

A MEMORY-BASED ARGUMENT FOR NON-REDUCTIONISM ABOUT THE TRANSTEMPORAL IDENTITY OF PERSONS

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Abstract: Does memory constitute diachronic identity? Or does it presuppose it? Butler has claimed that it is the latter, and, in this paper, I will side with him. My argumentation, however, will take a different route. My claim is not that memory presupposes transtemporal identity because I can only remember episodes that have happened to *me*. Rather, I will probe the idea that some properties of episodic remembering may be such that accounting for them requires us to posit a subject the transtemporal identity of which can't be reduced to continuity. These properties are the pastness of the recollected episode coupled with its first-personal accessibility. The argument will make heavy use of the experience of temporality.

I. Consciousness as subject

Discussing the relation between self and memory, what probably first comes to mind is Locke's theory on personal identity. According to this view the diachronic identity of a person is constituted by memory. I'm identical with *S* if I can remember at least some experiences of *S*. The Lockean theory in its contemporary form is probably the most widely held view with regard to the nature of personal identity in analytic philosophy (see Parfit 1984). I, however, think that memory can't be the foundation of identity because it presupposes it. A similar view was advocated by Butler but my argumentation only partly overlaps with his. My claim is not that I can only remember episodes that have happened to *me*. My claim is that to be able to make sense of episodic memory, we need to posit a persisting self. In other words, while Butler asserts that we can't explain personal identity by appealing to memory, my claim is that we can't make sense of episodic memory without appealing to a persisting self. This then is a non-reductionist take on the issue. Personal identity can't be reduced to psychological (or some other) continuity; it is a strict (numerical), transtemporal identity. I want to defend my thesis with two lines of argument. On the one hand, I will argue that the experience of the passage of time is a necessary precondition (and, in fact, a constitutive factor) for memory *and* that the experience of time itself wouldn't be possible without a persisting subject.¹ On the other

¹ The phrase "the experience of the passage of time" evokes a whole lot of questions about the nature of time and its relation to experience. I won't, however, cover these issues and will remain neutral about them. My investigation focuses solely on the experiential sphere. I will elaborate on this point a bit more extensively later.

hand, I will probe the idea that the ability to first-personally re-present past experiences in memory also requires such a self.² I will argue that at least some of the phenomenal features present in the content of (successful) recollection are numerically identical to features that were present in past experiences. In other words, in successful recollection I directly apprehend the phenomenal features of *past* experiences. It follows that I deny the indirect understanding of memory according to which what I'm primarily aware of in recollection is a mental representation. I will make the case that if the subject can be directly acquainted with past experiences, it entails that those experiences had to be the experiences of the very same subject.

Now what do I have in mind when I talk about a persisting subject/self? It has to be noted that the word 'subject' has more than one usages.³ Here I will apply it in its narrowest sense.⁴ To find out what the narrowest sense refers let's take the claim that the concept of experience

² It is important to note that when I'm talking about re-presentation of past episodes I don't mean re-presentation in the form of mental representations. My argument - as it will turn out - denies the indirect realist theory of memory according to which the content of recollection is a representation. I'll later clarify my use of the word "re-presentation".

³ See for example Strawson's distinction (2008b, pp. 154-158.) between the thick, classic and thin conceptions of what a subject is.

⁴ Which corresponds to Strawson's thin conception according to which a subject of experience only exists insofar an experience exists of which it is a subject of. In other words, if there is no experience, there is no subject (Strawson 2008b, pp. 155-158.). Strawson also thinks that this is the narrowest sense of the word 'subject'.

implies an experiencer (that is, a subject). This seems to be a conceptual truth. Experiences necessarily have a subject to them since the very word “experience” implies an experiencer that undergoes the experience. In an experience something is *experienced* and the phrase “being experienced” necessarily implies a subject who undergoes the experience. Thus being experienced means being experienced by something/someone. Since this is a conceptual truth it can’t be overwritten by observations like those of Hume (1793/2007, 165) and Lichtenberg (2000, 190) who have claimed that experience reveals no self. First of all, their argumentation runs in a completely different league. It’s about what is there to be found in the *contents* of experience. In other words, they deal in introspection. Whereas my claim is based on the meaning of a concept and its implications.

Now, the word “experience” in philosophy of mind is intimately linked to consciousness understood in the phenomenal sense. Experience then is to be thought of as the phenomenally conscious apprehending of phenomenal contents. But experiential presence is necessarily a presence *to* something/someone who consciously apprehends the content of the experience. (For the rest of the paper, I’ll use the phrase “experiential presence/givenness” for phenomenally conscious apprehending.) Now we can see why the observations of Hume and Lichtenberg run in a different direction. They take the fact the phenomenal contents experientially appear for granted and then go on to look for the self between the contents of experience, whereas my point is that the subject is exactly that *to which* experiential contents appear (and thereby can’t be found among them).

But what does this conceptual truth refer to? How should we understand this subject? I think the best understanding of it is the following: experience (in

accordance with the trend in philosophy of mind to treat experience synonymously with conscious apprehension) is the experiential givenness or presence of experiential content(s). Experiential givenness/presence is necessarily givenness/presence to someone/something. That which experiential content is present to is that which is conscious of the content. That which is conscious of the content is consciousness itself. This may seem an invalid step for one could insist that properly speaking what is conscious of the content is the *whole* organism, the brain or the psychological person. But the step is not invalid for the subject in its narrowest sense is something the existence of which has to be implied by the concept of experience. But neither the existence of the organism nor that of the brain or the psychological person is implied by it. The existence of which is implied by it is consciousness since if there is an experience, there must be a consciousness to it. This simply means that there are no unconscious experiences.⁵ If there is an experience, there is consciousness. Thus the subject in its narrowest sense is the consciousness *of* the content of experience.⁶

The claim therefore that I will argue for is that for episodic memory to be possible, the consciousness present in the act of remembering has to be numerically identical to

⁵ This claim is not the same as saying that there couldn't be unconscious phenomenal contents. If such phenomena are possible, they would precisely be *unexperienced* phenomenal contents, and thus their occurring wouldn't amount to being an experience.

⁶ It shouldn't be taken to mean that there are - ontologically speaking - two distinct *components* in experience - consciousness *and* content. The distinction here is only conceptual. The ontological interpretation of this conceptual distinction is something we don't have to be concerned about yet.

the consciousness that was present at the remembered episode. It's very important to be clear about what I mean here. I stress that I'm not talking about the continuity of the stream of consciousness for that could straightforwardly yield itself to a reductionist analysis. I'm not saying that for memory to be possible the act of remembering and the original experience has to take place in the same stream of consciousness. I'm saying that the consciousness *of* the content of remembering is the very same consciousness of content that was present at the remembered episode.⁷

II. The phenomenology of episodic remembering

First we have to examine how we can describe the experience of episodic remembering. **This is necessary for the phenomenological aspects I will identify are to serve as the basis for my argumentation for a persisting self. More specifically, I will propose that the best explanation of these aspects is the positing of such an abiding subject.**

How should we proceed with the description then? Yesterday evening I was watching an episode of a series and was at awe of one particular scene. I seem to *know* how it felt like to watch that scene. Of course it's not that remembering it I literally relive the experience. Remembering it I know or perceive that the remembered experience isn't transpiring *now*. Yet I seem to know what it was like when it transpired. Let's take another example from another modality. This is a trickier one. I inhale the smells of

⁷ In contrast to this, see Strawson who thinks that the stream of consciousness is composed of short-lived subjects (Strawson 2008b, 2009).

different soups and then try to tell which has had the most pleasant aroma for me. For that I have to compare the smells in memory. Here there is a certain elusiveness to remembering the fragrance. Much more so than in the case of an experience that is visually supported. (This is probably due to the fact that we rely more on the visual faculty than on the olfactory one.) Despite this elusiveness, I know that if I inhaled the smell of the soups again, the experience would be of instant familiarity. Yes, this fragrance I have inhaled before. There is a knowing again. A knowing of what it was like when I have inhaled it before. It is clear that this knowledge is not a piece of third-person knowledge. It's not like remembering some information (for example the year of the first Moon landing). This is first-person knowledge (**see Fernandez 2017**).

Now one may question what justifies the use of the word "knowledge" in the case of episodic remembering instead of experiential terminology.⁸ On the one hand, it definitely is a type of procedural knowledge. In it I know how to treat certain scenes as past experiences happened in my personal past. On the other hand, there's the fact that episodic memory "feels to originate from one's past experience" (Dokic 2014). Now, as Dokic rightly observes, this episodic feeling "seems to have some epistemic value" since it allows one to form judgements about past experiences (**see also Fernandez 2017**). When I remember what it was like to watch that particular scene from the series I implicitly judge that how it felt to watch it is the direct cause of how it is re-presented now in recollection.

In addition to this, we could say that episodic remembering is knowledge by acquaintance (see Russell

⁸ My reviewers worry that using epistemic vocabulary here may be unjustified, but, as we shall see, I disagree.

1912/2001). The things of which I have knowledge by acquaintance are things “immediately *known* to me just as they are” (Russell 1912/2001, 25, italics mine). Russell, accordingly, identifies memory as knowledge by acquaintance: “It is obvious that we often remember what we have seen or heard or had otherwise present to our senses, and in such cases we are still immediately aware of what we remember, in spite of the fact that it appears as past and not as present (Russel 1912/2001).” Thus, what it was like to experience a past episode is “immediately known to me”.⁹

Now, following Rowlands we could say that what sets episodic memory apart from other sorts of memory-knowledge is “a very specific mode of presentation” (Rowlands 2017, p. 41). In other words, it’s not just that episodic memory is about past episodes that are personal (that have happened to the remembering subject). It is that such episodes fall under a certain mode of presentation, namely under an “experiential” mode of presentation – as Rowlands puts it -, which means that the episodes are presented “*as* ones ... [one] formerly experienced” (Rowlands 2017, p. 49). Since I discussed the apparent first-person knowledge about past episodes, instead of experiential mode of presentation we could equally talk about first-personal mode of presentation.¹⁰ And this mode

⁹ This description of course presupposes the direct realist understanding of memory. But this is not a problem since here I only aim to reconstruct how episodic remembering seems to us pre-theoretically, which, to my mind is more in line with the direct realist picture.

¹⁰ The first-personal mode of presentation shouldn’t however be taken to mean that the remembered episode is always re-presented ‘as from my bodily perspective’. It is possible - as Rowlands points out - that a scene is re-presented in a way that my perspective on it is not my bodily perspective from which I have

of presentation could be regarded as knowledge insofar I'm acquainted with a past episode under it.

Here we already seem to have the first aspect of the phenomenology then: the knowledge/knowing aspect. This is a feature that remembering shares with perception since in both cases I'm *usually* committed to the actual (past or present) occurrence of the object of the experience. In memory I usually take the remembered episode to *actually have happened* while in perception I take the perceived phenomenon to be really there in the field of my perception. Now of course all kinds of epistemological questions may arise about the status of this seeming knowledge. All we have to grant here, however, is that this knowledge aspect (regardless of its nature) is part of the phenomenology. In many cases, I seem to know that the recollected episode happened, and more importantly for our purposes, I seem to know what it was like to undergo it.

There's, however, an aspect to perception that sharply distinguishes it from memory. Perception is presentational in nature: A presentational act apprehends its object in an immediate way, in its "bodily being", so to speak (see Thompson 2007, pp. 288-297). Memory is not like that. It is more of a re-presentational act which apprehends its object as

witnessed the episode (Rowlands 2017, pp. 45-46). Instead, it is from the 'from the outside' perspective. But it is still the case that such re-presentations are based on how the episode was first-personally presented. Necessarily, if a scene is presented under an experiential mode of presentation (even if it is presented 'from the outside'), it has to be based on the experiential presentedness of the recollected episode. And that presentedness was first-personal, 'from the inside'.

“phenomenally absent”, that is not occurring here and now (Thompson 2007, pp. 288-297).¹¹When I think back at the feelings the series episode has evoked, they are re-presented in the act of remembering as not occurring here and now (but in the *past*). Thus they are apprehended as absent. In this respect, memory is more aligned with imagination since the latter to posits its object as absent. The comparison is further warranted by the fact that many consider memory and imagination to be continuous (see Michaelian 2016a, 2016b).

These two derived aspects of the phenomenology may be characterized as the feeling of pastness (see Russel 1921) and the feeling of knowing (see Dokic 2014). We have to be careful though since putting it this way may give the impression that in remembering there is an image present in the mind to which these feelings are *attached*. I think this is wrong and it is exactly its alternative that I want to offer here.¹²Nonetheless, these terms do a good job at capturing these aspects. While ‘feeling of pastness’ expresses the particular re-presentational nature of memory, ‘feeling of knowing’ refers to the fact that I take the evoked episode to have actually happened and take my memory of it to “originate directly from ... past experience” (Dokic 2014). 2014).

¹¹ Thus it is clear that in the terminology of the phenomenological tradition the concept of a re-presentational act doesn’t mean that such acts necessarily involve mental representations.

¹² By denying that I’m presented with an image in remembering I only wish to deny that I’m presented with a mental representation, not that there are phenomenal qualities present in remembering.

This of course shouldn't be taken to mean that the phenomenological differences between the above discussed mental states are absolute. Remembering can sometimes be like perception. This is the case with people suffering from PTSD who can experience traumatic memories as if they were happening right there and then (see Ehlers – Hackmann – Michael 2004). Such episodes are called flashbacks. We also know that memory has connections to the constructive mechanism of imagination. For example, neuropsychological data seems to indicate that memory, at least in part, is tied to the same brain region as our ability to visualize scenes (see Mullally – Maguire 2014). Also in persons with Asperger syndrome, the reduced ability to understand others' mental states is accompanied with poorer episodic memory. If we understand the former capacity as a capacity to simulate, then one way to explain the coincidence of the defects is to say that memory, at least in part, relies on simulational capabilities (see Shanton – Goldman 2010). On grounds like these that some hold that memory is not different in kind than imagination.

Nevertheless, in spite of the possible and actual overlaps, most of the time we experience remembering differently than perception and imagination through the senses of pastness and factualness. To this we should add a third aspect, namely that the recollected episode is re-presented as having happened to *me*. This condition seems to be universally accepted. Thus, for example, Tulving writes that

“episodic memory has to do with one's auto-noetic awareness of one's experiences in the continuity of subjectively apprehended time that extends both backward into the past in the form of 'remembering' and forward into the future, in the form of 'thinking about' or imagining or 'planning for' the future. This definition emphasizes the conjunction of three ideas:

self, auto-noetic awareness, and subjectively sensed time.” (Tulving 2001, 1506)

But what does it amount to that I have an “auto-noetic awareness of [myself] in the continuity of subjectively apprehended time”? This is an important question since many would object to certain interpretations of this sentence. Galen Strawson, for example, is adamant that he, and many others alongside him, don’t experience themselves as persisting selves (Strawson 2008a). Still, it is quite clear that episodic memories can be ascribed to him since he presumably does recognize recollected episodes as belonging to his *personal* past and to his stream of consciousness. Therefore, to accommodate the experience of Strawson, the definition given by Tulving should be interpreted as referring to the sense of personal *continuity* and the sense of the continuity of one’s stream of consciousness.

This should be a pretty uncontroversial observation which is to be followed here by a seemingly more controversial claim. I agree with Strawson that a sense of a persisting self is not necessarily built into the experience of recollection. I, however, also think that there’s still another sense of mineness in recollection that is different from the sense of personal continuity and *matters for my present purposes more*. For we have to ask, what is the precondition for a recollected experience to be apprehended as belonging to one’s personal past. Well, it is the fact that it is recollected *first-personally*. Now this may not be a sufficient condition, but it is certainly a necessary one. I can apprehend them as (personally) mine because they are first-personally given to me.

I want to take it one step further, however. I think that the first-personal givenness of an experience itself

already constitutes a kind of mineness. How should we understand this? The phrase “perspectival ownership” that Albahari (2008) came up with may turn out to be exceptionally useful. Its function is to convey the simple idea that my experiences are given to me in a different and more privileged way (namely, first-personally) than the experiences of others. And it is in the sense of perspectival ownership, I claim, that remembering is endowed with a reference to a self at the most basic level. In other words, just as in any experience the experience is circumscribed as *mine* simply by being first-personally presented, the remembered episode is circumscribed as such in the same way by being first-personally presented. This is all I mean by the term “minimal/prereflective self-apprehension”.

One could object to this by saying that the mere fact the my experiences are first-personally given to me doesn't establish that they are given to me as *mine* (in a perspectival sense). This is a jump from first-personal givenness to (pre-reflective) self-consciousness. It seems to me however that it can be argued that a minimal kind of self-awareness is already entailed by first-personal givenness. The first-personal givenness of my experiences entails that I can't be confused about in whose consciousness the experiences appear. They necessarily appear in mine. The first-personal givenness of my experiences immediately sets these experiences apart from other experiences had by other subjects. Thus it immediately circumscribes them as *mine*. Consequently, the first-personal givenness of recollected episodes is ipso facto the givenness of those episodes as mine. But of course one may wonder if this sense that my experiences are *mine* has to be actual in every experience instead of merely potentially present. In other words, one may agree that the first-personal givenness of my

experiences sets them apart from other experiences but disagree that it immediately sets them apart as *mine*. Instead, it may be suggested, it sets them apart in a way that makes it possible to reflect on them as *mine*. But there are good reasons to think that the possibility of reflective consciousness itself requires the pre-reflective sense of mineness (see Zahavi 2018, 2020, Kriegel - Zahavi 2016).

I won't go into it however, since there are independent arguments that in my opinion show that every experience is a self-aware episode. I will marshal one argument now and one later. The one I'm about to explicate is specifically a memory-based argument. It originates with Buddhist philosophers and it goes like this (Thompson 2011, pp. 161-163):

- a) In remembering it is not only an object that is remembered, but also the experience of that object.
- b) For this reason, it doesn't take an additional mental act to recall the subjective side (the experience of the object) of the original experience.
- c) To remember something one must have experienced it.
- d) The causal basis for features of the present memory is corresponding features of the original experience.
- e) From a-d) it follows that the recollected experience had to include an awareness of that very experience.

In other words, the explanation for a) in accordance with the other premises is that the remembered experience was a self-aware episode.

Now one can immediately question whether a) is self-evident and indeed deny that the experience of the object is really implicated in the recollection. But this denial is going to turn out to be in conflict with the phenomenology of memory. As I remarked in recollection the recollected episode is featured as phenomenally absent, as past. But if it was only the object that is re-presented in the act of recollection then it's hard to see how this feature of pastness could figure in memory. If it's only the woman speaking in the scene that is recollected, it's hard to see how such a scene could acquire its sense of pastness. The scene in itself lays no claim to being past. As Thompson points out, "[the object] is gone, so the only way to reproduce it is in the form of an image. But if ... [the object] only appeared as an image apprehended in the present, then how could this image retain the character of pastness? (Thompson 2011, p. 166)" **But once we grant the self-awareness of experiences, the sense of pastness becomes less mysterious. An episode can be re-presented as past because it is re-presented as an episode that *was experienced*. Now we are almost there. This twofold intentionality (directed at the object of the past experience *and* the past experience itself) is part of what "accounts for the past remaining separated from the present" (Thompson 2011, p. 166). I will add another component shortly. For now, however, we can establish that the recollected experience is re-presented as being endowed with mineness by way of perspectival ownership.**

Now we have three major components of the phenomenology of episodic remembering: the pastness, the knowledge and the self aspects. This maps onto the characterization given by Perrin et al. who also speak about the past, the self and the causation components as obvious aspects of the

phenomenology (Perrin – Michaelian – Sant'Anna 2020).¹³ Their causation component is to be equated with the knowledge aspect since it informs the subject “that his current representation of the remembered event results from his past experience of it” (Perrin – Michaelian – Sant'Anna 2020, p. 3). Insofar the subject takes the object of remembering to have actually occurred, the episode is re-presented as known by him.

In light of these, here’s how I plan to deploy these aspects/components in my argumentation. In the next section I will argue that the sense of *pastness* is best explained through the experience of time which itself wouldn’t be possible if there was no abiding subject. After that I will aim to show that the first-personal givenness of past episodes is also best explained by such a self. Thus I will claim that the *mineness* present in the experience of recollection does express (even if implicitly) real transtemporal identity. This in turn means that the *knowledge* about what it was like to undergo a recollected episode is made possible by the fact that the episode was experienced by the very same subject.

III. Making sense of phenomenology 1. (The sense of pastness)

My first argument for the non-reducibility of transtemporal identity targets the fact that a sense of pastness figures in memory, or in other words that an episode of remembering is re-presented as a past episode.

¹³ To this they add the fourth component of singularity which conveys the idea the recollection re-presents particular episodes.

How is this possible? Let's proceed from the possible types of impersonal accounts according to which the sense of pastness can be derived from the non-experiential or impersonal processes of the information-processing workings of the organism/person. Maybe a proponent of such an idea would go about explaining it in the following (simplified) way: An experience is encoded in a certain pattern of activity in the body and the remembering of this experience is or supervenes on the reactivation of this pattern. But here is the problem with this: It is clear that the activation of the pattern can't in itself explain the sense of pastness. If the same pattern is activated in which the experience was encoded, then why is the experience of recollection phenomenologically not like the recollected experience? Why is it endowed with the phenomenology of remembering instead of being as if I was living it through now? If we want to say that memory is or supervenes on some pattern of activity of the body, then we have to say how the past can figure in the states of a physical system. Why is that so perplexing? Because nothing about the state of a physical system taken on its own **(that is, understood by way of its non-experiential properties)** allows that state to refer to the past. In its physical properties the state is no different in kind than a state associated with, say, perception. Okay, that's not a problem at all, one could say. Of course that it's not just the state on its own that we have to consider. We have to situate the state. We have to consider its causal connection with the experience that is recollected in memory. It's clear that we need more than that. A causal connection is not sufficient to explain the experiential pastness since of course not every experience that is caused by another experience is endowed with it. Think about how a traumatic experience causes certain affective attitudes toward other persons/the world. The affective dimension of these attitudes don't contain any

sense of pastness. Something more is needed and maybe this more is that memories represent their own causal origination in the recollected episode. Thus one could interpret in this light the account put forward by Fernández according to which the experience of the representation of causation is what gives rise to the sense of pastness through the apprehension that causes precede their effects (Fernández 2019, 108-109). Now, *if* we take the representation of causation to be a subpersonal representation, the proposal won't work since the apprehension of causation can't be derived from subpersonal processes exactly because the sense of time can't be derived from them either. First, the apprehension of causation presupposes the sense of time exactly because of the fact that causes *precede* their effects. Thus, apprehending that an event caused another event amounts to apprehending the former event as a past event relative to the latter. When we are talking about subpersonal representations, however, we are really talking about different physical processes connected by causal relations. But of course a nexus of physical processes on its own (that is, in a non-experiential information-processing way) just can't explain our sense of the past. The claim then would be that the sense of the past is imported into experience from non-experiential phenomena but that is untenable since the sense of time just can't be found outside experience, that is, outside consciousness. Why? Because for non-experiential processes there is no time. They are of course situated in time but time *for them* doesn't exist. Time only exists *for* something, if it (experientially) appears to that thing. Of course we could turn to a functional definition but a functional 'sense' of time is just not the same as the *felt* sense of time.

Now, one may object to the above considerations by saying that the proposals I've taken into account all focused

on how the information of being past-related can be transcribed from subpersonal content to experiential content. However, another, popular type of approach holds that the sense of pastness derives not from subpersonal content, but from features of the subpersonal processes which generate the subpersonal content. The gist of this approach is that these features – in the right context – gets interpreted as certain feelings, like the sense of pastness. In other words, the attribution of pastness to represented episodes is due to the metacognitive detection of subpersonal cues. Such a cue is for example the fluency with which a cognitive operation is performed (see Perrin, Michaelian and Sant’Anna 2020). The claim purports to be empirically grounded since in experimental conditions (which, most of the time, amount to recognition tests) the judgement and sense of pastness seems to depend on fluency. Thus, for example, there is experimental data that when perceptual and conceptual fluency is increased, the subject will more likely to claim the he/she recollects being previously presented with the actual image, word etc. (Kurilla – Westerman 2008).

Now, I don’t wish to deny that in certain circumstances the sense of pastness is indeed generated along these lines. I don’t think, however, that this kind of account could aspire to become a universal one. We have to recognize that the cases recruited in support of it are of a very specific kind and, therefore, of a very limited range. Mental acts in these experiments are given a quite narrowed down way of manifestation, and, therefore, there’s a chance that they will yield but an abstract reflection of how these acts really operate in non-experimental circumstances. In the experiments the subjects are confronted with an input and are asked to label that input under a specified dimension (for example “old” or “new”). It is rather easy to see how the attributionalist view can be mapped onto this scheme

for the very type of task (being asked to choose a label for an input) demands of the cognitive system to monitor for certain cues that help in labeling the input. But, of course, not all acts of remembering take place in this kind of context. Thus, my recollection of the scene from the series proceeded in a completely different way. It was not as if I had been presented with the scene and needed to label or identify it according to a certain criteria. No, I was thinking of a recent memory I could use as an example and this was the first one to appear to me. It doesn't seem that the sense of pastness needed to be attributed to it by any metacognitive monitoring because I already grabbed it as a past episode. Furthermore, even in the above cases of attribution the precondition of the attribution is, of course, the having of the sense of pastness. I can only attribute pastness to a stimuli if I possess the sense of it in the first place. And the question is from where the sense of pastness is derived from. I argued that it can't be derived from subpersonal information-processing mechanisms (since they simply don't have a sense of time) which means that it is a product of experiential processes.¹⁴ And this is in line with the claim, that in certain circumstances, the sense of pastness is not attributed, but rather the recollected episode is non-attributionally grasped as past.

How does, then, an experiential account of the sense of pastness look like? The straightforward analysis is that it is to be explained through the experience of the passage of

¹⁴ This is not to say that the temporal aspects of experience float free from the workings of the cognitive system. I only wish to claim that the sense of pastness is not deriveable from non-experiential processes.

subjective time.¹⁵ That I'm talking about subjective time is important to stress for I don't wish to engage with the intricate puzzles of the philosophy of time. Or at least, I wish to remain neutral on the question whether there's such a thing as the passage of time in the external world. That there's a passage of time in the experiential sphere is just something that can't possibly be denied. It can't be denied that we are experientially presented with a succession of experiences and experiential phases. Thus, even if it is the case that experience is composed of snapshots (which is the preferred understanding of those who deny the passage of time in the external world), there's still a ceaseless experiential transition from one snapshot to the other, and hence a passage of subjective time.

But how does the sense of temporal passage leads to the sense of pastness in the act of remembering? It is fairly straight-forward: I have an experience and then I experience the temporal succession of transpiring experiential phases (which is the *experiential* passage of time). When I recollect the experience later, this experience of the passing of time *after* the episode is what gets 'transcribed' as the sense of pastness. That the remembered episode is posited as past means that it is posited as something time has passed since which in turn - according to the proposed analysis - means that it is posited as something after which the passage of time was *experienced*. In other words, it is posited as past because - through the experience of the passing of time - I experienced it *sinking into the past*. **This of course, however, is not an explanation of how the experience of time passing gets 'transcribed' as the sense of pastness. Earlier I**

¹⁵ From now on I will simply say "the experience of the passage of time" but I will always mean subjective time, that is, time appearing in experience.

discussed the point that the object of memory is not exhausted by the object of the past experience but has to include the past experience as well. To arrive at an explanation regarding how the sense of pastness arises I want to add a third component: Even the two aspects of the recollected episode (the object of the past experience and the past experience itself) don't exhaust the intentional object of the act of remembering; the latter also incorporates the experience of time passing after the episode into itself. In other words, an episodic memory is not only about the episode (with its two aspects) it re-presents, but is also about the experience of time passing afterwards. Since it is also about that experience, it makes it comprehensible why the recollected episode is grasped as a past episode. It is grasped as such since the experience of time passing afterwards is also grasped in the act.

Now the question I want to pose is if we can understand the experience of time without the positing of a persisting subject. The persisting subject view is pretty common-sensical in this regard. The experience of time consists of the coming and going of experiential phases in front of the 'gaze' of such a subject. But how this experience of transpiring phases could take place with no abiding consciousness is not clear.

First, some words about the nature of the experience of temporality. There are, of course, more than one account of the exact nature of this experience, but I think it's hard to avoid the conclusion (as I will argue for it) that a Husserlian analysis cannot be dispensed with. **First of all, as Husserl points out, when we experience something, the experienced phenomenon "remains present to us for a time, but not without undergoing modification".** Now this modification that Husserl has in mind is to be

understood as a temporal modification. The idea this phrase is trying to convey is that when a perceived temporal part of a phenomenon elapses, it doesn't just vanish but gets modified instead in a temporal sense and "appears to us [...] *past*, pushed back in time, as it were" (Husserl 1991, p. 11). In other words, my moment-to-moment experience is such that the actually present experiential phase – as it elapses – continually gets transformed/becomes the phrase that has just been present allowing another phase to become the actually present one. The just-been-present phase(es) gets retained in consciousness. What is the justification for this interpretation of the experience of time? Take the paradigmatic example of a melody. As Husserl writes,

When a melody sounds, for example, the individual tone does not utterly disappear with the cessation of the stimulus [...] When the new tone is sounding, the preceding tone has not disappeared without leaving a trace. If it had, we would be quite incapable of noticing the relations among the successive notes; in each moment we would have a tone, or perhaps an empty pause in the interval between the sounding of two notes, but never the representation of a melody. On the other hand, the abiding of the tone-representation in consciousness does not settle the matter. If they were to remain unmodified, then instead of a melody we would have a chord of simultaneous tones, or rather a disharmonious tangle of sound, as if we had struck simultaneously all the notes that had previously sounded. (Husserl 1991, p. 11)

In order, then, to be faithful to how the experience of temporality occurs to us we must understand it through the idea of past phases getting retained

through temporal modification. The currently sounding tone of the melody is “in the mode of the now”, while the just elapsed phases are given in the mode of “immediately past” (Husserl 1991, pp. 25-26). In Husserlian terminology these two modes are referred to as primal impression (in the case of the now-mode) and retention (in the case of the immediately-past-mode).¹⁶ Now we have to be careful however about how we interpret this. It’s not that a *representation* or representations of the previous phase or phases are present in consciousness. This understanding would entail - in the case of the melody - the undesired outcome of “a chord of simultaneous tones.” Therefore, the actually occurring contents “are not able to switch their temporal function: the now cannot stand before me as not-now, the not-now cannot stand before me as now (Husserl 1991, pp. 334-335).” But what does get temporally modified if it’s not the content? As Gallagher (2003) points out, retention is not on the side of content, but of awareness. It is the intentional directedness and openness of consciousness to the just-elapsed (recent past) phase(es). The retained phases are (intentionally) presented in their absence (Brough 1989, p. 276). In other words, they remain present as non-present. What this idea of remaining present as non-present expresses is that the actually present phase is not present in isolation but in a wider context. This context is the horizon of the actually present phase without which the phase cannot be made sense of (Zahavi 2007). Thus, what

¹⁶ To this I should add that according to Husserl there is also a future-oriented aspect of consciousness which intimates the subsequent phases as in oncoming-mode. This aspect is called protention. This aspect, however, is not that relevant to our purposes, therefore I won’t discuss it.

gets retained in retention is the significance or meaning of the just elapsed phases (Gallagher 2003). The sense of the actually present phase relies on that which is no longer present.

This last claim needs some elaboration. The late Husserlian retentionalist account (expounded by Zahavi and Gallagher) which I'm espousing is an account of the *specious* present (Gallagher 2003, Zahavi 2007). Experiences have temporal width or extension and this is explained by the intentional structure of time-consciousness. I'm aware of one experiential phase giving way to the next, but as it elapses I retain it in my consciousness as past while also expecting the subsequent phases to arrive. Thus I experience just-elapsed and subsequent phases as parts of the immediate meaning-context of the actually present phase. This is how the specious present is constituted: by keeping in consciousness the phases that are elapsing while being open to the subsequent phases thereby giving an immediate context to the current phase of experience to rely on. As Thompson puts it, "The unified operation of protention, primal impression and retention underlies our experience of the present moment as having temporal width. (Thompson 2007, p. 319)" Now one could object that the idea of the specious present is not needed for the assertion that "the significance of what just happened influences what is currently experienced" and that this influence could be explained by "memory effects" (Artsila 2016, p. 175). But this is phenomenologically unsophisticated. When you watch a bird flying, the immediate temporal context of its flight is not given by acts of remembering. You don't have to remember its position from a moment ago in order to establish the temporal context of its current position (see Gallagher 2013, p. 139). There is the possibility to remember the previous phases of its movement, but not actual remembering. In fact,

retention seems to be the precondition for episodic memory. When I'm in the middle of uttering a sentence like "Today is a beautiful day." I can already consciously recollect the first word of it. But for this to be possible the original uttering of it has to be already apprehended. I'm only able to recall what has happened in the previous instants because I already have an apprehension of it. There is furthermore a graver problem with the suggestion. If we want to propose that my sense of passage is to be explained through memory then we have to explain the sense of pastness that is present in memory. We can't recourse to the experience of passage since that is what we want to explain with the aid of memory. But since direct experience of time-passage seems to be the only candidate for explaining the sense of pastness on experiential grounds, if we exclude that, then we have to leave the experiential domain. But, as I argued, the sense of pastness can't be explained non-experientially. Therefore the suggestion that the temporal context of the current experiential phase is grasped through memory is untenable.

The sense of the past is then already part of every experience through the experience of experiential phases continually sinking into the past. The sense of the past *in memory*, I suggest, is a *consequence* of this basic fact. I have an experience of an event and then I experience the passing of time through the retentive working of consciousness. The experienced event thus becomes past through the fact that I experienced that time has passed after it. It is important to note that this is also an argument for the claim that the right account of the experience of time *has to* be a Husserlian-retentive one. Why? Because only this account can make sense of the sense of pastness. At least in some episodic memories it comes from the experience of the passage of time. But the account of the temporal experience has to be such that it makes clear how the past

becomes graspable for us. And *only* a retentional account can deliver that since what it offers is exactly the explanation of how the sense of pastness arises *experientially*. (Let's keep in mind that my argument is that the sense of pastness is necessarily an experiential matter.) The past at the most fundamental level opens up for us through the experience of experiential phases continually sinking into the past and thereby becoming (through retention) past. Or, more concisely, the sense of pastness comes from the *experience* of experiential phases becoming past. It can come from no other source. The alternatives are non-experiential information-churning processes and "memory-effects". But they are untenable. Therefore, we arrive at the retentionalist account as the only viable account of time-consciousness.

Now we can turn to the question of whether we can make sense of the experience of passage if there is no persisting subject of experience. First of all, every experience is a self-aware episode. We shouldn't think of some robust, reflective self-awareness though. What is given to itself is simply consciousness or awareness. How do we establish the self-presence of consciousness? We have already seen one argument and I will present another, more straight-forward one now. Consciousness is the experiential *presence* of the experiential content. Now when I'm conscious of an experiential content, I'm ipso facto conscious of its being present. I cannot fail to be. I cannot be conscious of a content without also being conscious of its being present since this is exactly what the experientiality of the content consists in: in its being experientially present. But by being aware of the experiential presence of the content, I'm also aware of the consciousness of the content (since it is nothing but the experiential presence of the content). Now this may sound somewhat arcane, but the idea is simple: There could be no experience (the

experiential presence of content) if experience wasn't itself experienced, for then experience wouldn't be experientially present. But of course every experience is experientially present. The idea is both elegantly and simply put by Frankfurt when he asks:

...what would it be like to be conscious of something without being aware of this consciousness? It would mean having an experience with no awareness whatever of its occurrence. This would be, precisely, a case of unconscious experience. It appears, then, that being conscious is identical with being self-conscious. Consciousness is self-consciousness. (Frankfurt 1998, p. 162)

Or as Fasching puts it, "this self-presence [of consciousness] is nothing other than the phenomenality itself of whatever is phenomenally present. (Fasching 2008, p. 475)" This is why experiences are necessarily to be characterized by the sense of *mineness* since I, the thin subject of experience, am revealed in every experience.

It is very important however not to understand this self-awareness as a subject-object relation. Consciousness is primarily present to itself not as an object but as subject, that is, as that which objects are given to. Now this way some misunderstandings can be avoided. For one, the thesis doesn't lead to infinite regress since that would only loom if there was some distance between the presented and that which is being presented to. Since there's no such distance in pre-reflective self-awareness, there's no threat of infinite regress.

Another possible objection that would arise from an erroneous understanding of pre-reflective self-consciousness is the representationalist variety. It goes something like this: At least in some experiences what we are primarily aware of are external objects and their features. Since in these experiences their representational features exhaust these experiences, nothing remains to be

aware of (see Garfield 2016, Tye 2009, p. 6). It follows, that we are not aware of these experiences themselves. But the question of pre-reflective self-awareness is independent of the debate concerning the nature of phenomenal contents. It's not a matter of being aware of some non-representational property. Let's grant for the sake of the argument that the representationalist is right and that at least some experiences are exhausted by their representational features. It is still the case that these features are experientially present. Since the experiential *presence* of the content is what awareness is, awareness is present to itself because the experiential presence of the content is itself by necessity experientially present. The representationalist objection that I'm not primarily aware of my experiences is to be translated as saying that I'm not aware of features of my experiences *as features of these experiences* instead of as features of external objects. But again, pre-reflective consciousness is not a matter of what my experience posits its features to be. It is a matter of the experiential presence of those features.

The fact that experiential episodes are endowed with self-consciousness entails that the experiential phases retained in retention are retained as *mine*. What subject is implicated in the mineness of the retained phases? Is it the subject that is the subject of the current phase? Or is it a distinct subject? The former option seems to lead to the view of a persisting subject. The other route is to accept that all experiential phases are endowed with a sense of mineness but to deny that this entails that they are given to the same subject. The minesses of the phases don't point to an abiding subject. The phases have their own momentary subjects to which they are experientially given and what the sense of mineness in retention expresses is simply that the retained phases were experientially given to a subject. But this is strange. How could a past phase be presented as *mine*

if it was not I (this very subject) who experienced it? And as the other side of this: how could a phase be presented as just-been-present for me if it wasn't I for whom it was present? Doesn't it become just-been-present because it was really present for me (this very same subject)? Isn't it so that I can retain it as just-been-present precisely because it was present in this same experiential field? The just-been-presentness of the phase means that its *presence has become past*. Its presence becomes past by not being present anymore in the experiential field it was present in. Thus its presence becoming past implies a presence-field which it leaves and becomes just-been-present. But its *leaving* the field means that the field itself abides while the experiential phases pass through it becoming just-been-present. This understanding is bolstered if we direct our attention to the most basic status of the just-been-present phase, namely its pastness. Because how do the retained phases acquire their sense of pastness if not by the fact that they were present to the very same abiding subject? If there is an abiding subject, the phenomenon is clear. The phases become retained as *past* because the subject witnesses/experiences them *becoming* past. But if the subject of the retained phase and the subject of the now-phase is not numerically identical, then there can be no such witnessing. I will elaborate on it in a moment. Before that however a suggestion has to be mentioned regarding to the pastness of the retained phases. One may want to say that they are presented as past because they are tagged by the brain/body as such. But that can't work for reasons already mentioned. The sense of pastness in this case would be the result of impersonal mechanisms which – as I argued – it can't be. Instead it is the corollary of *the experience of becoming past*.

Therefore the fact that the phases presented in retention are presented as just-been-present (and therefore, as past)

supports the claim that the mineness of these phases refers to the very same subject. As Fasching points out:

I permanently experience the transition of each experiential phase into its having-elapsd – the transition, in Husserlian terms, from being-present in primal impression into being-retained in retention – and it gets retained as just-having-been-present, namely as having-been-present in *the very same presence* out of which it is continuously gliding and in which it becomes present as no longer present (as elapsd). (Fasching 2012, p. 179)

But let's jump back to the claim that the becoming past of a phase couldn't be experienced if the the two phases – the one to elapse and the one taking its place – had different subjects. Why is it the case? Let's say $c1$ is the elapsed phase and $c2$ is the phase taking its place. If they have different subjects – $s1$ and $s2$ –, then $c1$ is given to $s1$ and $c2$ is given to $s2$. But since they are given to different subjects, there is no experience that involves both the phases. In other words, the experience of one taking the place of the other is impossible. Now why can't we say that the content of the phases are overlapping between the subjects, one might wonder. In this case $c1$ would be presented to $s2$ as well to be followed by $c2$. Thus the experience of the transition between the phases would be secure. But of course it would mean that subjects (consciousnesses) can share their experiential contents which they can't. I'll argue for this point later in more detail. For now, let's just say that it is highly plausible to maintain that different subjects can't have first-personal access to the experiential contents of other subjects.

Maybe one would want to say that okay, there's no overlapping between the contents but we could still say that more than one phase (maybe two or three) is presented to the subject. This way we can have the experience of transitions between phases even with short-lived subjects.

But it won't do for when $s1$ ceases to exist, **its'** last content is still presented to $s2$ as a content just-elapsing. And then we are back at the problem of how to explain the sense of pastness of that content. As another side of this, we have to keep in mind that the transitions between the phases ceaselessly flow. This is true even in the case of hearing one enduring tone. The temporal phases of the tone continuously give way to the subsequent phases. It's not that I experience $f1$ flowing into $f2$ and then experience $f2$ flowing into $f3$. Instead I experience $f1$ flowing into $f2$ flowing into $f3$ and so on. For this reason, however, there seems to be no time for temporary subjects to replace each other. I experience $f1$ flowing into $f2$, but $f2$ is already experienced as flowing into $f3$. In other words, flowing into $f3$ is already constitutive of the experience of $f2$ and flowing into $f4$ is in turn already constitutive of the experience of $f3$ and so on. Each phase is experienced with its transition into the subsequent one. But from this it follows that all the transitions have to be experienced by the very same subject: $f3$ has to be present in the same abiding consciousness as $f1$ was since the experience of $f3$ is continuous with that of $f2$, the experience of which is in turn continuous with $f1$. In line with this, $f1$ is presented to me as just-been-present since I experienced it flowing into $f2$, that is I experienced it as leaving the field of presence. The next phase, $f2$ is in turn experienced as giving way to $f3$ and thereby itself becoming just-been-present-for-me. At the same time, $f1$ is still retained as a retention of retention. Now the mineness of $f2$ is expressive of the same subject to which $f3$ is now present since it is constitutive of the experience of it that it was flown from $f2$. But since it is constitutive of the experience of $f2$ that it was flown from $f1$, it follows that the mineness of $f1$ is expressive of the same subject as that of $f2$, that is to which $f3$ is present now. The mineness of retentionally presented phases has to be understood as showing that the

subject of these past phases was the very same subject as that of the currently present phase. The experience of passage accordingly is the streaming of the experiential phases through the experiential field of a persisting subject.

What routes are there to resist this conclusion? Well, as far as I can see, the only way to proceed is to deny that we always *seem* to experience transitionings between the experiential phases. This is the line of argumentation favoured by Strawson who doubts that “there’s always some sort of phenomenologically given – experienced – continuity” (Strawson 2009, p. 233). In fact, Strawson professes that in his experience “the invariably brief periods of true experiential continuity seem perfectly disjunct from one another” and that “a positive sense of complete if momentary absence is often part of the phenomenology ... it is as if consciousness as a whole is continually starting or restarting. (Strawson 2009, p. 238)” Maybe if we are attentive enough then, experience reveals itself as gappy and discontinuous after all. But it seems to me that the sense of gappyness or “restarting” or “absence” still presupposes experiential continuity. I can only have a sense of restarting and absence if I have an apprehension of the elapsed experiential phases to which they are contrasted. If I have a sense of restarting, I have a sense of experience taken place prior to restarting. If I have a sense of absence, I have a sense of experience taken place prior to the absence. Strawson of course wouldn’t deny this. But how can he account for this apprehension? As far as I can see it, either through the retentive model or through memory. But both are problematic for the purposes of the short-lived subject view. As for the former, I argued that that the retentive understanding of self-consciousness can’t float without an abiding subject. Therefore it can’t be assistance to Strawson. As for the latter, the memory-option has to account for the sense of pastness figuring in memory. I

argued that it is only possible through a recourse to the experience of temporal flow. But that is exactly what is supposed to be explained through memory. Thus this option too has to be rejected.

It seems to follow from this that we indeed experience transitionings between experiential phases. Dainton (2003) however thinks that the retentional view endorsed here is in fact in conflict with this. He says that this way experiencing is cut into “slices” of momentary primal impressions that are accompanied by intentional apprehensions of the just-past phases and this does away with the direct experience of temporal transition. But Dainton’s conclusion is in my view due to his misguided understanding of the intentional take on the retentional experience. He says that experience is cut into slices because only the primal impression is endowed with actual phenomenal qualities while the retained phases are only intuited intentionally as the meaning-context of the primal impression. This, according to him, leads to a continuous succession of sensations which of course doesn’t add up to an experience of change or duration. But this is a very abstract and didactic way of understanding the retentional theory and this very framing of it drives it into collision with experienced temporality. Dainton’s articulation suggests as if the retentional theory was an *essentially* non-dynamic theory of the experience of temporality. But this is really not so. It doesn’t have to be understood as saying that I have a primal impression of B while retaining A *and then* have a primal impression of C while retaining B (and A). It can portray experience this way but it’s not a necessary portrayal. Instead it can be understood in a way that is faithful to experience and saying that experienced temporality consists in the subject continuously experiencing the actually present phase *transitioning* into a just-elapsed phase. That is, I experience the phases as they pass through the tripartite structure of

consciousness from being actually present to being just-elapsed. To recapitulate, under Dainton's framing of the retentional account the different temporal modes (actually present and just-elapsed) of the same phase are separated in an *artificial* way. It's not simply that the current phase given qualitatively in primal impression is retained intentionally in the next moment. It is that I experience as the phase given in primal impression transitions from being given qualitatively to being retained intentionally. The retentional account thus can and should be understood as describing a dynamic experiential process. I also argued however that this requires an abiding consciousness witnessing the ceaseless experiential transitionings.

IV. Making sense of phenomenology 2. (First-personal access)

The first argumentation above sought to show that the sense of pastness in memory requires a persisting subject since experienced temporality which delivers this sense requires it. In the following I shall argue that first-personal access to past experiences also requires it. Having a first-personal access to a past experience simply means that I seem to have access to the way the experience was first-personally presented. In other words, I seem to be able to access *what it was like* to have that experience. My contention is that the reason I have a first-personal grip on a past experience is that it was present to the very same subject who remembers now.

I don't wish to advocate a simplistic idea of memory though. It is not an infallible reproduction of the recollected episode as it was experienced. We know that in episodic remembering imaginative-simulational mechanisms do play a role. We also know that memories

can and do (quite often, actually) become distorted and modified and there are even false memories where the object of remembering didn't even take place. **Indeed, many think that these facts favour the indirect realist understanding of memory.** For how can the idea of the direct apprehension of the past be squared with the possibility of distorted or false memories? Note that this – at least partly – seems to be a phenomenologically motivated issue. If veridical memories would be phenomenologically distinguishable from distorted or false memories, we could easily say that these mental states belong to different kinds. But they are often indistinguishable. According to the proponents of indirect realism, the best explanation for this if we take the memory-system to be a faculty that uses representations with varying accuracy.¹⁷ This, of course, would mean that the first-personally re-presented content is but a *copy* (so to speak) of how the recollected episode was first-personally presented. Now do we have to accept this line of argument? I think we are not forced to do so for epistemological notions such as indistinguishability need not have metaphysical consequences (see Aranyosi 2022). For this reason I will argue that successful remembering or even the accurate details of a

¹⁷ Here the situation is analogous with that of perception where the proponents of the indirect realist theory of perception also argues that since veridical perceptions are phenomenologically indistinguishable from hallucination (where the object of the mental state doesn't exist), these are not different types of mental states. In both cases the subject is presented with mental representations that may or may not have a counterpart in the external world.

misremembering *at least often* put us in a direct or experiential relation to past experiences.^{18 19}

Now back to the scene from the series. Suppose we say that it is not the the experience of the scene itself that I'm in direct contact with but a mental representation of it. But let's also say that *at least* some phenomenal aspects of it match my original experience of the scene. In it there is a woman speaking. The tone of her speaking has its many shades, its ebb and flow. And we hypothesize that the way it is re-presented in my memory is exactly how it was in my original experience. If the content of the memory is a representation, we have to ask the question: On what information are the matching phenomenal details based on? The straight-forward answer is that they are based on the memory-trace originating with the remembered episode (and maybe also on other traces originating with other past episodes).²⁰ More precisely, the phenomenal details are - by hypothesis - based on the content stored in the trace. But does it really make sense to say that such memory-traces are entities that can bear content? Currently, these traces are understood as strengthened connections between certain groups of neurons. The act of remembering reactivates

¹⁸ The notion of remembering as experiential relation to past episodes is defended by Debus (2008). Experiential relation is to be understood as direct awareness of past episodes.

¹⁹ The idea of direct contact with past episodes can be upheld even in the case of confabulations since these are often incorporate details into their contents from genuine memory-knowledge concerning other past episodes. This would of course mean that in this case the remembering subject can be (directly) related to more than one past experience.

²⁰ Simulationists hold that recollection *rarely* draws on solely on the one past experience it aims to re-present (see Michaelian 2016a, 2016b, De Brigard 2014).

(partly) those very same brain regions that were active during the recollected experience (see Anderson – Danker 2010). So for example certain areas of the brain involved in visual processing were active when I was visually perceiving something. When I recollect that episode some of the same areas are reactivated. But this seems to mean that memory-traces are really *dispositions* of certain neuronal assemblies to (re)activate in a certain way. But dispositions are not the kind of entities that are capable of bearing content. Thus storing (of content), as De Brigard notes,

is a rather misleading term. What seems to occur when we encode information is the strengthening of neural connections due to the co-activation of different regions of the brain ... A memory-trace is the dispositional property these regions have to reactivate, when triggered by the right cue, in roughly the same pattern of activation they underwent during encoding. (DeBrigard 2014, p. 169)

In other words, no content is added at the event of ‘encoding’. Looking at it from the neuronal level, all that happens at that level is that certain assemblies become *mechanically* (through the increase in the number of receptors on the surface of the postsynaptic cells) prone to activate in a certain pattern. That is, the only thing that gets added at the level of neurons at ‘encoding’ is this disposition to (re)activation. What seems to follow from this is that since the traces don’t encode content, the phenomenal details present in recollection can’t be based on them.

The question then that arises is this: How do the memory-traces support the content of the memory? As a possible answer I’d like to suggest a direct realist understanding of the neuroscientific data. I think that first and foremost the traces enable the bringing of previous experiences into the content of recollection. Their activation however is also a reflection or expression of

getting experientially (that is, directly) related to past episodes. The same neuronal assemblies are reactivated *because* there is a 'reaching back in time' invoking the experience of the recollected episode. At least some of the phenomenal details of the memory then are those of the recollected experience. They are reenactments of those aspects. And this is reflected in the neural aspects of memory since the pattern of activity correlated with the remembering is also the reenactment of the pattern of activity correlated with the recollected experience.

One could propose, however, that maybe the phenomenal aspects are based on semantic memory. But this just seems wildly implausible. Let's say that my recollection of the woman's voice and manner of speech with its many shades is accurate. I'm not a person, however, who has a the sufficient knowledge about the physical description of sounds and the production of sound. My respective knowledge is not compareable to that of Mary's. For this reason it seems clear that my semantic knowledge about the scene is not sufficient for the reconstruction of the phenomenal aspects of it.

It is also hard to see how the claim that the phenomenal features in the content are not those of past experiences but are generated anew can be reconciled with the sense of pastness present in remembering. I argued that the sense of pastness in memory - at least in some of the times - has to be understood as a result of the experience of time having passed since the episode. It is also clear by now that this doesn't apply to every particular experience with a sense of pastness. The attributional cases are exceptions to this account, and so are false memories. In the case of the latter the sense of pastness can't be the result of me having experienced time passing after the episode since there was no such episode that I seem to remember now. This, however, doesn't necessarily refute my claim. In fact, I have

a suggestion as to how to square the case of false memories with it. My solution is to say that the sense of pastness in their case is still to be derived from the sense of pastness in veridical memories where it is the result of me having experienced time passing after the recollected event.²¹ **In other words, veridical remembering is a more basic category than that of false memories for the latter is grounded by the former.**²²

This may seem *ad hoc* at first, but the necessity of the step can be shown. I argued that the sense of pastness as a *type* of sense can't be derived from non-experiential phenomena. If we accept this, however, then the suggestion becomes justified. For if the sense of pastness as a type can't be derived from non-experiential phenomena, it has to be the consequence of the experience of time passing. This, however, doesn't mean that every *token* of the sense has to be so derived. My hope is that my account of false memories may seem more feasible this way.

Now we have to take a closer look at how this would exactly look like. To my mind, it can take two forms. On the one hand, a false memory may incorporate into its content genuine memory-fragments. Let's say that I met a friend of mine last week. I told something to him to which he reacted with a shocked expression on his face. The

²¹ Again, the sense of pastness as such can't be derived from outside of experience. Therefore the most elegant explanation - to my mind - is to say that in memories where the recollected event *did* happen the sense of pastness is the corollary of the experience of time passing after the event.

²² I've found a clear expression of this idea in Aranyos (2022) who thinks that the faculty of mental time travel (that is, the faculty of imaginatively project oneself forward and backward in time) is grounded by memory.

following day I witnessed a car-crash. Let's say that I form the erroneous impression that I witnessed it with my friend and I even seem to remember his shocked expression *at the crash*. Now this is a confabulation. The face of my friend didn't show a shocked expression at the crash since he wasn't there. But I still had an experience of his face with that expression and I did have an experience of the crash. And after both I experienced time passing. This is the reason they are re-presented as experiences after which time has passed for me. And the sense of pastness in the confabulated impression is derived from their sense of pastness. If however, on the other hand, the content of the false memory is completely made up (that is, it doesn't incorporate any genuine memory-fragment), it can be argued that such an impression derives its sense of pastness from being a simulation *modelled on* genuine memories where the same sense is the corollary of the experience of time passing after the recollected episode. **Here I'm inspired by the simulationist theory of memory according to which the function of memory is not the preservation of particular past episodes but the simulation of *possible* past episodes (see DeBrigard 2014). If we want to concentrate on the sense of pastness, we can put it this way: According to the suggestion the *tokens* of the sense of pastness in confabulated memories are to be derived from the sense of pastness as a *type* which in turn has to be derived from the experience of time passing.**

Now since in some cases of genuine remembering the sense of pastness is so derived, it seems that what I'm aware of in memory is something that time has passed since. This in turn seems to mean that the indirect realist theory of memory is false since a mental image or representation (which is the immediate object of my awareness according to the theory) is not something time

has passed since. An image would in a direct sense be the product of the *now*, not of a *past* episode (though indirectly it would be a product of that episode). Therefore as some have pointed out, an image would be present as now, not as past. The indirect realist at this point might wonder why is it not sufficient to say that the content is an image *accompanied* by the sense of pastness. But again, how does it get accompanied by that sense? Even if we accept for the sake of the argument that memory-traces can encode content, such sources on their own could convey information about the contents of the experiences that caused those traces only as they were presented, namely as *now*. To make the content of recollection *past* something more than information-transmission through causation is needed. It may be a part of recollection (that is, it may be an enabling condition), but it is not enough. As Merleau-Ponty elaborates it:

... no physiological or psychic 'trace' of the past can make consciousness of the past understandable. This table bears traces of my past life, for I have carved my initials on it and spilt ink on it. But these traces in themselves do not refer to the past: they are present; and, in so far as I find in them signs of some 'previous' event, it is because I derive my sense of the past from elsewhere, because I carry this particular significance within myself. If my brain stores up traces of the bodily process which accompanied one of my perceptions, and if the appropriate nervous influx passes once more through these already fretted channels, my perception will reappear, but it will be a fresh perception, weakened and unreal perhaps, but in no case will this

perception, which is present, be capable of pointing to a past event ... (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 480)

The proposed analysis here is that the sense of pastness comes from the experience of time passing after the recollected event. But this then seems to mean that in recollection I'm experientially connected to that very episode. It is presented as an episode time has passed since because I grab that very episode that I experienced sinking into the past through the experience of the passing of time. Applying a metaphor, recollection and the recollected event are at opposite ends of a road. From one end I'm making my way to the other. While walking, I'm leaving one end behind and it is getting further from me. This is analogous to experiencing time passing after the event. Arriving at the other end I turn and stare back at the end which I have come from. I see that other end *across from the distance* I have traversed. Similarly, the experience of time passing opens up the past for me and in recollection I'm looking directly back into the past.

It is obligatory to recapitulate the problematic issue of false memories. It is a fact that mental phenomena that mimic the phenomenology of remembering (though they are not instances of genuine remembering) exist. It is possible for a state to have the phenomenology of memory and yet not to be in direct contact with any past episode. From this it seems to follow then that we don't need direct contact with the past to make sense of memory-experience. But this is not so. We have two ways to answer this argument. First and foremost, we could say that we do need direct contact with the past although not in every case of a state seemingly endowed with the phenomenology. Some could be understood as simulations modelled on genuine memories. This demarcation may seem ad hoc at first but it

is not because we need direct contact with the past to explain *the very possibility and existence* of the phenomenology (in the case of genuine memories). Once we have the phenomenology with genuine memories, simulations of that phenomenology (in the case of non-genuine memories) become possible.²³ It is also the case - as it was noted - that confabulations often incorporate and blend genuine memory-elements. If a false memory is composed of such elements, it can be maintained that in it there are multiple 'partial experiential relations' to more than one past episodes (see Sant'Anna 2020). In other words, the state may be in direct contact with more than one past episodes.

But even if it is the case that in memory a past experience is directly apprehended, why does it follow that it was an experience of the very same subject? The straightforward answer is that because if we deny that it is an experience of the very same subject then what remains is that in memory we first-personally access the experiences of *another subject*. It would be "retrospective telepathy" to borrow a phrase from Klawonn (2009, p. 116). But the idea of accessing another mind *from the inside* is a dubious one. The main problem with it is that it entails an incoherent ontological commitment. If we claim that minds can have access to each other from the inside, we commit ourselves to the idea that consciousness and its experiential contents are ontologically distinct entities. Why is this the case?

²³ I would apply the same understanding to the fictitious case of transplanted memories. If the idea expresses a real possibility, they are to be regarded as simulational states based on genuine, non-transplanted memories. The episodes referred in such quasi-memories weren't present for me and I (as the recipient of a transplanted memory) had no experience of them sinking into the past. Therefore their pastness *in my consciousness* is not an original but a simulated pastness.

Because if we say that one consciousness has access to the contents of another and maintain that consciousness and its contents are ontologically inseparable it follows that the two consciousnesses have become the *very same consciousness* since consciousness and content are one. If consciousness and content are inseparable, the relation between them is either identity or constitution. Both of these options will lead to the consequence that the access of two consciousness to the same content translates into the two consciousness becoming numerically identical. If the relation is identity then the situation is straight-forward. Content *c* as the content of consciousness *a* is identical to that consciousness. If it is also the content of consciousness *b*, it is identical with consciousness *b* too. Thus in accordance with the principle of transitivity consciousness *a* and *b* are identical. The same is the case with constitution. If content *c* is the content of consciousness *a*, it is constituted by that consciousness. If it is also a content of consciousness *b*, it is constituted by *b*. Therefore consciousness *a* and *b* are identical. But this of course is nonsense. Two things that are ontologically distinct can't become identical to each other.

For this reason if we want to allow interexperiential access we have to treat consciousness and content as ontologically distinct. But this position is incoherent too since it entails that phenomenal contents could in principle exist without being present in consciousness. But what exactly is wrong with this? Take your current experience. It is probably rich with perceptual contents, sensations and thoughts. What we are being asked here is to believe that all these could exist *in the very same manner* in the absence of consciousness. But this is self-contradiction. If they could exist in the very same way, then there really would be no difference between the two situations. As Dainton rightly notes, "what differences could there be, given that in both

cases intrinsically indistinguishable phenomenal properties are realized in all their technocolour glory? (Dainton 2002, p. 39)” If the contents retain their phenomenal nature, then it’s incomprehensible what it means that there’s no consciousness to them. Again, try to imagine your current experiential contents with the same phenomenal nature occurring in the absence of consciousness. Since by hypothesis they retain their phenomenal nature, there’s something like to have them. However, there is no one to whom there could be something like to have them. And this is self-contradiction since what’s its like-ness is necessarily what it’s likeness for someone/something. For this reason – since this view is unworkable – the direct realist theory of memory requires a subject with real transtemporal identity.

V. Some remaining issues

What exactly does it mean when I propose that in recollection we directly apprehend a past episode? A past episode is commonly understood to be something that has ceased to exist. But how could I be directly aware of or be in direct contact with something that has ceased to exist? In other words, doesn’t the idea of direct contact require both relatas to exist? This is probably the most common objection to direct realism. As Sant’Anna puts it “the objects of memory have ceased to exist at the time in which one remembers, and hence are *not* the kind of things that one can be acquainted with. (Sant’Anna 2002, p. 2)”²⁴ Now some who accepts the above entailment but still want to be a direct realist, endorse eternalism under which past

²⁴ Sant’Anna - at least in this paper – doesn't endorse this objection.

episodes do exist. I have my doubts however whether we have to accept such a radical solution. In fact I want to deny it. Instead I propose to understand direct contact with past episodes as *direct knowledge* about past episodes. This way as far as I can see the entailment that both relatas should exist is avoided. I can have direct knowledge about a past episode despite that this episode doesn't exist now. How is it so? **The watching of that particular scene of the series has transpired and has ceased to exist. But the knowledge that the scene was present to me remains. This knowledge, however, is not representational. Its status as knowledge doesn't consist in having a representation with a particular relation to the episode. That would be indirect knowledge. Instead the knowledge in question is analogous to the one I have about my current experience. For this reason, here I use the term 'knowledge' synonymously with first-personal presentedness. I possess direct knowledge about my current experience simply because of the fact that it is first-personally presented to me. I take it that the knowledge present is remembering is to be derived from this knowledge. I can access a past episode directly 'from the inside' because it was first-personally present to me, and this first-personal presentedness of the past episode itself is what is accessed later by the remembering subject. We could say that direct contact with a past episode is nothing other than the potential first-personal knowledge about what it was like to experience that episode. It is important to stress the difference to the indirect realist reading. This potential first-personal knowledge is not a matter of having a mental representation by help of which the phenomenal character of a past episode is reconstructed. Rather I have direct access to**

phenomenal character of the past experience itself. I don't get to know about it through some mediating entity but by the fact that it was first-personally present to me. This is the reason that even though it has ceased to exist I can, nonetheless, be in direct contact with it. In other words, the principle of the coexistence of the *relatas* (in the case of direct contact) only holds water if we grant that the precondition of direct access is that the subject has to access a thing that *is* and access *how* it is.

Now I dispute this. I think it makes sense to speak of direct contact even in the case of something that only *was* and *how* it was for it doesn't seem contradictory to say the following: Just as I can know directly (that is, without a mediating representation) what is it like to undergo my current experience (simply by being first-personally presented with it), I can know directly (that is, without a mediating representation) what it was like to undergo a past experience (simply by having been first-personally presented with it). What I actually claim here is that the principle of the coexistence of the *relatas* is based on circular reasoning. According to Malcolm, if "B is 'directly' aware of X, then B and X coexist" (1976). If by 'being directly aware' we simply mean unmediated access, then I don't see any conceptual-logical necessity here. It would be only so if the precondition of direct access would be that B has to access X as it *is now*. But this would be circular reasoning for the conclusion would be incorporated into the premises. Furthermore, I claim that a certain type of first-personal access (in the case of memory) gives us a counter-example to this principle. The subject in a veridical recollection is able to directly apprehend a

past episode as it was (because it was presented to them first-personally).

Now, this memory-knowledge by acquaintance is of course not explicit knowledge and its status *as* knowledge may not be available to the remembering subject. I may be uncertain whether a particular mental content I have is a content of memory or imagination. But if it is a veridical memory, it is still a piece of knowledge even if I don't have a grasp on it as such. It is knowledge since there is a direct contact with the episode. Direct contact is direct knowledge that such episode has transpired. It also has to be added that I don't wish to deny that this access to previous episodes is *made possible* by certain causal factors. They may very well be a condition of possibility. Since this is the case, the causal web underlying memory does influence how well I can apprehend a past episode.

Another issue concerns the alleged cases of states of unconsciousness such as deep sleep, anaesthesia or coma. One could say that in light of these a persisting subject is at most only possible *between* periods of unconsciousness since it borders on meaninglessness to say that subjects on the opposite ends of such periods are identical. But I deny that there are breaks in consciousness. I argued that the first-personal grasp on a past episode in recollection requires an abiding subject between the two mental episodes. This then is itself an argument against the alleged breaks. Giving up on the idea though is not a high price at all. Some say that it is common-sense to think that there are unconscious periods but I doubt that. I think that the content of common-sense wisdom on this is not clear at all. It may be useful in pre-theoretical contexts to speak as if some states were unconscious but such attitude shouldn't be confused with a folk psychological commitment about such states. If we deny that breaks in consciousness exist, there are two ways to think about the issue. The first option is the

obvious one: consciousness is present in every state of the living organism.²⁵ The second is one suggested by Klawonn. According to this, consciousness shouldn't be viewed as part of the objective world at all. So in the cases discussed, consciousness may be absent from the objective world, but its "subjective continuity ... remains unbroken in its own perspective" (Klawonn 2009, p. 136). In other words, according to this view, the so-called unconscious states are unconscious only in the sense that they don't enter into the (unbroken) stream of consciousness.

VI. Concluding remarks

The above argumentation sought to prove that the experiential character of episodic memory necessitates the view that the consciousness *of* content in an organism's experiences is a persisting subject. One aspect I was concerned with was the sense of pastness. I tried to show that the re-presentation of an episode as past is a re-presentation of an episode *after which* I experienced time passing. The sense of pastness then – at least, in some of the cases - is due to the fact that the subject of remembering experienced the passing of time between the episode recollected and the act of recollection. I argued that this requires the subject to be a persisting entity because the experience of temporal passing itself requires it. It was also my contention that veridical memories (and also veridical memory-fragments) need to be understood in a direct realist manner. **Here I argued that provided that the phenomenal details in the content of recollection match the corresponding details in the content of the**

²⁵ There are in fact independent reasons as well that support this view (see Windt - Nielsen - Thompson 2016).

recollected experience there is no candidate under the indirect realist theory to explain such a matching. Neither the so-called memory traces nor information stored in semantic memory can secure it. Hence I proposed that the best explanation for the matching is direct contact with the past experience. Since however a subject can't access the experiences of another subject in a first-personal way, the accessed past experience had to belong to the very same subject that is the subject of the present act of remembering. I concluded by elaborating on how to understand the concept of direct contact with past episodes.

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