

# Familiarity and Togetherness\*

*Sonia Maria Lisco*

University of Padova\*\*

[soniamarialisco@gmail.com](mailto:soniamarialisco@gmail.com)

*Linas Tranas*

a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School Cologne, University of Cologne\*\*\*

[ltranas@gmail.com](mailto:ltranas@gmail.com)

*Simone Aurora*

University of Padova\*\*\*\*

[simone.aurora@unipd.it](mailto:simone.aurora@unipd.it)

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\*\* *Correspondence:* Sonia Maria Lisco, Department Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology (FISPPA), University of Padova. Piazza Capianiato 3, 35139 Padova, Italy.

\*\*\* *Correspondence:* Linas Tranas, a.r.t.e.s. Graduate school for the Humanities Cologne, University of Cologne. Aachener Str. 217, 50931 Köln, Deutschland.

\*\*\*\* *Correspondence:* Simone Aurora, Department Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology (FISPPA), University of Padova. Piazza Capianiato 3, 35139 Padova, Italy.



The immense effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on our lifeworld and ways we live with others have provided a great opportunity to revisit and reflect on a relationship between the senses of familiarity and togetherness.

The sense of familiarity is a sense of having experienced something before, strictly connected to the fluency of a particular process and sometimes associated with a positive feeling of “warmth.” It has been an object of interest in phenomenology,<sup>1</sup> analytic philosophy of perception,<sup>2</sup> and contemporary investigations in psychology, sociology, and epistemology.<sup>3</sup>

The sense of togetherness is a sense that it is us, we who live, act, or feel, as opposed to living, acting, or feeling personally, on one’s own. Phenomena of living, acting, and feeling together with others have attracted attention of both early and contemporary phenomenologists<sup>4</sup> and analytic philosophers,<sup>5</sup> and have been a topic of the fields of collective intentionality and social ontology.

On the one hand, these concepts seem to be closely connected. Imagine meeting an old friend who now looks and acts in new, unfamiliar ways. Or, think of a member of a highly coordinated crew who starts performing her tasks in novel and unexpected ways. It seems that such disruptions of familiarity would threaten the sense of togetherness. On the other hand, togetherness and familiarity cannot be synonymous. Imagine, for instance, lifelong enemies who are familiar with one another in detail. Their familiarity with one another does not seem to entail togetherness in the sense introduced above.

The relationship between familiarity and togetherness is certainly not a new topic in a philosophical debate. A seasoned

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1 HUSSERL 1973, SCHÜTZ & LUCKMANN 1973, RATCLIFFE 2005.

2 WITTGENSTEIN 2009, BAZ 2020.

3 WHITTLESEA & WILLIAMS 2001, FUCHS 2014, LUHMANN 2000, MEYLAN 2014.

4 For example, HUSSERL 1973, HEIDEGGER 1927, WALTHER 1922, SCHELER 1973, 2008, SCHÜTZ 1972, GURWITSCH 1979, SCHMID 2009, SZANTO 2015, ZAHAVI 2015, DE VECCHI 2016.

5 For example, GILBERT 1990, BRATMAN 1993, SEARLE 2002, SARMELA 2012, TUOMELA 2013.

phenomenologist will immediately note that a close and important connection between these two notions has been thematized in a classical phenomenological discussion of the notion of homeworld, which has been characterized as a domain of familiarity and shared culture. As Schütz puts it, «'[t]o feel at home' is an expression of the highest degree of familiarity and intimacy».<sup>6</sup> From a Husserlian point of view, the homeworld is of an intrinsically communicative nature<sup>7</sup> which can develop intersubjectively thanks to a common shared lifeworld that is based on a specific degree of familiarity (*Vertrautheit*). Importantly, for Husserl, the homeworld represents a zero-point for a social world, as a foundational world for the various other forms of sociality.

However, the notions of familiarity and togetherness have since been discussed also in isolation from the phenomenological notion of homeworld and from one another. In analytic philosophy, familiarity has been conceived as an “epistemic feeling” and characterized as a cognitive state informing a subject about the fluency of her experiential flow.<sup>8</sup> Given the focus on its metacognitive nature, it has been discussed predominantly in individualist terms. However, since the experience of our familiar daily world is intrinsically intersubjective, we believe that the experiential flow of a single subject cannot be investigated without any reference to intersubjectivity and togetherness. On the other side, in the collective intentionality debate, although several authors, building on work of classical phenomenologists, emphasize the significance of a related notion of habituality for collective intentionality,<sup>9</sup> the notion of familiarity specifically seems to be largely missing. Moreover, authors barely refer to the aforementioned contemporary debate on familiarity.

We think that this lack of systematic discussion of the relationship between the senses of familiarity and togetherness in contemporary

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6 SCHÜTZ 1945, 370.

7 HUSSERL 1973.

8 ARANGO MUNOZ & MICHAELIAN 2014, MEYLAN 2014, WHITTLESEA & WILLIAMS 1998, WHITTLESEA & WILLIAMS 2001.

9 For example, CAMINADA 2014, THONHAUSER 2020.

debates in phenomenology and, more broadly, philosophy is unfortunate, since the exploration of this relationship promises insights and developments of theoretical and practical importance. The goal of this issue is therefore to clarify these concepts and shed new light on their interconnections by revisiting familiarity, togetherness and their relationship from the perspectives of contemporary research interests. This Issue certainly does not scope all the aspects of each of the notions and relationships between them or, let alone, answer all the relevant questions. However, it contains papers making inroads into several of them and, hopefully, inspiring further research into the topic.

The Issue opens with a paper by Jérôme Dokic, «Variations on Familiarity in Self-transcendent Experiences», which focuses on the peculiar relationship between familiarity and the so-called “self-transcendent” experiences, described as moments which seem to deeply alter the boundaries between oneself and the rest of the world. The aim of Dokic’s contribution is not only to clarify their meaning, but also to identify the level of self-consciousness to which they belong. His main claim is that self-transcendent experiences involve special instances of metacognitive feelings of familiarity or unfamiliarity. Therefore, he proposes to investigate them both from a theoretical and an empirical perspective, in order to shed a new light on the characterization of self-transcendent experiences.

Mikko Salmela’s paper, «Two Kinds of Experiences of Togetherness», sets out to clarify a notion of experience of togetherness that is popular and important in the debate of shared emotions. He argues that previous research has conflated two related but distinct experiences under it—a sense of togetherness and feelings of togetherness. Salmela presents a fine-grained and rich analysis of the differences and relations between these two kinds of experiences. He discusses different sources of these two types of experiences of togetherness in shared emotions and ends the paper by refining his account with a distinction between two types of feelings of

togetherness, weak and strong.

Olli-Pekka Paananen's paper, «Affective Familiarity and the Experience of Home: A Phenomenological Exploration», approaches the topic of familiarity through a phenomenon of home. Paananen analyzes emotional aspects of the experience of home and characterizes home as structured around things that are of high personal value. He argues that a feeling of familiarity is an intrinsic part of the experience of home, since whatever is personally significant to you is necessarily more or less familiar to you. He proposes that this means that the experience of home and ownness implies two senses of familiarity—familiarity with significant objects and familiarity with oneself as a feeling and caring being. Although only in passing, Paananen's discussion of home as a sociocultural space also relates to the phenomenon of togetherness.

Erik Norman Dzwiza-Ohlsen's contribution, «Going Home Alone? On Disorientation, Homelessness, and We-Identity in Alzheimer's Dementia», employs Husserl's phenomenological lifeworld approach to explore possibilities of enduring togetherness in the case of Alzheimer's Dementia (AD). Dzwiza-Ohlsen begins by introducing four constitutive conditions for enduring togetherness—familiarity, trust, communication, and identification—and shows how all of them are directly affected by the core symptoms of AD. This motivates the central question of the paper—can these constitutive conditions for enduring togetherness still be fulfilled in the course of AD? With the help of four examples, the author demonstrates how the resources offered by embodied expressivity and embodied selfhood make the togetherness possible even in the late phase of AD. Dzwiza-Ohlsen's contribution is of significance not only for a theoretical debate but for therapeutic purposes as well.

In her paper, «Empathy, Togetherness, Familiarity: from Online to Offline», Lucy Osler considers the role that epistemic familiarity plays in empathetic perception and in the feeling of togetherness with others. To do this, Olsen distinguishes between what she proposes to call “familiarity by acquaintance” and “familiarity by resemblance”,

exploring their role in empathetic experiences and various forms of feeling togetherness with others both “offline” and “online”. In particular, Olsen claims that experiences of online empathy and online togetherness with someone always presuppose a familiarity by acquaintance with the relevant person in the offline world. In contrast, familiarity by resemblance appears to play a crucial role in shaping our experiences of others, emphasizing that what one experiences as another’s expressive experience and how one experiences that expressive experience is permeated by previous intersubjective encounters.

Francesca Ervas’ paper «Feeling the Extraordinary in Ordinary Language: Familiarity and Linguistic Intimacy» approaches the problem of familiarity starting from the concept of linguistic intimacy. In particular, she questions whether it is common to all linguistic phenomena or it is peculiar to figurative language. Starting from this query, her paper investigates the idea that the feeling of intimacy depends on (linguistic) familiarity. Embracing a Wittgensteinian perspective, her work claims that linguistic intimacy is connected to “aspectual familiarity”, which occurs at the moment when the addressee is invited to see an aspect that the speaker considers meaningful to articulate, but difficult to share with others in ordinary language.

Continuing the Wittgensteinian perspective on the problem, in her work «Familiarity and Forms of Life», Sonia Maria Lisco tries to shed new light on the concept of “familiarity,” and to outline a Wittgensteinian point of view on the topic. In doing so, she discusses a central notion in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, namely the one of “form of life”. Her main claim is that offering a “transcendental perspective” on this concept could provide some essential theoretical tools to better understand the meaning and sense of “familiarity”. In particular, she outlines to what extent both concepts can be related to the “inconceivable,” introduced by Wittgenstein as the “unheard of”.

Finally, Simone Aurora’s paper, «From the Field of Consciousness to the Social Field: Aron Gurwitsch's Theory of Organization», concludes

the issue by presenting Aron Gurwitsch's phenomenological theory of organization, which Gurwitsch first presented in his dissertation of 1929, *Phenomenology of Thematics and of Pure Ego: Studies of the Relation between Gestalt theory and Phenomenology*, and then developed more extensively in his major work of 1957, *The field of consciousness*. Although Aurora refers to these two important works, the focus of the paper lies especially in another less known book, Gurwitsch's habilitation thesis that was completed in 1933 but only posthumously published in 1977 with the title *Human Encounters in the social world*. In this book, Gurwitsch tries to apply his theory of the field of consciousness to the domain of intersubjectivity and to the sphere of the social reality, undertaking some important reflections on the notions of "familiarity" and "togetherness" which, as Aurora tries to show, can play an important role both in the contemporary philosophical and scientific debate and in the actual political context.

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