

The Phenomenology of Ethical Self-Awareness

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Abstract:

This thesis offers a phenomenological study of self-awareness. I argue that, in its most basic form, self-experience consists of two aspects: affectivity and temporality. I then demonstrate that self-awareness can be primarily either affective or temporal. However, in both of its forms, self-experience remains continuous and unitary.

I then suggest that continuous and unitary self-awareness is incompatible with experiences of novelty. I argue that in order to accommodate the new, self-experience must become discontinuous and dislodged. I show that the form of self-awareness can be modified by concrete experiences. I then demonstrate that the experience of responsibility for the other produces a new form of self-awareness – one which is neither continuous nor unitary. Consequently, responsibility, by precipitating the emergence of a new form of self-experience, opens subjectivity to new experiences. In fact, the experience of radical novelty consists of a rediscovery of the other in a responsible attitude.

I conclude by arguing that, in contrast to the discontinuous and dislodged subjectivity, the continuous and unitary form of self-awareness is incompatible with responsibility and thus with ethics. The distinction between the forms of self-experience incongruent and congruent with ethics, in turn, allows me to suggest an ethical hierarchy of self-awareness: discontinuous and dislodged self-experience is ethically better than its continuous and unitary counterparts. Subjective life, therefore, oscillates between better and worse forms of self-awareness.

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‘... subjectivity constitutively has the form of subjectification and desubjectification...’

G. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to provide a study of self-awareness. In my analyses, I have chosen to draw on Husserlian phenomenology. I believe that Husserl’s writings are an invaluable resource to anyone interested in the nature of subjective experience: on the one hand, Husserl offers detailed and insightful analyses of subjectivity; on the other hand, Husserl’s model of consciousness offers an immensely rich framework in which to examine questions pertaining to the self-manifestation of subjective life. This richness is attested to by the originality of the works inspired by Husserl’s phenomenology – in fact, it is difficult to read Husserl in separation from the philosophies indebted to his thought. This thesis’s engagement with Husserlian phenomenology has been oriented by the texts of Michel Henry and Emmanuel Levinas – since both thinkers offer convincing re-interpretations of the Husserlian subjectivity, I have found their works particularly relevant for the study of self-experience.

The analysis of the encounter between Husserl and Henry has allowed me to reject reflectional models of self-awareness, and, instead, advance a pre-reflective account of self-experience. I have then been able to argue that, pre-reflectively, self-awareness consists of two aspects: firstly, it is *affective* – when I am aware of myself, I *feel* myself; secondly, it is *temporal* – when I am aware of myself, I feel myself *in time*. In other words, affection and time *individuate* the subject – I am aware of myself because I feel myself in time. Importantly, this experience of oneself is continuous and unitary. I will refer to this type of self-awareness as *subjectification*.

Subjectification can take two forms, which correspond to the two aspects of self-awareness: the unity which generates the sense of self can be *primarily* affective or temporal. I can, therefore, be aware of myself because I *feel* myself or because I feel myself *in time* – individuation can take place chiefly by means of an affect or by means of time. In other words, although self-awareness has two aspects, the process of subjectification involves a *domination* of one of the aspects over its counterpart: individuation via affective unity presupposes a suppression of time; individuation via temporal unity renders affection secondary.

However, as Levinas has argued, certain experiences are able to *disturb* or *modify* the interaction between affectivity and temporality, such that neither affection nor time is able to constitute a unified experience. Because disturbance renders unitary experience impossible, subjectification is stunted – the sense of oneself can no longer follow from the unity of affection or time. Instead, the disturbed interplay of temporality and affectivity individuates by means of a non-unitary (i.e. displaced or dislodged) experience. I will call this process *desubjectification*.

Desubjectification *neutralises* the struggle for domination between affectivity and time (the struggle which produced two forms of subjectification). In desubjectification, affectivity and time are determined *together* by the experience of the disturbance, and thus neither of them can compete for the role of the primary ‘individuator’ – both aspects of self-awareness find themselves subordinated to the experience of the disturbance. However, there *is* a conflict between desubjectification and subjectification. Firstly, because the two aspects of self-awareness relate to each other differently across the two processes – whilst in desubjectification time and affection work in tandem, in subjectification they battle for domination. Secondly, because individuation via dislocated experience is incompatible with individuation via unitary experience – I can be aware of myself as *either* dislodged *or* unitary.

Levinas is able to discover the effects of the disturbance on self-awareness by means of his appropriation of the phenomenological method, briefly outlined in *Totality and Infinity* as follows:

‘The method practiced here, does indeed consists in seeking the condition of empirical situations, but it leaves to the developments called empirical, in which the conditioning possibility is accomplished – it leaves to the *concretization* – ... [a] role that specifies the meaning of the fundamental possibility, a meaning invisible in that condition.’¹

Concretisation (or *deformalisation*, as Levinas also calls it)² is a technique or a procedure by means of which Levinas is able to shed a light on features unacknowledged by a strictly formal phenomenological analysis. Since deformalisation is a Husserlian concept lifted from *Ideas I*,³ it is perhaps unsurprising to find it present – although in an implicit manner – across Henry’s work.

The employment of deformalisation by Levinas and Henry, in turn, allows us to distinguish between two types of concretisation: one can refer to a theoretical technique of depicting formal structures of self-experience *as* concrete events; however, in order for the concretised image not to be arbitrary, there must be a connection between the formal aspects of self-experience and the concrete situations which illustrate them – this connection is established by the second type of deformalisation, which consists of leading the formal elements of self-experience back to concrete events in which they are actualised. The way in which concrete experiences realise the formal elements of self-awareness, in turn, grounds the validity of the concretised image: we can depict the form of self-awareness *as* a concrete experience, because the former is actualised in the latter. In consequence, an analysis of concrete events can help us to disclose otherwise obscured features of the realised form of self-experience.

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press 2013, p. 173

² *Ibid.*, p. 50

³ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy vol. I*, trans. F. Kersten, Martinus Nijhoff 1983, p. 26

Most importantly, deformalisation discloses the ethical significance of self-experience – when analysed in concrete situations, self-awareness appears bound up with ethics. More precisely, deformalisation demonstrates the ethical importance of desubjectification, and the incompatibility of ethics and subjectification. Put simply, unitary forms of self-awareness suppress ethical experiences – I can be ethical only when my awareness of myself is dislodged. The conflict between subjectification and desubjectification mentioned above, is an *ethical* struggle between forms of self-awareness congruent and incongruent with ethics. From the ethical point of view, therefore, there is a *hierarchy* of the forms of self-experience: desubjectification is ethically *better* than its counterparts. If the aim of this thesis is to provide a study of self-awareness, its result – secured by the deformed phenomenological method – is a discovery of an ethically structured subjectivity.

The structure of this thesis follows the progression of the forms of self-awareness from subjectification to desubjectification:

I begin the first chapter with a critique of the reflectional model of self-awareness. The limitations of the reflective account of self-experience motivate the subsequent analysis of pre-reflective self-awareness. Drawing on the work of Henry, I argue that pre-reflective self-experience is affective. As I show, affectivity is a unitary and continuous experience which individuates the subject: to experience an affect is to experience oneself *in* and *as* the affect.

I then consider Henry's claim that affection is *atemporal*. I suggest that the atemporality of affectivity purported by Henry shouldn't be understood as an absence of time, but, rather, as a *suppression* of temporality. Subsequently, I examine Henry's theory of intersubjectivity. For Henry, intersubjectivity is made possible by a shared affective life. I argue that Henry's account of intersubjectivity fails – shared affective life is unable to provide an adequate access to the other. In consequence, the other on Henry's affective model remains *inaccessible*. I suggest that the failure of Henry's theory of intersubjectivity is a

result of the suppression of time. I then claim that in order to experience the other, I must be aware of myself in time – the experience of the other’s inaccessibility necessitates a transition from an affective to a temporal form of self-awareness.

In the second chapter, I turn to a Husserlian account of temporal self-awareness. I argue that time-consciousness individuates subjectivity by giving rise to a unitary and continuous sense of self. I then consider a recent critique of the Husserlian model put forward by Martin Hägglund. For Hägglund, time and unity are incompatible. This means that temporal self-presence can never be unitary; on the contrary, time *divides* self-experience between its past and future phases. In my reply to Hägglund, I turn to Husserl’s account of temporal self-experience found in the ‘Bernau Manuscripts.’ There, Husserl demonstrates that Hägglund’s thesis is incorrect – time and unity are, in fact, compatible. I then show that temporal experience is a condition for both the encounter with the other and affectivity. On the Husserlian model, therefore, affects are secondary to time.

I conclude the chapter by suggesting that affectivity and temporality are, in fact, experienced together – self-awareness, therefore, should not be understood as either affective or temporal; rather, self-experience is constituted by an intertwining of the affective and the temporal forms of self-awareness. I then argue that the unitary character of affectivity and temporality closes subjectivity off from experiences of novelty. In order to account for the new, therefore, it becomes necessary to identify experiences able to challenge the unity of both the temporal and the affective forms of self-awareness, and in so doing, to open subjectivity up to the experiences of novelty.

In the third chapter, I show that self-awareness can be responsive to concrete experiences, and that certain events harbour a potential to modify the unity of self-experience. In order to ground the possibility of a modifiable form of self-awareness, I consider the effects which curiosity, melancholia, and fatigue have on self-experience. I then turn to Levinas’s analyses of death and fecundity – I demonstrate that the change they elicit in the

experience of time is insufficient to allow for novelty. At the end of the chapter, I examine the experience of ageing – I argue that ageing is able to disrupt the unity of time-consciousness; however, ageing is also experienced as a source of my concern, which, in turn, confirms the unity of affective self-presence. Since ageing precipitates only a partial disruption of the unitary self-awareness, it can only account for partial novelty.

In the last chapter, I revisit the relationship between temporal experience and the experience of the other. I demonstrate that encounters with others on the basis of time-consciousness can provoke affective reactions. I then show that the other can awaken my guilt. As I make clear, guilt is experienced as a disturbance of self-experience; what's more, guilt leads to responsibility for the other. I argue that responsibility for the other overcomes both the temporal and the affective unity of self-awareness – in responsibility, I experience myself as dislodged, and thus as capable of encountering the new. In fact, it is the rediscovery of the other in a responsible attitude which constitutes a case of a novel experience.

I conclude by arguing that unitary forms of self-awareness are incompatible with responsibility, and thus with ethics: as I demonstrate, whenever I experience myself as unitary, I have already abandoned the other. The contrast between the dislodged and the unitary forms of subjectivity, in turn, allows me to posit an ethical hierarchy of self-awareness: dislodged self-experience elicited by responsibility is ethically better than its unitary counterparts.

From the point of view of ethics, subjective life is constituted by an oscillation between better and worse forms of self-awareness.

Chapter 1: Affectivity

I begin the chapter with a critique of a reflectional model of self-awareness. I rely on the detailed analyses of its problems found in Dan Zahavi's *Self-Awareness and Alterity*,¹ which I develop further and complement with Michel Henry's criticisms of reflectional self-experience. In consequence, I present a comprehensive critique of the reflectional model of self-awareness: whereas Zahavi helps me to address the question of the identity of self-consciousness (i.e. the problem of reflectional *self-awareness*), Henry allows me to problematise the possibility of self-experience (i.e. the problem of reflectional *self-awareness*).

The limitations of the reflective model of self-awareness motivate the subsequent analysis of Henry's account of pre-reflective self-experience. For Henry, pre-reflective self-consciousness is affective: to experience an affect is to experience oneself *in* and *as* the affect. Drawing on Henry's work, I demonstrate that affectivity is a unitary experience which individuates the subject: when I feel an affect, I feel myself *in* and *as* the affect. I also show why, for Henry, affectivity is atemporal.

I then examine some problems with Henry's model of self-awareness. I argue that for Henry, the unity of affectivity is grounded in its passivity, which is experienced simultaneously as suffering and enjoyment. This allows me to show that Henry is committed to a 'concretised' account of self-awareness: for Henry, empirical experiences illuminate features of the formal structures of self-awareness otherwise hidden from view. In the following section, I revisit Henry's belief in the atemporality of affection. I demonstrate that for Henry time is not excluded from the work of affectivity; rather, it is relegated to a secondary or a subordinate role.

¹ Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation*, Northwestern University Press 1999. pp. 14-37

I then reconstruct Henry's theory of intersubjectivity. I show that, for Henry, intersubjectivity is made possible by a shared affective life. I argue that Henry's account of intersubjectivity fails – shared affective life is unable to provide an access to the other. In consequence, the other, on Henry's model, remains *inaccessible*. I suggest that the failure of Henry's theory of intersubjectivity is an accurate reflection of the affective self-awareness's failure to provide the access to the other. I claim that the experience of the other's inaccessibility necessitates a transition from affective to a temporal form of pre-reflective self-awareness – as I will show in the next chapter, in order to experience the other, I must be aware of myself in time.

1.1 The problems with the reflectional model of self-awareness

Traditionally, self-awareness has been construed as a dyadic, subject-object relation. For instance, in *Ideas I* Husserl distinguishes between, on the one hand, the lived or currently occurring mental processes, and, on the other, the ego's gaze which illuminates or highlights (i.e. pays attention to) particular aspects of the lived mental processes.² Importantly, for Husserl it is the ego's regard which, in turning its attention to specific elements of conscious life, allows the latter to appear. For example, I become *aware* of my hunger, when the ego's attentional ray sheds a light on the currently occurring feeling of hunger. On this model, subjective life can show itself only by becoming an object for the perceiving regard. One of the consequences necessitated by this view is the positing of consciousness as a duality, split between the necessary '*subjectively oriented* [Egoic] side' and the transitory '*objectively oriented* side,'³ i.e. between the ego's gaze and the lived processes.

² Even though the Husserl of *Ideas I* seems committed to a reflectional model of self-awareness, it should be kept in mind that he also elaborates a sophisticated account of *pre-reflective* self-awareness, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Cf., Dan Zahavi, 'Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-Reflective Self-Awareness', in *The New Husserl*, ed. D. Welton, Indiana University Press 2003

³ E. Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 191

While I become *aware* of my feeling of hunger by turning my subjective regard towards the ‘objective side’ (i.e. the feeling of hunger currently taking place), I *know* myself to be doing so with the help of a reflectional gaze – the latter grasps the relationship between the ego and the feeling, rendering their relation ‘evidentially apprehensible and analyzable.’⁴ Here Husserl doubles up the dyadic structure of self-awareness with an almost identical structure of reflectional self-knowledge. Despite the divergences in their epistemic value (the latter allows us to access and validate the former), self-awareness and self-knowledge are conceived on the basis of the same, subject-object relation, in which one element *sees*, while the other *is seen*. The only difference between self-awareness and self-knowledge seems to lie in the respective objects: in one case, the gaze is turned towards lived processes; in the other case, the regard grasps the ego in relation to conscious life. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to every instance of dyadic, subject-object introspection (i.e. introspection which relies on the separation between the gaze and its object) as *reflectional self-awareness*.

To be aware means to turn one’s regard towards an object; accordingly, to be *self-aware* means to turn *one’s* regard towards *one’s* conscious life as an object. In order to constitute *self-awareness*, the egoic and the objective poles – despite their differences – have to share a more fundamental identity: both the gaze and the lived processes have to belong to the same subjectivity. As Zahavi puts it, ‘In order to be a case of self-awareness, it is not sufficient that A is conscious of B; in addition, A must be conscious of B as identical with A.’⁵ Now, since the lived processes appear thanks to the objectifying regard, the unity of split consciousness can only be secured if the seen conscious life gives itself as identical to the seeing gaze the moment it meets the latter’s aim – when the egoic regard objectifies the feeling of hunger, the latter must be experienced as part of the same subjectivity as the former.

⁴ Ibid., p. 177

⁵ D. Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, Northwestern University Press 1999, p. 18

However, at times Husserl's descriptions in *Ideas I* seem to work against the requirement of identity. In giving an account of the relation between the gaze and the lived process, Husserl writes:

‘When the mental process which, at any particular time, is actually being lived comes into reflective regard it becomes given *as* actually being lived, as existing “now.” But not only that: it becomes given as having just now *been* and, in so far as it was unregarded, precisely as having been unregarded, as not having been reflected on.’⁶

The awareness of a lived experience assumes a present form: the regard brings to light a conscious process as it is *now*. However, the very same process gives itself as also having been taking place before the attentive modification. When I become aware of being happy, I illuminate a feeling which has been occurring partly prior to my awareness of it. Therefore, we can say that the gaze comes ‘too late’ with regards to its object – the regard is always ‘behind’ the lived process it sees. Of course, retrospectively, I am able to access the prior aspects of the feeling to which I wasn’t paying attention, and thus bring the past aspects under the present regard. However, even though I can, in principle, become retrospectively aware of the infinite chain of the past processes, every past moment present in my regard always signals another – still unregarded – past: as I reflect on the phase of my feeling which was taking place prior to my advertence, I realise that a different process preceded it – *before* being happy I was anxious; the past anxiety, in its turn, reveals another process which came before it, that process implies its own past, that past its past, and so on *ad infinitum*. As Husserl succinctly puts it, each now ‘necessarily has its *horizon of Before*.’⁷

We can thus identify the following three aspects of the temporal relationship between that which is seen and seeing itself: a) the regarded mental process is simultaneous with the regard which grasps it (both take place in the present); b) the mental process gives itself as having just been, i.e. it includes its past form in its current appearance (the now and the past

⁶ Ibid., p. 175

⁷ Ibid., p. 195

are in some sense contemporary in awareness); c) the past element attached to the now implies an infinite chain of other past moments which pre-exists the current regard; in other words, the very structure of becoming aware of mental processes necessitates a past dimension which always escapes from the ego's ray, however far back the latter reaches. The last characteristic shouldn't be understood as indicating some kind of limitation on the part of the gaze – in principle, all lived experiences (including past ones) display a readiness for being seen. Rather, the irreducible past attached to every lived process implies that the regard can never be completely co-extensive, or identical with, the conscious life it is attentive to. The irreducibility of the past dimension seems to introduce a temporal 'lag' between the attentive gaze and past lived experiences: since the latter are always given as already having been, that is to say, as taking place before being illuminated, the regard is always delayed or late. My awareness of conscious processes and those processes themselves seem to be marginally disjointed or 'out of synch.'

In addition to the temporal discrepancy, Husserl identifies the following incongruence between the gaze and the mental processes:

'During the pleasing course of thoughts a reflective regard becomes adverted to the rejoicing. The latter becomes a mental process regarded and perceived as something immanent, fluctuating and fading away thus and so as it is regarded reflectively. At the same time, the freedom of the course of thought suffers; we are now conscious of it in a modified manner; the pleasingness belonging to its continuance is also affected essentially — that too we can observe by adverting our reflective regard in yet other directions.'⁸

It seems that the regard – in paying attention to its object – *affects* the process which is taking place. Being happy, and being *aware* or *knowing* that I am happy (i.e. grasping the happiness), seem to differ – while the former includes a seamless flow of pleasant feelings, the latter, in some sense, 'extracts' the feeling from the continuous stream of conscious life. This extraction, in turn, interrupts and arrests the flow of pleasant feelings – consequently,

⁸ Ibid., p. 176

altering its pleasantness. Two conclusions can be drawn here: firstly, the regard grasps the feeling ‘in a modified manner’ – the feeling as it grasped, and the feeling as it is lived, possess different affective qualities. We can think here of a difference between *being* happy and *being aware* of being happy. Secondly, the regard is in some sense antagonistic to the feeling: the awareness of our happiness seems to contribute to the transformation of the latter; the gaze interrupts and alters the flow of the lived process, modifying its character.

The two passages from *Ideas I* allow us to identify three characteristics which differentiate between the attentive regard and the lived processes, implying their non-identity: 1) the temporal discrepancy, 2) the divergent affective qualities, and 3) the transformative antagonism of the gaze. Husserl, therefore, is right to assert the two-sidedness of reflectional self-awareness: conscious life gives itself as different to the egoic regard. However, if this is correct, the reflectional model of self-consciousness seems unable to meet the requirement of identity necessary for self-awareness. In short, since lived process are grasped as different than the gaze, consciousness remains split into two.

Certainly, we can always reflect upon the relationship between the ray of attention and its object; the act of reflection would, then, disclose the fundamental unity of the egoic regard and conscious life. However, since reflectional self-knowledge also involves a dyadic, subject-object relation, the requirement of identity retains its validity: in order to secure *self*-awareness, reflection must show itself as identical to gaze and the lived processes it grasps. This, however, seems impossible: whereas the relation reflected upon is a dyad made out of both the subjective and the objective poles of experience, reflection represents only the subjective pole; furthermore, since reflection annuls the subjective character of the gaze by turning it into an object, reflection cannot grasp the subjective pole reflected upon as identical to itself. Therefore, as Zahavi notes, in order to constitute *self*-awareness, ‘the act of reflection must... await a further act of reflection’ – the second reflection would take the initial reflectional triad as its object, thus securing its unity. But since the second reflection would face the exact same problems as its first counterpart, the second reflection would also

require an additional reflective act to secure the unity of itself and its object. The third reflection would, then, encounter the same difficulty – in order to show itself as identical with its object, it would require a fourth reflection, the fourth one a fifth one, and so on, to infinity. In short, ‘we are confronted with a vicious infinite regress’⁹ – any attempt to account for the unitary character of self-awareness on a reflectional model ends up in an infinite proliferation of reflections. From the point of view of reflection, therefore, subjectivity is always split, and thus can never be *self-aware*.

Furthermore, as Michel Henry points out, in addition to its failure to establish *self-awareness*, the reflectional model cannot even count as a case of *awareness* – for Henry, when we reflect upon conscious life, *the life itself is lost*. In other words, the ‘philosophical error’ of the traditional view consists in not realising that the reliance on the egoic regard for the illumination of conscious processes results in an inability to access lived experiences *as lived* – what the gaze grasps *is not* the mental process as it is occurring. In ‘The Phenomenological Method’ Henry writes:

‘...instead of being able to turn the *cogitatio* [i.e. a mental process] into an absolute given, the displacement of the *cogitatio* through its entry under the regard of thought causes it to disappear. It is not just a matter here of either a partial or provisional concealment. Even less is it a matter of a modification or alteration similar to what psychology describes such that, under the regard of attention, for example, mental processes are blurred to the point of occasionally breaking apart. It is an impossibility in principle: where the regard of thought, in its pure gaze, is concerned, the *cogitatio* does not stand. Instead of the regard being able to give the *cogitatio* as an absolute given that would reside in it and be identified with it, the regard de-realizes the *cogitatio* in an essential way. As for the *cogitatio*, the regard does not place it before us but only proposes the void to us. Has anyone ever seen his or her thought, emotion, passion, or anxiety, unless he or she mistakes them for what is only an

⁹ D. Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, p. 18

indication of them of what one interprets them to be? Our life is never and cannot be seen.’¹⁰

What warrants Henry’s radical claims? Henry takes up the descriptions found in *Ideas I*: for Henry, as for Husserl, the gaze is always late with regards to its object, and, consequently, the occurring of the mental process and its appearance are ‘out of synch’ – when the ego turns towards the mental process, the latter shows itself as existing in the past, before being regarded (when I become attentive to my hunger, the feeling is seen as already having been taking place before I paid attention to it). Henry, however, doesn’t accept the Husserlian thesis that the regard can be simultaneous with its object – whereas for Husserl the gaze illuminates the present feeling with its past, unregarded extensions, for Henry, what is accessed is *only* the ‘already having been’ of feeling. According to Henry, the temporal lag on the part of the gaze is irreducible. This seems to be a consequence of the very function of the regard: when I grasp my feeling of happiness, I objectify the feeling which immediately *preceded* the grasp – this means that the feeling lived *during* the operation of the regard remains unobjectified, which is to say, it is not given. Certainly, I can grasp the unobjectified feeling by ‘recalibrating’ my objectifying gaze; yet, when I do so, I find, again, that I can only access the feeling immediately prior to the recalibration of my gaze – the present aspect of the feeling keeps slipping away. In other words, the time it takes to objectify a mental process, that is to say, the time necessary to turn a lived experience into an object for the regard, introduces a minimal temporal gap between the process as it is grasped and the process as it is lived – the latter always ‘outruns’ the former. The gaze, therefore, is *constitutively* ‘too late’ with regards to its object, and, thus, it can never coincide with the lived experience *as it is lived* – conscious life is always seen as prior to the regard which takes hold of it, which means that conscious life is grasped only in its past form. In short, the

¹⁰ Michel Henry, ‘The Phenomenological Method’, in *Material Phenomenology*, trans. S. Davidson, Fordham University Press 2008, p. 48

past mental processes are the sole content of my regard – as Henry puts it, the gaze gives me to myself ‘as no longer existing, as dead in the past.’¹¹

In addition, Henry, again drawing on Husserl’s descriptions, emphasises the shift in affective properties which takes place when a mental process is grasped – as we have said, my awareness of happiness possesses different affective qualities than my happiness as it is lived. Consequently, for Henry, the regard cannot make the lived feeling ‘visible’ – since the gaze cannot preserve the affective character of the mental process, it can only pretend to give us the lived process as it lived. Furthermore, as we have also seen, the gaze is antagonistic to the mental processes – when I realise I am angry, the feeling of anger begins to fade away. The transformative effect of objectification shows that the gaze, in shedding its light on a mental process, does not illuminate the latter as it is occurring in a neutral manner – rather, it disturbs the taking place of the lived experience, subsequently changing its affective character. As Jean-Luc Marion observes, for Henry the elements of conscious life, in order to live on, must remain unregarded – the attempt ‘to make them visible would amount to killing them.’¹² Consequently, the gaze is unable to manifest mental processes in an unmodified manner, which, coupled with the impossibility of grasping the present aspect of a process, render the regard incapable of accessing conscious life as it is lived – the latter remains ‘invisible.’

For Henry, the source of the above problem lies in a mistaken presupposition which states that in order to become manifest, mental processes have to be inscribed in a dyadic relation, where they are turned into objects given for and by the regard:

‘The absurdity is that the real *cogitatio*... is only an absolute given to the extent that it is submitted to a regard and a pure gaze. Consequently, it is only given to the degree to which, as a real *cogitatio*, it is subordinated to another power of givenness than itself. The other power gives it purely and absolutely, then and only then making it into an absolute given. The *cogitatio* is thus not an absolute given in and of itself

¹¹ Ibid., p. 51

¹² Jean-Luc Marion, ‘The Invisible and the Phenomenon,’ trans. C.M. Gschwandtner, in *Michel Henry – The Affects of Thought*, ed. J. Hanson and M.R. Kelly, Continuum 2012, p. 27

but as the result of an external givenness that is added on to its own original being. Because the *cogitatio* is not in and of itself an absolute given, it can only become an absolute given in and through a pure gaze.’¹³

To believe that the regard is necessary for the appearance of conscious life is incorrect for (at least) three reasons: firstly, because it assigns the power of making manifest to an element *exterior* to mental processes themselves, thus ignoring the fact that conscious life is tacitly experienced independently of the egoic gaze – it is precisely these tacitly occurring mental processes which the regard makes explicit (as Zahavi puts it, ‘I can thematise myself...because I am already affected by myself.’).¹⁴ Secondly, because it asserts that *subjective* life can show itself only by becoming an *object* for the regard – paradoxically, in order to appear, the subject has to be transformed into object, thus losing its very subjective quality. As Henry puts it, when subjectivity ‘manifests itself to itself, it always manifests itself as other than itself, as the very thing which is other.’¹⁵ Lastly, because it drives a wedge between the regard which *sees* and the conscious life which is *seen*, that is to say, between the objectifying and the objectified aspects of self-awareness; consequently, it commits itself to a divided and non-unitary account of subjective life. In short, by subordinating the manifestation of conscious life to the power of the objectifying gaze, the dyadic model of self-awareness a) alienates mental processes from themselves, thus barring the access to conscious life as it is lived – this, in turn, makes it unable to account for self-awareness; and b) it re-affirms the split between the subjective and the objective poles of experience, which, coupled with the regress generated by infinite proliferation of reflections, proves incapable of accounting for the unitary character of *self*-awareness.

In the next section I will consider Henry’s own account of self-awareness which, against the dyadic model, advocates the unity of self-awareness, and which, against the belief in the necessary role of the egoic gaze, asserts the possibility of a self-manifesting conscious life.

¹³ M. Henry, ‘The Phenomenological Method’, pp. 45-46

¹⁴ D. Zahavi, ‘Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-Reflective Self-Awareness,’ p. 163

¹⁵ Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, trans. G. Etzkorn, Martinus Nijhoff 1973, p. 239

1.2 Henry's affective model of pre-reflective self-awareness

The problems that plague the reflectional model of self-awareness show the unfeasibility of accounts which conceive of self-consciousness as a dyadic relation between mental processes and the objectifying regard. In order to avoid the difficulties faced by the reflectional model, we should posit a pre-reflective and unitary account of self-awareness. Note, however, that such a pre-reflective account will not be incompatible with its reflectional counterpart; on the contrary, as we have seen above, both the egoic regard and reflection *presuppose* the conscious life they thematise – in this sense, the descriptions of the latter would be able to ground the possibility of former. However, in contrast to the reflectional model, on the pre-reflective account conscious life does not depend for its manifestation on the objectifying regard – the gaze and reflection merely make self-manifesting mental processes explicit.

Henry himself offers one such account of pre-reflective self-awareness. For Henry, I do not have to direct my attentive gaze to the lived experience in order for the latter to appear; rather, before being accessed by the egoic regard, conscious life ‘impresses’, or exercises some sort of pressure, upon itself, making itself *feel* itself. ‘Consciousness,’ Henry writes, ‘would seem to impress upon itself in such a way that this original self-impression would reveal it to itself, making possible its own revelation.’¹⁶ Self-impression, therefore, is an affective experience in which conscious life *gives itself to itself*. Furthermore, the fact that conscious life *feels* itself grounds the unity of subjective self-manifestation. For Henry, affects are self-enclosed and do not refer to anything but themselves – the affective impression constitutes both the power of feeling (that which feels) and the content of feeling (that which is felt). Affectivity, therefore, is nothing other than an impression giving *and* receiving itself in feeling. Pain, for instance:

¹⁶ Michel Henry, *Incarnation: A Philosophy of Flesh*, trans. K. Hefty, Northwestern University Press 2015, p. 48

‘...does not refer to anything other than itself; it is given over to itself, immersed in itself, submerged by itself, and crushed under its own weight. Pure pain is pure suffering, it is this suffering’s immanence to itself – a suffering... entirely occupied with itself because it fills the entire place, so that there is no other place for it but the one it occupies. It is impossible for it to leave itself, or to escape itself, or to get ahead of itself... this impossibility is not due to the circumstances, or the layout of the surroundings, or the tortures; *in the end it stems from the internal structure of suffering*... Suffering has neither doors nor windows, and no space outside it or within it that would allow it to escape. Suffering is not affected by something else, but by itself; it is *a self-affection* in the radical sense that suffering is what is affected, but it is by suffering that it is so. It is at once affecting and affected, what makes it hurt and what hurts, without distinction. It is suffering that suffers.’¹⁷

Moreover, for Henry affectivity individuates subjectivity: the self gives and receives itself in a feeling and as a feeling. ‘In the Self resides and is realized... the identity of the affecting and the affected.’¹⁸ In other words, when I feel my conscious life, I feel *myself*. Affective and unitary self-impression, therefore, constitutes ‘the essence of the subject, its subjectivity’¹⁹ – it *subjectifies*. Furthermore, since affectivity is strictly unitary, affective individuation disallows any differentiation between the affected subject and its affect – the feeling self *is* its suffering, without any gap or difference. Consequently, for Henry, the statement ‘I feel pain’ becomes identical to ‘pain feels itself’ – to be affectively self-aware is simply to be aware of oneself *as* and *in* one’s feeling. Think here about accidentally stubbing your toe. The moment it happens your train of thought ceases and all of your mental processes become overflowed with pain. It seems as if there was nothing but pain, no distance or space between the pain and you. In some sense, your subjectivity becomes exhausted by the suffering you are undergoing – the feeling overtakes the self, merges with it, to a point at which it becomes meaningful to assert that it is pain which experiences itself.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 58

¹⁸ M. Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 465

¹⁹ Michel Henry, ‘The Critique of the Subject’, in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, trans. P. Connor, ed. E. Cadava, P. Connor, J-L. Nancy, Routledge 1991, p. 162

²⁰ Of course, Henry doesn’t mean to suggest that in affective experience I *only* experience the affect; on the contrary, affective self-presence makes possible other types of experiences.

Since the self-manifestation of affective life is unitary and non-relational, conscious life feels itself by itself *immediately*, that is to say, *as it is lived* – i.e. affective life is self-aware; moreover, since affective manifestation is *unitary* and *non-relational*, affective life is also *self-aware* – to feel an affect is to feel *oneself* as identical. Henry's account of pre-reflective self-awareness, therefore, avoids the downfalls of its reflectional counterpart.

1.3 Affective self-awareness and time

It could be argued that the example of the stubbed toe I used above, proves the opposite of Henry's equation of subjectivity and affectivity. It might be the case that when I stub my toe I am completely overtaken with pain. But, since the painful feeling can subside at any point (I can take some painkillers, rub the hurtful spot, or distract myself by engaging in other tasks), the feeling of pain can be seen as an accidental modification of my, for the most part, pain-free consciousness. Feeling the pain in my toe would thus be a *relation of* gradually decreasing intensity between consciousness and its pain – as time passes, the latter would deteriorate until completely disappearing. However, consciousness, and the concomitant sense of self, survive the disappearance of the affect and continue without it. This goes to show, the criticism continues, that the feeling of pain *is not* co-extensive with self-awareness, and that, in fact, affectivity is characterised by a dyadic relation between the affected and its affect (while the former persists, the latter gradually disappears). Henry, then, seems to be faced with a choice: either to provide an alternative account of a unitary but non-affective self-awareness, or to embrace the dyadic structure of affective self-experience with all the problems of a dyadic model.

Henry rejects the above choice, and instead decides to provide a defence of his initial position. His reconstructed response consists of three steps: firstly, he tries to isolate the present dimension of an affect, *the very moment* in which pain overtakes our thoughts, before having time to loosen up its grip on us (the moment in which we *are* our pain); secondly,

Henry claims, the analysis of the present dimension of a particular painful impression (such as the pain involved in toe stubbing) discloses the structural properties of affective impressions as such: the formal features found in studying the experience of pain as it is in the now are universally shared by all affective experiences (including affective self-awareness); lastly, the content of the present dimension of an impression constitutes the content of the feeling of the self. Therefore, Henry concludes, the structure and content of the consciousness of pain *shows* the structure and content of consciousness as such, and, by virtue of being identical, does so non-relationally and immediately. Of course, Henry doesn't want to deny the fact that time does ease our pain, and that every particular stubbed toe sooner or later ceases to hurt. Nor does he want to advocate self-flagellation (or repeated toe stubbing) as a way of ascertaining oneself. It is rather that the analysis of the *present* dimension of affective impressions provides us with the means to identify the features possessed by the *presence* to oneself in feeling. The 'split second' just before temporality intervenes to relieve the pain (in which the latter is at its most acute, having completely overtaken the subject), suffering shows consciousness as an undivided and unitary self-presence.

The structure and content of the feeling of pain as it is in the now coincides with the structure and content of feeling of self. However, we have also noted that this identity is short lived – almost immediately, time begins to separate the feeling of self from the feeling of pain by causing the latter to gradually subside. By contrast, the feeling of self continues to subsist. Henry calls this continuous awareness of oneself, permanently present across the continual modification of conscious life, an *originary impression*. We can, therefore, refine the analysis of individuation developed in the previous section – it is the originary impression which, strictly speaking, enacts the process of subjectification which produces the sense of self. Importantly, however, the originary impression, and with it, the sense of oneself, are not separable from other affects; on the contrary, the originary impression is nothing other than a continuous experience of the present dimension of particular feelings. The presupposition

operative in Henry's account is that conscious life is *always* affective – *every* mental process is felt. Put differently, at no point is it possible for conscious life *not* to feel – the feeling of nothing is still a feeling. Originary impression, therefore, stands for this permanency of the presence of affectivity across its various modifications. Consequently, the continuous sense of self also remains tied to, and identical with, particular affects.

However, can Henry maintain the identity of the originary impression and particular affects, necessary for a unitary model of self-awareness? As a *particular impression*, the affect is immediately subjected to temporal self-alienation (think here of the gradual deterioration of the feeling of pain); however, as the *originary impression*, the affect is continuous and permanent, impervious to the division by temporal phases – and in this sense *atemporal* (Henry calls it the 'eternal living present').²¹ In short, affective impressions seem to be at once helpless victims and successful opponents of time. How, then, can we think the unity of the particular and the originary impressions, if their divergent relations with temporality seem to point towards a fundamental difference which separates them in principle? Have we not just discovered another dyad which divides self-awareness from within according to two distinct temporalities? It is as if Henry was merely shifting the split within consciousness from the relation between the ego and mental processes, to the relation between temporal and atemporal affection – consequently, presenting a dyadic account vulnerable to the same criticisms as the temporally out of synch, reflectional model of self-awareness.

For Henry, however, the application of time to affection (which apparently splits consciousness into two) is mistaken – temporality and affectivity are strictly incompatible. Because temporality 'denatures' impressions by placing them 'outside of themselves,' where there is time, the affect is *no longer*:

'The impression sliding out of itself is the very flow of temporality, the original way temporality becomes temporal; it is the "stream" of consciousness. When the

²¹ M. Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 63

impression comes out of itself in retention, this signifies the destruction of it, and we can see this in so far as the “immediately past”, or “just now past”, *is nevertheless entirely past* – not being, but nothingness: It is not an impression lived in the moment, and present; no fragment or reality subsists in it.²²

Inner time-consciousness necessitates a division of the impression into retention, primal impression, and protention.²³ This, for Henry, has two consequences. The first one, highlighted above, reads the retentional absence which attaches itself to every present impression, as ‘a sliding into the past’ of the present, or, in Henry’s parlance, as a turning into nothingness. The affective impression is ‘thrown out of itself’, into the past, thus becoming separated from itself as the now – retentional extension, therefore, stands for a gradual deterioration of the currently lived affect. Secondly, for Henry, since the present impression is characterised by its becoming past, ‘that which is given in the end’ is not the present impression, but rather ‘this sliding into the past as such.’²⁴ The present is a mere ‘logical exigency’ and an ‘ideal limit’; what is, in fact, given in its place, is only its process of deterioration. Hence, Henry states, the ‘present phase, in which there is nothing present and that constantly collapses into the non-being of the past, is nothing more than the place of annihilation’.²⁵ Concretely, this would mean that when we stub our toe, the passing of time bars us from ever accessing the instance at which pain is fully present. From a point of view of temporality, the painful affect is never *completely* coextensive with subjectivity – the toe, *from the very beginning*, is already on its way to recovery. This is attested by the fact that virtually at the very moment at which I stub my toe, I curse: as if, when experienced, the pain has already deteriorated, losing its grip on my thoughts, and providing me with a minimal mental freedom necessary for an employment of a swearword. Thus, in order for the feeling to be felt as it *is* (that is to say, as it is prior to its decomposition) impression has to realise itself *outside* of the work of time. To show itself as itself – and not as process of its own annihilation – the present dimension of the affect must be *atemporal*. This is why Henry

²² Ibid., p. 51

²³ Cf. sec. 2.1 below.

²⁴ M. Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 52

²⁵ Ibid., p. 52

writes that for ‘the one who suffers, for as long as he suffers, time does not exist’²⁶ – when I stub my toe I *do* experience the pain, and as long as I do, I am ‘outside’ of time. The atemporality of affection, in turn, allows Henry to maintain the identity of the originary impressions and the particular affects. Since affectivity, in all its guises, is experienced outside of time, temporality cannot divide self-experience into two – affective self-awareness remains unitary.

1.4 Some problems with Henry’s account of self-awareness

Henry’s model of self-awareness seems vulnerable to three sets of interrelated criticisms: 1) If time is excluded from affectivity, how can we explain the transition from, say, a feeling of joy to a feeling of anger, which seems to happen *over time*? Is the atemporality of affection able to account for the *change* between particular affects, attested to by experience? Can Henry’s model make sense of the variety of affective life? 2) Is it really possible to separate an impression from its temporality? Isn’t temporal extension a constitutive property of feeling? Isn’t the awareness of pain, for instance, always interwoven with the awareness of time (do we not say that time heals all wounds)? (Or, to phrase the worry differently, what happens with the experience of pain when it is stripped of temporality? Is the atemporal feeling a recognizable affective phenomenon? Can we even meaningfully speak of affects which do not take time?) 3) How can we maintain the permanence of the originary impression if its content is inseparable from the changing and deteriorating affects? Can a continuous sense of self be co-extensive with a discontinuous, or transitory, conscious life? Why can we call both the enduring and fleeting feelings by the same name?

²⁶ Ibid, p. 58

In fact, the above sets of worries can be summarised by three questions: how is the transition between particular affects possible? What grounds the possibility of atemporal affects? What secures the identity of the atemporal and the transitory impressions?

I will return to the problem of affective change in the next section; for now, I will address the two remaining worries, namely, the problem of the possibility of the atemporal impression, and its identity with affects subject to temporal deterioration. In order to render his position defensible, Henry must provide a description of a recognisable enduring feeling which constitutes the present dimension shared by all affective experiences. In other words, Henry has to account for an experience of an affective *now* which survives the temporal ‘annihilation’ of a feeling to which it belongs. We have to find an element which characterises the present of affectivity in all its guises – thus grounding the identity of feelings as a whole – which itself is experienced as an atemporal affect – thus grounding its own possibility. (Note that explaining the enduring affection by a permanent sense of oneself begs the question. If the continuous feeling of self is inseparable from the *now* point of a transitory affect which it inhabits, what remains unexplained is precisely the shared content constitutive of both).

For Henry, the constitutive property enduringly present in all affects is *passivity*. Affectivity *in general* is marked by an essential powerlessness with regards to itself – ‘no impression brings itself about as such,’²⁷ no feeling can create itself, or will itself into existence. Rather, it *receives* itself, and it is this passive reception which constitutes its self-manifestation. Similarly, no feeling can cease to be a feeling – even when undergoing temporal deterioration, the affect cannot make itself disappear, it is powerless with regards to its fate. Neither can a feeling choose or modify its content – its identity is fixed and helplessly borne. Passivity, understood as powerlessness pertaining to its origin, destiny, and content would constitute the essential feature of *all* feelings. As such, helplessness with regards to itself would become a permanent property of affectivity, a content *present* in every affect.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 61

Passivity, a shared present dimension of feelings, would then ground the identity between transitory affects and the originary impression.

Importantly, passivity is not merely a formal feature of affective experiences; on the contrary, passivity, for Henry, is itself experienced affectively as *suffering*. ‘The helplessness of the feeling,’ Henry writes, ‘announces itself in suffering and results therefrom’.²⁸ Suffering becomes elevated to the affect *par excellence*, because in it, the passivity of affection is at its most palpable – to suffer one’s pain is to feel powerless in the face of it; to suffer one’s affect is to feel powerless with regards to feeling as such. We can, therefore, distinguish between two meanings of suffering: on the one hand, suffering signifies a particular affect, contrastable with joy or pleasure; on the other hand, suffering signifies a permanent feature of all affects. The passivity of suffering, then, marks affectivity in general:

‘...in the passivity of suffering, feeling is given over to itself and cannot refuse what is given it, cannot run away or escape its content, but is rather handed over to the latter in such a way that, being handed over and riveted to it, it adheres to it in all its aspects in the perfect adherence of identity and in all helplessness, therefore, in it, in the passivity of suffering, feeling ‘arrives at’ itself’.²⁹

Recall, however, that the unitary affective impression has a double function: it is both that which is *felt* and that which *feels*. In other words, affectivity is Janus-faced: on the one hand, it is powerless with regards to itself – it is a passive reception of content, which it bears helplessly; on the other hand, however, it has the *power* to receive its content – when the affect is given to itself, it must be able to *take* itself. As Henry puts it, in ‘the helplessness of suffering the power of feeling is born’. Certainly, this power to feel is passive – an affect cannot help but to receive itself. Nevertheless, passive affectivity is *both* powerless *and* capable – it is felt, but it can also feel. Henry wants to identify the power to feel oneself, which characterises affectivity, with *enjoyment*: ‘feeling takes possession of its content,

²⁸ M. Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 474

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 475

experiences it, experiences itself, *enjoys* the self'.³⁰ In analogy with suffering, enjoyment can also be understood in two related ways: as a particular affect and as a permanent feature of affectivity in general. Furthermore, as the latter, it would constitute a rejoinder to suffering. Subjectified by the Janus-faced originary impression, the affective self is both a 'self-suffering of self'³¹ and a 'self-enjoying of self.'

However, it is far from obvious that a) the power to feel bears structural resembles to a feeling of enjoyment; and b) that the *unitary* originary impression can be experienced simultaneously as *both* suffering *and* enjoyment. Our everyday understanding of enjoyment is not co-extensive with the notions of power or ability: sure, sometimes we speak of 'being able to enjoy something' (e.g., because I am not stressed about my thesis, I find myself able to enjoy the nice weather); however, 'being able to do something' can also be an unenjoyable burden (e.g. I am the only person able to help my friend move house, and so, instead of enjoying the nice weather, I carry heavy boxes and pieces of furniture). Moreover, perhaps with an exception of sports and certain sadomasochistic practices, the feeling of enjoyment seems separate from the feeling of suffering: it is nearly impossible to enjoy the nice weather if I have an unbearable earache. Certainly, a Henrian could reply by saying that my counter-examples confuse two levels, namely, the transcendental or formal level of affectivity in general, and the empirical or concrete level of particular affects – whilst I am correct with regards to the latter, my descriptions don't apply to the former. However, it seems to me that Henry is committed to a 'concretised' account of the formal level, which, in turn, makes it impossible to clearly separate the transcendental from the empirical: firstly, Henry himself equates the features of affectivity in general with recognisable empirical experiences (suffering, enjoyment), which indicates their interrelation, if not identity; secondly, as we have seen, because the transcendental originary impression inhabits the present dimension of particular affects, the two are, in fact, inseparable. This suggests that the supposedly 'Henrian' differentiation between the transcendental and the empirical levels is thoroughly

³⁰ Ibid., p. 475 (my emphasis)

³¹ Ibid., p. 474

‘un-Henrian,’ and that, in fact, it constitutes a departure from Henry’s concretised or deformed project.

I think that the worries identified above can be clarified precisely by means of deformalisation – by bringing together empirical experiences and their transcendental condition, Henry invites us to think not only of the concrete on the basis of the formal, but, more importantly, to think of formal on the basis of the concrete. Thus, when Henry writes that ‘Feeling is the gift which cannot be refused,’³² the notion of the gift should be read both in its formal and empirical registers simultaneously: on the one hand, affection is like a gift, insofar as it is passively received and ‘cannot be refused’; on the other hand, affection is like a gift, because its reception brings joy to the one who receives it. In other words, the ability to receive a gift is a precondition for enjoyment – whether this gift I am able to receive is a pair of socks, a good book, or my presence to myself. It is undoubtedly correct to say that not every power relates to enjoyment; however, the power to receive a gift clearly does, and so, the experience of joyful gift-reception should serve as the basis for conceptualising the affective character of self-awareness. This is why Henry is able to claim that the self is self-enjoying.

Similarly, the apparently contradictory identity of helplessness and power, suffering and enjoyment, which for Henry characterises the experience of the originary impression, can be encountered in our everyday life – in fact, majority of us experience it at least once year, on the day of our birthday party. When I throw a party, I am powerless with regards to the arrival of my guests – they can be late or too early, they might not come at all, they can bring strangers; but the fact that I *can* welcome them and celebrate my birthday with them, undoubtedly brings joy. The birthday party, in analogy with affectivity, combines and blends helplessness and enjoyment.

³² Ibid., p. 475

Affective self-awareness for Henry, therefore, is a unitary, but also a complex and dynamic experience, which combines passive reception with a passive power to receive. Moreover, it is passivity – the originary impression and the constitutive feature of affectivity in general – which subjectifies conscious life. To be self-aware, therefore, is to be passively given oneself, to suffer oneself, helpless with regards to one's fate, riveted to oneself, unable to break 'the bond of identity'³³ and escape oneself; but it is also to be *able* to receive the gift of oneself, to 'burst forth,'³⁴ to experience power and enjoyment.

Of course, it could be objected that the joy associated with the reception of a gift, or the mixture of helplessness and enjoyment which characterises birthday parties, tells us nothing about self-awareness, and that an independent argument is needed to ground and justify the claim that self-experience combines enjoyment and suffering. However, it strikes me that concretisation or deformalisation, for Henry, is not an argument; rather, concretisation is a production of an image whose goal is to depict the formal structures of self-awareness as something intimately related to our everyday life. When the image of self-awareness begins to reflect the suffering and enjoyment which characterises our lives, self-experience ceases to signify merely a neutrally functioning transcendental condition, and, instead, becomes depicted as something *living*. This image, in turn, allows Henry's reader to become aware of their own self-awareness as a complex, dynamic, and living unity. Note that the 'living' character of the formal structures of self-awareness is both *presupposed by* and *unavailable to* a merely formal description and argument – without concretisation, the analysis of affectivity can only assert self-awareness as a condition of empirical situations, without, however, making explicit the role empirical situations play in the realisation, or actualisation, of self-awareness, and in the analysis thereof in the first place. Deformalisation, therefore, shows something *new*, namely, how everyday affects animate the subject all the way down, breathe life into it, and, consequently, constitute and reveal a *living subjectivity*. In

³³ Ibid., p. 474

³⁴ Ibid., p. 475

other words, suffering and enjoyment are two concrete experiences which realise the formal structure of affectivity.

1.5 Affectivity and time revisited

Henry's image of a 'living' self-awareness renders the question of time and its relation to affects (posed and unanswered in the previous section), even more pertinent: is it possible to reconcile the atemporality of affectivity, argued for by Henry, with the affective variety of conscious life, constituted by the continuous change of affects over time? In other words, is it possible to account, from within a strictly atemporal model of affectivity, for a transition between feelings of joy and sadness, pain and pleasure, which characterise our everyday lives? My answer is *no* – time is a necessary condition of affective change. Furthermore, I believe it to be Henry's answer also: for Henry, affection never frees itself completely from the work of time; rather, affectivity renders temporality *secondary*.

Recall that, for Henry, the atemporality of affection is synonymous with the permanency of affective self-presence: Henry presupposes a continuous upsurge of ever-changing affects, whose present dimension constitutes the permanently present originary impression (I will examine this presupposition in more detail in the next section). On the one hand, the equation of the originary impression with a continuous 'string' or 'chain' of the now-phases of particular feelings, allows Henry to assert the atemporality of affectivity – the originary impression, as the present dimension of each of the continually appearing affects, remains constant, and in this sense it is impervious to temporal deterioration. On the other hand, particular feelings are victims of time and temporal self-alienation: because the flow of time drags the feeling into the past, the affect, instead of giving itself as it is now, shows itself as *past*, as no longer there. Another affect then replaces the deteriorating feeling, thus assuring the permanency – or atemporality – of affective life as such. Two interrelated conclusions can be drawn here: firstly, the continuity of the originary impression is a product

of discontinuous affects, whose unceasing emergence constitutes the atemporal or permanent character of affectivity in general. Henry himself is sensitive to this movement in which affective permanency is secured by and across affective change – in *The Essence of Manifestation* he observes that, thanks to affection, ‘*The Self is the surpassing of the Self as identical to self*’;³⁵ he also mentions ‘the affective tonality of existence and the modalities through which this tonality successively passes and in which it ceaselessly transforms itself... without thereby losing its unity’.³⁶ Secondly, because the work of time allows for a transition between different affective states, time cannot be excluded from Henry’s model of self-awareness. It is rather that, for Henry, time plays a *secondary* or *subordinate* role: temporality’s attempts to destroy affections (whose success allows for affective change), are unable to damage the originary impression – since it is precisely the discontinuous and temporal affects which preserve the continuity and atemporality of affectivity in general, the originary impression *triumphs* over time, *within* time itself. In other words, it is only thanks to the work of time that the atemporality of the originary impression can be secured – time, therefore, *serves* affectivity.

I believe that Henry’s model successfully captures and accounts for the experience of *continuous* and *punctual* self-awareness: affectivity, or, more precisely, the originary impression, allows me to experience myself as identical to myself amidst the changes I undergo; furthermore, since the originary impression inhabits the now-phases of particular affects, affectivity anchors me in the present – from the point of view of affection, I am always in the now. These two features correspond to the way in which we experience ourselves through affects: when I suffer from an acute headache, as long as the pain lasts, I am overtaken by it, and in this sense I remain identical to myself (and my pain) for the duration of the headache; moreover, an acute pain makes it impossible to conceive of its past or future non-existence – the headache traps me in what seems like an ‘eternal living present.’

³⁵ Ibid., p. 473

³⁶ Ibid., p. 499

However, a continuous and punctual self-awareness is only *one* of the possible ways in which I can experience myself. It is perfectly possible, for instance, that I become aware of myself as discontinuous, or that I will experience myself as extended in time. In the next chapter, I will consider a *temporal* model of pre-reflective self-awareness. In the remainder of this chapter, however, I will examine Henry's theory of intersubjectivity. My hypothesis is that the transition from the affective to the temporal form of self-experience is motivated by a failure of the affective self-awareness to furnish an access to the other. In short, in order to encounter the other, I must experience myself otherwise than in and as my affects, and this other form of self-experience cannot continue to place temporality in a secondary or subordinate place.

1.6 Henry's account of intersubjectivity

Henry's model of pre-reflective self-consciousness seems unable to account for the experience of otherness. Zahavi, for instance, notes that it is difficult to conceive how self-awareness understood as a perfect coincidence between the feeling and the felt, i.e. as a self-enclosed identity without even a 'minimal division or fracture,'³⁷ could be open to experiences which 'contain a dimension of alterity'.³⁸ The non-relational identity characterising self-suffering consciousness, although avoiding the problems which haunt the reflectional model, seems to preclude the possibility of being affected by something other than itself – including other people. The continuous and punctual form of self-awareness seems only able to experience *itself*, consequently rendering intersubjective relations impossible.

When faced with the question of otherness, Henry could employ two tactics. The first one (favoured by Zahavi) consists of presenting self-awareness as originally 'divided' or

³⁷ Dan Zahavi, 'The Fracture in Self-Awareness', in *Self-Awareness, Temporality, and Alterity*, ed. D. Zahavi, Springer 1998, p. 32

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35

‘fractured.’ For example, affirming a distance separating the affect and the affected could serve as a way to introduce a degree of hetero-affectation into the otherwise self-contained affective experience.³⁹ The differentiated structure, in turn, could open consciousness up from within, exposing the self to the experience of otherness. This strategy, however, is radically un-Henrian: for Henry, the self is synonymous with a non-differentiated affectivity, which cannot be split into the affect and the affected, nor any other dyad or triad. The feeling self is indivisible.⁴⁰

The second strategy seems more difficult. It consists in maintaining the indivisibility of self-awareness, while, at same time, accounting for the possibility of entering into a relationship with alterity. In what follows, I will reconstruct a Henrian theory of intersubjectivity, motivated by a need to reconcile the affective model of self-awareness with the possibility of the experience of others. The task is made easier by the fact that Henry himself felt the necessity of such a project, devoting some of his later writings to precisely this issue.

Henry’s account of intersubjectivity can be seen as an attempt to answer the following two questions:

- 1) How does a unitary self, defined by and as its affectivity, experience the other?
- 2) What makes the experience of the other possible, despite the inaccessibility of the latter?

For Henry, in the first instance I experience the other affectively:

‘...let us...ask ourselves what the experience of the other is such as it is really experienced by each one of us within ourselves. It is a desire seeking out some sort of

³⁹ Ibid., p. 32

⁴⁰ Furthermore, the unitary self-presence which defines subjectivity plays a crucial role for Henry’s project as a whole. The unitary immanent manifestation constitutes a unique mode of appearance which shows itself by itself, without relying on a distance or difference characteristic of transcendent phenomenality. Consequently, subjective auto-revelation allows Henry to put into question ontological monism and its belief in only one type of (transcendent) manifestation. Cf. M. Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*.

response or nonresponse, an emotion before the reciprocity of this desire, a feeling of presence or absence, solitude, love, hate, resentment, boredom, forgiveness, exaltation, sorrow, joy, or wonder. Those are the concrete modalities of our life as a life with the other, as a pathos-with, and as a sympathy underlying all its forms.⁴¹

Another person is given to me through feelings. It is on the basis of affective states directed towards the other (such as desire, love, hate, longing, etc.) that all other intersubjective relationships are formed – before seeing, hearing, or sharing the world with the other, the latter appears as an aim of my feeling. Furthermore, since the individuating originary impression inhabits the now-phase of *every* feeling, the present dimension of the affects through which the other makes herself felt is, in fact, *contemporaneous* and *identical* with the feeling of self. Consequently, the problem of ‘getting outside’ in order to reach the other is bypassed – the inter- and intra-subjective affects are co-extensive, which means the feeling of the other belongs *within* the interiority of the self-feeling self.

At first glance, Henry’s account seems guilty of one major inconsistency. To understand the intersubjective experience as a feeling directed towards the other, is to confuse the *act* which aims at the object, with the *object* itself (a mistake especially surprising from an avid reader of Husserl). When I experience a feeling of longing – for instance, when I miss my girlfriend – it is the feeling of longing, *and not my girlfriend*, which is given in my experience. It is true, perhaps trivially so, that the feeling of longing belongs to the interiority of my conscious of life. But such feeling cannot count as a case of an intersubjective relation – the longing affect cannot conjure up my girlfriend. Any feelings, including those involved in missing one’s partner, refer back to the self who undergoes them, without being able to dissipate the solitude of the latter (if this wasn’t correct, and intersubjective feelings really did give us the other, a feeling of longing would become an impossible experience). To put it in Husserlian terms, by ignoring the distinction between an empty and a fulfilled affective intention, Henry seemingly affirms, against himself, the self-enclosure of the feeling subject.

⁴¹ Michel Henry, ‘Pathos-With,’ in *Material Phenomenology*, trans. S. Davidson, Fordham University Press 2008, pp. 103-104

However, Henry wants to read the above objection as a *positive* element of his theory: ‘one must affirm that this desire of the other in a radical sense is without an object, which is to say, there is no object for it.’⁴² Henry’s argument (which, as I show in sec. 2.5, he borrows from Husserl) seems to run as follows: the constitutive element of the experience of the other is her inaccessibility. I can never experience the other conscious life in the way I experience mine – the former remains in principle beyond my grasp, and so, there is an ‘abyss’ which separates me and the other. Furthermore, Henry claims, it ‘is in and through this abyss that the other is the other.’⁴³ In other words, that which establishes another person’s eponymous otherness is the unbreachable privacy of her own subjective life.

The other is given in a variety of ways. Sometimes she would be present only in a feeling (e.g. when I long for the other); sometimes she would disclose herself in a letter or on the phone; other times, when the other is physically there, the absence would be limited to her mental life.⁴⁴ These examples show that intersubjective experiences consist of varying degrees of presence and absence, or accessibility and inaccessibility. Importantly, it is the latter aspect which, for Henry, constitutes the defining characteristic of an experience *as* the experience of the other. Consequently, and perhaps paradoxically, since another person’s alterity is equivalent to her irreducible absence, the otherness of the other is given most ‘purely’ in the experiences in which she is most absent – it is when the other is the most inaccessible, that her constitutive inaccessibility reveals itself most fully. Here we can see why it is *feeling* which for Henry becomes the privilege example of an intersubjective experience.⁴⁵ By having no actual object and referring only to itself, the intersubjective affect most successfully brings to fore that which constitutes the essential property of the other – her privacy. This is not to say that the other can only show herself in my feeling, but, rather,

⁴² Ibid., p. 131

⁴³ Ibid., p. 132

⁴⁴ What’s more, the other’s mental life can also be given to a greater or lesser degree: we speak of the other appearing attentive, focused, engaged, but also we say that the other is absent minded, distracted, or ‘being somewhere else.’ This is why it is not an absurdity that a lover wistfully exclaims ‘I miss you, come back to me!’ to his beloved, even though the latter stands right there, in front of him.

⁴⁵ Those readers familiar with the Polish pop scene in the late 90s, should be reminded here of a hit song by Natalia Kukulska ‘Im więcej ciebie, tym mniej’. The chorus of the song (‘*The more of you, the less/ I feel it more than I know it*’) is very close to Henry’s insight. (My translation)

that every experience of the other (tactile, perceptual, etc.) presupposes an affective awareness of the other's alterity, the latter determining the nature of the former:

'The regard, for example, is an affect, which is what enables it to be a desire. At any rate, that is why it regards what it does regard, seeking without fail to see what it wants to see. In seeing, there is always nonseeing and thus something unseen that altogether determines it.'⁴⁶

It may seem, however, that instead of solving the problem, Henry merely displaced it. A successful theory of intersubjectivity has to account for *both* the inaccessibility and the accessibility of the other – as we have noted above, the encounter with another person consists of a mixture of presence and absence.⁴⁷ Yet, preoccupied with the latter, Henry seems to offer only half of the story. This is problematic. Without an account of how a self-referring affect could *access* another person, Henry's theory seems incomplete. What allows a feeling self to truly encounter the other – and not merely her absence? (Why does my partner's arrival manage to cure my longing?) Moreover, if the intersubjective experience *is* reduced to an affective awareness of the other's inaccessibility, this experience, instead of being an experience *of the other*, becomes an experience *of the other's absence*: since the feeling which aims at the other has to remain objectless, I can never truly meet the other in feeling (the intersubjective experience, then, would put me in a constant state of longing). What Henry wants to call an intersubjective encounter would constitute a mere reminder of my solitude. We thus seem to return to the same problem with which we started our analysis of Henry's account of intersubjectivity: the subject appears to be a prisoner of its own affects, unable to break out of its affective self-enclosure.⁴⁸ Henry, therefore, has to show how, despite the necessary abyss which separates my and the other's conscious lives (an abyss constituted by the hermetic identity of my affective life on the one hand, and, on the other, the irreducible inaccessibility of the other), a relation between us can be formed.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 133

⁴⁷ Cf. sec. 2.5 and sec. 4.1 below.

⁴⁸ This would confirm Henry's early claim that 'Solitude is the essence of life'. (M. Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation*, p. 285)

For Henry, the possibility of the intersubjective relationship is grounded in the fact that the other *also* possesses an affective life, the latter being given the moment she presents herself to me:

‘...when I look at the face of the other, I never see an eye, but its look, I see that he looks at me and possibly that he looks at me in a way that I do not see that he looks at me, I see that he diverts his look, or even that my own look bothers him, etc. Precisely because these movement are perceived as felt or wanted by him, their affective content, the affective tonalities in which they are given to themselves and which thus preside over their accomplishment – effort, wariness, desire, pleasure, displeasure, discomfort – are there, in a certain way, for me.’⁴⁹

But here, Henry seems to want to ‘have his cake and eat it too’: somehow the encounter with the other’s absence has become a recognition of her inner feelings. This however, shouldn’t be possible. The immediate experience of the other’s *inaccessibility* cannot, by definition, furnish the *access* to the other’s affective life. It might be the case that when I look at the other I see a feeling being; however, Henry doesn’t provide an account of *how* such recognition becomes possible (since it cannot happen through an *objectless* affect). In other words, the affective awareness of the other’s absence, in order to manifest the other as possessing an affective life, has to be supplemented with another experience, the latter being the condition of possibility for the former. This supplementary and conditioning experience, for Henry, is provided by the experience of *life*.

Recall that the affects which constitute self-awareness are passively received. Furthermore, as we noted in the previous section, Henry presupposes a continuous upsurge of ever-new impressions, which, in turn, secure the permanency – or the atemporality – of the individuating originary impression. But if affects merely *receive* themselves, what *gives* them to themselves? Of course, as we have seen, affects give and receive themselves – however, this self-givenness explains only the way in which affects are manifested, and not how they come to be as a self-giving unity. In other words, what remains unexplained is the ‘source’ or

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 153

the ‘spring’ from which affects arise as giving and receiving themselves. Here Henry has three choices: he could say that 1) impressions have an external source; 2) impressions are created *ex nihilo*, without a source; 3) impressions have an internal source. Henry argues for option 3). Concerning the precondition for an impression, he writes:

‘What is at issue here is a very strange precondition indeed: a precondition immanent to that for which it is a precondition, which does not take place before the impression, and never goes away, but remains within it – *which remains in it as that in which it remains itself in itself*. Of what does this coming in itself consist, which every conceivable impression in it precedes? It is life’s coming in itself.’⁵⁰

Let us unpack this passage. The source of an impression is *internal*; it conditions the impression by inhabiting it. The source of the impression is *life*, or as Henry makes it clear, a *movement* of life – ‘the coming in itself’ of life. Thus the movement of life is intrinsic to the emergence of an impression – the coming in itself of life takes place in the impression, in the coming in itself of the latter. When an affect emerges as a self-giving unity, its self-giveness is inhabited by the givenness of life – the givenness of life, in turn, has made possible the emergence of the affect. Put differently, the movement of life is the source of the ever-renewed affective life, a source immanent to the affective life is generates – in analogy with a spring, we can say that life is both the water which pours out, and the pressure of the water, which makes possible its pouring out. Accordingly, affective subjectivity becomes self-aware thanks to life, which belongs within this ‘becoming aware’ of affective consciousness. Furthermore, since life is internal to affections, we can say that *life itself is accessed in affectivity*: ‘Life undergoes experiencing itself in pathos; it is an originary and pure Affectivity...Life’s self-revelation takes place in Affectivity and as Affectivity.’⁵¹ Thus, in suffering one’s feeling, and so, in suffering oneself, we suffer the internal condition of affection – life. Note, however, that the concept of life as the source of affective impressions is not identical to the notion of everyday life discussed in sec. 1.4 (although the two remain related). Whereas the latter helped us to form an empirically grounded, or concretised, image

⁵⁰ M. Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 61

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61

of self-awareness; the former functions as the transcendental condition of self-experience. We can, therefore, think of these two concepts of life as the obverse and the reverse of self-awareness: the movement of life generates impressions, whose living character is made visible in empirical situations.

As I mentioned above, the movement of life, for Henry, constitutes the condition of possibility for the experience of the other:

‘Life generates in its transcendental possibility every Self and thus every conceivable I. It generates them as living Selves and egos and at the same time generates in them the transcendental possibility of their relation. For this relationship of the living to one another consists of nothing other than Life in each one. Not exactly in its finite life, in its Self or its finite I, where each would still be only himself, alone with himself and without any possibility of joining together. The relation of transcendental living Selves takes place in them before them, precisely in their transcendental possibility, in the place of their birth, in the proceeding of absolute life in which they arrive in themselves and in which they remain for as long as they are living.’⁵²

Note the distinction Henry draws between *finite* and *absolute* life. The former is internal to each individual self, insofar as each self is a singularly individuated being. The latter, however, is a universal condition of possibility belonging to any self qua self. In other words, if finite life individuates; absolute life accounts for the possibility of individuation. Furthermore, as the condition, absolute life precedes finite life: even though, for Henry, absolute life *inhabits* finite life (analogously to finite life internally conditioning the self), the universal possibility comes ‘before’ the particular instantiation (not temporally, but, rather, in terms of their hierarchy or structure). Now, finite life by itself is unable to account for an intersubjective relation: in each case it ‘gives birth’ to a singular, i.e. solitary, self, whose intersubjective feelings only give the other as utterly inaccessible. However, ‘before’ the generation of the individual self, *the possibility of generation* subsists – a possibility which is *universally shared*. What each self has in common is absolute life, the *possibility* of being delivered to itself as a self, and it is precisely this shared element which for Henry constitutes

⁵² Ibid., p. 243

the intersubjective community: ‘what is in common in every community is Life.’⁵³ And so, in contrast to traditional theories of intersubjectivity, for Henry, my original encounter with the other doesn’t happen through vision or a shared world. In fact, I experience the other the very moment I experience myself – or, to be more exact, when I experience myself as *alive*. Becoming aware, or being ‘delivered to oneself’ by life, is an affective experience in which I feel my unique life *as well as* the shared possibility of being alive. Hence, since I have the latter in common with the other, I experience something of the other’s unique experience of life (namely, the experience of being delivered to oneself in feeling). The other remains inaccessible, but the generation of her life, or rather the generation of *our* life, becomes the shared experience in which I access the other. In short, in suffering myself as alive, I suffer the life of the other,⁵⁴ and it is this affective awareness of a shared life which makes possible the manifestation of the other as also possessing an affective life:

‘For we could never know what is of the other, and first of all that it is a living Self, if we did not first know what Life is that gives us to ourselves. It is thus indeed *from what comes before the self, from its arrival in itself – never from itself* – that one must begin if being-with-the-other and being-with-others must be possible.’⁵⁵

If Henry is correct to see in life the condition of *both* the feeling of self *and* the intersubjective community, then the self and the community are related by means of a ‘reciprocal interiority:’ ‘community and individual are each connected by a relation of reciprocal phenomenological interiority that is nothing other than the relation of the living to Life, emptying of meaning *a priori* the idea of any sort of “opposition” between them.’⁵⁶ Insofar as I am alive, I am a singular self; insofar as we are alive, we form a community of singular selves – individuation, then, in producing a sense of a unique self, would *simultaneously* inscribe me within a community of unique individuals. This, for Henry, amounts to a reciprocal relationship between the individual and the group, which annuls the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 244

⁵⁴ Hence, the intersubjective experiences become defined ‘by the primal suffering of life and thus by the possibility of suffering. We can suffer with everything that suffers. This pathos-with is the broadest form of every conceivable community.’ (M. Henry, ‘Pathos-With’, p. 134)

⁵⁵ M. Henry, ‘Incarnation’, p. 247

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 244

opposition between them – the individual no longer opposes the group; the group no longer individuality. Furthermore, since absolute life, as the condition, precedes the generation of finite life (which is to say, it ‘comes before’ the appearance of singular selves), the absolute life – i.e. the life we have in common, and which establishes the intersubjective community – *precedes* the particular distinctions between individual selves. Before we are determinate as this or that person with this or that characteristic, i.e. before I become determined through my self-coincidence and you through your inaccessibility, ‘we’ are together in life:

‘Here the living being is neither for itself nor for the other; it is only a pure experience, without a subject, without a horizon, without a meaning, and without an object. It experiences both itself – the basis of life – and the other, inasmuch as the other likewise has this basis. It thus does experience the other in itself but on this basis, in terms of the other’s own experience of this basis. Both the self and the other have a basis in this experience. But neither the self nor the other represent it to themselves. The community is a subterranean affective layer. Each one drinks the same water from this source and this wellspring, which it itself is. But, each one does so without knowledge and without distinguishing between the self, the other, and the basis.’⁵⁷

1.7 *The Lobster and the limits of Henry’s account of intersubjectivity*

The bedrock of Henry’s theory of intersubjectivity is the shared experience of life, common to both me and the other. This originary commonality establishes the possibility of a relation between two feelings selves, despite the privacy, or solitude, of their respective sufferings: it is because the source of my life is the same as yours, that a community between us is formed – a community which, in turn, makes possible the intersubjective experience. In what follows I would like to put into question Henry’s concept of life, and the role it plays in the encounter with another person. To do so, I will turn to the film *The Lobster* (2015) directed by Yorgos Lanthimos. My argument will have two stages. Firstly, I will consider three scenes from the aforementioned film which illustrate intuitions counter to the thesis

⁵⁷ M. Henry, ‘Pathos-With’, p. 133

asserting the experience of common life. Secondly, I will argue that common life is not integral to our understanding of intersubjective encounters; therefore, by employing a concept external to the phenomenon it attempts to explain, Henry's account of intersubjectivity remains unsatisfactory.

It is in no way obvious that the possibility of being alive is shared; in fact, the following scenes from the film *The Lobster* seem to suggest that the experience of life is in each case unique and unshareable. *If* this is correct, life will be unable to play a part assigned to it by Henry – instead of establishing an experience in common, it would constitute a plurality of separate and singular experiences. Note that I will not offer an argument for the fact that life *isn't* shared; rather, I will only limit myself to demonstrating the *possibility* of an unshareable conception of life.

The Lobster is set in a hotel, sometime in a near future, in which single people must fall in love in a space of forty-five days. If they fail to do so, they will be transformed into an animal of their choice.

Scene 1 (the epistemological problem): The guests of the hotel are identified by a unique characteristic they possess. One of them, the so-called Limping Man, after an outburst which betrays his fear of spending the rest of his life as an animal, decides to approach the Nosebleed Woman, who, as her name suggests, suffers from random nosebleeds. The Limping Man gets into a swimming pool with the Nosebleed Woman, and begins a conversation about swimming. Unfortunately for him, the topic doesn't manage to grip the attention of the Woman. So, when she swims away, he hits his face against the edge of the swimming pool. When the Woman returns to the Man, she notices blood dripping from his nose. He then lies to her, claiming to suffer from random nosebleeds. The Nosebleed Woman, unaware of the lie, becomes extremely interested in the Limping Man. Eventually, they get married on the basis of the nosebleeds they both have in common.

The nosebleed experienced by the Nosebleed Woman, and the nosebleed experienced by the Limping Man, although seemingly the same, constitute two singular experiences. While the former passively suffers her condition, the latter actively makes himself bleed. Consequently, the possibility of bleeding doesn't constitute an experience in common - in fact, the Limping Man's plan consists of faking a shared condition in order to marry the Nosebleed Woman. Now, we can ask: what evidence do *we* have that the possibility of being alive which we all *seem* to share, really does constitute a shared experience? I do experience myself as alive, and if you tell me you do too, I will believe you. However, there seems to be no experiential basis on which we can assert that my experience of life and your experience of life are the same. Just because you *seem* to suffer life the way I do, doesn't mean that you *actually* do have an experience of suffering in common with me. Perhaps, similarly to the Nosebleed Woman, I'm only projecting my experience of life onto yours. Of course, it might be the case that we experience life in the same way. However, the difference between my life and your life is a real epistemic possibility which shouldn't be ignored. So when Henry, not content with a statement of possibility, asserts the actuality of the shared experience of life, he commits himself to an epistemologically unground thesis.

Scene 2 (the axiological problem): In the forest surrounding the hotel lives a group of people called the 'Loners'. The members of the group have decided to be single, and so, they hide in the woods in order not to be turned into animals. At one point in the film, the Loners break into the room occupied by the hotel Manager and her husband. The Loners tie the wife to a chair and stuff a piece of cloth into her mouth. They then ask the husband how much, on the scale from 1 to 15, he loves his wife. When the husband answers 14, they show him the gun and ask who, according to him, would find it easier to live alone. Almost without any hesitation, the husband identifies himself as the person who will be able to live without his partner. He is then given the gun and asked to shoot his wife.

We can imagine the questions the husband asks himself at this point: do I value my life *more* or *less* than my wife's? Am I willing to sacrifice my life or should I live and

sacrifice my wife instead? Is *my* being alive worth *your* death? The extreme situation in which the husband finds himself brings to light an *asymmetry* which seems to underpin the distribution of values between my life and the other's life. Another person's life is either *more* or *less* valuable than my own. Furthermore, the value assigned to a particular life belongs to it exclusively – the husband either kills the wife (thereby affirming his life over hers) or he kills himself (revealing the life of the wife as more valuable). A commonality between lives is ruled out – the husband cannot kill his wife and claim that he cares as much about her as he does about himself (in fact, the situation is designed to compromise his 14-strong love). Importantly, the experience of a multiplicity of lives conditioned by differentiating values is not limited to extreme, life and death cases. Selfless and selfish acts seem to be a constant feature of our intersubjective encounters: do I let someone through the door first? Do I give my last change to a beggar? Do I buy my friend a drink instead of buying myself a snack? The everyday examples which generate a value conflict, i.e. which show our lives as axiologically divergent, can be multiplied. But a theory which asserts a common experience of life seems unable to account for the divisive scenarios, in which it is the asymmetry between lives that is felt most acutely.

Scene 3 (the existential problem): The main character David books himself into the hotel with a dog, the latter being his brother Bob, turned into an animal a couple of years back. At one point David decides to become intimate with the so-called Heartless Woman, whose identifying characteristic is a complete lack of empathy. Even though David manages to fake being heartless for a fairly long time, his partner suspects the lie. In order to test him, the Heartless Woman kicks Bob the dog to death. She then announces to David what she did. Upon seeing the bloody corpse of the dog, David cracks and begins to cry.

In Henry's philosophy, life conditions a relationship with an absent other. The reason for the other's inaccessibility thus becomes irrelevant – the shared experience of life makes possible a relationship with another person irrespective of the type of absence. This is because, Henry argues, a common life establishes a relation *despite* another person's

inaccessibility, and so, life in some sense ‘overrides’ the fact of the other’s absence. Now, one of the consequences of this view, asserted by Henry, is a possibility of a ‘community with the dead.’⁵⁸ I can feel affected by the work of dead authors; I can relate to historical figures; I can also be part of a community with people who I have never met and who might not be alive (for example, other admirers of Kandinsky). Consequently, whether you have just left the room, live on the other side of the globe, or died a hundred years ago, a possibility of a relationship between us subsists, grounded in the commonality of life.

Despite its advantages, the above view seems to run into three difficulties when applied to David’s situation: 1) the relationship of David with Bob the dog is radically altered when the latter, instead of being ‘merely’ absent, turns out to be dead. However, the idea of a shared life, indifferent to the type of absence, seems to be unable to account for this drastic change; 2) in consequence, the commonality of life cannot do justice to the tragic character of the death of the other (as opposed to more ‘neutral’ absences) – David’s sadness seems philosophically ungrounded; 3) conversely, if to console David we tell him that, thanks to shared life, his relationship with Bob the dog subsists, are we not granting some sort of immortality to a clearly dead animal?⁵⁹ These three problems (inability to differentiate between absence and death; blindness to the tragedy of death; affirmation of ‘immortality’) seem to suggest that the existential significance of death presents an insurmountable difficulty to Henry’s philosophy of life.

Perhaps most importantly, in all three scenes we have considered, the concept of a shared life doesn’t contribute anything to the intersubjective encounter represented. In *Scene 1*, the attempt to find a trait in common (e.g. a nosebleed) in order to establish a romantic relationship seems absurd – in fact, a great amount of *The Lobster*’s humour comes from the hotel guests’ ongoing efforts to fake each other’s conditions in order to become partners. Why does the relationship between the Nosebleed Woman and the Limping Man seem

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 114

⁵⁹ In fact, towards the end of *Incarnation*, Henry is not too far from agreeing with us, as he writes that ‘our flesh is God.’ (M. Henry, *Incarnation*, p. 262)

funny? Perhaps because the nosebleed seems *irrelevant* from the perspective of the viewer, and so, the obsession with a shared experience seems hilariously misguided – at the end of the day, we don't fall in love simply because we have a condition in common. Likewise, the intersubjective relation as such might be indifferent to a shared experience; the encounter with the other can take place even though there is nothing in common between us. Not only do we not know if the other undergoes the same experience of life, but, more importantly, it doesn't seem to matter if she does.

When presented with *Scene 2*, a Henrian could reply that a value distinction between my and the other's lives presupposes a commonality of life as its condition. The shared experience of life would make possible the asymmetrical 'curvature' introduced by divergent values. This might be so. But when the husband aims the gun at his wife, he knows that the preservation of *his* life requires a sacrifice of *her* life, i.e. he knows the incompatibility, or the difference, which separates their lives. In situations in which lives are experienced as mutually exclusive, doesn't the notion of a shared life become redundant, replaced by a conviction of life's singularity and unshareability? (Likewise, I can give my life for yours because our lives *are* different).

Similarly, Henry's concept of life misses the mark when applied to the event of death in *Scene 3*. When employed to explain David's situation, life both doesn't say enough (we ignore the unique significance of death by likening it to other instances of absence), and says too much (we attempt to console David by telling him that, in some sense, Bob the dog is immortal because he *still lives in him*⁶⁰). Life thus proves inadequate for, and so, inapplicable to, the understanding of the experience of the other's death.

The conclusion which we can draw from our analysis is that the concept of a shared life is *superfluous*. Intersubjective encounters do not necessitate a recourse to a common experience of being alive. In fact, sometimes the emphasis on the commonality of life seems

⁶⁰ Here, in fact, we would be paraphrasing the words of another fictional character, namely, Rafiki the baboon from Disney's *The Lion King*.

to dissimulate the genuine structures of the experience of the other. The notion of a shared life thus seems external to our everyday understanding of intersubjectivity, if the latter involves an epistemological uncertainty, an axiological asymmetry, and an existential significance. As you recall, life was introduced by Henry as a solution to a specific problem – namely, the question of the possibility of a relation with the other despite her constitutive inaccessibility. However, if life doesn't play a role in intersubjective experiences, Henry's account of the experience of other people becomes, once again, incomplete: the other is *only* inaccessible, and, consequently, the subject exposed only to the absence of the other, unable to access the latter, remains a prisoner to its own solitude.

Henry's failure to provide a convincing theory of intersubjectivity is directly related to the form of self-awareness he defends: it is because affective self-experience is unitary and non-relational, that it results in the self-enclosure and solitude of subjectivity. It would seem that in order to account for the experience of the other, we have to modify Henry's model of self-awareness. However, I believe that Henry's descriptions of affective self-awareness identify a *recognisable* experience: I *can* be given to myself as continuous, punctual, and identical throughout changes. But if Henry's account of affective self-awareness is correct (as I will show in the following chapters, affective self-awareness constitutes one of the possible forms of self-experience), then his theory of intersubjectivity, necessitated by his model of self-experience, is *also* correct. In other words, the other's inaccessibility is not merely a theoretical failure of Henry's philosophy; on the contrary, Henry's theoretical failure accurately reflects a failure encountered *in experience* – for the affectively given self the other *is* inaccessible. Think about having an acute headache: on the one hand, you are given to yourself affectively as anchored in the present (you continue to feel yourself in and as the headache), and permanent (the headache seems to be never-ending); on the other hand, however, the headache makes it impossible for you to engage with others – completely preoccupied with your pain, you can't relate or pay attention to them; in fact, they now appear as a nuisance, and you want them to disappear. The headache (or any painful affect)

makes others inaccessible and, in some sense, necessitates their absence. The same seems to hold true, although to a lesser degree, for other types of affects: when I experience intense pleasure or when I laugh hysterically, the other also fades into a background, becoming absent. This implies that the failure to access the other is a feature of affective self-awareness.

However, we undoubtedly *can* encounter others: we relate to one another, we pay attention to each other – in short, we can be in each other's *presence*. This indicates that Henry's theory of intersubjectivity cannot be taken as an *exhaustive* account of intersubjective experiences. Furthermore, since encounters with others are, in fact, possible, Henry's model of affective self-awareness, which generates his theory of intersubjectivity, cannot be the only form of self-experience – if it was, intersubjective relations would remain impossible. At the end of sec. 1.5, I suggested that the failure to encounter the other on the basis of affective self-presence motivates a transition to a different form of self-awareness – one from which the other can be encountered. As I will show in the next chapter, in order to establish the possibility of intersubjectivity, affective self-experience has to give way to a *temporal* form of self-awareness. In order to experience the other, I have to experience myself in time. Furthermore, as I will argue in ch. 4, temporality is able to relate affectivity to the experience of the other, thus accounting for the possibility of intersubjective affects.

Chapter 2: Temporality

I ended the last chapter by suggesting that in order to experience the other, I must experience myself in time. I begin this chapter by providing an initial sketch of the Husserlian account of self-awareness as inner time-consciousness. Importantly, for Husserl, time-consciousness is given as an immediate unity; this way his temporal model is able to avoid the problems of reflectional self-awareness. I then consider Martin Hägglund's critique of Husserl's account. For Hägglund, temporal self-awareness can be neither unitary nor immediate; in fact, time divides consciousness from within, preventing it from ever coinciding with itself. My subsequent answer to Hägglund has two parts: firstly, I argue that Hägglund's own account of self-awareness is unfeasible; secondly, drawing on Husserl's so-called 'Bernau Manuscripts,' I offer a model of temporal self-experience impervious to Hägglund's critique. I then demonstrate how temporality renders the other accessible. Towards the end of the chapter, I consider the relationship between the temporal and the affective forms of self-awareness. I show that, for the most part, affectivity and temporality are intertwined, although they remain in an antagonistic relation. Lastly, I suggest that a unitary and continuous model of self-awareness – whether primarily temporal or affective – makes it difficult to account for the experience of novelty. In order to accommodate truly new experiences, therefore, we should posit a *third* – discontinuous and dislodged – form of self-awareness. I will explore the possibility of such a form of self-awareness in the next chapter.

2.1 Husserl's temporal model of pre-reflective self-awareness

When a younger sibling decides to learn a well-known guitar riff, they usually proceed to master the particular sequence of notes through a long process of trial and error – a

process which we might involuntarily witness while attempting to read a book next door. We are painfully aware of every time the sibling misses the note; each time a short sequence is played right, a feeling of relief ensues. We keep registering the music next door while trying to appreciate a book. We admire the prose of the latter while remaining conscious of the discontinuous unravelling of the former. After a couple of hours, our sibling finally manages to play the riff right; the notes follow each other forming a familiar a sequence, they end, and we are suddenly reminded to call a friend.

The above scenario can help us to illustrate the questions motivating Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness. When we hear a sequence of notes we are aware of it as an object – a riff. More specifically, we are aware of it as a transcendent object in empirical time. Husserl then asks: what makes this experience possible? The transcendent object, and the empirical time in which it takes place, are constituted by an immanent act – hearing the riff. Furthermore, I hear the melody as having a past, a present, and a future. My anticipation of the future phase, for instance, makes me annoyed whenever my sibling misses the note or relived when the note is played correctly. It is this temporal awareness of the object which constitutes the identity of the riff. Note that the act intends its object in a time different to the objective or empirical time; Husserl speaks here of 'immanent' or 'pre-empirical' time which makes possible the experience of objective time.

The act itself also has a duration – it begins, continues, and ends. My act of peacefully *reading* the book ended the moment I *heard* my sibling played the first note on their guitar; I *remembered* to call my friend when I stopped *hearing* the riff. Of course, it is also possible for a multiplicity of acts to take place at the same time; e.g. I can hear the music *and* read the book *and* remember to call my friend. Nevertheless, the duration of acts remains distinct – each act has a specific place within the stream of experiences as a whole. What then, Husserl asks, makes possible the experience of acts in pre-empirical time? There has to be a deeper level of constitution which could account for the distinctive duration of acts, while grounding their position within one and the same stream of experiences. Husserl calls

this deepest level of constitution the absolute flow of consciousness. The flow would then constitute our inner time-consciousness: the flow retains the past, presents the now, and portends the future phases of acts. In addition, for Husserl, in retaining, presenting, and portending the acts, the flow retains, presents, and portends *itself*. This means that absolute consciousness, in temporalising acts, also temporalises itself – inner time-consciousness is *self-constituting*. This self-constitution, or self-temporalisation, of the flow allows Husserl to avoid the threat of infinite regress, which would inevitably ensue if every level of consciousness required a further, constituting level – since inner time-consciousness constitutes itself, we don't have to seek an even deeper level of constitution to account for the temporal experience of the flow. To sum up, Husserl distinguishes between 1) the object of experience in empirical time (the guitar riff, the book), 2) the acts constituting transcendent objects in immanent time (hearing the riff, reading the book), 3) the absolute flow of consciousness, which in the Husserlian architectonic stands for the most fundamental level of subjectivity.¹

Importantly for our purposes, the self-temporalisation of the absolute flow (that is to say, its self-givenness in time), is synonymous with the self-manifestation of subjectivity – as Zahavi has successfully argued, 'Inner time-consciousness simply is the name of the pre-reflective self-awareness of our experiences.'² This means that when I am aware of the guitar riff and the act which grasps it, I am also tacitly aware of *myself* as having these experiences – the absolute flow *individuates* consciousness amidst other experiences it makes possible. Inner time-consciousness, therefore, *subjectifies* experience by giving rise to a pre-reflective, temporal, and individuated self-awareness.

To equate pre-reflective self-consciousness with inner time-consciousness is to understand self-awareness as structured temporally. Husserl speaks of three aspects of the temporal duration of the absolute flow: *primal impression* stands for the present; *retention* is

¹ Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, ed. M. Heidegger, trans. J.S. Churchill, Indiana University Press 1966, p. 98

² D. Zahavi, 'Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-Reflective Self-Awareness,' p. 168

the immediate past, attached to primal impression like a tail to a comet; while *protention* is the ‘anticipation’ of the future, or the extension of the now into the not-yet. This tripartite structure means that, in contrast to affective self-awareness, temporal self-experience is not a punctual identity: since the presence of primal impression is inseparable from the absencing of retention and protention, inner-time consciousness is *extended* and *differentiated*.

However, as Zahavi emphasises, the self-manifestation of the absolute flow is ‘not a gradual, delayed, or mediated process of self-unfolding’ in which discrete moments follow one another; rather, Zahavi tells us, ‘consciousness is “immediately” given as an ecstatic unity.’³

The tripartite structure of retention-primal impressions-protention is experienced *together* and *at the same time*. The temporally extended and differentiated self-awareness is, in fact, *unitary* and *immediate*, and as such it avoids the problems encountered by the reflectional model of self-consciousness discussed in ch. 1: inner time-consciousness is self-manifesting and its appearance doesn’t depend on an exterior element – consequently, it gives itself by itself, as it is lived.

2.2 Hägglund’s Derridean critique

In his book *Radical Atheism*, Martin Hägglund, drawing on the writings of Jacques Derrida, questions both the *unitary* and the *immediate* character of temporal self-awareness. Hägglund wants to show that the most fundamental level of subjectivity, the absolute flow, ‘divides the subject a priori,’⁴ rendering the unitary and immediate presence of subjectivity to itself a mere ‘theoretical fiction.’⁵ For Hägglund, inner time-consciousness never coincides with itself, and to claim otherwise is to hold on to an ungrounded philosophical prejudice.

Hägglund begins by formulating a ‘deconstructive logic’ which he then uses to undermine the purported unity and immediacy of the absolute flow of consciousness:

³ Ibid., p. 173

⁴ Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, Stanford University Press 2008, p. 68

⁵ Ibid., p. 59

‘Derrida argues that the unconditional is the spacing of time that divides every instance in advance and makes it essentially dependent on what is other than itself. What makes X *possible* is at the same time what makes it *impossible* for X to be in itself. Such is the minimal formula for the illogical logic of identity that deconstructive reason employs.’⁶

Hägglund’s deconstructive reading will thus rely on the following three axioms:

- 1) Every X is constituted by an interval or a gap (‘the spacing of time’) which prevents it from ever coinciding with itself.
- 2) This internal division of X establishes a relation of dependency with something other than X.
- 3) Since X is always divided and intertwined with something other than itself, it is impossible for X to be an immediate unity.

It should be added that the above ‘logic’ implies that Hägglund (or rather, the philosophers under his attack) operate with a notion of an *indivisible* unity. This follows from the progression of the steps of the deconstructive reading: locating division or difference at the heart of X demonstrates the non-unitary character of X. This means that, conceptually, division and unity are mutually exclusive, and so, the latter is to be understood as indivisible. In the next section I will show the untenability of this view, which, in turn, will allow me to defend the unity and immediacy of temporal self-awareness against Hägglund’s critique. For now, however, let us take a closer look at Hägglund’s argument.

For Hägglund, internal differentiation is necessitated by the work of time. Temporality introduces an interval which divides any X into its before and its after. This interval extends or divides X into its non-present past and non-present future. Consequently, X can never coincide with itself – because X is divided, it can only appear partially incomplete or absent. Likewise, X can never appear as it is immediately – since X is extended across different temporal phases, it can only appear temporally mediated. Here we can see the

⁶ Ibid., p. 25

force behind Hägglund's argument: *everything* in time is always already divided, which means that *nothing* in time can be immediately unitary. This conclusion presents a serious difficulty for a temporal model of pre-reflective self-awareness, which, in order to avoid the difficulties of the reflectional account, must assert the immediate unity of self-experience: according to the deconstructive logic, self-consciousness is *either* temporal *or* immediately unitary. Consequently, the advocates of pre-reflective self-awareness must decide: to keep unity but exclude time (*à la* Henry), or to keep time but give up on unity (an option favoured by Hägglund himself).

On Hägglund's reading, Husserl's (mistaken) attempt to reconcile immediate unity and time in his account of subjectivity, relies on a distinction between the *form* and the *content* of the absolute flow:

'...Husserl grants that the "content" of any experience is temporally extended. Accordingly, it is *no longer* or *not yet* present and must be retained or protended. Nonetheless, Husserl argues that the experience of the temporal content is given as an immediate presence, since the retention and protention function on the level of the absolute flow, which holds them together in an indivisible unity. Hence—if Husserl is right—the formal functioning of the flow (primal impression-retention-protention) *does not take any time*; it is given all at once as the "form" of an absolute subjectivity.'⁷

Husserl resolves the tension between the temporality and the unity of the absolute consciousness by a recourse to a distinction between, on the one hand, the temporally extended content of consciousness (divided between its past, present and future), and the atemporal form of the absolute flow. The latter, although articulated through a tripartite structure of retention-primal impression-protention is not itself subject to the division of time. Rather, as we have seen in the previous section, its extended presence is 'given all at once,' as an ecstatic unity. It is this immediate, unitary, and continuous awareness of the flow which makes possible the experiences of passing and differentiated contents – whatever happens in

⁷ Ibid., p. 61

time appears within the permanent and unchanging dimension of self-manifestation which endows the immanent contents with a temporal position. Absolute consciousness is able to hold the contents together because it itself is given continuously, immediately, and all at once.

Hägglund, however, puts into question the possibility of the atemporal form of the absolute flow. He argues that the tripartite structure of retention-primordial impression-protention, which characterises the most fundamental level of subjectivity, attests to a necessary temporal differentiation: ‘...retentional intentionality of the flow implies that it is always already temporal. If the flow were not temporal, its self-relation would not be disjointed into separate phases, and there would be no need for it to retain itself.’⁸ For Hägglund, the irreducibility of retention in the flow shows that the absolute consciousness is, in fact, temporally divided: the flow appears to itself by intending its own past and future. If this was not the case, continuous self-awareness would be reduced to a consciousness of a punctual now, and the tripartite ‘stretching’ of consciousness would be superfluous – this view, however, is unacceptable for an advocate of temporal self-awareness, since reducing consciousness to a punctual now would make an experience of the *flow* of time impossible. Consequently, Hägglund argues, the *temporal* self-manifestation of the most fundamental level of subjectivity *must* take place through its retentional and protentional extensions. This means that the self-awareness of the flow is constituted across a temporal interval which opens up between the intending (present) phase and the intended (past and future) phases. What is intended now is, in fact, the past and the future: I appear to myself as I *have just been* and as I *will be*. In this sense, I am always *too late* and *too early* in relation to myself. Consequently, the idea of an immediate unity of self-awareness becomes untenable – my self-presence is divided from within by my past and my future. As Hägglund observes, ‘I can appear to myself only by holding on to myself through retention and anticipating myself

⁸ Ibid., p. 63

through protention. Accordingly, my self-relation is necessarily mediated across a temporal distance that prevents me from ever coinciding with myself.⁹

For Hägglund, therefore, self-awareness cannot be understood as an immediate and unitary self-manifestation; rather, Hägglund tells us, self-experience is constituted by a process which ‘synthesises’ the divided subjectivity across its temporal phases, without, however, re-establishing it as an immediate unity. According to Hägglund, the passing of time which differentiates consciousness, requires an ‘inscription’ of each disappearing moment in retention. This retentionally inscribed primal impression is in principle capable of being remembered in the future. The fact that primal impression can be re-presented or repeated across a temporal interval, establishes a mediated continuity of self-experience. However, for Hägglund, this continuity itself remains subjected to the necessary temporal division. Retention cannot be ‘in itself’ since it points towards the future; the future memory cannot be ‘in itself’ because it anticipates its own becoming past. Put in more Husserlian jargon, for Hägglund, consciousness is present to itself thanks to an interplay of protentionally-directed retentions, and retentionally-directed protentions, which secure the continuity of self-experience, while, at the same time, attesting to an essential differentiation and non-coincidence of the absolute flow with itself.

Note that the retentional inscription of each now implies that inscribed primal impression can be remembered not only in the immediate, protentionally anticipated future, but also in the future which exceeds the protentional articulation of the flow – a time which can be called ‘future *as such*.’ Since it is in principle possible that the inscription will be reactivated in the future as such, the retentional inscription of the now establishes a relationship with a future exterior to the current flow of consciousness. The retentional inscription, therefore, opens consciousness up to something *other* than itself, namely, the future beyond conscious anticipation. Consequently, the retentional inscription plays a double function: on the one hand, it secures the mediated continuity of self-experience; on the other

⁹ Ibid., p. 70

hand, and at the same time, it opens subjectivity to the alterity of the future as such. Importantly, for Hägglund, the openness to the future as such is essentially ambiguous: since it cannot be anticipated, it is equally likely that the future will ensure the *survival* of the retentional inscription (and with it, the continuity of self-experience), as that it will *violate* or *annihilate* the inscribed conscious life. The relationship with the future as such, which constitutively sustains conscious life, opens consciousness to an unanticipated violation, dissimulation and death, which the future may bring about. This is why, for Hägglund, the inscribed now represents ‘the possibility of existence’ and, at the same time, the potential ‘peril of destruction’¹⁰ – subjectivity’s fate is not its own, since it depends for its survival (and death) on the coming of the unforeseeable future and that which will come with it. Temporally divided self-consciousness, therefore, remains open to, and dependent on, something other than itself – the coming of the future which surpasses conscious expectation.

I ended ch. 1 by suggesting that a temporal form of self-awareness, in contrast to its affective counterpart, is able to account for intersubjective experiences. The work of time, as it is described by Hägglund, makes possible the experience of the alterity of the other. On the one hand, the temporal division, and the concomitant openness to the unanticipated future, as constitutive elements of self-awareness, condition *all* subjective experiences: everything that appears must come to me in time and the experience of another person can be no exception. The appearance of the other, therefore, *depends on* the temporality of self-awareness. Here, the temporal and affective forms of self-experience play the same role: the other is given to *me* and thus is conditioned by subjective self-manifestation. On the other hand, and in contrast with fully accessible affection, temporality is an example of an intimate experience which combines accessibility with inaccessibility – features, which, as you recall from the previous chapter, characterise the other. Temporal appearance is always partial and incomplete, and the future as such can never be fully anticipated; the other’s appearance is also partial and incomplete, and her reactions can never be fully anticipated. Furthermore, for

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 31

Hägglund, intersubjective experiences reflect the ambiguous character of the unforeseeable future: since the reactions of the other can never be fully anticipated, the encounter with the other can be both peaceful and violent.¹¹ Whereas affection remained wholly foreign to alterity, time is, in fact, *analogous to* the other – temporal experiences function as a *precursor* of the accessible-inaccessible experience of the other's alterity, consequently rendering the latter unproblematic: temporality allows me to experience the accessibility and inaccessibility of both itself and the other. In short, temporality is both the condition of, and the template for, intersubjectivity.

2.3 The problems with Hägglund's critique

I believe that Hägglund's argument against the immediate and unitary character of temporal self-awareness is untenable. Firstly, Hägglund's analyses are motivated by a belief in the incompatibility of temporal divisibility and unity. As I will show below, this belief is mistaken: not only are time and compatible but Hägglund's own account of self-awareness presupposes the possibility of a divided yet unitary structure. Secondly, the mediated model of self-experience proposed by Hägglund is vulnerable to the same problems as its reflectional counterpart – Hägglund's account of self-awareness is, therefore, indefensible.

Recall that, for Hägglund, the continuity of self-awareness is constituted by the inscription of the present in retention, and the concomitant possibility of its reactivation in the future. However, it is unclear *what* constitutes the 'present' inscribed and preserved in retention, and consequently, what allows for the continuity of self-experience. This 'present' can *either* be simple (i.e. what is preserved is the primal impression) *or* extended (i.e. what is preserved is the tripartite structure of retention-primal impression-protention). As we have seen in the previous section, the now-phase is never experienced *in itself*, but, rather, it appears only through its retentional and protentional extensions. Hägglund, therefore, must

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, ch. 3

deny the possibility of a ‘simple’ present – according to the deconstructive logic, the present cannot be simple because it is divided into its (non-present) future and past phases. This means that what is preserved in the retentional inscription is the extended present. Thus, when an inscription is ‘reactivated’ or remembered in the future, it brings back a particular primal impression with its retention and protention. This reactivated memory, in turn, allows me maintain a mediated continuity between me *now* and me *then*.

However, isn’t the memory of the extended present, precisely, a *differentiated unity*? Do I not remember a ‘synthesised’ experience, in which the past, present, and future phases form a *whole*? For instance, when I remember being in a restaurant, I also remember that I got there by bus, and that I will leave by taxi – i.e. I remember an *extended yet unitary* present, constituted *together* by three of its aspects (bus-restaurant-taxi). Undoubtedly, the *content* of the memory unravels in time, and thus appears temporally divided; nevertheless, the *memory itself* (bus-restaurant-taxi) seems to retain its unitary character. Moreover, without the unity of the memory itself, the act of reactivation would become impossible – if the particular inscription is not somehow a discrete whole, it would be impossible for me to remember a *particular* experience; rather, I would have to reactivate the inscribed present with its *infinite* future and past extensions. Hägglund is right to insist that the retentional inscription cannot be in itself because it implies its own becoming-future; he is also correct to say that the memory cannot be in itself because it implies its own becoming-past. However, he remains blind to the fact that, across this incessant process of becoming, the extended present – constituted in inscription and reactivated in memory – retains its unity. Three conclusions can be drawn here: firstly, the analysis of memory demonstrates that, contrary to Hägglund’s belief, temporal differentiation and unity *are* compatible – a memory, for instance, combines both temporal division and unity. Secondly, the process of inscription described by Hägglund is, in fact, a constitution of a *differentiated unity* which, in turn, can be remembered: in order to be reactivated, my time in the restaurant (with its past and future extensions) has to be extracted from the flow of experiences, synthesised, and preserved for

the future. It is, precisely, this synthesis (acknowledged by Hägglund) which constitutes the memory as a differentiated unity. Lastly, since it is this extended present which, for Hägglund, ensures the continuity of self-awareness, on his account the possibility of self-experience is grounded in the preservation and reactivation of a differentiated unity. Paradoxically, therefore, in order to accept Hägglund's model of self-awareness, we would have to give up on the presupposition of the incompatibility of time and unity – a presupposition which motivated his deconstructive analysis in the first place.¹²

Even when revised, Hägglund's account of self-awareness remains indefensible. The process of inscription and reactivation of a memory, designed to secure the continuity of past and future experiences, in fact, re-introduce an irreducible dyad at the heart of self-awareness. I can only experience myself as continuous through a memory of my past conscious life. This means that my *currently* inscribed mental process can only be experienced by a *future* memory. This latter memory, in turn, would miss the life inscribed during its taking place, thus necessitating a further memory which could re-active the missed, and thus now *past*, life. In short, my *remembered* life can never be co-extensive with my life *as it is lived*. Hägglund's dyadic model, by relying on the mediating role of memory, encounters problems familiar to us from the previous chapter: 1) it affirms the irreducible split of consciousness (between memory and life as it is lived); 2) it is exposed to the danger of an infinite regress (the identity of memory and mental life is grasped by a further memory, itself in need of another memory...); 3) it makes it impossible to access conscious life as it is lived. The indefensibility of Hägglund's account, therefore, attests to the need for an *immediate* and *self-manifesting* account of temporal self-awareness, impervious to the weakness of a dyadic model.

¹² Although I cannot argue for it here, I believe that Derrida himself presents a more sophisticated – and, thus, more defensible – reading of inner time-consciousness. The failure of Hägglund's deconstructive logic, therefore, should not indicate the failure of Derrida's deconstructive logic; on the contrary, Hägglund's failure should motivate a more faithful re-interpretation of Derrida's reading of Husserl. Nevertheless, the limits of Hägglund's 'Derridean' objections nicely demonstrate that we cannot simply do away with the concepts of unity and continuity. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. L. Lawlor, Northwestern University Press 2010

2.4 A Husserlian alternative

In the previous section I suggested that it is possible to reconcile temporal division and unity – memory, for instance, combines both a differentiated structure and a unitary character. In this section, I will show that temporal division and unity characterise not only memory, but also pre-reflective self-awareness. Recall that, for Hägglund, inner time-consciousness cannot be unitary: firstly, because it is internally divided by time into its past and future phases, and, secondly, because it is constituted by a relation with a future which exceeds its horizon. Thus, it requires a mediating element, which could bring the disparate moments of divided subjectivity together. In what follows, I will draw on Husserl's account of inner time-consciousness developed in the 'Bernau Manuscripts,' in order to show 1) that the necessity of an internal division doesn't threaten the unity of the absolute flow; and 2) that a future which exceeds protentional expectation doesn't signify a moment of alterity with regards to flow – in fact, such a future can still be inscribed within a unitary interiority of the absolute consciousness. Consequently, inner time-consciousness, and with it, temporal self-awareness, doesn't stand in need of mediation; on the contrary, inner time-consciousness, is given as unity *by itself, immediately*.

In the 'Bernau Manuscripts,' Husserl attempts to provide a dynamic analysis of the absolute flow of consciousness, in which each of its three aspects (retention-primal impression-protention) is itself considered as *continuous flowing*:

'As a continuum of momentary phases, [...] it [time-consciousness] is consciousness of flowing in every phase, and what has been said of the presences as well as of that which is present in every phase, now has to be completed in the sense that each of these phases is characterized as flowing. And that therefore every moment of consciousness is not only consciousness of the primal present phase as flowing, that is, momentary consciousness of something flowing, but also that consciousness stretches beyond the moment with respect to the flowing, and in doing so, it makes

conscious both the contents by their temporal position, in their duration, and the presences as flowing by their continuity of flowing.’¹³

This ‘dynamic’ approach will allow Husserl to make two conclusions significant for our purposes: firstly, he discloses the intertwining of the immediate past and the immediate future. This, in turn, allows him to re-examine the nature of the present and, consequently, affirm the irreducibility of differentiation on the level of absolute consciousness. Secondly, Husserl discovers the crucial role of temporal horizons which, despite the incessant division of the flow, preserve the unitary character of temporal self-awareness.

Commenting on the ‘Bernau Manuscripts,’ Nicolas de Warren notes:

‘...Husserl seeks to describe how retentive consciousness is thrown ahead of itself as a protention as well as how protentional consciousness is behind itself in its emergence in a retention. Protentional consciousness is *ahead* of the now to the extent that it emerges *behind* the now, in the wake of a retentive consciousness. Retentive consciousness is already *behind* the now in so far as it is projected *ahead* of the now. As we have seen, protentional consciousness is the modification of retentive consciousness much as retentive consciousness is a modification of protentional consciousness.’¹⁴

On the dynamic model, retention preserves not only the just-past phase of consciousness – it also retains the protentional anticipation of the future attached to the just-past phase. This means that protention is already contained in the retained past. In this sense, as de Warren puts it, protention is ‘behind’ the now. Additionally, each protention includes within itself an anticipation of becoming past and being retained, in result, placing retention ‘ahead’ of the now, in the immediate future. The past and future phases of the flow are thus involved in an interplay in which a ‘protention implicates a (future) retentive modification

¹³ Here, I rely on Toine Kortooms’s translation found in his *Phenomenology of Time: Edmund Husserl’s Analysis of Time-Consciousness*, Springer 2002, p. 113. For the original see, Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana XXXIII: Die ‘Bernauer Manuskripte’ über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917/1918)*, ed. R. Bernet and D. Lohmar, Kluwer Academic Publishers 2001, p. 100

¹⁴ Nicolas de Warren, *Husserl and the Promise of Time: Subjectivity in Transcendental Phenomenology*, Cambridge University Press 2009, p. 199

much as a retention implicates a (past) protentional consciousness.’¹⁵ Note that the movement described here is the same as the becoming-future of inscription and becoming-past of memory, insisted on by Hägglund.

But what on the Husserlian picture happens with the now-phase of the absolute flow? As we noted above, each protention is dragged into the past and preserved in retention. We can speak of the ‘now’ whenever this past protention becomes realised – the now-phase, then, is nothing other than a fulfillment of the retained protentional expectation.¹⁶ As Toine Kortooms notes, the present is a point in which occurs ‘the actualization of a preceding anticipation of what is to come.’¹⁷ Importantly, considered from the perspective of the temporal movement of consciousness, the present is never fixed. The now-phase is always subjected to the flowing of time. This means that the plenitude which characterises the realisation of a past expectation (and which constitutes the present) is always coupled with a retentional ‘running off,’ i.e. with its own becoming past, which empties the fullness experienced in fulfillment. The present, then, is a momentary actualisation of what was anticipated in the preceding retention, itself on its way to become past. Note that in passing into retention, the present preserves its protentional extension, constituting itself as a past-phase anticipating, and thus making possible, the plenitude of future fulfillment, i.e. the following now-phase. The consciousness of the present, then, can be compared to an edge (*Kantenbewusstsein*) between the (future) retentions and (past) protentions, continuously falling into the no-longer of the past, while reaching into the not-yet of the future. As de Warren puts it, the consciousness of the now is:

‘...a consciousness of an in-betweenness that is itself caught in-between, and thus, situated, within the intersection of the absence and presence of time-consciousness itself. Time-consciousness is an original dispersal; the origin is always a diaspora, the

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 199

¹⁶ Cf. E. Husserl, *Husserliana XXXIII*, p. 46

¹⁷ T. Kortooms, *Phenomenology of Time*, p. 163

loss of a renewed presence, an invitation for the retrieval of an origin already past in the opening of a new beginning.¹⁸

The ‘dynamic’ analysis of time-consciousness allows us to conclude that the most fundamental level of subjectivity consists of a differentiating interplay between the chain of retentions, the now-phase (understood as a fulfilment of a retained protention), and a chain of unrealised protentions, where each protention implies its retention, each retention projects its protention, and the present is an edge between the emptiness of the not-yet and the no-longer. Here the Husserlian picture seems almost identical to Hägglund’s position: the dynamic functioning of the flow attests to the irreducibility of temporal division, confirming Hägglund’s conviction that every ‘event is both superseded (*no longer*) and to come (*not yet*) in its very event. Whatever happens is therefore transgressed by the future and becomes past.’¹⁹

However, in contrast to Hägglund, the Husserlian subjectivity remains an immediate unity: on the one hand, despite the transitory nature of each present, the *incessant* fulfillment of new retentional protentions generates a continuous and immediate self-awareness; on the other hand, the flowing of retentions and protentions is ‘held together’ by temporal horizons, which secure the unitary character of the subjectivity, despite its temporal division. As Wolfgang Walter Fuchs observes:

‘The future and the past, neither of which are present, are the horizons of the present. They are also the horizons of the temporal flow as a whole; that unity which we refer to as the flow of time. They are the horizons of the whole temporal flow in the sense of being its outer-limits.’²⁰

On Fuchs’ reading of Husserl, retentions and protentions are the horizons of the present, i.e. they are the non-present extensions which make possible the experience of the now-phase. We can call them the ‘near’ horizons. But Fuchs also identifies horizons of the

¹⁸ N. de Warren, *Husserl and the Promise of Time*, p. 172

¹⁹ M. Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, p. 29

²⁰ Wolfgang Walter Fuchs, *Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence*, Martinus Nijhoff 1976, pp. 71-72

past and the future *as such*, which reach beyond the immediacy of retentions and protentions. These ‘far’ horizons would then constitute the ‘outer-limits’ of the flow as a whole. What I would like to show is that 1) the passage from near horizons to far horizons unifies self-experience despite the temporal division of the flow; and 2) far horizons allow us to think a future which exceeds protentional expectation not as a moment of alterity, but, rather, as a function belonging to the interiority of self-awareness.

The flowing of time is a movement in which each phase of consciousness is incessantly ‘dragged’ into the more and more distant past. This means that at every moment, each retention moves further away from the immediacy of the near horizon. Importantly, in this movement towards the past, retentions fade away or weaken. The weakening of retentions is a process in which past experiences become more and more undifferentiated, eventually reaching what Kortooms calls ‘a point without differences.’²¹ This point – the outer limit of the far horizon – would be a bottomless depository of experiences, which, sedimented there, would lay dormant, awaiting a potential recollection.

Without the process of sedimentation, everything would have the intensity proper to the most immediate experiences, and so, there would be no way of distinguishing between the immediate and distant pasts respectively. Instead, as de Warren puts it, ‘I would succumb to the deafening madness of hearing without end the resonances of every experience ever had.’²² The fading away of retentions thus makes sure that experiences lose the acuity with which they were initially undergone, allowing us to draw a contrast between past and present experiences. In this sense, the retentional passage from the immediacy of the near horizon to the distance of the far horizon – and the fading out which it involves – is a necessary condition for self-awareness anchored in the differentiated present. James Dodd’s remarks on Husserl’s later writings also apply to our analysis:

²¹ T. Kortooms, *Phenomenology of Time*, p. 172

²² N. de Warren, *Husserl and the Promise of Time*, p. 186

‘Temporalized content is the richness in differentiation that it is thanks to its own becoming-undifferentiated, or to the distance and compression as a modification of the proximity of egoic differentiation... differentiation unfolds in the space of its own becoming- undifferentiated. Passage, and with that distance, belongs to proximity, and thus to egoic life as such. But passage is also compression (thus the geological metaphor of “sedimentation”); modification of sedimentation thickens the translucency of content-rich consciousness, and establishes a uniquely constituted distance through which something like “consciousness of” is possible at all.’²³

The passage from near to far past horizons thus attests to two important features of temporal self-awareness. Firstly, the past-directed movement of the flow is characterised by a gradual loss of differentiation, which terminates in a total eradication of differences. Consciousness is thus limited by a past horizon whose outer limit – the ‘point without differences’ – marks the last frontier of conscious life. Secondly, the experience of the differentiated present is constitutively dependent on its past becoming undifferentiated and sedimented in the ‘point without differences’. This means that the retentional division of self-awareness is inscribed in, and reliant on, a past horizon which neutralises that very division. But if this reading is correct, we can conclude, contrary to Hägglund, that the retentional differentiation cannot threaten the unity of subjectivity. The past-directed part of the flow is constituted by a horizon which dissolves differences – thus, establishing an undifferentiated border which circumscribes self-consciousness ‘from the back,’ as it were, contributing to its unitary character.

Analogous conclusions can be drawn with regards to the future-directed part of the flow. Protentional consciousness also presupposes the distinction between near and far horizons: future expectations form a continuous chain of more and more undifferentiated protentions which culminate in an empty ‘point without differences’ – the outer limit of the (future) conscious life. As Klaus Held observes, ‘every protention is directed not only toward

²³ James Dodd, ‘Death and Time in Husserl’s C-Manuscripts’, in *On Time – New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, ed. D. Lohmar and I. Yamaguchi, Springer 2010, p. 65

its next fulfilment... but also toward an empty horizon beyond this fulfilment'.²⁴ The far horizon, thus, unifies the articulations of protentions from the most immediate to those yet-to-come, which exceed the present anticipation. Furthermore, without the horizontal articulation of consciousness, and the implied distinction between an immediate anticipation and the empty future-directedness of the flow, the experience of time would be impossible. The future could never 'come' if it didn't unfold gradually, through more and more determinate protentions. This fact would have disastrous consequences for self-awareness – the latter would either be given all at once or not given at all, since the flowing which fulfils retentional protentions, and which generates present awareness, could not take place. The future horizon is, thus, a unifying boundary, necessary for the existence of the flowing self-consciousness.

But if the horizon holds together the immediate expectations *and* the undifferentiated future yet-to-come, we can no longer maintain (as Hägglund does) that the latter constitutes a time exterior to consciousness. The future which exceeds determinate protentions, instead of instituting a moment of alterity with regards to subjectivity, is, in fact, merely a distant fringe of the flow, circumscribed by, and included within, the horizontal border of consciousness. Consequently, and *contra* Hägglund, the indeterminate future does not open subjectivity up to its exterior; on the contrary, it marks the outer limits of the flow's interiority. Hägglund, thus, cannot maintain that consciousness depends for its survival or death on something other than itself – on the contrary, as de Warren notes, the fact that I project myself towards the empty horizon, implies that 'consciousness of any possible future involves an implicit consciousness of myself as "there" in the future... my consciousness anticipates its own temporal self-constitution and anticipates itself as the source of any possible future constitution of experience, including itself.'²⁵ In this sense, the relation with an indeterminate future is synonymous with an *infinite self-projection* of conscious life, which attests to the continuous and self-sufficient survival of the flow (a certain autonomous immortality, if you will), and

²⁴ Klaus Held, 'Phenomenology of "Authentic Time" in Husserl and Heidegger,' in *On Time – New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, pp. 100-101

²⁵ N. de Warren, *Husserl and the Promise of Time*, pp. 197-198

not, as Hägglund would have it, to a dependency on alterity and the exposure to ‘the peril of dying.’²⁶

As I have tried to show in this section, Hägglund’s deconstructive logic, although adequately identifying the necessary differentiation of temporal self-awareness, fails to take into account the immediate and continuous fulfilment of retentional protention, as well as the unifying role of temporal horizons. Consequently, Hägglund mistakenly reads the flow as a mediated and non-unitary structure, which relies for its functioning on something other than itself. The ‘dynamic’ account of the flow avoids Hägglund’s conclusion, by offering a model of self-awareness which acknowledges the irreducibility of temporal division, while, at the same time, preserving its unity and immediacy.

2.5 Time and the other

At the end of sec. 2.2, I argued that the experience of the other is dependent on, and analogous to, the experience of time-consciousness – temporality is both a condition and a template for intersubjectivity. However, there, I characterised the encounter with the other in its relation to Hägglund’s indefensible account of temporal self-awareness; it is thus necessary to rethink our relationship with the other on the basis of the correct, Husserlian model of time-consciousness.

For both Hägglund and Husserl, the other appears in the divided present, conditioned by the experience of retentions and protentions. Here the difference between their respective accounts is rather minor: whereas for Hägglund the encounter with the other is made possible by subjectivity’s relationship with the unforeseeable future *exterior* to conscious life, on the Husserlian picture the unforeseeable future which makes possible intersubjective experiences is a function *interior* to subjectivity. The more significant difference between the two accounts lies in their understanding of the other in analogy with time-consciousness. For

²⁶ M. Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, p. 9

Hägglund, the appearance of the other reflects the ambiguous character of the future which, as utterly unforeseeable, can signify both survival and death. This cannot be the case for Husserl, for whom the unanticipated future is simply the infinite projection of conscious life, which ensures subjective ‘immortality’ – thus invalidating Hägglund’s analogy, and annulling the figure of the other as both the bearer of peace and a potential threat. How, then, can we think of the other from a Husserlian perspective on time?

In *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl draws an ‘instructive comparison’ between the experience of the other and remembrance.²⁷ The conscious life of the other is never given to me directly. I can never see what the other person thinks or feels. But neither is the inner life of the other wholly absent from my perception, since I can see that this person in front of me is conscious, and that she has thoughts and feeling of her own. Thus, in experience, the inner life of another human being is *accessible in her inaccessibility* or *present as absent* – in the Husserlian parlance it is ‘a non-originary presentation.’ Similarly, when I remember something which took place in the past, I also experience a non-originary presentation, since the memory provides access to an experience which is strictly speaking absent. For Husserl, then, both the appearance of the other and remembrance signify experiences which are presently given to consciousness as non-present. As de Warren notes, the ‘ostensible point of this comparison is to illuminate how the Other... is given to me through an intentional modification – in the same way in which the remembered past is given to me as past, as an absence, on the basis of the modification of the present in which I remember.’²⁸ For de Warren, however, this comparison is of little help for understanding the way in which the other is experienced. This is because in memory I remember an experience which once was ‘constituted temporally in and through my absolute time-consciousness’, i.e. an experience whose content is present as having once been mine. By contrast, ‘the Other as Other was never, and could never, have been originally constituted in my absolute stream of time-

²⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Mediations*, trans. D. Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff 1960, p. 115

²⁸ N. de Warren, *Husserl and The Promise of Time*, p. 245

consciousness²⁹ – by definition, the life of the other can never be present as having once been mine. The experience of another person thus shouldn't be compared to remembrance because, contrary to memory, it does not refer to an experience whose content is present as mine.

De Warren corrects the Husserlian 'instructive comparison' by suggesting that a more productive analogy can be drawn between the appearance of the other and the experience of far retention – a faded or empty retention, outside of the 'near horizon' of conscious life – in which an object is given 'in its palpable or tangible absence, as what I have without having or possessing.'³⁰ To illustrate far retention, de Warren evokes 'an embarrassing moment of absent-mindedness' when the name of his wife escapes him. 'Having a name on the tip of my tongue is a condition of inner restlessness; the empty consciousness of the forgotten name "begs," so to speak, to be remembered... my wife's name is given to me without actually being genuinely given. Her name does not appear in my mind and yet it is nonetheless given as this non-appearance, as this determinate forgetting'.³¹ Far retention, then, provides an access to a non-present and temporally immemorial object – the forgotten name on the tip of the tongue demands to be remembered, yet it nonetheless refuses to be made present. I will return to this 'demand for remembrance' in ch. 4. For now, the important point is that, in contrast to memory, the content of far retention is given as *absent* – even though the experience of far retention is mine, its absent content, by virtue of its absence, cannot involve a sense of being mine. The experience of palpable absence in far retention is thus comparable to the non-presence of the other, since both experiences involve a certain 'resistance to light' on the side of the object – the experience of the other is mine, yet its content (i.e. the other) is present as absent. Of course, de Warren is aware of the difference between the determinate absence of his wife's name and the perception other – while the former *was* (hopefully!) once present to his mind, the other has never, and will

²⁹ Ibid., p. 246

³⁰ Ibid., p. 248

³¹ Ibid., pp. 190-191

never, be fully present: ‘even when I remember my wife’s name... her alterity as a life other than mine is always given to me in an empty consciousness, as if the Other were always on the tip of my tongue.’³² Nevertheless, the *temporarily* ‘present as absent’ far retention functions as precursor of the *permanently* ‘present as absent’ appearance of the other.

2.6 Time and affection

In this section, I will reconsider the relationship between time and affection, in order to show that the Husserlian and the Henrian models of self-awareness (i.e. the models examined in this and the previous chapters) are, in fact, compatible, and that the affective and the temporal forms of self-experience are, for the most part, experienced *together*.

As we have seen in sec. 2.4, in the ‘Bernau Manuscripts’ Husserl understands the now as a result of a dynamic interplay between retentions and protentions: the present is a momentary actualisation or fulfillment of what was anticipated in the preceding retention, itself on its way to become past. In passing into retention, the present preserves its protentional extension, constituting itself as a past-phase anticipating, and thus making possible, the plenitude of future fulfillment, i.e. the following now-phase. This means that the *present* aspect of experience is incessantly renewed – although each particular now is ‘dragged’ into the past, a new now appears in its place, made possible by the protention attached to the previous now. The unceasing renewal of the present seems to account for the sense of *continuity* which characterises temporal self-awareness – despite the fact that each present is ‘dragged’ into the past, the perpetual fulfilment of retentional protentions ensures the continuous experience of myself in the now.

Understood this way, however, temporal self-experience seems structurally indistinguishable from its affective counterpart. As I argued in sec. 1.5, the originary impression is able to ensure the continuity of self-awareness because it is identical to the

³² Ibid., pp. 247-248

present dimension of ever-changing affects – my ‘atemporal’ feeling of self is, in fact, a result of an upsurge, disappearance, and re-emergence of new, transitory feelings. In other words, I can experience myself as continuous across changes thanks to a continual re-generation of the now-phase of affects. Consequently, *both* temporal *and* affective self-awareness presuppose an incessant renewal of the present, which, in turn, ensures the permanency of self-experience.

However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, affectivity anchors me in the present *and only the present* – the affective experience is *punctual*. When I suffer from a severe headache, the acuteness of its present dimension makes it virtually impossible to think of its past and future non-existence – I am ‘stuck’ in what Henry calls the ‘eternal living present.’ By contrast, time-consciousness, as well as allowing for the experience of the present, also, and at the same time, involves the experience of past and future – the fulfilment of retentional protentions is only one out of three constitutive aspects of temporal self-awareness (the other two being retentional sedimentation of past experiences and infinite projection of conscious life into the future). In short, the temporal experience of the present *always* and *immediately* has a past and a future horizon. From the perspective of time-consciousness, therefore, my experience of the headache cannot be punctual – the headache is a present affliction, which comprises the past in which the pain wasn’t present, and the future in which it will no longer be present. Temporality *extends* the affective experience, ruining its unitary punctuality.

The fact that the affective and temporal forms of self-awareness generate two conflicting accounts of the experience of the headache suggests the incompatibility of the various forms of self-experience: continuous self-awareness can be, primarily, *either* affective *or* temporal (my headache can be, primarily, *either* punctual *or* extended). In fact, the relationship between the affective and the temporal forms of self-awareness is one of *mutual antagonism*: on the one hand, the punctuality of affection can only result from the subordination of the now to itself, and the concomitant suppression of temporal horizons; on

the other hand, time-consciousness ‘extends’ or ‘differentiates’ affection, undermining the unitary character of the latter. In short, affects suppress and subordinate time, whereas time ‘divides’ the otherwise unitary affects. The realisation of one form of self-awareness, therefore, presupposes the repression of the other form.

Nevertheless, it is rarely the case that I experience myself *purely* temporally or affectively. For the most part, my self-awareness *combines* both punctuality and extension. An average headache, for instance, anchors me in the present (my discomfort is experienced in the punctual *now*), but also, to a greater or lesser degree, it implies its own past and future non-existence (earlier I felt comfortable, later I might do too). It is only the most *extreme* headache which is experienced as purely punctual; conversely, it is only the *mildest* headache which is experienced as purely extended. This suggests that pure punctuality and pure extension (and with them, the purely affective and purely temporal forms of self-awareness) are only *limit cases* of self-experience which, more often than not, comprises both. The forms of self-awareness, therefore, are rarely separable; in fact, for the most part, they are intertwined, thus producing an affective *and* temporal self-awareness, that is to say, an experience *both* identical over time *and* temporally differentiated.

Despite their interweaving, however, affectivity and temporality remain antagonistic – the more severe my headache, the more enveloping the present becomes; conversely, the more I experience the pain in time, the less severe the headache. Self-awareness, then, is a site of a struggle for a *more* punctual and *less* extended self-experience (from the point of view of the affective form of self-awareness), or a *less* punctual and *more* extended self-experience (from the point of view of the temporal form of self-awareness). Even though self-awareness is unitary and continuous (in all its forms self-experience is a unity which presupposes an incessant renewal of the present), self-experience is, in fact, diverse and ever-changing: at each moment I can be given to myself more or less affectively, more and less temporally.

In the previous chapter I suggested that the transition from the affective to the temporal forms of self-awareness is motivated by the fact that a punctual self-experience makes it impossible to access the other – a sudden outburst of extreme pain, for instance, overcomes me completely and ‘locks me’ in the solipsistic present; when I suffer, there is nothing or nobody but my pain. Here, the other is utterly inaccessible. In order to experience another person, therefore, it is necessary for me to loosen up the grip of the present and experience myself as temporally extended; as we saw above, far retention, as the experience of presence as absence, is the precursor for the experience of the other. This section’s analyses, in turn, can help us to understand the reverse transition, namely, the change from the temporal to the affective form of self-awareness. It is *the intensity of affection* which determines the extent to which I experience myself punctually: as noted above, the more intense the affect, the less temporal my experience. Self-awareness, therefore, seems to oscillate between its need to access the other via time-consciousness, and its affective experiences whose intensity is able to suppress time. It is precisely this oscillation, which, at each moment, determines the particular conjunction of the affective and temporal aspects of self-experience.

I would like to end this section with one more observation. As I have suggested, affectivity and temporality *subjectify* self-awareness, producing an *individuated* experience: my affective and temporal experiences are tantamount to the experience of *myself*. The unitary sense of oneself produced by affects is punctual – I experience myself as self-identical in the present. By contrast, the unitary sense of oneself produced by time-consciousness is differentiated and extended – I experience myself as having a past and a future, and thus, insofar as my past cannot be reduced to my future, I experience myself as non-identical. There are, therefore, two distinct types of individuation, which correspond to two forms of self-awareness: I can experience myself as identical and non-identical. However, if affectivity and temporality are – for the most part – intertwined, then subjectivity is individuated in two distinct ways *at the same time*: I am *both* self-identical in the present

and temporally differentiated and non-identical. In short, I am *overindividuated*: at each moment, there is more than one process of subjectification at work. Furthermore, the exact character of this ‘double’ sense of oneself varies according to the constant oscillation between the affective and the temporal aspects of self-awareness: sometimes, I experience myself more identical than non-identical (e.g. when I lose track of time while enjoying a good film), other times I am more non-identical than identical (e.g. when I am so preoccupied with getting to the finish line that I don’t notice the pain in my leg). Of course, overindividuation doesn’t imply that affectivity and temporality have all of a sudden become compatible; on the contrary, even though my sense of myself is produced in two distinct ways, one way always *dominates* the other – the sense of myself remains primarily affective *or* temporal. Nevertheless, I remain overindividuated, i.e. at one time, I experience myself in two distinct ways.

2.7 Novelty and boredom

In both of its forms, self-awareness is *unitary*: whereas the originary impression is an experience of a punctual unity, time-consciousness is an experience of an extended unity. In both of its forms, self-awareness is *continuous*: the incessant upsurge of new nows secures the permanency of both the affective and the temporal self-presence. More specifically, the continuous movement of the emergence, disappearance, and re-emergence of transitory affects, grounds the atemporality of the originary impression – the latter presupposes the ongoing appearance of the now-phases of the former, which it then ‘inhabits.’ Likewise, the continuous flow of retentional protentions incessantly renews the primal impression – the fulfilment of a previous anticipation produces a new now, which itself becomes a present-generating retentional protention. I will refer to the unity and the continuity of self-awareness in both of its forms as *synchrony* – whether more affective or temporal, self-experience is always *synchronised*, that is to say, it is unitary and continuous.

However, it is difficult to conceive how a synchronic self-awareness can be open to experiences which involve a degree of novelty. When commenting on the renewal of the now in time-consciousness, Klaus Held notes: ‘if every content which becomes the originally impressionally present contains a fulfilment, then everything that consciousness encounters is somehow protentionally “expected”; nothing is strictly speaking “new”.’³³ He then observes:

‘...Husserl’s theory ultimately amounts to the thesis that the consciousness of the field of presence never starts entirely anew. The “starting point” of such consciousness is already embedded in the retentional-protentional stream of consciousness, meaning that the “new” can always only occur as a response to certain prefigurations emerging from the retentional sedimentation of previous protentions and their fulfilments. There is no possibility that absolutely “new” events could emerge.’³⁴

Held’s criticism is twofold: firstly, Held notes, the renewed now can never be *radically* novel, since the very possibility of its appearance depends on the fulfilment of a previous expectation. The resurfacing of the present is always already anticipated, and so it shouldn’t feel radically new – instead we should merely sense an ongoing confirmation of our past anticipations. Protention itself is at odds with an experience of the novelty of the now. Secondly, Held claims, since each now is an ‘edge-point’ at the end of a chain of previously retained protentional fulfilments, which motivate or condition the emerge of the new now, the latter can only occur on a basis of an already prefigured structure. Thus, the ‘starting point’ of each now is already a response predetermined by the iterative chain of retentions and protentions, and thus cannot be new in an absolute sense. Furthermore, we can add, the fact that subjectivity projects itself into the future means that no future novelty can be exempt from ‘neutralisation’ – the future implies the presence of my consciousness as ‘there,’ and so no future present can ever appear outside of my anticipation motivated by a prefigured structure, i.e. in principle, no future present can be radically new.

³³ Klaus Held, ‘Phenomenology of “Authentic Time” in Husserl and Heidegger’, p. 102

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104

Note that novelty is disallowed by the elements of time-consciousness which synchronise temporal self-awareness, namely, the fulfillment of presents within the past and future horizons. This would suggest that the synchrony of temporal self-awareness is at odds with experiences of radical novelty. The same conclusion can be drawn in the case of affective self-awareness: the unitary identity of the originary impression remains *the same* across the changes; what's more, the sameness of the originary impression is secured by the *permanent* support of the continuously emerging transitory affects. Each 'new' experience is, in fact, a function of the permanent sameness of affection; the synchrony of affective self-awareness, therefore, subsumes 'new' events, which effectively neutralises their novelty. The *oscillation* between the forms of self-awareness is equally unable to account for radically new experiences. The transition from (a unitary and continuous) affective self-experience to (a unitary and continuous) temporal self-experience does nothing to change the structural elements which render novelty impossible – in both of its forms self-awareness remains synchronic, and thus structurally incapable of accommodating novelty.

It can be argued that the synchrony of self-awareness is not incompatible with the experiences of the new. De Warren, for instance, argues that *every present* constitutes an 'unexpected irruption of *novelty*'³⁵ – there is a sense of 'freshness' which, as de Warren notes, belongs to the experience of the now.³⁶ Despite the synchrony of self-awareness, each new present renews or rejuvenates subjectivity – the always renewed present never 'gets old,' rather, each now resurfaces feeling young, fresh, and new. In order to defend his claim, de Warren shows that the present is neither reducible to the fulfilment of past protentions, nor derived from pre-existing configurations. Paradoxically then, de Warren argues that the novel now precedes its own possibility. He asserts that even though the structure of time-consciousness makes the now appear, it is the *novelty* of the present which animates, or makes possible, the incessant interplay of retentions and protentions. On the one hand, each renewed present manages to surpass the particular protention which preceded it. Each now in

³⁵ N. de Warren, *Husserl and the Promise of Time*, p. 218

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 258

some sense catches us by surprise: ‘the arrival of each now always surpasses or saturates any determinate expectation of the now on the basis of the past; in this fashion, each now catches us from behind; the future never arrives from the direction in which we expect it.’³⁷ On the other hand, each new now is ‘prior’ with regards to the chain of retentional protention, in a sense of being the origin, or an animating principle, of its own past: if ‘the beginning is the now, and the now is the new, and the new always arrives as surpassing our expectation, I would suggest that the transcendence of the new is the transcendence of consciousness as absolute, as origin... Otherwise, consciousness would always just be itself, and be condemned to being what it already has been.’³⁸ In other words, the novelty of the present *transcends* both the anticipating protention and the structure of consciousness which preceded it, and, in doing so, it ‘breathes life’ into consciousness. We can extend de Warren’s analysis of the temporal form of self-awareness to its affective counterpart: the present cannot be fully subsumed by the originary impression; on the contrary, each new now exceeds or transcends the atemporal affection, and insofar as it is able to do so, each now is experienced as new. However, our worries are, to some extent, justified: the radical novelty of the present as the origin of consciousness can be missed because it transcends the temporal structures in which it appears – the novelty of the present obscures itself in its own functioning. As de Warren puts it, ‘...one cannot fully recuperate oneself entirely within oneself as an origin.’³⁹ ‘The life of consciousness, as the event of its self-temporalization, hides itself within its own accomplishment as consciousness.’⁴⁰

To say that the radical novelty of the now escapes the analysis of time-consciousness not because of its impossibility, but rather because of its function as an opaque origin which transcends its own manifestation, is undoubtedly interesting and creative (in fact, it ingeniously furthers Husserl’s own analysis of the upsurge of primal impression as the ‘source-point’ of the experience of time, found in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-*

³⁷ Ibid., p. 257

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 258-259

³⁹ Ibid., p. 268

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 253

Consciousness). However, one can object to de Warren's account on the basis of the fact that the emergence of new nows secures the *continuity* of self-awareness. De Warren seems to be committed to one of three claims: 1) the unexpected present, by virtue of surpassing my expectation, disrupts the flow *at every moment*; 2) the transcendent novelty of the now, by virtue of being opaque, is not included within the immanent self-manifestation of the flow; 3) the newness of the now is not included in the present self-experience but can be recuperated through retention. In other words, either the flow is discontinuous, constantly interrupted by the surprising now; or the continuity of the flow makes it impossible to experience its own transcendent origin, since the latter cannot show itself within the functioning flow; or the obscured novelty can be grasped retentionally. All of these positions seem suspect from a phenomenological point of view.⁴¹ 1) It seems incorrect to say that in my everyday experience I'm constantly surprised by each new now. Sure, there might be a sense of 'freshness' to my experiences, but, for the most part, this feeling is nothing other than a confirmation that my experience is continuing the way it has been. Otherwise, self-awareness would be similar to an overly-excitabile tourist, shouting 'Wow!' at everything they encounter. Furthermore, it can be argued that being surprised by each new now is a characteristic of psychedelic trips. This would indicate that, normally, we are *not* surprised by the present – otherwise taking the drug would be superfluous. 2) If the novelty of the now is missed by conscious experience, doesn't it mean that novelty is merely an abstract postulate, in principle not experienceable? If this is so, novelty would take us beyond the realms of phenomenology and a phenomenological account of self-awareness. 3) Perhaps the newness of each now can be retentionally recuperated. However, is a new present which has become past, still a novelty? A past present is no longer fresh, young, nor new in the same way as the present is. Retention would then neutralise the newness of the now, giving us access to only the no-longer-new-present, consequently making impossible the experience of a new now *as a new now* (I will examine the possibility of past novelty unrelated to the 'freshness' of the now in sec. 3.4). In short then, de Warren cannot maintain that the experience of the

⁴¹ In his writings de Warren seems to occupy a mixture of positions 2) and 3).

‘unexpected irruption of *novelty*’ in the now is compatible with the functioning of subjective life.

However, to assert the impossibility of novelty seems equally suspect, since it ignores a certain *discontinuity* which occasionally characterises self-experience. Sometimes, the present exceeds my expectations – I can be surprised, shocked, or taken aback by what comes to pass. I’m astonished whenever I miss my mouth when drinking from a glass; I shriek when my flatmate jumps at me from behind the door. Equally, thrillers and horror films rely on, and exploit, the possibility of surprise. Furthermore, to rule out the possibility of a radically novel experience is to condemn consciousness to a more or less monotonous life in which nothing *truly* new happens. The concrete image which synchronic self-awareness seems to depict is one of *boredom*: the unitary and continuous subject is condemned to a monotonous and repetitive life. Consciousness would then resemble the protagonist of Paolo Sorrentino’s *The Great Beauty* (2013), whose wild parties, aesthetic experiences, and romantic encounters confirm, instead of interrupting, the fundamental monotony, and the concomitant boredom, of his existence (the sense of pervasive repetitiveness in the protagonist’s life is reinforced by the film’s editing – seemingly sensational events start with the *end* scene, which is then followed by a sequence of scenes which precede it chronologically. In effect, the viewer is never surprised because he or she has already seen what will happen – in analogy with new experiences pre-figured and subsumed by a pre-existing subjective structure).

Certainly, boredom can be helpful: if every new now were surprising, I would be unable to cope with the world, engage with daily tasks, or even maintain my sanity. Nevertheless, as confirmed by Sorrentino’s character, boredom can become extremely tedious and essentially unsatisfying. Furthermore, as I argued above, it seems phenomenologically incorrect to characterise self-awareness as bored. I believe that certain experiences constitute a cure for boredom: occasionally, we *are* able to experience something radically new. My suggestion is that, since radical novelty is disallowed by the continuity and

unity of self-awareness, in order to encounter something new, I cannot only experience myself synchronically. Rather, to experience novelty, my self-awareness must become discontinuous and dislodged. In other words, to encounter something new, self-awareness *itself* must be transformed – there must be *another* form of self-experience, neither continuous nor unitary, which, as such, would save subjectivity from boredom. In the next chapters, I will explore the possibility of a discontinuous and dislocated form of self-awareness, in order to show that self-awareness is not exhausted by monotony, and that boredom is not the only modality of subjective life.

Chapter 3: Deformalisation

At the end of the previous chapter, I argued that the unity and continuity of self-awareness – i.e. its synchrony – makes it structurally impossible to experience anything radically new. I also suggested that the monotony of synchronic self-awareness is concretely experienced as boredom. The tedious character of boredom, in turn, motivates a need for *another* form of self-awareness – one able to open subjectivity to truly new experiences by challenging and overcoming its synchronic structure.

The hypothesis I will develop in the next two chapters, is that it is the new itself which precipitates the emergence of a non-synchronic form of subjectivity – i.e. it is novelty which provokes a change in the form of self-awareness. In other words, true novelty generates its own condition of appearance – I am able to have new experiences because the new has transformed my self-awareness by challenging its unity and continuity. The measure of a radical novelty, then, is its ability to produce a new form of subjective manifestation – one able to accommodate its own transformative experience. In order to defend my claim, I will demonstrate, firstly, that the form of self-awareness is *responsive to* concrete events; the encounter with the new, then, *can* have an impact on self-experience. Secondly, I will argue that concrete events are able to *modify* self-awareness; novelty, then, would be able to engender an *altered* form of self-experience. In what follows, I provide a deformed account of self-awareness which shows that subjective manifestation is both responsive to, and modifiable by, concrete experiences.

In the previous chapters, deformalisation allowed me to show that self-awareness reacts to concrete experiences. In sec. 2.6, I suggested that the oscillation between the temporal and the affective forms of self-awareness responds to concrete states in which subjectivity finds itself – as we have seen, an intense affective experience provokes a

transition to a less extended self-manifestation, which results in the inaccessibility of the other; the impossibility of relating to the other, in turn, calls for a less punctual self-experience, one which would be structured temporally. In short, the particular conjunction of affectivity and time in self-experience is a reaction to concrete events in which self-awareness is actualised.

Although the oscillation between the forms of self-awareness attests to the fact that self-experience is responsive to concrete situations, it does not show that the forms of self-awareness can be modified – whether affective or temporal, self-awareness remains unitary and continuous. In other words, the reactions to concrete situations we have examined so far, confirm synchrony as the fixed form of subjective manifestation – intense affection and inaccessible other leave the unitary and continuous structure of self-awareness intact. Thus, in order to account for the possibility of novelty, we must identify experiences which are able to provoke a more drastic change – one which transforms the synchrony of subjectivity.

In this chapter, I will focus primarily on deformed experiences of time. In sections 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4, I consider experiences and events which harbour a potential to modify time-consciousness, and, consequently, to account for the new. I will argue that temporality can undergo modifications of varying degrees: from a change of pace and direction to a transformation of its formal structure.

Before examining deformed experiences of time, however, I will provide an argument for the *possibility* of temporal deformation. I will conclude by suggesting that even though some experiences can challenge the synchrony of the *temporal* form of self-awareness, they cannot overcome the synchrony of the *affective* form of self-experience. And since novel experiences are disallowed by both types of synchrony, a modification in time-consciousness with no impact on affection can only account for a partial or ‘bound’ novelty, immediately recuperated by affective self-presence. In the next chapter, therefore, I will examine experiences which oppose the synchrony of both time and affection. I will argue that

it is responsibility for another person which successfully challenges the continuity and unity of both forms of self-awareness; consequently, it is responsibility which produces a new form of subjective manifestation. Responsibility, by virtue of its transformative effect on self-experience, constitutes a genuine example of radical novelty.

3.1 *The possibility of the deformatisation of time*

I borrow the motif of deformatised temporality from Emmanuel Levinas, who in a late interview identifies the deformatisation of the notion of time as the essential theme of his research.¹ Levinas motivates his interest in deformatisation by pointing out that, traditionally, the formal aspects of temporality haven't been conceived as sufficiently responsive to, or determined by, concrete events; in consequence, and here Levinas identifies our problem, every 'new' content is pre-determined by the temporal form in which it appears:

'... philosophers never required, for the constitution of that form of temporality itself, a *condition* in a certain *conjecture* of 'matter' or events, in a meaningful content somehow prior to form. The constitution of time in Husserl is also a constitution of time in terms of an already effective consciousness of presence in its disappearance and in its 'retention', its immanence, and its anticipation – *disappearance and immanence that already imply what is to be established*, without any indication being given about the privileged empirical situation to which those modes of disappearance in the past and imminence in the future would be attached.'²

For Levinas, Husserl doesn't pay sufficient attention to the fact that time-consciousness is realised in concrete events; in consequence, Husserl is unable to notice that the formal structure of temporality is itself conditioned by the concrete situations in which it is actualised. Since Husserl is unable to offer an account of time sensitive to its concrete

¹ In recent years, the question of the deformatisation of time has been picked up by multiple commentators. Cf., Stefano Micali, 'The Deformatization of Time,' in *Debating Levinas' Legacy*, ed. A. Breitling, C. Bremmers, A. Cools, Brill 2015; Adonis Frangeskou, *Levinas, Kant, and the Problematic of Temporality*, Palgrave Macmillan 2017; Cynthia D. Coe, *Levinas and the Trauma of Responsibility: The Ethical Significance of Time*, Indiana University Press 2018

² Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Other, Utopia, and Justice,' in *Entre Nous*, trans. M.B. Smith and B. Harshav, Continuum 1998, p. 201 (third emphasis mine)

realisations, he remains blind to the possibility of the deformalisation of time, and thus to the full nature of temporal subjectivity.

A Husserlian might object to Levinas's critique by pointing out that if concrete events were able to determine or condition temporality, then time-consciousness would have to be conceived as, to some extent, malleable or plastic. From a Husserlian perspective, however, the idea of a malleable or plastic flow of time-consciousness seems unfeasible. As Husserl notes, while the contents of consciousness can accelerate, slow down, or simply remain static, the absolute flow 'has the absurd property that it flows exactly as it flows and can flow neither "more swiftly" nor "more slowly."'”³ This might seem intuitive: when absent-mindedly listening to a generic pop song on the radio, I am aware of the slow verse, a faster chorus, and a semi-slow ending; time itself, however, seems to go neither slower nor faster – there is a certain monotony in the time-flow's pace, behind the divergent durations of the song's parts.

I believe that, contrary to Husserl's own conviction, the Husserlian model itself suggests the possibility of an alterable or plastic time-consciousness. In what follows, I will explore further the Husserlian distinction between the form of absolute consciousness and its immanent content. I will demonstrate that absolute time-consciousness and immanent experiences are experienced *together* – drawing on the so-called Zahavi-Brough debate, I will argue that the difference between immanent acts and the absolute flow of consciousness, presupposes their co-belonging in *the same* stream of temporal experiences. Furthermore, as I will show, this unity grounds the possibility of a modifiable time-consciousness – since immanent experiences and absolute consciousness are, in fact, experienced together, the alterations in the experience of immanent content (allowed for by Husserl) should, at the same time, alter the experience of the absolute time-consciousness.⁴

³ E. Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, p. 99

⁴ Stefano Micali also examines the Zahavi-Brough debate in the context of the deformalisation of time. Micali uses Zahavi and Brough to highlight the problem of fixed time-consciousness, which he then solves independently from their writings. By contrast, I attempt to read both Zahavi and Brough as

A) The Zahavi-Brough debate and the question of objectivity

The Zahavi-Brough debate concerns the number of levels of consciousness. While Brough argues for the existence of three levels (transcendent objects, immanent acts, absolute flow), Zahavi maintains that, initially, we are only conscious of two levels. Recently, Neal DeRoo has suggested that ‘what is at stake in this discussion is a particular issue of objectivity.’⁵ According to DeRoo, the difference between Brough’s and Zahavi’s readings consists primarily in their respective positions with regards to the objectivity of immanent content. And so, for Brough, immanent acts are objects constituted by the absolute flow. This, in turn, means that consciousness consists of three levels: transcendent objects, immanent act-objects constituted by the absolute flow, and the (self-) constituting absolute flow. Zahavi, on the other hand, maintains that acts are initially non-objective, and become objects only as a result of being taken up by reflection. Prior to reflection the acts and the absolute flow constitute the same level of pre-reflective and non-objective self-awareness. For Zahavi then, consciousness consists of two levels: transcendent objects and the immanent (and non-objective) flow of the acts.

What I would like to show is that DeRoo’s approach, although textually grounded and undeniably interesting, is, nevertheless, unable to settle the debate. A more substantial examination of Zahavi’s and Brough’s writings reveals that neither of them subscribe to an unequivocally ‘objective’ or ‘non-objective’ interpretation of the acts. Instead, both Zahavi and Brough embrace more subtle positions – they deny the constitution of full-blown immanent objects, without, however, denying the possibility of distinguishing between the

themselves offering (however unwittingly) models of time-consciousness responsive to, and modifiable by, concrete experiences. In other words, whilst Micali wants to distance himself from the orthodox Husserlianism of Zahavi and Brough, I want to show that the Husserlian position is itself able to account for the possibility of deformed time. Cf. Stefano Micali, ‘The Temporalizations of the Absolute Flow of Time-Consciousness,’ in *On Time – New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*

⁵ Neal DeRoo, ‘Revisiting the Zahavi-Brough/Sokolowski Debate,’ in *Husserl Studies* 27, Springer 2011, p. 2

content and the flow. As I will show, the focus on objectivity suggested by DeRoo is unable to successfully represent Brough's and Zahavi's views without either misrepresenting their positions or discovering an unsatisfactory common ground, which, instead of clarifying, muddles the topic of the debate. More importantly, however, the objectivist reading tells us nothing about the effect acts may have on the experience time – on DeRoo's interpretation, the debate's contribution to the possibility of a deformed experience of time is missed. As I will show in the following section, the Zahavi-Brough debate bears on the possibility of deformation when it is framed as concerned with the question of temporality.

Considered from the point of view of the objectivity of acts, Zahavi's two-level model of consciousness can be summarised by a formula which states that immanent experience 'is not pre-reflectively *experienced* as an object'. As Zahavi himself notes, the plausibility of this claim 'to a large extent depends on what we mean by "object".' For Zahavi, 'objects' designate a specific category of appearance where an *x* appears 'as transcending the subjective consciousness that takes it as an object.' In other words, to count as objects, immanent content must be grasped in 'opposition' to, or 'over and against' the grasping consciousness. However, Zahavi claims, when 'we are absorbed or immersed in our daily concerns and simply live through the experiences... they are not something we observe from a distance and they do not stand opposite us.'⁶ In other words, the pre-reflective life of consciousness does not rely for its appearance on an objectifying activity of a distinct part of consciousness; instead, it gives itself by itself in a single stream of experiences. It follows then, that there is no difference between (the given) immanent act and the (the giving) absolute consciousness – the latter just is the pre-reflective givenness of the former. 'On this reading, the stream of consciousness is not illuminated by a separate spotlight, rather the stream is self-luminous.'⁷ In other words, our pre-reflective temporal self-awareness is identical to the awareness of our immanent experiences. Of course, immanent acts *can* appear

⁶ Dan Zahavi, 'Inner (Time-)Consciousness', in *On Time – New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, p. 332

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 334

as objects. This happens when they are taken up by reflection. Reflection ‘separates out’ the immanent elements of the non-objective stream, and in doing so, imposes an objective status on that which it grasps. Yet reflection, in thematising an experience, objectifies something which initially was experienced as a non-objective unity – originally ‘consciousness does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. It is nothing jointed; it simply flows’.⁸

However, as Brough notes, even ‘if it is true that consciousness is not a string of disconnected bits, there are good grounds for saying that it is jointed, even in prereflective experience. If it were not, what would guide acts of reflection in making their objectifying cuts?’⁹ At any point I can experience a plurality of acts – I can be reading a book, listening to music, and, at the same time, remembering to call a friend. Without these experiences being pre-reflectively given as somehow distinct from each other – seeing from hearing, perception from memory etc. – it is unclear what motivates reflection in the subsequent disentangling and demarcating of these acts. Without *some* account of a pre-reflective distinction between various acts, the reflective thematisation of individual contents seems wholly arbitrary. ‘In the absence of prominences, of peaks and valleys in prereflective experience, there would be nothing to guide reflection in making its objectifying cuts.’¹⁰ Furthermore, Brough’s argument continues, if reflection grasps already pre-formed elements, then a story that accounts for this pre-formation has to be told. Brough himself argues that acts are established as separate by a ‘deeper’ level of consciousness – the absolute flow. Hence, Brough concludes, we must posit a third level of consciousness, inseparable yet irreducible to immanent content, which makes the experience of the latter possible.

The above exchange between Zahavi and Brough could lead us to believe that the functioning of reflection renders Zahavi’s two-level model untenable, and that we should, instead, embrace Brough’s three-level interpretation of consciousness, in which immanent

⁸ D. Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, p.77

⁹ John B. Brough, ‘The Most Difficult of All Phenomenological Problems’, in *Husserl Studies* 27, p.33

¹⁰ John B. Brough, ‘Notes on the Absolute Time-Constituting Flow of Consciousness’, in *On Time – New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, p. 39

acts are constituted as objects by the absolute flow. However, such conclusion would rely on an unjustified oversimplification of both Zahavi and Brough's positions. As we have seen, Zahavi puts into question the pre-reflective objectivity of immanent acts. But Brough doesn't think of the formation of distinct acts as full-blown objects either; in fact, for him 'calling the experienced act an "object" is not the happiest terminological choice.'¹¹ Instead, we should call acts 'unities' or 'individuals' – that way we can preserve the distinctness of immanent contents without, however, endowing them with objectivity. In other words, Brough *does not* claim that acts are objects, and to read him otherwise is to simplify his position to a point of misreading. On Brough's view, to be pre-reflectively aware of acts as somehow distinct from each other is to be aware of them as *non-objective*:

'...experiencing, which is what the flow is and does, is *nonobjectivating* awareness of the act and of itself. It is true that Husserl's frequent description of experienced acts as "objects" is not felicitous, but it is usually quite clear that when he applies the term he does not mean that acts appear to the flow as "full-blown inner objects." He is simply indicating that there is consciousness of the act, that the act is experienced.'¹²

Brough's position, therefore, seems extremely close to that of Zahavi – both agree that the distinction between immanent acts and absolute consciousness shouldn't imply the full-blown objectivity of the former, but, rather, that the acts are originally experienced non-objectively. In short, Brough is in agreement with Zahavi with regards to the non-objective character of pre-reflective consciousness.

Disclosing this common ground shared by the two interlocutors constitutes an undeniable advantage of approaching the Zahavi-Brough debate from the point of view of the potential objectivity of acts. Nevertheless, this approach leaves unclarified a cluster of crucial questions: if acts are 'unities' rather than objects, what does it mean to experience an immanent unity (as opposed to simply experiencing an object)? And how is 'the formation of

¹¹ Ibid., p. 37

¹² Ibid., p. 32 (my emphasis)

non-objective unities' different to 'the constitution of objects'? Furthermore, how can we distinguish the non-objective manifestation of immanent unities from the non-objective manifestation of the flow? Without answering the above questions, the nature of immanent acts is muddled and confused. Their formation and function remain a mystery; more importantly, however, their position within consciousness becomes unclear – they are somewhere in between two levels, neither objective nor completely identical with the flow. Framing the Zahavi-Brough debate as concerned with objectivity of acts thus proves unable to answer the question motivating the dispute in the first place, namely, whether consciousness should be understood as originally two- or three-dimensional. What's more, it tells us nothing about the possibility of the deformatisation of time – it remains unclear whether, and if so, how, unities and objects are able to modify the structure of time-consciousness.

B) The Zahavi-Brough debate and the question of temporality

What I would like to show in this section, is that the questions generated by the objectivist approach can be answered when the Zahavi-Brough debate is considered from the point of view of *temporality*. The temporal approach I'm suggesting is more advantageous because it manages to do justice to the subtle complications of Zahavi and Brough's respective views on the nature of the acts, while providing a clearer grasp on the relationship between the different levels of consciousness. Furthermore, it will allow me to show that the immanent acts and absolute flow constitute the same stream of temporal experiences; their co-belonging, in turn, will ground the possibility not only of the determination of immanent acts by absolute consciousness, but, more importantly for our purposes, of the modification of the absolute flow by its immanent content.

Whenever I am aware of an experience, I am also aware of myself as having this experience. The latter form of awareness, in contrast to its former counterpart, doesn't

emerge only to fade away. Rather, the awareness of myself as having transitory experiences, i.e. the awareness of the flow, is continuous. Put in more technical terms, the flow constitutes itself as an incessant fulfillment of retentional protentions, whereas acts are experienced as gradual episodes: they emerge from the past, reach a culmination point, and tend towards their future disappearance. Of course, this is not to deny that the awareness of the flow does have *its own* form of emerging and fading. In fact, as we observed in the previous chapter, the passage from the near to far horizons, and the becoming-undifferentiated of consciousness which this passage signifies, is constitutive of the experience of the absolute flow.

Nevertheless, there is a certain permanency or continuity to the dynamic interplay of the flow's retentions and protentions – a permanency which cannot be found on the side of the fleeting acts. Considered from a temporal point of view then, the consciousness of the flow and the consciousness of the act cannot be the same – while the latter comes and goes, the former continues. And so, as Zahavi puts it, the difference between the dimensions of self-experience is grounded in 'the *difference* between our singular and transitory acts and the abiding dimension of experiencing';¹³ it is, therefore, 'highly appropriate to distinguish the singularity *lebendige Gegenwart* from the plurality of changing experiences,'¹⁴ i.e. to differentiate the singular dimension of self-awareness (the absolute flow) from the transitory multiplicity of acts.

The way in which absolute consciousness interacts with its content further solidifies the distinction between them. The flow makes possible the experience of the temporal phases of the act: retention and protention give the past and the future aspects of the act. This means that the past and future phases of an immanent element are retained and protended thanks to a running off and an arriving of the elaborate unfolding of the flow – the simple, linear movement of the act through its past, present, and future, presupposes the complex intersecting of the past, present, and future of the flow, in which the past preserves the future expectation, and the future expectation includes the past. Consequently, we cannot say that

¹³ D. Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, p. 80

¹⁴ D. Zahavi, 'Inner (Time-)Consciousness', p. 336

retention and protention are simultaneous with the retained and protended past and future phases of the act – although experienced together, the flow possesses a temporal articulation different than the acts. This is why Zahavi insists that there is no temporal match between the absolute consciousness and the immanent content of which it is conscious.¹⁵

The non-identity of immanent acts and the absolute flow is further attested to by the fact that the ‘self-manifestation of consciousness has a temporal horizon’¹⁶ – the far horizons of the flow (both future and past) in principle exceed the givenness of acts. When an act appears, it is experienced thanks to the most immediate retentions and protention, i.e. it takes place within the near horizon of the flow. When the act fades, it passes into a more and more distant and undifferentiated past, i.e. it tends towards the flow’s far horizon. Since acts appear in the immediacy of the near horizon, they, by necessity, miss the far future horizon – even though near protentions allow the act to appear, the indeterminate far protentions reach beyond the acts, towards the horizon of an indeterminate future. Far protentions remain empty precisely because acts are absent from the far horizon. When I read a book and listen to music, the empty future-directedness of my awareness transcends the experiences I am currently having. As Brough puts it, the ‘fundamental sense of protention, understood as my immediate openness to what is not yet now, is that I am not identical with any one of my present or past acts or experiences.’¹⁷ A similar conclusion can be drawn with regards to the past-directedness of my self-awareness. As we have said, the past horizon of the flow constitutes the so-called point without differences, which functions as a depository of sedimented, and now indistinct, past experiences. When I remember a particular past act, I reactivate it, i.e. I render it explicit by ‘excavating’ it from the distant past horizon. Importantly, when I remember that earlier today I was reading, and that before reading I was listening to music, I am aware of the dormant past horizon from which they have been unearthed, and which contains *more* than the explicit memory I am currently enjoying. In

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 323

¹⁶ D. Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, p.82

¹⁷ J. B. Brough, ‘Notes on the Absolute Time-Constituting Flow of Consciousness’, p. 47

fact, without the awareness of having a past as such, I would not seek to reactive long-gone experiences. Each reactivated act then presupposes a past from which it has been ‘rescued’ – an undifferentiated past as such, irreducible to the given act.

In contrast to the objectivist reading suggested by DeRoo, my temporal approach allows us to clearly distinguish between the different levels of consciousness: firstly, whereas the immanent contents are transitory, absolute consciousness persists; secondly, the flow involves a complex interplay of retentions and protentions, whilst immanent acts unravel in a linear fashion; lastly, the horizons of the most fundamental level of subjectivity always exceed the domain of the acts. In short, the acts and the flow constitute two distinct levels of subjective experience.

Importantly, however, the difference between immanent content and the absolute flow should imply neither their incompatibility nor their separability – as Brough puts it, ‘the flow is consciousness of itself only in the process of being conscious of immanent unities.’¹⁸ Arguing for a demarcation of two levels within consciousness should not be mistaken for advocating a split subjectivity, divided between the acts and the flow. Rather, ‘the one consciousness possesses two distinct but inseparable moments through which it is aware of its unity and also of its multiplicity in the form of its acts.’¹⁹ To illustrate this point better, Brough compares functioning consciousness to a sea with its ‘depths’ and ‘waves’:

‘Waves may not be things, but as any sailor or surfer knows, they can become prominent and stand out, enjoying a fleeting individuality. Now if acts are like waves, they too have a unity and distinctness in relation to other acts. Just as waves are discrete moments of the sea, so experiences are discrete moments of consciousness. Furthermore, if one thinks of actual waves, it is obviously appropriate to say of them that they are perceived in temporal modes –as now, for example, or as just past. If acts of consciousness are comparable to waves, they will be *experienced* in temporal

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 42

¹⁹ J. B. Brough, ‘The Most Difficult of All Phenomenological Problems’, p. 31

modes. Indeed, if acts were not given as now, past, and future, we could not experience them as discrete unities with their fixed locations in immanent time.²⁰

Both the depths (absolute flow) and the waves (immanent acts) belong to the same sea, yet the waves observed on the surface of the sea are distinct from the depths.²¹ Brough's insistence on the inseparability of the flow and its acts leads him to suggest 'to drop the talk of "levels" with its suggestion of a stratified consciousness and all the problems for the unity of consciousness it entails, and speak instead of "dimensions," "aspects," or "functions" of consciousness.'²² That way we can understand the distinction between the acts and the flow as a difference between two complementary functions, or dimension, of the same consciousness. In short, it is not the case that the experience of acts is somehow 'above' the experience of the flow; rather, we should think of immanent experiences as taking place *within* absolute consciousness – the acts are, quite literally, *immanent* to the flow.

Note that in the above quote Brough draws a connection between the 'discrete unity' of acts and their temporality. Each wave stands out for a brief moment from its surroundings – it raises, reaches its peak, and falls. Analogously, each act is discrete by virtue of its own temporal phases – it begins, persists, and begins to fade. Importantly, for Brough the unique duration of an act distinguishes it from other acts. When I read a book and listen to music, I might finish reading before the end of the song. I then close the book and absent-mindedly focus my attention on the music. I am aware of the difference between the act of reading and the act of listening thanks to their respective temporal positions within the flow – the former finished *before* the latter. Note that this awareness is pre-reflective – I do not need reflection to be conscious of the respective positions of the just-finished act of reading, and the still-taking-place act of listening. Zahavi also seems to support this view. He notes that 'when experience occurs, it automatically acquires an unchangeable location in the stream. I can

²⁰ J. B. Brough, 'Notes on the Absolute Time-Constituting Flow of Consciousness', pp. 39-40

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40

²² J. B. Brough, 'The Most Difficult of All Phenomenological Problems', p. 37

only locate an act in recollection if it already has a position.’²³ This means that the pre-reflective experience of acts is in some sense individuated by their unique duration and place within the temporal flow; in this sense, it is absolute consciousness, and the experience of time it makes possible, which pre-forms acts into temporal moments ready to be thematised by reflection. In short, every ‘unity’ is a result of what Zahavi calls a ‘streaming unification’ carried out in the flow.²⁴ The unifying activity of absolute consciousness, in turn, attests to the fact that immanent experiences take place *in* the flow – discrete immanent acts are constituted by their position *in* time-consciousness. In other words, for Zahavi, as well as for Brough, the absolute flow and the immanent experiences it makes possible constitute a *single* stream of self-awareness.

C) The Zahavi-Brough debate and the deformatisation of time

Our analysis of the Zahavi-Brough debate has shown that, on the Husserlian model, the two aspects of temporal self-awareness are always experienced *together* – the acts and the flow constitute *one* stream of temporal experience. But if temporal self-awareness is a single stream of immanent content *in* absolute consciousness, then any alteration, whether on the level of content or absolute consciousness, must be experienced as an alteration of the stream as a whole – the unity of temporal experience suggests that a change in one of its aspects, should be experienced as change in the singular stream as such. In analogy with a cinematic experience, we can say that, since the elements of the film and the film itself are seen together, if an element of the film changes, the film itself is modified. The fact that the experience of time can be altered by a change in immanent content, in turn, grounds the possibility of the deformatisation of time: we can conceive of a malleable or plastic time-consciousness because temporal self-experience as a whole is responsive to, and modifiable by, immanent events.

²³ D. Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, p. 79

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79

One might object, however, that neither a change on the level of acts, nor an alteration in temporal experience as a whole, prove that *absolute consciousness* is responsive to immanent experiences. Acts change constantly – a moment ago I was perceiving a glass in front of me, now I remember something I was told last night – yet, across these changes, my time-consciousness remains the same; the ongoing alterations on the level of acts leave the formal structure of time-consciousness intact and unchanged. Likewise, my temporal experience as a whole can seem different at different times (it can be faster or slower, future- or past-directed) – yet, my time-consciousness continues to flow undisturbed, in the same pace and direction. This suggests that the alterations of acts, and the concomitant modification in the temporal experience as whole, change nothing on the level of absolute consciousness – the latter is simply indifferent to what happens within it.

By putting into question the possibility of an alterable time-consciousness, the above objection can help us to distinguish between two ways in which the *modification* of absolute consciousness can be understood: on the one hand, we can think of a change in the *structure* of time-consciousness – differentiated immanent content would provoke alterations in the formal articulation the absolute flow; on the other hand, we can think of a change in the *flowing* of time-consciousness – the modification of the stream of experiences is, in fact, equivalent to an alteration in the dynamic unravelling of the absolute flow. The above objection questions the possibility of both types of modification. However, to suggest that the stream of temporal experience is somehow different to the absolute flow, and that, consequently, a modification in the flowing of the former does nothing to the latter, is to misconstrue the nature of temporal self-awareness. There is only *one* stream of temporal self-awareness constituted by the flow of time-consciousness; if an immanent experience can change the stream of temporal experiences, then it changes *nothing but* the flow of time-consciousness. In other words, a change in the stream of temporal self-experience is equivalent to a change in the absolute flow, because the stream of temporal experience *is* the absolute flow plus its content – an alteration in the flowing of the former, therefore, is

identical to an alteration in the flowing of latter. As I will show in the following section, both the pace and the direction of the flow can be altered by immanent content.

Certainly, a change in the *flow* of time-consciousness is not equivalent to a change in its *structure* – the fact that the flowing of time can be experienced differently at different times, does not mean that the form of time-consciousness also changes. Whether the flow speeds up or slows down, its formal aspects remain the same: temporal experience continues to involve the fulfilment of protentional retentions, horizontal unification, and infinite self-projection. Importantly for our purposes, this means that the change in the flowing of time-consciousness is insufficient to account for the new – radical novelty is disallowed by the formal features of temporal self-awareness, and so, it is the form of time-consciousness which must change in order for novelty to become possible. In sec. 3.3 and 3.4 below, I will examine experiences which harbour a potential to modify the form of temporal self-awareness. As I will show, some experiences imply a temporality *incompatible* with the regular structure of time-consciousness; and since immanent content and the absolute flow constitute one stream of temporal experience, the unusual temporality of an immanent element must be experienced as an unusual temporality of the stream as whole. In other words, if an experience involves an atypical temporal structure, then the experience of time-consciousness itself must become atypical, since the two constitute a single stream of temporal, and now atypical, self-experience. Furthermore, as I argue, the discontinuous and non-unitary temporality of some experiences is able to challenge the synchrony of temporal self-awareness, and in so doing, to open consciousness to the new.

3.2 Deformalised experiences of time: curiosity, melancholia, fatigue

In this section I will examine three immanent experiences which are able to alter the flow of time-consciousness; more specifically, I will consider three affective inflections of acts: curiosity, melancholia, and fatigue – all of which have an experienceable effect on the

flowing of time-consciousness. However, as I will make clear by the end of the section, none of the experiences considered here are able to modify the formal structure of temporal self-awareness – even though curiosity, melancholia, and fatigue have an impact on our experience of time, the alteration they provoke is unable to account for the experiences of novelty. In the next two sections, therefore, I will explore experiences whose temporality has a more radical effect on the formal aspects of time-consciousness.

In his book *Sculpting in Time*, the director Andrey Tarkovsky offers an example of what we may call a deformed experience of time. When reflecting on cinema, Tarkovsky writes that the ‘dominant, all-powerful factor of the film image is *rhythm*, expressing the course of time within the frame.’²⁵ Rhythm of a film is ‘determined not by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them’.²⁶ Importantly, Tarkovsky recognises the existence of ‘various time-pressures, which we could designate metaphorically as brook, spate, river, waterfall, ocean’.²⁷ These different time-flows constitute the unique rhythms of particular films. This is why Tarkovsky confesses that his professional task as a director is to create his own, ‘distinctive flow of time, and convey in the shot a sense of its movement – from lazy and soporific to stormy and swift’.²⁸ In his writings, Tarkovsky also offers a phenomenological description of the impact the film’s time-pressure has on the viewer’s experience of time. Commenting on Pascal Aubier’s short film *Le Dormeur* (1974), Tarkovsky writes:

‘First it shows the life of nature, majestic and unhurried, indifferent to human bustle and passions. Then the camera, controlled with virtuoso skill, moves to take in a tiny dot: a sleeping figure scarcely visible in the grass, on the slope of a hill. The dramatic denouement follows immediately. *The passing of time seems to be speeded*

²⁵ Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. K. H. Blair, University of Texas Press 1986, p. 113

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 120-121

up, driven on by our curiosity. It is as if we steal cautiously up to him along with the camera, and, as we draw near, we realise that the man is dead.’²⁹

Note that Aubier’s film consists only of one shot, which unfolds in a continuous pace; and yet the development of the film – or its unique rhythm – comprises a transition from the ‘unhurried’ time-pressure of the opening, to an accelerated time-pressure towards the end (or, to use the metaphors of a flow introduced by Tarkovsky, we encounter a movement from a ‘river’ to a ‘waterfall’). This change in pace is not achieved by a modification in film-time: the pace of the single shot remains the same throughout. As Tarkovsky observes, that which changes the movement of time is *our curiosity* – even though the time of the film continues in a monotonous tempo, the time of the curious viewer has speeded up. In other words, it is the rhythm of time-consciousness which becomes modified by the images of the film, and it is this rhythm which, in turn, structures the unfolding of Aubier’s work. Put in more technical terms: the immanent act of an interested perception has an effect on the pace of absolute consciousness, accelerating its flowing. The acceleration of flowing, in turn, has an effect on the pace of the film.

Another example of a deformed experience of time is offered by Stefano Micali. Drawing on the work of Ludwig Binswanger, Micali observes that melancholic subjectivity temporalises itself according to a conditional expression ‘If I had only not. . .’ which alters the articulation of the flow:

‘When temporal consciousness exclusively attempts to find the open possibilities in the past, then the primal impression... disappears. The disturbance of one of the moments of the absolute flow of consciousness (in this specific case the retention) implies a disturbance of the whole intentional subjectivity. In my opinion, it is however illegitimate to speak of an empty protention, as Binswanger does in relation to the case of Cécile Münch. In this specific case the melancholic person is overwhelmed by an unbearable sense of guilt for a decision made in the past. The

²⁹ Ibid., p. 114 (my emphasis)

protentions here are not empty, but oriented to the past, or better, to an (impossible) *negation of a particular past event*.³⁰

In melancholia the unfolding of time-consciousness is directed towards the chain of retentions. Protention does not anticipate the future, but rather points towards what has been – the regretful decision made in the past. The future and past extensions of the now, therefore, become indistinguishable. What’s more, for the melancholic, the now itself disappears – melancholia replaces the experience of the present in primal impression with a retentionally preserved past event. In short, the melancholic lives retentionally – the threefold articulation of the flow is directed towards, and subordinated to, the past-phases of consciousness, and the guilt-inducing decision it harbours. Note that, in contrast to Tarkovsky, Micali thinks of the modification in the articulation of time-consciousness achieved in melancholia not in terms of rhythmical alterations, but, rather, as a change in the direction of flowing. The melancholic temporality is wholly turned towards the past.

A combination of the rhythmical and the directional changes of time-consciousness can be found in Levinas’s descriptions of the experience of fatigue. In *Existence and Existent*, Levinas writes:

‘In the midst of the advance over oneself and over the present, in the ecstasy of the leap which anticipates and bypasses the present, fatigue marks a delay with respect to oneself and with respect to the present. The moment by which the leap is yonder is conditioned by the fact that it is still on the hither side. What we call the dynamism of the thrust is made up of those two moments at the same time and is not constituted by the anticipation of the future, as the classical analyses, which neglect the phenomenon of fatigue, would have it. Effort is an effort of the present that lags behind the present.’³¹

Fatigue, according to Levinas, seems to slow down time – it is as if the now was moving too slowly for its completion, stretching itself out, preventing the next present from replacing it. Each now elapses with what seems like an effort, as if the very flowing of time

³⁰ S. Micali, ‘The Temporalizations of the Absolute Flow of Time-Consciousness’, p. 174

³¹ Emanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existent*, trans. A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press 2014, p. 20

was exerting. This delay in the passing of presents, in turn, obscures protention – we struggle to anticipate the end of what seems like a never-ending now. The now-phase has become all-encompassing – when fatigued we seem completely enclosed in the present. The fatigued now, then, is both unbearably sluggish and wholly enveloping. We can think here of the last hours of a long shift at work – we cannot wait to go home, yet whenever we check the clock, almost no time has passed. It is as if the shift kept extending, pushing to the distance the prospect of leaving the workplace – we are ‘stuck’ at work. When the shift finally ends, we are exhausted, as if we ourselves forced time to move forward.

As the examples of curiosity, melancholia, and fatigue demonstrate, the co-belonging of the absolute consciousness and immanent acts in the same stream of experiences allows for a modification of the articulation of time-consciousness by the affective inflection of immanent events. However, as noted in the previous section, the change in the articulation of time-consciousness can refer to two different types of modification: on the one hand, it can signify an alteration in the dynamic functioning of the flow (its pace, direction, etc.); on the other, it can designate a change in the formal structure of the flow. As we have seen, Husserl maintains that both articulations are fixed. The examples offered by Tarkovsky, Micali, and Levinas do not question Husserl’s thesis in its entirety – in fact, they only correct the Husserlian conviction with regards to the dynamic articulation of the flow. Time can flow slower or faster in various directions, depending on the experiences in which it is realised; nevertheless, the formal structure of the temporal form of self-awareness remains unchanged. The absent-minded listener, the curious viewer, and the melancholic subject, all experience time (however differently) through *the same* formal aspects of time-consciousness.³² Furthermore, since it is the formal structure of temporal self-awareness which neutralises

³² Micali himself seems to fall prey to the equivocation of the concept of temporal modification: even though he rightly notes that ‘the way in which the intertwining between primal impression, retention and protention comes alive is different in the different experiences,’ he is mistaken to suggest that, because of these differences, time-consciousness should no longer be conceived as an ‘invariant form.’ His examples only show that the invariant form of time-consciousness can undergo a dynamic modification, which leaves the structure of temporal experience intact. (Cf. S. Micali, ‘The Temporalizations of the Absolute Flow of Time-Consciousness,’ p. 178)

novelty, the dynamic modification of time-consciousness with no effect on its form is unable to account for radically new experiences. As long as self-awareness is unitary and continuous it remains incompatible with novelty – whether fast or slow, past- or present-directed, a synchronic flow cannot accommodate the new. In the next two sections, I will examine experiences which may be able to challenge the synchrony of time-consciousness, thus opening consciousness to novel experiences.

3.3 Deformalised experiences of time: death, fecundity

Recall that the synchrony of time-consciousness is secured and maintained by three aspects of the temporal form of self-awareness, which together disallow for the experience of radical novelty: 1) a continuous striving for fulfilment of protentional retentions, that is to say, for a self-presence in the now. This ‘tendency’ makes possible the first part of Held’s critique we examined in the last chapter – since the now is only a result of a striving for fulfilment of a prior expectation, no new now can be radically new. 2) The horizontal articulation of the flow which unifies all conscious experiences, including those no-longer and not-yet present. As Held rightly pointed out, the now can be experienced only on a basis of a pre-existing arrangement of horizontally unified retentions and protentions, which motivate or predetermine the emergence of the new present, thus extinguishing its newness. 3) In anticipating the future, consciousness anticipates its own survival and presence in that future. The self-proclaimed immortality of consciousness means that the hope for a future novelty which somehow escapes extinction in the present self-experience is vain. The impossibility of absolutely new experience cannot be revoked – since the future implies the presence of my consciousness, no future novelty can be exempt from the process of neutralisation my consciousness effects. This third aspect of time-consciousness, therefore, seals the inevitability of the processes which disallow for the experience of radical novelty. In order to overcome the synchrony of temporal self-awareness and allow for novelty, an

experience has to put into question all three of the formal aspects of time-consciousness: the striving for fulfilment in the present; the horizontal unification of the past, present, and future experiences; and a self-projection into the infinite future.

Throughout his work, Levinas sees *alterity* as a potential source of the modification of the formal articulation of temporal self-awareness. I believe that he is correct – the synchrony of time-consciousness *can* be overcome in the experiences of otherness. However, as I will show in this section, not *every* type of alterity is able to put into question the three aspects of time-consciousness; consequently, not every encounter with otherness is able to account for the experiences of radical novelty.

In the period leading up to, and including, *Totality and Infinity*, it is the *future* which furnishes a paradigmatic example of alterity – in *Time and the Other* Levinas unequivocally states: the ‘other is the future’.³³ Note that Levinas distinguishes between protentional future and the ‘authentic future’ – while the former belongs to the horizons of conscious life, the latter is in some sense external to them. The notion of the ‘authentic future’ resembles that of the ‘future as such,’ which I introduced in my discussion of Hägglund’s account of temporality. However, as I demonstrated in sec. 2.4, despite Hägglund’s claims to the contrary, the future as such constitutes a moment interior to consciousness. By contrast, the Levinasian authentic future signifies a future radically exterior to the everyday functioning of subjectivity. The exteriority of the authentic future, in turn, ties together the notions of alterity and novelty: since authentic future comes from *beyond* the anticipatory horizons of conscious life, it is both other than consciousness and ‘absolutely surprising’³⁴ – the authentic future ‘is what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us.’³⁵

In *Time and the Other*, the concrete example of the relationship with the authentic future is constituted by the event of death. Death ‘is absolutely other,’ it ‘bears alterity not as

³³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. R. A. Cohen, Duquesne University Press 2013, p. 77

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 77

a provisional determination... but as something whose very existence is made of alterity.³⁶ This is because death cannot ‘be anticipated – that is, grasped’.³⁷ Due to its essential ungraspability, death does ‘not enter into a present’³⁸ – it remains eternally futural, outside of the horizons of my conscious life. ‘When death is here,’ Levinas writes, ‘I am no longer here’.³⁹ The authentic future of death, then, seems to challenge all three aspects of time-consciousness, and in so doing, to open subjectivity to an experience of radical novelty: since death is incompatible with my self-presence, it can neither take place in the present, nor can it be horizontally unified; furthermore, death puts an end to the projected immortality of consciousness – death is a future event incompatible with my future presence.

However, in order to be *experienced*, the novelty of death *must* enter into a relationship with the present – otherwise its alterity will remain a mere abstract conjecture beyond the scope of phenomenological scrutiny. As Levinas himself points out, the ‘description of the phenomenon of death is made while one is alive.’⁴⁰ This condition seems to generate a difficulty: temporal self-experience has to include that which, in principle and by definition, is exterior to consciousness. Levinas seems to be aware of this problem; in order to illustrate the paradoxical relation of death to conscious life, he evokes Macbeth:

‘Had not the witches predicted that a man of woman born could do nothing against Macbeth? But here is Macduff, who was not of woman born. Death is coming now. “Accursed by that tongue that tells”, cries Macbeth to Macduff who learns of his power over him “for it hath cow’d my better part of man... I’ll not fight with thee”... This is what I have called the “end of virility.” But immediately hope is reborn, and here are Macbeth’s last words: “Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane, and thou oppos’d, being of no woman born, yet I will try the last.” Prior to death there is always a last chance; that is what heroes seize, not death. The hero is the one who always glimpses a last chance the one who obstinately finds chances... Hope is not added to death by a sort of *salto mortale*, by a sort of inconsequence; it is in the very

³⁶ E. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 74

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72

⁴⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘The Philosopher and Death’, in *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. M. B. Smith, The Athlone Press 1999, p. 154

margin that is given, at the moment of death, to the subject who is going to die. *Spiro/spero* [If I breathe, I hope].⁴¹

When Macbeth realises the imminence of his death, he resigns himself to it (“I’ll not fight with thee”). This, as Levinas observes, lasts only for a moment – almost immediately, Macbeth regains hope. A sense of a last chance, of still having time – in a word, a non-acceptance of death – replaces the experience of dying. Importantly, for Levinas, the hope which conjures away the inevitability of death is essential to the experience of the latter. In fact, it is hope, *and not death*, which is grasped in the final hour. Death remains ungraspable.

Death, then, seems to establish a relation with my present through an experience of resignation and hope. But if this is so, the formal structure of time-consciousness is *not* challenged: both resignation and hope are easily inscribed within the standard articulation of the flow. Resignation presupposes a sense of having a future – in order to accept whatever may come, a remnant of time is needed to welcome my fate. There is a horizon of protentions even in resignation. And what is this anticipatory horizon if not a hope that this moment is not my last? Hope, through which the novelty of death is to be experienced, would define and animate protentions – in fact, hope would be equivalent to the self-projection of subjectivity into the immediate and the infinite future. In effect, the experiences which announce the alterity of death cannot accommodate novelty: resignation and hope confirm and solidify the protentional, horizontally unifiable experience of the future in relation with the present – thus affirming the formal aspects of time-consciousness, and the concomitant impossibility of the new. In an interview given four decades after the publication of *Time and the Other*, Levinas concedes: ‘Don’t negation and annihilation leave in place the stage on which negations and annihilations are played out? Isn’t the outside inside, in a sense? Aren’t we always enclosed within existence? No escape.’⁴²

⁴¹ E. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, pp. 72-73

⁴² E. Levinas, ‘The Philosopher and Death’, pp. 156-157

The paradoxical structure of the authentic future – as both within and beyond the present experience – is taken up again by Levinas in his analysis of fecundity and the ‘infinite time’ (or ‘absolute future’) it introduces. Fecundity marks an advance with regards to the discussion of the authentic future of death. Here, in contrast to the event of death, the alterity of the future is not understood merely negatively, as ungraspable. Rather, Levinas writes that the ‘relation with the child – that is, the relation with the other that is not a power, but fecundity – establishes *relationship* with the absolute future, or infinite time.’⁴³ The (impossible) structure of death as both within and outside of my conscious life, becomes reformulated as the very form of fecundity: the infinite future, realised concretely in the event of having a child, is both ‘my own and non-mine,’⁴⁴ that is to say, it is both *outside* and *in relation* to my present. This is because the child is at once other than me, and yet, in an important sense ‘I am my child’⁴⁵ – the child ‘is me a stranger to myself.’⁴⁶ This means that the child’s future *is* and *isn’t* my own. The child, insofar as he or she is me, ‘extends’ my own time, stretching my temporal horizons; however, insofar as the child will live after my death, his or her future lies beyond my time. By opening consciousness to a future beyond its horizons, fecundity seems to create a temporal experience which is both continuous with (that is to say, experienceable by) and discontinuous with the parent. The event of having a child, then, seems to constitute an experience of radical novelty: I experience my child’s future as something which cannot be anticipated, i.e. as something absolutely novel. Put more technically, the deformalisation of time in fecundity seems to create a change in the structure of time-consciousness: the protentional chain limited by the future horizon is in some sense doubled up; this doubling, however, removes the horizon which limits protentions, allowing an infinite extension of the new protentional chain – an extension which refuses horizontal unification. In consequence, the doubling up and ‘infinite’ of my protentions allows for the novelty exterior to, or discontinuous with, time-consciousness to enter into a relationship with

⁴³ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 268 (my emphasis)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 267

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 277

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 267

my present experience. This is why Levinas maintains that the future of the child ‘is my adventure still... my future in a very new sense, despite the discontinuity.’⁴⁷

Insofar as the child’s future cannot be unified in the horizontal articulation of the flow, infinite time seems to put into question the formal articulation of time-consciousness, and in so doing, to open temporal experience to the futural alterity of novelty. However, I would like to argue that fecundity *does not* manage to challenge the form of temporal experience, and that, consequently, it proves unable to ground the possibility of the new. This is because the continuity between my and the child’s times necessitates a *repetition* in the child’s future, of all three novelty-neutralising aspects of time-consciousness identified above.

In some sense, my present begins anew in the child’s time. This possibility is the condition of the continuity between the parent’s and the child’s respective lives: ‘Recommencement in discontinuous time brings youth, and thus the infinition of time.’⁴⁸ But if the child resuscitated my present, isn’t the latter renewed with the same neutralising processes which characterise the present as such, and which extinguish the novelty of primal impression? The supposed novelty of the child’s future, in fact, constitutes an extension of the same impossibility to experience the new – whether in the parent or in the child, the fulfilment of retentional protentions renders radical novelty non-experienceable. Furthermore, the incessant renewal of the present motivates the protentional self-projection into the infinite future. It is because the present *will be* renewed again, that consciousness can posit itself in the future as ‘there’: to ‘be infinitely – infinition – means to exist without limits, and thus in the form of an origin, a commencement’.⁴⁹ In other words, the ‘youthfulness’ of the present assures consciousness of its immortality. This means that, in a sense, consciousness exists ‘without limits’, in an infinite time, even prior to the event of having a child – the horizon which is supposed to limit protentions, already attests to an infinity of

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 268

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 284

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 281

future experiences. The doubling up of the protentional chain in fecundity would constitute merely a reiteration of consciousness's own infinity; parenthood would then be only a natural extension of the parent's self-projection – a self-projection which *disallows* for the appearance of future novelty. Moreover, the relation to my child (which, for Levinas, is a 'continuation across... rupture'⁵⁰), is also a relation of the child to me. For the child to be *my* child, his or her time must to some degree be related to my time – despite the 'rupture' between them, my time constitutes a past extension of the child's temporality. This would imply that the child's future is in some sense *motivated by* its past. This, in turn, renders infinite time structurally indistinguishable from my horizontally articulated future – both emerge *prefigured* by their pasts, and thus can never be radically novel. In short, the relationship with the time of the child cannot account for the possibility of the new; in fact, infinite time extends and repeats the three aspects of time-consciousness which make novelty impossible.⁵¹

As DeRoo observes, modelling the alterity of novelty on the relationship with the future is in 'keeping with our common understanding of time... While the present is currently here, and the past has already happened, the future alone is that which is not-yet and hence that which we cannot know.'⁵² However, despite its intuitive appeal, the conception of futural novelty is ultimately unsatisfactory – when experienced, futural alterity repeats the neutralising processes of the present, and as such, is unable to accommodate for radically new experiences. The fact that future alterity cannot sufficiently modify the structure of time-consciousness suggests that, in order to account for the new, we should look for experiences of alterity unrelated to the future. My hypothesis is that it is the otherness of the *past* which harbours a potential to challenge the structure of time-consciousness, and that, in

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 284

⁵¹ This is not the most problematic aspect of 'Beyond the Face'. The last section of *Totality and Infinity* has been criticised most widely for its gendered language and sexist overtones (to say the least). Cf. Tina Chanter, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, Pennsylvania State University Press 2001; Claire Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine*, Indiana University Press 2003; Eric Severson, *Levinas's Philosophy of Time: Gift, Responsibility, Diachrony, Hope*, Duquesne University Press 2013

⁵² Neal DeRoo, *Futurity in Phenomenology: Promise and Method in Husserl, Levinas, and Derrida*, Fordham University Press 2013, p. 74

consequence, novelty comes to us from the past. This perhaps counter-intuitive turn towards the past for the sake of the new, can also be found in Levinas's later work. In the next section, I will consider the experience of ageing as it is analysed by Levinas and Catherine Malabou. I will show that the alterity of the event of ageing, by putting into question the synchrony of temporal self-awareness, constitutes an example of a past novelty.

3.4 *Deformalised experiences of time: ageing*

Malabou distinguishes between two ways of conceptualising growing older. The first, she remarks, 'is inconceivable apart from the gradual movement of "becoming-old."' This is ageing as a steady process in which we slowly lose hair, put on weight, become wrinkled and weaker – this conception of growing older is comparable to a descent of a plane 'which, without necessarily being linear or without turbulence, nevertheless proceeds through an orderly traversing of subsequent stages.'⁵³ The second way to understand ageing is as an *event* – a 'sudden rupture or flight crash, if you like.' Here we no longer conceive of ageing as a slow yet inevitable becoming-old, but rather 'as an unexpected, sudden metamorphosis, like the ones we sometimes read about: "her hair went white overnight."' ⁵⁴ This conception of ageing is present in a scene from *One More Time with Feeling* (2016), a recent documentary about the life of the musician Nick Cave, where the protagonist looks into the camera examining his wrinkles, and asks: 'When the fuck did I get old?' – as if the event of ageing was an upsetting and surprising accident which took place suddenly, unnoticed or behind his back. For Malabou, the two conceptions of ageing are complementary – any attempt to think of ageing as *either* a process *or* an event would result in an incomplete picture. Ageing is a complex phenomenon in which the continuity of its process doesn't

⁵³ Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. C. Shread, Polity Press 2012, p. 40

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41

preclude a possibility of a sudden discontinuity of its event: ‘Even in the most peaceful ageing there will always be an accidental, catastrophic dimension.’⁵⁵

Interestingly, Levinas’s (slightly more technical and definitely less focused) descriptions of ageing found in *Otherwise than Being* seem to endorse a position very close to Malabou’s:

‘Temporalization as lapse, the loss of time, is neither an initiative of an ego, nor a movement toward some telos of action. The loss of time is not the work of a subject... Time passes. This synthesis which occurs *patiently*, called with profundity passive synthesis, is ageing. It breaks up under the weight of years, and is irreversibly removed from the present, that is, from re-presentation. In self-consciousness there is no longer a *presence* of self to self, but senescence. It is as senescence beyond the recuperation of memory that time, lost time that does not return, is a diachrony, and concerns me.’⁵⁶

On the one hand, ageing is a necessary counterpart to the fact that ‘time passes’: minute after minute, day after day, I – with patience and without resistance – become older. Here, the continuity of time makes possible the inscription of each new moment into the arc of my life as retention, and, then, as memory ready to be remembered in the future. Levinas, following Husserl, calls this process ‘passive synthesis,’ which, for both, names the regular flowing of time-consciousness. On the other hand, ageing is an event which takes place unnoticed or behind my back. I can never witness the exact moment at which I aged; in fact, when I realised that I have aged, I am already too late – the event has already taken place. Levinas calls it a *lapse* of time – similarly to a record which skips and loses a note, time-consciousness skips and loses an instant. Moreover, and contrary to any Proustian sentiments, the moment at which I aged cannot be remembered – since the event of ageing takes place behind the back of my present, it cannot be retained nor preserved in memory. In Levinas’s parlance, the event of ageing is *immemorial*. When, for the first time, I noticed my receded hairline, I couldn’t recall when exactly I had lost my hair – the skipped instant has been lost

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41

⁵⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press 2006, pp. 51-52

and it cannot be retrieved by remembrance. The event of ageing is foreign to both my present (I haven't witnessed it) and my retained past (I cannot recall it). The event of ageing is also different from my past far horizon: whereas the latter constitutes an experience of an *indeterminate* past as such, ageing is a *determined* past event, which, nevertheless, cannot be located in my (memorable) past – even though I know that I aged sometime in the past, the exact moment at which it happened escapes me. The fact that ageing involves a lapse of time, which, moreover, cannot be recovered in memory nor reduced to the indeterminate past, attests to its otherness: ageing *qua* event is an example of a past alterity experienceable by me in its exteriority to my manifest conscious life.

In contrast to Malabou, for Levinas, the event of ageing, and the loss of time it involves, is not an *accident* which befalls consciousness. On the contrary, ageing *qua* event is inextricably bound up with ageing *qua* process: for the most part, each present is retained and turned into a potential memory; some moments, however, instead of being preserved, are irreversibly lost – the passive synthesis of time (i.e. the regular functioning of time-consciousness) inevitably 'breaks up under the weight of years, and is irreversibly removed from the present'. It is as if subjectivity was too full and despite itself needed to throw up the indigestible time.⁵⁷ Two conclusions can be drawn here: firstly, since the immemorial event of ageing is a function of my temporal self-experience, it occurs *regularly*; it follows, then, that I age more than once and on a regular basis. (I realised that I have aged when I noticed my receded hairline; I have aged again, when I found my first grey hairs; I will have aged again when I spot wrinkles on my face). Secondly, if, as Levinas maintains, the loss of time is a regular occurrence, then we can no longer conceive of temporal self-awareness as *fully* present to itself. Rather, temporal self-awareness is *senescence*: a continuous form of self-manifestation interrupted by moments of discontinuity, in which time is lost and cannot be recuperated by memory. We can think here of the film *Synecdoche New York* (2008) in which

⁵⁷ The nauseous reaction (or the 'throwing up' of time) is related to the ethical aspects of the lapse of time (cf. sec. 4.2). The relationship between nausea and ethics is noted by Levinas in *On Escape*, where nausea is described as 'phenomenon of shame of a self confronted with itself'. (Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. B. Bergo, Stanford University Press 2003, pp. 67-68)

the continuity between scenes is regularly disturbed by the realisation (of both the characters and the viewers) that a chunk of time – never seen and thus irrevocably lost – had taken place between the current and the previous scene. The process of ageing, then, is lived through at every moment; the events of ageing, by contrast, ‘have properly speaking never been lived.’ ‘Something takes place between the dusk...and the dawn in which consciousness returns to itself, but already too late for the event which is moving away.’⁵⁸ In addition, the alterity of ageing can help us to rethink the alterity of death, which, as I argued in the previous section, becomes neutralised by experiences of resignation and hope. The event of ageing is incompatible with my self-presence – even though it is *my* experience, it cannot be witnessed; likewise the event of death is incompatible with my self-presence – even though it is *my* experience, it cannot be witnessed. Understood on the basis of the event of ageing, death becomes experienceable precisely in its exteriority to manifestation and presence. The alterity of ageing is a precursor of the alterity of death.

Importantly for our purposes, ageing enacts a *structural* modification of time-consciousness – ageing bypasses and opposes all three aspects of synchronic temporality, thus challenging both the continuity and the unity of temporal self-awareness. In other words, the event of ageing, by taking place outside of the neutralising processes of time-consciousness, constitutes an example of a radically new experience. Insofar as the event of ageing involves a lapse of time, it takes place ‘behind’ the present – the event of ageing, then, interrupts the continual fulfillment of retentional protentions; insofar as the event of ageing is immemorial, it cannot be inscribed in the unifying horizon of (memorable) conscious life. Moreover, the event of ageing puts into question the infinite self-projection of consciousness: my past contains an experience to which I wasn’t present; it is possible, therefore, that my future will involve an experience of the same type. The event of ageing appears outside of both the *continuity* of the present and the *unity* of past and future horizons – in short, ageing subjectivity appears to itself as both *discontinuous* and *disjointed*. The event of ageing, then,

⁵⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Phenomenon and Enigma’, in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press 2013, p. 68

plays a double role: on the one hand, by virtue of bypassing the novelty-neutralising processes of time-consciousness, it constitutes a radically novel past experience;⁵⁹ on the other hand, since ageing subjectivity is co-constituted by an event which challenges its synchrony, ageing reveals a new form of discontinuous and dislodged self-awareness. Levinas calls this transformed structure of time *diachrony* – ‘a disjunction of identity where the same does not rejoin the same’,⁶⁰ marked by ‘the impossibility of the dispersion of time to assemble itself in the present’.⁶¹

The structural modification of time-consciousness has a concrete effect on subjective life – as Levinas observes in the passage above, *diachrony concerns me*. Levinas’s claim can be understood in two interrelated ways: firstly, *diachrony is my concern* because it pertains to my consciousness – it is my self-awareness which becomes discontinuous and non-unitary; secondly, however, the fact that something which is my concern took place in secrecy, unnoticed, and behind my back, unnerves me and *leaves me concerned* – insofar as *diachrony* comprises a disturbing event, which, moreover, cannot be remembered, it is the cause of my concern. Thus, to experience myself diachronically is to experience myself as concerned *with* myself and *by* myself. However, to experience myself as concerned is to experience myself as *no longer bored*. The feeling of concern breaks up the monotony of my conscious life – something unexpected has taken place, and it concerns me. The transition from a synchronic to a diachronic temporal self-awareness, then, changes the experience of boredom into concern.

⁵⁹ Note that this past novelty is different to the past novelty I dismissed in sec. 2.7. There, past novelty signified a retentionally preserved present; here, by contrast, past novelty skips the present and thus cannot be preserved in retention.

⁶⁰ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 52

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 38

3.5 Deformalisation of time and affection

Deformalisation of time reveals temporal self-awareness to be responsive to, and modifiable by, concrete events. Time can flow faster or slower, and in various directions; in addition, time-consciousness can be destructured by experiences which resist its regular structural features. As we saw in the previous section, the structural modification of time is equivalent to an emergence of a new, diachronic form of temporal self-awareness, in which my sense of self is co-constituted by an immemorial event I never witnessed, but which, nevertheless, concerns me. Even though I continue to experience myself as temporally extended, in contrast to synchronic types of individuation, I also experience myself as disjointed and discontinuous. I will refer to the individuating process which results in a dispersed sense of oneself as *desubjectification*.

On the one hand, desubjectification seems incompatible with *temporal* subjectification – whereas the latter produces a unified and continuous sense of self, the former disrupts both the unity and continuity of self-awareness. On the other hand, and insofar as it is a disruption of subjectification, desubjectification presupposes the synchrony of time – as we observed in the previous section, the discontinuous event of ageing is inseparable from the continuous process of ageing which it interrupts. A similar relation can be found between desubjectification and *affective* subjectification; on the one hand, diachronic self-experience, insofar as it is temporal, constitutes a case of an extended and non-identical self-manifestation, in conflict with the punctuality of affective identity; on the other hand, desubjectification presupposes affectivity – as Levinas himself notes, the diachrony of ageing is experienced affectively, as concern. However, this suggests that, in contrast to its effect on temporal synchrony, the diachrony of ageing is unable to interrupt the synchrony of affection. Concern, like any transitory affect, contributes to the permanency of the originary impression; since the immemorial event of ageing concerns me, and concern is

an affect, concern over ageing sustains the identity of affective self-presence. The emergence of a *new* temporal experience helps to preserve the *old* form of affectivity – diachrony, insofar as it involves concern, is recuperated by, and thus complicit in, the synchrony of affectivity. This fact helps to explain why, when I realise I have aged, I still experience myself as identical to myself – since ageing concerns me, my affective self-awareness continues undisturbed, despite the temporal dispersion. Subjectivity, then, remains *overindividuated* – diachrony both desubjectifies and, insofar as it comprises an affective dimension, contributes to the process of affective subjectification.

Ageing is not the only deformed experience of time related to affection – in fact, *all* the temporal experiences considered above involved an affective dimension. As noted in sec. 3.2, curiosity, melancholia, and fatigue are examples of affective inflections of immanent acts; death, whether considered in sec. 3.3 or sec. 3.4, implies the affective attitudes of either resignation and hope or concern; fecundity seems inconceivable without an affective relation with the child. The prevalence of affection amongst experiences with a potential for engendering temporal changes, suggests that the modifications in the experience of time cannot be separated from affectivity – a temporal alteration implies a concomitant presence of affection. Moreover, since transitory affects preserve the originary impression and the affective self-identity it secures, temporal modifications, or, rather, their affective dimension, is also complicit in maintaining affective self-awareness with its synchronic processes.

The above conclusion, in turn, has consequences for the possibility of radically new experiences. The discovery of a diachronic temporality allowed us to secure the *temporal* possibility of the new. However, in sec. 2.7, I showed that novelty is disallowed by the synchrony of *both* temporal *and* affective forms of self-awareness – without a non-synchronic affection, the experience of novelty can only be *partial*, since anything new will be recuperated and neutralised by the sameness of affective self-presence. The event of ageing, although successful in opposing the unity and continuity of time, is unable to challenge the synchrony of affection; in fact, insofar as it involves concern, the temporal novelty of ageing

confirms, and contributes to, the affective form of self-awareness – that is to say, to the very processes which render novelty impossible in the first place. Ageing, then, can be unexpected and novel, but only sometimes, and never in a radical sense. Its relation to affection makes temporal novelty into an experience of what Natalie Depraz calls a ‘micro-rupture’ – a ‘mild’ discontinuity or dislocation almost immediately neutralised and incorporated into the continuous and unitary form of affective self-experience. For Depraz, temporal diachrony would be ‘a kind of newness that is always bound.’⁶²

Depraz concludes by suggesting that, since the new is always bound or partial, the notion of *absolute* novelty is ‘at base abstract’⁶³ – only experiences of mild surprises are subjectively possible. Contrary to Depraz, I believe that radical novelty *can* be experienced. As I will show in the next chapter, responsibility for the other is able to challenge the synchrony of *both* the temporal *and* the affective forms of self-awareness. Responsibility transforms our self-experience by producing a radically new form of self-awareness – one which gives rise to a fully desubjectified sense of self, in which subjectivity appears both temporally diachronic and affectively dislodged. This new form of non-synchronic self-awareness, in turn, accounts for a possibility of absolute novelty. In the next chapter, then, the search for the new becomes motivated by responsibility, because responsibility itself constitutes a case of a radically novel experience.

⁶² Natalie Depraz, ‘Phenomenology of Surprise’, in *Advancing Phenomenology: Essays in Honour of Lester Embree*, ed. T. Nenon and E. Blosser, Springer 2010, p. 233

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 233

Chapter 4: Ethics

In ch. 3, I argued that certain experiences are able to modify the temporal form of self-awareness; I then showed that the event of ageing produces a new experience of time, able to overcome the unity and continuity of time-consciousness. However, by virtue of being experienced as a source of my concern, the event of ageing was unable to challenge the synchrony of affective self-presence – concern, like any transitory affect, facilitates the unity and continuity of the originary impression. Ageing, therefore, cannot constitute a case of radical novelty: since in interrupting temporal synchrony, ageing contributes to affective self-identity, it can only be experienced as a ‘bound’ or ‘partial’ novelty.

In this chapter, I will argue that the synchrony of self-awareness is overcome in the experience of responsibility for the other. Responsibility presupposes a transformation of self-experience, and an emergence of new, non-synchronic form of self-awareness. In consequence, responsibility allows me to rediscover the other in a radically new attitude – my encounter with the other in responsibility, then, constitutes an example of an absolute novel experience. In order to defend my claim, I will demonstrate that it is possible for the experience of the other to have an impact on both my temporal and affective self-awareness. I then examine the way in which the other’s face can trigger my guilt, and how the experience of guilt can lead to the experience of responsibility. I conclude by suggesting an ethical hierarchy of the forms of self-awareness: as I will show in the last section, non-synchronic self-experience is ethically *better* than its synchronic counterparts.

4.1 *The face of the other*

In ch. 2, I argued that time-consciousness is a condition for the experience of the other in two interrelated ways: firstly, insofar as the other appears in time, her appearance is made possible by my temporal self-awareness; secondly, time-consciousness provides a template for the experience of the other. In sec. 2.5, I demonstrated that the appearance of the other involves a degree of constitutive non-presence: although the other appears as having a conscious life, her life can never be given directly; rather, the other's life is accessed in its inaccessibility, or present as absent. For Husserl, this likens the experience of the other to memory, in which I experience something as no longer there. As we have seen, de Warren corrects Husserl's 'instructive comparison' by suggesting that a more productive parallel can be drawn between the experience of the other and far retention. Importantly, both Husserl and de Warren link the appearance of the other to subjectivity's past experiences – whether in far retention and memory, the absence of the other is prefigured by the absence of my past. I believe that the affinity between the non-presence of the other and my past experiences, pointed out by both Husserl and de Warren, is not accidental. The appearance of the other is related to my past, because the face of the other implies *its own past* – in fact, it is the absence of the other's past which contributes to the other's constitutive non-presence. In other words, far retention – i.e. an aspect of my past self-awareness – can serve as a template for the experience of another person because the latter's appearance implies its own past. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate, both far retention and the other's past can provoke an affective reaction – they can both be the source of my interest and indifference. I will then argue that far retention is not the only past experience which prefigures the encounter with the other – the event of ageing we examined in the last chapter, can also play a role of a precursor of intersubjective experiences. Moreover, the other's past can provoke an affective reaction analogous to the affective effects of ageing. As result, I can find myself concerned with the other. However, none of the responses mentioned above can put into question the

synchrony of the affective form of self-awareness – by virtue of being affective, these experiences confirm the unity and continuity of the originary impression. I will conclude this section by suggesting that the past of the other is also able to provoke my responsibility, and that, in contrast to other affects, responsibility challenges the synchrony of affective self-presence.

However youthful the other person seems, her face appears *aged*. The blemishes, grey hair, and wrinkles I notice when I see the other attest to the inevitable passage of time. Even the faces of the relatively young have aged: a teenager is no longer a child; an adult is no longer a teenager, etc. As Levinas puts it, the other's 'young epiphany, the still essential beauty of a face... is already past in this youth; the skin is with wrinkles, a trace of itself'.¹ The other's youth is visible precisely as 'leaving' the other's current countenance; it is as if we caught the other's younger self 'in withdrawal' – the signs of ageing (wrinkles, blemishes, etc.) are traces of this 'withdrawal' of the other's youth. This suggests that the aged face of the other implies its own past – a past which, although gone, is nevertheless visible in the traces it left behind, and which make up the other's present countenance. The other's past, then, contributes to the other's non-presence – the other's past life (in addition to her current life) is present as absent. This, in turn, can help to explain why it is the experience of the past which, for both Husserl and de Warren, constitute a template for intersubjective encounters – the experience of the other is itself an experience of a past, albeit the experience of the *other's* past. Moreover, as I will show below, the experience of my past can produce a variety of affective reactions, which can also be found in the experience of the other's past. The different affective responses to the other's past, in turn, can help us to account for the various modalities in which we encounter the other.

¹ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 90

A) Interest and indifference

Since the content of memory involves an explicit reference to being mine (a reference which, by definition, is absent from my experience of the other's life), de Warren is right to suggest that, instead, intersubjective encounters should be compared to far retention. Because the experience of the latter is a present experience of an absent content, far retention provides a more successful template for understanding the particular way in which the other appears. However, it strikes me that de Warren didn't explore the connection between far retention and intersubjectivity sufficiently. In what follows, I will expand de Warren's analysis by showing that far retention can help us to account for two affective modalities in which we encounter the other: interest and indifference.

De Warren notes that retention is characterised by a 'double intentionality,' which preserves both the past *object* and *myself* as having experienced the object in the past. As de Warren puts it, 'retentional consciousness is both a retention of an elapsed now-phase as well as a self-retention'.² The double intentionality of retention, in turn, is a condition of memory: if retention preserved only the past object, I wouldn't be able to remember my experiences as my experiences; instead, I would reactivate only the object of a past experience, without a direct awareness of its owner (e.g. I would have a memory of walking in the park without knowing that it was me who walked in the park). This is exactly what disqualifies memory from offering a template for the experience of the other: in memory, the content of the experience is present, and given as mine. What distinguishes far retention from memory is that in the case of the former, there is no content which could be given as mine. This is not to say that I don't experience the *absence* of the object as mine: far retention, being a species of retentional consciousness, also involves a double intentionality which gives an object and myself – however, in contrast to retention which presents the just-passed object, far retention

² N. de Warren, *Husserl and the Promise of Time*, p. 190

is an awareness of myself experiencing a non-present object (as we have seen, de Warren illustrates far retention with an example of having his wife's name on the tip of his tongue – the name is present precisely in its resistance to being made present). In short, far retention is a two-aspect experience: on the one hand, it is an experience of an absent object; on the other hand, it is an experience of myself as conscious of the absent object.

Importantly, as I demonstrated in sec. 2.4, far retention constitutes the outer horizon of conscious life – far retention marks the point at which my self-experience becomes increasingly indeterminate, and where it is sedimented awaiting future reactivation. Furthermore, as I argued in sec. 3.1, the givenness of far retention as my past horizon exceeds, and thus is *not* co-extensive with, far retention as the object: I have a tacit awareness of having a past, which lacks any determinate content. This would suggest that at a certain point, far retention ceases to be a two-aspect experience of the object *and* myself, and, instead, becomes a single-aspect experience of myself, or, more specifically, of my past as such – the awareness of the object fades, leaving only my awareness of having a past devoid of content.

However, if far retention covers *two* experiences (namely, the experience of an absent object and an experience of a contentless past), it becomes unclear which of the two experiences is to provide a template for the encounter with the other. Since in both of its forms far retention is a present experience of an absence, the question then becomes: is the experience of the other an experience of a determinate absence, comparable to the object of far retention, or does the other appear as an indeterminate absence, akin to the indeterminacy of my past horizon? What adds complexity to the issue is that far retention *qua* object and far retention *qua* past as such have radically different affective effects on subjectivity: recall that de Warren characterises the determinate absence of his wife's name as 'a condition of inner restlessness; the empty consciousness of the forgotten name "begs," so to speak, to be remembered. I become single-mindedly preoccupied, indeed, obsessed, with remembering

my wife's name.³ By contrast, the experience of the indeterminate past horizon, as a constitutive feature of the regularly functioning time-consciousness, doesn't produce the same fixation – if it did, I would be constantly preoccupied with having a past (which I am not when, for instance, I worry about my future). In fact, my interest in the wife's name presupposes my indifference to the past of the horizon from which the name 'wants to' be excavated – my sense of having a past is an implicit or indeterminate background of the determinate absence of the wife's name. We can, therefore, rephrase our initial question: if the non-presence of far retention is a precursor of the non-presence of other, is the latter a determinate absence with which I am preoccupied or is it, rather, an indeterminate absence to which I am indifferent? De Warren himself seems confused on this point – on the one hand, he wants to maintain that the other is a *determinate* absence; on the other hand, however, he claims that the other cannot have the same affective effect as the object of far retention, which, in turn, would liken intersubjective encounters to the *indeterminate* absence of the past horizon. Below, I will argue that the other can be experienced as both a determinate and an indeterminate non-presence, and that, in consequence, the other can be a source of both my interest and indifference. In other words, the two experiences of far retention offer templates for two experiences of the other.

The forgotten name of the wife preoccupies de Warren not because of 'the practical worry of avoiding her ire,' but, rather, because of the very character of its absence – it is as if the name on the tip of his tongue 'demanded' to be made present. We can explain this phenomenon by drawing on the Husserlian distinction between 'empty' and 'fulfilled' intentions – in an empty intention an object is present to consciousness indirectly; a fulfilled intention, by contrast, presents the object directly or 'in person' (e.g. when I cannot remember the wife's name, I intend it emptily; when I finally remember it, my empty intention becomes fulfilled). As de Warren notes, for Husserl, 'the relationship between empty and fulfilled consciousness is teleological' – the goal of an indirectly given object is to

³ Ibid., p. 191

be given directly. In other words, since the empty intention ‘wants to’ become fulfilled, an empty consciousness of something motivates its own fulfilment. The ‘inner restlessness’ caused by the wife’s name is simply an experience of the latter’s teleological striving – when I emptily intend the forgotten name, its emptiness calls for fulfillment. This is further attested to by the relief which ensues when de Warren finally remembers his wife’s name – ‘the tension of an empty intentionality becomes relaxed and “satisfied,” as Husserl would say’.⁴

If the determinate absence of far retention is to offer a template for the absence of the other, then the demand for fulfilment generated by far retention should also be found in the experience of the other. In other words, if I am preoccupied by the empty consciousness of far retention, I should also find myself preoccupied with the empty consciousness of the other. Earlier, I suggested that the other’s absence is co-constituted by her past – the other’s younger self is visible in the other’s aged countenance as ‘leaving’ her and becoming-past; the signs of ageing, then, are traces of the other’s past, which mark the other’s face with a tangible absence of her youth. I believe that when the absence of the other’s past is determinate, it is able to provoke an affective reaction analogous to the determinate absence of far retention – the other’s determinate past motivates its own fulfilment, and by ‘demanding’ to be made present, it becomes the source of my interest.

When I attend a school reunion, people’s faces, although for the most part recognisable, seem older. The moment I notice my friend, I immediately want to find out what happened in her life between now and our school days. It is as if the chunk of time we didn’t experience together – a chunk of time attested to by her aged face – contained a whole collection of exciting memories and experiences which I should hear about. This sense of curiosity is also present when later on I bump into someone I dislike. This person, in turn, awakens the worst parts of my personality, and so, I want to hear about disappointments, failures, and tribulations which haunted his life after school. In both cases, however, the past of another person interests me – it is as if the absent past of the other, implicit in her or his

⁴ Ibid., p. 191

appearance, wants to be recovered and witnessed. Note that the other's absence is determined in two interrelated ways, which motivate two interrelated types of fulfilment: firstly, the other's past is limited in advance by, on the one hand, the memory of our last meeting, and, on the other hand, our current conversation. These limits, in turn, create an impression that a finite number of recounted experiences would be able to fill up and remedy the absence of their past – by hearing about my friend's particular adventures, I would be able to traverse the distance between now and our previous encounter.⁵ This type of determination is also experienced in the encounter with a stranger – although the absence of the past of an unfamiliar other cannot be limited by the memory of our last meeting, the stranger's non-presence is delimited by the infinitesimal span of time which separates my first and my current perception, and which also 'wants to' be traversed. Secondly, the past of the other can be determined as a particular absent object – I want to hear *this* story, or learn more about *this* detail. In short, I find myself interested in a particular experience the other has undergone. Furthermore, the detail which initially triggered my interest, points to other, related details: when my friend tells me she has a partner, I ask where they met; when she answers, I ask about the partner's profession; when she tells me that, I pose another, related question. The particular experience of the other, then, seems to generate what we may call a 'horizon of determinate absence,' which, like a halo, surrounds the detail in the other's past, and points towards associated details which also call for fulfilment. Together, the determinate absent objects located in the time span limited by our past and current interactions (however infinitesimal or great), animate my interest – the determinate emptiness of the other's past 'demands' to be overcome and brought to presence.

The determinate absence of far retention is accompanied by what de Warren calls a 'consciousness of possibility,'⁶ which contributes to the empty intention's striving for fulfilment – since the wife's name *can*, in principle, be recalled, remembering it can preoccupy de Warren. Likewise, we can identify a 'consciousness of possibility' in the

⁵ In a case of a friend we see regularly, her past can be delimited by *any* of our previous encounters.

⁶ N. de Warren, *Husserl and the Promise of Time*, p. 191

interested experience of the other – since the details of the other’s past *can* be recounted, the experiences of the other can trigger our curiosity. However, the ‘consciousness of possibility’ is lacking in the experience of far retention *qua* the indeterminate past horizon. Because the awareness of my past as such is devoid of content, it follows that nothing in my past horizon could ‘demand’ fulfilment. Certainly, determinate past experiences can be reactivated, and thus made present; however, the indeterminate horizon from which the past experiences are excavated, remains unfulfillable – since there is nothing in the awareness of my past as such that could be made present, the consciousness of this past is always empty. My past horizon, then, is an experience of an indeterminate absence which does not call for fulfilment – I am never preoccupied with ‘remembering’ or ‘recalling’ my past as such, because in the case of the past horizon the possibility of fulfilment is ruled out in advance, and so, its absence doesn’t ‘expect’ to be made present. Most of the time, I am indifferent to my indeterminate past in a manner similar to the indifference I display towards the names of particular birds in a flock – I do not care about their names, because there are no names I could care about. This indifference can be found in the experience of the other: when the other’s past is experience as indeterminate, it also fails to ‘demand’ fulfilment.

On my way back home from the school reunion I find myself surrounded by people. Yet, they are unable to animate my interest in the same way as my old schoolmates did. In contrast to the aged faces of my friends, the passengers’ wrinkles and blemishes do not trigger any sense of curiosity. Even when someone bored of waiting for their stop strikes up a conversation with me, our exchange involves a degree of indifference: my curiosity about their life is merely an attempt at politeness; occasionally, I don’t even care to feign interest in their problems. I would like to suggest that my indifference to the people on the train is a result of the way they appear to me; more specifically, the absence characteristic of the passengers is experienced as indeterminate, and thus unable to motivate its fulfilment. In such cases, the other’s past doesn’t show up to me as referring to anything which could be made present – the other simply has a past devoid of content, and so, nothing in the other’s

indeterminate past could be fulfilled or made explicit. As de Warren puts it, 'I intend the Other in an empty consciousness... without a striving for fulfillment'.⁷ Consequently, I do not find myself preoccupied with my fellow passengers; their indeterminate past – or a past that doesn't 'want to' be brought to presence – provokes only my indifference.

However, as my conversations at the school reunion soon reveal, I can never know everything which took place in my friends life since we last saw each other: my friends' stories necessarily exclude some events and details – an infinite number of situations, people, and impressions which make up the other's past will never be made present. This means that the seemingly determinate emptiness of my friend's past, implies its own indeterminacy: a particular detail can be made explicit only by being 'excavated' from her indeterminate past. In analogy with sedimented objects awaiting their reactivation in the indeterminacy of the past horizon, the fulfillment of the other's determinate absence presupposes the unfulfillable emptiness of the other's past as such, from which it can be reactivated. This would suggest that there is always a degree of indifference in the interested interaction with the other – a degree proportionate to the experience of the other's indeterminate past. Conversely, more often than not, I am never completely indifferent to the people on the train – on most occasions, my eye will be caught by something about the other which, to a lesser or greater degree, could be of interest (a scar, a pair of glasses, a hair style, etc.). This detail, in turn, would point to other absent yet determinate aspect of their past – I wonder how they got their scar or where they bought their glasses. This suggests that, for the most part, the experience of the other's past consists of a mixture of indeterminate and determinate absences, which effects an affective reaction combining indifference and interest. Furthermore, it is also the case that the mixed affective reaction to the other can be different on different occasions; sometimes I find myself completely uninterested when my friend recounts her past adventures; other times, a conversation about the life of a fellow passenger on the train can be

⁷ Ibid., p. 248

truly fascinating. The experience of the other's determinate and indeterminate absences, then, can fluctuate between interest and indifference.

As I argued above, the experience of the other's non-presence can be understood as the experience of the other's past, analogous to the givenness of far retention. Furthermore, as I have shown, the absences of both far retention and the other's past can have affective effects: the mixture of determinate and indeterminate absences produces a mixed affection reaction, which combines interest and indifference. Importantly for our purposes, the above analyses presuppose the synchronic form of temporal self-awareness: insofar as the past of the other is correlated with the experience of far retention, it refers to time-consciousness, which is to say, to the unitary and continuous form of temporal self-experience. However, as I will argue in the next section, diachronic form of temporal self-awareness can also offer a template for the experience of the other.

B) Concern

I would like to suggest that the experience of the other's past can also be characterised in analogy with the experience of ageing. In sec. 3.4, with the help of Malabou and Levinas, I characterised ageing as a complex phenomenon which comprises a gradual process and a sudden event: I become older every day, but when I realise I've aged, I am surprised and unnerved – I feel like time has skipped, making me miss the moment at which I suddenly became older. The experience of ageing attests to the double character of the passage of time: the gradual process of becoming-older reflects the fact that time passes; the event which takes place behind my back, suggests that time is also lost. I believe that the aged face of the other can also be experienced as a process and an event. As we have seen, the other's absence is constituted by her youth 'withdrawing' from her current countenance – the other's past is visible in the trace this 'departure' has left behind. On the one hand, the wrinkles, blemishes, grey hair, etc., express the gradual process of becoming-old – the other's

youth inevitably leaves her every day, reflecting the continuous passage of time. There is nothing surprising about this process – when I go to a school reunion, I expect to see faces which aged proportionally to the time which has elapsed since our last encounter. On the other hand, however, when I do see my friends for the first time in years, the wrinkles and blemishes visible in their faces, shock me. Despite having expected to see older faces, the other's aged countenance surprises me – I have an impression that time has skipped and that the other, as Levinas puts it, has 'fallen into the past with an unrecuperable lapse.'⁸ It is as if the other's face has aged all of the sudden, and that, moreover, this event has taken place behind my back, completely unnoticed by me. The event of ageing is especially disturbing when it pertains to people I see regularly – when I suddenly realise that my parents, who I see daily, are no longer young, I am perplexed by the fact that I missed the moment at which they became old. Furthermore, I am unable to remember when this event took place – only yesterday, my parents seemed youthful. The event of ageing can also mark the face of a stranger – when on the train I see a passenger who I thought was my age, I am surprised when, upon the second look, I realise they are much older – it is as if, between my initial and my subsequent perception, their face has skipped a chunk of time. We can, therefore, speak of diachrony in the face of the other, analogous to the diachrony of self-experience introduced by the event of ageing: although the 'withdrawal' of the other's youth takes place gradually, it can also be experienced as a lapse of time, which cannot be recalled; moreover, the unwitnessed and lost chunk of time interrupts the continuity and unity of the other's past – the absence of the other comprises an immemorial event, whose exact occurrence cannot be located on the continuum of the other's past.

The past of the other, then, is constituted by three types of absences: firstly, there is the determinate absence of particular past events, which, in principle can be recalled; secondly, there is the indeterminate absence of their past as such, which cannot be made present; thirdly, there is the absence of the event of ageing – a determinate moment which,

⁸ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 89

nevertheless cannot be made present. Interestingly, insofar as the event of ageing it is a particular experience which took place sometime between then and now, its absence is determinate, and invites us to traverse the distance between our last and current encounter. However, in contrast to the details in the other's past which *can* be rendered explicit, it is impossible to fulfil the emptiness of the event of ageing – since the latter involves a lapse of time, there is no memory which could bring it to presence. In this respect, the event of ageing resembles the other's indeterminate past – both rule out the possibility of recollection because both lack the content which could be recollected. Paradoxically, then, the absence of the event of ageing appears at once determinate and indeterminate, fulfillable and unfulfillable: although it *should* be possible to overcome its absence, the event of ageing *cannot* be made present. I would like to suggest that this impossible demand for fulfilment produces a new affective reaction: the determinate character of the other's past is the source of my preoccupation; however, since the event of ageing cannot be recalled, my preoccupation with the other's past shouldn't be understood as an attempt at making the lost time present. On the contrary, I am preoccupied with the other's past, without being interested in overcoming its absence. In short, I am *concerned* with the other: their aged face troubles me, yet I do not simply want to find out what happened; rather, I find myself gripped by an event in the other's face which escaped me. Recall that *my* event of ageing was also a source of concern: the fact that an event which pertains to my life has taken place behind my back leaves me concerned. The concerned experience of the other's aged face mirrors the concerned experience of my own ageing.

Certainly, the concern I experience over my own ageing is not identical to the concern provoked by the other – whereas the former refers to self-experience, the latter designates an experience of an interpersonal alterity. Nevertheless, these two types of experience are not unrelated; in fact, the sudden realisation of the other's age can result in a sudden realisation of my own age (this may be one of the reasons why people avoid school reunions). This would suggest that the intersubjective event of ageing, as a reminder of my

age, is able to elicit the subjective event of ageing. Now, since the realisation of my own ageing produces a new – discontinuous and dislodged – form of temporal self-awareness, it follows that, by occasioning the realisation of my ageing, the experience of the other's past precipitates the emergence of a new form of temporal self-awareness. In other words, diachronic temporality is both a *precursor* and an *effect* of the experience of the other. We can thus say that insofar as the other appears in time, temporal self-awareness is a condition of intersubjective encounters and that both synchronic and diachronic experiences of time can offer a template for the experience of the other; however, we can also add that an encounter with another person can influence or modify our experience of time.

In this section, I have argued that the experience of the other's past has an impact on both the affective and the temporal forms of self-awareness: the other can be the source of my interest, indifference, and concern; what's more, the concerned experience of the other can precipitate a change in time-consciousness. None of the experiences considered above are able to fully challenge the synchrony of self-awareness – interest and indifference are affective reactions which presuppose the synchronic time-consciousness; concern, although related to diachronic temporality, is an affective response, and as such, it contributes to the unity and continuity of the originary impression. Concern, then, can only elicit an experience of a 'bound' or 'partial' novelty. Consequently, the three modalities in which the other can be experienced cannot account for the *radically* new. Nevertheless, the fact that the other can influence both affection and time – a possibility attested to by the affective and temporal effects of the other's past – makes it possible to envisage an intersubjective experience able to challenge the synchrony of both forms of self-awareness. In the next section, I will show that it is responsibility for the other which succeeds in overcoming the unity and continuity of self-experience, thus allowing for the experience of the new.

4.2 Responsibility

In the previous section, I argued that the non-presence characteristic of the experience of the other is co-constituted by the absence of her past: the other's younger self is visible in her aged face – wrinkles and blemishes are traces of the other's youth 'leaving' her countenance. The other's past is present in the other's face in the traces the 'withdrawal' of youth has left behind. I also suggested that the other's ageing should be understood both as a process and an event: the other's youth continues to gradually leave the other every day; sometimes, however, the withdrawal of the other's youth is sudden and unexpected – it is as if time has lapsed and aged the other instantaneously. Importantly, the youth which leaves the other every day can be recuperated in memory – I can recall the other's younger face, with less wrinkles and blemishes. By contrast, the youth which leaves the other suddenly is irrevocably lost – we can only recall the other's face before and after youth has left it, but the skipped chunk of time in which the event of ageing took place cannot be recuperated. The youth which leaves suddenly is truly gone and cannot be preserved even in memory. For Levinas, to experience the sudden disappearance of the other's youth is to experience 'an existence deserting itself'⁹ – the other's life is leaving itself.

Above, I argued that the sudden withdrawal of the other's youth can be understood in analogy with ageing, as a source of concern. However, the disappearance of the other's youth can also be experienced as an 'abandonment' of the other – when the other's youth leaves, it, in some sense, abandons the other. When the other's past is experienced as deserting the other, her face appears as 'anachronous immediacy more tense than that of an image offered in the straightforwardness of an intuitive intention.'¹⁰ This is because the encounter with the other's past as abandonment provokes my responsibility.¹¹ 'This existence

⁹ Ibid., p. 90

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 91

¹¹ As Levinas puts it, the 'mode in which a face indicates its own absence... requires a description that can be formed only in ethical language.' (Ibid., p. 94)

abandoned by all and by itself, a trace of itself, imposed on me, assigns me in my last refuge with an incomparable force of assignation'.¹² When youth 'leaves' the other, the other is left *to me*. In sec. 4.2e, I will show why the abandonment of the other produces my responsibility. Below, however, I will examine in detail the movement from the experience of the other as abandoned and to the experience of responsibility.

In the previous section, I argued that the concerned relation with the other (in contrast to indifference or interest) can influence the experience of time: my realisation of the other's ageing can contribute the realisation of my own ageing, consequently precipitating the emergence of a diachronic form of temporal self-awareness. Concern, then, can only trigger an experience of a 'bound' or 'partial' novelty – although it bypasses the synchrony of time-consciousness, as an affect it helps to maintain the unity and continuity of the originary impression, i.e. the novelty-neutralising sameness of affective self-presence. Similarly to concern, responsibility for the other is directly related to the diachronic experience of time; however, responsibility also involves a change in the affective form of self-awareness – as I will argue below, responsibility complicates or confuses affection by introducing alterity into its self-identity. Consequently, responsibility allows for a rediscovery of the other in *radically new* attitude – to find oneself responsible for another person is to relate to him differently, as if one saw him 'for the first time (even if he is an old acquaintance, an old friend, and old lover, long caught up in the fabric of my social relations)'.¹³ In short, because responsibility challenges the synchrony of both temporality and affectivity, the encounter with the other in responsibility constitutes a radically novel experience.

A) Disturbance

Insofar as the other appears in time, her experience is conditioned by the temporal form of self-awareness. If, as I claim, in responsibility I rediscover the other in a radically

¹² Ibid., p. 90

¹³ Ibid., p. 86

new attitude, this rediscovery should be accompanied by a change in the temporal self-givenness of subjectivity. In ch. 3, I showed how concrete experiences are able to influence the flow and structure of temporality. In this section I will explore the way in which the experience of the abandonment of other affects time-consciousness. As Levinas observes, the sudden abandonment of the other is experienced as a *disturbance* of self-awareness. In sections 4.2b and 4.2c, I will consider the effect of the disturbance on affection; below, however, I will explore how the abandonment of the other disturbs time, and in so doing, changes the flow and the structure of temporal self-awareness.

Levinas notes that the disturbance has a direct effect on the experience of the present – the disturbance ‘fissures’ or ‘destructures’ the present: ‘For there to be a possibility of disturbance, a fissile present is required, “destructuring” itself in its very punctuality.’¹⁴ Of course, in a certain sense, the present is always already fissured: the now-phase of consciousness is split by its retentional and protentional extensions (in fact, the interplay between retentions and protentions makes possible the experience of the present). Levinas is aware of that: ‘What is realized in and by intentional consciousness offers itself to protention and diverges from itself in retention, so as to be, across the divergency, identified and possessed.’¹⁵ Thus, if the disturbance divided the present in a manner analogous to retentions and protentions, it would simply be incorporated into the flowing of time-consciousness – consequently, it could hardly *disturb* time. Instead of dividing the now, the disturbance ‘destructures’ the present by constituting an experience which the present is unable to seize completely – the disturbance is ‘too much’ for the now, and so, the latter is, in some sense, ‘exceeded’ by the experience it tries to grasp. A comparison with the event of ageing could be instructive here: similarly to the event of ageing, the disturbance involves a lapse of time, in which the present misses the experience; however, in ageing, the lapse of time refers to simply to a loss (which I figuratively described as a ‘throwing up’ of an indigestible time), whereas in the disturbance, the lapse refers to a loss which results from a possibility of a gain

¹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Phenomenon and Enigma’, p. 68

¹⁵ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 102

too excessive for the present (as if subjectivity tried to ‘eat’ more time than it could digest). In other words, whereas the realisation of ageing is a sudden disappearance of time, the disturbance can be understood as an appearance of too much time. Two conclusions follow from the inability of the present to contain the whole of the disturbing event: firstly, the excessive aspects of the disturbance – i.e. aspects missed by the present – become past: ‘Incommensurable with the present,’ the disturbance ‘is always “already in the past” behind which the present delays, over and beyond the “now” which this exteriority disturbs or obsesses.’¹⁶ Secondly, since this past is constituted by aspects of the disturbance which escaped the present, they can neither be inscribed in retention nor preserved in memory – in other words, they are immemorial. The excessive aspects of the disturbance, therefore, can never be given ‘in person’; rather, they are only experienced as a trace of an immemorial past: ‘This way of passing, disturbing the present without allowing itself to be invested by the *arche* of consciousness, striating with its furrows the clarity of the ostensible, is what we have called a trace.’¹⁷

In analogy with the determinate emptiness of other’s past, the ‘determinate emptiness’ of the excessive aspects of the disturbance ‘demand’ to be made present; In consequence, the experience of time becomes directed towards the past aspects of the disturbance. The experience of the disturbance, then, enacts a temporal change similar to the experience of melancholia examined in the previous chapter – as you recall, melancholia also directed consciousness to its past. However, in contrast to melancholia which orients temporality towards a memorable event, in disturbance, time-consciousness is turned towards an immemorial experience. This fact rules out in advance the possibility of seizing the excessive aspects of the disturbance – the immemorial disturbance cannot be reactivated and brought to presence, since it was never present in the first place. Consciousness wants to recuperate the excess of the disturbance, yet it is unable to do so. In effect, the now becomes ‘trapped’ by the immemorial disturbance which it strives to seize – subjectivity remains

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 101

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 100

‘anachronously *delayed* behind its present moment, and unable to recuperate this delay’.¹⁸

This fact, in turn, enacts a transition in the rhythm of time-consciousness: disturbance ‘agitates rest, arresting time.... Time is deferred.’¹⁹ It is as if temporality was arrested by a force which successfully pushes towards the past aspects of the disturbance and against the future-oriented stream of time-consciousness, and which, at the same time, agitates the subject. On the one hand, and in manner reminiscent of fatigue, the past-directedness of the disturbed consciousness postpones the arrival of the new present; on the other hand, the determinate absence of the disturbance agitates time, which, in turn, likens it to curiosity in which the animated time wants to go faster. This experience could be called ‘obsession’: ‘Obsession traverses consciousness *countercurrentwise*, is inscribed in consciousness as something foreign, a disequilibrium, a delirium.’²⁰ We can think here of the film *Oldboy* (2003), in which the main character passes out, only to wake up imprisoned in a room he doesn’t recognise, without a clue as to why he is held captive. Something took place during his black out – his every day becomes preoccupied with an attempt to recuperate the past event he cannot recall. His immemorial past, quite literally, traps him; furthermore, the immemorial event becomes his obsession – the film’s plot is driven by the hero’s need to find out what happened during his black out.

Temporal self-awareness responsive to the event of the disturbance can be neither continuous nor unitary – the flow of time is interrupted and oriented towards the excess which eludes the present. The experience of the disturbance, then, ‘opens the distance of a diachrony...where difference is the past that cannot be caught up with’.²¹ The diachronic form of temporal self-awareness, elicited by the experience of the disturbance, has two effects on subjectivity: firstly, it opens consciousness to experiences of novelty, and in so doing, accounts for the *temporal* possibility of an encounter with the other in a radically new attitude. Secondly, diachrony gives rise to a discontinuous and dislodged sense of myself – I

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 101

¹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, trans. B. Bergo, Stanford University Press 2000, p. 139

²⁰ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 101 (my emphasis)

²¹ Ibid., p. 89

am individuated by a disturbance, and a subsequent obsession with a past which has never been present. Earlier, I referred to the dislocated experience of oneself as desubjectification – the event of ageing, and the diachrony it produces, also desubjectifies the self. However, in contrast to ageing where temporal desubjectification worked in tandem with affective subjectification, the disturbance also challenges the continuity and unity of affectivity. The affective effect of the experience of the disturbance is guilt.

B) Guilt

Guilt, as Anthony Steinbock observes, is a ‘guilt about *something*.’ He then points out that this “‘something” is what we call an “accomplishment” which is in some sense “mine”.’²² For Steinbock then, the experience of guilt consists of two interrelated elements: on the one hand, it involves a determinate or indeterminate object: a specific action, a thought, or a word, or ‘a more indeterminate dimension’ in which I feel guilty ‘even though I can no longer remember or have any memory of that which I am guilty.’²³ On the other hand, guilt involves the experience of this (determinate or indeterminate) object as *my accomplishment*: it is *my* action, *my* thought, *my* word which is the object of guilt. In this sense, guilt bears not only on particular events, but also on *me* as a person: I am the type of a person whose accomplishments – thoughts, actions, words, etc. – produce the experience of guilt. As Steinbock puts it, ‘the guilt-event accrues in principle to my personal dispositions.’²⁴ Steinbock characterisation of guilt corresponds nicely with our analysis of temporal disturbance above: a guilt-producing ‘something’ has taken place and now troubles subjectivity, in a manner reminiscent of the disturbance. Moreover, as Steinbock himself notes, the object of guilt doesn’t have to be remembered to have a troubling effect – guilt can be response to an immemorial event, which eludes the present (although Steinbock refers to

²² Anthony J. Steinbock, *Moral Emotions: Reclaiming the Evidence of the Heart*, Northwestern University Press 2014, p. 103

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 108

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104

the immemorial object as simply 'indeterminate,' I believe that it would be more accurate to call it determinately absent, since a guilt-inducing 'something' have taken place). In addition, guilt also impacts on my sense of self – guilt reveals me to myself as someone capable of the experience of guilt, as well as someone whose actions result in guilt. Guilt, then, is a past event, possibly immemorial, which individuates subjectivity – as such the experience of guilt bears a striking resemblance to the experience of the disturbance. The similarities between the experiences of guilt and the disturbance lead me to suggest that guilt is the affective counterpart of the temporal disturbance analysed in the previous section – guilt is the disturbance caused by the abandonment of the other considered from the point of view of affectivity. The disturbing character of guilt is also noted by Steinbock, who observes that guilt involves 'a disruption of the normal, unchecked flow of experience.'²⁵ Consequently, and insofar as it also disturbs affectivity, the experience of guilt opens consciousness up to novelty, thus making possible the rediscovery of the other in a radically new attitude.

It is important to add that guilt is never a singular, once-in-a-lifetime experience. On the contrary, guilt *recurs* more or less regularly (yesterday, I felt guilty because of a particular thought; today, I feel guilty because of a particular action; tomorrow, I will feel guilty for no apparent reason). My thesis here is that the formal descriptions of recurrence found in *Otherwise than Being* correspond to the concrete experience of guilt (the fact that guilt is mentioned in the very last sentence of the section 'Recurrence' seems to support this thesis).

Insofar as it is a disturbance, the recurrence of guilt stands in contrast to the ordinary unfolding of subjective life: guilt interrupts or bothers our regular, everyday experiences. For Levinas, this interruption of subjective life by guilt consists of two aspects: a *contraction* and an *extraction* of self-experience. When I feel guilty, it consumes me: I am tormented with

²⁵ Ibid., p. 117

guilt, I agonise over it.²⁶ All guilt appears to have an unmistakably negative valence: Levinas speaks of anguish, and, drawing on the etymology of the word, emphasises the uncomfortable ‘tightness’ of the experience: the guilty subject is ‘up against a wall, or twisted over itself in its skin, too tight in its skin.’²⁷ It is as if guilt enacted a painful contraction of subjective experience to itself – subjectivity is unable to distance itself from its guilt the way it is unable to distance itself from its pain. ‘The irremissible guilt... is like a Nessus tunic my skin would be.’²⁸ The comparison with pain is instructive here: both guilt and pain, by virtue of being affects, are self-enclosed and self-identical experiences, which, by suppressing temporal extension, produce a punctual sense of self anchored in the present. However, insofar as guilt is also an affective disturbance, it involves an uncontainable excess, which overflows the self-enclosure and self-identity of the affect. In other words, even though both guilt and pain generate a punctual self-experience, there is *more* to guilt than there is to pain – the former harbours a trace of an excessive past aspects of the disturbance. Importantly, however, since the excess of guilt escapes the present, it is, strictly speaking, absent from the affective experience; in consequence, the overflowing of guilt shouldn’t be understood as a temporal extension which lessens the extent of contraction by temporally differentiating its self-identity – since the excessive aspects of the disturbance are incommensurable with the present, they cannot constitute a past extension or a retention of the now-phase of guilt. The past excess is attested to only by the reorientation or a redirection of the punctual affection towards its past – a reorientation which in no way compromises the self-identity or self-presence of affection. Guilty subjectivity directed towards the past, remains anchored in the present, ‘too tight in its skin,’ wholly enclosed by its affect. We can think here of a statue which has been turned on its spot to face the other way – even though the statute no longer faces the wall, it continues to occupy the exact same patch of the floor (I will return to the signification of the past-directedness of guilt in sec. 4.2c below).

²⁶ Sometimes to a point of a physical reaction – in *Crime and Punishment*, guilt-ridden Raskolnikov suffers from a fever, but insomnia and nausea are also possible consequences.

²⁷ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 104

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109

If the guilty subjectivity is in some important sense reduced to, or contracted to, its experience of guilt, this must affect the way in which the subject comports itself to the world. In fact, it seems that the *contraction* of self-experience in guilt entails an *extraction* from the everyday relation with the world. In guilt, the usual significance of worldly entities falls away: since it is guilt which constitutes my sole preoccupation, I become *disinterested* with the world, others, and myself as I normally relate to them. To emphasise the sense of extraction effected by guilt, Levinas once again plays on the etymology of the word: the disinterested subject is *dis-inter-esse*, that is to say, *no longer-among-beings*. It is important not to confuse the disinterestedness experienced in guilt from other types of ‘disinterested experiences’.²⁹ In order for a judge to fairly arbitrate a conflict, they are required to be disinterested. Here disinterestedness means *detachment* or *neutrality*. But the guilty subject is neither detached nor neutral: the object of guilt troubles me to a point of obsession. Equally, someone undergoing an aesthetic experience – a viewer of an excellent play or an attendee of a brilliant concert – can be said to be disinterested. Here disinterestedness is conceived as akin to a mystical experience in which the subject ‘forgets itself’: the viewer is ‘lost’ in the play, the attendee ‘dissolves’ in the music. However, in guilt the subject is unable to detach itself from itself; to the contrary, to experience guilt is to experience *myself* as guilty. Again, it will be more helpful to think of the disinterestedness of guilt on the basis of the experience of extreme pain. When I suffer, I am unable to either remain neutral or ‘forget myself’ – pain exhausts my subjectivity and alters my relation with the world and others. Similarly, to become obsessed with the object of guilt is to disregard anything which does not relate to it, and so, it is to find oneself extracted from the way one ordinarily experiences the world. This would suggest that guilt, in manner similar to pain, would make it impossible for me to relate to others – if I am extracted from my everyday preoccupation with the world, I am also extracted from my relations with others, insofar as the latter are a part of my worldly experience. Perhaps we can call this a ‘reduction,’ akin to the Husserlian *epoche*, which suspends our natural attitude to everything inner-worldly; however, in contrast to the

²⁹ I am grateful to Clint Verdonschot for his comments on this subject.

Husserlian *epoche* which discloses transcendental consciousness, the reduction of guilt reveals a contracted and anguished subject, troubled by what has taken place (in the words of Levinas, ‘It is the reduction to restlessness in the literal sense of the term’³⁰). Even though guilt suspends my everyday relations with other, this suspension doesn’t result in a solipsistic self-experience; on the contrary, the suspension of my regular relationships with others is a precondition for an encounter with the other in a radically new attitude: the other can appear differently, or ‘for the first time,’ because the usual significance of intersubjective experiences has been suspended. In the following sections, I will show how the self-enclosed experience of guilt can lead to a novel experience of the other. Before doing so, however, I would like to make a few remarks on the nature of the affective disturbance.

The hyperbolic language I have used in this section might have implied that guilt is always an intensely acute experience, comparable only to extreme pain. However, disturbances can occur with varying intensities, and the disruptions they effect can be more or less severe. To conceive of guilt as a disturbance of regular subjective life, therefore, is to emphasise that guilt can also be experienced as more or less severe. When I steal a couple of sweets from my brother’s packet, I do not experience Raskolnikov’s post-murder guilt. This means that the painful contraction into oneself – the claustrophobic anguish of guilt – can be more or less intense. In some cases, guilt is experienced as a crippling obsession, which wholly consumes the subject. Here, the already mentioned Raskolnikov would be a paradigmatic example. In other cases, guilt is merely a background condition, an unpleasant but bearable ‘itch’ or ‘cramp’: for instance, the guilt of a man who jumps the queue in a pub, or that of a child who takes their sibling’s sweets. There are of course countless other contractions of varying intensity in-between the respective extremities of Raskolnikov and the queue-jumper. Corresponding to the severity of contraction is the extent of extraction: the more intense the anguish of my guilt, the more disinterested I become with the world, others, and myself as I normally relate to them (and, conversely, the less intense the guilt, the more I

³⁰ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 45

experience the world in its usual significance). Consequently, it would be a mistake to think of the contraction and extraction of self-experience in a binary fashion as a state one *either* is *or* isn't in. On the contrary, the extent of contraction and extraction corresponds to the intensity of guilt. To use a metaphor of a sound, we could say that guilt will occasionally be deafening, sometimes loud and clear, in other cases merely an echo or a vibration still audible after the sound has died.

C) *Accusation*

In this section, I will defend three claims: firstly, I will show that the invariant feature of the experience of guilt is the experience of accusation – to feel guilty is to feel accused. Secondly, I will demonstrate that accusation implied in the experience of guilt corresponds to the excessive aspects of the disturbance, which elude, trouble, and reorient the present experience. Lastly, I will argue that to feel accused is to feel accused by the other – the indictment issued by another is an irreducible feature of the content of guilt. Importantly, if, as I claim, guilt is co-constituted by an experience of the other's accusation, then guilt is co-constituted by an experience of alterity. This fact, in turn, confuses or complicates the affective self-identity of guilt – if self-enclosed experience of guilt is, from the start, permeated with alterity, then we can no longer speak of affective *self*-presence of guilty subjectivity; rather, when I experience *myself* as guilty, I experience *the other's* accusation, i.e. in experiencing myself, I, in fact, experience alterity (and vice versa). Levinas calls this type of self-awareness 'the other in the same.' As I will show in the next section, the transformation of affective self-identity into 'the other in the same' leads to a responsibility for the other, that is to say, to a rediscovery of the other in a radically new attitude.

Earlier, following Steinbock, I suggested the object of guilt can be both determinate and indeterminate. Sometimes when I wake up in the morning overcome with guilt, I am able to trace my current state to a particular event which took place the night before (I acted

inappropriately, offended someone, etc.). However, occasionally, I am unable to identify a specific action, intention, or a word which could explain my guilt: the latter recurs, even though I am unable to remember its object. Furthermore, it is also possible to experience a guilt-object which is vague. Here the guilt relates to an object which is neither fully determinate nor completely indeterminate – although I cannot remember the details of the guilt-producing event, I am nevertheless painfully aware that it occurred the night before. However, as Steinbock rightly observes, whether determinate, indeterminate, or vague, the ‘experience of guilt entails the experience of being accused or indicted’³¹ – in short, to feel guilty is to feel accused.

As the above examples indicate, the accusation relates to a past event which may or may not be remembered – I feel guilty over events I can and cannot recall (a drunken night-out is a perfect example of a mixture of memorable and immemorial guilt-inducing events). This suggests that the experience of accusation cannot be reduced simply to a memory of an event; rather, accusation is an invariant feature of the object of guilt, regardless of whether this object can be recalled. More importantly, however, the accusation itself seems to escape memory – when I wake up feeling guilty and accused of something I cannot remember, I also cannot recall the accusation which led to my guilt. The same holds true for guilt-inducing events which can be remembered – when I say something hurtful to my friend, I feel guilty, even though no explicit accusation was issued (I will examine cases where explicit accusation *is* issued below). Despite the fact that accusation cannot be reduced to a memorable guilt-inducing event, it, nevertheless, refers to the past – accusation orients or directs subjectivity towards the past object of guilt (e.g. I become troubled by what I said to my friend last night, because I feel accused of uttering hurtful words). I believe that accusation is able to do so, because it is, in fact, the concrete manifestation of the excessive aspects of the disturbance: accusation is that excessive past constitutive of the experience of guilt, which cannot be recuperated in memory, but which, nonetheless, is able to ‘obsess’ subjectivity with its past.

³¹ A. Steinbock, *Moral Emotions*, p. 109

The equation of the excess of the disturbance with accusation, in turn, can help us to explain how I can experience myself accused of my past, without a direct memory of accusation: the latter is present in my guilt as a trace of something uncontainable, which bothers me by its demand for fulfilment, and in so doing, orients me towards the past object.

I would like to argue that accusation is always an accusation by the other. Furthermore, since accusation is a constitutive feature of guilt, if accusation is always the other's accusation, then the contraction of self-experience in guilt is, in fact, a contraction to the experience of the other's indictment.

It can be objected that I can feel guilty *without* an experience of the other's accusation. For instance, I can feel bad when instead of going for a run, I decide to eat a tub of ice cream in front of a TV; or when I oversleep and miss the sunrise I intended to watch. Arguably, in these cases, there is no other to accuse me; it is rather, that in these situations I accuse myself. However, this seems to be a mistaken interpretation of the experience of accusation. Think about trying to *actively* make yourself feel guilty: it doesn't matter how much you think that you should feel bad – this conviction is not sufficient to produce guilt (I can skip my run, or miss the sunset, or not call my mother back, and still *not* experience guilt). Furthermore, active self-accusation is not necessary for guilt either: I can feel guilty even though I think I shouldn't feel guilty (for instance, I feel guilty when I reprimand my students, despite the fact that they have misbehaved). Since active self-accusation is neither sufficient nor necessary for the experience of guilt, the latter has to have a source which lies outside of the subject's will. In other words, since in guilt, subjectivity is passive (i.e. I am overcome with guilt whether I will it or not), it seems incorrect to say that I feel guilty because I actively accuse myself of skipping a run and eating a tub of ice cream.

Of course, the fact that guilt is a passive experience does not necessarily entail that it must harbour a reference to the other's indictment. Countless experiences which happen to subjectivity – i.e. in which subjectivity is passive – have their source in the subject. Think

here of respiration: for the most part, this sensible process occurs whether I will it or not (that is to say, they happen *to* me) – and yet, it would be difficult to identify aspects of subjective life more intimately mine. Respiration is a case of *self*-experience which happens *to* me and *in* me. It is thus possible to think of accusation on the basis of respiration – accusation would be an experience which happens *to* and *in* me. This in turn would mean that guilt is a passive *self*-experience independent of the other.

I concede that the passivity of guilt may be understood in analogy with sensible processes – guilt is an experience which happens *to* and *in* me, and as such, it can be likened to respiration. However, this very fact doesn't erase the reference to the other – in fact, since respiration is inextricably bound up with a circulation of a substance found outside of myself, the comparison emphasises the reference to alterity. When I find myself out of breath, I desperately gasp for air – the passive process of respiration depends on oxygen. In fact, the experience of respiration is from the start a movement of a foreign substance: my lungs contain a compound found outside of my organs. Respiration, therefore, *confuses* the distinction between interiority and exteriority: when I breathe, I interiorise an outside substance.³² For Levinas, it seems, the same holds true for accusation: in 'its passivity is effaced the distinction between being accused and accusing oneself.'³³ Accusation is an experience of the disturbance which, on the one hand, exceeds or eludes the present (in this sense, accusation is exterior to self-experience), and, on the other hand, demands to be recuperated by the present (in this sense, accusation is interiorised by self-experience). Thus, in analogy with respiration, we can understand accusation as an intimate experience of interiorisation of a 'foreign substance' – a type of experience which Levinas calls 'the other in the same,' and in which the accusation by the *other* is an accusation *in me*, and vice versa.

For my reply to work, I must demonstrate that the experience of accusation really constitutes an experience of the other: only then will it make sense to speak of 'the other in

³² 'It is as though the atomic unity of the subject were exposed outside by breathing, by divesting its ultimate substance even to the mucous membrane of the lungs, continually splitting up.' (Ibid., p. 107)

³³ Ibid., p. 125

the same'. However, it seems that an indictment by the flesh and blood other is neither sufficient nor necessary for the experience of guilt. It is possible that the other explicitly accuses me of wrong-doing, and yet I feel no guilt in result (people who are late regularly seem indifferent to the innumerable indictments they receive over the course of their lives); it is also possible that there is no explicit accusation by the other, and yet I do feel guilty (as in the case of the skipped run). In short, my guilt cannot be coerced by another – nor does it have to be. But if this is the case – i.e. if the other cannot force my guilt – it becomes unclear what is meant by the guilt-inducing accusation by the other. In fact, when it comes to an intentional production of guilt, the other seems as powerless as I am.

If accusation is reducible to neither the subject nor the other, then, in order to explain the source of accusation, a third term or a third party has to be posited. Levinas names this third term *illeity*: a neologism which can be translated as 'he-ness' or 'it-ness'. As the translation makes clear, *illeity* names the third person or a third term which can be contrasted with both the first-personal 'I' and the second-personal 'you'; *illeity* is *other* to both myself and the flesh and blood other. However, *illeity* does not refer to an *actual* third term or a third person – as Michael L. Morgan points out, 'the term does not denote... In a sense, it is not.'³⁴ *Illeity* is not a substantial other³⁵ – rather, it names an experience of *other-ness*; in fact, the alterity of *illeity* – i.e. that which differentiates it from both the subject and the flesh and blood other – consists solely of the ability to accuse effectively: to experience the alterity of *illeity* is simply to experience the fact *that* I am accused, which cannot be accounted by either the will of the subject or the other's explicit efforts (hence, it is also appropriate to translate *illeity* as 'that-ness'³⁶). Put differently, the experience of accusation is an experience of a 'normative force'³⁷ *other than* both the subject and the other. Consequently, to experience myself as accused is to experience the alterity of the fact *that* I am accused; in other words, to

³⁴ Michael L. Morgan, *Discovering Levinas*, Cambridge University Press 2007, p. 203

³⁵ 'Illeity lies outside the "thou" and the thematization of objects.' (E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 12)

³⁶ M. Morgan, *Discovering Levinas*, p. 189

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 194

experience myself as accused is to experience myself as ‘other in the same,’ permeated by the alterity of illeity irreducible to either me or the flesh and blood other.³⁸

The introduction of illeity lets us explain the emergence of guilt in cases unaccounted for on the dyadic model which allows only for the subject-other relation. For instance, illeity explains why sometimes I can feel guilt, despite the fact that the other assures me of my innocence; it can also explain cases in which I feel guilty even though there is no other to accuse me (e.g. our skipped run and ice-cream tub case). Furthermore, illeity can clarify why sometimes my guilt is incommensurable with the other’s infliction – it is not the latter, but the intensity of the moral force of illeity which determines the severity of my guilt (hence, it is possible to feel immense guilt over seemingly insignificant transgressions, and to remain only slightly guilty in the face of far more terrible events).

Moreover, the fact that illeity is both a constitutive element of guilt and an experience of ‘the other in the same’, reveals the self-identity of guilt as from the start traversed by alterity. Guilt, therefore, transforms affective self-awareness by desubjectifying it: my affective sense of self remains punctual and self-enclosed; however, it also involves a sudden realisation *that* I am accused by an accusation which came from ‘*who knows where*’³⁹ – this realisation interrupts and confuses my continuous self-identity, producing a sense of self permeated with the alterity of accusation. In guilt, affectivity ceases to be continuous and self-identical, which means that it becomes non-synchronic, and thus capable of encountering the other in a radically new attitude.

³⁸ In his work, Levinas equates the alterity of illeity with the infinity of God. However, it strikes me that such equation takes us beyond the bounds of a phenomenological analysis; consequently, I do not examine it further.

³⁹ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 100

D) Substitution

In sec. 4.3b, I argued that the disturbance of guilt is characterised by a contraction and extraction of self-experience; in sec. 4.3c, I suggested that the experience of guilt is co-constituted by an awareness of accusation. In contraction, I am unable to take distance from my guilt: I am encumbered and pressured from all sides, in anguish, too tight in myself, painfully constricted by the indictment – in Levinas’s words, ‘the subject is accused in its skin, too tight for its skin.’⁴⁰ Furthermore, subjectivity is extracted from the world in its usual significance: since self-experience is reduced to guilt and the concomitant awareness of accusation, the subject becomes disinterested in the world as it normally experiences: I am ‘in the accusative, without recourse in being, expelled from being, outside of being.’⁴¹ In this section, I will demonstrate that the contraction and extraction of self-experience leads to a responsibility for the other; more specifically, I will show that guilt and accusation can be transformed into substitution for the other, which I understand as becoming responsible for the other’s responsibilities.

The negative valence of guilt (attested to by the negative connotations of terms associated with guilt – anguish, obsession, accusation, etc., as well as the similarities we have found between guilt and extreme pain) renders self-experience unbearable. Clearly, guilt cannot be endured forever – its very negativity necessitates a cure able to ease the pain of guilt. Guilty subjectivity stands in need for an antidote which could remedy the insufferable burden of guilt: the subject is ‘forced to detach itself from itself, to breathe more deeply, all the way, forced to dispossess itself to the point of losing itself.’⁴² Note that it is the very pressure of guilt which forces subjectivity out of its burdensome experience: it is as if the weight of guilt continued to press on subjectivity pass the uncomfortable tightness of

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 106

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 110

⁴² Ibid., p. 110

contraction, to a point at which the subject has to be ‘pushed’ or ‘squeezed’ out of its experience of guilt: in Levinas’s evocative words, the guilty subject ‘is exiled in its own fullness, to a point of explosion or fission’;⁴³ ‘without any rest in itself, “more and more one”, to the point of breakup, fission, openness’.⁴⁴ However, if, as I argued above, guilty subjectivity is individuated by its feeling of guilt, then an antidote for guilt would be synonymous with a cure for myself as guilty – if guilty subjectivity is its guilt, then to escape the burden of guilt would be to escape the burden of myself: ‘the recurrence to oneself cannot stop at oneself, but goes to the hither side of oneself; *in* the recurrence to oneself there is a going to the hither side of oneself’.⁴⁵ Concretely, this may mean suicide: to kill oneself is undoubtedly the most effective way to rid oneself of guilt, and guilty self-experience. Luckily, suicide is not the only option – for Levinas, the alternative is constituted by the possibility of substitution for the other.⁴⁶

Substitution, for Levinas, is a transition from the experience of guilt to the experience of responsibility for the other. Certainly, responsibility for the other is also a burden; in substitution, therefore, the burden of guilt is turned into a burden of responsibility. This transference of weight is made possible by the very pressure of guilt. The antidote for the negative gravity of guilt, then, is its inversion into the positive gravity of responsibility. Furthermore, as I will show below, the transition from guilt to responsibility enacts a change in self-experience; in fact, substitution ‘frees’ subjectivity from guilt by producing a new form of self-awareness – one in which my sense of oneself is associated with my responsibility for the other. By transforming my self-experience, substitution allows me to encounter the other in a radically new, i.e. responsible, attitude.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 104

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 107

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 114

⁴⁶ ‘Does this loss have as its term the void, the zero point and the peace of cemeteries, as though the subjectivity of a subject meant nothing? Or do the being encumbered with oneself and the suffering of constriction in one’s skin, better than metaphors, follow the exact trope of an alteration of essence, which inverts, or would invert, into a recurrence in which the expulsion of self outside of itself is its substitution for the other? Is not that what the self emptying itself of itself would really mean?’ (Ibid., pp. 110-111)

However, substitution is not the only way to free oneself from the burden of guilt. In *The Problem with Levinas*, Simon Critchley suggests a third option, namely, ‘aesthetic sublimation’: a transformation of an experience into a broadly understood aesthetic object. Critchley writes: ‘Lacan defines sublimation as the taking up or elevation of the object and transforming it and giving it the dignity of what Lacan calls the Thing, something that has a certain sublime quality... It would be the ability to produce a new kind of screen or a new kind of medium through which [the experience] would be articulated.’⁴⁷ It is definitely possible to translate the experience of guilt into a different medium and thus turn it into an aesthetic object: I can compose a song about guilt, I can confess my guilt to a priest, I can even write a work of philosophy devoted to the experience of guilt.⁴⁸ What these varied forms of aesthetic sublimation have in common is their ability to externalise and, consequently, to neutralise guilt. When, for example, I write a song about my guilt, I turn the latter into a ‘thing’ to some degree exterior to me. The external position of the newly formed ‘guilt-thing’ (e.g. the song), in turn, neutralises the ‘sting’ characteristic of the experience of guilt: when guilt is no longer co-extensive with subjectivity and, instead, becomes externalised, it ceases to trouble self-experience. From the point of view of the subject’s well-being, the possibility of aesthetic sublimation is invaluable. However, in the context of ethics, the sublimation or ‘aesthetisation’ of guilt is detrimental for two interrelated reasons: firstly, to turn guilt into an aesthetic object is to render insubstantial the reality to which guilt is a response – by neutralising my guilt, aesthetic sublimation also neutralises its reference to my wrong-doing . When I compose a song about my guilt over x, it becomes virtually irrelevant if I really committed x (this is attested to explicitly by theories which see artists and their creation as beyond moral evaluation, and implicitly by our appreciation of the works of despicable individuals). Secondly, however, by externalising guilt, aesthetic sublimation blocks the possibility of substitution – as I will show below, transition from guilt to

⁴⁷ Simon Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas*, Oxford University Press 2015, p. 90 (citation modified)

⁴⁸ A good ‘philosophical’ example of aesthetic sublimation is offered by John Drabinski’s book *Sensibility and Singularity*, which concludes a discussion of the ethical experience with a poem by Celan. (Cf. John E. Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity: The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas*, SUNY Press 2011, p. 219)

responsibility is a movement *interior* to self-experience; the externalisation of guilt, therefore, redirects the impetus of guilt outside subjectivity, consequently, diverting the course of self-experience away from the experience of responsibility.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, exteriorisation seems to be necessitated by the experience of guilt. The unbearable burden of guilt forces subjectivity ‘out’ of its guilty self-experience and into responsibility for the other – it is as if the weight of guilt ‘squeezed’ the contracted subjectivity out of itself: the subject ‘too tight in its skin [is]... already outside of itself.’⁵⁰ Interestingly, for Levinas, in the case of substitution, this ‘exterior space’ into which subjectivity is pushed by its guilt is carved out *within* the interiority of the subject, in a way in which a deep breath reveals the depths of my lungs after a period of breathlessness. It is as if the affective self-enclosure of guilt imploded under its own gravity, leaving in its place only an empty space. Levinas calls this ‘cored out’ dimension of interiority the *null-place (non-lieu)*.⁵¹ Substitution, therefore, divests or empties the guilty subjectivity – the null-place is the result of this ‘divesting’ of guilt. The empty space left behind by guilt doesn’t stay empty for long – immediately, subjectivity withdraws into the null-place (as if the newly opened interior space was a black hole which sucks in self-experience).⁵² As result, subjectivity undergoes a change: it moves out of the constrictive or even claustrophobic experience of guilt, and into the newly carved empty space – there, the subject suffocated by guilt can ‘breathe more deeply,’ because the null-place to which subjectivity withdraws is created by the implosion or the ‘emptying’ of guilt. ‘In this substitution, in which identity is inverted...

⁴⁹ Analogous criticisms can be found in Jacob Taubes’s *The Political Theology of Paul*, in which Taubes accuses Adorno of the aesthetisation of the problem of the Messiah. According to Taubes, for Adorno ‘the whole messianic thing becomes a *comme-si* affair’ – when aestheticised, the coming of the Messiah, and, in consequence, the reality for the sake of which the Messiah is to come, become insubstantial. Taubes then contrasts Adorno with Walter Benjamin, and shows how, for Benjamin (in analogy with St. Paul), the Messiah, and the reality in need of redemption, are intensely substantial problems. (Cf. Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. D. Hollander, Stanford University Press 2004, pp. 74-75)

⁵⁰ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 104 (citation modified)

⁵¹ ‘To be in-oneself, backed up against oneself, to the extent of substituting oneself for all that pushes one onto this null-place, is for the I to be in itself, lying in itself beyond essence.’ (Ibid. p.116)

⁵² ‘To be oneself as in the trace of one’s exile is to be as a pure withdrawal from oneself, and as such inwardness.’ (Ibid., p. 138)

the self is absolved of itself.⁵³ Self-experience, then, is transformed: the subject becomes ‘a being divesting itself, emptying itself of its being, turning itself inside out.’⁵⁴ Importantly, however, the transition from guilt to the null-place shouldn’t be understood merely as a negation of guilt; rather, the empty space becomes the locus of my responsibility for the other. It is as if the other for whom I find myself responsible has been waiting for me in the space, which had to be created by the implosion of my guilt. The other is ‘*the first one on the scene*,’ as Levinas puts it.⁵⁵ This fact takes us by surprise. We can think here of the common trope of a hero who, after a long and tiresome journey towards an undiscovered land, finds that this ‘newly discovered’ place is already occupied by others. However, in contrast to our proto-colonial hero taken aback by others outside of his homeland, in substitution I find myself surprised by others *in me* – as if the newly discovered aspects of my own homeland have already been colonised or taken over by others. We can also compare this experience to being taken hostage by the other in one’s own home – as if I had moved into a house already overtaken by the other. ‘The I approached in responsibility... dis-locates itself, loses its place, is exiled’.⁵⁶ To escape guilt, then, is to discover ‘the other in the same’ – similarly to accusation (which, as the alterity of illeity, confused affective self-identity) substitution transforms self-experience by leading it to the other, who, in turn, colonises it.⁵⁷ Importantly, for Levinas, the other discovered *in* responsibility is also discovered *as* responsibility: when I find myself responsible for the other, I am responsible for the other’s responsibility. In fact, the other is able to colonise responsible subjectivity by substituting her responsibilities for mine – consequently, when I experience myself as responsible, I find that I experience the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 115

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 117

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 86

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 138

⁵⁷ Note, however, that illeity and the other discovered in responsibility are distinct cases of ‘the other in the same’: whereas responsibility leads me to a flesh and blood other, illeity – or the third party – constitutes a moment of alterity irreducible to the flesh and blood other. Cf. sec. 4.2c above.

other's responsibilities.⁵⁸ As Levinas puts it, 'To be oneself, the state of being a hostage, is always to... [bear] the responsibility for the responsibility of the other.'⁵⁹

My reading of substitution is able to answer the following criticism of this key Levinasian concept: since the word 'substitution' signifies 'taking the place of', if x substitutes itself for y, x takes the place of y. Consequently, to substitute oneself for the other seems to mean 'to take the place of the other.' However, 'taking the place of the other' is ethically ambiguous: on the one hand, when I jump in front of you to protect you from a bullet, I have taken your place in a way which seems commendable; on the other hand, when, on the train, I take a seat reserved for passengers who find it difficult to stand, and if by doing so, I prevent an elderly person from sitting down, my taking the place of the other seems far from commendable (similarly, if a company hires me instead of a candidate in financial troubles, it is difficult to see my taking the other's place as commendable). Jan de Greef puts this point well when he asks: 'substitution... is it not also to take, albeit despite oneself, the place of someone else? How thereafter avoid a substitution that is not usurpation?'⁶⁰ However, as my reading makes clear, it is a mistake to understand substitution as 'taking the place of the other.' Rather, substitution refers to an experience in which the other takes my place: the other's responsibilities have replaced mine; in consequence, my responsible self-experience becomes co-extensive with the experience of the other's responsibilities. In other words, substitution would be usurpation if my experience was substituted for the experience of the other; on my reading, however, substitution is equivalent to the experience of the other taking the place of my self-experience: 'I am "in myself" through others. The psyche is other in the same, without alienating the same'.⁶¹

⁵⁸ 'The self, a hostage, is already substituted for the other. "I am an other," but this is not the alienation Rimbaud refers to.' (Ibid., p. 118)

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 117 (citation modified)

⁶⁰ Jan de Greef, 'Of Substitution that is not Usurpation', in *Levinas' Contributions to Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. B. Bergo and D. Perpich, New School for Social Research 1998, p. 144

⁶¹ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 112

Substitution bears directly on the forms of self-awareness. On the one hand, responsibility continues the transformative effects of guilt: since both constitute species of 'the other in the same' (in guilt, I am aware of the alterity of accusation; in responsibility, I experience the other's responsibilities), both are able to confuse affective self-presence. In addition, responsibility prolongs the interruption of the now: whereas guilt arrests the arrival of new present by orienting consciousness towards the excessive past, the now-phase of responsibility presupposes an 'implosion' of the instant. On the other hand, however, responsibility radicalises the changes which began in guilt: whereas guilt remains a unitary affective experience, responsibility results from a sudden liberation from affective self-enclosure. Furthermore, the diachrony of responsibility (in contrast to the diachrony of guilt) is not limited only to a 'destructured' or fissured present; rather, responsibility opens subjectivity to a temporalities beyond the horizons of conscious life – since responsibility is an experience of the other's responsibility, it can contain moments which refer to a time before my birth (e.g. in the case of the responsibility of older others) and after my death (e.g. in the case of the responsibility of younger other). As a radicalisation of guilt, responsibility is able to overcome the synchrony of both the affective and the temporal forms of self-awareness: as a result of the 'implosion' of guilt, responsibility gives rise an experience discontinuous with both the previous, unitary affect, as well as the previous, retentionally articulated present – in fact, we can say that which isn't anticipated in the protentional retentions of the previous now-phase (and thus what interrupts the continuity of the temporal self-experience in the now) is precisely the destruction of affective unity and a discovery of the other in me. Moreover, the break-out from unitary affection is inseparable from diachronic temporality – in contrast to other affects, responsibility cannot produce a punctual self-experience because it relates affection to the time of the other: in finding myself responsible for the other's responsibility, I find myself affectively tied to moments beyond my self-presence. The relation with a time before my birth and after my death, in turn, 'overflows' the unitary horizons of conscious life, and in so doing, puts into questions the

self-proclaimed immortality of consciousness – there have been and there will be times which do not imply my presence ‘there.’

Three conclusions can be drawn here: firstly, by successfully challenging the unity and continuity of both affectivity and temporality, responsibility produces a new form of self-awareness – one which is dislodged and discontinuous. Secondly, in overcoming the synchrony of self-experience, responsibility manages to open consciousness up to absolute novelty: since self-awareness is no longer unitary or continuous, it is able to accommodate radically new experiences – in fact, the rediscovery of the other in responsibility itself constitutes a radically new experience (the novelty of the encounter with the other in responsibility is attested to by the surprise, identified above, which ensues when I realise that the other has ‘taken my place’ and that the other’s responsibilities have become mine). Thirdly, the emergence of a non-synchronic form of self-awareness suspends the overindividuation of self-experience. In sec. 2.6, I argued that synchronic self-awareness comprises two incompatible senses of self, which correspond to two subjectifying processes: on the one hand, my affective self-presence allows me to experience myself as punctual, self-identical, and anchored in the present; on the other hand, time-consciousness generates an extended and differentiated sense of self, which involves the awareness of my past and future. By contrast, in responsibility, affectivity and temporality work in tandem. As I have shown, responsibility involves an affectively secured temporal diachrony, and a temporally altered affectivity – responsibility, then, individuates by means of a *single* process, which comprises affective and temporal aspects. Consequently, as Levinas notes, when I experience myself in responsibility, I experience myself as ‘undeclinable *One*.’⁶² The ‘oneness’ of responsible subjectivity, however, should not be confused with either unity or continuity – in contrast to affectivity and temporality which subjectify self-experience by means of synchronic processes (i.e. processes which protect the unity and continuity of self-awareness), responsibility *desubjectifies* self-experience by producing a dislodged and discontinuous self-

⁶² Ibid., p. 92

awareness; even though, in responsibility, I experience myself as ‘one’ this oneness is from the first inhabited and disrupted by the other – I am ‘one-for-the-other,’⁶³ and thus neither unitary nor continuous.⁶⁴

E) Abandonment

As we saw above, responsibility is a result of a transformation of self-awareness which begins with the experience of the abandonment of the other: the trace of a past which suddenly left the other’s face disturbs self-experience, thus beginning the process which ends in responsibility. I have also argued the disturbance produced by the abandonment of the other by her youth is experienced as guilt – this, in turn, would suggest that guilt is a response to the withdrawal of the other’s youth. However, this conclusion seems counterintuitive – why am *I* guilty of the inevitable ageing of the other? Moreover can anyone really be guilty of the other’s lost youth? Sure, we can occasionally hear someone angrily exclaim ‘I wasted my youth on you!’, what’s more, this statement can trigger a feeling of guilt in a sufficiently sensitive recipient. But, even in this context, it would be difficult to argue that it is *the past deserting the other’s face* which is the source of the feeling of guilt (as opposed to, for instance, the unappreciated sacrifices made by the other, implied in her statement). In other words, it is unclear *why* the withdrawal of the other’s youth makes me guilty; in fact, it is far from obvious *that* the withdrawal of the other’s youth results in guilt. However, if there is no connection between the experiences of guilt and the other as abandoned by her youth, then it becomes unclear whether the experience of the other’s aged face is able to begin a process which ends up in a new form of self-awareness. In fact, without an account of the relationship

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁶⁴ I am, therefore, in agreement with Robert Bernasconi, for whom substitution bears directly on the question of subjective identity; however, whereas Bernasconi aims to show the way in which substitution undercuts the traditional theories of *relational* identity (i.e. identity constituted by a relation between the subject and itself), I have tried to examine the effects of substitution on *non-relational* identity of pre-reflective self-awareness. Cf. Robert Bernasconi, ‘What is the Question to which “Substitution” is the Answer’, in *Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. R. Bernasconi and S. Critchley, Cambridge University Press 2002, pp. 241-245

between the abandonment of the other and my guilt, this chapter's analysis of responsible subjectivity becomes suspect.

In sec. 4.1b, I argued that the experience of other's past as leaving the other, can 'remind me' of an analogous event which occurs in self-experience, and in so doing, initiate a change in the latter – the realisation of the other's age can lead to a concern over my own ageing, and a subsequent emergence of a diachronic form of temporal self-awareness. I believe that the experience of the other's past as abandoning the other, can also 'remind me' of an analogous event which occurs in self-experience, and in so doing, initiate a change in the latter: the experience of the other as abandoned by her youth echoes the experience of the other as abandoned by me – the aged face of the other, deserted by her past, reminds me of my own neglect of the other. This reminder, in turn, triggers my guilt: the realisation of my negligence, precipitated by the sudden withdrawal of the other's youth, disturbs me – I begin to feel accused of abandoning the other, which, eventually leads to a transformation of self-experience into responsibility.

Importantly, the experience of the other as abandoned by her youth is *structurally* reminiscent of the experience of accusation (without this structural similarity, my guilt would be a result of a mere thought-association or, worse still, of a word-play). Recall that the sudden loss of the other's youth can only be experienced as a trace – I am always too late to witness the event of the other's ageing; what's more, since the event of ageing 'lapses' over the present, the withdrawal of the other's youth hasn't been preserved in retention, and thus cannot be reactivated in memory – it is irrevocably lost. The immemorial character of the event of ageing, in turn, introduces diachrony into the aged face of the other – the other's past is now experienced as discontinuous and non-unitary. Likewise, accusation can only be experienced as a trace: since, as I argued in sec. 4.2.c, it is co-extensive with the excessive aspects of the disturbance, it escapes the present, and thus can signify only from the past – as such it is also immemorial (the impossible demand for fulfilment, which results from accusation's resistance to memory, 'obsesses' subjectivity and orients it towards the past). To

use a Levinasian phrase, we could say that both the other's ageing and accusation are experienced as 'anachronous immediacies' – my current experience is disturbed by a trace of a past which eludes the present.

Where the two experiences differ is in the nature of their absences: in the case of the withdrawal of the other's youth, we experience a loss; in the case of accusation, by contrast, we experience an excess. However, and despite their difference, the two absences can be experienced together: as we have seen, the trace of the other's lost youth can remind me of the excessive accusation; but, in consequence, accusation becomes related to the other's past: the trace of the excess of accusation begins to underlie my experience of the other's lost youth. As a result, the other's aged face becomes a reminder of the fact *that* I am accused (we can say that the other's face becomes accusatory);⁶⁵ consequently, the accusatory face of the other is able to 'obsesses' consciousness in a manner proper to the experience of accusation: 'A trace lost in a trace, less than nothing in the trace of an excessive... the face of the neighbour obsesses me with this destitution.'⁶⁶ The 'awakening' of my guilt by the withdrawal of the other's youth, and the subsequent experience of the other's aged face as accusatory, establishes a connection between the abandonment of the other and the transformation of self-experience – guilt and responsibility are responses to an experience of the aged face of the other: 'The order that orders me to the other does not show itself to me, save through the trace of its reclusion, as a face of a neighbour.'⁶⁷

4.3 *Self-awareness and ethics*

In sec. 4.2, I argued that the abandonment of the other by her youth reminds of my own negligence of the other; this realisation, in turn, awakens my guilt which begins a

⁶⁵ This means that the face of the other becomes a site from which the alterity of illeity can be experienced. As Levinas puts it in 'Meaning and Sense,' 'it is in the trace of the other that the face shines'. (Emmanuel Levinas, 'Meaning and Sense', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 106)

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 140

transformation of self-experience into a responsible subjectivity. Undoubtedly, I feel guilty of neglecting others on regular basis: I often forget to phone my grandparents, I rarely give change to beggars, I never remember people's birthdays, etc. However, to say that these cases of 'abandonment' precipitate the emergence of a new form of subjective experience seems rather excessive – arguably, when I realise that, yet again, I forgot to call my grandad, I continue to experience myself in exactly the same way as before. Consequently, it becomes unclear what type or degree of abandonment warrants guilt and the subsequent transition to a new form of self-awareness. By themselves, everyday cases of neglect seem insufficient to trigger a transformation of self-experience. In order for my realisation of the abandonment of the other to truly disturb self-awareness, this abandonment must be related to a less trivial experience than, say, forgetting to phone my grandad.

My hypothesis is that abandonment of the other is a constitutive feature of synchronic self-experience – my guilt, therefore, results from a realisation that, due to the way in which I experience myself, I have already abandoned the other. Furthermore, since my guilt pertains to self-experience, it can motivate a transition to a new form of self-awareness – in order to 'cure' guilt over self-experience, I must begin to experience myself differently.

I seem to abandon the other whenever I experience myself affectively. In ch. 1, I argued that affective self-presence is incompatible with an intersubjective relation: the more intense the affection, the more inaccessible the other. When I am overtaken with extreme pain, for instance, I find myself unable to relate to the other – and in this sense, I desert her. In ch.2, I showed that the other becomes accessible thanks to time-consciousness: my temporal experiences provided a condition and a template for the encounter with the other and her constitutive non-presence. Time-consciousness, therefore, remedies the inaccessibility of the other in affection; what's more, temporality relates affectivity to the experiences of the other – as I showed in sec. 4.1, intersubjective encounters made possible by time-consciousness are able to provoke affective responses, such as interest and

indifference. The possibility of indifference, however, is synonymous with the possibility of abandonment: indifference allows me to turn away and leave the other behind.

I have also argued for two types of intertwining: above, I suggested that every encounter with the other involves a mixture of interest and indifference; at the end of ch.2, I argued that, for the most part, affective and temporal forms of self-awareness are experienced together. If I am correct and these two types of intertwining do, in fact, occur, then abandonment of the other is a constitutive feature of synchronic self-awareness. If every intersubjective experience on the basis of time-consciousness involves a mixture of interest and indifference, then every intersubjective encounter on the basis of time-consciousness harbours a possibility of turning away and leaving the other. Moreover, if affectivity and time co-constitute my self-experience, then my self-experience is co-constituted by an abandonment of the other proportionate to the intensity of affection. Consequently, the features of synchronic self-awareness account for the possibility and the actuality of the other's abandonment. Synchronic self-awareness, then, constitutes the subjective condition for the everyday cases of negligence: I can forget to call my grandad because the way in which I experience myself is constituted by negligence of others. To realise that I have abandoned the other, therefore, is to realise that the other has been abandoned by my self-experience. This is why I can be accused of the other's abandonment; this is also why this accusation can lead to a new form of self-awareness.

Responsibility, by contrast, creates a condition for attending to the other. As Levinas famously puts it, 'It is through the condition of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon, and proximity – even the little there is, even the simple "After you, sir".'⁶⁸ In fact, in most extreme cases, substitution makes possible or inspires self-sacrifice:⁶⁹ 'an inspiration, that is, an alterity in the same... psyche in the form of hand that gives even

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 117

⁶⁹ For Bernasconi, one of the questions which substitution answers, is: how is self-sacrifice possible? Cf. R. Bernasconi, 'What is the Question to which "Substitution" is the Answer?', p.235

the bread taken from its own mouth.⁷⁰ I am capable of self-sacrifice because substitution is itself a sacrifice of one's self-experience to the other – in substitution, I cede my place to the other and her responsibilities. For Levinas, the self-sacrifice which characterises responsible subjectivity renders it *good*: 'the self is goodness, or under the exigency for an abandon of all having, of all *one's own* and all *for oneself*, to the point of substitution.'⁷¹

The ethical contrast between the synchronic and non-synchronic forms of self-awareness allows us to draw three interrelated conclusions: firstly, if subjectivity which attends to the other (sometimes to a point of self-sacrifice) is *good*, then subjectivity which abandons the other – as the opposite of responsible subjectivity – would be *evil*.⁷² Secondly, from the point of view of ethics, self-awareness doesn't comprise of equal forms; rather, it is structured *hierarchically*: 'Evil... is neither alongside of nor in front of the Good, but in the second place, beneath, lower than, the Good. The being that perseveres in being, egoism or Evil, thus outlines the dimension of baseness itself, and the birth of hierarchy.'⁷³ In other words, non-synchronic self-awareness is *better* than its synchronic counterpart – responsible subjectivity 'in its restlessness and emptying and diachrony, [is] better than all the rest.'⁷⁴ Thirdly, the ethical hierarchy of the forms of self-awareness does not prevent a transition between them: on the one hand, a return to a synchronic self-awareness might seem like a viable way to ease the burden of responsibility: at times, neglecting the other appears more

⁷⁰ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 67

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 118

⁷² It could be argued that sometimes responsibility and self-sacrifice are *not* the ethical options: when the other violates me, ethics shouldn't require me to take responsibility for this violence, nor to see my sacrifice as good or desirable. Despite the force of this example, however, Levinas insists that responsibility and self-sacrifice are always the ethical options – 'the persecuted one is liable to answer for the persecutor' (E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 111). This has led some commentators to suggest that Levinas's ethics is unacceptable. For instance, Critchley (following others) has claimed that Levinasian responsibility is 'a hyperbole that feeds on excessive masochism.' (S. Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas*, p. 88) I believe that a Levinasian can answer the above objection in three possible ways: 1) bite the bullet and advocate the responsibility of the victim for her violation; 2) show that the word 'persecution' is equivocal in Levinas's oeuvre, and that it can also refer to the way in which I am haunted by the other's destitution (responsibility for the persecution, then, would mean a responsibility for the other's destitution); 3) argue that I am responsible for everything the other does (including her violence), but in some cases I have to ignore my responsibility and act against the other (on this reading, responsibility could become pathological, yet I am able to suppress it when necessary). Although I do not have space to argue for it here, I tend towards option 3).

⁷³ Emmanuel Levinas, 'Humanism and An-anarchy', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, pp. 137-138

⁷⁴ E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 92 (citation modified)

desirable than a prospect of self-sacrifice (in such cases, 'Evil claims to be the contemporary, the equal, the twin, of the Good'⁷⁵). On the other hand, however, synchronic self-awareness produces conditions of its own overcoming: my encounter with the other on the basis of synchronic self-experience can remind me of her abandonment, and in so doing, awaken my guilt – which, then, leads to the emergence of the non-synchronic form of self-awareness ('evil strikes me in my horror of evil, and thus reveals – or is already – my association with the Good...The experience of evil would then be also our waiting on the good.'⁷⁶). In transitioning between its non-synchronic and synchronic forms, self-awareness oscillates between responsibility for, and the abandonment of, the other – and since this movement constituted subjective life, subjectivity is always in-between good and evil.

⁷⁵ E. Levinas, 'Humanism and An-anarchy', p. 138

⁷⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, 'Transcendence and Evil', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, p. 183

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have offered a phenomenological study of self-awareness. I have argued that, in its most basic form, self-experience consists of two aspects: affectivity and temporality. I have demonstrated that self-awareness can be primarily either affective or temporal; however, in both of its forms self-experience is continuous and unitary.

I have suggested that unitary and continuous self-awareness is incompatible with experiences of novelty. Therefore, in order to accommodate the new, self-experience must become discontinuous and dislodged. I have shown that the form of self-awareness is responsive to concrete experiences, and that certain events are able to modify the structure of subjectivity. I have argued that the experience of novelty is constituted by a rediscovery of the other in a responsible attitude, because the experience of the other is able to enact a transformation of self-awareness. In responsibility, I experience myself as dislodged and discontinuous.

I have concluded by arguing that, in contrast to the discontinuous and dislodged subjectivity, the continuous and unitary form of self-awareness is incompatible with responsibility and thus with ethics. The distinction between the forms of self-experience incongruent and congruent with ethics, in turn, has allowed me to suggest an ethical hierarchy of self-awareness: discontinuous and dislodged self-experience is ethically better than its continuous and unitary counterparts. Subjective life, therefore, oscillates between better and worse forms of self-awareness.

I would like to end this thesis by raising three questions which pertain to my conclusion:

Firstly, it is unclear whether responsible subjectivity comes about by a radical break with unitary self-awareness, or whether, on the contrary, it is – to some degree – continuous with the other forms of self-experience. On the one hand, it seems that the disturbance of guilt enacts a radical transformation of self-experience; on the other hand, since the disturbance of guilt can be more or less severe, the subsequent transformation of self-experience should also be more or less radical. Put differently, is it ever possible to experience oneself as *fully* responsible, or is responsible subjectivity always ‘diluted’ or ‘contaminated’ by the forms of self-awareness from which it tries to depart?

Secondly, if substitution is a condition for ethical action, how are we to explain the fact that sometimes I feel responsible for the other, yet I *don't* act morally? Is it simply that I have reverted back to a unitary self-experience which allows me to neglect the other? Or is my ethical action ‘blocked’ or ‘stunted’ by a different subjective process, e.g. my will (as St. Augustine would have it) or ‘sin in the flesh’¹ (as St. Paul suggests)? Interestingly, in a section of *Totality and Infinity* devoted to the ‘ethical relation and time’ – a section, one should add, almost completely neglected by Levinas’s commentators – Levinas examines the detrimental effects of the ‘materiality of the will’ on responsible subjectivity, thus highlighting the importance of the embodied will for ethics.² What, then, is the relationship between the ‘material will’ and the pre-reflective event of substitution?

Lastly, to what extent is responsibility for the other a *historical* category? In other words, to what extent is ethics related to history? *Otherwise than Being* is dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, which might suggest that ethics is a response to historical atrocities. However, the book itself argues that ethics takes place outside of, or otherwise than, history. Why, then, is Levinas’s work – written at a precise historical moment and with a precise historical event in mind – advocating an extraction from history? In other

¹ Rom. 8:3

² Cf. E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 220-255

words, how can the abandonment of history be historically motivated? Furthermore, in what sense is an escape from history *not* a desertion of the other?

All three questions offer a promising starting point for further research.

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