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## *Inner Joining* in Gerda Walther (1897–1977)

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“Inner joining” or “inner unification” (*innere Einigung*) is a simultaneously psychological and ontological process that constitutes an essential step in the formation of social communities. It is a non-cognitive “feeling of belonging together” in relation to other persons, and by extension to social institutions as a whole. This inner joining, which Walther describes as “a warm, affirmative wave of greater or lesser impact” flowing through the subject, is a determining factor for the relationships we develop with individuals and institutions. (1923: 34f).

In order to explain the different kinds of social formations, Walther distinguishes inner joining or unification into two distinct types: unconscious and habitual unification. While unconscious unifications concern communities that simply “grow together” without an affirmation by its members (for instance as the love towards one’s family members), habitual unification is based on individuals having explicitly experienced an inner joining at some point (such as the start of a friendship). Both types of unification can refer to either personal or non-personal relationships, allowing Walther to address the question of how we are differently unified to, or emotionally involved with, living persons and social institutions such as laws, traditions and even communities as such.

Taking cues from Alexander Pfänder’s writings on affects, Max Scheler’s work on sympathy, Edmund Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and Georg Simmel’s sociology, with “inner joining”, Walther develops a concept that explains how our social relationships come about and dynamically change through time without our being completely aware of it. The phenomenological description of “inner joining” is thus a valuable part of the analytical description of the “pure I”, the person and various other forms of communal subjects. For this reason, it has also become a term of interest for contemporary theories of social ontology.

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## Keywords:

early phenomenology, Gerda Walther, psychology, social ontology, sociality