' are disrupted, and linear relations between word and meaning, self and object, and self and other are complicated. In Walther's work on mysticism, philosophy does not *ground* things, as in Husserl's updated Cartesian meditation. Rather philosophical vocabulary is an imperfect tool, a set of metaphors with which to non-mimetically describe difficult experiences: experiences which in some way defy understanding, and which disrupt the order of things. These difficult experiences include those of the divine, but also other materially located experiences such as telepathy, and even instances in which the subject becomes absorbed by an object, or distracted: cases, in particular, where the centrality and the consistency of the first-person voice and the first-person perspective is undermined.

My analysis of *PdM* has made explicit the contingency of the terms Walther employs. It can be seen that the 'Es' that acts as metaphorical placeholder for the divine does not function so differently from any of the other terms Walther uses. In a sense what Walther has constructed is like the Nietzschean 'Bau der Begriffe'. While Teresa warns of the perils of creating a structure on sand,¹⁰⁰ in *PdM*'s strongest moments the modernist mystic embraces the contingency of the structure. Rather than meaning the terms are abstracted from reality, their relative 'groundlessness' or contingency ensures that they do not assert an unjustified

¹⁰⁰ Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*, p. 51.

authority over the subject matter in question. Philosophical abstraction is avoided and the focus on the material is maintained.

One of the images Teresa employs in her meditations, alongside that of the inner castle, is the silkworm: the ‘nonrational’ creature that constructs a beautiful ‘house’ around it without any sense of the meaning of its actions. For Teresa this represents the soul making itself ready for God’s intervention.¹⁰¹ In Walther experience of the divine proceeds similarly: one might make themselves ready and call for God, and one might receive an answer, but the divine answer is not a direct result of the call itself; God intervenes on the subject, but the subject cannot intervene on God. In the modernist mystic’s vision, language forms a part of this: I have shown how the ‘Etwas’ and the ‘Es’ function as inarticulate articulations of the divine intervention. But this tension between the articulate and the inarticulate extends beyond these divine instances and characterises the terminology used throughout, whereby the labels used for things are constantly changing, and meaning appears suspended between literal and metaphorical. The silkworm’s house offers a key to how Walther’s *PdM* functions as a whole: the ‘Bau der Begriffe’ she has created does not have a direct (in the sense of representational) claim to meaning, but it is an edifice that can come to be inhabited by meaning.

In *PdM* community with others is one of the ways in which meaning can come to inhabit this structure. In its appeal to an implicit audience and to the authority of a mystical community, as well in the accounts it provides of extreme forms of interpersonal interaction, *PdM* presents a version of meditative mysticism which is far from solipsistic. By presenting an account of a complex, often disrupted intentionality, and in the tension it demonstrates over issues of personalisation and depersonalisation, *PdM* possesses a modernist form of Teresa’s humility: one in which the authority of the text and the voices it contains (the first-person, the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 91–3.

third-person) is destabilised. It is a text that is calling out for others to intervene in its processes, to make sense of it. In the following chapter I move to an analysis of Walther's social ontology in *O&G*, a text which works to characterise forms of social life and social meaning. I look at *O&G* in the light of my findings here, assessing the implications for interpretations of that text of Walther's meditative phenomenological mode. *PdM* is a text that plays with genre and proceeds via a flexible methodology: it is worth considering the extent to which *O&G*, which is more conventional in its subject in the context of Walther's milieu of early phenomenologists, does the same. And if analysis of *PdM* highlights the centrality of the material to Walther's phenomenology, it is worth re-examining *O&G* to discover the extent to which Walther's claims there are thrown off-centre when revealed as contingent.

CHAPTER THREE: PHILOSOPHY

I. Introduction

My close reading of *PdM* has revealed a phenomenological methodology that is meditative in motivation, and modernist in its use of language. This chapter investigates Walther's *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften* (1922). With its focus on community and briefer treatment of forms of experience such as the mystical and telepathic, this slightly earlier text more clearly fits the mould of early German phenomenology. This chapter shows through further close readings how Walther's procedure in *OsG* in fact resembles that of *PdM*. I situate these readings in the wider philosophical context of the text's production, showing the implications of this reading of *OsG* as similarly meditative and modernist for Walther's association with this phenomenological milieu.

OsG has received the most attention in recent scholarship on Walther, and as that scholarship shows, it is a text which demonstrates Walther's participation in wider trends in early German phenomenology, as it took on questions around sociality and community. With an examination of her social ontology Dan Zahavi has placed Walther into dialogue with Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger and Aron Gurwitsch.¹⁰² Sebastian Luft and Ruth Hagengruber compare this text with works on social life by Edith Stein and Hedwig Conrad-Martius.¹⁰³ Of the recent scholarship on Walther only Antonio Calcagno's edited volume devotes (almost) as much space to *PdM* as to *OsG*; and there the contributions on each of Walther's two primary texts are kept mostly separate.¹⁰⁴ The wider attention received by *OsG* reflects its more straightforwardly 'philosophical' status: it is Walther's first published work and in terms of its topic and stated approach is in keeping with the sorts of works being

¹⁰² Zahavi, 'Intersubjectivity, Sociality, Community'. See also Zahavi and Salice, 'Phenomenology of the we'.

¹⁰³ Luft and Hagengruber (eds), *Women Phenomenologists on Social Ontology: We-Experiences, Communal Life, and Joint Action*.

¹⁰⁴ Calcagno (ed.), *Gerda Walther's Phenomenology of Sociality, Psychology, and Religion*.

produced by her contemporaries. As compared with *PdM* it contains fewer references to less academically ‘secure’ topics such as telepathy.

In *Osg* Walther offers a phenomenological explication of the constitution of human community. She gives an account of that which renders a set of social relations *communal* rather than merely *societal*. Her account proposes that community can obtain between people with different levels of individual and group consciousness: in broad strokes, there is what Walther calls the ‘first level’ of ‘Gemeinschaft “an sich”’, and a second higher level of ‘Gemeinschaft “an und für sich”’. Similar to structures outlined in *PdM* in relation to individual experience (mystical or otherwise), the first level is associated by Walther with childhood, and the second self-conscious level of community with adulthood (*Osg*, p. 94).

My aim here is to disrupt the idea that Walther’s work on community forms a distinct contribution to her achievements in *PdM*. In particular I demonstrate that the interest of the earlier text lies to a large degree in how, despite initial appearances given by its explicit identification of approach, it struggles to fit the mould of an early phenomenological text. As with *PdM*, there is evidence throughout the text of its ambivalent relation to its explicitly stated aims. I first examine these aims as they are stated in the early passages of *Osg*, giving an account of the text’s unusual situation between a transcendental idealist vision of phenomenology and Marxist-materialist approaches to questions of sociality. I then situate Walther in relation to Edith Stein: making use of Alasdair MacIntyre’s reading of Stein, whereby her work is seen as part of a project to find alternative modes of philosophising to that with which she was surrounded.

I do close reading of some early passages of *Osg*, identifying cases in which Walther is playing with genre (including passages which employ the qualities of literary fiction). And I ultimately focus on the distinction between society and community Walther presents in *Osg*: a distinction which rests on the notion of ‘inner connection’ between individuals, something

that is seen by scholars as Walther's unique contribution to the field¹⁰⁵, and which I assert has been misunderstood as a positive descriptor when it in fact bears a status in the text much more like the metaphorical 'placeholders' of *PdM*. In examining Walther's 'inner connection' I use the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein as a point of reference, presenting in this way an alternative model for thinking about Walther's more playful vision of the task and tools of philosophy. I argue that *OsG* blurs the boundaries between modes of writing and modes of philosophical and non-philosophical engagement with questions around community. In a sense, Walther is already in this text engaged in a kind of meditative journey which sees her employ some of the same narratives, such as that of the Fall, which have an important place in *PdM*. I argue that one of the main concerns of *OsG* is the question of sayability and unsayability, demonstrating some of the same modernist and mystical impulses that characterise *PdM*, but staging them in a more explicitly philosophical (as opposed to mystical) context. In *OsG* Walther continually collapses the distance between descriptive and generalising statements, and between the material and the transcendental. What *OsG* offers then is an important meditation on what it is for a text to be a philosophical one.

II. A materialist in idealist's clothing

This first section examines how *OsG* explicitly situates itself, and the implicit problems that arise out of this explicit self-identification. Gerda Walther submitted her doctoral thesis in January 1921, and it was published in 1922. Completed in Munich under the supervision of Alexander Pfänder (one of Husserl's co-editors on the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*), it presents the results of work that Walther began in Freiburg under Husserl. Walther thanks Husserl along with Pfänder in her acknowledgments, and thanks the community of teachers and students (including Martin Heidegger and Edith Stein) around Husserl with whom she engaged while in Freiburg. This engagement (in the form of

¹⁰⁵ See for example Zahavi and Salice, 'Phenomenology of the we', p. 519.

lectures and seminars, as well as ‘in privaten Besprechungen’) is highlighted as crucial to the development of her thought. In particular she attributes the ontological and phenomenological method underlying her work entirely to these other figures, and as such positions her own contribution as being dependent on them (*O&G*, p. iv). Unsurprisingly then Walther’s text is one that in many respects fits the mould provided by that phenomenological community and her teacher Husserl: Walther’s introduction in particular leans heavily on Husserl’s work, and her usage of potentially difficult terms is guarded throughout by reference to Husserl.

An important example of a term used by Walther which she explicitly recognises as a Husserlian inheritance is ‘Wesen’: a term which takes on strange and undefinable significance in Walther’s later work *PdM*. The ‘Wesen’ Walther invokes in the first sentence of her introduction is explicitly identified as a Husserlian essence. A footnote points readers to several passages in Husserl, with little discussion provided (*O&G*, p. 1, note 1); similar footnotes citing page numbers from Husserl’s *Ideen* appear regularly in this introduction. It seems that Walther takes for granted that no discussion is needed at this point, and that this somewhat crude indication of her philosophical alignment suffices to inform the reader of the sort of work with which they are dealing. Walther gives a slightly fuller account of what is meant by a Husserlian essence in a footnote on page three which contrasts it with Platonic and Aristotelian essences. Here Walther cites Husserl’s notion of the essence as ‘ideale Möglichkeit’ (an a priori relation or structure that makes certain experiences possible, as opposed to something with independent status or existence) (*O&G*, p. 3, note 1).

An important sense of the kind of essence (of an object) found through Husserlian phenomenological reflection is that this essence is not a general concept found via reasoned consideration of particular objects encountered in experience; rather the Husserlian essence presents itself to the subject in experience. In characterising how Husserl’s essence was of use

to Edith Stein in her work, Alasdair MacIntyre notes that in Husserl's conception the subject experiences the 'essential properties', that aspect of the object which is a matter of 'necessity', 'in and through the presentation of the particulars as something that holds independently of [the subject's] judgments concerning that necessity'.¹⁰⁶ Walther conforms to this basic phenomenological premise in *OsG*. It could be assumed then that Walther's work in *PdM* builds on very different premises. After all, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, Walther later stated that she was disappointed by Husserl's reception of her 1923 text: in particular that he saw her discussion of the mystical as concerned with 'ideale Möglichkeiten', instead of consisting of 'Schilderungen von Realitäten'.¹⁰⁷ *OsG* seems to align itself with Husserlian idealism in this opening section, while *PdM* departs from it (a departure that by the time she writes of this disappointment becomes explicit). Yet Walther's mysticism was already part of her life by the time of the submission of her thesis. The reading of *PdM* I present here casts *OsG* in a different light: Walther begins to move away from the apriority of the Husserlian essence almost as soon as she introduces the notion.¹⁰⁸

Walther notes in the introduction to *OsG* that 'Freiburg phenomenology' proceeds, 'wie schon früher Descartes und Augustin' from the evidence of the experience and immanent reflection of a 'cogito', a pure consciousness. In saying this she identifies herself with this tradition, though she notes in a footnote that not all phenomenologists agree on this point: citing Max Scheler as a dissenting voice (*OsG*, p. 1). Walther's repeated references to Scheler throughout *OsG* (where he appears not as dissenter but as collaborator) signals her somewhat divided philosophical loyalties, and the tension in her work around the focus on the power that a pure consciousness can have in phenomenological or ontological efforts. While,

¹⁰⁶ MacIntyre, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ Walther, *PdM* (1955), pp. 16–7.

¹⁰⁸ For an introduction to the apriority of Husserlian essence see the entry for 'Apriority' in Dermot Moran and Joseph Cohen, *The Husserl Dictionary* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), pp. 40–44.

as MacIntyre writes, ‘the “I” of Husserl’s phenomenology is an impersonal “I”,¹⁰⁹ in hinting at an alignment to Scheler, whose approach allows for more intervention of the social collective into the most basic processes of the ‘I’,¹¹⁰ Walther foreshadows a more socially constituted sense of subjectivity than that which appears in Husserl.¹¹¹

This social contextualisation of the ‘I’, its situation within a social world, forms part of the draw towards the material and contingent that I have shown to be present in Walther’s *PdM*, and which I argue is present in *OsG* as well. The role of the Husserlian pure consciousness in its own constitution is diminished as other subjectivities, and group subjectivities, intervene in the formation of the self. Walther’s social ontology takes on an interesting character when examined in the light of *PdM*, a text which I have shown tests the boundaries of what can be achieved in a phenomenological-philosophical approach that must remain materially grounded. Walther’s efforts in *OsG* to provide a more conventional and systematising approach to social life, one which fits more clearly into the genre of Freiburg phenomenological writing than *PdM*, begins to appear less straightforwardly Husserlian when contextualised in relation to *PdM*.

Walther’s introduction to *OsG* begins with an account of the work done in an ontology, and that done in a phenomenology. She draws a provisional distinction between the two philosophical modes, with a view to providing versions of both in this text. Walther states that ontology is concerned with the ‘Wesen jeder Gegenständlichkeit’, while phenomenology examines these objects’ ‘Gegebenheits-, Erscheinungs- und Erkenntnisweise [...] im reinen

¹⁰⁹ MacIntyre, p. 58.

¹¹⁰ For Scheler, the ‘I’ does not precede the ‘we’. See for example Max Scheler, *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* [1923], 3rd edn (Bonn: Cohen, 1931), adapted from Scheler’s 1913 publication *Zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Sympathiegefühle und von Liebe und Hass*.

¹¹¹ Dan Zahavi argues that Husserl does have more of a role for the social in the constitution of the self: this might suggest that MacIntyre overstates Husserl’s individualism. But this social constitution is one that Husserl ascribes only to the ‘personal I’ in Zahavi’s account: there is still an emphasis on the ‘pure I’ that precedes the personal and the social. Dan Zahavi, ‘We in Me or Me in We? Collective Intentionality and Selfhood’, *Journal of Social Ontology*, 7 (1) (2021), 1–20 (pp. 9–11).

Bewusstsein' (*OsG*, p. 1). This distinction, introduced by Walther as a guiding principle in a manner that does not suggest that it is particularly controversial, in fact forms the basis of an important disagreement among phenomenologists as to whether the investigation of the experiencing subject must precede an investigation of objects of experience (including, generally, the world and others). As captured by Herbert Spiegelberg in his historical account of the phenomenological movement, Roman Ingarden saw this issue as integral to the question of whether Husserl could be considered a realist or an idealist. Guido Küng, one of Spiegelberg's collaborators in the revised third edition of his text, writes:

Ingarden was of the opinion that an analysis and evaluation of the constitutive processes involved in our knowledge of things presupposed as a 'guiding thread' the prior possession of a clarified notion of those things, while Husserl maintained that a clarified notion of the things could only be obtained on the basis of a prior understanding of the process of constitution. This difference between Ingarden and Husserl is, in fact, the one which separates the realistic from an idealistic approach to this problem.¹¹²

For Ingarden, phenomenology does not have to precede ontology, and ontology can have consciousness as one of its fields of examination (something that Husserl's position rules out). Ingarden speculated that any realism attributed to Husserl was a projection onto him by those philosophers influenced by the more realist Munich (and later Göttingen) strand of phenomenologists.¹¹³ Walther, who was herself exposed to both the Freiburg and Munich circles of phenomenologists, begins with the ontology in *OsG*, indicating a general preference to approach others as objects before examining in detail the constitution of the subject as it might ground itself. But she explicitly states that she wishes to avoid the common 'Verwechslung' of phenomenology and ontology, of which she says in a footnote the Munich

¹¹² Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, 3rd rev. edn, rev. by Karl Schuhmann (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1982), p. 225.

¹¹³ See MacIntyre p. 139–40. MacIntyre integrates into his account of Edith Stein's development the analysis appearing in Spiegelberg's text of Ingarden's role in the dispute around realism and idealism.

and Göttingen-based Max Scheler is guilty: examination of consciousness and of objects appear to remain as distinct enterprises (*OsG*, p. 4).

However even as she seems to assert the importance of a Husserlian transcendental phenomenology that grounds the pure, impersonal 'I' independently of objects, Walther quickly returns to the world in which that 'I' is engaged, one which appears distinctly realist, and which verges on the materialist. In drawing her distinction between phenomenology and ontology, Walther comes up against a problem she encounters in *PdM*: that of the extent to which phenomenology is tied up with accounts of the contingent experiences of specific material subjects. This reveals among other issues that the pure subject does not appear in Walther's phenomenological description to be self-constituting or self-grounding. Walther does not truly commit to a bracketing of Husserl's natural standpoint. The Husserlian, transcendental 'reines Ich', is explicitly distinguished by Walther in this introduction to *OsG* from the materially located 'reales Ich' (*OsG*, p. 13); however the two begin to implicitly converge as her analysis continues. The pure I proceeds according to Walther in parallel to the real (or material/empirical) I, and its phenomenological reflection offers up a novel way of looking at experience. Walther states that Husserl's pure I is 'das abstraktiv-formale Moment des Hinblickens und Aktualisierens aktueller, reiner Erlebnisse' (*OsG*, p. 13). She notes that the pure I only ever appears in real experience, and is filtered through a real I, but that the two can be distinguished. Even if it is not intended as a criticism, her reference to formal abstraction is interesting, as it demonstrates that to her Husserl's phenomenology does not overcome the problems of philosophical abstraction dramatized in *PdM*. In Walther's account there seems little to distinguish transcendentalism and abstraction.

In gesturing at the potentially productive character of an abstracting transcendentalism, Walther is grappling with the question of what a text like hers, a philosophical text, can hope to achieve. Walther emphasises that despite its focus on the

consciousness of the experiencing subject, phenomenology cannot be ‘eine möglichst genaue Schilderung einzelner, individueller Erlebnisse und ihrer Gegebenheiten bei irgendeinem empirischen Subjekt in allen tatsächlichen Zufälligkeiten seines Verlaufes’ (*OsG*, p. 2). This is an encapsulation of Walther’s impulse that phenomenology, as a kind of philosophy, *ought* to be doing something more than describing one subject’s experience. This seems a reasonable requirement: the philosophy that emerges once ‘philosophical objectivity’ is abandoned¹¹⁴ must surely go beyond subjective descriptions by individuals of their experience. Examination of Walther’s work so far has shown how she struggles to meet this requirement. In trying to make some of her accounts seem more phenomenologically or philosophically authoritative, she resorts to a form of depersonalisation which conceals but does not truly disrupt the first-person descriptive form of her text. As I have shown, in *PdM* this first-person is far from Husserl’s ‘impersonal’ one; rather it is rooted in the perspective of a materially located subject. It is the real, material subject Gerda Walther who speaks in many of the passages I have examined, as opposed to a ‘pure’ subjectivity.

If Walther seems unable or unwilling to truly follow through on the possibility of using transcendental abstraction in her investigation, it is worth asking why she seems drawn to this sort of procedure in the first place. I have already indicated that in the case of *PdM* Walther wishes to give her mystical-meditative reflections the veneer of academic authority, particularly in the cases of the passages on telepathy where Walther anticipates the most scepticism. An ontology of social community, as I have noted, fits far more easily into the Freiburg-phenomenological mould than do her aims in *PdM*. Walther gives an important clue as to her hopes for what a Husserlian approach might offer her in the preface to *OsG* (‘Vorwort’, in *OsG*, pp. iii–iv). This two-page preface offers an account of how Walther began

¹¹⁴ As Ariane Mildenberg puts it in summing up the ‘shifts of attitude’ that characterise the thinking of phenomenologists and modernist artists during this period, Husserl’s insight was in highlighting ‘the fact that consciousness itself was the source of meaning of the world and that objectivity arises *from* an intending subjectivity’. Mildenberg, pp. 8–9.

engaging with the questions about social life that form the basis of her investigation in the text. She centres on the question of the relations between individual and community, a question she says she first encountered in her engagement with historical materialism: her readings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Karl Kautsky, August Bebel and Max Adler. Notes in her *Nachlass* reveal that this engagement with Marxist literature is longstanding; and that Walther was concerned as a teenager with Marxist answers to questions about societal gender roles.¹¹⁵ It is clear that Walther is moving away from Marxist materialism as she writes *O&G* and *PdM*, and that she later sees herself as having left it behind altogether; as indicated in the full title of her 1960 autobiography: *Zum anderen Ufer: Vom Marxismus und Atheismus zum Christentum*.

According to the preface of *O&G* what began to concern her most during her studies and ultimately led her to this thesis topic was ‘die Frage nach der Willensfreiheit des Individuums trotz und in seiner sozialen Gebundenheit, vor allem in Hinblick auf den extremen Sozialdeterminismus mancher Marxisten’ (*O&G*, p. iii). Walther wished to overcome the extreme form of social-historical determinism she identified in Marxist accounts. Husserl’s transcendental idealism seems to offer a way out of this, but the reliance on a form of abstraction that Walther explicitly commits to makes it an uneasy fit for her, as close analysis of *O&G*’s implicit processes reveals. Walther’s account of this period in her autobiography makes it clear that this search for the element that would allow for the freedom of the individual in the face of Marxist determinism was indeed an uneasy time for her. She describes her dissatisfaction in reading Marxist theory, and her attempts to find answers in the works of

¹¹⁵ I refer to some of these in my introduction; another note from when Walther had just turned sixteen contains thoughts on the division of household labour between men and women, a question which she solves (attributing it not to nature, but to contingent historical developments) with the help of Friedrich Engels: ‘Lösung endlich gefunden den 29.3.1913, bestätigt den 29.5.1913.’ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Ana 317 Gerda Walther Nachlass, Sch. 21. B. V. Diverse Nachschriften. For a later account of Walther’s Marxist upbringing see ‘In der Hochburg des Marxismus’, *ZaU*, pp. 133–44.

Georg Simmel, Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber. She was close to giving up on the question of the self and the social altogether when she had a strange dream (she cannot remember when exactly, but knows it was before 1917) (*ZaU*, p. 272–3). In this dream Walther was searching for the solution to these questions in a chest of drawers, opening each drawer one by one. She eventually found ‘das Gesuchte’ in the very bottom drawer. Walther writes:

Ich wachte auf und nahm es als ermutigenden Hinweis, daß mir einst die Lösung gelingen würde, wenn es auch erst viel später und mit großer Mühe geschah: denn ach, was auf dem Dokument stand, das ich da im Traum schließlich entdeckt hatte, wußte ich beim Aufwachen nicht mehr. (*ZaU*, p. 273)

In the case of *O;G*, it seems that transcendental abstraction is the mysterious ‘Gesuchte’, the element which allows the I, as pure and not entirely socially determined, to freely intervene in its own processes. The trouble with Walther’s adoption of transcendental abstraction is that even as she employs it, she demonstrates a fundamental lack of faith in its power as a philosophical tool. Walther’s impersonal I is not Husserl’s; it is rather a personalised I that has been stripped of its personality after the fact. Walther’s depersonalisation has its most glaring example in the telepathy account in *PdM*, which amounts to what is in fact a personal descriptive account of an experience masquerading as the result of more systematic philosophical thinking.

In adopting something of the Husserlian standpoint, however imperfect a fit it seems for her, Walther is clearly moving away from the purely Marxist framework that had determined her intellectual life up to this point. In her autobiographical account of this intellectual upbringing, Walther notes her former commitment to Marx and Engels’s vision of human relations whereby ideological, spiritual and religious debates ought to be viewed through the lens of material class conflict (*ZaU*, p. 142). By the time she is writing *PdM*, Walther exhibits the desire to engage with such debates on different terms. Her uneasy

adoption of an abstracting Husserlian voice, which conceals a personal and still more materialist approach, sees her act against the principles she found in Marx and Engels.

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels give an account of intellectual history in which contingent, material concerns are co-opted by German socialist thinkers who choose to give these concerns an ‘absolutist’ character. They describe how ‘Deutsche Philosophen, Halbphilosophen und Schöngelster’ of the eighteenth century appropriated the revolutionary writings of French socialists, mining them for their ‘generalisable’ insights, and in doing so stripping those writings of their practical force.¹¹⁶ The ‘Willensäußerung’ of particular revolutionaries is cast as ‘die Gesetze des reinen Willens’; the interests of the proletariat are replaced in such philosophical writings by ‘die Interessen des menschlichen Wesens, des Menschen überhaupt [...], der keiner Klasse, der überhaupt nicht der Wirklichkeit, der nur dem Dunsthimmel der philosophischen Phantasie angehört’.¹¹⁷

Marx and Engels compare the German socialists to medieval monks who write over classical mythology ‘mit abgeschmackten katholischen Heiligengeschichten’ (though these modern Germans write behind, rather than on top of, the original texts);¹¹⁸ and describe the results of their efforts as an elaborate garment with which they can conceal their true, emaciated form: ‘das Gewand, gewirkt aus spekulativem Spinnweb, überstickt mit schöngelstigen Redebäumen, durchtränkt von liebesschwülem Gemütstau, dies überschwengliche Gewand, worin die deutschen Sozialisten ihre paar knöchernen ewigen Wahrheiten einhüllten’.¹¹⁹ Walther, in presenting her investigations as those undertaken by a ‘reines Ich’, performs in a sense as the kind of thinker Marx and Engels condemn here. The 1923 edition of *PdM* contains an ‘Übersetzung’ (to use Marx and Engels’ term) of an original,

¹¹⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* [1848] (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), p. 47.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

at that point unwritten, version of the telepathy story which uses a personalised, material 'Ich' (Walther's 'Ich', as it is her experience). This original version is 'uncovered' in the later edition of the text. Walther's pure I is not self-constituting; it is written 'behind' the real I like the abstractions of Marx and Engel's modern monks.

Walther seems to some extent drawn to systematisation and a certain form of abstraction, using 'das abstraktiv-formale Moment' she identifies in Husserl's transcendental idealist I as the moment in which the individual can assert its freedom from extreme determinism. However Walther's depersonalised I is not anti-realist; it is conspicuous in its concealment of material underpinnings. The disruptive strategies revealed in my close reading of *PdM*, born of a modernist era, show that Walther's performance as Husserlian philosopher is designed in such a way that the cracks in the text's approach become visible, and are at issue: the relative inadequacies of her description generally allow for the text to make meaning in an indirect manner, and for its meditative force to shine through. There is more going on than it seems in her phenomenological procedure. How might this then play out when she is writing a social ontology, and explicitly emphasises that the approach that covertly drives much of *PdM* is forbidden here?

Ontology, as opposed to phenomenology, is concerned according to Walther with examining the essence of objects, stepping away from all that is empirical or contingent (*O;G*, p. 4). So far, so Husserlian; Husserl, when looking at a red house, is aware not only that this house is red, but of 'Red as such': this generalised insight is grasped in apprehension of the object, not via subsequent abstraction in an empiricist sense.¹²⁰ Walther quickly distinguishes her approach from Husserl in a subtle way that reveals an important difference in emphasis: she notes that her ontologies consist in 'Untersuchungen von regionalen, gattungsmäßigen, speziellen und "individuellen" Wesenheiten' (*O;G*, p. 5; the quotation marks around

¹²⁰ As summarised in MacIntyre, p. 46.

‘individuellen’ are Walther’s own). She states in a footnote that Husserl does not include consideration of the ‘individual’ in his ontological analysis, but that she sees grounds for their inclusion: there are cases of objects which do have some distinctive sense about them, some essence that is not generalisable. The examples she gives in this note are an ‘angel’ (about which term she uses quotation marks, as if to shield herself from claims that such beings do not exist), and singular works of art, such as Beethoven’s ninth symphony: a specific, contingent example (*Osg*, p. 5). What this highlights is Walther’s sense of the essence as something like a materially located special character of an object: something that sets it apart, but not a quality that is necessarily shared between objects. Something can be ‘X *as such*’ as in Husserl’s ‘Red’, but the distinctiveness of this ‘Red’, or any other ‘X’, is not necessarily that it is a property shared with other objects.

What then is distinctive about this ‘X’, this essence that is worth seeking in investigation and which can arise in consideration of the individual, empirical and contingent case? Is it something that can be captured in positive conceptual terms? In *Osg* different examples of this ‘X’ form ‘das Gesuchte’ of *ZaU*. ‘Das Gesuchte’ is ‘that which is sought’: an adjectival noun in which the referent, the ‘that’, remains unspecified or unsaid. Walther’s essence, called in *PdM* ‘ein gewisses gemeinsames Etwas’ (*PdM*, p. 9), aligns with the very meaning of her terms. The primary essence sought in *Osg* is that of the social community.

My examination of Walther’s approach in *Osg* will reveal an ongoing concern with the problem of sayability and unsayability around that which is sought: this is a concern that I have shown to drive *PdM*, an understanding of which will alter considerably how Walther’s text on social ontology is understood today. I show that Walther’s use of generalising statements is a kind of performance that allows her to present her work as fitting the phenomenological mould, but which reveals in indirect fashion a more mysterious background of meaning. In behaving in this way Walther offers an implicit criticism of the

sort of phenomenological approach to which she is drawn, and which she attempts on some level to undertake. What Walther presents on an explicit level as a minor modification of Husserl (the inclusion of the individual case) in fact amounts to her pulling the loose thread of the abstracted 'Gewand', leading to its unravelling.

Alongside its very traditional and dry explication of the phenomenological and ontological standpoint, Walther's introduction to *O&G* includes some important indications that the text's approach is in fact much closer to that of *PdM* than is suggested by their mostly separate treatment in recent scholarship on Walther. For one, there is a sense that Walther in the earlier text already takes on the role of a guide to her readers as they engage in their own ontological analysis of the essences of objects (something that is not out of step with other phenomenologists, but which in Walther takes on a distinctive, meditative tone).

Walther explains how this sharing with others operates, and in doing so gives another indication of the relative unsayability of the essential insights such ontological analysis can result in.

Bei den individuellen, aber auch bei manchen generellen Wesen handelt es sich zumeist um sogenannte Urphänomene, letzte Gegebenheiten, die nicht weiter auf anderes zurückgeführt oder analysiert und definiert werden können. Man kann sie nur 'haben' oder 'nicht haben'. Auch anderen erklären kann man sie eigentlich streng genommen nicht, wenn man auch andere dazu bringen kann, sie eventuell auch zu 'haben' [...], indem man sie ihnen aufweist. Dieses Aufweisen kann nur darauf beruhen, daß man ihnen den Weg, die Bewußtseinshaltung zeigt, die zur Erschauung und Erfassung dieser letzten Gegebenheiten führt. (*O&G*, pp. 5–6)

Walther continues to state that one can also 'indicate' [aufweisen] an essence by comparison with another known essence, or by demonstrating 'die Summe der wesentlichen Merkmale und Momente einer Wesenheit (die natürlich nie mit ihr identisch sein kann) und eventuell die wesentlichen Verhaltensweisen und Relationen dieser Momente zueinander und zu anderen Wesenheiten' (*O&G*, p. 6). These quotations are interesting in a number of respects. Walther depicts the process of coming to understand objects. There is a parallel here with the process

of understanding that guides *PdM*. The insights at which one arrives cannot ‘strictly speaking’ be ‘explained’: this statement limits the role for saying things about objects’ essences in a way that relies on positive reference. Philosophy’s task here is not to generate propositions about objects in the world. But there is still a role to be played by ‘showing’, and a process of comparison that does not function by full, explicit delineation. As in *PdM*, insight is something that is either reached, or is not reached, depending on the individual; each investigator must follow their own path, like their own spiritual journey in *PdM*, and any help that is offered to them acts indirectly. And even for that individual, the exact moment at which the insight occurs is not the result of some explicit process of understanding: techniques like conceptual comparison and definition only get us so far.

Walther’s use of abstraction, identified by her with the workings of the ‘pure I’, retains a strong sense of pragmatism, and is beneficial only insofar as it assists on the journey to an understanding that occurs somewhat indirectly to it; abstraction can be a kind of catalyst for insight. An important result of the phenomenological turn at the turn of the twentieth century is the new consensus that objectivity is the construct of intending subjectivities, and is itself relativized (though not to some fatal degree).¹²¹ Walther emphasises in an important footnote which qualifies her use of the phenomenological distinction between the pure and the material ‘I’ that the generalisable statements of phenomenologists, those which depend on such distinctions (‘Abgrenzungen’), are in tension with the unity of experiential reality. She goes so far to say that reality is in some sense unavoidably ‘vergewaltigt’; this is a ‘Begleiterscheinung’ of all academic enquiry (her own, presumably, included), which ‘kann nur unschädlich gemacht werden, wenn jeder, statt bei den theoretischen Begriffen und Definitionen stehen zu bleiben, durch sie hindurch weiter zu den leibhaften Gegebenheiten, zu der irrationalen Wirklichkeit zurückkehrt [...] ohne sich durch die Abgrenzungen beirren zu lassen’ (*OsG*, pp.

¹²¹ Mildenberg, pp. 8–9.

13–14 (note 2)). So for Walther, phenomenology is not as it is for Husserl: a reorientation that allows for the pre-theoretical standpoint of the ‘pure I’ to re-ground enquiry. Rather it is itself doomed to function only by systematising and making potentially dangerous conceptual distinctions. Walther has however moved past an understanding of this as necessarily dangerous, as in Marx and Engels. There is a sense that the ‘Gewand’ of theoretical discourse may be used not only to obscure, but to draw attention to that which it envelops.

This offers a crucial hint for how Walther’s efforts in *Osg* ought to be read generally. There is a clear indication in her introduction that the distinctions Walther presents throughout are ones that she has attempted to make ‘unschädlich’, but which nonetheless carry the potential to mislead. Walther’s disclaimer is a strange one, one which invites the reader to question the apparent insights presented, and which destabilises any straightforward textual authority. A point that has not been considered in recent scholarship on Walther’s social ontology is the extent to which Walther anticipates her own failure as a theorist, and the implications this must have for any reading of her texts that attempts to take her statements at face-value. With this disclaimer *Osg* bears a striking similarity to Walther’s text on mysticism, which operates in a meditative tradition that stresses the humility of the authorial voice.

I have identified in *PdM* a destabilising modernist form of this humility. There is a creative power to this modernist humility. Walther notes early on in *Osg* that her talk of essences is to be distinguished from the Platonic Eidos: ‘Nicht also ist die Verkörperung eine bloße “Nachahmung” des Wesens, des Eidos (der “Idee”) im platonischen Sinn, der nur ein sekundäres Sein dem Wesen gegenüber zukäme’ (*Osg*, p. 7). It is not the case that objects of experience form an inadequate mimesis of the essences Walther describes. Grounding my reading in the non-mimetic descriptive approach I identify in *PdM*, I suggest that the text of *Osg* can be seen in parallel to this essence: as something more than ‘Nachahmung’.

Subsequent sections of this chapter examine what exactly this ‘other’ kind of writing offers. As with *PdM*, there is a sense in *OsG* that in spite of the relative unsayability of things, Walther may continue to speak, and to in pragmatic fashion gesture at insights of a certain kind. These are insights about how we experience sociality, and insights about how language and theory interact with this experience: by obscuring or it, or allowing it to unfold. *OsG* contains examples of the sort of textual enthusiasm that characterises *PdM*, including an abundance of exclamation points and direct addresses to the implicit community of readers (for example, in statements like ‘Doch prüfen wir nochmals unsere bisher gewonnene Ergebnisse!’ *OsG*, p. 29.) Not much scholarly attention has been paid to this tonal or stylistic quality, which in the light of my analysis of *PdM* indicates that in *OsG* the reader is being guided along a narrative, meditative process.

It will be seen that Walther’s performance as the abstracting philosopher has a sense of dramatic and narrative *irony*: what goes unsaid, and what fails or falters in her analysis, is as significant as that which is stated in positive terms. Walther is not merely generating propositions as to the structural qualities of experience. Close textual analysis of some key passages of *OsG* allows her meanings to unfold: the complex of sense-relations (‘Sinnzusammenhang’, *OsG*, p. 12) or ‘Leitmotiv’ (*OsG*, p. 29) that she identifies in experience has a textual parallel. What emerges is a sense not only that Walther has ‘failed’ to do phenomenology, but that phenomenology is an approach doomed to failure of a certain kind. But there is in modernism as well as in the mystical tradition a kind of affirmation possible in failure, a redemption for which a Fall is necessary.

The next section offers an alternative point of comparison for Walther’s social ontology in the form of Alasdair MacIntyre’s account of Edith Stein’s development. Stein represents another figure in the early phenomenological movement in Freiburg whose work moved from concern with social life to concern with religion (though this development

occurred over a longer time frame in Stein's case). Stein's description of social life as performance, and MacIntyre's illustration of Stein's attempts to move away from her Husserlian starting-point, offer useful reference points for my reorientation of Walther's work. MacIntyre's account is particularly important as a model for my own account of Walther because of the work he does to make explicit those points of departure from Husserl in Stein's work that she did not herself acknowledge as such.

III. A comparison with Edith Stein: faith and irony

Alasdair MacIntyre has illuminated how examination of Edith Stein's work can provide an important nuance to the story of the development of Husserlian phenomenology. MacIntyre's account does not include consideration of Walther, but it is clear that the two philosophers can be considered in parallel; indeed much of the recently emerging scholarship on Walther has used a comparison with the work of Edith Stein as a jumping-off point for consideration of Walther's unique contribution to social ontology.¹²² There are parallels to be found in that Walther and Stein were two of the women working in Husserl's circle of early phenomenologists. Husserl both encouraged women to contribute but also enforced a strict limit to the achievements allowed to them; MacIntyre highlights Husserl's role in Edith Stein's rejection for a *Habilitation* in 1919.¹²³

Walther states in her autobiography that when discussing the possibility of her own *Habilitation* Husserl told her, 'etwas verlegen', that he had rejected Stein on the grounds that he thought 'daß die Aufgabe der Frau im Grunde doch das Heim, die Ehe sei' (*ZaU*, p. 216). Walther was five years younger than Stein, and attended Stein's philosophical 'Kindergarten' when she arrived in Freiburg. According to Walther's autobiography it was Stein who pacified Husserl following Walther's initial meeting with him, in which Walther told him that she

¹²² See especially Luft and Hagengruber.

¹²³ MacIntyre, pp. 106–7.

wished to become a ‘sozialistische Agitatorin’ (Walther writes ‘Husserl schien innerlich zurückzuprallen’, and told her ‘dann kann ich Sie nicht brauchen!’) (*ZaU*, pp. 203–4). Over the course of their philosophical careers, Stein and Walther were concerned with similar philosophical questions around social and religious life.

In writing *OsG*, Walther displayed a familiarity with Stein’s work on empathy and social life, citing Stein throughout. Though she followed Stein in writing about social life and was not baptised into the Catholic Church until 29 January 1944 (see ‘die Taufe’, *ZaU* pp. 627–43 (p. 636)), the beginnings of Walther’s turn to religion possibly precede the start of Stein’s (though the two conversions occurred over time, and seem to have overlapped for the most part). Walther writes that her first mystical encounter of the divine was in 1918, five years before the publication of *PdM* (*ZaU*, pp. 221–8). The two women encountered the writings of Teresa of Ávila within a year of one another. Stein discovered Teresa’s works while visiting the Bergzabern home of another member of the circle of Freiburg phenomenologists, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, in the summer of 1921. Conrad-Martius’s account of this visit describes herself and Stein as accompanying one another ‘in the middle of a religious crisis’.¹²⁴ Within a few months Stein had converted to Catholicism and was on her way to becoming a Carmelite nun.¹²⁵ Walther read Teresa’s *Interior Castle* in 1922, having earlier already engaged with various other medieval mystical writings (*ZaU*, p. 323).

Walther finally met Conrad-Martius in the summer of 1923 when she was invited to the latter’s home in Bergzabern (*ZaU*, p. 331), and the two were to become close friends and long-time correspondents.¹²⁶ It was on that visit that Walther learned of Stein’s conversion, and was astonished. Walther indicates in her autobiography her disappointment at having

¹²⁴ As quoted in MacIntyre, p. 167.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 167–8.

¹²⁶ Their extensive correspondence from the 1950s can be viewed in Walther’s *Nachlass*. See Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Ana 317 Gerda Walther Nachlass, C. Briefe II. Korrespondenz seit der Studienzeit (insbesondere seit 1945). Hedwig Conrad-Martius.

missed the opportunity to discuss matters of religion with Stein: 'Ich war in Freiburg nie auf den Gedanken gekommen, religiöse Fragen mit ihr [Stein] zu besprechen' (*ZaU*, p. 332).

Walther writes of her excitement at speaking to Erich Przywara about their common acquaintances including Edith Stein in the run-up to her baptism in 1944. It was in those conversations that Walther learned of Edith Stein's murder at Auschwitz (*ZaU*, p. 632). In a letter to Conrad-Martius from August 1954 Walther demonstrates her concern that the philosophical and religious contributions of women such as Stein were being forgotten. She states in this letter that she had received the second volume of the *Lexikon der Frau*, a work produced by Gustav Keckeis and Blanche Christine Olschak in Zurich between 1953 and 1954. Walther writes that she made her own additions to the *Lexikon*, by adding in Conrad-Martius, along with Stein and Simone Weil:

Auch Simone Weil (die man auch vergessen hatte) ist mit einem sehr ansprechenden Bild vertreten [...] Edith Stein habe ich auch noch hineingebracht, leider brachte man kein Bild, ich hätte aus der Karmeliterbiographie natürlich auf Wunsch einen beschaffen können. Das Werk macht sich recht gut und stattlich und gefällt mir sehr.¹²⁷

It can be seen from this both that Walther was herself keenly aware of the possibilities of women's contributions being lost, and that she later came to see herself as working in a particular tradition, as part of a generation of women writing on social life and religious or mystical experience. MacIntyre makes a case for the productive possibilities of drawing out what is distinctive about Edith Stein's contributions to early phenomenology: a project in which he weaves biographical details of Stein's remarkable life with consideration of the philosophical context in which Stein was active, and an elucidation of her own philosophical thinking. This is a useful point of orientation for consideration of Walther's contribution. I do not give a full account of the intersections of the two's philosophy, but offer MacIntyre's

¹²⁷ Letter from Gerda Walther to Hedwig Conrad-Martius dated 28 August 1954. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Ana 317 Gerda Walther Nachlass, C. Briefe II. Korrespondenz seit der Studienzeit (insbesondere seit 1945). Hedwig Conrad-Martius.

account of Stein's 'one type of philosophical life possible in the twentieth century' as an important point of reference for my examination of what lifts Walther's work above the phenomenological milieu in which she explicitly situates it in *O&G*.¹²⁸

There are a number of aspects of Stein's philosophical approach that are of interest here, and which demonstrate that Walther follows to some extent in Stein's footsteps in shifting her emphasis away from a Husserlian vision of the transcendental 'I'. MacIntyre outlines how Stein highlights in her dissertation on empathy the role of the body and of other subjects in the constitution of the self. He notes that Stein saw herself as 'having developed a line of enquiry that was entirely faithful to Husserl's earlier thought'.¹²⁹ However, as MacIntyre points out, the shift of emphasis away from the 'I' and towards others and the body is a philosophically significant one: 'If Stein is right, no "I" can have the self-sufficiency and the self-constituting properties that Husserl ascribed to the transcendental ego'.¹³⁰ MacIntyre's contention is that Stein contributed more than she would herself admit. Stein destabilises the perspective of the Husserlian generalised transcendental 'I' in a manner that lays the ground for Walther's extreme destabilisation in *PdM*.

Stein is, like Walther, interested in forms of experience in which the subject's intentionality is complicated in some manner. The following passage from MacIntyre's account of Stein's conception of fatigue, and its disruptive role in experience, shows how close her procedure appears to Walther's:

The academic style of Stein's writing may have the effect of concealing from the reader the interest and the originality of what she is saying. When philosophers write about mental acts and mental states their examples are generally of acts or states in which the mind is lucid, focused, and self-aware. Stein by contrast begins from the experience of fatigue (the Cartesian mind never seems to suffer from fatigue). And by beginning here she reminds us of the mind's vulnerability, of how the quality of our perception, our feeling, and

¹²⁸ MacIntyre, p. viii.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 103.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

our thinking depends on factors external to, but impinging upon consciousness.¹³¹

There is a parallel here with Walther's vision of experience that is 'zerstreut' in *PdM* (*PdM*, p. 26). In *OsG* too Walther writes: 'das Ich lebt vielmehr gewöhnlich in einem Komplex von innigst verwobenen Erlebnissen', and notes that this stream of experience is not like a chain of clearly distinct inputs: 'er ist vielmehr viel eher ein Strom von solchen Erlebniskomplexen, deren einzelnen aktuellen (im Erleben natürlich meist nicht geschiedene und unterschiedene) Momente sich ständig durchdringen, verschieben und ablösen' (Walther thanks Heidegger in a footnote to this point) (*OsG*, p. 12). And as I have pointed out, Walther's style often has a 'concealing' effect.

As my analysis of *PdM* shows, this concealing effect often suggests a particular vision of the role of the social in the formation of the text, and thus is itself evidence of a distinctive conception of social life. In the case of *PdM*, certain stylistic choices have the effect of appealing to different kinds of implicit readers: those seeking guidance on a spiritual journey in places, and a critical academic audience elsewhere. The 'other' in the form of this implicit reader is granted an active role in the constitution of the text's meanings. The text is not self-grounding or self-constituting; its insights are imparted indirectly. Stein similarly has a vision of certain forms of social life as a kind of theatre, in which stylised performances overlay some original, essential complex of relations. She writes:

Die Formen der 'Gesellschaft' bilden ein kompliziertes Kunstwerk [...], und unter der Decke der spielenden und stilisierten menschlichen Beziehungen kreuzt sich ein Gewirr von ursprünglichen und naiven Beziehungen, die innerhalb der 'Gesellschaft' unmöglich wären. [...] Diesem ästhetischen Objekt steht man freilich nicht betrachtend gegenüber wie einem Gemälde [...]. Es ist ein Schauspiel, in dem man zugleich Schauspieler und Publikum ist [...].¹³²

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 111.

¹³² Edith Stein, 'Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften', *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, 5 (1922), 1–283 (pp. 262–3).

Walther's performance as a phenomenologist is a kind of Steinian 'aesthetic spectacle' (to use MacIntyre's phrase).¹³³ Unlike Marx and Engels, she demonstrates a certain degree of faith in the power of the 'Gewand' to impart meaning, though it cannot do so in a direct manner. The effectiveness of donning this 'Gewand' depends on the awareness of its relative artificiality. There is then a sense of irony to the propositions that result out of phenomenological or ontological abstraction in Walther, as analysis of some of the early sections of *OsG* will reinforce.

In her investigation of the nature of individual and social life, Stein encounters a problem similar to one that my analysis of the modes of mystical experience presented in *PdM* uncovered in Walther: the question of the universality or exhaustibility of the distinctions made in phenomenological reflection. In outlining the ways that Stein accounts for the role of social engagement and 'the natural world' in the constitution of the self, MacIntyre notes the following:

[Stein] has taken account of those relationships [between the self and the social and natural world] in cataloguing the parts that perceptual receptivity, intellectual receptivity, motivation, impulse, inclination and will play in generating thought and action. But as she herself recognized, what she has provided is as yet no more than a catalogue [...].¹³⁴

What is the problem of 'cataloguing'? Catalogues can be useful. A kind of catalogue which lists and carefully describes different kinds of social engagement might well prove useful for readers who encounter difficulties in their own social lives. It might be useful to say 'members of a community behave in X way' because it causes us to reflect and measure our own social relations against the value-criteria marked by X, and decide that some relationships come up short, and that we ought to take some action to change it. The problem is that the explicit aim is to investigate social life 'as such', like Husserl's 'Red as such', to arrive at a set of

¹³³ MacIntyre, p. 130.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

propositions about social life that goes beyond descriptions (mimetic or otherwise) of specific contingent states of affairs, or statements of criteria. There is a desire to secure a kind of certainty that can only be found through a generalising systematisation, and this is something that can only be achieved by an abandonment of the phenomenological standpoint. This is articulated by MacIntyre on Stein:

[...] Stein seems to have reached the limits of purely phenomenological enquiry. In order to go further she needs to supplement her phenomenological findings by moving to some philosophical standpoint that would enable her to ask how an embodied consciousness can be understood from a third-person rather than a first-person point of view. Phenomenology is the practice of disciplined self-awareness of embodied human consciousness. But such embodied consciousness can also be viewed from without as the consciousness of a natural and social being interacting with other beings. To acknowledge this is to acknowledge that phenomenological enquiry is by itself always radically incomplete.¹³⁵

MacIntyre praises Stein for her articulation of vital questions (ones which ‘of course [...] presuppose positions taken’), rather than her ability to provide definitive answers.¹³⁶ His account provides a compelling story of how Stein expands on Husserl’s notion of a self-constituting ego, and how in doing so she draws attention to the limitations of the very approach she explicitly subscribes to. This is a reading of Stein that has real resonance for my reading of Walther.

A good portion of the emerging scholarship on Walther is grounded in a comparison of Walther’s work with Stein’s, particularly in a comparison of their accounts of social life, and the distinction between society and community.¹³⁷ To some extent the consensus that arises out of this comparison fits with the vision of Stein’s contribution provided by MacIntyre. The typical result of the comparison is to note that Stein expands Husserl’s account of the constitution of consciousness by adding in a consideration of social life (the ‘other’ is involved

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 117.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹³⁷ See Luft and Hagenhuber, especially the contributions in part 1, pp. 3–143.

in the constitution of the 'I'); and that Walther goes even further than Stein in ascribing the ability to the 'I' to unite in communal experience with the 'other'. A version of this reading is Antonio Calcagno's: 'For Stein, the ownness that empathy reveals as fundamentally given precludes one from truly overcoming such Iness, whereas Walther suggests we can'.¹³⁸ Julia Mühl provides another: 'Stein maintains that human beings can empathize with others, they can understand what others feel, but they cannot feel the same experience in the same way. [...] Walther believes that human beings can experience through others in themselves'.¹³⁹

I argue based on close readings of *O&G* that the view of Walther's text upon which this consensus is based overstates the extent to which *O&G* can be read as having clear conceptual content. In particular these accounts of the continuities and discontinuities between Stein and Walther's work neglect to take under consideration the explicit and implicit difficulties that the two writers encounter in their efforts to characterise social experience. These are the sort of difficulties of approach which in my analysis of *PdM* reveal a mode of operation that does not result in positive, generalised propositions with clear reference.

What I mean with this criticism of how *O&G* is being read will come out more clearly in my close readings of that text (particularly around Walther's notion of the 'inner connection'), but for now I will indicate a basic problem that arises out of attempts to elucidate what Walther means by this more extreme 'unity' of subjects in communal experience. Calcagno and Mühl's accounts both describe versions of this 'unity' as opposed to 'disunity' without giving much indication of the sort of experience this describes. The unity of subjects remains in their analysis an abstract conceptual notion, and they crucially provide no comparative criteria against which to judge the relative merits of Stein and Walther's apparently opposing accounts. How should a reader determine whether their experience of

¹³⁸ Calcagno, 'Edith Stein and Gerda Walther', p. 17.

¹³⁹ Mühl, p. 23.

empathy is better captured in terms of unity or disunity of different subjects? What use are these statements if they cannot?

Absent from these accounts of Walther's 'unity' of subjects is any mention of telepathy, the actual, material form of experience that provides the impetus for the most extreme form of Walther's notion of the unity of subjects, and which features heavily in *PdM*, a text published just two years after the submission of Walther's thesis and just one year after the thesis's publication. Walther's autobiography describes how though she did not at that time know to call it 'telepathy', a 'dark awareness' of this sort of experience guided her in her in-person discussions with Stein, prompted by her reading of the latter's dissertation on empathy:

Ich meinte immer, es müßte noch eine andere, eine direkte Erfassung des Fremdseelischen geben, ich sagte dies auch Edith Stein. Sie stutzte, schien betroffen, dann fragte sie, wie man sich denn das vorstellen sollte? Darauf freilich konnte ich ihr damals keine Antwort geben. Sie liegt in der Telepathie, von dieser aber wußte ich ja noch nichts, wenn ich auch ganz dunkel ahnte, daß es so etwas gab. (*ZaU*, p. 271)

My analysis of *PdM* demonstrates how Walther uses a form of depersonalisation and a form of academic abstraction to obscure the roots of her telepathy account in that text. In offering a description of telepathy that sees it stripped of all but the most generalised and abstracted statement of the 'unity of subjects', Walther runs into another form of the problem of sayability and unsayability explored in my analysis of *PdM*. Of course it is not only telepathic experience that is at issue in *OsG*: the unity of subjects explored in that text is of a kind that manifests in a range of other (more common) communal experience. Indeed telepathy remains in *OsG* only a 'dunkle Ahnung', as indicated by the above quotation from Walther's autobiography. And Walther is herself performing a certain kind of abstracting procedure. However any discussion in secondary literature on Walther that neglects to mention the possibility of telepathy runs the risk of divorcing Walther's generalised statements even further from those forms of experience to which they are intended, if not to directly

correspond, than at least to *speak*. The secondary literature on Walther highlighted here performs a further round of abstraction on the text, meaning that the question of the meaning of the ‘fusion’ or ‘identity’ of subjects in Walther’s account is not further elucidated.¹⁴⁰

What MacIntyre uncovers in Stein that is missed in this scholarship comparing Stein and Walther is the extent to which the conceptual terms employed by Stein are problematised within her text (something that is also true of Walther). MacIntyre points out that in contrast to Husserl, Stein, as she engaged more and more with Thomism, increasingly did not see philosophy as a self-sufficient field of academic enquiry. To Stein, philosophy and the natural sciences ‘complement’ one another in ‘philosophy’s overall descriptive task’, ‘a task that proceeds through stages towards a goal that will never be finally achieved, so that philosophy can never be fully systematic, but is always in some respects a fragmentary and untidy set of enquiries’.¹⁴¹ Stein abandoned any hope for Husserlian certainty.¹⁴² This is the context in which I propose we read Walther’s work: as, in its most successful parts, implicitly anti-systematic, even where it performs a certain surface-level systematisation.

Walther recounts in her autobiography her falling-out with Husserl following the publication of her essay ‘Ludwig Klages und sein Kampf gegen den Geist’ in 1928. Husserl accused Walther of misunderstanding his work and removed from subsequent editions the index of Husserlian terms Walther had created by 1921, which had appeared in the 1923 edition of *Ideen* (*ZaU*, pp. 215–6). Walther had worked on this index since 1918. In a letter (dated 17 October 1918) to the prominent Marxist Karl Kautsky, a friend of her father, Walther had complained that she had little time to engage with politics anymore as work on Husserl’s index was taking up much of her spare time.¹⁴³ The suggestion that Walther assumes

¹⁴⁰ These are terms used by Calcagno. Calcagno, ‘Edith Stein and Gerda Walther’, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ MacIntyre, p. 181.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁴³ Letter from Gerda Walther to Karl Kautsky dated 17 October 1918. Amsterdam, International Institute of Social History, Karl Kautsky Papers, Korrespondenz, Briefe von/an Karl Kautsky, 736.

Husserl objected to when he removed her index from his book was her depiction of his systematic method of doing philosophy in her 1928 essay. As she writes in her autobiography, she contrasted this systematisation with an alternative approach represented by Klages: ‘ich [setzte] Klages Haltung zur Welt im Vergleich mit der systematischen Philosophie, wie sie etwa Husserl verkörperte, den auf einer Wiese sich tummelnden Schmetterlingen im Unterschied zu den säuberlich in einem Sammlerkasten aufgespießten gleich’ (*ZaU*, p. 215). Though Walther insisted (in her autobiography, and directly to Husserl in a letter (*ZaU*, p. 216)) that she was not taking sides in drawing this comparison, Husserl’s identification of an implicit criticism in this characterisation seems reasonable: even if the scientist studying butterflies behind the glass case has in her view a real contribution to make, Walther suggests that he cannot possibly tell the whole story, that his descriptive efforts are fragmentary. My analysis of *PdM*, a text which draws on diverse traditions and incorporates meditative and narrative devices, demonstrates Walther’s instinct to move beyond what she sees as the limits of philosophy.

Framing Walther’s efforts in this way importantly reorientates discussion of what Walther is saying in *OsG*, and how she is saying it. Rather than offering a systematic social ontology, Walther offers a strange text which problematises the very ontological efforts it stages. In a way, Walther is getting at one of the most fundamental philosophical problems, and problems with philosophy: the impulse that it should be a self-grounding discipline. Walther’s philosophical texts lack the self-grounding character that would make their statements true *as such*, just as her ‘I’ lacks that which would make it whole prior to its engagement with others and the world; and this lack is at issue in her text. Stephen Mulhall has described how a version of the problem I identify as being implicitly raised by Walther’s social ontology continues to plague present-day ontological efforts that aim at systematisation.

Walther, Gerda. Digitised at <<https://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH00712.736>> [accessed 27 September 2021].

In a review of Graham Harman's *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (2018), Mulhall writes (drawing on Wittgenstein):

This is the trouble with philosophical theories of everything, whether it's everything in a given domain (tools, say, or language), or absolutely everything. It isn't so much that their generality increases the risk of incorporating erroneous claims; it's that they risk failing to make a claim at all.¹⁴⁴

This is a new formulation of the problem of unsayability that I outlined in my analysis of *PdM*, and which appears in another form in Marx and Engels's flashy 'Gewand' of systematic statements in which the original materiality is transcended or abstracted from. It is important to establish against other readings of Walther when it is that Walther's performance of abstraction assists in developing a new vision of how a fragmentary philosophy can function, and when it operates in a manner that obscures her real contribution. The task of the following section will be to work out, by means of analysis of some textual examples, what Walther is saying when she is saying nothing at all.

IV. Playing the philosopher: Walther's 'fictional' interludes

This section offers a close examination of Walther's preliminary account of social community ('B.1. Der Sinn des Begriffes "soziale Gemeinschaft" und vorläufige Bestimmung seiner wesentlichen Merkmale', *OsG*, pp. 18–30), in order to reveal the workings of her performative philosophical procedure. In particular I highlight Walther's use of anecdotal examples in her account of social life, examples which have an almost literary, and often playful character. These features have an important status in a text which limits the role of theoretical thinking. Walther states explicitly that she engages in this passage in a kind of definition ('Bestimmung'), one which will ostensibly result in the meaning of the term 'community'. Walther asks what might need to be true of a group of subjects that they might be termed a community. Her first observation is that social community must be between human subjects.

¹⁴⁴ Stephen Mulhall, 'How complex is a lemon?', *London Review of Books*, 40 (18) (2018), 27–30 (p. 27).

It cannot be between humans and a dog, or humans and God; nor could the kind of community that can be found among ‘Engeln, Feen, Zwergen, Nixen, Kentauren usw.’ (*OsG*, p. 18) be termed a social community (some of these beings fall under the category of imaginary beings, which do not have social community (*OsG*, pp. 24–5); angels however are considered by Walther to be quite real (see *PdM*, p. 123), but are excluded for being ‘other’ in some other way).

Walther’s method is performative here: she proposes to delineate the meaning behind the terms in question using a kind of speculative reason, referring to traditional philosophical notions of definition, and of necessary and sufficient conditions for a case to conform to that definition (*OsG*, p. 20). But the distinctions she makes, and the cases she excludes, are not done so on a priori grounds. A reader might well ask why it is that a community between angels or fairies ‘cannot be called’ a social community? On what grounds does Walther make this claim? The reason that angels and fairies cannot be said to form social communities is simply that Walther *says* that they cannot. It is not so much that Walther is saying that there cannot be something that could be called a community, or which resembles human communities, between non-human entities. One could quite easily come up with a definition of social communities which does include communities between angels and fairies. Rather what Walther is saying is that she is only considering cases which include humans alone. Her exclusion of certain cases is an active one, and is not done on formal or experiential a priori grounds (as in the case of Husserl’s ‘red *as such*’). In this way it is not a systematic enterprise.

Walther works on her active definition of social community, drawing up a series of ‘conditions’ which must apply for a group of subjects to be termed a social community.¹⁴⁵ She notes that some communities have external markers of their status as community, such as a

¹⁴⁵ In the following I follow Walther in sometimes dropping the ‘social’ from ‘social communities’, as she makes clear social communities are the only communities at issue in in her subsequent investigation.

uniform or family name; but such markers are not what is primary ('das Primäre'). They act as 'Merkmal', 'Symbol' or 'Zeichen' of a social community that is more than such external markers (*OsG*, p. 19). In this language around sign and symbol there are traces of the sort of procedure that marks *PdM*: the sense that there is a mysterious, primary meaning that is not unrelated to the terms, signs and symbols that operate around these meanings, but which defies any direct intervention from language's operation.

Once she has decided that such 'external' markers, and 'das körperliche Leben', do not provide the answers (*OsG*, p. 20), Walther moves to 'internal' factors. She states that members of a social community must possess some common intentional life: 'Es muß also wohl ein ganz oder teilweise gleiches seelisch-geistiges Leben mit, wenigstens teilweise, Gleichen intentionalen Inhalten oder doch Intensionsrichtungen vorliegen, damit eine soziale Gemeinschaft besteht' (*OsG*, p. 20). There is some discussion of whether community is a question of epistemology: of whether *knowledge* of the other makes for community. Again, Walther concludes that this is not it, citing the example of three scientists working on the same theoretical problem in three different countries (the consciousness that higher level communities have of their constitution as community (*OsG*, p. 94) is not the same as theoretical knowledge, similar to the post-Fall consciousness of the subject in *PdM*). Noting that they could surely not be called a social community without each member knowing that the other was working on the same problem, Walther concludes that knowledge of one another alone would not mean that community has been achieved. She writes in her characteristically emphatic tone: 'Nehmen wir aber an, jeder der drei Männer wüßte rein verstandesmäßig etwas von den anderen – davon, daß sie dasselbe Problem auf dieselbe Weise untersuchen, wie er selbst – , wäre damit schon eine Gemeinschaft gegeben? Doch wohl nicht!' (*OsG*, p. 20). The use of 'doch' and the exclamation mark indicate that the reader is expected to recognise that this is the case.

Walther notes that other thinkers, such as Simmel, Weber and Husserl, would think that once these three men start working together, once there is a form of ‘Wechselwirkung’, there now is a community among them. But Walther questions this conclusion, noting that there are myriad numbers of forms of ‘Wechselwirkung’ (‘physisch, physiologisch, psychisch, bewußtseinsmäßig-intentional’), each of which could accompany a community, but which could equally exist between subjects who do not form a community. Her examples of such insufficient social relations are varied, and they take the form of small fictional interludes, anecdotal accounts that have a distinctly literary quality in their detail and dramatic content. They include a physical ‘Wechselwirkung’ persisting between two fishermen who both drown when their boats collide in the mist (a particularly evocative scene). Another example of is two medical students from different countries who notice each other’s textbooks on a train on their holidays and realise that they study the same subject, while also unknowingly infecting one another with the different illnesses each suffers from (*O&G*, pp. 20–21).

There is a keen sense with these strange examples, appearing almost as micro-novellas, of how Walther sees systematic consideration of communities as doing a disservice to the material and individual cases that are intended to fall under it; and she seems to get carried away by her more literary instincts. The more systematic procedure being fragmentary, other forms of writing and of reflecting upon social relations creep into the text. Nonetheless Walther persists in her efforts to find some common condition for social community, feeling a sense of urgency about the prospect of arriving at that Husserlian general, rather than individual, essential quality. This is seen in the following quotation, where Walther is speaking of certain ‘Studiengemeinschaften’ or instances of people working independently towards a common end without dividing their labour and truly working together:

Aber solche Gemeinschaften sind doch nur eine gewisse Unterart der Gemeinschaft ‘überhaupt’, wir würden also die Definition eines speziellen Gemeinschaftswesens mit der ihres generellen Wesens verwechseln, wollten

wir diese Bestimmung als ausschlaggebend für das Wesen der Gemeinschaft ‘überhaupt’ ansehen. (O&G, p. 23)

Walther ultimately decides that the kind of ‘Wechselwirkung’ relevant to her is an intentional one: subjects who form a community must, as well as knowing about one another, share an intentional object (real or imagined), and they must be directed towards this object in the same way: they must be ‘in einem einheitlichen Sinn motiviert’ (O&G, p.30). Walther suggests that this condition, this definition of community, is not arrived at without difficulty, as is made clear in the following quotation, which follows her consideration of another potential exception: the case of a ‘primitive’ family in which the man and woman carry out very different tasks in service of a common aim, and thus relate to that aim in apparently different ways.

Wir müssen also doch wohl die gleichen intentionalen und evtl. auch sonstigen gleichen Lebensinhalte und das teilweise gleiche seelische und geistige Leben als wesentliches Konstituens für die Gemeinschaft wieder fallen lassen!? Andererseits aber sahen wir doch vorhin, daß das bloße Wissen-um-einander und ihre Wechselwirkung bei Einzelnen wohl für die Vergesellschaftung im weitesten Sinne genügen mag, nicht aber für die Vergemeinschaftung, daß vielmehr für diese eine Wechselwirkung in bezug auf einen gleichen Inhalt im gleichen Sinn vorliegen muß. Wie kommen wir aus diesem Dilemma heraus? Wir scheinen an einem toten Punkt angelangt zu sein – oder haben wir vielleicht nur einige Äquivokationen außer Acht gelassen, durch deren Unterscheidung sich uns diese Widersprüche auflösen würden? Untersuchen wir nochmals eingehend unsere Begriffe! (O&G, p. 23)

Yet the inclusion of this passage, this indication of philosophical difficulty, is a stylistic flourish: in its exaggerated tone (the excessive punctuation, the lists of questions, the invocation of the ‘wir’, which suggests the reader is a co-conspirator in this investigative journey, and the fatalistic language of ‘dilemma’ and ‘toten Punkt’) it marks a performance of a philosophical conundrum rather than a genuine expression of the thorniness of the issue. It introduces to the text a sense of narrative irony: a knowingly constructed sense of danger to be resolved as the investigative journey proceeds.

Having flagged this danger in such exaggerated manner, the example Walther introduces in order to solve it (by introducing as a further condition to community that the members share a *sense* or *meaning* of their object as well as the object itself) is playful to the extreme. Its playfulness is right there on the surface; it is literal. Walther asks the reader to imagine a group of children who work together to build a fairy temple, forming ‘eine “Gemeinschaft der Diener dieser Fee”’ (OsG, p. 25). The intentional object (the fairy) is not a real one, and the children know this. But still the community among the children is real, because their behaviour in the service of the fairy is real: ‘Real ist hier nur das Verhalten der Kinder “im Dienste der Fee”’ (OsG, p. 25).

The point is that regardless of whether the fairy is real, the children share a sense of the same fairy (Walther again thanks Heidegger in a footnote to this point). The children’s intentional ‘content’ [‘Inhalt’] need not be identical for this sort of community to pertain between the children, for them to have a shared inner life: there need not be a single, ideal ‘fairy’ which is exactly the same to each of the children. What is crucial is that there is a shared sense [‘Sinn’] of what is going on between the community members. Walther is explicit in limiting how much can be stated in positive terms about this shared sense, again referring to the problem of generalisability and specificity in ontology:

Wir müssen uns hier bewußt etwas vage ausdrücken, da jede nähere Bestimmung dessen, was unter diesem ‘gleichen Sinn’ gemeint ist, leicht zu eng werden kann, so daß er nur für eine bestimmte Gemeinschaftsart, nicht aber für die Gemeinschaft ‘überhaupt’ gelten würde. (OsG, p. 26)

She recognises that if she specifies too exactly what she means, that the description will fail to hold for community as such. Conversely however she is left with the difficulty of how to say anything meaningful about community, beyond that it ‘has meaning’. What remains for her to do is to provide a less direct, a less systematic sense of the meaning of community, by means

of her quasi-literary interludes: a creative form of the ‘cataloguing’ Stein engages in.¹⁴⁶ These passages are no less revealing than the more generalised, ontological statements Walther makes. The general is not privileged over the material, and the language corresponding to each interacts in meaningful ways.

Another example of Walther’s scenes is that of a ‘Kaiser’ and an ‘ungebildetes Bauernmütterchen’ in wartime, who, though their paths do not directly cross, can be said to form a kind of community in sharing an intentional object in that they both, in their own way, have the ‘Sieg Deutschlands’ as their aim (*OsG*, p. 28). Prompted by this example Walther introduces a new way of conceiving of the shared sense that guides communal relations, one which casts those relations as part of a creative (in this case, musical) endeavour. She writes:

Hiermit dürfte die Bedeutung des einheitlichen Sinnzusammenhanges [...] wohl geklärt sein: es ist wie ein oberstes Leitmotiv, das das seelisch-geistige Leben innerhalb der Gemeinschaft bei allen Mitgliedern durchzieht, wenn sie auch in verschiedenen Variationen und mit verschiedenen Instrumenten spielen. Jeder muß, auf seine Weise, so spielen, daß er letzten Endes, trotz aller Abweichungen, das Gesamtstück mit seiner Gesamtharmonie nicht stört, sondern mit den anderen Spielern zusammen sie erst erwachen läßt und realisiert. (*OsG*, p. 28)

There is a sense in this quotation that this is a surface level set of relations that could fall apart if disrupted. But it is a set of relations with real meaning. Even if stylised, theatrical and aestheticized like Stein’s social relations, the theatrical is not negatively connotated to indicate artificiality, and the ‘fictional’ artistic theatre does not conceal some ‘reality’ to which it is opposed. In this way Walther’s performance as philosopher, her engagement with the social community of phenomenologists of which she is part, even as it includes an implicit criticism of certain kinds of philosophical procedure which overestimate their achievements, is not an outright rejection of philosophy. Rather it is an appeal to find the playful in philosophy: to

¹⁴⁶ MacIntyre, p. 116.

participate in the ‘aesthetic spectacle’ of philosophy, and engage both with other members of the philosophical community, and with members of other communities (such as artistic ones).

As with the parallel between the body and the text that I highlighted in my analysis of *PdM*, there is in *OsG* a parallel between the operation of the text and the social community. The shared sense upon which community relies for its constitution in Walther’s vision is not something that can be fixed using language or theory but rather is something like a horizon of meaning that members of the community share. This is a horizon of meaning that stands not behind, above or beyond the contingent, material operations of the world in some ideal realm, but is tied up with those operations. *OsG* itself, a philosophical text, is a ‘Bau der Begriffe’ (to borrow the Nietzschean term) that operates in parallel to the social relations it works to characterise. It employs terms and textual strategies whose power rely on the shared understandings of the reader. There is a playfulness to this parallel operation. As the meanings that underpin different communities shift, so too might the language used to characterise them. The narrative example of the Kaiser and the mother forming a kind of community during wartime might have been abandoned by the older Walther, who when visited at her retirement home in Dießen by the Linda López McAlister in 1976 (the year before Walther’s death) supplemented her autograph on López McAlister’s copy of *ZaU* with a sticker reading ‘war is not healthy for children and other living things’.¹⁴⁷

What comes through here is the sense that narrative is part of how Walther sees the world, and makes sense of it, even as a philosopher. Communal understandings (that is, understanding of the community, and the communal understandings upon which the operation of the text relies) unfold over time, and have a fluid character. Approaches to

¹⁴⁷ López McAlister, ‘My memories of Gerda Walther’, in *Women Phenomenologists on Social Ontology*, ed. by Luft and Hagengruber, p. ix. These stickers were designed by Lorraine Schneider for the US organisation ‘Another Mother for Peace’, founded by women in 1967 in opposition to the Vietnam war. Another Mother for Peace website, <<http://anothermother.org/about>> [accessed 8 July 2020].

Walther which attempt to fix her meanings into theories of the unity of subjects neglect this important aspect of her work. Walther's playfulness will become more obvious as she reaches the next stage in her investigation, where she distinguishes community from mere society using the notion of the 'inner connection'. I present a close reading of the passage in which Walther introduces the 'inner connection'. As one of the most discussed aspects of her work, it will be important to reorientate it in relation to the neglected aspects I have outlined here. As part of my reorientation of Walther's contribution I examine her 'inner connection' in relation to another philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose work more explicitly rests on a kind of playfulness and fluidity of approach, and who more definitively rejects the systematising impulses which Walther ironizes.

V. The workers' Babel: Walther's distinction between society and community

This section has as its focus Walther's distinction between society and community, and the notion of the 'inner connection' at which she arrives and which she states marks community out as such (*O&G*, pp. 30–34). I have already noted that the emerging scholarship on Walther sums up her contribution to social ontology by stating her commitment to the 'unity' of subjects in community: some kind of radical overlapping of distinct subjects' experiences. I have also indicated the difficulties of summing up Walther's position in this way, and how generalised descriptions of this sort of experience run the risk of failing altogether as descriptions. Given that scholars such as Zahavi and Salice highlight Walther's 'inner connection' as that which makes her work worth revisiting, it makes sense to investigate this part of her text in some detail with these considerations in mind.¹⁴⁸ And given the significance I have identified in Walther's anecdotal interludes, I think it important to spend some time on the scene Walther presents in introducing that which for her marks out community as such. This is the scene of a building site, on which the builders share a certain amount of intentional

¹⁴⁸ Zahavi and Salice, 'Phenomenology of the we', p. 519.

content and contextual meanings, but whose interpersonal relations Walther states nonetheless fall short of community.

Just as she attributes her phenomenological method to figures other than herself, in introducing this distinction between society and community Walther is consciously following philosophical convention: she recognises Max Weber (*OsG*, p. 31, note 1) and Ferdinand Tönnies (*OsG*, p. 3, note 1) as having worked with this distinction. Zahavi and Salice identify Max Scheler as among the other early phenomenologists who used the distinction.¹⁴⁹ In *PdM*, Walther reworks the conventions she adopts continually, and so it makes sense to look for how Walther rethinks this particular philosophical convention too. At this stage in her analysis Walther has already noted that for a set of interpersonal relations to be called a community, the subjects must share some intentional object (or context), be aware of one another, and approach (spiritually and in action) their shared intentional object or context in a similar, and reciprocal way (like the children building their fairy-temple). But Walther determines that these conditions she has laid out are not sufficient to make a community; or rather that the generalised phenomenological description she presents up to this point does not seem to adequately reflect what is going on in cases of community.

Her example of the builders is given as a case where these conditions are met, or this description rings true, but community still seems to be lacking. I quote the entire introduction to this scene below, in order to be able to refer to parts of it throughout this section.

Nehmen wir etwa als Beispiel eine Anzahl wahllos zusammengelesener Arbeiter, Slowaken, Polen, Italiener usw., die alle auf einem Bau beschäftigt sind. Sie verstehen gegenseitig ihre Sprache nicht, kennen sich nicht, haben nie früher miteinander etwas zu tun gehabt – sie wollen nur alle ihren Lebensunterhalt verdienen und sind dabei zufällig von dem gleichen Bauunternehmer angestellt worden. Nun führen sie etwa eine Mauer auf, einige holen die Ziegelsteine, einige reichen sie den anderen weiter und geben sie schließlich den Maurern, die sie mit Mörtel bestreichen und aufeinanderlegen – die Arbeit muß ganz genau in einem bestimmten

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Rhythmus vor sich gehen, damit sie nicht stockt – , jeder muß sich nach dem anderen richten und die Steine im gleichen Tempo nehmen und weitergeben, damit die Kontinuität der Arbeit nicht unterbrochen wird. Vielleicht kochen und wohnen die Arbeiter auch zusammen, solange sie auf dem Bau beschäftigt sind. Bilden sie nun eine Gemeinschaft? (OsG, pp. 30–31)

As I have pointed out elsewhere, this anecdote is an inversion of the biblical Fall narrative of the Tower of Babel.¹⁵⁰ Walther's builders come from different parts of the world and already speak different languages when they begin their building project, rather than beginning in a unified state and being sent elsewhere, as in the biblical story. They build a wall, not a tower: the theme of division and differentiation has a literal expression on the level of Walther's story. In this fallen state, the workers lack that which would make them a community.

Walther entertains Weber's suggestion that there are other factors (found for example in the rules or ethical codes that different communities accept through 'Einverständnis') which could be added to this scenario in order to render the relations between the workers communal (OsG, p. 31–3). However the forms of this which might pertain on the building site seem to her obviously insufficient to bring about community. These include an 'Arbeitsordnung', 'schriftlich fixiert': a code which might set out 'in welchem Tempo, Rhythmus, in welcher Reihenfolge usw. die verschiedenen Arbeiten zu verrichten seien' (and which would be enforced by supervisors) (OsG, p. 32). Again, this does not get us very far in Walther's eyes. This detail is an interesting one, subtly gesturing at the limitations of certain forms of (in this case, written) language in capturing what is going on in social relations. The introduction of this written agreement does not add anything to the implicit agreement of the workers: they had already established a working rhythm, as is shown in the above quotation. Indeed there is no suggestion that a common language would be the element which might bring about a community among these workers. Walther includes in this passage an indication

¹⁵⁰ Burns, p. 261.

of the incomplete nature of the written text; here is an overlooked hint as to how Walther's term of 'inner connection' might be treated.

In her rejection of Weber's proposals, Walther seems reluctant to accept that any specific set of material conditions can be pointed to as determining community. What is present in a community cannot be reduced to a description of its particular character (by reference to laws, traditions or shared ethical codes) (*OsG*, p. 32). This could be read as a generalising impulse – to give an account of these particular workers' shared code or tradition (if they did form a community) would not be a description of community *as such*: this brings us back to the idea that phenomenological description, and philosophy generally, ought to get beyond specifics. This also corresponds with the idea that Walther is wishing to get beyond purely materialistic and deterministic accounts of social relations as she moves away from Marx; the lack of a discussion around the builders' potential class consciousness is notable. Yet Walther's position is not that simple. That which fails to be captured in these rejected accounts of community is not merely the formal, generalisable philosophical character of 'community as such'. Walther's missing condition is more complex.

The 'inner connection' appears next in Walther's investigation, and is positioned as the key to community. Once she has summarised the elements of communal interplay she introduced using previous anecdotes, she reaches that element which does make community:

Wenn nun aber [...] zu allen anderen Bestimmungen hinzukäme eine innere Verbundenheit, welcher Art auch immer [...] – hätten wir dann nicht eine Gemeinschaft vor uns? Hier – und erst hier – scheint uns, läge eine wirkliche Gemeinschaft vor. Erst durch ihre innere Verbundenheit, jenes Gefühl der Zusammengehörigkeit – sei es auch noch so lose und begrenzt – springt ein soziales Gebilde in eine Gemeinschaft um. (*OsG*, p. 33)

It can be seen in this quotation that Walther uses a number of different terms for this same element, in keeping with the strategy of fluid terminology that characterises *PdM*. That which marks out community is called a 'feeling of belonging together' ('Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl'), an 'inner bond' ('innere Verbundenheit'), and (later on the

same page), an ‘inner unification’ (‘innere Einigung’) (*OsG*, p. 33). Walther’s shifting terminology in this passage is not something that has been pointed out even by scholars who draw upon this section of her text in order to make clear Walther’s distinct contribution (I have referenced several here: Zahavi, Salice, Calcagno, Mühl). However it seems crucial to note that the element these scholars work to delineate seems far from fixed in the original text.

Walther uses the phrase ‘welcher Art auch immer’ here, which might appear as a throwaway phrase, but which is in fact strange, and significant. Why shouldn’t it matter ‘in which way’ there pertains an inner connection, or inner union, or a feeling of belonging, between the members of a community? If Walther is trying to characterise, describe or delineate community, then surely it matters a great deal ‘what kind’ of connection this is. Attempts to pin Walther down to generalised statements of the ‘unity’ or ‘fusion’ of subjects present a streamlined version of Walther’s own words in which their original enigmatic character is lost. Presenting Walther’s work in this way neglects the crucial fact that in characterising community in this strange fashion, Walther is not really saying anything at all about community. And that is precisely her point. Community, rather than being something to be carefully characterised by means of generalisable statements of formal characteristics, is something that is either there, or it is not there. It is an ‘Etwas’ of the kind found in *PdM*; it is, to quote Walther, a kind of ‘toter Punkt’ (*OsG*, p. 23) beyond which the philosopher cannot get.

In a sense then, community is mysterious. It might seem then that *OsG* begins as a philosophical text but very quickly descends into a quasi-mystical meditation upon the indefinability of the very subject it sets out to investigate. And there are moments at which Walther does offer figurative descriptions of the kind that appear as she moves further into the mystical realm in *PdM*. One example is a metaphorical characterisation of how the inner

connection arises in experience that is quite different in tone from Walther's abstracted philosophical language of shared intentionality. I give quite a long quotation here in order to give a sense of the description's extended, quasi-narrative structure:

Was geht da vor sich? Eine warme, bejahende seelische Welle von größerer oder geringer Wucht durchflutet plötzlich mehr oder weniger jäh und heftig oder ruhig und mild das ganze Subjekt oder nur einen Teil oder eine ganz 'dünne' Sphäre desselben. Sie scheint das ganze Seelenleben und seinen jeweiligen Erlebenskomplex mit einem warmen Licht zu übergießen und dringt nun auch aus dem Bewußtseinshintergrund in die Sphäre des wachen Vordergrundsbewußtseins mit seinem wach schauenden und alles erlebenden Ichmoment ein. Es ist, als trüge diese Welle das ganze Subjekt mit seinem erschauenden, von ihr durchdrungenen Ich seelisch hin zu seinem Einigungsobjekt. (*OsG*, pp. 34–5)

Walther continues in this tone for some time. What these strange interludes show is that Walther is remarkably unconcerned by the indefinability of community, and simply reaches out of a generalising mode and into a creative, mystical one. Crucially this is another point at which Walther's description has the sense of a personal description of the contingent realities of experience. Though stripped of material detail, the above quotation is not truly abstract, and more closely resembles the kinds of meditations I have identified in *PdM*. It is introduced with the statement 'Vergegenwärtigen wir uns kurz das dort Ausgeführte!' (*OsG*, p. 34): an appeal to the reader to realise or visualise the narrative they are reading.

This is not an abandonment of philosophy; Walther switches between these modes as she sees fit, and continues to ontologise community. She works throughout *OsG* to distinguish community from other forms of social life, and to show how these different forms can interact. And she goes on to offer a meditation on a higher form of community in which community members become aware of their own constitution as community: the 'adult' version of the 'childhood' community (*OsG*, p. 94). To return to a phrase used by MacIntyre to in his work on Stein, Walther provides in the remainder of this work a kind of creative 'catalogue' of forms of social life and community. In her distinctive meditations on the inner connection, the point beyond which one cannot philosophise, Walther shows that in a sense,

the level of the catalogue is all there is, and all there can be. As in other points in Walther's work, the discovery of such a limit is not cause for despair: the catalogue can offer a useful point of comparison for those reflecting on their own communal relations.

VI. A comparison with Ludwig Wittgenstein

The reading of *OsG* presented here demands new points of orientation for Walther's work as philosopher. The mystical-meditative vision of philosophy presented in my previous chapter can be seen to be just as relevant to Walther's earlier published work as it is to her work on mysticism. And MacIntyre's analysis of Edith Stein as offering a counterpoint to Husserlian phenomenology acts as useful context for this reading. Here I suggest another comparison in the form of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who provides an alternative model for philosophical approaches to language and meaning. There is no reason to think that Walther or Wittgenstein read one another's work (it is not easy to establish direct links of this kind between Wittgenstein and far better-known phenomenologists such as Heidegger)¹⁵¹; however, the fluidity of Walther's inner connection and its place within her text as analysed above make this comparison fruitful nonetheless. Walther's non-systematic approach and use of anecdote bears some resemblance to Wittgenstein's approach in *Philosophical Investigations* (published posthumously in 1953). In particular, Walther's inverted Babel story bears a striking superficial similarity to a story in Wittgenstein's text. In both texts these stories appear as part of an account of social interaction, and form part of reflections on the role of language in these interactions, and in characterising them (through philosophy). Crucially Wittgenstein's discussion of language is far more explicit than Walther's, and so an understanding of it assists in my project of rendering the implicit in Walther's text explicit.

¹⁵¹ There is no record of Heidegger having read Wittgenstein, and there is only one recorded remark by Wittgenstein on Heidegger. See David Egan, Stephen Reynolds and Aaron Wendland, 'General Introduction', in *Wittgenstein and Heidegger: Pathways and Provocations*, ed. by David Egan, Stephen Reynolds and Aaron Wendland (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1–18 (p. 13).

Philosophical Investigations begins with a quotation from Augustine's *Confessions* which depicts childhood language-learning as a matter of coming to know (by understanding adults' gestures) which signs signify which objects, and learning how to use those signs to refer to objects oneself.¹⁵² Wittgenstein goes on to explore the implications of Augustine's account of language using a series of anecdotes and dialogic scenes. One of the scenes is of two builders who are depicted using language in this manner, where each sign refers to an object. As in Walther, the builders in Wittgenstein embody a kind of inadequacy. Builder A requests that his assistant B hands him objects. The names of these objects are imagined by an Augustinian thinker to form a complete 'primitive' language. However Wittgenstein shows that it is the Augustinian understanding that is 'primitive': 'Jener philosophische Begriff der Bedeutung ist in einer primitiven Vorstellung der Art und Weise, wie die Sprache funktioniert, zu Hause'.¹⁵³ The Augustinian picture of language neglects all of the other contextual clues and shared practices that must pertain in order for, for example, the term 'pillar' to act as a command in this work-context. The builder who shouts 'pillar' is doing more than simply referring to an object; he is asking for it to be brought to him, in order that he can complete his work.

Wittgenstein's builder scene follows another scene depicting this simplistic view of language as pure reference. A shopper hands the shopkeeper a list of items he has been commanded to purchase; it reads 'fünf rote Äpfel'.¹⁵⁴ The shopkeeper opens a drawer labelled 'apples' and consults a colour chart to find the meaning of 'red'. He counts to five as he removes apples. An imagined interlocutor asks how the shopkeeper should know where to look up these objects in the first place, and Wittgenstein responds: 'die Erklärungen haben irgendwo ein Ende. – Was ist aber die Bedeutung des Wortes 'fünf'? – Von einer solchen war

¹⁵² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* [1953], rev. 4th edn (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

hier gar nicht die Rede; nur davon, wie das Wort ‘fünf’ gebraucht wird’.¹⁵⁵ In a sense, what Wittgenstein is suggesting here is that the Augustinian reference-based account of language is both too simplistic and too complicated. It is simplistic in the sense that in the scenes I have recounted here, both the builder and the shopkeeper operate with a language that has a much wider and more complex horizon of meaning than a reference-based account of language can allow for. At the same time, however, the Augustinian thinker seeks a more complicated, or a more complete, accounting of language’s operation: he wishes to provide a kind of ultimate ground to the use of language.

In these scenes Wittgenstein begins his diagnosis of the problems of philosophical procedure which attempts to reductively systematise, to fix that which is fluid. I identify a parallel between this tension and the tension surrounding philosophy and phenomenology’s role in Walther’s work. I have shown how in *O&G*, Walther explicitly frames her philosophical search as one for the ultimate grounds of things. To use Richard Rorty’s language (when he writes of the parallels between Wittgenstein and Heidegger), Walther is explicitly in search of ‘type A entities’: those entities which ‘contextualize and explain but cannot, on pain of infinite regress, be contextualized or explained’ (in Walther’s case, this would come in the form of a Husserlian version of ‘the Platonic Forms, the Kantian categories, and the Russellian logical objects’). This is opposed by Rorty to ‘type B entities’, which ‘require relations but cannot themselves relate, require contextualization and explanation but cannot themselves contextualize nor explain.’¹⁵⁶ However the actual workings of Walther’s text demonstrate that this is not her only guiding impulse, and her text implicitly criticises the Husserlian systematisation it purports to carry out.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 5–6.

¹⁵⁶ Richard Rorty, ‘Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the reification of language’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. by Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 337–57, p. 342.

Those elements like the inner connection which are to some extent positioned as ‘type A entities’ do not in fact condition ‘type B’ forms of social life; rather they mark the moments in the text at which Walther is implicitly saying, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, ‘die Erklärungen haben *hier* ein Ende’. For Wittgenstein, the refutation of the Augustinian position, and the abandonment of the search for ‘explanations’ in the form of ‘type A entities’ was the result of a philosophical journey that took place over time, as he began to move away from his initial approach in the *Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung* (1921; published in English in 1922 as the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*). In the earlier text, Wittgenstein was still overly indebted to this dualistic grounding instinct. Walther’s text then can be read as marking a stage in a journey parallel to Wittgenstein’s. To use Walther’s own structures, her work in the early 1920s marks a point at which the journey beyond the distinction between type A and type B entities is underway, but not consciously so.

Walther’s language around consciousness and unconsciousness is tied up far more with religious structures than it is, for example, with psychoanalysis. Walther frames her work on social ontology, as well as her work on general experience and mystical experience in *PdM*, in terms of a series of Fall narratives. This is another respect in which Walther’s work is interestingly compared with that of Wittgenstein. I referred in my previous chapter to Stephen Mulhall’s examination of Fall narratives in philosophy. Mulhall examines Wittgenstein’s explication of the Augustinian view of language as such a Fall narrative, alongside comparable narratives in the works of Nietzsche and Heidegger. He examines these philosophers’ indebtedness to the narratives and vocabularies of Christianity, particularly those around Original Sin, along with their attempts to replace the divine with other possible solutions even as they employ Christian tools. Mulhall states that Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein can all be seen as attempting

to preserve a recognizable descendent of the Christian conception of human nature as always already averting us from the relation to truth, comprehension and clarity that is

nevertheless our birthright – hence as structurally perverse or errant and yet redeemable from that fallen state [...] [but also] to relocate the source of that redemption within (or at least on the borders of) the world of human experience.¹⁵⁷

Walther can be seen to be engaging in a similar project to a certain extent. She encounters the same problem that Mulhall's exemplary philosophers do: that of how to negotiate the contingent and the essential in presenting the human condition as genuinely fallen (this being an essential rather than contingent state). But Walther gets around the problem faced by Mulhall's philosophers in that she does not truly wish to secularise the Christian. Her investigation in *PdM* is explicitly religiously motivated, and she has no problem gesturing at sources of redemption or meaning that are mysterious in various ways, beyond philosophical accounting, and divine. This colours how *OsG*'s own Fall narratives are to be read, insofar as their presence is an indication that the inquiry is reaching the limits of philosophical accounting. What aligns Walther's work with the investigations that Mulhall describes is that Walther, though fundamentally religious, does wish to 'relocate' that religiosity within the realm of everyday human experience, as is seen in her work on mysticism.

In looking at Wittgenstein's staging of the Augustinian view of language in the shopkeeper example, Mulhall roots the dissatisfaction of Wittgenstein's interlocutor in the desire of many philosophers to situate their investigations beyond the limits of whatever language games we commonly engage in, to make them unconditioned; while Wittgenstein, the philosopher-therapist, wishes to dissuade them of the notion that limits are limitations that must be overcome.¹⁵⁸ The interlocutor's desire to definitively establish meaning arises, Mulhall states, from a dualistic notion of the acting subjects: there must be some mental contents that stand behind our actions and explain them, just as words must have 'meaning' behind them. The scepticism of the interlocutor can only be 'overcome [...] by offering an internalised version of the public processes of correlation and comparison that the

¹⁵⁷ Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 94–5.

shopkeeper goes through in Wittgenstein's story'. Mulhall notes that such an internalised explanation can only satisfy if 'one is inclined to fetishize their sheer interiority – as if the inner were a realm of magic beyond rational accounting', otherwise a mental picture of the colour red would not be any more of a guarantee of understanding than a colour chart.¹⁵⁹

To some extent Walther is guilty of this kind of fetishization of interiority. With her notion of the inner connection, Walther seems especially concerned with moving away from deterministic material descriptions which rely on 'external' factors: this can be seen in her refutation of Weber's account of community. But Walther is perfectly upfront about her treatment being of a realm 'beyond rational accounting'. Though she shares something of Wittgenstein's interlocutor's impulses, she does not succumb to a state of 'grammatical disorientation' in the same way as Augustine's followers: this is a state in which we attempt to 'speak beyond or outside language games', and 'lose control' of those things which 'constitute the limits or conditions of the human capacity to know, think, or speak about the world'.¹⁶⁰ Walther is not disoriented by the 'unsayability' of the matters she wishes to approach. Her silence is a directed one; she is oriented around that which she cannot adequately describe and that to which she is happy to ascribe a magical quality. And the 'magic' of her descriptions is not restricted to 'type A entities'. As in *PdM*, the difference between essence and material is collapsed in *OsG*.

In this way Walther seems to synthesise something of the early and later Wittgenstein, showing an alternative form of the development of philosophical thinking at this time. This is a form of philosophising whose creativity is important. Marjorie Perloff gives an account of the creativity of Wittgenstein's earlier text, which saw him move away from Bertrand Russell, who lamented that Wittgenstein has become 'a complete mystic' by the time the *Tractatus* is

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 98–9.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

published.¹⁶¹ The *Tractatus* accounts for the meaning of propositions as discrete entities whose connection can only be grasped through analysis of logical connectors. Meaning cannot be explained discursively because this would necessitate our standing beyond the realm in which that meaning is meaningful. Hence ‘das Mystische’ of the *Tractatus*: it designates that which is beyond what we can say.¹⁶² Here Wittgenstein can be seen to bear some similarity to Walther: there is a sense that there are certain matters which cannot be represented in philosophical propositions. And there is a sense of some mysterious ungrounded horizon of meaning which grounds those statements we can make. Perloff notes that Wittgenstein soon came to reject his previous conception of propositions as discrete atomic entities. She relays comments Wittgenstein made to members of the Vienna Circle in 1929: ‘What was wrong about my conception [in the *Tractatus*] was that I believed that the syntax of logical constants could be laid down without paying attention to the inner connection of propositions’. As he works on the *Philosophical Investigations* he develops what he calls ‘a more comprehensive syntax’.¹⁶³ This ‘inner connection’ stands parallel to that invoked by Walther, and represents Wittgenstein’s lessening anxiety about the need to either logically quantify meaning or say nothing at all about it. He comes to recognise a meaning in use that goes beyond that propositional content that can be transferred into the language of logic. But Perloff emphasises what she calls the ‘poetic power’ of Wittgenstein’s earlier position: of allowing some degree of unsayability to stand.¹⁶⁴ Walther, in bringing the mystical into the material realm of everyday experience and understanding, preserves a ‘poetic power’ to her own work even as she implicitly rejects the possibility of an absolute grounding beyond materiality.

VII. Conclusion

¹⁶¹ Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein’s Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 30.

¹⁶² ‘Es gibt allerdings Unausprechliches. Dies zeigt sich, es ist das Mystische’. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung* [1921] (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2016), p. 111.

¹⁶³ Perloff, p. 46–7.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Gerda Walther was generally disappointed by the reception of her work by her early philosophical teachers, particularly that of *PdM*. I have noted that she did not wish for her work to be seen as a discussion of ‘ideale Möglichkeiten’, as Husserl read *PdM*; and as I have noted Heidegger dismissed *PdM* as marking phenomenology’s descent ‘zum philosophischen Lärm des Tages’. I have suggested in this chapter that Walther’s gender may have played some role in her negative reception, or that it may have contributed, as in Edith Stein’s case, to her relative lack of academic advancement. What I have shown here is that this is only one of the ways in which Walther can be seen to have fallen short of full participation in the structures of the philosophical community in which she found herself. It seems that Walther’s disappointment with this reception stems to some extent from the fact that she did not see herself as working in a different manner to those around her, similar to how Stein did not herself explicitly articulate the advancement upon her Husserlian starting point that her work represented.¹⁶⁵ Many of Walther’s early readers recognised that her performance was not quite of the right kind of philosopher; while her most recent readers overstate the extent to which she was that sort of philosopher. It is quite possible that the earlier readers saw in Walther’s work some of the alternative mode of philosophical operation she describes (and did not approve of it).

The distinctiveness of Walther’s alternative mode of philosophising can be illustrated by reference to an encounter with one of her early readers, Heidegger. Walther’s autobiography contains an anecdote about a seminar she attended which was ran by Heidegger. Heidegger designed an exercise to explore human intentionality. Walther describes it as follows:

Ich erinnere mich, wie wir in einem Seminar in Gedanken stundenlang eine einheitliche rote Fläche ‘betrachteten’, die uns als einziges Objekt ‘gegeben’ sein sollte. Wir sollten dadurch ermitteln, ob ein Bewußtsein, für das nur ein einziger, undifferenzierter ‘Gegenstand’ vorhanden ist, überhaupt zu dessen

¹⁶⁵ MacIntyre, p. 103.

Erfassung gelangen kann. (Ein Problem, das z. B. für die Unio Mystica wichtig ist, doch ging es hier nicht um diese.) Oder ob dazu nicht seine Unterscheidung von anderem nötig ist. Allerdings könnte jedes Subjekt sich immer – ohne einen weiteren ‘gegebenen’ Gegenstand zu haben – auf sich selbst zurückwenden – Aber was sollte es dazu veranlassen? Ich weiß nicht mehr, zu welchem Ergebnis wir kamen. (*ZaU*, p. 208)

As an attempt to create a scenario in which the subject only has one intentional object, this exercise might initially seem ridiculous; there are plainly other objects in the room which form part of the intentional horizon of this subject, even if they are not the direct object of its focus at that time (Walther’s account does not give us much of a sense of what Heidegger’s intention was here; this might well have been the point). This exercise as such cannot form part of an investigation of the pure, grounding I and the structures of its experience in the way in which it is conceived. There is simply too much *material* in the room. By extension, any phenomenological description of this experience which excludes the other objects entirely is a simplification of the experience: one which relies on the kind of abstraction which pushes that description into that risky territory in which it either misleads, or generalises beyond the point of really saying anything. However what is interesting in this anecdote is that Walther does not present any such criticism of the exercise. Rather she arrives at the idea that the way such an exercise might bring about useful results is if this extreme focused attention (itself, in a way, a personalised material form of the sorts of Cartesian scenarios which I have shown are ‘materialised’ in *PdM*) becomes part of a religious experience. What is enacted in this radical direction of attention is not the fundamental grounding structures of a pure I, but a religious devotion to a single object (here, the ‘red surface’, but as Walther’s aside shows God can be approached in the same way). This is the kind of ‘pure’ devotion Walther suggests as an alternative to phenomenological purity in her ‘Contra Heidegger!’ note.

Walther does not, as the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* does, entirely abandon the impulse to *ground* things in favour of providing what is a kind of careful catalogue of the ‘stylised’ relations (to use Stein’s terminology) governing human interaction and

language (one which shows those grounding efforts as another form of language to be catalogued rather than something underlying all other pursuits). Her text does to some extent form part of an explicit effort to get beyond deterministic accounts of human relations by means of Husserlian idealism. However as I have shown here, in her text's most interesting moments Walther pulls the 'grounds' onto the level of those everyday, material interactions. God (the element which comes to ground everything in *PdM*) becomes at times as accessible and material as the red surface from the Heidegger anecdote is. In my reading of *OsG* Walther has identified the problem of philosophical unsayability, and so presents a creative catalogue, a series of snapshots of social life which are not merely there to assist in a search for 'type A' grounds of community (marked by the inner connection). Instead the difference between 'type A' and 'type B' entities, between the material and the grounding, and between contingent and abstracted descriptions, is collapsed even as it is invoked. In this way *OsG* follows the redemptive path of *PdM*, each text employing these sorts of fixed differentiations only to overcome them, to render them fluid (a structure which is parallel to that of the social community in which distinct individuals find a radical unity in their differentiation).

In *PdM* and *OsG*, grounding elements such as the inner connection are conceived in mystical terms, in the sense that they are to some extent both 'beyond rational accounting'¹⁶⁶ and available to individuals as material experiences. They form part of a fluid and vital horizon of meaning which can become visible, but not to the extent that everything can be made to make sense (as in the later Wittgenstein). Even as these matters retain a sense of mystery, they are also everyday: part of what Heidegger disappointedly calls the 'Lärm des Tages'. In both texts Walther makes clear the value of creative and narrative description to her alternative philosophical and mystical mode: foregrounding irony, playfulness and anecdotal description as part of how community and mystical experience are treated in reflection; and relying on a

¹⁶⁶ To quote Stephen Mulhall. Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall*, pp. 98–9.

creative understanding of the meanings that are shared between community members, and between text and reader. For this reason I move in the next chapter to an analysis of Walther's references to literature and art, showing in more detail the kind of modernist artistic modes with which she displays an affinity. Having reframed Walther's use of philosophical abstraction here, I look to the other cultural locations of abstraction in the modernist era as part of the horizon in which Walther's work is meaningful.

CHAPTER FOUR: ART

I. Introduction: Modernism

I move now to a consideration of the role of art in Gerda Walther's two main published texts, indicating more precisely the sense in which artistic modernism forms a crucial part of the context of Walther's work. I have given some indication up to now of the role of artistic reference in Walther's work, and Walther's affinities with an artistic mode in her own writing. I have noted how Walther turns to art as she deviates from the established philosophical modes available to her as a member of the early phenomenological community, and as somewhat of an outsider. This can be seen in *PdM*, where her philosophical analogy collapses into a kind of modernist metaphor, or in the playful mini-narratives of *OsG*. This chapter examines some of Walther's explicit references to artistic works, and in foregrounding these references further characterises the distinct artistic character of her philosophy. In her work on mysticism, for example, artistic texts are referred to in a similar manner to that with which Walther refers to the accounts of various mystics; they are called upon as if to bear witness as Walther engages with forms of experience that defy characterisation of a very fixed sort. This positions the artistic text's relation to Walther's own text as a very intimate one. Beginning with this consideration of her explicit artistic references, I will work to expand the cultural context in which Walther's work takes shape, and reflect on how bringing Walther's work into such a context will assist in refining present-day discussions of modernist art, particularly with regard to its relations to phenomenology.

A brief example of such explicit artistic references will allow me to make clear the bearing of this consideration of art on my wider consideration of Walther's distinctive mode of writing. This example appears in Walther's chapter on 'Die Erfassung Gottes als unendliche geistige Person' in *PdM* (*PdM*, pp. 156–75). Walther is describing how 'Mitteilungen' and 'Ansprachen' can arrive in the experiencing subject; they can sometimes be

identified as coming directly from God, or their origins can be murkier (they might be ‘subjektive Phantasien und Einbildungen’, or ‘undeutliche telepathische Erlebnisse’) (*PdM*, pp. 161–2). A long footnote (spanning over two pages) notes the disturbing possibility that such communication might have as its origin not God, but the Devil (*PdM*, pp. 162–4). The note begins with one of many references to Teresa of Ávila: noting that Teresa is not always clear if communication from the Devil is identifiable as such due to its phenomenal character for the receiver, or if it is identifiable ‘nur auf Grund ihres satanischen Inhaltes’ (*PdM*, pp. 162).

In this footnote Walther introduces in a bracketed aside one of two references in *PdM* to Rudolf Borchardt’s drama ‘Verkündigung’, written between 1904 and 1908.¹⁶⁷ In characterising the quality of the ‘Licht’ (a term presented in quotation marks by Walther) associated with satanic communication, Walther includes the following in brackets:

(Wir verweisen auch hier wieder auf die mit unübertrefflicher Meisterschaft durchgeführte Darstellung dieses Sachverhaltes in Rudolf Borchardts Drama ‘Verkündigung’, vor allem auf die Stelle [S.34], wo der ‘falsche Bote’ der Jungfrau befiehlt, sich innerlich mit Spiegeln zu umstellen, die, sie von allen Wesen abschließend, sie sich selbst ‘als All’ genießen lassen.) (*PdM*, p. 163)

In this note Walther allows a fictional dramatic portrayal of the dangers of the satanic to act as a kind of illustration of the sort of experience she is phenomenologically characterising. As she warns of the possibility of satanic consequences to a long repose in the self, her text includes an intertextual reference: reaching outside of itself, in an instance of the sort of textual humility I have examined elsewhere.

I highlight two respects in which this sort of reference is interesting. First of all, it appears, despite its presence within brackets in a footnote, as just one of many forms of characterisation of the sort of experience in question. It is not a mere illustration, in the sense of an inessential add-on to the core textual description. Rather it is one of many non-absolute,

¹⁶⁷ The other reference appears in a footnote following a comment about the dangers of resting ‘in eitlem Selbstgenießen’, which can make one ‘wahnsinnig oder teuflisch’: ‘Vgl. die meisterhafte Darstellung des Satanischen in Rudolf Borchardts Drama “Verkündigung”’ (*PdM*, p. 102).

non-exhaustive characterisations of satanic communication: artistic production is as such positioned as one of a number of sources, including mystical sources, which allow Walther to approach, or approximate, her subject matter in a fluid manner. Walther's own language of divine or satanic 'Licht' is itself incomplete in the sense I have explored in the previous chapters, and so the artistic reference is not truly subordinated to the primary phenomenological description. The 'Vgl.' with which Teresa's work is introduced is not different to the 'Wir verweisen [...] auf' of the above quotation: both kinds of texts are appealed to as alternative characterisations of the experience in question. The second thing to note here is that this artistic reference lends a certain kind of accessibility to this account of divine and satanic communication. This is an account of difficult and unusual forms of experience, and even as Walther proceeds with the sort of figurative characterisation (using light imagery) that I have pointed out elsewhere, she nonetheless offers the reader an indication of how they might make sense of this by means of engagement with artistic output and their cultural context.

In this chapter I give an account of the relation between Walther's explicit reference to artistic texts and her own distinctive phenomenological method. I consider the significance of Walther's reference to works by Stefan George (of which there are many), as well as her passing reference to expressionist painting, included among her strange colour-coded catalogues of mystical experiences in *PdM*. An aside quoting a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, followed by a disapproving reference to his approach, assists in showing how poetry offers Walther a model for speaking about God. Alongside these modernist examples, I discuss the addition of highly accessible references to *Alice Through the Looking Glass* in the revised 1955 edition of *PdM*. In including such explicit artistic references to different kinds of sources, Walther's work sits between accessibility and difficulty: just as her metaphors in *PdM* allow for her text to appear at times as spiritual guidebook, and at times something only comprehensible to those already in the know. I frame this discussion in terms of recent

scholarship on modernism which locates modernist artistic (and philosophical) output in the tension between habit on the one hand, and novelty or shock on the other.

This sort of explicit reference to artistic texts has gone mostly undiscussed in scholarship on Walther. This might initially seem understandable: quotations from literary texts are hardly unheard of in philosophical texts, and do not necessarily need to constitute a crucial part of the text's strategy (though they might nonetheless be of interest). However, in the case of Walther's work, I have demonstrated that material included in footnotes and asides is very often revealed as having real significance in a careful reading of her work. Examples of this include the parts of *PdM* written in smaller type, or the footnote in *OsG* in which a crucial modification to the Husserlian position regarding the essences of 'individual' beings is outlined (*OsG*, p. 5). Walther continually makes her most distinctive points in an indirect manner, with that indirectness itself at issue. And in both of the texts I have examined, some version of a narrative or literary form of writing is employed as part of Walther's phenomenological description: such as the narrative playfulness of her anecdotal accounts in *OsG*, the examples of narrative irony as opposed to philosophical argumentation in both texts, and the textual enthusiasm of *PdM*, which bears both an artistic as well as a personal-mystical character. Investigating her use of explicit artistic reference will contribute then to the development of a more precise account of the relation between Walther's texts and those modernist artistic modes which I argue form a crucial part of the context in which her work ought to be understood.

Walther's explicit engagement with artistic texts contributes to the sense of her work as 'modernist': as embodying an approach and specific textual strategies shared with, or borrowed from, non-philosophical, and specifically artistic, cultural practices in the modern period. The sense of the term 'modernism' encountered in scholarship on art and philosophy in modernity is itself in flux. As Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei puts it, a basic characteristic of

these varied modernist sources is that they occupy a ‘tension between everydayness and ecstasis’.¹⁶⁸ Meanwhile scholarship on modernism displays a similar tension, between on the one hand a (more dominant) view of the modernist period as characterised by radical crises and ‘cracks’ in our habitual modes of experience,¹⁶⁹ and, on the other, the sense of a pragmatic form of modernism which allows habit to appear (in Lisi Schoenbach’s words) as ‘generative and productive’ rather than merely ‘stultifying and disabling’.¹⁷⁰

I have introduced the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein as a point of comparison with Walther, highlighting a common playfulness of approach. Out of this comparison arose the sense that even as Walther maintains some commitment to mysterious and even mystical essential *grounds* to language and experience, she collapses the difference between this essential ground and everyday, habitual experience. Walther foregrounds the everyday, never quite suspending Husserl’s natural standpoint. Rather she locates her field of enquiry firmly in the ‘Lärm des Tages’ (to adopt and even reclaim Heidegger’s disparaging language). In that Walther finds a synthesis between the mysterious horizon and the everyday, her work is not only relevant to this discussion around the very character of ‘modernism’ in artistic and philosophical contexts, but also offers a model for a way out of some of the trickiest contradictions of that discussion.

As scholars such as Mildenberg and Gosetti-Ferencei expand the term ‘modernism’ to include philosophical, and specifically phenomenological, texts which engage in a similar project of reorientation, so too is Wittgenstein increasingly seen as a modernist philosopher. In Marjorie Perloff’s account, Wittgenstein’s earlier text bears a ‘poetic power’, leaving space

¹⁶⁸ Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ See for example Mildenberg, p. 17. Mildenberg quotes Gertrude Stein, who in 1984 called the modernist period ‘a time when everything cracks’, and characterises modernist literature and art, as well as phenomenology, in terms of responses to this radical rupture in habitual modes of viewing and speaking about the world.

¹⁷⁰ Schoenbach, p. 6.

for some degree of unsayability.¹⁷¹ Wittgenstein's work is conceived then as not closed off from literary production; indeed Wittgenstein discussed with Ludwig von Ficker the possibility of publishing the *Tractatus* in von Ficker's literary journal *Der Brenner*.¹⁷² Ben Ware situates Wittgenstein's philosophical efforts in the *Tractatus* as arising out of a modernist approach to the world and to language, using the language of shock or crisis. Positioning 'modernism' as a wide range of responses to the 'problem' of 'modernity'¹⁷³, Ware characterises diverse artistic, philosophical and social-critical modernist writing as sharing a 'directedness of [...] form':

[...] all are committed to an affirmation of the *new* and to the production of works which engage with the novelty of the present; [...] all are driven by a *negation-compulsion*, whereby the old – understood as past forms or past ideas – is systematically discarded as part of a process arriving at a transformed aesthetic, ethical or political perspective.¹⁷⁴

Modernist art is responding in this conception to the revelation of the inadequacy of habitual language (due to either the groundlessness, or the staleness, of its terms). Ware draws on canonical German texts by Karl Kraus and Hugo von Hofmannsthal which advance different kinds of 'linguistic scepticism' in response to the challenges of the era.¹⁷⁵ As language itself (artistic and otherwise) is called into question, Hofmannsthal depicts a world as summed up by Ware, 'in which all hitherto fixed meanings have been displaced by a sense of dispossession, alienation and conceptual fragmentation'.¹⁷⁶ For Ware, this is the context in which Wittgenstein operates when he calls into question the notion of fixed, representational meaning. And it is certainly true that there is a sense of this sort of crisis in Walther's work, as

¹⁷¹ Perloff, p. 47.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 31–2.

¹⁷³ Ben Ware, *Dialectic of the Ladder: Wittgenstein, the 'Tractatus' and Modernism* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 1–4 (p. 3).

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 2–3.

well as that of many other phenomenologists: her account of human relations and meaning is framed in terms of human ‘fallenness’.¹⁷⁷

The account Ware presents is a fairly typical depiction of modernism in general and German modernism in particular grappling with the challenges of a ‘Sprachkrise’ which is canonically presented as beginning with Nietzsche’s *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*, and includes the figures Ware cites, especially Hofmannsthal.¹⁷⁸ This is itself a version of the ‘shock’ oriented model of modernism which Schoenbach contends tells only part of the story around modernism. In a sense the kind of account Ware presents in the case of Wittgenstein is very useful, and reconstructs part of the context in which Walther’s own productive struggles around (un)sayability, representation and communication have a clear cultural resonance. I have already noted how the Nietzsche text in particular forms a useful point of comparison with Walther in her use of indirect, mystical description. But there is also a sense in which this vision of a crisis of language does not seem to fit Walther’s case. It is overly pessimistic; despite Walther’s invocation of crises both personal and societal, she appears motivated throughout her work by the hopeful desire to approach God, others, and meaning. Even if that approach must take an indirect form, and she must employ diverse tools, none of which are sufficient in themselves, Walther does not ontologise the unsayability with which she grapples to the point where meaning is *as such* unachievable. As in the mystical tradition represented by Teresa and drawn upon by Walther, humility around one’s own capabilities (to do with language and otherwise) does not always act as a barrier.

The other related difficulty with this conception of modernism as grappling with the shock of language’s contingency is one that Ware himself is aware of, and is a conceptual

¹⁷⁷ See for example Walther’s depiction of a crisis of over-intellectualism in philosophy as a kind of Fall (*PdM*, p. 31). Husserl too writes in terms of modern ‘crises’: see for example Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie* [1936], ed. by Walter Biemel, *Husserliana*, VI (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976).

¹⁷⁸ See for example the overview of the topic in Martina King, ‘Sprachkrise’, in *Handbuch Literatur und Philosophie*, ed. by Hans Feger (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2012).

difficulty that seems to plague any attempts to define or otherwise fix a characterisation of modernism. In constructing the modernist context in which Wittgenstein is to be placed, Ware refers to differing conceptions or definitions of modernity and modernism, which share only the sense that both the conditions of modern life, and the artistic or philosophical responses to it, resist being pinned down. So while Fredric Jameson describes the ‘hollowing out’ of the term ‘modern’ itself, T.J. Clarke emphasises the contingency of modernism; all of this Ware uses to reach his reading of modernism as concerned with novelty, arguing that this is the sense in which it is relevant to Wittgenstein.¹⁷⁹ As for scholarship on phenomenology and modernism, Mildenberg writes that modernist artists exhibit ‘less one particular style than a search for a style’.¹⁸⁰ Modernist art (and philosophy) displays a particular resistance to being spoken about in fixed terms. In a sense, ‘modernism’ as a term behaves like an ‘Etwas’ (*PdM*, p. 9) or a ‘Gesuchtes’ (*ZaU*, p. 273) in Walther’s philosophy: a uniting essence of some kind, but one which we can only circle around or approach in our discourse. How Walther might assist in this discourse is in offering a model by which the shock of this unsayability is integrated into a more pragmatic approach. The indefinability of the term ‘modernism’ does not prevent a huge amount of academic study revolving around something that scholars basically agree modernism ‘is’; this alone shows that most scholars who work on modernism are in some sense pragmatic in their approach to the field.

The trouble with this unarticulated agreement around the meaning of ‘modernism’ is that certain differences which can or should be articulated to some degree are not given adequate treatment. In presenting the alternative model of pragmatic modernism, Schoenbach argues that ‘studies of modernism have been dominated too long by a central ideology [...] of rupture, opposition, and anti-institutionality’.¹⁸¹ Instead she outlines that habit has as much of

¹⁷⁹ Ware, pp. 8–11.

¹⁸⁰ Mildenberg, p. 19.

¹⁸¹ Schoenbach, p. 12.

a role for certain modernists as novelty and shock do for others. In doing so she notes the contradiction that arises when the search for novelty itself becomes a habit, and the primacy of shock an institutionalised value. Schoenbach argues ‘that we should rise to the challenge of this paradox rather than throwing up our hands in despair’.¹⁸² In a similar way I argue that Walther’s work may offer a model for a pragmatic consideration of the shocks of modernism. Schoenbach’s contradiction around habit and novelty applies directly to the phenomenological situation, and to the tensions in phenomenology that are at issue throughout Walther’s work. Walther is unwilling to fully commit to the purity of standpoint of Husserlian phenomenology, and problematises that very purity. At its best her phenomenology describes something other than ‘contingency as such’, itself a structural absolute about which little can be said. The perpetual beginner of Husserl’s philosophy, whose commitment to continued novelty exhibits the contradictory character Schoenbach outlines, has quite a different character in Walther’s work. Walther might present the challenges of experience and of describing experience in ‘shocked’, crisis-oriented terms, but her response to that shock is thoroughly pragmatic.

As I show in this chapter, Walther’s engagement with literature and art forms part of this pragmatic response, with art, like mysticism, offering a kind of comfort in the face of philosophy’s lack of self-sufficiency. Following a consideration of Walther’s more ‘difficult’ artistic references, those to Stefan George and expressionist painting which appear in her most figurative mystical passages, I return in this chapter to Walther’s motif of childhood, placing it in a wider cultural context. Commonly employed by both phenomenologists and modernist artists, childhood appears in Walther’s work as a source of fluid, redemptive structures in *PdM*, and in the fairy-play of *O;G* as part of a creative account of togetherness and meaning-making. Gosetti-Ferencei identifies in her account of modernism and

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 13.

phenomenology's connections a topos of 'childhood as [a] state of freedom from fixed conceptuality and habit that characterises adult consciousness re-engaged in for the revitalisation of quotidian life'.¹⁸³ I examine the extent to which Walther does follow the shock-oriented logic of 'originary' childhood experience, and the extent to which childhood is instead valued as concrete, contingent experience. In discussing childhood as ideal, I consider as well the ideal of the 'primitive' pervasive in Walther's cultural surroundings. I follow this with consideration of Walther's reference to a poem by Rilke, exploring more fully how literature and philosophy approach God. I conclude by considering Walther's additions of references to children's literature in the 1955 revised edition of *PdM*, which firmly reconfigure childhood on the side of the pragmatic. I view this not as a departure from Walther's original model, but rather as a case of Walther herself making explicit pragmatist impulses implicit in her work as early as in the fairy-play of *OsG*.

II. Stefan George and community

Walther's engagement with Stefan George's poetry and the community surrounding him demonstrate her grappling with the tensions of modernist language. Walther makes references to George's poetry throughout the second half of *PdM*. In this part of the text she treats mystical experience more directly than in the first half, which covers the structure of experience more generally. In some sense these references align with the 'shocked' sense of Walther's modernist tendencies. They tend to appear when Walther is describing the most intense forms of mystical experience, at which point her own descriptive strategies undergo the interesting breakdown I give an account of in my second chapter. As Walther's own language becomes more figurative, her references to other sources, mystical and poetic,

¹⁸³ Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, pp. 59–60. It is worth noting that this topos, prevalent in the 1900s, hinges on an idealised and overly simplistic vision of childhood behaviour. There is more recent research showing, for example, that children participate in habitual social conventions, and adopt and even themselves enforce certain social norms from a very young age. See Marco F. H. Schmidt and Michael Tomasello, 'Young Children Enforce Social Norms', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 21 (4) (2012), 232–6.

increase. But the first reference to George appears earlier. *PdM* has a ‘Widmung’ in its opening pages, which reads: ‘Dem Stern, der leuchtet in den Finsternissen unsrer Zeit: – dem Stern des Bundes zwischen Gott und Mensch und des Menschen mit dem Menschen in Gott’ (*PdM*, p. iii). If this is not an indirect reference to George’s 1914 collection *Der Stern des Bundes*, which is directly referenced several times in *PdM*, it at least demonstrates that George-esque language has entered Walther’s own devotional vocabulary.¹⁸⁴ Appearing in this dedication, this indicates the possibility for such language to form a part of the author’s approach to God. In this section I briefly consider George’s status in relation to ‘modernism’, and then reflect on the general context of the George references in Walther’s work, considering their status in the text. I offer some biographical context for Walther’s engagement with the George circle as indicated in her autobiography. I then examine in more detail a few specific examples of poetic reference, and look at how these operate within the text; particularly in relation to her colour and jewel schema for categorising different kinds of mystical experience (which includes as well a reference to paintings by Franz Marc).

Stefan George is a difficult figure in the history of German modernism. There is a clear sense in which he can be viewed as part of the sort of context of modernist poetry which is drawn on above: a modernism which identifies inadequacies in tradition and works at a kind of renewal through language. Yet George does not make an appearance in the recent scholarship on modernism and philosophy I discuss above, even where they do focus on the German tradition. George’s status as a modernist is disputed. On the one hand, he is sometimes considered one of the great figures of the era, and is situated alongside figures like Rilke and Hofmannsthal who are very much considered typical German modernists (insomuch as there can be said to be any ‘typical’ form of German modernism). Jens Rieckmann writes:

¹⁸⁴ References to *Der Stern des Bundes* appear at *PdM*, p. 138, p. 145, p. 191.

George is one of the three pre-eminent German poets of his time. Together with Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Rainer Maria Rilke, he initiated the revival of German poetry at the turn of the century and put an end to the ‘Sing-Sang Mode’ of post-Romantic German poetry.¹⁸⁵

As David Fernbach puts it, George can be compared with Rilke, in that both are ‘heavily influenced by Nietzsche, bending the German language to [their] will’.¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, George’s brand of aestheticism is considered by some to be decidedly anti-modernist.¹⁸⁷ Indeed Fernbach notes that George would himself disavow the modern Nietzschean connections other see in him: ‘George followed in the wake of Nietzsche — not that he would recognize any mentor later than Goethe and Hölderlin’.¹⁸⁸ This can be seen as another expression of the kind of self-mythologisation seen in Husserl’s ‘return’ to Descartes, which has its place in the modernist cultural imagining. In this way George’s rejection of the cultural decay of the present day, and search for a ‘return’ to something more valuable underlying it or preceding it, fits the modernist ‘shock’ model. It is not a constant search for novelty, or rejection of all that is old, as conceived in Ware’s vision of modernism.¹⁸⁹ But it does fit with the kind of modernist structures presented in recent studies of phenomenology and modernism, in which the radical rejection of habit takes the form of a ‘return’ to pre-reflective modes of experience and uses of language. This sort of model appears to align with Walther’s structures of Fall and redemption, which propose a conscious return to a (previously unconscious) fluid and harmonious ‘Kindheitszustand’ (*PdM*, p. 113). However Walther’s engagement with George is quite a personal one, relating far more to her sense that his poetry speaks to the kinds of concrete religious or mystical experiences she had herself.

¹⁸⁵ Jens Rieckmann, ‘Introduction’, in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, ed. by Jens Rieckmann (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), pp. 1–22 (p. 1).

¹⁸⁶ David Fernbach, ‘Prophet-Pariah’, *New Left Review*, 18 (2002), 149–53 (p. 150).

¹⁸⁷ See for example Stefan Breuer, *Ästhetischer Fundamentalismus: Stefan George und der deutsche Antimodernismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995).

¹⁸⁸ Fernbach, p. 149.

¹⁸⁹ Ware, p. 11.

Walther cites George throughout the second part of *PdM* in much the same manner as she does various mystical sources: a tendency that is potentially problematic. Walther is generally not particularly critical when engaging with mystical sources; she does not question the events described by mystics, or how they were recorded or edited. And her simultaneous invocation of poetic ‘sources’ might be seen to suggest that these poetic texts carry some argumentative weight, if one views Walther’s text as attempting to prove or legitimise her discussion of mystical experience. An example of this occurs when Walther is describing how the divine ‘Grundwesen’ enters into one’s own essence (in chapter six, ‘Die Erfassung Gottes und des Grundwesens in ihm’, *PdM*, pp. 130–56). In describing how the Ich returns to itself after residing for a time in the ‘Unendlichkeit des Alls’ (*PdM*, p. 137), Walther states that the Ich begins to ‘see’ and feel its own foundational essence again, and follows this statement with a footnote reading ‘Vgl. Buber, l. c. S. 97, 108, 112, 124, 143’ (*PdM*, p. 138). Just a half page later she states that the Ich ought not to fully lose its connection to the source of this mystical experience, and includes the following footnote: ‘Vgl. Stefan George, “Der Stern des Bundes”, S. 78’ (*PdM*, p. 138).

At points like this it appears that Walther does not see much of a difference between citing the poetic and the mystical sources: the mystics (as mediated by Buber) and the poet are all called upon as witnesses, and the status of the texts in question (as historical or religious sources, or as works of art) is not given any explicit consideration. At a later point in the text, when describing the different ways in which human ‘Mittler’ can have a role in relaying messages from God (‘sei es, daß der Mittler ein Menschgott, sei es, daß er ein Gottmensch ist’, *PdM*, p. 193), she turns not to the mystics but to George. At this point she addresses the difference between the two sources only in terms of the historical time-distance between them: ‘Um statt vieler Beispiele aus der Vergangenheit ein einziges aus unserer Zeit anzuführen, möchten wir hier nur verweisen auf die Vorrede des von Stefan George herausgegebenen Maximin-Gedenkbuches, abgedrückt in der 3. Auslese aus den “Blättern für

die Kunst” (1909)’ (*PdM*, p. 193). Before discussing several of these references in more detail, I present some biographical context for Walther’s engagement with George. This offers important hints as to the status of George’s work generally in Walther’s phenomenology of mystical experience.

I have suggested up to this point that it is a mistake to read *PdM* as attempting to prove the possibility of mystical experience, or to legitimise discussion of it (other than those points examined in my second chapter where Walther is uncharacteristically defensive in response to an imagined critical academic reader). It is not in the service of such a proof that she calls upon her mystical ‘witnesses’. Rather these references appear in the text as examples from members of a shared religious community, whose experiences of the divine contribute to the context in which Walther’s own language around God and the mystical gains shape. Walther’s references to George bear the same character as these references to the mystics. Her references to George’s poetry for the most part reveal that she views George as a kindred spirit whose poetry offers another way of approaching or approximating God through language.

Walther is very clear about this in her 1960 autobiography. She gives an account of her tangential engagement with the Georgekreis in the chapter entitled ‘Der Jünger und sein Meister’, focusing mostly on her troubled relationship with Percy Gothein, a member of George’s circle, and the ‘Jünger’ of the chapter’s title (*ZaU*, pp. 291–321). As she describes it, she discovered the poetry of Stefan George as a student in Munich, when visiting Karl Löwith (another student of Husserl and Heidegger). While waiting for Löwith at his home, she noticed a large violet book, picked it up, and saw that it was George’s *Der siebente Ring* (1907). Löwith entered the room, took the book out of her hands, and said ‘Das ist nichts für Sie!’. Intrigued, Walther saw the book displayed in a shop window a short while later (‘fast als hätte es dort auf mich gewartet’), and purchased it (*ZaU*, p. 291).

Walther describes how she initially struggled to understand the book, but that the poem ‘Kunfttag I’, which she quotes almost in its entirety in *ZaU*, acted as the magic key that opened the rest: ‘Ja, das verstand ich: wie ein “Sesam öffne dich” erschloß sich mir von hier aus das ganze Werk’ (*ZaU*, p. 291). Walther sees in this poem, which she notes describes the experience of another individual, Maximin,¹⁹⁰ a direct reflection of the sort of mystical experience she began having a couple of years earlier:

Ja, diese fürchterliche Nacht, hatte ich sie nicht erlebt, als ich damals, im Winter 1918/19, zwischen zwei Welten hing und ins endlose, finstere Nichts zu stürzen fürchtete? Und hatte mich da nicht jener Lichtstrahl, jene Flut von Licht und Wärme aufgenommen? (*ZaU*, p. 292)

In this passage of *ZaU*, ‘understanding’ literature is a matter of recognising in it something of one’s own experience. Walther is quite clear not only that the poem speaks to her experience, but that the light it describes is ‘the same’ as the one she experienced: ‘[...] war die Nacht nicht die gleiche, wie hier? [...] Zu jedem bahnte [das göttliche Licht] sich wohl auf eine andere, diesem angemessene Weise den Weg, doch das Licht war dasselbe, in welcher Gestalt auch immer es sich kundgeben mochte’ (*ZaU*, p. 292). In this sense Walther seems resistant to a modernist aesthetics where the free play of language is entirely free of any underlying, non-formal value. Walther is astounded by her teacher Pfänder’s assertion that George is purely an ‘Ästhet’, and sees his dismissal of George as the result of a bias she is dismayed to see in a teacher who had always demanded of his students ‘strengste Objektivität’ (*ZaU*, p. 293).

Walther is adamant in her defence of George, describing this encounter with Pfänder as evidence in favour of Max Weber’s assertion that ‘Brodem des Spießbürgertums reiche in Deutschland bis in die höchsten Kreise der Gelehrtenaristokratie hinauf’ in any matters concerning sexuality (*ZaU*, p. 293). She describes as a ‘tragedy’ the negative reception, persisting to the time of her writing *ZaU*, of George’s contribution to the spiritual life of the

¹⁹⁰ See Rieckmann, p. 13.

nation.¹⁹¹ And she distinguishes herself from the ‘aesthetes’ who received his work positively: ‘Stefan George wurde ja zumeist von “Ästheten” geschätzt, obwohl man ihn meiner Meinung nach nur vom Religiösen, von der Welt des “Heiligen” her völlig begreifen kann’ (*ZaU*, p. 294). Walther’s inclusion of references to George in *PdM*, and the fact that these references are treated in much the same way as those to mystical texts, makes sense in the light of the fact that she saw George as both genuinely religious, and as using poetry to speak (if indirectly) of mystical experiences which bore the same phenomenal character as those which she herself experienced.

There is a sense in which this kind of relation to literature might be said to be limited, if it is the only kind of literary ‘understanding’ Walther envisaged. It could perhaps be argued that Walther’s view of literature here relies on some underlying, fundamental commitment to realism: the view that literature ought to describe experience, and that formal, aesthetic experimentation is some kind of unnecessary indulgence. However Walther does not make any absolute pronouncements about the function of literature; there is no reason to think that this is the only kind of literary engagement that she allows for. And the sense in which George’s poetry relates to religious experience in Walther’s view is not that they are representative or descriptive in some direct, realistic sense. Rather his poetry appears in Walther’s view to operate in an analogous way to her own indirect, figurative phenomenological characterisation. As they appear in Walther’s texts, George’s poems have a devotional rather than a directly descriptive relation to mystical experience, and there is no hierarchy of these kinds of indirect characterisation. Philosophy is not above poetry; both seem to offer something useful to Walther. In integrating poetry in this way Walther

¹⁹¹ ‘Welche Tragik, daß er, der seinem Volk so viel hätte geben können, es zu größter Vollendung in Schönheit, Wahrheit und Kraft aus dem höchsten göttlich-geistigen Erleben heraus erziehen wollte, so verkannt, so in den Schmutz gezogen wurde und wird!’ (*ZaU*, p. 293).

demonstrates a freedom of approach that has a modernist character, in the sense that she moves fluidly between previously more fixed disciplines or discourses.

The particular George references in *PdM* I wish to focus on here appear in chapter six, ‘Die Erfassung Gottes und des Grundwesens in ihm’ (*PdM*, pp. 130–56). This is the chapter I discussed towards the end of my second chapter, in which Walther describes an ‘Es’ that enters into the Ich in its detached state. Walther’s characterisation of experience in this chapter operates with a deferral of meaning: as well as a lack of absolute claims, there is a lack of fixed designators when it comes to the divine and the experience of it. Meaning is made indirectly. Descriptions of the experience of the divine foundational essence in one’s own foundational essence feature several footnoted references to mystical accounts collected by Buber, and to poems by George (see especially *PdM*, pp. 136–8).

In the passage covering how the Ich returns to the world, having spent some time in this mystical state, two stanzas of the George poem ‘Kunfttag III’ appear suddenly in the main text. This poem is part of George’s ‘Maximin’ poems in *Der siebente Ring* (1907). The stanzas appear after Walther’s description of how the Ich, when it begins to ‘see’ others and the world again, can now see divine light in them when it is present. I quote the lines directly preceding the poem:

Vor allem ‘sieht’ [das Ich] die anderen Menschen wieder, die ihm einst lieb und teuer waren, ehe es in jenem furchtbaren Abgrund versank. Doch immer ist es dabei noch ganz von weitem gehalten von jener anderen Lichtquelle und auch sie sieht es deshalb nun in ihrem Schein, mit ihren ‘Augen’, fühlt auch sie mit ihrem ‘Herzen’: [...]. (*PdM*, p. 139)

This quotation demonstrates the kind of incompleteness of description that I have previously outlined: the use of quotation marks on ‘sieht’, ‘Augen’ and ‘Herzen’ indicates that these terms are employed in some way other than or beyond their ordinary usage.

The George stanzas follow this quoted passage directly, reading:

Eh blöd der menschen sinn

Ihm ansann wort und tat
Hat schon des schöpfers hauch
Jed ding im raum beseelt.

Wenn solch ein auge glüht
Gedeiht der trocken stamm ·
Die starre erde pocht
Neu durch ein heilig herz. (*PdM*, pp 139).¹⁹²

With most of *PdM*'s references to George, as with many of its references to mystical sources, a page number is given in a footnote without a quotation or a comment. In those cases, the reader is given the option to go elsewhere for an alternative form of description, or another example of the kind of thing described in the main text. In this case, the poem is integrated into Walther's text. Given the contingency and fluidity of the phenomenological descriptions presented in the main text, the poem's status is raised to that of the main text's description. All of the language used, philosophical and (quoted) poetic language, is all equally inessential or incomplete; and so in another sense then the poem has a genuine significance in the text. Indeed it can be seen in Walther's inclusion of this poem that she adopts many of the more figurative metaphorical designators used in this section from George: the 'Auge' and 'Herzen' attributed to 'Gott' in this section of the main text (e.g. *PdM*, p. 138) appear in the quoted George poem attributed to the 'schöpfer'.

Walther does not reflect explicitly on the role of the poem within her text, but it is presented as an alternative expression of her point about how an Ich who has had a direct experience of the divine may then see divine light in things in the world. The poem is followed directly by the line: 'Das Ich hat nun gelernt, auch in allen anderen geistigen,

¹⁹² The first stanza of this poem is not quoted by Walther. It reads:
'Nun wird es wieder lenz ..
Du weihst den weg die luft
Und uns auf die du schaust –
So stammle dir mein dank.'
Stefan George, *Der siebente Ring* [1907], Gesamt-Ausgabe der Werke, VI/VII (Berlin, Bondi, 1931), pp. 97–8.

seelischen und körperlichen Wesen einen Strahl jenes Lichtmeeres zu sehen und zu erkennen, wo er vorhanden ist' (*PdM*, pp. 139). The poem however focuses not on an Ich's experience, but centres the idea that the divine is in the world prior to human understanding of it (reading the 'Auge' of the poem as being the divine 'Auge' Walther mentions in the sentence that introduces the quotation). Its focus then is subtly different to that of the main text: the poem interrupts the main text's narrative of the Ich's return to the world. It offers in the first two lines quoted a reminder to remain humble, and in the second quoted stanza presents a vital world whose vitality is of a primal sort, belonging to 'stamm' and 'erde', not to the 'menschen' of the first quoted line. As well as offering a reflection on the divine that alters the focus of the main text, the poem offers an explicit reflection on the relation between human understanding and language, and the divine. The divine (the 'Schöpfer') has done what it does before any clumsy human attempts to impose upon it 'wort und tat'. So the interruption of the main narrative by the poem acts as a reminder both of the contingency of the human experiences it describes, and of that description itself.

I examined in my second chapter some of the kinds of metaphorical determiners Walther employs, particularly how they take on a particular weight and status within the text when the contingency of all its terms are revealed. Walther's schematic of colours and jewels for categorising different forms of mystical experience is one of the kinds of vocabulary she chooses. She develops this schema throughout the section of her text in which the most George quotes appear. I noted in that chapter the potential problematic nature of this categorisation, in that Walther appears at times to lay claim to some sense of exhaustiveness in her description. However in the light of my analysis of her playful 'cataloguing' in *OsG*, the schema she describes here may be viewed as more playful, and less absolute. An important aspect of the light, colour and jewel imagery is that Walther clearly borrows from George in drawing up this imagery. Even if she does not say so explicitly, some of the first use of

specific colour imagery, which I quote below, appears just a few lines after a quote from a George poem:

[...] ähnlich ist das göttliche Geisteslicht auch jenem weißen Licht, das aus dem eigenen 'Kopf' in das Ich hineinströmt, nur hat es einen 'goldenen' Ton und ist unendlich viel reicher als das 'weiße' Licht des Menschengeistes oder die einseitige 'Farbe' seiner besonderen seelischen Aura, denn es ist nicht einseitig 'gefärbt' mit der 'Farbe' eines einzelnen, besonderen Grundwesens [...]. (*PdM*, p. 141)

On the next page this divine light appears as 'das leuchtende Weiß eines sonnenüberfluteten Schneefeldes', which both remains white and carries 'tausend im Sonnenglanz sprühende Funken von allen nur erdenklichen Farben' (*PdM*, p. 143). Walther continues in this vein, her descriptions of Godly love becoming all the more figurative until the subject she describes is called a 'würdiger Träger jener Funken' (*PdM*, p. 145). At this point her narrative is interrupted again by an extract from a Stefan George poem, this time from the third book of *Der Stern des Bundes*, which is printed in *PdM* as below:

Da
Ihr in geweihtes haus geleitet waret,
Sprachlos erschüttert eure kniee beugtet
Im kern ergriffen an ein all euch gabet
Da brach die alte not – euch ward ein Sinn ...
Ihr richtet euch empor in stolz und freude
Nicht nur am haupt: am ganzen leibe strahlend ...
Ein herz voll liebe dringt in alle wesen
Ein herz voll eifer strebt in jede höhe
Und heilig nüchtern hebt der taglauf an. (*PdM*, p. 145)

This poem interrupts the text but contains imagery and terms that feature directly in that main text: one that stands out in particular is the 'strahlen' of the entire body.

The poetic quotation, itself a fragment of a poem as indicated by the dotted line,¹⁹³ is immediately followed by a broken line physically interrupting the text, after which Walther states that 'von der jetzt erreichten Höhe unserer Betrachtungen aus', the workings of an Ich

¹⁹³ For the full poem in its original context see Stefan George, *Der Stern des Bundes* [1914], 5th edn (Berlin: Bondi, 1922), p. 82.

and its foundational essence can be drawn up, 'gleichnishaft' (*PdM*, p. 145). The presence of the broken line, the interruption of the poem, destabilises the narrative-descriptive voice of the text and offers a reminder of the contingency of those terms that follow. As great heights are reached in this explicit narrative, as well as in the content of the poem, the precarity of the Ich's situation and of the text's achievements is emphasised with these destabilising formal features.

The contingent terms that follow are an even more specific scheme of metaphors in which the different sides of one's foundational essence appear as coloured jewels and stone. The foundational essence as 'Geist' is 'ein weißer Bergkristall'; as 'Seele' it is a warm red ruby, a deep-blue sapphire (and possibly a violet mix of the two), or some other coloured 'Edelstein' or a multi-coloured opal; the 'Leib' is 'wie gewöhnliches Gestein' 'erdig', and can be lit up by the other sides (*PdM*, p. 146–7). The description includes a note that the body ought not to be neglected; the harmony achieved here is 'weit vollendeter [...] als jenes asketische Ideal der Schwäche' (*PdM*, p. 148). The everyday stone of the body is important too. Walther also often categorises the 'seelisch' or 'geistig' auras she experiences radiating from others along similar colour-lines.¹⁹⁴

Though the specific George quotations included by Walther do not include much reference to colour or jewel references, this is the sort of imagery which George used commonly. Rey Conquer presents an account of the special status of colour and coloured material in George's poetics, noting that colour appears in poetry generally to negotiate a dual presence and absence:

What colour language and coloured stuff seems to share is a certain elusiveness with respect to *meaning*; both colour words and the colours of lights, pigments, cloth and so on seem to oscillate between semantic richness and emptiness or indifference.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ For reference to Stefan George's own aura, see *ZaU*, p. 317.

¹⁹⁵ Rey Conquer, *Reading Colour: George, Rilke, Kandinsky, Lasker-Schüler* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), p. 2.

As Conquer notes, colour-words are often seen as markers of the difficulties of language (a difficulty that aligns with post-Nietzschean modernist anxieties around language): they evoke a type of thing that is absent in the text in some distinctive way.¹⁹⁶ In George's case in particular, Conquer notes that colour-words are key to George's negotiation of the distance between the concrete and abstract, whereby 'the concrete is an excuse for the abstract'.¹⁹⁷ The colour in George's poetry is generalised, absolute or abstract colour, and the coloured material or objects, the instantiations of that colour, are 'pretexts' for the colour. In this process, 'the everyday [is] dragged upwards, rather than art downwards'.¹⁹⁸

Walther's colour and jewel schematics follow the logic of George's poetics. In choosing words which carry with them a heightened sense of their own absence in the text, Walther's description manages at this point to be both more concrete than elsewhere (in the sense that it is referring to objects of sensory experience) and more abstract (in the sense that those concrete references do not function in their usual referential material context when applied to mystical experience). This is another example of Walther collapsing the distance between the concrete everyday and some higher order mode of operation. The sense of abstraction in Walther here is not philosophical abstraction: the colours and jewels do not assist in categorising mystical experience by offering a generalised summary of the features of particular experiences, for example. The colour and jewel imagery has a poetic quality in both its lack of direct referentiality, and its constructedness *as imagery*. Walther is using this imagery to expand her descriptive vocabulary, but this expansion involves a further deferral of meaning. The colours and jewels are another layer of discourse, one which does not obscure, but which operates in a mysterious way.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 1–3.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

Even though this imagery carries with it a sense of its own constructedness, Walther does nonetheless continue to suggest some absolute grounding to her choices around these images. In one extended footnote on contemporary and classical art, she suggests that artistic ‘Vollkommenheit’ is an expression of the redeemed, fluid ‘Geist’, ‘Seele’ and ‘Leib’, even if it is not consciously that (*PdM*, pp. 107–8). Walther writes that this is the case with Franz Marc’s animal paintings, and approves specifically of Marc’s choice of colour:

Nichts anderes als eine möglichst reine Verkörperung geistig-seelischer Wesenheiten [nicht intellektueller Begriffe!] ist es doch, was uns etwa aus den wundervollen Pferde- [und überhaupt Tier-] Bildern Franz Marcs entgegentritt [die ja auch in der Farbe der Aura dieser Tiere zumeist gemalt sind]. Von Begriffsmalerei und anderen verwandten Experimenten, wie sie etwa die Bilder De Chiricos zeigen, scheint uns dies himmelweit verschieden zu sein, wenn man auch alles unter dem einen Begriff des ‘Expressionismus’ wahllos zusammenwirft. (*PdM*, p. 108)

Marc generally chooses the right colours to depict the animals, according to Walther; and this achievement is different to other ‘expressionist’ experiments. Again the (successful) artistic text appears here to lose some autonomy; its success is dependent on its correspondence with some absolute ideal, even if this is not a matter of direct, representational correspondence (or the result of any intellectual processes at all). And the colour-schematic again appears to be positioned as having a certain systematic sense. As Conquer notes when writing of the use of colour in poetry generally, there is a sense that colours ‘have no fixed meanings or hierarchy’, and so operate as ‘empty vessels to be filled’; but there are also ‘cultural significances’, or a ‘sense of natural rightness’ that determines the associations that certain colours carry.¹⁹⁹ Franz Marc himself developed a fixed systematic of these associations, so Walther’s approval of his choices, even if it might appear to limit the autonomy of the artwork, is in keeping with the artist’s own vision of how his artistic vocabulary operated.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

²⁰⁰ This schematic is detailed in a letter to August Macke from December 1910, quoted in Hajo Düchting, *The Blaue Reiter* (Cologne: Taschen, 2016), p. 72.

A 2017 psychological study tested whether Marc's associations (such as that of blue with masculine and yellow with feminine) could be established by implicit association tests. It found that some of Marc's associations were confirmed by its results, while others were not.²⁰¹ Of course the sense in which such a study can determine the validity of Marc's 'theory' is not in establishing that these colours have absolute or inherent associations; rather it suggests a (limited) shared cultural colour-vocabulary between the subjects and Marc. This is one important sense in which Walther thinks that Marc chooses the right colours for the right animals; or that Stefan George can be said to have a white-gold aura (*ZaU*, p. 317), or that the pure soul is a crystal (*PdM*, p. 146). These associations have cultural meaning. Thus even if colours are in the very beginning of *PdM* highlighted as one of the common ways that mystics *inadequately* describe their experience ('jedoch handelt es sich hier u. E. durchaus nur um Gleichnisse'), they may still be assessed against some cultural standard. At the same time, however, Walther does invoke a more absolute grounding to these associations: she notes 'die seltsame Übereinstimmung in der Anwendung ganz bestimmter, gleicher Sinnbilder für die Verdeutlichung ganz bestimmter mystischer Erlebnisse' (*PdM*, p. 11). And, of course, the divine source of the mystical experiences appears throughout to offer another form of grounding to her vocabulary. There is then a sense of the contingent and the absolute operating at once, forming part of the same horizon of meaning.

These dual sources of meaning allow Walther to operate between the 'shocked' and the 'pragmatic' forms of modernist language. Walther is explicit about the contingency and the limitations of the descriptions she offers:

Es ist eine letzte Urgegebenheit, eine unmittelbare Schau, die sich nicht weiter zergliedern läßt, wie jede letzte Gegebenheit und Wesenschau. Wer es nie erlebt hat, wird es nie begreifen und verstehen, bis er selbst es auch erlebt. Denn nur andeutungsweise und in schwacher, mangelhafter Annäherung kann

²⁰¹ Annika Grotjohann and Daniel Oberfeld, 'Evaluation of Franz Marc's Color Theory using Implicit Testing Procedures', *Art & Perception*, 6 (2018), 41–66.

man, von anderen Sphären herkommend, sich auch nur einen Begriff des hier Gemeinten machen [...]. (*PdM*, p. 141)

In a sense, this is Walther at her most sceptical about language. But what is striking about this section of her text is its lack of pessimism in the face of such limitations. In fact Walther's descriptions, her contingent categorisations, have a sense of harmony about them. After the interruption of the George poem discussed above Walther goes on immediately to give a sense of the unity of the Ich's worldview following the revelation of the divine: 'So sieht nun das Ich den wesentlichen Aufbau der Welt gleichsam von innen, sieht, wie in alles wertvollste Sein solche Lichtstrahlen einmünden und wie von ihm wieder feine geistige Fäden sich zurückspinnen zu jenem Lichtmeer' (*PdM*, p. 140). And immediately following the previous quotation, which calls the language she uses 'schwach' and 'mangelhaft', Walther writes the following, including another George reference in brackets: '– wer es aber selbst erlebt hat, für den genügt auch eine geringfügige Andeutung, um zu wissen, worum es sich handelt. (Drei sind der wissener stufen die letzte kennt nur, wen der Gott beschlief, Stefan George.)' (*PdM*, p. 141).²⁰² She notes the inadequacies of her language in one sense, but immediately states that there is another important sense in which those inadequacies are of little consequence. Her language might not do God justice, but anyone who has experienced God will know what she is talking about anyway.

This is an important modification to the 'shock' model of phenomenological modernism. Language and human experience are revealed to be contingent and even precarious, but that contingency does not itself constitute a shock. It is rather a given, and Walther, working together with others in what she views as her spiritual community, may work towards some meaningful 'Andeutung'. Artistic reference is in Walther an important part of this thoroughly pragmatic approach; and artists are positioned, alongside other phenomenologists and mystics, as part of her community. Walther senses in George an

²⁰² This is also a quotation from George's *Der Stern des Bundes*.

approach to the divine or the absolute that is as inadequate, and therefore just as good as, those of the philosophers. Where poetry has an advantage, it seems, is in its creative pragmatism: the sense that is obvious in poetry, but less so in philosophy, that human language forms part of an approach to things, but does not make any claim to mastery over those things.

There is of course some question as to whether Walther was right to identify George as working (pragmatically) towards the same (absolute) end as her. For one, Walther's impression that George was genuinely very religious, and religious in the same way as her, does not conform with the usual scholarly view of George.²⁰³ In some ways Walther could be said to over-simplify the George texts quoted in *PdM* in her enthusiasm to find suitable interlocutors. But Walther, as with the mystical texts, is not offering a critical reading of the poetic texts in question. Rather she includes the results of very personal engagement with those texts. This personal engagement is not always a matter of reading the texts and achieving some pure understanding of the divine that it inadequately approaches. Rather, as in Walther's work more generally, this pure form of mysticism is accompanied by a pragmatic engagement with the communities in which it arises. Walther sees the divine in George's work, but she also sees George and those around him, and wishes to engage in their community. Appreciating this side of Walther's work gives a sense of what Walther means by 'community' in practice: she can be seen to participate, or to half-participate, in practices from which she is on some level excluded.

This desire for community is apparent in Walther's autobiography. The chapter of her autobiography that deals with her interaction with the Georgekreis includes the passage quoted above, which describes her very personal and individual engagement with a poem: one which does rely on a sudden, shock-like 'pure' understanding. For the most part, however,

²⁰³ Especially for example with regard to George's 'cult' around 'Maximin'. See Rieckmann, p. 13.

Walther's engagement with this poetry appears as a communal act in this chapter. She remembers with some fondness Percy Gothein reading George poems to her by moonlight on a bridge on the Nymphenburg Canal in Munich (*ZaU*, p. 301). But even in these anecdotal accounts there is a sense of Walther seeking and never quite finding the right communal context: a pattern that repeats that of her engagement with the Freiburg phenomenologists. Women were never allowed to become part of the Georgekreis.²⁰⁴ As such Walther's perspective on that circle was that of an outsider looking in, even as she engaged (either personally or academically) with figures such as Scheler, Simmel, Klages or Gothein who were more or less involved in the Georgekreis at different times.

As with her introduction to George through Karl Löwith (who told her that the book was 'nichts für Sie' (*ZaU*, p. 291)), in Walther's account Percy Gothein spends a great deal of time actively excluding Walther from the community she seeks to enter. One anecdote in particular (*ZaU*, pp. 302–3) stands out as such an example, and is both comical and sad, though Walther's tone even in the 1960 retelling is more than anything one of disappointment and confusion. Gothein appeared 'mit geheimnisvoller Miene' and told Walther that he must go away for a short time. Walther took this to mean he was going to visit a sick George. Shortly after he left Walther received a delivery of apples from a family friend, and decided to anonymously send the nicest apple (which she calls 'ein Prachtstück') to George. She wrapped it in violet and gold paper, which she knew to be significant colours for George and his followers, and included with it a note that read: 'dieser Apfel, der schönste unter seinen Gefährten, habe mit Trauer von der Krankheit des Meisters vernommen und sich deshalb auf den Weg gemacht, um ihm eine kleine Freude zu bereiten' (*ZaU*, p. 302).²⁰⁵ Gothein returned shortly afterwards and was outraged: George guessed immediately by the packaging that the

²⁰⁴ See Rieckmann, p. 12.

²⁰⁵ Walther's use of the coloured paper, corresponding to the physical binding of George's anthologies and their elaborate colourful decoration, is another reminder that for her and for George, colour is not just 'absent' (as Conquer puts it in the case of George). See Conquer, p. 43.

sender was a woman, and Gothein was ('glücklicherweise') able to direct his suspicions elsewhere (*ZaU*, p. 303). Walther gives a hyperbolic description of Gothein's reaction: 'Stirnrunzelnd stellte er mich zur Rede: wie ich mich "unterstehen" könne, dem Meister einen Apfel zu senden? Es hätte ihm die größten Unannehmlichkeiten [sic] bereiten können' (*ZaU*, p. 302). But as well as being a humorous interlude in her autobiography, this absurd account demonstrates rather sadly Walther's failure to truly find her community, or to be understood by some of those whom she viewed as her interlocutors.

Walther was not deterred: she claims to have felt George's 'Ausstrahlungen' one evening shortly after the apple debacle (*ZaU*, p. 303). She calls this a 'telepathische Unterhaltung' (though she includes quotation marks on this phrase herself, as though it does not quite fit what occurred) (*ZaU*, p. 304). She describes having been deeply shaken on another occasion when looking at a portrait of George, feeling that it was looking back at her (*ZaU*, p. 304). And finally she encountered George in the flesh (recognising him by his golden-white 'Aura' as well as by his face), though she did not speak to him and simply walked past him as he looked in a shop window, and watched as shortly afterwards he walked past the shop she was in (*ZaU*, pp. 316–7). Walther places a great deal of significance in these personal encounters, even if they betray that she was mostly denied the chance to directly engage with the artistic community George is the centre of.

More important for her readers than the question of Walther's direct acceptance by the Georgekreis is the kind of engagement with the poetry that is found in *PdM*: one which productively and pragmatically expands the vocabulary available in a philosophical approach to the subject matter in question. As a significant figure in the German literary scene of the time, it is not entirely unusual for George to have inspired such devotion: Walther's account of being stunned as she sees George in the street is not unlike Walter Benjamin's account of

waiting on a park bench in the hope of seeing George.²⁰⁶ And though Walther's strategies often place her at the awkward and unusual intersections between forms of writing and academic or artistic communities, there are other respects in which her work, and her appropriation of typical artistic forms, engage with more mainstream cultural and academic trends of the day. I return to one of these next, the form of the Fall, which will expand the context of Walther's modernism along the lines of shock and the absolute, and habit and contingency.

III. Childhood and primitivism: the Fall revisited

Walther relies on several key tropes which crop up frequently in both philosophical and modernist writing, and which are highlighted by Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei as important points of intersection between the phenomenological and modernist-poetic modes.²⁰⁷ These tropes are: childhood experience as ideal; the Fall as experiential structure; and a form of primitivism. In *PdM*, the process of coming to experience one's foundational essence is presented as a Fall narrative: first, the subject lives in an idealised state of unconscious, undifferentiated harmony; then that subject falls into a state of differentiation in which 'Geist' 'Seele' and 'Leib' become consciously distinguishable and distinct (and at worse lose all connection to one another). Finally, the subject can achieve redemption by re-achieving the unity of the three sides: this is a higher state of being in which the subject is conscious of both the differentiation that occurred and the re-gained unity (see especially the chapter 'Die Erfassung des Grundwesens als leibliche Lebenskraft' for this account, *PdM*, pp. 106–22). To some extent, Walther uses the structure of the Fall as a contingent narrative heuristic: one that will have had great cultural resonance among her readers. However as I have noted, Walther also takes seriously the structure of the Fall as an expression of a kind of absolute that must have religious or

²⁰⁶ Fernbach, p. 151.

²⁰⁷ See especially 'Sources of Ecstasy in Childhood Experience', in Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, pp. 41–85.

divine (rather than philosophical) underpinnings. Walther identifies this structure as one that can apply in individual concrete experience, with childhood as the originary harmonic state:

Denken wir etwa an ein selten schönes, reines Kind und vergegenwärtigen wir uns seine innerseelische Haltung [...]. Daher ist denn auf dieser Stufe gleichsam alles Seelische und Geistige schon auf weiteres auch leiblich, es drückt sich viel mehr in Mienenspiel und überhaupt im ganzen leiblichen Sein aus als beim ('beherrschten') Erwachsenen [...]. In der ungeschiedenen Harmonie des Kindheitszustandes sind die drei Seiten des Grundwesens so eng ineinander verschlungen und verwoben, daß keine von ihnen sich genügend von den anderen abhebt, um für sich bewusstseinsmäßig erfaßt werden zu können. (*PdM*, pp. 108–13)

Differentiation, and ultimately conscious redemption, occur in adulthood. Walther's focus with the 'Kindheitszustand' is on individual, concrete experience (her 'denken wir' in the above quotation invites the participation of the reader, calling on them to think perhaps of an example from their own experience). In *O&G*, playful childhood experience appears as a primary form of communal experience in her example of the 'Gemeinschaft der Diener [der] Fee' (*O&G*, p. 25). In its specificity the latter is an even more effective textual device for calling to mind exemplary concrete experiences which might form the basis of phenomenological investigation.

In setting forth childhood as a model for harmonic experience, Walther aligns herself with a great number of modernist philosophers and artists for whom childhood represented an ideal of fluidity of experience and thought, as yet relatively untainted by habitual, adult forms. As Gosetti-Ferencei notes, Husserl's insistence on pursuing what he conceived of as a 'scientific approach' differed from a phenomenological approach represented by Merleau-Ponty, for whom 'philosophical endeavors amounted to an attempt to recapture the experience of childhood'.²⁰⁸ Despite the difference in emphasis, Gosetti-Ferencei points out that the focus on childhood experience is to an important extent in keeping with a Husserlian

²⁰⁸ Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, p. 41.

vision of ‘phenomenology as a philosophy of beginnings’.²⁰⁹ Walther’s focus on ‘childhood’ rather than a more abstracted notion of a ‘beginner’ is another example of her general tendency to privilege the contingent over the pure. In the above quotation from *PdM*, purity is valued, but it is the purity of a particular type of child, and ‘pure’ is a positive designator like ‘beautiful’ (‘ein selten schönes, reines Kind’). Gosetti-Ferencei notes that childhood is invoked by artists and thinkers because of its fluidity: in childhood, ‘the world, being first constituted as world, is open to constant renegotiation’.²¹⁰ She describes how in the modernist period, artists (and phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty) begin to treat childhood not only as an ideal that could never truly be reached or regained in adulthood (as Gosetti-Ferencei argues the Romantics conceived of childhood). Rather ‘it is also recognised as valuable in itself, as a stratum of human existence and experience’; it is ‘lived’.²¹¹ Walther at her best similarly values the undifferentiated fluidity of experience of childhood *as experience*. Her ideal is like her ‘essence’; it is fundamentally accessible even if it is also in some way mysterious.

Walther’s invocation of childhood experience then aligns her in particular with a modernism in which childhood stands for more than just an abstract notion of fluidity. In Gosetti-Ferencei’s vision of childhood in the modernist period, childhood, and the related ideal of *play*, are associated with concrete ‘specificity’. Whereas for Schiller, for example, ‘play concerns the granting of necessity to what seems accidental’, Gosetti-Ferencei finds in Walter Benjamin’s *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* an alternate account of literal, concrete childhood playfulness that respects the specificity of children’s experience.²¹² Benjamin offers ‘in a text that is both literary essay and autobiography’ reflections on specific, concrete childhood experiences: ‘being late for school, reading boys’ books, the hours of childhood illness, hiding in the house, having one’s clothes mended by one’s mother, searching for

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 42.

²¹² Ibid., pp. 45–6.

Easter eggs'.²¹³ Gosetti-Ferencei relies on her own such reflections or observations of childhood play, for example in criticising Freud's account of children's play as an imitation of adulthood. She presents a series of delightful examples of alternate forms of childhood games:

[...] children [...] also regress, pretend to be babies, [...] wish to be inanimate objects, stars and trees [...] enjoy repeating and modifying nonsensical sounds, [...] mixing colors without regarding them as attributes of things, delighting in the look of useless things.²¹⁴

These are cases which Freud's characterisation does not seem to cover; and Gosetti-Ferencei's list, or catalogue, acts as a more compelling critique than an argument expressed in purely formal terms.

In a similar way Walther's childhood example in *OsG* works by conveying something identifiable of early human relations, a concrete example of meaning made playfully. It appears in a series of mini-narratives that I have already argued borrow from literary forms of writing in their introduction of narrative drama. Walther's creative catalogue, as I have called it in reference to MacIntyre's work on Edith Stein, uses contingent description rather than abstraction to call to mind that which she deems essential about the relations she describes (and in doing so locates that essence in the everyday). In this way Walther's work can be viewed alongside Benjamin's writing. Benjamin's work on childhood blends forms and traditions of writing (essay, literature, autobiography) to provide 'a study of childhood experience' (as Gosetti-Ferencei puts it)²¹⁵ that expands the form of 'study'. One of Benjamin's examples (quoted by Gosetti-Ferencei) is of chasing butterflies. He describes how he as child-subject begins to merge with butterfly-object, and the strict distinctions between them no longer hold. The butterfly seems to take on some human characteristics, and thereby reveal something important about humanity:

²¹³ Ibid., p. 47.

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 45–6.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

Dann hätte ich gewünscht, in Licht und Luft mich aufzulösen, nur um ungemerkt der Beute mich zu nähern und sie überwältigen zu können... je mehr ich selbst in allen Fibern mich dem Tier anschmiegte, je falterhafter ich im Innern wurde, desto mehr nahm dieser Schmetterling in Tun und Lassen die Farbe menschlicher EntschlieÙung an, und endlich war es, als ob sein Fang der Preis sei, um den einzig ich meines Menschendaseins wieder habhaft werden könne.²¹⁶

Benjamin uses the term 'sich anschmiegen' to describe the child's approach to its object (the butterfly): a term used by Walther to characterise her phenomenological investigations in *PdM* (*PdM*, p. 2). In the use of this term Walther's approach is positioned from the outset in terms of vital care, even as she emphasises that it should be 'vorurteilslos' (*PdM*, p. 2). Even if she cautions against preconceptions, her investigative stance is one of involvement in concrete experiences, and her study is not presented as exclusively scientific. In her comparison of Husserl with Ludwig Klages, the comparison that caused her falling-out with Husserl, Walther imagined her former teacher studying butterflies as an adult: characterising them scientifically, arranged in a glass case. By contrast, Klages sees the objects of his investigation like butterflies fluttering through a meadow (*ZaU*, p. 215).

In *OsG*'s example of the children serving their imagined fairy God, meaning is arrived at through agreement of the participants of the game, and this process is associated by Walther in another example with the communal artistic production of an orchestra. Children's play and artistic production are two sites of phenomenological investigation which offer models for that investigation itself. As in Benjamin's recollection of butterfly chasing, the investigating subject finds material in its concrete subject matter which makes a vital impact on the subject/investigator. In *OsG* it is a model for making meaning that embraces, rather than reeling from, the contingency of the world around us. Even if Walther is reluctant to present her characterisation of Husserl as a criticism, implicit in the comparison and in her

²¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1950), p. 27. Quoted in Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, pp. 47–8.

own approach is the sense that trying to catch and exhaustively categorise the butterflies is futile; one should instead, or as well, revel in their fleeting, everyday wonder.

In the phenomenological paradigm, there is a tendency to privilege moments of shock, as though with the revelation of the contingency of the world and of experience, and the return to a pre-reflective mode, some great chasm opens that irreversibly threatens our ordinary language, modes of experience, or interpersonal relations. This how both modernist-artistic and phenomenological approaches are characterised by Ariane Mildenberg, for example, who quotes Gertrude Stein's statement about the twentieth century as 'a time when everything cracks'. Even as she writes that 'rupture' brings forth 'awareness' rather than 'rejection', Mildenberg calls this period 'a time of radical change, of showing forth what lies beneath the cracked surface of facticity and everyday-life habits'.²¹⁷ The sheer drama of the narrative structure Walther associates with childhood in *PdM*, a Fall followed by a redemption, fits this shock-model. Indeed her description of the Fall structure of experience (paraphrased at the beginning of this section) sometimes veers into a more abstracted meditation on an idealised child's ability to reshape the world around it. One of the things which connects her use of the Fall narrative to her invocation of Stefan George's work is in that focus on a lingering sense of an absolute that underlies everyday relations: one that speaks to a sense of the inadequacy of those relations when taken on their own terms. This absolute is something *difficult*, and the artistic approaches to it that Walther highlights are framed in her autobiography as initially challenging: to Walther herself, who says George's book is at first 'wie eine riesige, fugenlose Mauer aus seltsam behauenen Felsblöcken'; and to Karl Löwith, who had told her George's anthology was 'nichts für Sie', and who later admits to Walther 'daß er selbst nicht allzu viel damit anfangen konnte' (*ZaU*, p. 291). This difficulty, followed in Walther's case by the shock of understanding, is however always accompanied by a more

²¹⁷ Mildenberg, p. 17.

pragmatic desire to gradually find understanding through community, with artistic approaches offering a suitably indirect means to establish such understanding.

It is clear that Walther's work generally inhabits a tension between a desire for absolute meaning and essence on the one hand, and a satisfaction with working with contingent tools on the other. This tension characterises a great deal of output by artists and thinkers during the modernist period in Germany (and beyond), and the tropes of fallenness and redemption are a useful line along which to examine how this tension plays out. In Walther's case, the commitment to the absolute has an explicitly religious dimension which determines her sense of the absolute in an important way. The account of the experiential Fall and redemption structure paraphrased above includes a footnote that begins:

Vielleicht ist es u.a. der Sinn der christlichen Lehre vom 'Sündenfall', daß die Menschen durch das Essen vom Baume der Erkenntnis jenes paradiesischen Zustandes der ungeschiedenen Einheit von Leib, Seele und Geist verlustig gingen, um durch deren Trennung und sogar teilweise Entgegensetzung jede dieser drei Seiten des Grundwesens erkennen zu können, was, wie wir sahen, im Zustande ihrer undifferenzierten Harmonie unmöglich war. (*PdM*, p. 116)

The above quotation shows Walther as somewhat hesitant in asserting her sense of the religious dimension to her use of the Fall/redemption structure (see her 'vielleicht' and 'u.a.'). But nonetheless it is important because as I have shown, the religious is in *PdM* fundamentally something experienced, not something that stands entirely apart from experience and gives it shape from beyond. Walther's absolute can be seen to encroach on the concrete; the spheres are not entirely separate, and do not necessitate different phenomenological methods.

Gosetti-Ferencei's vision of the ecstatic in the everyday is a more useful model than Mildenberg's for characterising the sense of modernism in Walther's work: a pragmatism in the face of shock. Gosetti-Ferencei's account of the use of childhood in modernism gives examples of how a certain form of spirituality is present in the appreciation of childhood experience as a respite 'in the context of adult disenchantment with the technological, urban or abstract experience of modernity, so forcefully suggested by Hofmannsthal's *Briefe* and

Rilke's *Malte*.²¹⁸ This account has something of the 'shock' about it, and conforms to some extent to accounts like Ware's which trace linguistic scepticism as arising out of such shock. Though Walther's identification of sources of redemption has a more explicitly religious character than many of the examples Gosetti-Ferencei looks at, they are nonetheless at their best 'specific' in the ways that Gosetti-Ferencei's examples of invocations of childhood are.

Still Walther does rely on modernist tropes which neglect specificity to damaging effect. At one stage in her delineation of the child-like ideal of fluidity of experience in *PdM*, Walther briefly introduces several other examples of this sort of harmonic existence, none of which are focused on with anything like the care given to childhood in *O:G*:

Daher kommt es auch, daß wir bei Menschen auf dieser Stufe (seien es nun Kinder, oder 'primitive' Menschen untergegangener Kulturen oder 'tiefer' stehender 'Natur'völker) oft eine fast rührend 'unschuldige' Schönheit finden, wie wir sie ähnlich bei vollendet schönen Blumen und Tieren wiederfinden können. (*PdM*, pp. 109–10)

This is another example of Walther's attempts to situate her thinking for an academic audience: it is followed by a very brief footnoted reference to the "Typus der "schönen Seele"", a term popularised in Germany by Christoph Martin Wieland, as another example.²¹⁹ Walther uses quotation marks liberally here to mark her employment of terms that come from other discourses, as though to absolve herself of responsibility for their use. Walther's uncritical use of terms like 'primitiv' and 'Naturvolk'; her marked lack of specificity with regards to the historical or contemporary cultures she is referring to; and particularly her comparison of those vaguely conceived 'cultures' or 'peoples' with 'sublime' ('vollendet') flowers and animals, is an example of a very common lazy primitivism in German culture. This is one that went beyond academia, forming part of a wider cultural output and consumption.

²¹⁸ Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, pp. 54–5.

²¹⁹ Christoph Martin Wieland, 'Was ist eine schöne Seele?', in *Vermischte Schriften*, C. M. Wielands Sämtliche Werke, XXIX (Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1857), pp. 129–37.

This passage appears one page after Walther's reference to expressionist painting discussed above, appropriately given the particular prominence of such tropes of primitivism in German expressionism. Jill Lloyd shows the place of such tropes in the works of artists associated with *Die Brücke* and *Der Blaue Reiter* (which included Franz Marc) in a 1991 study. In this account she notes that 'much of the internal energy' of German expressionism arose out of dual 'backward- and forward-looking attitudes'.²²⁰ As was raised in my consideration of Stefan George's complex status as modernist or anti-modernist, a great deal of modernist artistic production combines a push for novelty with a desire to 'return' to pre-modern forms. Lloyd notes the affinity of modernist painters with 'primitive' culture, a label broadly applied to cultural or artistic production that is historical, non-European or non-bourgeois. Lloyd emphasises that these trends were 'neither revolutionary nor conservative in exclusive terms, but potentially both', and notes that primitivism acted at times as 'a critical tool to question the dominant values of Western bourgeois society', though 'the danger of false reconciliation, of a retreat from the real complexities of history into lazy universalism, remained'.²²¹

In Walther's brief usage of tropes of primitivism, there is a definite sense of the 'lazy universalism' Lloyd identifies. The connection between 'primitive' cultures (very broadly conceived) and childhood found in Walther is all too common in the artistic output of the day. In an examination of the beginnings of primitivism in German expressionism in the work of *Die Brücke*, Lloyd writes:

The link between childhood and concepts of the primitive was common at the time, growing out of evolutionary modes of thought and continually used as a justification for colonial power, but also associated at the beginning of the century with more positive ideas about renewal and regeneration.²²²

²²⁰ Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. vi.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

²²² *Ibid.*, pp. 36–8.

Walther neglects the specificity of the ‘other’ cultural contexts she mentions; they remain entirely unspecified and their mention acts only as an assertion that there are other cultural contexts in which the sort of experience Walther describes were or are dominant. She does not actually specify when in history or where in the world the cultures she refers to might be found. In Walther’s text these primitive ‘cultures’ or ‘peoples’ have no content whatsoever, and they act as nothing more than the abstract possibility of a redemptive response to the challenges of modernity (these challenges themselves remaining unspecified at this point).

This sort of thinking has links to a modernist form of mysticism going beyond Walther and with which she engages. Walther’s identification of spiritual affinities with Franz Marc is borne out by an examination of his own writing about his artistic production. The connections between this sort of spirituality and the kinds of dual reactionary and revolutionary thinking highlighted here are illustrated by Marc’s contribution to the *Blauer Reiter Almanac* of 1912. In a short essay entitled ‘Geistige Güter’, Marc questions what he sees as the neglect of ‘purely spiritual contributions’ to public life and to the nation. His essay begins:

Es ist merkwürdig, wie geistige Güter von den Menschen so vollkommen anders gewertet werden als materielle.

Erobert z.B. jemand seinem Vaterlande eine neue Kolonie, so jubelt ihm das ganze Land entgegen. Man besinnt sich keinen Tag, die Kolonie in Besitz zu nehmen. Mit gleichem Jubel werden technische Errungenschaften begrüßt.

Kommt aber jemand auf den Gedanken, seinem Vaterlande ein neues reingeistiges Gut zu schenken, so weist man dieses fast jederzeit mit Zorn und Aufregung zurück, verdächtigt sein Geschenk und sucht es auf jede Weise aus der Welt zu schaffen: wäre es erlaubt, würde man den Geber noch heute für seine Gabe verbrennen.

Ist diese Tatsache nicht schauerlich?²²³

²²³ Franz Marc, ‘Geistige Güter’, *Der Blaue Reiter* (Munich: Piper & Co., 1912), pp. 1–7. Available online as part of Leicester’s German Expressionist Collection, ‘The Blue Rider Almanac 1st Ed.’ <<https://www.germanexpressionismleicester.org/leicesters-collection/books-and-other-publications/the-blue-rider-1st-edition-star/>> [Accessed 08 Feb 2021].

Peter Nicholls describes the aims of this publication as follows, referring to the same essay by

Marc:

Contributors to the *Almanac* were keen to stress that their new art would inaugurate a spiritual age no longer tainted by nineteenth-century materialism, and that their modernism would thus renew connections with the art of earlier epochs. So, for example, Franz Marc illustrated his essay on ‘Spiritual Treasures’ with images drawn from a wide range of traditions (they include German woodcuts, Chinese painting, Bavarian Mirror Painting, Picasso’s *Woman with Mandolin at the Piano*, and two drawings by children).²²⁴

As can be seen in the above quotation from Marc’s essay, however, Marc’s spiritual alternative is framed in terms of the very contemporary values it seeks to supersede: he asks why spiritual ‘treasures’ or ‘goods’ are not valued like the results of colonialist exploitation. This is hardly a radical refutation of the values of the ‘Vaterland’. Interestingly his desire is for the new spiritual ideas and images he champions to become habitual following the shock of their introduction: ‘Neue Ideen sind nur durch ihre Ungewohnheit schwerverständlich – [...] Wir werden aber nicht müde, [...] die neuen Ideen auszusprechen und die neuen Bilder zu zeigen, bis der Tag kommt, wo wir unseren Ideen auf der Landstraße begegnen’.²²⁵ The ‘difficulty’ of these new artistic forms is not valued for its own sake.

Walther’s engagement with these trends, even if it is positioned as a concern with finding sources of the absolute, is similarly (and inevitably) tied up with her own cultural moment: her assertions in *ZaU* about Stefan George’s neglect by his nation quoted earlier in this chapter demonstrate her concern not only that his work has ‘absolute’ value but that it might have had something to offer in its particular cultural or historical moment. It is Walther’s reliance on absolutist shock-tropes that most closely aligns her with some of the lazier academic or cultural habits of the day. And these attempts to reach outside her specific cultural context in search of some absolute meaning are some of the parts of her text which

²²⁴ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: a literary guide* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 141.

²²⁵ Marc, p. 3.

most clearly situate her in her contemporary moment. Nonetheless both *PdM* and *O;G* more commonly place value on specificity, with childhood and the structures of Fall and redemption as important points of reference here as well. As I will return to later, Walther's cultural references change in the second edition of *PdM*, with the addition of references to Alice in Wonderland illustrating the journey of the phenomenological investigative subject. Walther's references to 'difficult' literature are still present, but so too are references where accessibility is the emphasis. However these additions do not mark a complete change in tone: rather Walther's attention to contingent specificity can be identified even in the original edition, making the moments where this attention falters stand out more.

IV. Rilke, poetry and God

The other modernist poet quoted by Walther in *PdM* is Rainer Maria Rilke: a figure who similarly invokes childhood and 'primitive' forms of spirituality. Childhood experience is a common motif in Rilke's work and has long been considered central to his poetics.²²⁶ Rilke is another figure highlighted by Gosetti-Ferencei as embracing childhood in literature as a means of 'stepping out of adult everydayness'.²²⁷ Gosetti-Ferencei notes that Rilke, like Benjamin, both values childhood for the model it provides for 'the consummatory or privileged moment sought in aesthetic experience', but also regards it 'as a state of being with its own rights and demands';²²⁸ she also observes that his concern with childhood continued throughout his career.²²⁹ In this sense Rilke also appears at the crucial intersection between a contingently-located pragmatism and a shocked absolutism. Gosetti-Ferencei finds in Rilke's 1914 narrative essay *Puppen* a vision of childhood play in which 'the doll is a half-thing, helping the child to

²²⁶ For example, Frank Wood calls 'the theme of childhood' 'the matrix from which all Rilkean conceptions of poetry spring'. Frank Wood, *Rainer Maria Rilke: The Ring of Forms* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p. 103.

²²⁷ Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, p. 43.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

keep the overwhelming world at arm's length'.²³⁰ As in Walther's invocation of childhood play in *OsG*, in her example of the 'Gemeinschaft der Diener [der] Fee', play is for Rilke 'a medium through which the child can participate in the creation of meaning'.²³¹

In this sense that play assists the child in the face of an 'overwhelming world' there is the potential for childhood to be invoked in the face of a kind of modernist crisis. I present one example (not quoted by Walther) of this here: a poem from Rilke's 1899 collection *Mir Zur Feier* which depicts what can be read as a linguistic crisis. In this poem, the crisis of language and the desire to find a redemptive source of meaning outside of calculated, representational language is particularly strong. The search for linguistic meaning (both the speaker's and that of the people he criticises) is associated with some form of the divine. As such, the poem clearly shows the kind of Rilkean approach to poetic language with which Walther finds an affinity. The poem ruminates explicitly on how language is used:

Ich fürchte mich so vor der Menschen Wort.
Sie sprechen alles so deutlich aus:
Und dieses heißt Hund und jenes heißt Haus,
und hier ist Beginn und das Ende ist dort.

Mich bangt auch ihr Sinn, ihr Spiel mit dem Spott,
sie wissen alles, was wird und war;
kein Berg ist ihnen mehr wunderbar;
ihr Garten und Gut grenzt grade an Gott.

Ich will immer warnen und wehren: Bleibt fern.
Die Dinge singen hör ich so gern.
Ihr rührt sie an: sie sind starr und stumm.
Ihr bringt mir alle die Dinge um.²³²

In this poem, Rilke's speaker appears as a scared child being taught the ways of the world, and the ways of language, by the adults around him. The speaker is so alienated from this process that he appears in the first line to stand outside the domain of the human altogether. The

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 59.

²³² Rainer Maria Rilke, *Gedichte 1895 bis 1910*, ed. by Manfred Engel and Ulrich Fülleborn, Werke, I (Frankfurt a.M. and Leipzig: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), p. 106.

speaker of this poem is not explicitly identified as a child; in this way it fits with Ruth Hermann's observations that 'das Kind in Rilkes Texten ist eine Randfigur'.²³³ Hermann connects this sense of childhood's dual foregrounding and marginalisation to questions of the limits of language:

Der Rand kann, wo es um Texte geht, auch den Rand der Sprache selbst bedeuten. Und tatsächlich bewegen Kind und Kindheit sich bezüglich der Sprache in einem Grenzgebiet. Das zeigt sich an der schlichten Tatsache, dass kein Kind von Kindheit spricht. 'Kindheit' wird erst dann zu einem Thema, wenn sie vergangen ist. Wer sich authentisch in der Kindheit bewegt, nämlich das Kind, spricht nicht über sie; wer über sie spricht, bewegt sich nicht mehr in ihr: in diesem Sinn ist die Kindheit der Sprache unzugänglich. Gerade darin liegt die Anziehungskraft dieses Themas für die dichterische Sprache. Die sprachliche Unzugänglichkeit der Kindheit fordert dazu auf, die Grenzen der Sprache zu erweitern.²³⁴

Childhood is only considered as such by adults, and so the child-speaker's status in the above poem is signalled indirectly, left implicit. The speaker uses childlike, simplistic language throughout ('Mich bangt'). The poem's opening stanza quotes phrases that seem pulled from a lesson in which this speaker learns how to apply linguistic labels to the objects around him: 'dieses heißt Hund und jenes heißt Haus'. The 'Wort' of the people around the speaker is too clear, too precise. In wonderfully simple language, the speaker conveys that these adults imagine they can understand and linguistically represent causality and history perfectly: 'hier ist Beginn und das Ende ist dort', and later: 'sie wissen alles, was wird und war'.

The 'language lesson' in this first stanza appears as a simplistic perversion of real-life language-learning. In this way it resembles Wittgenstein's simplistic depiction of the process of language learning in his shop and building-site examples from *Philosophical Investigations*. Stephen Mulhall notes that the Augustinian account of language Wittgenstein takes issue with is based on Augustine's retrospective understanding of how he himself came to learn language

²³³ Ruth Hermann, *Im Zwischenraum zwischen Welt und Spielzeug: Eine Poetik der Kindheit bei Rilke* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), p. 12.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

as a child. Mulhall points out that Wittgenstein's story of the shopper and shopkeeper comes closest to resembling a scene from real life if we imagine that the shopper is a child: it has been handed a shopping list by its parent and then hands this to the shopkeeper to indicate the parent's wishes (Mulhall also advises against overlooking overlook the significance the apple as a symbol of the Fall).²³⁵ The child has not yet learned how to fully engage as a shopper; it can only follow basic commands and is not yet fully socialised. On the philosophical-historical level, Augustine's vision of language represents a philosophical or cultural 'Kindheitszustand', to use Walther's term. Wittgenstein's solution involves a recognition of the limitations of language: we cannot achieve mastery over the world by naming things, and must rather embrace some degree of childish playfulness in order that we might 'remake [our] culture', as Mulhall puts it.²³⁶ This bears structural resemblance to Walther's notion of redemption in *PdM*, where the subject must rediscover something of childhood experience.

In Rilke's second stanza, even more nuanced language appears as cruel. 'Spiel' is not the domain of the child, but rather is that of the sophisticated adult who mocks the speaker: 'Ihr Spiel mit dem Spott'. The wondrous natural 'Berg' is rejected by the adults in favour of an ordered 'Garten und Gut' that borders directly on God; the proximity to God is undermined by the sense of a definitive 'Grenze'. Rilke's speaker warns off such efforts to approach the divine, and the divine everyday, in the final stanza: one should leave 'die Dinge' alone, and instead listen to their 'singing' from afar. To attempt to capture things in words, to touch them with language, is to kill them: 'Ihr rührt sie an: sie sind starr und stumm./Ihr bringt mir alle die Dinge um'. Language has here the potential for violence. In overestimating the power of language, adults may silence the world around them, and prevent its natural song from emerging. In this invocation of violent potential alongside childlike wonder and playfulness,

²³⁵ Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall*, pp. 100–101.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104.

there is a sense of the responsibility of the artist to protect ‘die Dinge’, and allow them to sing. As Gosetti-Ferencei notes in an analysis of another poem by Rilke (‘Die Gazelle’), ‘it is not the naming (conceptual) capacity of words but their capacity to evoke images that is the key to their power’.²³⁷ The speaker’s own words carry an implicit power in their explicit denial of a certain kind of linguistic power.

It is clear how this sort of engagement with the possibilities and pitfalls of language in modernism might lead Walther to identify an affinity with Rilke. Walther herself values a form of indirect, narrative expression over forms of writing (especially philosophical) which rely on the precise ‘naming’ or ‘conceptual’ power of the language used. But her engagement with Rilke’s work is more ambivalent than her much more frequent mention of Stefan George’s poetry. Rilke appears twice in *PdM*, once approvingly and once disapprovingly. The first mention of Rilke is in the fourth chapter entitled ‘Die aus dem Grundwesen hervorgehenden Erlebnisse und seine Erfassung in ihnen’ (*PdM*, pp. 72–122), in the section ‘B. Das Grundwesen als “Geist”, “Seele” und “leibliche Lebenskraft”’ (*PdM*, pp. 83–122). Towards the beginning of this section Walther outlines the different sides of the human foundational essence, giving a sense of how individuals and cultures can be one-sided in their development, neglecting one or two of the three essential sides she identifies.

Walther claims that individuals are influenced in the direction of their development by their historical or social circumstances, and also potentially by ‘great personalities’. According to her some people never have a direct experience of their foundational essence, and others only see it from a particular limited perspective. She writes the following, including a quotation from a Rilke poem in an aside on the ‘one-sidedness of most historical religions’:

Die meisten [Menschen] übernehmen da einfach das ihnen in geschichtlicher
Überlieferung oder durch hervorragende Persönlichkeiten ihrer Umgebung
Gegebene, ohne es zu irgendwelchem ursprünglichen Erleben ihres

²³⁷ Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, p. 162.

Grundwesens oder gar des Wesensgrundes zu bringen, oder doch nur zu spärlichen Ansätzen solcher Erlebnisse. Aber auch bei den Menschen, die weiter gehen, scheinen, je nach Rasse, Volk, Zeit, Geschlecht und Eigenart des Einzelnen, bestimmte Wege bevorzugt zu werden. (Darauf beruht wohl auch die Einseitigkeit der meisten historischen Religionen: ‘Alle, welche dich suchen, versuchen Dich; und die, so Dich finden, binden dich an Bild und Gebärde’ [Rilke].) (*PdM*, p. 88)

The poem that Walther quotes here was written in 1901 and published in Rilke’s 1905 *Stunden-Buch*. It appears in the second part of that collection, entitled ‘Das Buch von der Pilgerschaft’.

It reads in full:

Alle, welche dich suchen, versuchen dich.
Und die, so dich finden, binden dich
an Bild und Gebärde.

Ich aber will dich begreifen
wie dich die Erde begreift;
mit meinem Reifen
reift
dein Reich.

Ich will von dir keine Eitelkeit,
die dich beweist.

Ich weiß, dass die Zeit
anders heißt
als du.

Tu mir kein Wunder zulieb.
Gieb deinen Gesetzen recht,
die von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht
sichtbarer sind.²³⁸

This collection is the one which according to Wolfgang Braungart established Rilke’s reputation as a religious poet.²³⁹ The second book of the collection in particular is said by Braungart to result out of the ‘Polarität von Subjekt und Gott’; drawing on Schlegel he writes:

²³⁸ Rilke, p. 213.

²³⁹ Wolfgang Braungart, ‘Das Stunden-Buch’, in *Rilke-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. by Manfred Engel (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2004), pp. 216–27 (p. 217).

‘[diese Gedichte] müssen immer nur im Werden sein, weil sich diese Aufgabe der Bestimmung Gottes und des Subjekts eben nie abschließen läßt’.²⁴⁰

These poems were written shortly following Rilke’s trips to Russia, during which he later wrote that he was gifted ‘die Brüderlichkeit und das Dunkel Gottes, in dem allein Gemeinschaft ist’.²⁴¹ In Russia Rilke found inspiration in a form of community and religiosity which seemed to offer a return to a pre-modern, authentic sorts of experience. As Charlie Louth writes, ‘Russia represented for Rilke and many of his western contemporaries an unbroken tradition of spirituality still in touch with its beginnings’; it offered ‘a counter-image to the decadent West’.²⁴² In this sense Walther chooses the period in which Rilke is most George-like: he is following the modern trend of rejecting modernity (even if, as Braungart notes, that concern with the ‘Vormoderne’ takes a modern poetic form).²⁴³ Russia is presented as one of those ‘pure’ ‘primitive’ cultures whose relation to the divine might be seen as somehow more authentic. And Walther finds in Rilke a poet staging modernist questions around sayability and unsayability around the traditional difficulty of representing the divine.

Walther quotes the first two lines of the poem, in which the speaker presents an established way of treating the ‘dich’ (read straightforwardly as God by Walther, as indicated by her use of capitalisation) which those who ‘seek’ it follow: ‘Alle, welche dich suchen, versuchen dich/ und die, so dich finden, binden dich an Bild und Gebärde’. Walther employs these lines in a critical characterisation of a kind of religiosity which seeks to tie God to a particular historical moment, or to characterise God with reference to externalisations in ‘image’ or ‘gesture’. The ‘binden’ is an active process, and God’s connectedness to ‘Bild und Gebärde’ appears a human construction. It is only through vanity (‘Eitelkeit’) that God is

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 224.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 216.

²⁴² Charlie Louth, ‘Early Poems’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, ed. by Karen Leeder and Robert Vilain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 41–58 (p. 49).

²⁴³ Braungart, pp. 216–7.

placed in history: 'Ich weiß, dass die Zeit/ anders heißt/ als du' (though the final stanza suggests that God's laws still may nonetheless become clearer as time and generations pass). Those who 'bind' God to external signs are contrasted in the lines not quoted by Walther with the speaker who seeks to find a form of understanding of God that is associated with more natural, primal impulses ('Ich aber will dich begreifen/ wie dich die Erde begreift;/ mit meinem Reifen/ reift/ dein Reich').

Why does Walther borrow from this poem to make a point about historical religions? The artistic reference seems to speak to her desire to keep her sources varied, in some sense accessible, and interesting (this desire is indicated in her note about using George rather than sticking to medieval sources). As well as that it offers another signal of how Walther's own terms are to be considered by the reader. The explicit message of the poem seems to be that an understanding of the divine involves a gradual, natural appreciation of its mysteries, as opposed to attempts to tie it down by identifying its external markers. The 'maturity' of the speaker and the world in which the divine is found is a natural one that seems more in keeping with the childlike wonder found in the previous poem I have examined than its 'adult' attempts to quantify or exhaustively characterise the world or the divine. So in that sense, the poem's message fits Walther's own vision of a redeemed maturity in which the originary unity of the self and the divine are appreciated following the Fall of adulthood. In terms of its content or message the poetic quotation also acts as another marker of Walther's attempts to move beyond the material, even if her philosophical procedure is otherwise firmly rooted in it.

At the same time it in choosing a poem at all, and this poem in particular, Walther offers another hint as to her own approach with language. If the reader's engagement with the poetry were just a matter of extracting a coherent message, Walther could quite easily dispense with the poetic reference altogether, and restate this message in other, perhaps more conceptual language. Instead Walther foregrounds the poetic form, even if she does not quote

the poem in its entirety. The indirectness and formal beauty of the poem are inseparable from its meaning: the connections between its words in formal features such as rhyme and rhythm go beyond that which can be encapsulated in an extraction of a message. As I have argued elsewhere, in including this reference Walther signals the importance of treating her own text *as text*, rather than seeking always to extract its philosophical argument.²⁴⁴ Additionally Walther offers another reminder that her own characterisation of the divine, and of experience generally, is indirect and contingent in nature. Poetry, of course, does not make propositional claims about the world, experience, or God; and here Walther reminds us that a philosophy which does make such claims has no greater hold over those matters than poetry does. Walther's reference to this poem reminds the reader that, as with Kofman's Nietzsche, her choice to write primarily in philosophical or conceptual terms is itself a contingent one.²⁴⁵

Rilke appears again on the final page of *PdM*, in an appendix entitled 'Über das Verhältnis der christlichen Gottessohnschaft zur mystischen Einigung mit Gott und zur Gemeinschaft mit Gott' (*PdM*, pp. 238–48). In this final part of the text Walther explains that there must be a 'ein unüberbrückbarer Wesensunterschied' between the kind of union between God and Christ, and the kind of union between God and the mystic (*PdM*, p. 239). This is because while God and Christ share a foundational essence even if they are distinct as 'Person' (*PdM*, p. 239), each human still has their own foundational essence (*PdM*, p. 241). Walther does not argue this point; rather she illustrates it. The various foundational essences are represented by means of her previous 'Gleichnisse' of different kinds of flames and lights, finishing with a bracketed quotation from Dante, the second half of which is repeated at the end of the paragraph: '(“Se non eterno, ed io eterno duro!” [Dante].)' (*PdM*, pp. 244–7). Walther continues, and where before Rilke appeared as an ally, here he is presented in a

²⁴⁴ Burns, see especially pp. 265–9.

²⁴⁵ Kofman, p. 3.

negative light. Walther takes issue with the suggestion that God, the unconditioned being, needs the conditioned (human) being. She writes:

[Es ist] vermessene Torheit [...], wenn Menschen (wie z. B. Angelus Silesius und R. M. Rilke) sich einbilden, Gott 'bedürfe' der geschaffenen, endlichen, besonderen (menschlichen) Wesen, um erkannt zu werden und um sich durch das Erkanntwerden von seiten anderer Wesen selbst zu erkennen, ebenso bedürfe er dieser Wesen, um lieben und geliebt werden zu können. Demgegenüber ist es vielmehr klar, daß kein besonderes, geschaffenes Wesen Gott Vater je auch nur annähernd so erkennen könnte, wie Gott Sohn, – und umgekehrt. (*PdM*, p. 248)

Walther does not here identify where in Rilke's work she finds this view. But the poem she quotes earlier in *PdM* does in the parts not quoted by Walther have some hint of a role for the conditioned being that is greater than she might be comfortable with. The line 'Mit meinem Reifen/ reift/ dein Reich' potentially suggest that the speaker's own 'ripening' is needed for God's 'Reich' to unfold. The speaker also gives the addressee instructions ('Tu mir kein Wunder zulieb./ Gieb deinen Gesetzen recht').

In all of this Walther may read that there is a sense in which God depends on the contingent human being in Rilke's vision. This demonstrates an important distinction in how Walther and Rilke treat contingency and the absolute. I have shown that in Walther, the absolute appears on the level of the everyday, and as such the distinction between the two is not a guiding one in the same way as it is for other philosophers with whom she engages. For Rilke the divine similarly appears on the level of the everyday. But whereas for Walther the divine even in its material contingent appearance remains in some sense inaccessible to humans (in that it is accessible via divine grace only), for Rilke there is more of a sense in which humans may exert some control over the divine. God appears elsewhere in Rilke as a human plaything: Gosetti-Ferencei writes that in the story *Wie der Fingerhut dazu kam, der liebe Gott zu sein* (from his 1902/1904 collection *Geschichten vom lieben Gott*), children 'assign the

divine presence to an ordinary domestic object'.²⁴⁶ For Walther on the other hand it seems that humans may not choose to assign the divine in this way. In a sense, Walther preserves here a sense of difficulty, of an absolute that cannot be reached. In continuing to use her metaphors to depict this difficulty, however, she reminds us that in relinquishing any claim to power over the absolute, her own kind of contingent playfulness may operate without the burden of having to actively call forth the absolute.

V. Conclusion: Through the Looking Glass

Walther's references to literature in *PdM* and *O:G* are revealing of how she approaches questions of abstraction and the absolute, and specificity and contingency. Some of the most interesting parts of her work arise out of the tensions and interactions between these impulses. Childhood is one line along which these this is made clear. Walther uses the imagery of childhood both as a marker of specificity and contingent playfulness, but also at times as an ideal that appears divorced from material childhood experience. Childhood is sometimes valued as its own specific kind of contingent experience: as in the fairy play of *O:G*. But it also sometimes appears only as a generic marker of 'specificity *as such*', as in the passages as *PdM* where childhood is equated with other generic cultural markers of supposed purity. At such points the advantages of Walther's approach over Husserlian universalism is lost.

In terms of the implications of Walther's use of art for her overall methodology, art ultimately acts as a way out of absolutism for Walther. The literary interludes in *O:G*, interspersed with their 'translations' into phenomenological insights, act as a kind of dialogue between the literary and the philosophical, with neither having the final word. Neither discipline is closed off from others, and neither can offer an exhaustive vocabulary for representing the experiences in question. Literature seems preferable insofar as it makes no claims to such exhaustiveness. Literary output is contingent, and it may speak to experience in

²⁴⁶ Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Ecstatic Quotidian*, p. 64.

an indirect way. What Walther does by placing this alongside her philosophical claims is indicate that her philosophical claims are similarly indirect.

Walther's references to Stefan George, Franz Marc and Rainer Maria Rilke in some sense play with the ideas of difficulty and shock. They are examples of modernists who identify a culture that is fallen, and work to go beyond the 'cracks' of habitual modes of experience and language use. What is sought beyond these habitual modes often appears a form of the absolute: something eternal underlying specific, contingent cultural expressions. This stands parallel to the phenomenological project, represented by Husserl, which seeks to establish phenomenology as a discipline underlying all other disciplines. However Walther's engagement with George reveals that she was at her most interested in his work when it offered signs of others experiencing something similar to her own mystical experiences. Walther seems to hope that by engaging with George, she might find a community and a vocabulary that would help her work through her experiences with others. A similar impulse drives her engagement with Franz Marc. Marc's vision for his art was that its difficulty might become habitual, an important modification to the Husserlian phenomenological impulse to be a perpetual beginner. Walther turns to Rilke for assistance in making a specific point about historical religion, but also as a marker of how her own work is to be understood. Art and literature appear in Walther's work as points of access rather than expressions of difficulty. Overwhelmingly her use of artistic reference appears as a form of cultural pragmatism, rather than an expression of shock.

In the second edition of *PdM* in 1955 a new set of artistic references is added. Alongside her original references to high modernist poetry and visual art are references to Lewis Carroll's children's literature. In this the association of literature and childhood with accessibility, specificity and a pragmatism of approach is all the more apparent. Walther adds to her description of the Ich's inward turn and investigation of its own processes references to

Alice Through the Looking Glass [1872], a text which by 1955 had a long-standing readership.²⁴⁷

This begins early on in the first chapter on ‘Das Ich als Zentrum des Erlebens’, as Walther introduces the task of finding one’s own ‘Ich’ in the face of the ‘Spiegelungen’ of the outside world.²⁴⁸ Walther adds:

Wie aber finden wir nun eigentlich ‘uns selbst’ unabhängig von dem Gespiegelten, von der Außenwelt? Sollten wir es dazu nicht machen wie die kleine Alice im Märchen, die in den Spiegel hinein stieg und auf der ‘anderen Seite’ eine neue, ungeahnte ‘Wunderwelt’ entdeckte? Zweifellos müssen wir in ähnlicher Weise die neue, wunderbare Welt der Seele, des Geistes suchen!²⁴⁹

In this passage Walther is guiding her reader through the process of phenomenological self-investigation: the literary reference adds to the sense of the original edition’s status as a spiritual guidebook. This investigation involves an important transformation of habitual ways of seeing and being in the world. The task of finding one’s foundational essence, the first step on the path to experiencing God, is explicitly framed here as the regaining of childhood wonder.

Another reference to *Alice Through the Looking Glass* appears two chapters later, as Walther is discussing how the self experiences others.²⁵⁰ The point Walther is building towards at this stage in the text is that one’s sense of other people is grounded on something other than just an extrapolation from their outward ‘Ausdrucksphänomene’ (including ‘Mienenspiel’ and ‘Mitteilungen’): this reflects philosophical discussions of the problem of other minds.²⁵¹ Such outward ‘signs’ of the other arrive, Walther says, ‘von vorne, während das Ich noch diesseits des “Spiegels” der kleinen Alice steht’.²⁵² Walther argues that encounters with others

²⁴⁷ Walther herself read English, but she could also have expected a German-speaking audience to be familiar with Carroll. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* [1865] was first translated into German in 1869: see F. Lösel, ‘The first German translation of *Alice in Wonderland*’, *Hermathena*, 99 (1964), 66–79. *Alice Through the Looking Glass* was translated into German by Helene Scheu-Riesz in 1923. Lewis Carroll, *Alice im Spiegelland*, trans. by Helene Scheu-Riesz (Vienna: Sesam, 1923).

²⁴⁸ Walther, *PdM* (1955), pp. 35–46 (p. 35).

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁵⁰ ‘Erlebnisse fremder Subjekte im eigenen Inneren’, in Walther, *PdM* (1955), pp. 54–62.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

can involve alongside such external features some underlying, less easily defined or characterised ‘understanding’ of the other (one that is even more direct and extreme in the case of telepathy). To explain this she again turns to *Alice Through the Looking Glass*: ‘die zweite Gegebenheit des Fremdseelischen vollzieht sich sozusagen hinter dem Rücken des Ichzentrums, a tergo, auf der jenseitigen Seite des Spiegels, also bereits im “Wunderland” der kleinen Alice’.²⁵³ This point is similar to the point made by Walther in her discussion of historical religion which included assistance from Rilke: though the artistic references do not have the same role, in both cases Walther reaches for artistic texts when expressing a dissatisfaction with the impulse to externalise all relations.

Walther’s final reference to Lewis Carroll occurs in the passage of her text in which she is describing the most extreme form of detachment experienced by her subject, where that subject continues to have experience of some kind, but without intentional objects. She uses the imagery of the mirror to explain the position of the ‘Ich’:

[...] das Ich [scheint] [...] gleichsam ‘zwischen’ dem Grundwesen (und der Einbettung mit der übrigen Quellen) einerseits, der ‘Welt’ im weitesten Sinne andererseits zu stehen: also, um auf den Spiegel der kleinen Alice zurückzukommen: im Spiegelglas selbst, zwischen der Welt vor und hinter diesem.²⁵⁴

Walther is here describing one of the more ‘difficult’ forms of experience, a form in which the Ich has little by way of reference points with which to orientate itself. Her typical use of quotation marks on words indicating the Ich’s position in metaphorical spatial terms (‘zwischen’) speaks to the sense that language cannot quite access the domain of such experience. Even so Walther offers her reader a point of reference, a new, borrowed set of metaphors that is consciously culturally located, and readily accessible even as it is fantastical.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 141.

These references might appear to differ in kind to the more difficult contemporary poetry that makes up most of the literary references in the earlier edition of *PdM* (and which remain in the 1955 edition, supplemented rather than replaced by the Alice references). But there are similar impulses guiding the use of both, and so the addition of the later references simply makes explicit those impulses already present in the earlier edition. As with the re-personalisation of the telepathy passages in the 1955 edition, these changes demonstrate that Walther has grown more accepting of her own process in the meantime. With the Alice references Walther positions her reader as a child to be guided on their spiritual and investigative journey. This gestures at Walther's faith in the redeemability of her adult readers, a faith that they might re-animate their childhood structures and engage in this phenomenological play. In staging this journey as one of travelling through the looking glass, there is a sense of the child-reader as a perpetual beginner. However in using this accessible and even conventional reference, Walther demonstrates that this perpetual beginning is itself a habit.

Walther's phenomenological process, one which relies on contingent, culturally located claims even where forms of the absolute are of concern, involves a reassessment rather than an overhaul of habitual modes of language use and communal engagement. This chapter has shown the modernist cultural context on which Walther relies for her text to take shape: including language crisis, primitivism, and poetic responses to religious experience and community. These involve artists who identify a form of crisis in modernity but whose approaches nonetheless offer Walther pragmatic tools for her meditative phenomenological investigation. In turning to art, Walther does not ontologise it: it is not that an artistic approach is as such different to or better than a philosophical one. Rather she highlights all these approaches as open-ended, non-exhaustive and contingent.

Examining Walther's work in this context contributes to a more nuanced vision of the crisis (of language and otherwise) in German modernism. Lisi Schoenbach's identification of two models of 'shocked' and 'pragmatic' modernism is an important point of reference in this chapter. Schoenbach highlights a problem for modernists whereby the search for novelty became habitual, and anti-institutional figures were quickly adopted by the institutions they initially placed themselves outside of.²⁵⁵ I identify a parallel problem for phenomenologists, whose pursuit of pure reorientation, particularly over one hundred years after the early days of phenomenology, is itself a fairly typical starting orientation. What Walther offers is an early model for overcoming these difficulties, in that she locates her investigative stance within the natural standpoint. Engagement with cultural production is key to this, acting in Walther's work as a constant reminder that the phenomenology is reliant upon its cultural situation.

²⁵⁵ Schoenbach, pp. 12–3.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

I. Walther beyond the 1920s: myth-building

Gerda Walther's career in academic philosophy was cut short. As Linda López McAlister writes, Walther's family lost their money in the hyperinflation of 1923, and there was no opportunity for her to earn a living in academia.²⁵⁶ My focus in this thesis has been on the period of her output in which she was part of the Munich and Freiburg circles of phenomenologists, which is when she produced her most compelling work; as well as some of her revisions to *PdM* in 1955 which shed light on the murkier impulses of the original. In this conclusion I first briefly consider Walther's life past the 1920s, during which time her work became increasingly esoteric. I take the most problematic example of her 'occultist' output and show how Walther, having been excluded from more established academic communities, contributed to dangerous populist myth-building in the Nazi period (a somewhat different practice to the mainstream academic establishment's integration of Nazi ideology). In doing so I encourage a nuanced view of Walther's more positive and productive contributions, to which I return here too. I emphasise Walther's cultural situation and pursue a demythologised history of the period: one that does not ignore the failings of new figures who also have something positive to offer.

Beyond the publication of *OsG* and *PdM* Walther's philosophical output was limited, and many of her later publications related to the psychological studies she observed as a secretary, and the activities of the occult and parapsychological circles in which she became active (see esp. *ZaU*, pp. 384–480).²⁵⁷ During the Second World War, Walther worked in the Foreign Postal Censorship Office, having been conscripted to 'Kriegsdienst' (*ZaU*, p. 568–

²⁵⁶ López McAlister, 'Gerda Walther', in *Contemporary Women Philosophers*, ed. by Waithe, p. 191.

²⁵⁷ Walther's entire output is listed by Eberhard Avé-Lallemant in Andreas Resch, *Gerda Walther* (Innsbruck: Resch, 1983), pp. 50–78. Avé-Lallemant looked after Walther in her old age and worked on organising her *Nachlass*. See López McAlister, 'My memories of Gerda Walther' in *Women Phenomenologists on Social Ontology*, ed. by Luft and Hagenhuber, p. viii.

82). Walther's autobiography contains many passages condemning Nazism and the war, which position this condemnation as in line with her views at the time, rather than developed in hindsight. One example is the passage in which she describes how she came to choose the Censorship Office over a position in an arms factory ('Ich wollte nicht auch nur im geringsten an der Herstellung von Mordwerkzeugen beteiligt sein'), or one as a teacher ('Da mußte ich ja den Kindern die nationalsozialistischen Phrasen eintrichtern, – ausgeschlossen!') (*ZaU*, pp. 568). Her account of this period includes what she presents as attempts at modest acts of resistance, such as printing banned anti-Nazi sermons (*ZaU*, pp. 573–4), and a tragic account of her sourcing pills to allow a Jewish couple who were scheduled for transportation to a concentration camp to take their own lives (*ZaU*, pp. 574–6).

Walther writes of her arrest and weeks-long imprisonment by the Gestapo, who questioned her about her earlier links to socialist groups and, primarily, her 'occultist' activities (in the chapter 'Hinter Schloß und Riegel: Gestapohaft!', *ZaU*, pp. 583–98). Eric Kurlander gives an account of the role of occultism and esoteric sciences in shaping Nazi ideology and propaganda. He shows how this strand of Nazi thinking emerged out of the sorts of trends in modern German cultural and intellectual life highlighted throughout my thesis. This includes 'a renaissance in new forms of everyday religiosity', and the sense that members of the public in Germany as well as Nazi membership, 'living in a society riddled by crisis, increasingly viewed popular aspects of occultism, paganism, and border science as fundamental to negotiating the complexities of modern life'.²⁵⁸

Walther's personal experience speaks to the Nazi party's varied engagement with forms of the supernatural examined by Kurlander. This includes in broad terms its appropriation of occultist vocabulary and ideas for propaganda purposes, the genuine belief of

²⁵⁸ Eric Kurlander, *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 5, pp. 60–61.

some members in the occult, and its crackdown on some occultists.²⁵⁹ Following her arrest Walther was warned to cease her involvement in parapsychology: ‘So hieß es denn eines Tages, ich werde entlassen, müsse mich aber verpflichten, mich nie mehr mit Parapsychologie, Astrologie usw. zu “beschäftigen”, widrigenfalls ich “schlimmste Maßnahmen” (KZ) zu gewärtigen habe’ (*ZaU*, p. 596). Some months later she was asked to visit a naval captain, who requested her assistance in understanding the principles of pendulum dowsing, which he believed was how the British army was locating German submarines. He thought he might be able to teach German sailors to do the same (*ZaU*, pp. 599–602). Walther was unconvinced, and declined to help: ‘Ich hielt das für phantastischen Unsinn’ (*ZaU*, p. 600). In her view, one would need to be a clairvoyant to do this successfully, and according to her most clairvoyants had been arrested and murdered by the Gestapo (*ZaU*, p. 601).

So Walther seems to disapprove of Nazi policies around the supernatural, and their use of the occult for militaristic purposes. However despite her anti-Nazi stance in *ZaU*, there is evidence that before the war Walther did also contribute to some extent to a form of parapsychology and occultism that fed into Nazi propaganda. In 1938 Walther published a short text entitled *Abnen und Schauen unserer germanischen Vorfahren im Lichte der Parapsychologie*, based on a paper she gave in Amsterdam in 1937. This text re-examines old Germanic ‘Mythen, Sagen und Märchen’ and mines them for their parapsychological content, claiming that in the light of modern advances in parapsychology, these legends can be understood as records of certain kinds of occult experiences.²⁶⁰ It includes short chapters on, for example, ‘Wahrträume’, ‘Waches Hellsehen’, ‘Exteriorisation und ätherischer Doppeltgänger’, ‘Schutzgeister’, and ‘Spukphänomene’.

²⁵⁹ On this crackdown, see ‘The Third Reich’s War on the Occult’, in Kurlander, pp. 100–130. ‘When the regime worked to repress or ‘coordinate’ esoteric groups, it had more to do with controlling than eliminating occult ideas.’ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

²⁶⁰ Gerda Walther, *Abnen und Schauen unserer germanischen Vorfahren im Lichte der Parapsychologie* (Leipzig: Hummel, 1938), p. 5.

The focus on the specifically ‘Germanic’ quality of these experiences is more understated in the case studies than the publication’s title and blurb might suggest. It does not seem in the case study sections that these examples are necessarily interesting for their Germanness. However the publication’s introduction suggests that the case studies together offer a picture of some Germanic essence: the earlier generations are ‘unsere unmittelbaren geistigen und seelischen wie körperlichen Ahnen, also [...] Menschen des gleichen Typus, den wir selbst verkörpern, mit einer Grundeinstellung zu Leben und Schicksal, die auch der unseren entspricht’.²⁶¹ The ‘wir’ here is an exclusionary one. Walther clearly fits her parapsychological insights into a kind of Nazi myth-building.²⁶² Her claims in *Abnen und Schauen*, about the German ‘Geist’ and about what Germanic legends say about parapsychology, are (unsurprisingly) altogether unconvincing. The quasi-scientific force of the myths is not clear. Here Walther blends forms of inquiry or textual-generic forms, but the result is far from compelling: both because of the problems with those forms, and her own manner of combining them.

It could be argued that Walther was not truly committed to the idea of essential Germanness (her introduction also suggests that the legends of other ‘primitiver Völker’ might offer as much insight for parapsychology: itself an offensive claim for how it conceives of non-German cultures).²⁶³ If Walther was really as unconvinced by Nazi propaganda as her autobiography suggests, then this framing of her parapsychological work might be more a pragmatic or cynical decision that gave her work a veneer of acceptability for publishers or readers who were seeking out this sort of material. Either way (and it could be that her true position was somewhere in the middle of these two extremes), it shows a weakness on Walther’s part. Whether it is the case that Walther cynically tailored the results of her thinking

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁶² Kurlander gives an account of the development of nationalistic interest in folklore and mythology. See esp. Kurlander, pp. 5–10.

²⁶³ Walther, *Abnen und Schauen*, p. 5.

on parapsychological topics to the taste of the day, or whether she was truly concerned with finding a Germanic essence, this publication in some sense follows patterns that are present too in Walther's earlier work. These are a procedure of concealment or indirectness, and a difficulty in establishing the appropriate context in which her work might take shape.

In *Abnen und Schauen* the Germanic essence is another 'Etwas': another undetermined determiner, a kind of placeholder for meaning. But it is the worst example of this sort of procedure in Walther's work, this manner of saying something by saying nothing. As begins to happen in the less compelling parts of *PdM* (such as the passage about the 'primitive'), the 'Etwas' can appear to float free from its material context, which means that it ceases to stand for anything at all. This kind of essentialism involves a particular procedure of denial and concealment of the material context in which the text takes shape: as in Heidegger's concealment of the Jewish roots of certain strands in his thought.²⁶⁴ *Abnen und Schauen* fails to say anything convincing or even very clear about the Germanic 'Geist', but it does indirectly indicate its participation in Nazi myth-building.

The case of *Abnen und Schauen* shows where Walther's procedure of concealment and her awkward placement between forms of cultural output is at its most problematic (following on from parts of *PdM*). I have shown that in her earlier texts, this sense of indirectness and concealment is central to the interest and strength of her work. Walther conceals the material, personal sources of her account of mystical experience in *PdM*. But their traces remain in the unusual procedure of the text. This concealment makes the absent portions feel present, and what remains implicit are forces that are compelling: the place of the mystic, and women, in philosophy; and modernist sensibilities around the functioning of language. Concealment is not as such a good or interesting procedure: it is that which is concealed, and the manner in which it is concealed, that makes sections of Walther's earlier work valuable. With Walther's

²⁶⁴ As outlined by Caputo, drawing on Marlène Zarader. Caputo, 'People of God, People of Being'.

inner connection in *OvG*, for example, the reader is led through the narrative-phenomenological description to a point of recognition around the placeholder ‘Etwas’ that the inner connection marks. This gives it a grounding, even if that grounding is itself relative or contingent. With the Germanic ‘Geist’ in *Abnen und Schauen*, the textual procedure has no such power. The ‘Etwas’ is entirely ungrounded: introduced at the beginning of the enquiry and not interrogated or earned in any sense.

At this later point in her life Walther writes in a manner that in some respects resembles her earlier procedure, but which demonstrates a lack of grounding in terms of its textual or argumentative force. This emerges most strongly after Walther lost her institutional grounding. Though Walther’s earlier texts contain impulses that go beyond the philosophical, it was her rootedness in academic philosophy that allowed her to make her most constructive contributions. What Walther does at her best is collapse the radical distinction between the material on the one hand, and the essential or the abstract on the other. Walther approaches this conventional philosophical distinction, along with conventional problems such as around the subject’s engagement with others, or the representational power of language. But in approaching such distinctions and problems she side-steps into non-philosophical modes, the mystical and the literary: showing that the original conception of these distinctions and problems does not have an absolute hold on the material in question.

Examining Walther’s rootedness in the contingent and the personal can assist in bringing to light some of the concealing procedure present too in the work of stricter phenomenologists: whether it is the personal basis of Husserl’s own ‘pure’ inquiry (as pointed out by Sara Ahmed)²⁶⁵, or the implicit workings of different genres or traditions in supposedly

²⁶⁵ Sara Ahmed notes that Husserl begins from his personal experience as a philosopher at the writing table, and that she herself does not ‘[relegate] the table to the background’ as Husserl chooses to. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 4.

‘grounding’ philosophical texts.²⁶⁶ Expanding the context in which phenomenological texts are read, as Walther’s work invites, allows for their distinct character and flaws to come to the fore, contributing to a more nuanced account of this period in intellectual and cultural history. Following Walther’s compelling destabilisation of pure phenomenological inquiry, my own approach replaces the investigation of community ‘as such’ with an investigation of the particular diverse communities in which Walther participated, or sought entry to. My study assists in a project of demythologising this period.²⁶⁷ A recognition of Walther’s own participation in Nazi myth-building ensures that this nuance is not simply constituted by an attempt to introduce a ‘great woman’ into a list of individual-focused ‘great men’ (to use Christia Mercer’s conception of the history of philosophy).²⁶⁸ Rather attention is paid to cultural and historical context throughout: Walther’s constructive contribution should not be entirely isolated from her weaknesses.

II. Productive failures

Though she does not purport to herself radically re-ground philosophy (as other phenomenologists seek to), Walther at her most productive does seek to pick apart certain philosophical habits. In doing so she is part of a strong tradition that includes several of the other philosophers I have considered here. As Stanley Cavell puts it, ‘both Wittgenstein and Heidegger incessantly philosophize by putting the language of philosophy under fire’.²⁶⁹ Lee Braver quotes this passage from Cavell in drawing together the two philosophers: a project which itself brings nuance to a philosophical history that keeps them separate.²⁷⁰ Braver points

²⁶⁶ As explored in my second chapter with regard to Husserl and Descartes; or as in Heidegger. Caputo, ‘People of God, People of Being’.

²⁶⁷ A project represented for example by Caputo, *Demythologising Heidegger*, and contributed to in MacIntyre, *Edith Stein*, p. 5.

²⁶⁸ Mercer, p. 2542.

²⁶⁹ Stanley Cavell, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), p. 143.

²⁷⁰ Lee Braver, *Groundless Grounds: A Study of Wittgenstein and Heidegger* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), p. 3.

out that this form of re-contextualisation is more in keeping with Wittgenstein's way of putting philosophical language under fire: 'It is one of the great ironies of Wittgenstein scholarship that a philosopher who continuously emphasized the distortive effects of removing elements from their context is frequently studied in precisely that way'.²⁷¹

Walther has her own way of putting philosophical language under fire. It is more subtle than someone like Heidegger's, who dramatically declared Walther's work to be the 'philosophical noise of the day' in 1923. Walther's own unpicking of phenomenological procedure and language lacks the overt drama of Heidegger's condemnation, but it possesses a compelling narrative sense. I have explored how Walther was to some extent allowed membership of the circles of phenomenologists in Freiburg and Munich, and how her affiliations with these groups had its limitations. These limitations led her to look outside of what these groups had to offer, and to seek her community elsewhere. In a sense, it might be a privilege of members of the philosophical establishment to be able to put its language under fire, or at least to have one's efforts to do so recognised in scholarship. To do so dramatically might involve a claim to a universalist view of philosophy *as such*, the kind of claim that appears less likely to be made by those who are not as established in philosophy.

Sara Ahmed gives an example of a less established position in *Queer Phenomenology*. She emphasises that it is phenomenology's denial of its material basis that leads it to present as universal a particular orientation that is in fact contingent and exclusionary: considering 'how phenomenology might universalize from a specific bodily dwelling'.²⁷² Ahmed states that her approach is 'not "properly" phenomenological', adding that she '[suspects] that a queer phenomenology might rather enjoy this failure to be proper'.²⁷³ This is a model of a 'failed' phenomenology that contributes a great deal in terms of the material or disciplines (in queer

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁷² Ahmed, p. 4.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 2.

studies) that it uses phenomenological tools to approach, but which also manages in its failure to give a strong critique of the inherent limitations of a 'pure' phenomenology. Ahmed identifies an 'enjoyment' in this failure, and explicitly acknowledges that it is a kind of strength. Walther's failure in *OsG* and *PdM* marks an earlier version of a productive diversion from the supposedly pure phenomenological path, as Edith Stein's work does too in other ways.²⁷⁴ Walther, like Stein, was not yet able to fully enjoy her productive failures, or to champion them explicitly. Instead she leaves traces of them for her readers to follow. My contribution here is to highlight and explore these traces. Recent scholarship has uncovered aspects of Walther's contributions as a phenomenologist to areas of enquiry such as social ontology. What I add to this can be seen as an examination of Walther's valuable contribution as a failed phenomenologist.

Walther's failure as a phenomenologist exposes some of phenomenology's inherent failures. As her work invites us to see, phenomenology's purported purity is undermined as it tends towards a universalism that its own focus on the 'situatedness' of its enquiry ought to exclude. Walther relinquishes any desire for textual or generic purity in allowing other forms of writing to operate in her inquiry as well. As a result her work is at times messy, a blend of philosophical, mystical and artistic modes. Walther identifies a spiritual connection with Teresa of Ávila. As I have explored, her method of adhering to the establishment mode while subtly offering an alternative has an important historic parallel in Teresa's meditative-mystical writings: both women's output relinquishes absolute textual authority while finding a way for their distinct contributions to shine through. Walther's mystically-informed approach to language (following a tradition in which God is approached but never captured in language) has a modernist inflection, revealed in her commitment to artistic modes. This modernism sits between the 'shocked' and 'pragmatic' models described by Schoenbach. For Walther, art

²⁷⁴ See MacIntyre.

seems at times the only appropriate mode for approaching the most intangible, difficult realities with which she concerns herself. But just as her most compelling essences are those which are in some important sense materially available, art is where Walther seeks communal understanding. Without setting things in stone, art makes the difficult visible and accessible.

In the preface to her autobiography, Walther writes that she first began to consider documenting her life story following the original publication of *PdM* in 1923, when a reader suggested that she publish an account of her own personal mystical experiences and acknowledge them as such. Walther states that her first instinct in response to this was not to write directly of her own experience, but to turn to a literary mode: 'Da es mir so sehr widerstrebte, von mir selbst [sic] zu berichten, schrieb ich damals das Ganze in Romanform nieder' (*ZaU*, p. 11). She worked on the manuscript until 1938, when she states she hid it to avoid it and her anti-fascist leanings being discovered by the Gestapo (*ZaU*, p. 12). Following some discussions with publishers (where she faced resistance to the supernatural content even in the novel form), Walther concluded that she must finally have the courage to own up to her own experience:

Wieder wurde ich gedrängt, doch das Buch zu veröffentlichen, aber nicht als Roman, sondern in der Ichform als Tatsachenbericht. Mir war gerade das äußerst unsympathisch, aber ich mußte zugeben, daß hier – aufgrund der geschilderten Umstände – die Anonymität ja doch kaum gewahrt werden könnte: jeder würde wissen, um wen es sich handelte, da sei es schon besser, mutig zu dem Geschilderten zu stehen, statt sich hinter ein 'wir', oder ein Pseudonym zu flüchten. (*ZaU*, p. 13)

Here, the artistic form appears as the easy way out for someone whose underlying commitment is to another form. Presenting her life story as a novel would absolve her of full responsibility for the claims she wishes to make about her experience. The embellishment or denial of certain facts, and the invention of others, might come more easily and carry less moral weight to the writer of such a semi-autobiographical novel than it does to the writer of an autobiography. In the end, Walther decided that she needed to be more direct.

If Walther had presented her life story as a novel, it might have made things easier for her readers too. The reader might have been better able to make sense of the strange dream sequences, telepathic visions and moments of religious affirmation, all of which are considered highly significant and real by the narrator. They could do so by bracketing off their content as symbolic, as operating on a different level to the main events of the novel. If the different levels of the story began to overlap, the reader could perhaps see it as a kind of modernist experiment, in which the very status of the narrative was called into question. The reader could also very easily choose not to overthink the difference between the main events and the mystical visions, because it is, after all, just a novel. As it stands, many of Walther's readers are left with the uneasy sense that not all of her claims are fully accessible. Some readers might choose to declare her visions delusions, and others might recognise something in them. Ann Taves notes that historians 'have little basis on which to [explain]' accounts of such experience.²⁷⁵ In my view, this extends to scholars of modern languages (and indeed philosophers). I am instead content to show how Walther makes sense of these experiences, and how scholars might make sense of her texts.

III. Walther's contribution

The problems of understanding and recognition around *ZaU* are in some respects quite like those that surround *PdM* and *OsG*. In this thesis, I have traced the cultural and philosophical significance of Walther's work on mysticism and social ontology, and presented a new interpretation of how her texts make their meaning. I offer a critical analysis of Walther's textual processes that allows their difficulties and ambivalences to stand, and does not force coherence on texts which function by defying fixed interpretation. In doing so, I hope that my findings constitute a philosophical contribution, as well as a contribution to wider cultural and literary studies. My thesis does not radically reorient the history of the period: indeed it is this

²⁷⁵ Taves, p. 3.

language of radical reorientation that sometimes leads to mythologised, reductive narratives about the ‘great figures’ of philosophy, and leaves other voices out. Rather it is an intervention that forms part of a collective and pragmatic project to expand the historical narrative around this period, and to include figures whose work defies straightforward categorisation. One path to a fuller understanding of the philosophical and cultural output of the period is to engage fully with the messy, material reality of the texts, and the figure, of Gerda Walther.

In spite of the difficulties around her work, and in fact in many instances precisely by means of that difficulty, Walther made a real, positive contribution to a number of disciplines with work that was at its best visionary and ground-breaking. My thesis has shown that close reading of Walther’s work can uncover an imaginative and often daring philosophical method that significantly expands the sphere of influence of her work beyond the boundaries within which she explicitly places it.

Even as she persuasively questions the absolutist impulses of the philosophical tradition in which she is trained, Walther imagines a philosophical language that in important respects unconstrained. Her mysticism expands the lines of subjectivity and challenges the fixed dualisms that characterise a philosophical approach which sets too much store by rationality: between self and other, material and absolute, and language and meaning. Walther foregrounds the body and materiality in philosophical work that is also spiritual. She shows how creative language can speak to forms of experience that strain against everyday language and understanding, while remaining vital and material. With an innovative blend of forms of writing, Walther compellingly destabilises narrative authority with an approach that is bold in its humility.

Though Walther struggled to find a community in her time, the expanded remit of phenomenology she imagines is in many ways ahead of its time. With the benefit of historical distance, it can be seen that her work occupies an interesting and important place in the

development of phenomenology. As I have explored, Walther's situation of her work between philosophy and literature sets her in a tradition in which Nietzsche is one of the most significant figures (along with, for example, Kierkegaard). Though Walther's output was dismissed by Heidegger, it can be seen to have anticipated some of the later developments in Heidegger's phenomenology. Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei explores how Heidegger's turn to a 'poetics' of being beyond the 1930s sees him reimagine philosophy's task, and its relation to subjectivity, using poetic language.²⁷⁶ Later philosophers like Merleau-Ponty operate between philosophy and art as a matter of course, recognising the value of that shifting mode of writing for reflecting complex subjectivities and embodied experience. By the time of Sartre and de Beauvoir's novels, it is a more natural proposition that a philosopher might philosophise through art, and through literary meditations on situated experience. The wide range of work on the connections between phenomenology and literature I have cited in this thesis shows that the disciplines' affinities are now firmly established in scholarship. Walther's work can then be seen as visionary: as an unrecognised bridge between forms of phenomenological exploration, and as daring experiments in a form that later flourished.

In the light of my analysis, Walther can be repositioned as an early challenger to the phenomenological mainstream. For the brief period in the 1920s when she produced *OsG* and *PdM*, she created a space for herself in which her gender and her creative and religious impulses empowered her to make a unique contribution that sets her aside from her contemporaries. Her pointed failure to conform philosophically allowed her to engage in a wider project that sits within and without academic phenomenology. She is best appreciated when her work in that period is viewed holistically: with the more straightforward-seeming *OsG* opening up as playful and meditative when considered alongside *PdM*. Her methodologically innovative approach in both texts arises out of productive aesthetic

²⁷⁶ Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Toward a New Poetics of Dasein* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

concerns around the difficulties of language and metaphoric representation. This makes her a compelling modernist thinker.

Walther did not have the benefit of hindsight or the academic freedom to state her case boldly, and indeed, I have argued that her subtlety and humility are essential aspects of her positive contribution. Instead I make a bold claim on her behalf: that she was a truly important figure in her own time and ours, whose productive critique of classical phenomenology and search for religious and artistic community led her to reimagine what philosophy can do, and compels her readers to look differently at everyday life and its philosophical description.

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